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A Great Blessing **John 20:29-31**

Intro: We are looking at the appearance of the risen Lord to Thomas, 1 week after the Resurrection. Thomas was the last of the 11 disciples to see Jesus alive; he was also, apparently, the hardest nut to crack. Again, this is not because he had more doubt than the other 10. None of them believed Jesus was alive either until they saw Him with their own eyes. Ultimately, Thomas' problem wasn't one of doubt; his problem was unbelief – determined, stubborn unbelief. He could not conceive of a scenario that could reverse the horrible, inevitable outcome of the crucifixion that Jesus endured. In his mind, Jesus was dead and both history and experience told him that once a man died, there was no coming back from that. He refused to believe the testimony of his fellow disciples.

Until, that is, Thomas was confronted by the risen Lord Himself. Jesus knew the situation. He understood the logical and historical reasons for Thomas' unbelief. He also recognized the melancholy tendencies of Thomas' character, how he tended to look at the downside of things. But Jesus also knew that these "reasons" for Thomas' unbelief, no matter how accurate, did not excuse his unbelief. So Jesus, the risen Lord, revealed Himself to Thomas and issued him a great challenge; He literally commands Thomas to move from a position of stubborn unbelief to true faith. Jesus didn't wait for Thomas to get his mind right; He met him right where he was and challenged him to believe. Jesus appeared to Thomas because He wanted to strengthen Thomas' faith and include him in all the blessings that lay in store for those who choose to follow Him. What blessings? That will be partially answered in our text today.

We have been considering the 7 last statements of Jesus before His ascension. These statements reveal the new spiritual reality that was brought into existence by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The 1st few statements were delivered on the evening of the resurrection when Jesus first appeared to His followers (minus Thomas). He began by granting them a great gift, the gift of Peace – not just peace with God but the peace of God as well. He then presented them with a great Commission – sending them out into the world to carry on His work, just as the Father had sent

Him. Next, He offered them a great Consolation – the constant presence of the Holy Spirit, His own Spirit to empower and enable them to accomplish the mission He is sending them out to do. A week later, Jesus extended a great Challenge to Thomas to stop being unbelieving and believe the truth about the Resurrection.

Now, prior to the crucifixion, Thomas would have qualified as a believer in Jesus. He walked with Him, ministered with Him, learned from Him and lived with Him as a faithful, dedicated disciple. But, at this meeting, Jesus didn't give Thomas any credit for his prior belief. He didn't cut Thomas any slack for his previous belief in the teachings and miracles of Jesus. No, Thomas did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus so Jesus considered him an **unbeliever**. This obviously points to the necessity of accepting the truth of the resurrection for salvation but it also identifies the crucial role the resurrection plays in the life of the believer. To down-play or neglect the reality of the resurrection in the life of a Christian robs us of blessings and opportunities as Jesus goes on to declare...

29 – One of the most encouraging things about the Bible is that it is filled with far more blessings than curses. There are plenty of curses in God's Word – these are simply warnings of coming judgment. But on the whole, the blessings are more numerous and more wonderful than any of those more somber parts.

The Bible begins with a blessing: after each day of creation God declares of His work that, "It is good." The Bible ends with a blessing, "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen" (**Rev 22:21**). In between, the blessings are everywhere: from His blessing to Adam and Eve in the Garden "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (**Gen 1:28**) to His blessing of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; to His many blessings promised to His people in general.

The OT is filled to overflowing with blessings from God and this glorious trend continues into the NT. Depending on the concordance used, you can find as many as 375 OT passages that deal with God's blessing and 108 in the NT.

In light of this wonderful characteristic of God, it's not surprising that Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, also had many words of blessing to give during the days of His earthly ministry: the beatitudes of **Matt 5:3-11**; His blessing

of the children in [Mk 10:16](#); of the disciples in [Mt 13:16; 16:17](#), of the faithful servants of God in [Mt 24:46](#); of those who hear the Word of God and keep it ([Luke 11:28](#)). There is also this great benediction that is our text today, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” ([John 20:29](#)). This blessing, the 5th of Jesus’ last words in John’s Gospel, is great for 2 reasons: 1) its the last blessing Jesus spoke on earth; 2) its not just for an individual person or a limited group of people but applies to everyone who believes on Jesus as their personal Savior.

What does Jesus mean by this statement? Is He saying that a subjected faith that’s not based on any evidence is better than an objective faith that’s based on facts? Is He saying that only blind faith is blessed? It would be hard to accept that this is His meaning, since He just provided tangible evidence of His resurrection to Thomas by appearing to him and inviting him to put his finger into the holes of His hands and put his hand into His side. It’s also clear that John didn’t take Jesus’ words this way either, because immediately after this John will say that he wrote certain things in his Gospel for the express purpose that those who would read it might believe. It’s clear that Jesus is not advocating for faith entirely devoid of evidence. But that still does not answer the question. What does He mean? I would posit to you that Jesus is not speaking of a subjective faith, but of a satisfied faith. He is speaking of a level of faith that is completely satisfied with the evidence that God provides of Himself in His Word and is thus, not yearning for extraordinary, supernatural evidence to confirm their faith. It’s a faith that thrives without any expectation of visions, miracles, spiritual experiences, or various forms of “success” as evidence of God’s favor. In fact, Jesus says a faith without these things is actually superior to a faith based on these things.

Think about it, there are plenty of examples in the Bible of people being granted visions, witnessing miracles or having a spiritual experience with God. We read about them all the time because they are everywhere in the Bible and we think of how wonderful that experience must have been for that person then, let’s be honest, we ask, “Why can’t we experience something similar?” I mean, we serve the same God, right? Surely we could believe much better and be more effective in our Christian walk and witness if we did; at least, that’s our argument.

The reality is: that’s not true at all, even if we like to tell ourselves it is. For

one thing, we usually desire these experiences for the wrong reason—vanity. We'd have a higher opinion of ourselves if we were given an experience most believers don't get. For another, visions don't necessarily lead to greater faith. There are plenty of examples in the Word where somebody heard directly from God and still went about doing their own thing (Cain, Balaam, Saul). Obviously, faith gives meaning to our experience rather than the other way around. In every case cited, the person didn't lack in information from God, they lacked a desire to believe and obey God.

What about miracles? Do you pray for them thinking you could believe God better if you saw some? The opposite is true. If you're looking for miracles (which God sometimes but seldom provides), you will gradually become insensitive to the thousands of normal evidences of God's great mercy that you constantly receive through out the day.

There are those who think their faith would be stronger they'd be better able to live the Christian life were they had some special spiritual experience. We see the spiritual gifts Paul lists in [1 Cor 12:9-10](#) and think if we could only have or experience something like that, we'd be stronger and happier Christians. But that's not true either. God sometimes grants such experiences for the good of His church; that Paul lists them is evidence that He does. But if you read the chapter carefully you'll notice that Paul never encourages us to seek these experiences. If anything, he seems to warn against them, and he certainly doesn't pronounce any special blessing on their exercise. Why? Because the blessings of the Gospel are for those who live by faith and not by sight, for those who live by their faith in the character and goodness of God and not in the evidence of visions, miracles, or other such experiences.

There's another thing which cannot be ignored because it's so common in our day. It's the supposed evidence of success, measured by the number of people converted, church growth, income for Christian ministry and other such things. Does this mean that we're not to work to see as many people converted as possible? Does it mean that we're not to be concerned with church growth? Does it mean that we shouldn't be concerned with the level of income necessary to keep our ministries running? Not at all! But, it does mean that we're not to tie our faith in God to these things. We're to pray, believe and go on working even when we don't see this kind of numerical blessing.

What is faith? Faith is believing God on the basis of His Word and then acting on it. That's true faith. That's what God blesses. God promises a blessing on those who have faith. We cannot repeat that enough. God promises to bless true, mature faith, not the living out of some unusual spiritual experience.

It must be this way for (1) God to be fair in His dealings with us and (2) for the blessing of faith to be for all? What if it was the other way around? What if God's blessings were linked to the unusual? That would mean either His blessing would only be for a small, select group; or the unusual would have to become commonplace = they would cease to be "special evidences." They'd be just like all those other countless evidences of God's providence that we enjoy daily but don't regard so highly because they're so common. No, the blessings of God are for every believer and they're not based on any unusual Christian experience but on faith which is common to all who call upon the name of Jesus as Savior. This is why the Gospel of John ends on this note. It ends here because John wants to encourage everyone to believe on Jesus and enjoy God's blessings.

30-31 – Some books are written to entertain, some to share information, some books are to cause arguments and some are written to settle arguments. Some books are written to make money and some are written to engage in an ego trip – to make the author's name well known. But here, at the end of ch20, John shares with us the fact that his Gospel was written for a singular purpose – that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Christ and by believing, they may have eternal life in His name. I realize that sounds like 2 reasons but it isn't. The 1st part is the primary reason why John wrote this Gospel – to produce faith. The 2nd part is merely a consequence of that faith.

Since this was his purpose, John obviously had to be very selective in what he wrote about Jesus. John had spent over 3 yrs following and ministering with Jesus. He was part of the "inner circle" of 3 disciples that were taken by Jesus up to the Mt of Transfiguration, to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter, to go deeper into the Garden on the night of His arrest to watch and pray with Jesus. He saw His anguish, His sweat as it were great drops of blood. But, oddly enough, John doesn't mention any of these events in his book. John omits any and every event that could possibly promote him

over Jesus. He fills all the available space with the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. Everything is subordinate to his grand end that the reader should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Some books are written to satisfy curiosity but not this one. John could have added a physical description of Jesus: height, weight, color of eyes, hair, etc. John was a cousin to Jesus and was probably privy to what Jesus was like as a child, or at least a teenager – who were His first friends; what people thought about Him early in His life. He could have added some information on what became of Nicodemus or how the religious leaders reacted when they heard Jesus was alive or a hundred other things but he didn't. He only included those things that would lead us to faith in Jesus as Messiah and God, not to satisfy our useless curiosity.

We have been studying John's Gospel verse-by-verse for some time now and it has been very instructive to our Christian faith and walk. But, the down side of the verse-by-verse study is that you often miss the big picture – you can't see the forest for the trees. If you stop and think about it, John's Gospel is actually just one long series of testimonies to Jesus. In [ch1](#) we have the first testimony provided by John the Baptist, who declares Jesus to be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Then both Andrew and Philip recognize Him as Messiah, while Nathaniel declares Him to be the Son of God. In [ch2](#) He reveals His glory to the disciples by the miracle of turning the water into wine. In [ch3](#) we have the witness of Nicodemus In [ch4](#), the witness of the Samaritan woman, then that of the citizens of Sychar and the testimony of the nobleman whose son Jesus healed.

In [ch5](#), Jesus cites the witness of John the Baptist, His own works and the testimony of the Father as evidence of His claims and says the Scriptures testify about Him. In [ch6](#), He feeds the 5K then confronts the crowd with the truth about Himself and many quit following Him. He confronts the 12 and they declare, through Peter, their belief and trust in His deity. [Ch9](#) has the story of the healing of man born blind; [ch11](#) of the raising of Lazarus, [ch12](#): Palm Sunday. After the resurrection, we have the experiences of Peter and John, Mary Magdalene, the 10 disciples and then finally Thomas who declares the greatest confession of all. From first to last, this book is a testimony to Jesus!

What are we to do with all this information? Clearly, believe that Jesus is who He said He is. Accept His teachings as true, believe on Him personally and commit yourself to Him. If you do, John tells you that you will have eternal life. Eternal life doesn't mean endless time; even the lost are going to live forever in hell. Eternal life means the very life of God experienced today. It refers to a quality of life – not the quantity of time. It's the spiritual experience of heaven on earth today. The believer doesn't have to die to experience eternal life; they possess it in Christ today!

For the believer, we must consider what the basis of our faith is. We shouldn't look at Thomas and the other disciples with envy, thinking that the power of Christ's resurrection can't be experienced in our lives today. It's not necessary to "see" Jesus in order to believe. Sure, it was a blessing for the early Christians to see Jesus and know that He was alive but that's not what saved them. They weren't saved by seeing Jesus, they were saved by believing on Him; just as we are today.

Am I saying that visions, miracles, spiritual experiences or successful ministries are wrong? Not at all – especially if God provides them. What is wrong is the constant pursuit of those things as evidence to bolster our faith. The constant need for continual manifestation of God's presence in our lives points to an immaturity of faith. Let me put it this way: are our spiritual ears so dull, are our spiritual eyes so blind; are our carnal minds so preoccupied and our attitudes so jaded by this world that we selfishly require God to perform some spiritual manifestation to encourage our failing faith? Mature faith reads God's Word and trusts that God will do what He has said. That kind of faith will be blessed – with confidence, assurance, knowledge and hope that cannot be extinguished by the cares of this world.

What kind of faith do you have? 😊