

WHAT YOU SEE DETERMINES WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Easter Day

April 20, 2025

The apostle John, on this first Easter day, revealed to us an important lesson. What you see determines what you believe.

That first Easter morning saw Mary Magdalene running from the tomb in search of the disciples. Upon finding Peter and John, she presented them with the shocking news that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. Peter and John immediately took off running. John eventually outpaced Peter and arrived at the tomb first. He stopped just outside and peered in. Peter arrived and entered.

The Gospel tells us what Peter saw: "He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed." John saw and believed.

What did he see? Or more importantly, what did John not see? He did not see a body. But he did see the linen wrappings that had encased Jesus' body lying there bunched up on the stone slab. He saw the cloth that had covered his face lying neatly folded to the side. And because of what John saw, he believed.

What you see determines what you believe.

John believed because of what he saw. And what he saw, and what he believed in the tomb that day, would end up being foundational to his entire burgeoning spiritual and religious belief system. Everything that the apostle John would ever believe – about his religious belief system as a Jew and follower of Jesus; about the world, and how he understood all of creation – all of it, would be influenced and grow from the fertile soil planted that day. Your entire belief system and mine grow from this same fertile soil.

As a Jew living in the first century, John would have believed firmly in the Law of Moses and the Davidic Kingdom as foundational for what he believed about the world, and how he lived his life. He would have understood the Jewish people to be God's chosen people; holy and unique and separate from all the Gentile peoples of the earth.

But as his new foundation was planted in that empty tomb, and as it developed over the years, he would begin to see ALL people differently, and all of creation differently. He would grow to see all people as God's chosen beloved children, not just the Jews. Unfortunately, many of his former Jewish brethren would not understand this change within him.

Your belief system and mine, just like John's, will continue to develop over time. We receive our belief systems from the fertile soil of the resurrection; and from everything that we see, and what we are told, and what we are open to seeing. Jesus' disciples were just like each of us. They had a hard time seeing and believing in something new;

something that would be beyond their current comprehension; beyond their current level of conscious awareness.

Jesus had tried to prepare them for this new reality while he was still with them. He had told them: “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.” And he said: “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day.” Despite Jesus’ speaking plainly to his disciples of his pending death and resurrection; despite Jesus having raised individuals from the dead; the disciples still could not believe in resurrection.

All the disciples that is, except John apparently. John the beloved disciple’s belief system burst wide open that day in the tomb as he smelled the stench of death, and saw the burial coverings and face napkin folded neatly to the side. In that moment his mind must have flashed back and forth, trying to get its bearings; trying to establish equilibrium. Dead is dead; rotting flesh does not rejuvenate itself. But wait, what about Lazarus, and Jairus’s daughter, and the widow’s son? Now, hold on! Dead is dead! But still, this tomb holds no body.

John may have thought; probably someone took away his body. But no, that makes no sense. Why would they remove all the burial wrappings from his naked body to take him away buck-naked. Well, maybe Jesus wasn’t really dead, only nearly dead. Maybe the cold tomb had

somehow revived him, and he stumbled out. No! That's ridiculous. How could he have moved away the large boulder covering the tomb? And besides, we saw his bloody battered stone-cold body! The breath of life had clearly left him.

We are told that John went into the tomb that day; he saw and believed. He believed, relying only on the words of Jesus, and the evidence of an empty tomb and burial wrappings. Would that be enough to convince someone? Most people, probably not. No one seeing with only their physical eyes would accept the truth of resurrection. Clearly John was using some kind of further vision. Physical eyesight alone would not have been enough to cause John to believe.

What you see determines what you believe. John was convinced as he accessed the further vision emanating from his heart and soul. It was that powerful irrefutable inner witness; that witness connected to the divine, that convinced John of the truth of Jesus's words; three days and three nights, Jesus, the Son of Man was in the heart of earth's tomb, and after suffering, the Messiah rose from the dead on the third day. John SAW, and believed, and light and joy inexpressible burst like a lightning bolt from his heart and soul and mind. He is risen! He is risen indeed, hallelujah!!

Standing there in the empty tomb John did not physically see the risen Christ, and yet, he believed. After his resurrection we are told that

Jesus appeared to the disciples, and then to Thomas. He spoke these words to Thomas: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Sadly, many of the Jews and their religious leaders were not able to see and believe in new ways. But the Pharisee Nicodemus was. And Joseph of Arimathea was. And a good number of the Jews as well were able to see; to make this mental transition and believe. The Pharisee Saul of Tarsus was initially unable to see. He was one of the fiercest antagonists of the followers of Jesus.

And yet eventually Saul saw the risen Christ in a vision outside the city walls of Damascus. He had finally seen and believed. Later, Saul, now the Apostle Paul, while writing to the Christian church in Philippi, wrote: “I regard [all my former accomplishments] as rubbish because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.” Paul did not just know ABOUT Jesus Christ, Paul KNEW Christ. And yet, in knowing Christ, he wanted to know Christ more – and the power of his resurrection, and the sharing in his suffering.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ. How much have you seen of Jesus Christ? Do you know Christ? Do you desire to know him more? Do you believe?

What you see determines what you believe.