

## Unless I See . . . . I Will Never Believe It

Do you believe in something you have never actually physically seen with your own eyes? I believe there was a plane called 'Concorde,' a singer called Elvis, a Prime Minister of Australia called Menzies, a President of America called Washington, a hymn writer called John Newton. My belief is based on the testimony of others. In the same way, I accept the testimony about Jesus of first century people.

"Unless I see . . . I will never believe it," are words spoken by Thomas when the disciples tell him they'd seen Jesus Easter Sunday evening. A week later, even though the doors are locked, Jesus again appears in the room where the disciples are gathered. This time Thomas is present. Jesus says: "Peace be with you!" Then he says to Thomas, "Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas responds to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26-28).

To this day Thomas is still called "doubting" Thomas! Honest doubt and sincere questions are not things celebrated among Christians. Too often people are told: "Just believe." But who wants to believe a lie? Thomas didn't want to have a blind or empty faith. The other disciples keep repeatedly saying to Thomas "We have seen the Lord!" But to him this is an impossibility.

Thomas is obstinate. He is so certain of the death of Jesus that he cannot believe this report of Jesus' reappearance and insists he will not believe unless he can actually touch Jesus' body. Thomas wants nothing less than material evidence [EBC]. Jesus' response to Thomas highlights his failure. A failure to believe the "apostolic witness" which is to be the basis for the faith of Thomas and ourselves.

There are two things about the encounter of Thomas with Jesus that reinforces the fact that Jesus truly did rise from the dead that first Easter Sunday. First, Jesus knows the conditions Thomas lays down as the basis for changing his mind. Jesus listens in on our conversations! Secondly, Jesus physically stands there and talks directly to Thomas. He responds with a heartfelt confession, "My Lord and my God." "The most outrageous doubter of the resurrection of Jesus utters the greatest confession of the Lord who rose from the dead."

Jesus responds with his last recorded beatitude: "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Whether we are first or twenty-first century people, who have not physically seen Jesus, Jesus reassures us our position is not inferior to that of Thomas. In fact, it is a position that includes a unique blessing. Peter writes: "though you have not seen him, you love him" (1 Peter 1:8).