



## Sermon

Date

### John's Witness

John 20:19-31; 1 John 1:1-2:2

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Let us fly back in time to April 33A.D. A group of frightened men have retreated to a hiding place for fear of the authorities. Why are they afraid?

It is the evening of the Sunday after the crucifixion. There has been some wild tale that Jesus' body has gone from the tomb. Some of the women have told the men that angels had spoken to them saying Jesus was not there anymore. Mary Magdalene even said she had spoken to him. Peter and John have found the body gone with the wrapping left behind like a discarded chrysalis.

It is dangerous— it is very likely the authorities will come looking for the men Jesus led and get rid of them too. So they have locked the door for some safety, and then - on this most surprising of days – Jesus comes and stands in the midst of them. Somehow he has entered or appeared – they don't know how - yet that is not the chief surprise: he should be dead and here he is alive and so very solid.

He greets them with the normal Jewish greeting, "*Shalom* – peace be with you." Who is this? It looks like Jesus but it can't be. He shows them his hands and his side with the marks of the crucified and the spear thrust which proved he had been dead.

It was He – somehow – alive again. How they rejoiced – their worst nightmare had been turned to something altogether glorious.

John was there; he recorded what he saw because it is vitally important. He was an eyewitness and he had evidence to share. In the reading from Acts 4, we hear that the Apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, verse 33:

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ...

We also read in Acts 1:8 that Jesus had said to them, "... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The point of a witness is to tell what they have experience. This was no metaphor dreamed up to ease the pain of a brutal execution.

Meanwhile, Thomas had not been present. And he did not like the story his fellow disciples told. He sounded angry, didn't he? Was he impatient with them for, as he thought, making up a fairy story in their grief? Was he just unable to conceive of such a thing as most of us would have been? Whatever his motivation, he threw out a challenge demanding the level of proof he needed to believe:

"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."<sup>1</sup>

Well, God heard him and the following week, when they were all gathered together, Jesus once again came among them and said to Thomas,

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:25

“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”<sup>2</sup>

How would you feel? You set conditions on God; he hears them and fulfils them exactly for you. Do you see the gracious kindness of the Lord in his response? Does that encourage you that Jesus knows your questions, doubts and struggles too and will respond to you?

And can you take heart from Jesus’ next comment that we who believe, although we have not seen, are blessed?

As we explore the eyewitness material we are given, John gives us more in his first letter. He wrote that he was with Jesus alive, solid, talking and eating.

Listen to what John wrote in the beginning of his first letter:

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it. ... The eternal life which was with the Father ... has appeared to us. <sup>1</sup>It was from the beginning, we have heard it, we have seen it with our eyes, we have touched it with our hands – this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life.

He was saying in effect, “How solid do you want your evidence?” I tell you about what I have heard, what I seen with my eyes, what I have touched with my hands – eyewitness evidence does not get better than that!

John was writing of Jesus and identified him as Eternal Life. Do you remember Jesus said of himself, “I am the Resurrection and the Life”<sup>3</sup> and also, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”<sup>4</sup> Eternal Life is a person not a thing. That takes a bit of getting your head around! Eternal life is a person who is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

John speaking as a witness could say he heard him, saw him, gazed upon him (yes physically with his eyes) and touched him with his hands.

We are given the testimony of the eye witnesses of the time. When we put our trust in Jesus it is not just an intellectual position like: “I believe the chemical formula of water is H<sub>2</sub>O.” It is more like jumping into the swimming pool believing that the water will support you.

When we put our trust in Jesus as Son of God, Saviour, risen from the dead it changes everything. We come into relationship with God. Our past is washed clean; our future is assured with life that reaches beyond the grave and our present is lived with Jesus available to us.

In his epistle, John continues by discussing relationship with God in the vertical dimension and with each other in the horizontal. Life in God will affect live human relationships. Jesus invites us into the fellowship he has with the Father.

The Gnostics against whose beliefs John was arguing, separated the spiritual from the physical. They would say, ‘Get the spiritual right and it doesn’t matter about what you do in your body.’ But that is totally wrong. If we don’t walk in the light we are not in good fellowship with God. That is, we need to live transparent, honest lives. But sin fractures this connection this flow of relationship. It is a barrier between us and God. And that barrier can only be dealt with by repentance and forgiveness.

Others in John’s day, denied that they had sinned at all. They believed they were perfect. I have heard someone say something like that. Just couldn’t accept she’d done anything wrong in her life.

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<sup>2</sup> John 20:27

<sup>3</sup> John 11:5

<sup>4</sup> John 14:6

Well, John says that is self-deception and it shows God's truth is not in us. On the contrary, the way to be clear of sin, is not to pretend it does not exist but to confess and ask forgiveness.

We need to have confidence that our God is serious about forgiving sin. It is a very important part of the Bible message. The next verse is key and worth memorising:

**1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Will you repeat that after me?

It is an important promise we need to have ready to help ourselves and others when we struggle with knowing we are forgiven.

What is the condition for the promise? If we confess our sins... That is what we are asked to do. Don't hide them from God but acknowledge them before him.

Do you notice two actions God will take?

1. Because he is faithful, he will forgive our sins. He is faithful to his promises to forgive us.
2. Because he is just, he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Jesus has already paid the penalty on the cross. If we fulfill the condition, it would be unjust of God to punish us as well as bearing the penalty himself on the cross.

How can we be confident in this? Well if the straight word is not enough for you we are told more about Jesus.

1. In 1 John 2:1 we read: "... if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."  
Do you realise that Jesus is your lawyer? He is your advocate. He speaks for you not against you. He presents the only legal defence: this one has trusted in me Father. He or she is washed from all sin by my blood.
2. Then in verse 2: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." Jesus himself is the righteous one and the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His offering of himself deals with the wrath of God against sin.

It is important that you realise when you become a Christian putting your faith in Jesus, trusting him to be your saviour and asking for forgiveness, you become an adopted child of God.

When you subsequently sin, you don't cease to be a child of God, it is that the relationship is marred. There is a blockage between us and God. When we come again to ask forgiveness, it is not a fresh salvation event, it is a restoration of relationship.

When you are guilty for some sin you have committed don't hesitate to confess your sin to God and ask for his forgiveness. And know that because he is faithful and just, he forgives your sin and cleanses you from all unrighteousness. Know that Jesus is praying for you and pleading your case with the Father. Know that he has already made the sacrifice that atones for your sin.

When we come to God, confess our sin and ask forgiveness we have the assurance of these verses from 1 John Chapters 1 & 2. And we can rest on His word when he assures us: "I am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 43:25