

Believing is Seeing

One of the new words that entered the English vocabulary is the word Deepfake. A deepfake is an AI-generated image or movie that perfectly mimics a real person or event. Deepfakes of politicians, actors, celebrities saying and doing things they never did are spreading. For the near future and maybe beyond, we are going to have a difficult time knowing if something is real or fake on the Internet.

In other words, AI means the death of that old saying seeing is believing. For the last few centuries, man has claimed that if he see something, and verify it, then he knows its true. Sceptics of faith and religion have said that if only you could give visible evidence. Perhaps if camera technology had been available and placed outside the tomb of Christ, and we had visual footage of the stone being rolled away by an angel, we could then believe. Seeing is believing.

Well, not anymore. AI has put an end to trusting pictures, videos. It can always be faked, always be engineered, so that with more and more visuals, we now will end up trusting them less and less. So what can we trust in? What should we use to verify if something is true?

We have already seen what persuaded Mary – and it was not a missing body, or misplaced graveclothes. We now see another incident displaying how faith comes about in this incident with Thomas. Thomas was one of Christ's twelve apostles, but he is known for his doubt. Doubting Thomas has come to be his nickname, for he is most remembered for this scene where he doubted that Christ had risen, probably unfairly, because he was likely no different to the others.

Thomas is important because he answers the question once for all: do we need to have seen the Resurrection, the Risen Christ, to believe in Him? What is faith really based upon? Is seeing believing?

What do you look to, to confirm truth? Now that we've crossed this technological threshold of Deepfakes, and AI-generated anything – who will you believe? And why? What will you stake your life and eternity on? This account of the first Resurrection Sunday, and the one following it gives us an answer that could have been written in 2025.

This is a story of faith becoming sight, then doubt demanding sight, and then sight demanding faith.

I. Faith Becoming Sight

⁹ 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." ²⁰ When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

On Resurrection Sunday, towards the end of the day, Jesus appears to the Eleven inside closed doors. Earlier in the day, He had already appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the other women, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but now He appeared to the other apostles, with Thomas absent.

Apparently, the disciples are still in fear – still fearful of arrest, trial, and prosecution. They've locked themselves in a room, barring access, so the only way in was through that locked door.

John gives us this detail, not only to show us their state, but to make a point about Jesus' Resurrection body. Jesus appears and stands in the middle of them. It seems the Resurrection body,

although it is completely physical, as He is about to show them, can bypass and overcome physical barriers. I think you can understand why the resurrected body will be given to people once sin and evil is eliminated. Picture having this power and being evil and selfish.

Jesus greets them, using the greeting still used today: "Peace be with you" – Shalom Aleichem. I'm sure they were terrified for an instant, and so Jesus identifies Himself with scars, scars which would not be present in a ghost, or an apparition.

"Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. ⁴¹ But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" ⁴² So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. ⁴³ And He took *it* and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:39–43)

Well now that they know He is alive, and victorious, what now? What happens next? They believe that Jesus is truly the risen Messiah, so does He now inaugurate the millennial kingdom? Now Jesus gives them a special commission, and a special enablement.

²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

The commission is one of the great themes of the Gospel of John. The Father sent the Son. And just as the Son was sent by the Father, and just the Spirit will be sent by the Father and Son, now the Son is sending his disciples into the world.

They are sent into the world with a message. What is that message? It's the message that they are seeing fulfilled before their very eyes this first Easter Sunday. "all things which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms are fulfilled in Messiah Jesus and now that He has died and risen again, repentance and remission of sins is to be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44–48)

They are to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that He commanded.

But here John adds something not found in the other Gospels. And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

So what is happening here? Is this the moment that the apostles were baptised by the Spirit? We have to harmonise this Scripture with ⁴⁹ "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)

Or later in the book of Acts, Peter says that what happened to Cornelius is what happened to them, ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. (Acts 11:15)

That suggests Peter saw the Day of Pentecost as the day the Spirit baptised them. Either the apostles receive the indwelling Spirit *before* the 120 disciples here on this day, or they receive the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and this is then something different.

I suggest this is something different. I think this is Jesus giving them that special anointing that was given to Israel's prophets, priests and kings, and given to Jesus at His baptism. We call it the theocratic anointing, a special gift of empowerment and enablement. Here as Messiah is about to depart, He gives this enablement to the men who are going to be both twelve emissaries for the

church, but also twelve princes of Israel. They function in a dual role: the last true leaders of Israel before the Millennium, and the foundation of the church. They are the authors of the new covenant, which is firstly for Israel, but also is the constitution of the church. So these eleven, soon to be twelve are being empowered by Messiah with the special authority they will need to witness to Israel and transition to the church. I think that's also why they had unique authority, unique prophetic powers, unique miraculous powers, because of this moment. They're not being baptised yet, but given their unique apostolic authority and power. This is connected to the Great Commission.

When Jesus says whoever's sin you forgive or retain, they are forgiven or retained, He is not giving them the personal power to forgive sin. We know that, firstly because the resulting verbs are passive. They are forgiven – they are retained, means it is done by someone else. Who is that someone? God. And only the person sinned against can forgive the sin. Secondly, we know this because this is the same language used in Matthew 18.

¹⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

That language is used of the church as it gathers to exercise church discipline. The idea is, when the true (apostolic) church (by apostolic I mean the church founded on the New Testament teachings of the apostles) gathers in the name of Jesus, at least two or three, and carefully and wisely applies the gospel, Jesus gives the true church the authority to say, at least outwardly, your sins appear to be forgiven, you seem to be saved. And conversely, to also say, you don't seem to be saved, your sins appear to be retained. Jesus calls this authority the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. It is not that anyone has the personal authority to unlock heaven for you, only Christ can do that. But the church corporately has been given the authority to use the mind of Christ given to us, to say, sins forgiven, or sins retained. This is a very serious thing, and it is the reason we give salvation testimonies in publicly, readout before the believing church. It is the reason we ask the believing church to agree that someone's testimony is valid and sound. It is because of these verses, where Jesus Himself grants to the church external, public verification of internal, invisible realities.

The Great Commission is not this massive dispersion of truth with no follow-up. It is share the Gospel, and one-by-one, verify if someone has truly become a disciple.

These ten have seen, believed, and are ready to take the gospel out. But there was one missing.

II. Doubt Demanding Sight

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

When Thomas returned, they told him of Christ's appearance. What did Thomas say? Unless I'm given physical evidence that my eyes can see, and that my fingers can handle, I will not believe.

Now think of what Thomas is saying. Here are another ten men, all saying the same thing – we have just seen the Risen Christ. Thomas is really calling all of these men, liars. Either they've all conspired to trick him, or they have all been hallucinating, but he is going to dismiss the eyewitness testimony of some of his best friends. In other words, Thomas was saying, for me to believe, I will not trust anyone except my own senses.

So what's wrong with that? Can we blame Thomas for wanting to see Jesus with his own eyes?

How long had he walked with Jesus? For a minimum of two years. In that time, what had Thomas already seen? What had he been in the front row to see? Miracles and signs. How many had he seen? Numerous signs. So many that John suggests it would fill up books to record them all. Also, during that time, had Thomas heard Jesus say anything about the resurrection? Yes. On several occasions, Jesus had told his disciples that he would be arrested, killed and would rise again on the third day. Did Thomas have any opportunity to see if you could trust Jesus' promises? Did Thomas know the kind of character behind Christ's words? And now, on this day, he heard his friends and compatriots, men whom Jesus had personally chosen, give an eyewitness account of having seen Jesus.

So what was Thomas doing? Was he just an innocent scientist looking for more proof? No, Thomas was doing a lot more than that. Thomas reveals what is really going on in the heart of the sceptic, in the heart of the doubter.

Thomas was calling his fellow ten apostles unreliable at best. He was not willing to trust these men he had practically lived with for two years. He was disbelieving the promises that Jesus had made. He was not willing to trust that the words of Jesus were trustworthy and reliable. He was not willing to trust that the One who had performed all those miracles in front of His eyes, had now performed another one not seen by his eyes.

What was Thomas really doing? Thomas was making himself the standard of truth. His own eyes, his own ears were going to become the final authority. Thomas was claiming that his own eyes and senses were the most reliable source of truth.

At the heart of it is – I don't trust anyone, but I trust my own senses. No one can be trusted- not the apostles, not Jesus' promises, not the biblical prophecies that Messiah would rise from the dead, and so even God cannot be trusted. Who can you trust, Thomas? I trust myself. I am incapable of wrong judgement.

He was committing himself to unbelief ("I Will not believe"), until his demands for evidence were met which made him not neutral, but hostile. He was calling for Christ to submit to his test.

And here is the real heart of unbelief. This is the heart of a doubter. He claims to be on an honest quest for the truth, but when we look closely, we find out that he dishonestly rejects all kinds of evidence. We find out that very often the man who says I must see it, actually means, I trust nobody except myself. No one is reliable. Everyone lies, including God. Only my eyes do not lie.

I'm not sure the other disciples would have behaved that differently to Thomas had they been the ones absent when Jesus showed Himself. There's something in everyone that says, "I don't want second-hand testimony. I must verify it." Well, he got what he wanted, but it came at a price.

III. Sight Demanding Faith

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!" 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."

After eight days, Jesus appears again. If you count the days, this puts this at the next Lord's Day.

He repeat what happened on Resurrection Sunday, appearing within closed doors greeting them the same way.

And now, Jesus shows that though He was visible to the ten, and then gone, He was still present when Thomas had made his demands. He had heard the conversation Thomas had with the others, and now invites Thomas to do the very thing he said he must do to believe:

So what did He do here? He graciously, kindly condescended to Thomas and called on him to believe. Jesus showed mercy on him, and appeared.

We do not read if Thomas actually touched and handled Jesus. But we do read his response, which in many ways is the climax of the entire book of John.

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

Thomas is certainly not blaspheming here. He is talking to Jesus, and he calls Jesus my Lord, and my God. He recognises what Jesus has been teaching all along: Jesus is the Word, the one who was with God from the beginning, and the one who is God. He is the Word made flesh. He is the Lord, and He is God.

Jesus doesn't correct Thomas, and tell him he has overstated it. The next verse tells us that Jesus acknowledged that now Thomas believed.

Did Jesus then congratulate Thomas for being so sceptical? Did Jesus say, I commend you for your scientific attitude? Did Jesus say, "I understand that you needed proof, and I am happy to provide it."? How did Jesus respond?

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."

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Thomas, you have believed because you have seen. That's not a bad thing. But Jesus says there is a better thing, a superior blessing.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Those whose faith was not dependent upon some supposed physical proof are happier, better off. Privileged are the ones whose faith is not reliant on the eyes.

Thomas felt he was at a disadvantage not being there that first Sunday. But actually, Thomas had been given an opportunity. He'd been given the chance to trust the words Jesus had spoken, to trust the Person of Christ, and to trust the eyewitness testimony of his ten fellow apostles. Had he believed, this moment would have been a joyful confirmation and vindication.

That's actually the experience of most Christians in history. If we total up the number of Christians from history, what percentage of them saw the physical evidence of the resurrection? A very small amount. So what is their faith based on? Since you are one of those, what is your faith based on?

Romans 10:17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Faith is based upon a promise. The trustworthiness of a promise is based upon the trustworthiness

of the One making it. The blessed ones Jesus speaks of have banked upon the word of the promise because of the trustworthiness of the One who made it. Faith is a response to a promise. The promise is as good as the one who made it.

You see, faith is a choice to regard God as true and reliable. Faith is treating the character of God as trustworthy. Unbelief is a choice to regard God as untrue and unreliable. Unbelief is treating the character of God as untrustworthy.

Faith is not a matter of getting enough evidence. Faith is a matter of believing a person's statements are trustworthy. Layton Talbert put it this way in his book, "The Trustworthiness of God's Word" "To question the truthfulness of God's words is to question the truthfulness of God Himself. His words are an extension of His character; disbelief is not merely intellectual hesitation but a moral affront to His integrity.

When it comes down to it, we believe because He has spoken, and He is trustworthy. He is more trustworthy than my own eyes. He is more trustworthy than my own ears. Faith says, God is more reliable than my eyes and ears. For that matter, God is more reliable than my brain, and how it interprets what my eyes and ears receive.

In other words, faith is a matter of love. You love and respect God, and so you trust what He says. On this occasion, Thomas' love for Jesus wavered. He had distrusted what Jesus had said. He had distrusted the promises of Jesus. Blessed rather are those who trust the Person making the promises. Jesus says to you, seeing is not believing. Believing is seeing.

Spurgeon "Beloved, do you know what it is to commune with God? Words are poor vehicles for this fellowship; but what a blessed thing it is! Proofs of the existence of God are altogether her superfluous to those of us who are in the habit of conversing with the Eternal One. If anybody were to write an essay to prove the existence of my wife, or my son, I certainly should not read it, except for the amusement of the thing; and proofs of the existence of God to the man who communes with God are much the same."

If the risen Jesus appeared before us, and we filmed him and photographed him, and so on, there are some here who would not believe. They'd believe what their eyes were seeing, but they would reinterpret it later. It wasn't really Jesus. It was the hype of the moment. Something must go before the sign. The heart must believe that God is trustworthy. The heart must believe that what He has said can and must be trusted. And then, all the signs line up like a starry conjunction and confirm and verify.

C.S. Lewis said "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." I have faith in Christ, not only because I see that He is the risen one, but because by trusting that He is the Risen one, that I see everything else properly.