

A Faith That Works

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Scripture Text— John 20.19-31

I heard about a group of ladies who returned to their home town after many years, and when they visited the church, they noticed that over the years, deceased members of the various families were scattered throughout the cemetery.

And they decided that families ought to all be buried together and that they should do something about it. So on Sunday morning they told the pastor that they had paid someone to rearrange the cemetery so now all family members would be together for all time.

Of course the pastor was a little bewildered and said, "But how did you rebury all those people? None of the graves look disturbed." And the ladies said, "Oh, we didn't rebury those people. We simply had the headstones rearranged."

Perhaps that was the cemetery where Addie Mae Collins was buried in 1963 . . .
Addie Mae Collins, Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 < 1998 body to be exhumed, but not there!
Different suggestions were made, such as maybe the cemetery had buried her in the wrong plot, or maybe the headstone was put over the wrong grave. . .

Of different suggestions as to what happened, one suggestion was never made:

. . . That Addie Mae had come back to life. Dead people don't do that!

John 20:19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

John 20:20 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

John 20:21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

John 20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

John 20:23 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 20:24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

John 20:25 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."

John 20:26 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!"

John 20:27 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."

John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are

those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

John 20:31 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.

Faith, Presumption or Superstition? (All 3 are things that are unprovable)

A valid faith distinguishes itself from presumption and superstition in this:

A valid faith requires a sufficiency of evidence to warrant the faith.
Everybody lives by faith every day. Even skeptics and atheists.

Many people have a religion which they believe to be true, but that doesn't mean that they have faith. Of these three (*faith, presumption, superstition*), only faith is grounded upon evidence as opposed to theosophy or one's desires or fears.

Thomas unwilling to suspend his intelligence, believe something simply because he would like it to be true. Thomas was *willing* to believe. He just wanted some evidence to support that belief.

Actually, *all* the disciples were just as skeptical as was Thomas!

Seeing the risen Lord gave each of them sufficient evidence to believe in the resurrection.

But . . . "Blessed are those who have not seen and still believe." (29)

For us too, evidence is required.

Faith as Proposition or Life

Many people have no factual basis for their belief, so what they are believing in is the *idea* that the Lord is risen. And an *idea* is different from a Presence.

Though they say they believe Christ is risen from the dead, He is absent from their lives.

They are living between the Cross and the Resurrection.

They are living between the Cross and *Newness of life*.

Recent survey: The lives of most Christians is not much different from that of unbelievers.

For example, the divorce rate is about the same. So also the premarital pregnancy rate.

And also, people who are not *experiencing* their salvation are leaving the church.

They are living in the gap between the Cross and the Resurrection.

Their belief is not founded upon sufficient evidence to warrant a valid and productive faith . . . something that *convinces* them that the Lord lives!

The empty tomb (the great symbol of the resurrection of Christ) proves only that He was no longer there. For those first believers, the convincing evidence was actually *seeing* the risen Lord. But the Lord said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and still believe.*"

What is the evidence for us?

The witness of those believers (1 Corinthians 15.1-8; Luke 24.44-49)

Critiquing the Biblical record and finding it to be true and valid.

Seeing salvation's *newness* of life in true believers such as Chuck Colson, or the captain of a slave ship who became a Christian, and wrote the immortal hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

The debunking of atheism because of the findings of research in physics, cosmology and astronomy, biological complexity and biological information (DNA)

Denise Johnson: --Just reaching out in desperation to God . . . "O God, if you are there . . . !"

The innocent belief of a child who comes to experience life with an eternal quality as a child, and the experience of that life validates itself. So also for believers already walking with the Lord.

There must be some reason that enables people to believe that the Lord does live, or else they are believing only in the proposition that He lives, and not actually believing in Him.

Faith that Saves.

The point of salvation is not forgiveness and heaven (although that is part of it).

Rather, the essential point in God saving us is that we are to be saved *from* our sinful nature which controls our thinking and motivates us to sinful behavior . . . saved from this and saved *unto* being God conscious in all we do and righteous in all our behavior!

And the experience of our salvation resides with the person of Christ, and not just in believing something about Him.

So the question for each of us is, "Do I really know that the Lord lives, and is with me?" . . .
And then we must ask, "Is His presence the controlling factor in my life?" . . .

Faith / belief > *πιστις* = trusts in, clings to, relies upon

Christianity is not just another self-improvement program (*Change the way you think and you'll change your life*). No, Christianity is not just a philosophy, a doctrine, or a teaching.

Christianity is the practice of immersing yourself in the Spirit of Christ, so that in all your ways you are representing him in this world.

This means that a Christian is one who (as much as possible) is totally responsive to the Lord without any reservations, filled with His Spirit, and who lives his life as one who is "on mission," seeking at all times and in every situation to do what God would have him do.

What enabled you to reach out to God and trust in Him?

- the change you saw in a believer's life?
- the validity of the Biblical message?
- the desperation of no other hope?

How long are these "*faith enablers*" the foundation of one's faith?

... **Only Until** these initial "faith enablers" are replaced by the *experience* of being saved.
(2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

The Perfect Seven: Aspects of our salvation

1. Forgiveness--the deliverance from guilt and estrangement from God
2. Reconciliation--being embraced by God, your friend and creator
3. Redemption--being saved from the power your sinful inclinations have over you
4. Regeneration--being given a heart that loves God and wants to serve Him
5. Justification--the sufficiency of Christ's payment for your sins, and God's gift of true righteousness
6. Sanctification--being set apart for God's special purpose for you, and conforming you to the image of Jesus, and filling you with the character of His Holy Spirit (Galatians 5)
7. Glorification--God revealing Himself through you

And this promise that God will reveal Himself to others through His humble children and servants raises the question . . . What is our mission as Christians? . . . to *convert* people to our (Christian) doctrine?

Are we to argue them into the kingdom? . . . Are we to give them some "plan of salvation" whether they want it or not? . . . or did Jesus tell us to be *witnesses*? And what is the difference?

There is a time to witness and a time to be silent (note Ecclesiastes 3.7)

Witnesses of what? (Luke 24.44-49)

- The fulfillment of the prophecies regarding Jesus, the prophesied Messiah
- His crucifixion and resurrection
- God's command to repent and His remission of our sins
- The presence of his Holy Spirit in our lives
- And then, remembering that Jesus has appointed us to be *witnesses* that **WE** are experiencing the risen Lord, we must do more than share the gospel of Christ with others. . . We must help others to find a reason to believe!

Christians in the "Dark Ages" refusing to flee the towns during the Bubonic Plague, and staying to nurse the sick and bury the dead of their pagan neighbors even though many of them succumbed to the disease. They were doing what the Lord would have done!

It's the witness of a uniquely Christian character and behavior that earns the privilege of telling others that God loves them, and that in the person of Jesus Christ their sins are forgiven, and that their destiny is to become conformed to the image of Jesus.

Regardless how fervently you believe your Christian doctrine, you are to be witnessing of the reality of that salvation which you are experiencing, because salvation is not a doctrine. Salvation is experiencing the reality of being saved from what you are apart from God.

The doctrine of salvation simply describes that experience. But the important thing is not the description, but the reality.

"They will know you are Christians by your love."

How confident are you that the Lord *lives*? Is this a theological proposition to you, or do you live all of life aware of His Presence and leaning upon His guidance and enablement?

Are you experiencing his salvation daily? In what ways is He saving you?

How is your life different when you've given control of your life to the Lord from what it is when you are trying to run your life?

Are you experiencing the “perfect 7” aspects of his gift of salvation?

Whether for the first time or once again, will you give yourself, your life to the risen Lord Jesus Christ?

Will you live life as He wants you to live it?

In whatever words you choose, give yourself to Him right now. Totally! No conditions.

Either you're accepting Him as Lord and Savior or you're not.

“O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, I give myself to you

Save me from what I am apart from you. Save me to become just like you.

Save me for I am a sinner, unable to be righteous as you are righteous, unable to forgive as you forgive, unable to love as you love. In your Presence, I see that all the self-righteousness with which I clothe myself is but as filthy rags, for you see me for what I am. So I give myself to you and ask you to take me back, saving me from what I am, to become the kind of person Jesus is.

And I make this solemn commitment: I will trust you with my whole being. In good times and bad, I will trust you, I will serve you. I will worship and praise you in all circumstances. I will be what you want me to be, go where you want me to go, do what you want me to do. And I will walk through life knowing that you are by my side at all times, my closest friend, my enabler, and my Savior. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.”