

HANGING IN THIN AIR

- 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.
- 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
- 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.
- 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,
- 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.
- 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.
- 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)
- 10 Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

John 20:3-10

Special Music: "Help My Unbelief"

Ryan Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03XtfZqHNnk>



FACING DISBELIEF

I want to believe
That the air is there.
I reach out to grasp a breeze
But my hand returns...
Empty.
The wind whispers in my ear
And speaks my name,
But I cannot taste or see it
The air itself...
Says nothing.
The smells of life
On flightless wings
Waft through the nothingness
And engage my senses.
I am resolute when I say
The air's not there
I cannot,
Will not.
Shall not...
Believe.
To do so contradicts
My modest mind.
And yet,
The air IS there
Amidst my disbelief,
And not dependent
On my repentance
Or even my existence.

**I was not there
To see Him
Hanging in the air
Jesus bled and died for me.
And I was not there
To help him bear
The pain of Calvary.
I did not see
The blood He shed
I did not hear His gasping moans
Or watch him cringe
When they placed
A crown of thorns
Upon his head,
A sham as they sought
To end His breath.
I did not see the blood
Creating crimson pools
Beneath the cross
I was not there
When he gasped His last,
“It is finished.”
Nor was I there
To see the temple veil
Torn asunder,
As the thunder cracked
And my savior died.
I did not see him
Placed within the tomb
Nor watch them roll
The stone in place**

Sealed with wax
Of my own disgrace.
Nor was I there
On Easter morn
When the stone rolled back.
My Lord reborn.
I was not there.

I was not there
When the angel spoke
“He is not here.
He is risen,
Freed from the prison
Of death!”
I was not there
When he met His friends
Holes in hands
His flesh torn side,
Giving proof of what
Had been His life,
Like a knife separating
Disbelief from truth.
I was not there
On the road
To listen and learn
As he returned
To teach
I was not there.
I simply was not there.

And yet,
Just like the air
There is within me
The opportunity
To face my disbelief
And reconcile
My mortal mind
To eternal truths.
God loves me,
Christ died for me,
The Spirit leads me,
Just as I am.

Christ is there
Amidst my disbelief.
I become distracted
By the world's refusal
To seek out the truth.
And I cry out
to ears that will hear
And engage the truth,
"He does not live
Because I believe,
I believe
Because he lives."

HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

It is a long, hard journey that tests every ounce of our faith as we look at Good Friday, as we envision our Savior bleeding and dying on that cross, as we see the blood seeping down from the crown of thorns, as we see the oozing wound in his side, as we see him take his last breath and say, “It is finished,” to suddenly being able to say on Easter morn, “He is risen. He is risen indeed.”

How do we get from there to here? A great number of people find it much easier to ignore Good Friday and just get excited for Resurrection Sunday. After all, isn’t it really all about the resurrection? Anybody can die. It’s that resurrection part that is more difficult to embrace, even if we struggle with the whole coming back from the dead concept. So many people see the Crucifixion as reality, and all we seem to want to do these days is escape reality. Reality is hard. Reality is painful. Reality is drama. Reality is struggle.

But, oh, the resurrection steps into a different corner of the brain, a place where imagination and faith hold hands and dance. If Good Friday is tragedy, then Easter Sunday is mystical. Good Friday leaves us with blood on our hands that won’t wash off. Easter Sunday leaves us ecstatic because the blood that wouldn’t, couldn’t come off our hands suddenly gets washed away. We don’t find ourselves wanting to hide our eyes from the Resurrection like we do for the Crucifixion.

We need to understand, though, that the Resurrection is just as real, just as factual as the Crucifixion. We just have a harder time accepting it for two very logical reasons:

1. We don't have an account of anyone seeing Jesus walk out of that tomb.

That doesn't mean that it didn't happen. Where there were throngs of people at the Crucifixion, but we don't have anyone at the Resurrection except the guards, and they ain't talking. Mary encounters Jesus in the garden, but she didn't see him walk out of that tomb. When she tells everyone that she saw him, no one believes her. And no one will admit to rolling the stone away.

2. And number two, while it was one thing for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead, it's a whole different thing to believe that he raised himself!

And let's tell it like it is. No one expected Jesus to come back from the dead, even though he had been saying explicitly that it was going to happen.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:31

The women who went to the tomb didn't have a clue about how they were going to move the stone from the entrance. None of the disciples showed up to see if Jesus had come back until after the ladies told them that the tomb was empty and that they had encountered angels. If anyone had even slightly believed that Jesus was going to defeat death and come out of that tomb, at the very least, they would have been there to witness it; at the very most, they would have sold tickets.

I want us to step away from that for a moment and look at a different situation in Jesus' ministry. A man came to Jesus' disciples and asked them to heal his son, whom he believed was possessed by a demon. The disciples tried but were unable to drive the demon out of the boy, so they brought the man and his son to Jesus. The man says to Jesus, "Please, heal him if you can." And Mark 9:23-24 tells us that Jesus responded this way:

23 "‘If you can’?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" How many of us have prayed that short prayer? "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Where do we cross that point from "well, maybe" into shouting, "He is risen. He is risen indeed." When do we stop "Hanging in Thin Air" and allow the shoe to drop into reality rather than pluck our fingers in the air at the mystery? We want to grab the truth out of the fog of our uncertainty, so we beg that the truth be made visible and tangible.

Life is so much easier for us when we think the Resurrection is wispy, shadowy, and just possible, rather than foundation-laid, built of brick, truth. It's easier to back away from whimsy than it is to commit to truth, especially when it requires us to have the "faith of things unseen."

Many of us adopt a Thomas attitude. "I'm not going to believe it until I touch the holes in his hands and the wound in his side." And, although Thomas was able to do that and reconcile what he believed impossible, we don't have that

option. Our belief is hinged on the faith that we find in our Lord Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If we cannot step into a full relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are left “Hanging in Thin Air,” where we never quite get from the shadow of truth to truth itself. We are left with our hands grasping at the possibility of the Resurrection and never quite committing to the truth of the Resurrection.

The entire life of Jesus Christ on earth is a spiritual growth experience for us. We can embrace the tangible nature of the Nativity. We can walk with Jesus through his ministry and begin to understand the miracles he performed and the teachings he gave to us. We can find solace in the Eucharist as a reminder of his love for us. We can see that love exemplified on the Cross as he cries out, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t realize what they are doing!” We can visualize him taking his last breath as the Spirit leaves his body.

But the Resurrection is different. For that, we must step into faith and commit to a truth that can only be discerned by our personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no first-hand account of the actual resurrection, just the evidence that is left behind and the accounts of his appearance among the people afterwards. It is when we see the evidence of the stone rolled away, the grave clothes in the tomb, the encounter with the angels, and Mary’s account of meeting Jesus in the garden that we begin resolve the conflicts with our frail human minds, and embrace the divinity of encountering Jesus, the Risen Lord. It is Jesus’ appearance to the disciples and again later, when Thomas is there, that we start to grasp the essence of what has happened. The encounter with the two

men on the road to Eumaeus adds depth to what we have already begun to realize.

On this Easter Sunday, this day we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, I want us to ask ourselves, “Have we made the commitment to step into faith, to stop Hanging in Thin Air, and plant our feet firmly into the truth of Jesus’ victory over death? Or do we find ourselves wobbling on the fence and not quite ready to step from the possibility of the resurrection and into the reality of our Lord, risen from the dead?” I ask, because it affects your response to the statement, “He is Risen.” Will we answer, “It’s possible.”? Will we answer, “I’m almost there, preacher.”? Or can we firmly answer, “He is risen indeed!”? Are we hesitant or are we steadfast in our belief?” The blessing comes with the faithfulness of our answer, not because someone else told us that this is true, but because we have a relationship with Jesus Christ and we know that it’s true.

So I say again, “He is risen.”

And you answer, “He is risen, indeed!”

God bless you all! Happy Resurrection Day!

Amen

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