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How often have you heard the words, *Seeing is believing*? Would you believe if I told you, the Standard Chartered bank has an global initiative whose mission statement is *Seeing is Believing*, a programme to treat avoidable blindness and visual impairment by improving access to affordable and quality eye care?

Would you believe, we have here in the UK, **Highways SIB (Seeing is Believing)** which offers local authorities, opportunities to find out about the latest developments and products which can help improve the safety of the highway network.

I am making a wild guess here, but I don't think either organisation, Standard Chartered or Highways SIB, realise they have plagiarised their slogan *Seeing is Believing*, from the Bible<sup>1</sup>!

The entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is the history of the human race trying to manage the tension between the easy option, *Seeing is Believing* (I want tangible evidence), and the more difficult option of gaining confident assurance in the person of God, being absolutely certain, what we hope for is waiting for us, even though, from where we stand, we cannot see it ahead<sup>2</sup>.

The first recorded temptation was an excursion into the easy world of *Seeing is Believing*. Having challenged God's authority, satan enticed the woman to see the "fruit" for herself. *So when the woman **saw, realised and believed** that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight for the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:25, 27-29; 1 Kings 10:7;

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew 11:1

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:4-6

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Before we understand what is going on here, please realise that the pre-condition to *Seeing is Believing* is dismantling and demolishing God's authority, and discrediting the Law of God.

So satan starts with, *Did God **really** say...?* which demolished God's authority to say anything believable, followed by *Surely you will not die...* which discredited God's Law.

Now that God is out of the picture, the woman saw the fruit without its warning label, liked what she saw and rationalised, therefore it must be good for food.

Through her eyes, the sight of the fruit delighted her; the eyes which are the window to her soul, conveyed delight and pleasure deep within her. It was a short step from there to convince her mind, the whole **tree** was to be desired to make one wise.

Before reaching out to eat the forbidden fruit, the authority and Law of God had been dismantled and discredited, she justified her action by convincing herself, it looks like good food, it feels good just to see it (delight to the eyes), and it will make me a better person (wiser).

What then, does creation and the first recorded temptation have to do with the Easter story? **Everything!**

Lets start at the beginning. Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb while it was still dark and **saw** that the stone which had sealed the grave had been removed. So she ran from the tomb to where Simon Peter and John were staying. She would have woken them up, and in loud whisper, she said, *They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid Him.*<sup>4</sup> All Mary saw in the darkness was a gaping hole, the

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<sup>4</sup> John 20:

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entrance to the tomb wide open. She did not go in. What she believed was based on what she first saw, and what she saw was only a small part of the complete story. Because the stone no longer sealed the burial chamber, in her mind, *those evil people have taken my Lord's body and who knows where they have put Him!* That is exactly what she said to Simon Peter and John.

Peter and John run as fast as they could. John is the first to reach the tomb. Stooping to look in, he saw the linen clothes neatly folded, but he did not go in. Could Mary be right? Have the body snatchers taken Jesus' body away to some undisclosed location?

The sense of drama is real! Simon Peter arrives, huffing and panting, enters the burial chamber and sees the linen burial cloth neatly folded in a place, and the cloth covering the face and head of Jesus, neatly folded in another place. Now that Peter was safe inside, John gingerly enters the tomb and saw what Peter saw, the linen burial cloths neatly folded, carefully placed.

One can just about catch the subtle humour inserted by the author - Young Jesus was well trained by Mary to make his bed neatly every morning as soon as he woke up, and here was the evidence of a well practiced habit!

John is the first to put a positive light on *Seeing is Believing*. He says, *as yet they (the disciples) had not understood the Scripture, that Jesus **must** rise from the dead, but he (John) **saw and believed!***

John and Peter had an *aha!* moment. Looking at each other, they understood what Jesus meant when He said to them on several occasions, He would suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the

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chief priests and scribes, be killed, and on the third day, be raised from the dead. <sup>5</sup>

By now it appears, all 11 disciples were at the scene. They did not return to the upper room where they were huddled for fear of being found out, but their returned to their homes.

This would have been particularly poignant for John to make a note of, because he had taken Mary into his home, and surely she must be told what has happened.

But Mary Magdalene remained, weeping outside the tomb. She continued to believe what she **thought** she saw, because she says to the two angels who appeared before her, *They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid Him!* She turns around and sees a man standing there. Presuming him to be gardener, she says, *Sir, if you have carried Him away, please tell me where you have put Him, and I will take Him away and care for His dead body.*

She is so convinced of what she saw, and made herself believe as a result, she could not see the Risen Christ standing in front of her, until he calls her by name! Mary!

She returns to announce to the disciples, *I have seen the Lord!* I have seen and now I believe!

The evening of the same day, the disciples gather in a safe room and lock the doors. Jesus appears, showers them with the blessing of peace, and anoints them with the gift of the Holy Spirit to forgive, any and all people.

Thomas was not present at this gathering. Not having seen Christ after His resurrection, Thomas doubted the reality of Jesus' resurrection *Unless*

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 9:21, 44; Matthew 17:22, 23; Mark 9:30.

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*I **see** in His hands the mark of the nails, **and** place my finger into the mark of the nails, **and** hand place my hand into His side (where He was pierced), I will never believe.* Thomas wanted the full sensory experience - to see and feel the marks of Jesus' wounds.

John very painstakingly reveals three attitudes towards *Seeing is Believing*.

**Mary Magdalene** took a first look, made up her mind what might have happened and stuck to what she convinced herself. She was earnestly seeking Jesus, and found Him when He calls her by Name. She believed in the Risen Christ as soon as she heard His voice! That's all it took, because she was looking for Him.

**John** runs up to the burial chamber, peers in and doesn't know what to make of what he saw.

**Peter** runs into the burial chamber, saw exactly what John saw, turns around to see John stepping in, and they both have an *aha!* moment - so that's what Jesus meant... sure I believe!

There are those who are searching for Jesus, and all they need is a personal reminder, something they see or hear, and they are convinced He is alive. They believe He is true to His word.

Then there was **Thomas**. We know little about him, but what we do know about his character is that he seemed to have a negative view of life. As they left the east bank of the river Jordan to see Lazarus who had died, Thomas said to his fellow disciples, *Let's also go, that we may die with him*<sup>6</sup>! What a dark thing to say, when Jesus had just informed the disciples, *Lazarus has died and for your sake, I am glad I was not there, **so that you may believe.** Let's go.*

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<sup>6</sup> John 11:16

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Then, just before the final Passover meal, Jesus says, *I go to prepare a place for you in my Father's house, and if I go, I will come again and take you to myself. You know the way to where I am going.* Thomas' response is, *Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*

Those with a negative view of life, who are not listening to anything positive, surrounded by pessimists, not willing to believe anything good can come from life, cannot believe in the Risen Christ, because they first want the evidence.

*First you show yourself to me, prove to me you are the Christ (or You are God), then perhaps I will believe.*

Jesus says to Thomas, *Have you believed **because** you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

It really doesn't matter if you are searching for Jesus and one day see Him standing before you, or you want a string of conditions to be fulfilled before your very own eyes, before you believe Jesus is the risen Christ, **God is not interested whether you believe in the Resurrection.**

**God is interested whether you believe His Son, our Christ was resurrected from the dead, to prepare a place for you, and one day He will come and take you home, to spend eternity with the Father.**

Easter brings us face-to-face with this question: will you accept by faith, God is true to His promise, that He so loved the world that He sent His Son to break the stranglehold of death by His own death on the cross, that whoever believes this by faith, will enjoy eternal life in God's kingdom?

If you do, welcome into God's kingdom; if not, what are you waiting for?

**AMEN**