

DO YOU SEE?**JOHN 20:1-8**

How many of you have ever seen the Grand Canyon? I've seen it on two occasions. Beautiful. Impressive. A bit overwhelming. It really is some sight to see. Did you hear about the three men who were visiting the Grand Canyon for the first time? One was an artist, one was a pastor, and one was a cowboy. As they stood on the edge of that incredible, massive abyss – taking it all in as they viewed it together – each one responded differently. The artist said, “What beautiful scene for me to paint!” The pastor observed, “What a wonderful example of God’s creative handiwork!” But the cowboy’s observation had a different tone altogether. He frowned and signed, “What a terrible place to lose a cow!” Many times, what you see is determined by how you see it. And how you see something determines what you see.

In John 20 we have one of several Easter stories in the Bible. We discover something fascinating there about what was seen that first Easter Day and how it was seen. I was intrigued to discover some time ago now that there are three different words in the original Greek language for seeing or sight used in the first eight verses of John 20. Let’s read it just now. There are many ways to see the risen Lord Jesus Christ. What you see in Jesus is determined by how you see Jesus. How you see Jesus determines what you see in Him. There’s only one way to see Jesus that matters in the end: the seeing that leads to believing. So, from the Easter story we read today, let me point out three kinds of seeing or sight and how all three apply to your life and mine.

A FIRST KIND OF SEEING: GLANCING

Sometime between 3 and 6 am on that first Easter Day, Mary Magdalene came to Jesus’ tomb and saw that the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. Frightened, she immediately ran and got Peter and John – two of Jesus’ twelve disciples. Peter and John ran to Jesus’ tomb to check out Mary’s story. John – who referred to himself as “the disciple who Jesus loved” – got there first, bent down and looked into the tomb. He saw the strips of cloth that had been used to wrap Jesus’ dead body. But Jesus’ body was gone.

Now both words used there – what Mary Magdalene saw at the tomb and how John first looked into the tomb’s interior – refer simply the physical vision of our eyes. You might call it glancing. Glancing is the most basic form of sight. It’s the ability to see something with our physical eyeballs. It’s also the most superficial and obvious kind of sight. When you glance, you just kind of look around and take in whatever is there. Glancing doesn’t take in the significance of what you’re seeing or the importance of it. Mary and John’s first response to Jesus’ empty tomb was superficial, basic, obvious. Neither one of them recognized yet the significance of what they saw. They glanced.

You and I do a lot of glancing. Take a beautiful sunset for example. Anyone with eyes that work can see it. But because we’re so busy getting somewhere, most of just glance at a sunset. We see it in a superficial, obvious kind of way. “Oy, yes, a sunset. Pretty.” A few of us might stop to appreciate its beauty, enjoy all of its colors, and wait

long enough to see them change and develop. Or, have you ever watched people at an art museum? Some folk just walk quickly from room to room glancing at the pictures. They never stop and really look at any one picture. Do they even see the pictures, you wonder? In one sense, they do. But not in the same way another person sees when he or she stands in front of one picture for twenty minutes mesmerized by the beauty of the painting and the artist's skill. A lot of our seeing is just glancing.

It's sad but true that most people see the risen Jesus in much the same way. They glance at Jesus, so to speak, rather than understanding His significance. They acknowledge Jesus, but in the most superficial, obvious sort of way. They acknowledge Jesus' historical existence. They admit someone named Jesus actually lived some 2,000 years ago. They acknowledge Jesus was a great teacher and prophet. They like some of His teachings like the Golden Rule and the Beatitudes. Many of them will even acknowledge Jesus died and rose again. But right there is the problem. They see Jesus, but they don't really see Him. They glance at Jesus, but they fail to perceive His significance or appreciate the magnitude of the One they're looking at.

Here's the saddest thing about people just glance at Jesus. He is essentially irrelevant to you. He makes no real difference to you in your every day, walk around life. Jesus has no effect on your values, your relationships, or your view of how to live your life. Jesus doesn't factor into your ambitions, your dreams, or your hopes for the future. On Easter Day and every other day, you glance at Jesus and see Him in the most superficial, obvious kind of way. "Oh, yeah, it's Easter. Jesus stuff. Supposed to go to church or watch it online." Easter remains a nice family day when kids get chocolate bunnies, all of us eat a nice, big meal, and some of us enjoy a nap. Easter is little more than a time to celebrate something vague but nice. You might be a hard-working, good person, a faithful spouse, an involved parent, a decent student, and even a spiritual person. But when it comes to the risen Jesus and His true significance, you just glance at Him. You don't really see Him.

William Sangster was a British pastor. He began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. When he went to see his doctor, he was told he had an incurable disease that would cause his muscles to waste away gradually. His voice would eventually fail and he would lose the ability to swallow. As the disease began to take more of a hold over his body, Sangster continued to minister through writing and prayer as best he could. Gradually, his legs became useless. His voice disappeared completely. On Easter morning – just a few weeks before he died – he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it, he wrote, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, 'He is risen!' But it would still be more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout." If you've never felt like shouting on Easter Sunday – or any other day for that matter – at the sheer joy of knowing Jesus is alive and how that changes everything, then you've never seen Him. You've only glanced at Him. But there's a second kind of seeing in our story.

A SECOND KIND OF SEEING: GAZING

So, Peter and John ran to Jesus' tomb. John got there first, but he was a bit timid about going into it. True to his impulsive nature, Peter just walked right in. "Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen." (Jo. 20:6-7 NIV) The word for Peter's seeing there is different than the glance of Mary Magdalene and John. We might call it gazing. It means to observe and to study whatever you're looking at to some degree. It implies a certain level of concentration and focus. You're really trying to understand the significance or importance of whatever your eyes are taking in. That's gazing.

That same word for seeing is used elsewhere in the Bible. For instance, we read, "Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name." (Jo. 2:23 NIV) But then the very next verse says this about those people, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people." (Jo. 2:24 NIV) Interesting. When Jesus walked on the earth, many people saw His miracles and even believed in Him at some level. But their belief was inadequate. They were intrigued with Jesus; they were interested in Jesus; they were impressed by Jesus. But they did not fully or truly understand who Jesus was and why He had come. Gazing is certainly better than glancing. But it's still not enough when it comes to seeing Jesus for who He is – His significance, His importance, His supremacy.

So gazing is better than glancing when it comes to seeing Jesus, but it's still inadequate. You might well be interested in Jesus – His life and His teachings. You might be intrigued with Jesus – His miracles, His words, the stories about Him. You might be impressed by Jesus – how He died, the undeniable influence He still has over billions of people some 2000 years later, and even the whole Easter story about Him rising from the dead. You might resemble Peter that first Easter Day. You know something very important happened, but what does it all mean? You acknowledge something very significant occurred, but what difference does it make to your life?

Some people who consider themselves Christians might see Jesus like this. You see Jesus died and rose again for you, but you lack understanding of what it means for you to die and rise with Jesus spiritually. You see Jesus offers a different quality of life, but you've not experienced it yet in your life. You see Jesus forgives sin, but your life is still dominated by guilt or shame. You see Jesus is the Savior, but you're not quite sure He's ever become your Savior in a personal, direct way. You see Jesus loves you, but what it means to love Jesus remains a mystery to you. You might attend church virtually or in person, but you don't know Jesus. That's gazing. And gazing is better than glancing, but it's still an inadequate way to see the risen Jesus. Let's consider a third way to see Jesus from our Easter story in John 20.

A THIRD KIND OF SEEING: GRASPING

While Peter gazed at Jesus' clothes that were used to wrap His dead - but now very absent - body, John entered the tomb. Look again at how it's described, "Then the

disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed.” (Jo. 20:8 NLT) Right there is the third distinct word for seeing in our text today. It means to grasp something fully. This kind of seeing means to understand something fully and have true insight into whatever you’re observing. John looked at Jesus’ grave clothes and suddenly it all came together. The proverbial light bulb went off! Jesus is risen!

This word for seeing is used elsewhere in the Bible. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said to those at the scene, “Didn’t I tell you that you will see God’s glory if you believe?” (Jo. 11:40 NLT) On another occasion, Jesus explained something to His disciples and He said, “If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him! Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!” (Jo. 14:7, 9 NLT) This kind of sight or seeing doesn’t depend on physical eyeballs at all. Grasping is all about understanding fully what is revealed by the Holy Spirit to your mind and heart. This kind of seeing means to know something deeply and well. We use the word “see” in this way. We explain something to a friend and ask, “Do you see what I mean?” or “Do you see?” In other words, we’re asking, “Do you know what I mean? Do you grasp what I mean?” It would be perfectly appropriate to translate the end of v. 8 there, “He (John) knew and believed.” He grasped the significance of what he saw. The linen strips weren’t a bunched mess. That meant no one had stolen Jesus’ body. No, instead, those grave clothes were lying in regular folds as if Jesus’s body had just emerged right through them. John now grasped what had happened. Jesus had risen from the dead!

What was the result of his kind of seeing – this grasping. For John, it meant believing. Did you know the word “faith” never appears in the Gospel of John? But the verb form – “to believe” or “believing” – is everywhere in it! Why? Because believing means active commitment rather than a passive state of mind. It means more than being aware Jesus existed. It means more than being interested in or impressed with Jesus. It means to grasp who Jesus is and then to commit one’s entire life to Him. Believing is a matter of your will – a continual, active, every day obedient response to God. John saw and believed. He grasped what he saw. He got it. And as he perceived what he saw that Easter Day, John’s commitment to Jesus deepened into consecration.

A woman from Germany had an amazing story. She stood up against the Nazi regime and was sentenced to prison and solitary confinement. At the time, she wasn’t a follower of Jesus. She became so discouraged and depressed by her circumstances that she decided to commit suicide. She made a noose from her tattered blanket, tied it to the bars of her cell, stood on her bed, and prepared to jump off of it and hang herself. But at the very moment, the sunlight broke through the window of her cell and she saw two words on the wall of her cell: “Jesus Christ.” A previous prisoner had written those words on the wall. No doubt when that distraught woman first entered that prison cell, she had seen that Name. She’d glanced at it. She may have even gazed at that Name. But at that moment – with a noose around her neck – that Name became a personal presence. And at that moment, she grasped the meaning and significance of that Name – Jesus Christ. She saw and believed. Her life was both spared and changed forever.

Do you see? “Well, sure, Rick, I see because I believe in Jesus!” What does it mean to believe? A lot of American Christianity proclaims, “I believe in Jesus, but He doesn’t tell me what to do or how to live. When it comes to how to use my money, or how to express myself sexually, or how to relate to other people, I pretty much do my own thing.” Truly believing in Jesus always results in comprehensive, personal change. When you truly see Jesus, He changes your life, your outlook, your conduct, your priorities, your values, your ambitions – everything! Your life focus shifts from you to God. Your mind shifts from Earth to Heaven. Your heart shifts from getting ahead in this world to helping advance the Kingdom of God. What you care about most shifts from what happens in time to what happens in eternity.

Do you see? If you grasp the risen Jesus, how you treat your spouse will change; how you treat your kids will change; how you treat your parents will change, how you interact with co-workers or fellow students will change; and how you relate to neighbors will change. Your love for and interest in others will grow and you’ll want more and more to make a positive, eternal contribution into their lives. If you grasp the risen Jesus, every facet of your personal life will undergo change and transformation. It will be all to the better. If you grasp the risen Jesus, how you react to life’s disappointment will change, how you deal with the inevitable tragedies of life will change, and even how you approach the moment of your own death will change. Do you see?

Edith Burns lived in San Antonio, Texas. She was the favorite patient of her doctor, Dr. Will Phillips. One morning he went to his office with a heavy heart all because of Edith. When he walked into his waiting room, there sat Edith with her big, black Bible in her lap. She was earnestly talking to a young mother sitting beside her. Edith had an unusual habit of introducing herself to new people. She would say, “Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?” Then she would jump into explaining the meaning of Easter. Many times people started following Jesus as a result of that conversation initiated by Edith’s question, “Do you believe in Easter?”

For example, there was Beverly. She was Dr. Phillips’ head nurse. Beverly had first met Edith when she was taking a routine blood pressure. Edith, true to form, said, “My name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?” Beverly said, “Why, yes, I do.” Edith said, “Well, what do you believe about Easter?” Beverly said, “Well, it’s all about egg hunts, going to church, and dressing up.” Edith kept sharing with her the real meaning of Easter and finally Beverly committed her life to Jesus.

After being called into his office, Edith sat down, looked at her doctor, and said, “Dr. Will, why are you so sad? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying?” Dr. Phillips said gently, “Edith, now I’m the doctor and you’re the patient. Your lab report came back and it says you have cancer. Edith, you’re not going to live much longer.” Edith responded, “Why, Will Phillips, shame on you. Why are you so sad? Do you think God makes mistakes? You’ve just told me I’m going to see my precious Lord Jesus, my husband, and my friends sooner than I thought. You have just told me I’m going to

celebrate Easter forever, but here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket!" Dr. Phillips thought to himself, "Edith Burns is one magnificent woman."

Eventually Edith's condition deteriorated to the point where she had to go to the hospital. She called Dr. Phillips, "Will, I'm very near home, so would you make sure they put women next to me in my room who need to know about Easter." Well, that got arranged somehow and several women heard about and committed their lives to Jesus. Everybody on that floor from staff to patients eventually started calling her "Edith Easter." Everyone except the head nurse, Phyllis Cross.

Phyllis made it plain she wanted nothing to do with Edith because she was a "religious nut." Phyllis was a no nonsense health professional and did everything by the book. She had seen it all and heard it all. She had been married three times. Life had left hard and cold. One morning two nurses assigned to care for Edith were both sick and Phyllis had to go into her room to give her a shot. When she walked in there was Edith with a big smile on her face. She said, "Phyllis, God loves you and I love you. I've been praying for you." Phyllis said, "Well, you can quit praying for me. It won't work. I'm not interested." Edith said, "Well, I'll pray and I've asked God not to let me go home until you come into His family." Phyllis said, "Then you will never die, because that will never happen." She turned and walked curtly out of Edith's room.

Every day Phyllis Cross walked into Edith's room and Edith said, "God loves you, Phyllis, and I love you. I'm praying for you." One day Phyllis was somehow drawn into Edith's room like a magnet drawn to iron. Edith said, "I'm so glad you've come, Phyllis, because God told me today is your special day." Phyllis said, "Edith, you've asked everyone here the question, 'Do you believe in Easter?' But you've never asked me."

Edith said, "I wanted to many times, but God told me to wait until you asked. Now that you've asked..." Then, Edith took her Bible and shared with Phyllis the Easter story. "Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe Jesus is alive and wants to live in your heart?" Phyllis said, "I want to believe with all of my heart, and I do want Jesus to be in my life." Right there in Edith Burns' room, Phyllis prayed and invited Jesus into her heart. Two days later, Phyllis came in and Edith said, "Do you know what day it is?" Phyllis said, "Why, Edith, it's Good Friday." Edith said, "Yes, but for you every day is Easter. Happy Easter, Phyllis!"

Two days later, on Easter Sunday, Phyllis stopped by a flower shop and got some Easter lilies on the way to the hospital. She wanted to give those lilies to Edith as a gift and wish her a happy Easter. Edith was in bed. The big, black Bible was on her lap. Her hands were inside the Bible. There was a sweet smile on her face. Phyllis realized Edith had died. As she removed her hands from the Bible, Phyllis saw that Edith's left hand rested on John 14. "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Her right hand was on Revelation 21. "And God will wipe away every tear

from their eyes, there shall be no more death nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Phyllis took one look at that dead body, and then she lifted her face toward Heaven. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she said, “Happy Easter, Edith. Happy Easter.” Phyllis walked out of the room and over to a table where two student nurses were sitting. She said, “My name is Phyllis Cross. Do you believe in Easter?”

Edith Burns saw and believed. Phyllis Cross saw and believed. Do you see? You can glance at the risen Jesus. “Oh, yeah, Easter. Jesus stuff.” You can gaze at the risen Jesus. “Jesus... kind of interesting.” Or, you can grasp the risen Jesus and like another disciple who would meet Jesus a little later that first Easter Day – Thomas – you can fall on your knees and proclaim, “My Lord and my God.” Do you see?