Theme: Blessed Are Those Who Have NOT Seen and Yet Have Believed

Text: John 20:24-31

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them [the disciples] when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

It's pretty amazing how much of an impact something that is "unseen" can have on your life, and even the entire world. Especially over this past month our lives, our region, our state, our country, and even the whole world has been greatly affected—and essentially "shut-down"—by one little virus (COVID-19) that can't even be seen with the naked eye! But that's one of the most difficult and most frightening things about this crisis we are facing, isn't it: The fact that it is "unseen"? You can't physically see it being transmitted from person to person. We could be carrying the virus and spread it even if we're not showing any visible or physical symptoms. For these reasons it's been referred to by some as the "invisible enemy."

"Well, I've never seen the coronavirus with my own eyes so I don't believe it exists, and until I do, I'm going to live my life like it doesn't exist!" Does that sound like a wise philosophy to adopt? Why not? You and I can't see it, why should we believe it exists? Well, you could point to the overwhelming evidence of millions of confirmed infections worldwide. You could point to the effects of the virus, the symptoms people exhibit and even the thousands who have died because of the virus. You could even point to eyewitness accounts from doctors and nurses who have treated patients with the virus—or even better yet, first-hand accounts of people who have the virus or have recovered from the virus and experienced for themselves what it was like.

Yes, it's amazing how much of an impact something that is "unseen" can have on your life, and even the entire world. When I've preached on this text in previous years I usually make references to some of the other very obvious and extremely important things in life that we believe and know to be real and true even though we can't see them with our physical eyes: gravity, oxygen, and the wind, just to name a few. But think of even something like love. Can you physically "see" love? You can see the evidence of love, the effects of love, and can even experience and express love, but can you actually "see" it? Can you point to love floating in the air and say, "There's some love!" No. But I bet that you believe and know that love exists!

The fact is we believe in many things even though we can't see them. Why is it then that we don't often use this same clear and obvious type of thinking when it comes to Jesus and His promises? We've got evidence of God and His love all around us—in the magnificent way He's made us, in the beautiful creation He's provided for us, and the way He preserves and blesses us every single day. Most importantly we have His very own words! We have what He's told us about Himself as well as pages and pages of eyewitness accounts, examples, illustrations, decrees, commandments, prophecies, and promises that have themselves been miraculously preserved for us over thousands of years. All people should—at the very least—believe in the existence of God, and in the fact that He must be incredibly wise and powerful, just as easily as they believe in the existence and power of gravity, viruses, and love!
Thomas should have “put the pieces together” as well and realized the truth that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead even before Jesus appeared to Him the week after Easter behind locked doors:

- Thomas had the eyewitness testimony of the women who saw Jesus on their way back from His empty tomb.
- He had the eyewitness testimony of the two disciples who walked and talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.
- He even had the eyewitness testimony of the rest of his close, trusted friends: Jesus’ disciples. We hear them tell Thomas in our text, The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord" (v. 25).
- At the very least Thomas should have believed the very words of the Lord Jesus Himself! During Jesus’ ministry Thomas and the rest of the disciples had repeatedly heard Him predict His suffering, death, and His resurrection on the third day. Mark records one of these predictions for us, Then He [Jesus] took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again" (Mark 10:32-34).

Thomas had no reason NOT to believe, but he chose to believe only what his eyes could see.

That is not faith. The Bible defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Jesus did not “praise” Thomas when he put too much stock in what he could see and feel and allowed his reason to “doubt” that Jesus had, in fact, risen from the dead. But what did Jesus say about those who have not seen Him, and yet believe in Him (and remember this would include you and me!)? He doesn’t call us “childish,” “foolish,” or “small-minded” for believing in Him even though we haven’t ever seen Him. No! He calls us “Blessed!” He says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (v. 29).

Jesus does not want a “doubting Thomas” type of faith from His followers. That is why He says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (v. 29). In times of weakness, confusion, and doubt; when we find ourselves crying out “Why, Lord?!” and “Where are you, Lord?!” and we, like Thomas, ask the Lord for more proof, what we are doing is narrowing our search down to the visible, physical proof that we want to see. In times of confusion and doubt it is important that we look to the things that we know and can be sure of—the sure and certain things Jesus has shown us:

- The fact that His handprints are all over creation (which, by the way, is something we can see, observe, and experience for ourselves).
- Our “natural knowledge of Him; the conscience that He has placed inside each one of us.
- The historical fact of Jesus crucifixion on the cross where Jesus gave His life for us as the ultimate and unquestionable proof that He loves us and would do anything to save us from hell.
- The fact that He has given us His very own words—the very words of God Himself—which He inspired His own eyewitnesses to write down. Eyewitnesses like John, who tells us in the last verse of our text, “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (v. 31).

Jesus has come to each one of us today in His Word—with His very own words—to remove our doubts. He says to each one of us, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side (v. 27a). See and touch the wounds I bore on the cross for your sins. See and touch that I am your living, loving Savior! Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (v. 27b). Jesus is speaking to you and me as well when He says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (v. 29).
Jesus has also given us the sure and certain words of His eyewitnesses, like Peter, who wrote to Christians, who, like us, had not seen Jesus with their physical eyes either, “Though you have not seen him [Jesus], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9 NIV).

Yes, it’s amazing how much of an impact something—or Someone—that is “unseen” can have on your life, and even the entire world. The fact is, we “believe in” plenty of things in this life without having seen them with our eyes: gravity, oxygen, viruses, and even love! Just take a look at the evidence and the effects of each one: they all exist! Take a look at all the evidence Jesus has given us that He lived, He died, and lives again—or just take His Word for it! He’s never broken a promise! With “eyes” of faith in Jesus’ Words we confidently say today with the disciples, “We have seen the Lord!” (v. 25). Believe and there will come a day when you will truly see—not with “eyes” of faith—but as the Apostle John reminds us, “we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2)! Like Job of the Old Testament, we look forward to that day and say, “For I know that my Redeemer lives... Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25,27). Amen.