

SEEING IS BELIEVING

John 20:26-29

INTRODUCTION

- A. How many of us believe in UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects)? How many of us believe in Sea Monsters? Do you realize that there have been over 70,000 reported sightings of UFOs since World War II? I personally do not believe in UFOs. But there are 70,000 individuals out there who do. I don't happen to believe in sea monsters. But there are many who have visited Loch Ness or seen something on the high seas who believe fervently in such things.
- B. What makes the difference between me and them? They saw something I haven't seen. For those people, UFOs or sea monsters aren't really a matter of hard evidence or scientific probabilities or logical assumptions. Rather, they have witnessed something that will make believers of them no matter what science or evidence or logic may say. You can argue with them 'till you are blue in the face - ultimately, they will only smile and say, "I know what I saw."
- C. Seeing is believing. And that fact is central to an understanding of the book of Acts. You cannot approach this book and understand its heart and dynamic without understanding the importance of "seeing" to this book. The faith, zeal, and evangelistic fervor of the disciples in Acts is founded on the fact that they could smile and say, "We know what we saw." These were eyewitnesses of Jesus - His life, death, and resurrection. That witness charged the early church with a sense of conviction and urgency which has rarely been seen any time since.

I. EMPHASIS ON WITNESS.

A. Jesus Understood the Importance of Eye-Witnesses.

- 1. Luke reports that Jesus made certain these men knew beyond doubt he was alive, **Acts 1:1-3**:
 - a. He "*presented himself*" to these men.
 - b. He gave "*many convincing proofs*" that he was alive.
 - c. He "*appeared to them over a period of 40 days.*"
- 2. Jesus commissions the apostles not so much as teachers or preachers but as *witnesses*, **Acts 1:8**.
 - a. Their primary task was not to organize the church or develop theology or teach morality.
 - b. They were called to tell other people what they had seen and heard.

B. Importance of Seeing and Touching.

- 1. The choosing of a replacement for Judas. What requirements do you impose for becoming an apostle? High moral character, good speaker, visionary?
- 2. **Acts 1:21-22** - The *witness* was all important.
 - a. Someone who had seen everything from the beginning.
 - b. Someone who could "become a witness" of the resurrection.

C. Emphasis on Witness in Sermons of Acts.

- 1. Sermon on the day of Pentecost:
 - a. Peter preaches on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
 - b. **Acts 2:32** - At the climax of his sermon, Peter stresses that he and the others had witnessed the resurrected Jesus – **NOT JUST HEARSAY!**
- 2. Sermon in the Temple:
 - a. Peter and John heal a crippled beggar in the Temple and attract a great crowd to listen to their preaching.
 - b. Again, Peter preaches the death and resurrection.

- c. **Acts 3:15** - Peter has seen Jesus. He is a witness.
- 3. Sermons before the Sanhedrin:
 - a. **Acts 4:18-20** - First encounter with the Jewish authorities.
 - b. **Acts 5:29-32** - Second encounter, after having been warned not to preach in this man's name.
- 4. Peter's sermon to Cornelius:
 - a. Peter doesn't lecture Cornelius on being a dirty gentile. His message focuses on Christ.
 - b. **Acts 10:37-41** - More particularly, his message focuses on his witness to the Christ.

II. SEEING MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

A. Seeing Built Faith

- 1. Saul was the last man on earth the early Christians expected to convert to Jesus.
 - a. Saul was there, giving approval to the death of Stephen (8:1)
 - b. It was Saul who *"began to destroy the church"* when a great persecution broke out against the Jerusalem church (8:1-3).
 - c. It was Saul who (9:1) breathed *"murderous threats against the Lord's disciples"* and went even to Damascus to arrest those belonging to the Way.
- 2. Yet something happened to Saul that changed him from persecutor to preacher, from despiser to disciple.
 - a. **Acts 9:3-6** - What happened to Saul?
 - b. Quite simply, he *witnessed* the risen Christ.
 - i. **A. 9:17** - Ananias tells us what happened: *"Jesus, who appeared to you..."*
 - ii. Acts 9:27 - Barnabas reports what happened: *"how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord . . ."*
 - iii. Paul himself tells us what happened: **1Co 15:3-8** (Emphasis on appeared.)
- 3. Seeing is believing in the book of Acts. It is a powerful motivation for faith.

B. Seeing Fueled Zeal and Boldness

- 1. Notice the Apostles before they saw the resurrected Jesus:
 - a. They had deserted Jesus at his arrest.
 - i. Peter denies he even knows Jesus.
 - ii. None of the apostles relieve Jesus of the burden of the cross, but a stranger named Simon.
 - iii. Only John is recorded as being at the crucifixion.
 - iv. It is not the 12 who take Jesus from the cross and bury him, but two men we know little about - Joseph and Nicodemus.
 - b. They were afraid. John tells us that on Sunday, they were together but had the doors locked for fear of the Jews.
- 2. Notice the Apostles AFTER they witnessed the resurrected Jesus:
 - a. Eleven times, Acts describes the disciples as "bold."
 - b. On one occasion, when the Sadducees saw the boldness of Peter and John, *"they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus,"* Acts 4:13.
 - c. Far from hiding behind closed doors, the apostles speak up in the Temple, courtrooms, synagogues, and the marketplace. When beaten, they rejoice; when imprisoned, they sing; when about to be killed, they give thanks!
- 3. Seeing produces zeal in the book of Acts. It is a powerful motivation for boldness.

C. Seeing Spurred Evangelism

- 1. Faith and Zeal spilled over into Evangelism: Because they *knew* that Jesus had been resurrected, and because they were so excited about that fact, they had to share what they had seen and heard.

2. Chapter 5 as an example of the evangelistic fervor of the apostles:
 - a. All believers met together at Solomon's portico (vss 12-16).
 - b. Sadducees arrest the apostles and put them in jail (vss 17-18).
 - c. That night, an angel releases them and sends them to the Temple to *"tell the whole message of this Life"* (vss 19-20).
 - d. *"Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach"* (vs 21a).
 - e. The full Sanhedrin convenes and sends for the apostles. But they are back in the Temple *"teaching the people"* (vss 21b-25).
 - f. The apostles are re-arrested and accused of having *"filled Jerusalem with your teaching"* (vss 26-28).
 - g. The response of Peter: *"We must obey God rather than men! . . . We are witnesses of these things . . ."* (vss 29-32)
 - h. They flog the apostles and order them not to speak (vs 40).
 - i. The apostles *"kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"* (42).
3. Being a witness brought a great sense of responsibility. There were others to be told *"the whole message of this Life."*

CLOSING: How do we catch a vision of Jesus today?

A. Pressing Needs of the Lord's Church.

1. We are in desperate need of the very things which so characterized them:
 - a. Faith - life-changing and powerful
 - b. Zeal - changing our timidity into boldness
 - c. Evangelistic fervor - so we never cease to tell
2. Yet the one thing which seems so influential in promoting those characteristics in the lives of the apostles is out of our reach.
 - a. It was the *witness* which changed in the apostles - primary evidence!
 - b. We have no primary evidence—only the word of those who saw.

B. Discipleship could not Depend on Sight.

1. The story of doubting Thomas - John 20:24-29
2. **Jn. 20:29**, *"Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."*
3. Jesus understood there would be a class of believers who did not have the privilege of an eye-witness experience.

C. Learning to "See through the mirror darkly", 1 Cor. 13:12.

1. Seeing through the eyes of gospel writers.
2. Using other senses to come into contact with the divine.
 - a. Just as the blind man must develop other senses to make contact with his environment, the man and woman of faith must develop other senses to make contact with Jesus.
 - b. Examples: Worship, Prayer, Obedience, Imitation