

Eyes to See

Easter Message

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

I wonder if we were told that we had to relinquish one of our five senses, how many of us would give up our sight. For those who can see, it is probably more valued than the ability to hear or smell or taste or feel.

The human eye is one of God's most amazing creations. Even Charles Darwin admitted doubting his own theory of origins simply because of the complexity of the human eye. And God has given us two of them, through which to perceive the world.

Since our eyes are delicate, God went through some pretty careful design specifications to protect them. Most of the eye is inside the hardest part of our body – our head. How many of you have a hard head?! How many of you married someone with a hard head? Just the ladies are raising their hands, and a couple of foolish men.

Our eyes were designed and placed for maximum protection. They are protected by the bony protrusion of the brow, by the cheekbones underneath and on either side, and further by the bridge of the nose in between. Some of us have more protection than we want!

God installed tear ducts that constantly bathe our eyes. He has hedged them above with eyebrows to reroute sweat from the brow. He equipped them with eyelashes that catch foreign objects. He then gave them beautiful colors to catch future husbands.

God gave us two eyes instead of one. He could have perhaps, given us two noses and one eye – that would have been attractive.

God also enabled us to see in three dimensions. We can determine distance and velocity, height and depth.

The truth is, most of us, if forced to choose, would give up the ability to taste, hear, smell, and feel, as long as we could see.

I have read that every twenty minutes, someone in the world loses their eyesight. There are now approximately fifteen million blind people in the world.

If millions of people in the world are physically blind, there are untold millions who are spiritually blind.

It is not surprising that God uses sight as a metaphor for spiritual perception and spiritual life throughout the Bible. According to the Bible, it is possible to see physically and yet not be able to see spiritually.

Jesus Christ rebuked the religionists of His day when He said,

... You ... see, but ... [do] not perceive (Matthew 13:14)

In other words, while they had 20/20 vision, they were spiritually blind. In fact, Jesus referred to them as,

... blind guides of the blind. ... (Matthew 15:14)

The apostle Paul talks about unbelieving mankind being unable to see because,

. . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (II Corinthians 4:4)

They observe some things, but cannot see the full picture unless they are brought to faith in and by the grace of God.

This is illustrated well by a great poem that I first read in middle school. Let me read it to you.

*It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.*

*The first approached the elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl,
“God bless me! But the elephant
Is very like a wall!”*

*The second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, “Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me ‘tis mighty clear
This wonder of an elephant
Is very like a spear!”*

*The third approached the animal,
And, happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake,
“I see,” quoth he, “the elephant
Is very like a snake!”*

*The fourth reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
“What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain,” quoth he;*

*“’Tis clear enough the elephant
Is very like a tree!”*

*The fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said, “Even the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can?
This marvel of an elephant
Is very like a fan!”*

*The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
“I see,” quoth he, “the elephant
Is very like a rope!”*

*And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
They all were very wrong!*

The truth is, we are all in desperate need of help. How do you know that the little part you see of life and what you believe about the afterlife is really the full picture?

I want to point out several places in the Bible in which we are challenged to not just look, but truly see. I will tell you ahead of time:

- The first sight has to do with the miracle of the resurrected Christ;
- The second sight has to do with management of the Christian;
- The third sight has to do with the mission of the church.

The Look that Delivers Everlasting Life

The first scene I want to take you to occurs at the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. This is the look that delivers everlasting life.

Turn to John’s gospel, chapter 20, verses 1 through 8. We will begin with verses 1 and 2.

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

By the way, the record tells us that Mary saw the stone already taken from the tomb. Literally, thrown, as it were, off the gutter; it was set inside.

Notice that she does not run to the disciples, filled with exhilaration, and announce, "Hey, you won't believe it, the Lord has indeed risen from the dead! I've got proof – the stone has been thrown off the track."

No, she saw that the stone was rolled away, but concluded His body had been moved.

She was right – His body had moved. It had not, however, been moved by people who had hidden it.

Continue to verses 3 and 4.

So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first;

Now follow this carefully; in fact, you might circle the three additional times the English verb "to see" appears in the text. Although translated "saw" all three times, the Greek language used three different verbs with three different meanings.

John gets to the tomb first, and notice, in verse 5, *and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in.*

We are told, "he *saw* the linen wrappings". This is from the verb "blepo (βλεπω)," which simply refers to a casual glance.

John stooped, looked in, and saw the linen wrappings. This was just a casual look and nothing further. In fact, verse 5 tells us that John did not even go into the tomb.

Now Peter finally arrives at the garden tomb, having come in second place in this foot race. I am convinced that irritated him to no end. Look at verse 6.

And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there,

This is typical of Peter. He made it to the tomb, pushed past John, and without hesitation, went in and *saw* the linen wrappings lying there. The Greek word for "saw" in this verse is from "theoreo (θεωρεω)," which gives us our word "theory".

Peter is standing there, dumfounded by the sight, trying to put the clues together. He is inquisitive, puzzled. Why? Because, as the text tells us, the strangeness of that scene. Look at verse 7.

and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

Someone has tidied up the place. The face-cloth, the "soudarion," which was about the size of a small washcloth, was rolled up neatly and placed to one side. The grave cloths or strips were still lying there – literally, in their place.

In other words, the cocoon of these graveclothes, which had been wrapped around the body of Jesus and interlaced with several hundred pounds of gummy spices, was still in place. It was like an empty cocoon; there was no body inside. And the face-cloth was neatly rolled up.

Peter is standing there scratching his head and thinking, "I wonder what this means!"

While he is standing there scratching his head, John finally comes in. Notice verse 8.

So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.

John now saw the graveclothes. They are not torn up and scattered around the tomb as if Jesus had been quickly unwrapped by body snatchers, or by religious leaders wanting to make sure Jesus stayed dead. The wrappings are still in their fold. In other words, they are still in the form of a human body. They are now, however, an empty shell.

John *saw* – not casually; not with questions in his mind – he *saw*. The Greek verb is "orao (οραω)," which means, "to see with understanding" – to comprehend!

This incident perfectly describes our world today. In our world:

- There are those who casually nod at this Easter thing and say, "An empty tomb? Yea, okay . . . so what?"

- There are those who scratch their heads and say, “If I had a little more evidence; a clue or two more, maybe I could figure it out; maybe then I could buy into this story.”
- There are those who see it! By faith, they comprehend the empty tomb means victory over death, life beyond the grave, entrance into heaven, forgiveness over sin!

We see it! This first look delivers everlasting life.

The Look that Delivers Direction in Life

The second look delivers direction in life. Turn to Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In this scene, you are a runner in the race of life. The word for race in verse 1 is “agon (αγων),” which gives us our word “agony”.

The writer is referring to the Isthmian games of Greece. This was not a Saturday morning jog, but the agonizing marathon run.

Can you make it, Christian? The biblical writer indicates it has everything to do with your focus.

In fact, the word for “look,” or your translation may read, “fixing your eyes,” is a word that appears in the New Testament only this one time . . . “aphorao (αφοραω),” and it means to look away from everything else.ⁱ

It is true, isn’t it, that when you are running, especially if you are running in a race, the last thing you want to do is watch your feet, or stare at the other runners, or constantly look back over your shoulder, or look into the television cameras as you run by and say, “Hi Mom,” or wave at the crowds.

In the Isthmian Games, there was a pedestal at the finish line of the “agon (αγων)” – the marathon race – and on top of the pedestal was the victors crown or laurel wreath.ⁱⁱ

The runner had his eyes fixed on the prize.

In the same way, the believer has his eyes fixed on his prize – the presence of Christ; the risen Lord who awaits us at the finish line.

Do you think you can make it to the finish line?

Look at Christ:

- the One who had every reason to doubt the goodness of God the Father;
- the One who had every opportunity to abandon His race;
- the One who had every earthly evidence that following God was not worth it.

Look at Him – see how He ran; see how He responded; watch His actions; keep Him in your sights as you run your marathon of life. Endurance is gained by being preoccupied with the risen Lord.

Look at Christ! This is the look that delivers direction for life.

The Look that Delivers Life to Others

There is a look that brings life, there is a look that brings direction for life, and thirdly, there is a look that delivers life to others.

- The first look has to do with the Messiah.
- The second look has to do with our management.
- The third look has to do with our mission.

Turn back to John’s gospel. In chapter 4, Jesus is resting beside a well of water that was originally dug by His ancestor Jacob, the patriarch. The disciples have gone into the village of Samaria to find food to eat.

A Samaritan woman came to the well. Jesus gave her the gospel of her Messiah and, after telling her He knew all about her – including her five former husbands and her current live-in boyfriend – she believed that He was the Savior, the promised Messiah. She hurried back into town to share the news with everyone.

In the meantime, the disciples came back and were with the Lord at the well. They wanted Him to eat something, but He wanted them to see something. All of the villagers were coming toward them – through the lower area of the village and then up the hill to Jacob’s well.

Jesus said to His disciples, in verse 35,

... Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

Harvest fields are not necessarily white. Furthermore, they were not facing a harvest field, but the city of Samaria. What did Jesus mean?

One Bible commentator found the answer as he himself one afternoon, a century ago, sat at Jacob's well. As he sat, he saw Samaritan men come out from the city and start to climb the hill toward the well. They came in little groups and they were all wearing the customary robes with their with turbans wrapped around their heads. As he sat there and watched, he could see their white heads bobbing along as they approached the well.

It may very well be that just at this moment in John, chapter 4, when the people started to flock out to Jesus in response to the woman's story of the Messiah, as they streamed out in their white turbans and came across the field and started up the hill, Jesus said, "Look at the fields! But don't just look – can you see them? They are white for the harvest."

Conclusion

The questions remain today:

- Can we look with joy into the empty tomb?
- Can we look with surrender at our reigning Lord?
- Can we look with sorrow at our empty world?

Ladies and gentlemen, it is possible to have 20/20 vision, and yet, be blind spiritually. It is also possible to be blind physically, and have perfect spiritual perception.

Fanny Crosby, the famous hymn writer, lost her sight as a baby when her family doctor improperly treated an eye infection. What many believed to be nothing but a tragedy, this young girl, early on, saw it as God's design for her life.

As an eight year old, she wrote the following poem. It is to me, an incredible challenge to the spiritual insight and perspective of believers today.

*Oh what a happy child I am,
Although I cannot see!
I am resolved that in this world,
Contented I will be.ⁱⁱⁱ*

This little girl would grow up and write many hymns for generations of believers to sing. Many of her hymns related to her anticipation of one day

seeing her Savior. One of her most popular lyrics went like this:

*And I shall see Him, face to face,
And tell the story – saved by grace.^{iv}*

Do you want that kind of confidence?

Then Jesus Christ is not someone to casually look upon; He is not someone you create theories about – He is the missing piece.

Do not just look into the empty tomb; do not just glance inside on one more Easter Sunday. Ask God to allow you to see it – to see it for what it is!

Do you want direction in life? Then become preoccupied with the risen Lord. See Him on His throne, in total control of even the chaos of your world. Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Church, do you want to see your mission in life? Do you want to not just look at the world around you, but see it for what it is; see it for its tragic emptiness? Then, look upon the harvest fields of the world.

Do you see the harvest fields? They are ready for the declaration of the gospel; to hear from people who believe something true – who see it; who see Him!

Our message to the world is simple – if you want to see His face in the future, you must see Him by faith in the present.

That is the kind of confidence which allowed Fanny Crosby to write of her future with these words:

*When clothed in His brightness transported I
rise,
To meet Him in clouds of the sky,
His perfect salvation, His wonderful love,
I'll shout with the millions on high!^v*

The resurrection of the Redeemer, makes possible the coming resurrection of the redeemed.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to know that at this church, we take the biblical record of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection literally. We believe in the record of scripture, everything in it and every part of it!

I like to say we believe the Bible, from the book of Genesis to the book of Concordances. We do not debate it, we declare it.

We believe the Bible is the living word from the living Lord. We do not doubt its claims in our classrooms. We do not pull back from it in the

pulpit. We are not embarrassed to claim it in our culture.

We declare with the apostle Paul that our greatest need and desire is to,

... know ... the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings ... (Philippians 3:10)

Perhaps you are thinking, “But, I just need the advantage of the early disciples! They got to see Him. I haven’t seen the risen Savior.”

Then the words of the Lord to Thomas in the upper room are for you. After doubting Thomas saw His wounds preserved in His hands and feet and side, even though He was glorified in His resurrected body, Thomas fell to his knees before the Savior and cried,

... My Lord and my God! (John 20:28)

Our Lord said to him, and more importantly to you and me,

... Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed. (John 20:29)

This is my invitation to you – to receive the greater blessing by believing in Him whom you have not yet seen; to join the rest of us who believe the Word of God; who believe the record of Matthew, chapter 28, verses 5 and 6, when the angel announced,

... you are looking for Jesus Christ who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. ...

By faith, simply accept the fact that,

... Jesus [is the living] Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, [then] you will be saved; (Romans 10:9)

If you place your faith in this living Lord, then you can indeed join the rest of us who see it – who see it! We:

- look at our empty world with a mission;
- look at our reigning Lord for direction;
- look into the empty tomb with perception.

And we exclaim together with joy what we see by faith!

Are you ready?

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Sing:

He is Lord, He is Lord,

He is risen from the dead, and He is Lord.

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess,

That Jesus Christ is Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/27/2005 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John Phillips, *Exploring Hebrews* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 176.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *Hebrews* (Moody, 1983), p. 379.

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, *Victorious Christians You Should Know* (Baker Book House, 1984), p. 23.

^{iv} *The Hymnal For Worship and Celebration* (Word Music, 1986), p. 550.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 496.