

**CHRIST'S ASSURANCE THAT MANY WILL  
CONFESS HIM AS RISEN LORD**

*“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet  
believe.”*

(John 20: 29B)

In most of the churches which I have served as pastor it is the custom that on Easter Sunday morning young people make public profession of faith. I am convinced that this is a good custom. The resurrection of Christ and the profession of the Christians truly belong together. The first is connected unmistakably to the second: I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the first-born of the dead, the Son of the living God! Had Christ not risen that day, there would be from our side no public profession of faith.

Resurrection and profession. On the first Easter it was not so apparent. As we noted earlier, there was much unbelief, hesitation, doubt and even fear. Things happened so quickly and so unexpectedly. It took some time before the disciples could profess in true faith: Christ is risen, Hallelujah, Christ is risen from the dead!

## **HOW WILL WE EVER BELIEVE?**

The Lord Jesus had to follow a careful process of appearances to His disciples, convincing them step by step that He was indeed the risen Lord. And it is not without reason that we read in the Scriptures the story of Thomas, how at first he was unbelieving when he heard his fellow-disciples testify that they had seen the Lord.

The question may come up: if it took *them* so long, even though they saw in person the risen Lord, how will others ever come to faith? If Thomas did not believe the apostolic testimony – and he was one of the disciples – how shall we ever believe? We have never seen Jesus, neither before nor after His death. Will we be able to confess Him truly and to stand firm in that confession?

What the Lord Jesus does in our text is use this encounter with Thomas and the disciples to demonstrate an important point, to teach them and us a vital lesson. He teaches the disciples who must go out with the Word about the powerful effect of that Word. He comforts the church and its members about their ministry: to sow the seed in tears and then to reap the abundant harvest with gladness. He assures us that there will be faith in the risen Christ, worked through the Spirit by the Word. We may see the visible proof thereof whenever people come to profess Jesus Christ as their Saviour. In brief, we read in this passage how Christ assures His disciples that by the power of the apostolic Word many will come to confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Our Lord speaks of the miracle of this confession and the blessing through this confession.

## **A DOUBTING THOMAS**

We all know the story of Thomas and his proverbial doubt. We speak sometimes about a person being “a doubting Thomas.” And we may think: Thomas really blew it, what a poor showing! Indeed, how awful of him not to believe the women, his fellow disciples, and those two who travelled to Emmaus. There were so many witnesses whose testimony agreed, yet Thomas refused to believe. He insisted: unless I see visible proof, I will not believe.

Some explainers point out that this reaction was in accordance with Thomas’ personality. He was probably the “sceptic” among the disciples, the one who

always saw things from their darker side. He expected the worst and was therefore also prepared to accept the worst.

Let me give you an example. When Jesus hears that Lazarus has died, He says to His disciples, "Let us go to him." Now it was quite dangerous for Jesus to go to Judea at that time, for the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill Him. They were all aware of the dangers, but Thomas immediately expected the worst and said, "Let us all go that we may die with Him" (John 11: 16). Thomas is the pessimist, who says: Okay, we're in this together, let's go and get killed together. Notice that Thomas is not afraid to go and fight, but he is sure that the worst will happen. They will all die.

## **DEATH IS THE END**

And death is indeed the end. When Jesus was condemned and executed, Thomas considered the matter finished. His worst fears had come true. Well, they had not all died, but Jesus was dead. The sad thing was that Thomas, too, had really believed in Jesus and despite his scepticism had expected great things from Him. Now it is over. My trust has been betrayed and my dreams appear to have been just that, dreams. Must I now believe that Jesus has risen from the dead? First I have to see it!

Some people are sceptical; others are gullible. Some will believe everything they hear; others believe nothing. Some are cynical; others naive. Is that the level on which we must judge things here? Is Thomas' reaction so much different from that of the other disciples? Is it a matter of personality or character?

No, Thomas' reaction is not really all that different. They all thought: dead is dead, it is over. No one really expected a resurrection. They all had to see first, before they would believe. And even then, it took them time to digest in faith what they had seen. We read earlier in John 20: 8 that when John entered the empty tomb and saw its orderly state, ". . . he saw and believed," but it means literally that he only *began* to believe. Something awoke in John at that moment, but it was not yet the full scriptural understanding and deep faith which is required. Yes, they all had to see, not only Thomas, but all of them.

## **A LEADER IN FAITH?**

Thomas' reaction is wrong, but understandable. Therefore the Lord does not rebuke him severely. It is more a gentle reprimand: "Have you believed because you have seen Me?" (Verse 29). For in the end Thomas did come to full acceptance of the fact of the resurrection. He even made a wonderful confession, one which the others had perhaps not yet made up to that moment. He said: my Lord and my God!

Thomas gave the greatest recognition and worship which could be given: you are indeed God of God, Lord of Lords. This was for an Israelite quite a thing to say. What a giant leap of faith! The Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus on the charge of blasphemy, because He had made Himself equal to God. It is indeed the key issue,

and Thomas appears to be the first one to say it outright: my Lord and my God! Had any other disciple come so far and been so outspoken?

You see here the wondrous way in which the Lord uses even our weakness and sins to promote His cause. The sceptic is turned into a believer. He who lagged behind in unbelief becomes a leader in faith. From cynic to professor, what a step ahead. Now the church has heard that Jesus is not only Lord but also God, and that He has risen from the dead by the power of His divinity!

## **MANY WILL BELIEVE**

And Christ accepts this confession. What is more, He lets it be known at that specific moment that not just Thomas and the disciples will make this profession of faith, but that there will be many others. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” Which implies only one thing: there will be those who believe, although they have not seen, but only heard. Many people will be able to go by only one thing: the testimony of others, that is, of the apostles.

Yes, we will go one step further and say that this will be the rule: not seeing, but hearing, and so coming to faith. Our text is, as it were, a beatitude, and it gives us a ground-rule for the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

Christ does not say these words to make Thomas look or feel bad, or to make the other disciples feel guilty because of their unbelief. The Lord is never out to make His servants look bad. He says these words in order to encourage and comfort them. They had to see, before they would believe. Yes, indeed, they are and must be *eye-witnesses*, eye-witnesses of the resurrected One, for that is their apostolic calling. They must testify of what they have *seen*. They must also come one step further: they must testify that what they have seen is in full accord with the Scriptures of old. He rose according to the Scriptures.

But lest they think that their testimony will be fruitless, the Lord Jesus assures them that many will come to believe through the apostolic Word in the glory of the risen Christ. Many will come to this profession of faith: Jesus is my Lord and my God!

## **FAITH REMAINS A MIRACLE**

It will be a miracle. Just as Thomas was unwilling of himself to believe the testimony of his fellow disciples, so everyone who hears the Gospel will never accept it of himself. As a matter of fact, many will reject the apostolic Word. The general rule in the world is: first I have to see it, and then I’ll believe it. And even then sometimes people say: did I really see what I think I saw? Seeing can also be deceptive. The eyes are easily subject to illusion. And seeing alone does not lead to faith. All the signs and wonders which Jesus did, did not bring the Pharisees to faith.

Faith remains a great miracle, a powerful work of the Holy Spirit, and it is always a response to the working of the Word of God in the lives of people. That

Word does what God wants it to do. That Word alone can convict of sin and assure of redemption. That Word brings about faith and public profession of faith.

At Easter time the Lord told His disciples: I will not be making personal appearances to everyone. I will not give special signs to everyone. I am going to my heavenly Father, and one day every eye shall see Me, also those that pierced Me. But until that day it will be: blessed are those who have not seen but do believe! It will be faith worked by the power of the apostolic Word through the Spirit who has been poured out over the church. That is the rule in the Kingdom of heaven.

## **FAITH THROUGH HEARING**

Now we understand key passages in the Bible: faith is through hearing and hearing comes through preaching (Romans 10). What is faith? “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, *the conviction of things not seen*,” Hebrews 11:1. Is it not as Peter wrote later, “Without having seen [Christ] you love Him, though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him. . .” (1 Peter 1: 8)?

Thomas said: I have to see it to believe it. And Christ said: I’ll let you see, because I want you to be an eye-witness, but I tell you all that many will believe without seeing. For believing is: accepting the testimony of the prophets and the apostles, receiving the Word of God concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the whole truth. True faith is saying with the heart: Jesus is my Lord and my Saviour, and this I know because the Bible tells me so!

And this is the power of the resurrection which is evident throughout history and still is evident today. It is an outright miracle every time someone comes to faith and profession of faith. It goes against every grain of our sinful human nature. The carnal mind does not of itself think spiritually. The striving of the flesh is enmity against God. But Christ has risen, hallelujah, and He is alive and well, living in heaven, and by the power of His Word He has worked this faith. And today He receives this confession: Jesus, my Lord and my God. The miracle is still happening, the miracle of regeneration, of confession of sin and profession of faith. Despite all contrary indications and all diabolic temptations, people say: I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour.

## **MIRACLES AND MEANS**

True, miracles do not exclude specific means. Christ uses the upbringing by parents, the teaching at the schools, the catechism classes, the worship services, the study societies, the communion of saints, to bring us to profession of faith. If you don’t want the miracle to happen, just shun the means. If you don’t use the Word and let it work, then you will never believe. Stay away from church, close the Bible and you’ll always doubt, a skeptic for life, a skeptic unto death. You will stay in the worldly way of looking at things: first see and then believe. And since you will not see Christ until He comes in judgment, when you do see Him it will be too late. The

miracle of salvation must happen now, in this life, because when you see Christ it is too late. Now you must believe the Word and if you do, then you will see Him in great joy.

I want to stress this: miracles do not occur except in the manner ordained by God. The miracle of faith is by hearing the Word. Whoever has not come to the profession of faith, or whoever is really struggling with the profession he or she once made, must continue to tie the miracle to the means. Whoever professes his faith must remember, "I must be guided always by the Word and Spirit of Christ." Continue to use the means given to the church, for only then will the miracle continue in your lives; only then, having come to faith in Christ will you abide in Him. Satan will test your profession, will try to destroy the miracle by making you scorn the means, the Word, the sacraments, the fellowship of the saints. Don't let him! Resist him fiercely! You know what brought you to faith, and you know also what will keep you in the faith. If we remain faithful in this way, we shall experience more and more the *blessing* of our profession of faith.

## **BLESSED ARE THE BELIEVERS**

For Christ says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." This does not mean that Thomas and the other disciples are not blessed. Or that those who believe through the Word are more blessed than those who believed through seeing. The disciples were blessed as well. They had a different task, but the same blessing.

What Christ says is this: all who come to faith through the apostolic Word are truly blessed. The same word is used here as in the beatitudes, in the Sermon on the Mount, and it must therefore also have the same basic sense.

In the beatitudes the word "blessed" is always in sharp contrast to what the world thinks. The world says: the poor in spirit are lost. Christ says: no way, blessed are the poor in spirit. The world says: the meek are pitiable, for they get nothing. Christ says: blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. The world says: believers are crazy, believing some story about a resurrected Lord they've never seen. How can you believe such nonsense? But Christ says: blessed are the believers. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe! You see? Whom the world calls foolish, the Lord declares blessed. There is no greater antithesis than this!

What does this word "blessed" mean? Well, whenever we speak of blessing, we know that the *curse* has been taken away. The curse is always first of all: the curse of sin, the wage of sin which is death. To be blessed means to live in the embrace of the love of God, to stand in His fellowship, to be His child, and so to share in all the gifts of Christ. Blessed means: to be congratulated with a very special situation. Blessed; indeed, congratulations to those who have not seen but do believe.

## **BLESSING AND BLOOD**

The original English word for “blessing” comes from a word that has to do with blood. Blessing comes from “bloedsian,” to consecrate with blood. You are blessed, for indeed, the blood has been poured out for you; you have been washed clean by the blood of Golgotha. Is that not the essence of Psalm 32, blest is the man whose trespass is forgiven, blest is the man against whom thou wilt not count all his iniquity and guilt! The great blessing is to be cleansed of sin, and so to receive eternal life.

The apostle Peter also spoke in this vein: as the outcome of your faith you receive the salvation of your souls. Your life is saved in Christ. That is the foremost blessing of faith.

Still there is more here. The word “bless” may also be connected to the word “bliss.” The original Greek has a word that includes the notion of happiness. Bliss means indeed happiness, great joy. Did not Peter write: though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy? Blessed are the believers. Blissful are the believers! The happiness of the believer is not something that can always be expressed properly or explained adequately. It is unutterable and exalted. It is a rejoicing in heavenly matters. It is a spiritual joy.

Those who believe experience already in this life a special joy that comes from faith, from the fellowship with the Father through Christ. You who believe, do you know what we are talking about? We are talking about the firm basis, the quiet certainty, the deep joy in the Lord. Yes, how blest is the man and, it says, how happy! Blessed people are happy people, whose joy rests in Christ and His perfect work.

## **NO MORE PROBLEMS?**

Does this mean that when we profess Christ, we never have any more problems? That it is all bliss from then on? No, it doesn't. Jesus warned His disciples for false expectations. He said: you will have many trials! Satan will try to undo your confession. And Peter wrote, “now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials. . . .”

To be blessed does not mean that we will never feel depressed and never wonder about our faith and faithfulness. There will be times when, because of our sins and lack of prayer, by not exercising the power of faith, we will not feel the effects of God's grace in ourselves. There may be times when we “greatly offend God, grievously wound our consciences, and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God's favour.” I just quoted from the beautiful Canons of Dort. Yes, we do make it so very difficult for ourselves and for others by our lack of proper exercising our faith. Be on guard that you do not harm your faith. Still, God will not rob us of the blessing of our profession of faith. He will cause us to experience again the favour of a reconciled God so that we adore anew His mercy and faithfulness.

Oh Thomas, it is a miracle when someone professes faith in Christ as the risen Lord. But what a blessing, what bliss comes with it and through it. Blessed are

those who believe the apostolic testimony, blessed in this life and in all eternity. In all the trials, through all the valleys, God will keep their faith and give them true joy. How blest are those whose strength Thou art, yes, O LORD of hosts, how blest is he who puts his hope and trust in Thee! (Psalm 84). So we will go on, through all the valleys, until the journey ends in the New Jerusalem where we shall see Christ with our own eyes, face to face, and He will say: see, I told you!

## **WE WILL SEE HIM**

Those who believe and confess His Name will see Christ with their own eyes, and with great joy. Those who do not believe will see Him with great fear. But see Him we shall!

Christ faced that little group of disciples with Thomas and He said: you believe because you have seen? Do you know what I see? I see my holy catholic church, I see the great multitude of those who believe in the apostolic Word, the miracle multitude, the blessed multitude with the songs of joy, the multitude gathered by the Word which I gave.

Blessed are you who have not seen Christ but do believe and profess your faith in Him. Never forget: it is based not on seeing, but on hearing, on the solid rock of the apostolic Word. And by faith you begin to see what others refuse to see. You always have a different point of view from the world. Remember this: you walk by faith and not by sight. You hope for what is not seen. Hang on to this blessing with all your might. Begin every day by saying: blessed are the believers, blissful are the believers, for they do see and shall see God. They do live and shall live with God. For the curse has been removed. Easter means that death has been overcome. New life has begun.

Let us enjoy the miracle of faith by the power of Him Who died and was buried, but lives! And let us rejoice in our eternal heritage. The lines have fallen in most pleasant places. Let us believe and confess, today and always:

“With Thee full joy and bliss are ever present!” (Psalm 16, *Book of Praise*)

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe that Christ has risen from the dead and that He is coming to judge the living and the dead; blessed are those who through Him acclaim the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.