

Happy Believers Who Did Not See Jesus

John 20.24-29

When John wrote his Gospel, Jesus had been gone many years. The early Christians to whom he wrote had not seen Jesus. For them, and us, Jesus' encounter with Thomas communicates a simple truth: All who believe – whether they saw Jesus on earth or not – are blessed!

The Narrative

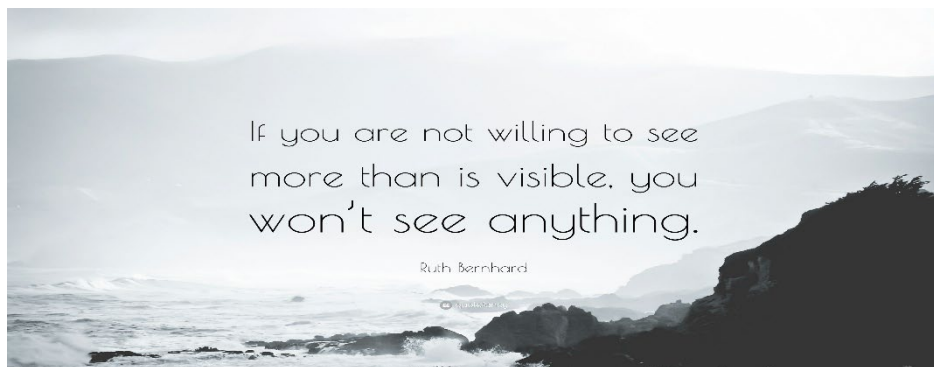
- Thomas is not there when Jesus appeared to the other disciples
- Having seen Jesus, they excitedly tell Thomas He is alive!
- Thomas refuses to believe unless he sees Jesus for himself
- A week later, Jesus challenges Thomas to see, and believe
- Thomas' magnificent confession: "My Lord and my God!"
- Jesus declares a blessing on those who don't see, and believe.

Usual Application: 'Don't look for evidence – just believe!'

Better: All who believe are happy, esp. those who don't see!

Key Observations

- Jesus *pursues* those who don't believe, even obstinately!
- People come to believe in many different ways
- There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to experience faith
- Only question: *Are you willing to see...and believe?*



1. Christians unfortunately tend to be hyper-judgmental. We may have valid motivations, even a desire for good morals. But our idealism can produce condemnation of those who aren't at the same spiritual maturity level we are. Thomas is a good example. He has been given the disparaging title "Doubting Thomas" – 'tarred-and-feathered' as somehow having an 'inferior faith' to others. Read John's narrative in John 20.24-29: *Whose testimony did Thomas refuse to believe? Is Thomas the only person in John 20 who didn't believe the testimony of others? (See Luke 24.36-43 as well!) Who initiates the meeting between Jesus and Thomas? Does Jesus condemn Thomas for his unbelief? What does Jesus invite Thomas to do? What does Jesus want Thomas to do? What is Jesus' attitude toward Thomas?*
2. Thomas responds to seeing Jesus with the most profound confession of Jesus' deity in Scripture: "My Lord and my God!" (28) This is the supreme Christological pronouncement in John – a narrative filled with great pronouncements. What other titles does Jesus receive in this Gospel? See 1.29, 36; 38; 41; 45; 49; 51 (that's in one chapter!). This declaration put Jesus on the same level as Yahweh! Compare Thomas' words to those of the heavenly beings to God the Father in Revelation 4.11!
3. English translations are divided on whether to take Jesus' words to Thomas in v29 as an assertion (KJV, NKJ, NIV, NLT) or a question (NAS, ESV, NRSV, NET Bible). The original Greek does not have punctuation marks, so these must be supplied by us. Which reading do you prefer? What difference does it make?
4. The lesson here is for Christians *and* non-Christians. For unbelievers the question is, *Are you looking for reasons to believe, or reasons to not believe?* For Christians, while we have received eternal life, we live each day by faith. When our faith is weak or we have wandered from the Lord, He'll come especially for us. He'll even meet us on our terms! We just need to look for reasons to believe, to walk by faith with Him *today*. Right now, just confess with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"