

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: April 19, 2009
Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“NEW FAITH” (Part 2) ~ John 20:19-29

“Seeing is believing.”

Really? Or is it, “Believing is seeing”?

☑ The Last Battle is the final book in C.S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia* series. Although it is a fantasy, it conveys a great deal of truth.

In The Last Battle a false Aslan arises, claiming to be the Great Lion. Many are deceived but the imposter is eventually revealed as a fraud.

Some Narnians cry to the real Aslan for help, and their faith is restored. By contrast, the Dwarfs become cynical. Having been duped by the false Aslan, they will not believe in the real one. Their faith is shattered.

A battle ensues. Narnia’s enemies capture the Dwarfs, bind them, and throw them in a stable. In Aslan’s providence the door to the stable becomes the door out of the old Narnia into the new Narnia. Only the Dwarfs cannot see it, because they won’t believe it:

“Are you blind?” [asks] Tirian.

“Ain’t we all blind in the dark!” [retorts a Dwarf].

“But it isn’t dark...” [says] Lucy. “Can’t you see? Look up! Look round! Can’t you see the sky and the tress and the flowers? Can’t you see *me*?”

“How in the name of all Humbug can I see what ain’t there? And how can I see you any more than you can see me in this pitch darkness?”

Lucy picks a bunch of violets. “Listen,” she says. “Even if your eyes are wrong, perhaps your nose is all right: can you smell *that*.” And she holds the flowers to the Dwarf’s nose.

“How dare you!” he [shouts]. “What do you mean by shoving...filthy stable-litter in my face?”

Aslan appears, and Lucy pleads for him to help the Dwarfs.

“Dearest,” replies Aslan, “I will show you both what I can, and what I cannot do.”

Aslan gives a long growl. “Hear that?” the Dwarfs say. “That’s the gang at the other end of the Stable. Trying to frighten us....Don’t take any notice. They won’t take *us* in again!”

Aslan makes a gourmet feast appear out of thin air, but to the Dwarfs it tastes like stable hay, withered turnips and dried up cabbage. They drink fine wine from golden goblets and say, “Ugh! [Imagine] drinking dirty water” from a used donkey trough.

The Dwarfs cannot see Aslan’s goodness even when He drops it in their laps. They are doomed to an eternity of self-imposed darkness, hunger and thirst. Their smug last words are, “We haven’t let anyone take us in.”

Aslan explains: “They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they *are in* that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.”

☹ People who are committed to disbelief cannot see. Consequently they disregard God and miss his blessing even when He hands it to them on a platter.

☺ The opposite is equally true! People who are committed to belief can see. Faith equips them to connect with the Lord and receive his blessings.

Please turn with me again to John chapter 20 {p 1106}. We examined vv 1-18 last week. The apostle describes two more Easter scenes in vv 19-31.

☐ Scene 1 is in vv 19-23.

The time is Easter evening. The place is a locked room in Jerusalem. The people are the 11 surviving disciples (minus Thomas), and maybe some other Christ Followers as well.

† In v 20 the Lord suddenly appears! **“Peace be with you!”** He says, and shows them his wounds. They are overjoyed.

◆ Resurrection Faith is experiential.

† In v 21 Jesus says, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** And in v 23 He says, **“If you forgive the sins of anyone, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** Both vv tie in with the commission Christ is going to give us at his Ascension: {Mt 28:19-20a} **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the HS, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”**

◆ Resurrection Faith advances the Kingdom of God.

† In v 22 the Lord breathes on his disciples and says, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** The presence of God enters in and fills them.

◆ As we learned last week, Resurrection Faith is grounded in relationship, above all with God.

□ Scene 2 is in vv 24-29.

† In vv 24-25 we learn that Thomas was not with the others on Easter. When they tell him about how the Lord appeared he replies, **“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.”**

Thomas is not *committed* to disbelief, like the Dwarfs in The Last Battle; but neither is he firm in faith. He is taking a wait-and-see approach.

Consider this: had Thomas joined the others in that room on Easter Sunday evening, he would not have been in doubt. Being with the rest of the disciples would have enabled him to experience Christ’s Resurrection life.

◆ This is further evidence that Resurrection Faith is grounded in relationship: our vertical connection with Jesus, of course, but also our horizontal connection with other Christ Followers. Both dimensions are essential to a thriving faith.

† Vv 26-27: A week later the disciples are back in the same place. This time Thomas is with them. Christ Jesus appears through the locked doors again. He turns to Thomas and invites him to touch his wounds: **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”**

◆ Resurrection Faith is experiential.

† To his credit, Thomas’ response is immediate and unequivocal: **“My Lord and my God!”** (v 28).

It is a profound realization, one that will turn his life around and change the world! Far from being a doubter, Thomas will be a man of bold conviction. He will bring the Gospel to people in faraway lands, and in the end enemies of Jesus in India will run him through with a spear.

And Thomas’ courageous faith did not begin in India. He certainly risked his life to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with his Jewish friends and neighbors right from the start.

For those reasons, it is unfair to characterize him as “Doubting Thomas” on the basis of this one incident in John 20. Thomas was a hero of the faith.

† In the meantime, the Risen Lord concludes this encounter in v 29. **“Because you have seen me,”** He says, **“you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

His words remind me of a poignant poem:

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.

**I believe in love even when I cannot feel it.
I believe in God even when He is silent.**

Those words declare an *enduring* faith that survives hardship, a *potent* faith that overcomes evil, a *transforming* faith that enables trust in God even as one is being hunted, brutalized and scheduled for death. You see, they were scratched onto the walls of hiding places and concentration camps by a Jewish poet during the Holocaust.

I suspect that Thomas could have written those words, later in his life. After all, he knew the Lord of Easter.

We can, too. {1 Pe 1:8} **“Though [we] have not seen him”** with our physical eyes, we can **“love him; and even though we do not see him now, [we can] believe in him and [be] filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”**

Believing is seeing.