



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for The Feast of St. Thomas
December 21, 2025

Believing Is Better Than Seeing

John 20:24–29

²⁴ Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them 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.”

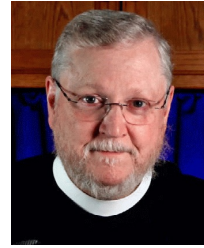
The disciples were especially blessed, weren't they? I mean, getting to see Jesus in the flesh, to travel around with Him, to see Him perform miracles, to actually see Him risen from the dead, to see Him with their own eyes! What could be better than that? No wonder they had such a strong faith! Too bad we can't have that kind of faith in our day.

Have you ever thought about the advantage they had? On the day of His resurrection, in the evening, Jesus Himself came to them and showed them His hands and side. No wonder they believed! Well, most of them, anyway. Thomas wasn't there that night. Where was he? What was he doing? We don't know. All we know is that, when the others were gathered, he was absent. Strange and sad.

The others told him, “We have seen the Lord.” “Mm-hm. You do remember He was crucified, right? Just a couple days ago. He's dead, guys. Our master is dead. Roman soldiers don't mess up on things like that. No, I can't believe your crazy wishful thinking. Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.”

Well, a week later, Thomas was there with the rest of them and Jesus appeared to them again. He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

Seeing *is* believing, right? Thomas was blessed to see. The rest of them were blessed to see. And they believed. Lucky dogs! Oh, those fortunate disciples! If only we could have been in their position! Then we would be strong Christians and wouldn't falter in our faith.



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But that's not how Jesus sees it. He said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." According to Jesus, seeing is not an advantage. Seeing is not the same as believing. In fact, Jesus turns it around. He says, basically, that "Believing Is Better Than Seeing."

What does Jesus mean by this? And who does this include? Beloved, when Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," He's talking about *everyone* who believes in Him and has never seen Him. That's you! Jesus is talking here about you. He says that you are blessed – more blessed than His own blessed apostles – because believing is better than seeing.

You and I, beloved, are in the same category as the people for whom John was writing his account several decades after the fact – for folks who had never seen Jesus, either because of the years or the distance. There were relatively few who actually got to see Jesus during His public ministry, and even fewer who saw Him after He rose from the dead.

There were enough eyewitnesses, however, to attest to the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ for all time to come; God saw to that. Jesus wanted a core of witnesses to verify the factuality and physicality of the resurrection. As Peter would testify to the Jewish council, "We are witnesses of these things." The Apostle Paul would later write: "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

So there were plenty of eyewitnesses to establish the facts at the time of the founding of the church. But it wasn't the seeing alone, nor was it the seeing *per se*, that produced the faith. Seeing, by itself, is not the same thing as believing.

You and I are like the millions of Christians around the world, dating back as far as the first century, who never got to see Jesus, yet still believe in Him. And Jesus calls us all "blessed." And we still get in on the blessings that come through faith in Him.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Well then, we must be very blessed indeed! Think of all we haven't seen! We haven't seen Jesus turn water into wine. We haven't seen Jesus heal a man born blind. We haven't seen Jesus raise anyone from the dead. We haven't seen Jesus Himself risen from the dead. Yet we believe. And we are blessed.



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The blessedness of believing rather than seeing is a consistent teaching throughout the New Testament. The Apostle Peter, writing several decades after Christ's ascension, writes to Christians just like us: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pe. 1:8-9). *There* is the blessedness of believing apart from seeing! We know who Christ is and what He has done for us, and so we love Him. We rejoice with an inexpressible joy, because we know that we will obtain a glorious outcome, even our eternal salvation.

You know, that's something else we haven't seen. Not only have we not seen Christ's resurrection, we haven't yet seen our own. I don't know about you, but I haven't seen any of the folks I've buried get up out of their grave. And there's a grave down in Salemville waiting for me, but one day – the day Jesus comes again – I'm going to get up out of that grave. And I am absolutely certain that that's what's going to happen. Unless, of course, Jesus comes before they put me in the ground. But it's basically the same thing: believing that I'm going to live forever because of my Savior Jesus – whom I have never seen. Believing is better than seeing.

Likewise, Paul writes in Romans 8 that we wait eagerly for "the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Or again, in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul writes, "We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." And in chapter 5: "We walk by faith, not by sight."

The writer to the Hebrews says the same thing in chapter 11: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

All these passages are pointing out that you don't see! And remarkably, what you don't see is what you get! The eternal things, things like the salvation of your soul and the redemption of your body. You and I cannot see those things with our eyes. Yet, that is our sure and blessed hope, as sure as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. How is it that we believe all this – Christ's death winning our salvation, Christ's resurrection guaranteeing our own rising from the dead? You can't see forgiveness. Neither can you see eternal life. Not here. Not now.

But seeing does not equate with believing. It never did. There were plenty of people who saw Jesus but didn't believe. Think of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of Israel, who mocked Jesus while He hung on the cross: "He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." Well, no, they wouldn't. They wouldn't have trusted in Him as their Savior. All they would have seen was the man they had hated and rejected, and they would have been *horrified*, not filled with faith. They were



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like the people Jesus talked about in the account of the rich man and Lazarus: “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

Seeing by itself does no good; it must be accompanied by repentance over one’s sin and a genuine faith in the Savior. And, if those things are present, seeing is unnecessary. For seeing is not how repentance and faith are produced. And here now is the key. Here is how saving faith is produced: By the Word. The living and active Word of God works repentance and faith in our hearts. The Law convicts us of our sin and our need for a Savior. The Gospel leads us to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and enables us to trust in Him to supply our most crucial need, which is forgiveness of our sins and life that lasts forever. That kind of faith we only get through the gospel, as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts that miraculous believing that is better than seeing.

The Word – the Good News of Jesus Christ – *that’s* what does it! That’s what John says right after the Thomas account, stating the purpose for his whole Gospel: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” It’s the gospel, the good news of Christ, as it’s preached to us, taught to us, *sacramentally* handed to us – this gospel draws us to Christ and leads us to believe in Him as our Savior and by this to receive the gift of life He gives us.

And even that faith is a gift. As we say in the Third Article of the Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” The Holy Spirit works this saving faith in us our whole life long, from start to finish, and the gospel is the means by which He does this.

Therefore, beloved, in light of all this, what is to be our response today, as we approach the celebration of our Savior’s birth? At least this: Be in the Word.

If, as Paul says in Romans 10, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ,” then how important is it to remain in that Word? It’s all important, isn’t it? Oh, how we need the Word of God throughout our lives, every year, every week, every day! This is what sustains our faith! Without that life-giving Word, coming to us here in church every week, through the preaching and teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments – without the Word in our homes and our hearts in daily devotions – without the Word, our faith grows weak and is in danger of dying. God preserve us from that! But with the Word, with the gospel of Christ burning bright in our hearts and minds, our faith grows stronger and becomes active in good works, bearing the good fruits of faith. God help us to be in His Word!



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How blessed we are, my friends, to be those who have not seen and yet have believed! Praise God from whom all blessings flow! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen