**North Christian Church**

**~ In 2020, Looking to See a Perfect Vision of God’s Perfect Plan ~**

***“Where there is no vision, the people perish…”* - Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)**

**April: *Seeing the Perfect Plan of God – Part 3 Just Seeing Jesus!***

***“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”* - Mark 16:7**

**Today: Just Seeing Jesus-from Thomas to the rest of us. The non-eyewitness Believers.**

***“*Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” *–* John 20:29**

**“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” – Hebrews 11:1**

**“For we walk by faith and not by sight.” – II Corinthians 5:7**

**Jesus came to live among us, to be on our level, teach, heal, and to personally bring in the Kingdom of God. He also came to serve, suffer, and die on the cross for our sins. Then…we know that He also came to overcome sin and conquer death. And when He did all of this…He intended to be seen, He purposefully wanted to be noticed…for people to recognize and realize who He was and what He was doing. His life was lived out in the open, on display, on the world stage for all to see Him, and for all to believe in Him as their Savior and Lord! So this month…we are seeing Jesus, living out His mission and purpose on earth. Holy Week. Palm Sunday. The Last Supper. Good Friday. Then…Easter Sunday.**

**Last week we looked at all the important eyewitness who saw the resurrected Jesus and testified to that fact and truth. We ended last week giving thanks to God for those eyewitnesses who have gone before us. And, we ended on the challenge that now, we are the new I - witnesses. Those who have not seen Jesus, but still witness for Jesus. Today, we represent the non-eyewitness witnesses of Jesus Christ. But who started this group? Who were the first non-eyewitness witnesses? The first century believers who heard the message, the eyewitnesses accounts from those who saw Jesus die and come back from the tomb alive? Those who first believed? They are our ancestors and forefathers of the faith. They were not Jesus’ Disciples, nor were they His Apostles. But, nonetheless, they were that elite group of believers who were a part of the new faith called Christianity. They started the trend of believers to whom Jesus referred in John 20 when He told His Disciple Thomas…”Blessed are those who do not see and still believe!” Jesus was talking about us. So today we are going from Thomas to the rest of us… This is that group of non-eyewitnesses who believed in the risen, living Jesus. They are those who have lived throughout the centuries...who have lived the faith, died for the faith, written volumes for the faith, and gone around the world proclaiming the faith. And, today we are in that group also…billions and billions of believers who have carried on the truth of the Risen Jesus from one generation to the next. And, it all started back there in the book of Acts…just a few weeks after the Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb and flowed by the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. From the eyewitness believers to the non-eyewitness believers…of Jesus Christ. Today, we need to know about them and follow their examples to us. Why, you may ask. Because of them, we are here today. We owe them our faith. Today we are observing four very important of the first non-eyewitness believers…mentioned in the Holy Scriptures.**

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1. **The First non-eyewitness believer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Witnessed to by The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, appointed a Deacon in the First church, and the first martyr (killed) because of the Faith.**

**Acts 6:5 – 8:1 – In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jewsamong them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3Brothers and sisters choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” 5This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. 8Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. 9Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. 10But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. 11Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” 12So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” 15All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. 7 Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?” 2To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! …48“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 49“‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50Has not my hand made all these things?’ 51“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.” 54When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep. 8 And Saul approved of their killing him.**

1. **He shows us how to \_\_\_. Live for Christ. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Be filled with wisdom, grace, and power. Perform great wonders and signs. Have an angelic appearance! He sets the bar high.**

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1. **He shows us how to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Christ. A bold witness for Jesus. Shows us how to represent Christ. Wise in his discussion of the faith. Powerful speaker of the Faith. He spoke the truth with boldness. Also, he did his homework and knew his history!**

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1. **He showed us how to \_\_\_\_\_\_. He died like Jesus did. He showed love and forgiveness. He forgave his murderers. He gave his spirit to Jesus to receive him.**

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1. **He was rewarded for his faithfulness. II Timothy 4: 7-8. He saw Jesus standing in heaven. His reward, and ours! All non-eyewitness believers will see Jesus when we all get to heaven. We will see our loved ones…yes. But most of all, we will see Jesus, the Savior of our lives!**

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1. **The second non-eyewitness believer. Joseph \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Witnessed to by the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the great Encourager of the Faith, leader and teacher in the first century Churches.**

**Acts 4:36-37 – Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), 37sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.**

**Acts 9: 26-27 – When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.**

**Acts 11: 22-26 – News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.**

**Acts 13-15 – Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. 4The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. … 42As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. 44On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. 46Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47For this is what the Lord has commanded us:” ‘I have made youa light for the Gentiles, that youmay bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” 48When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; … 3So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. … 8In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. 9He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. 11When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” 12Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. … The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. 21They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. 23Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. … 26From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. …So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. 4When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. …12The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. … 22Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. …35But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord. 36 Later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” 37Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39They had such a Sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. 41He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.**

1. **He was the first great \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ church member. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He gave generously to the early church. He was nicknamed the Encourager. A term of endearment.**

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1. **He was a mentor and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of young Christians. He could see potential in them that others could not see. Saul and John Mark, in particular. Saul to Apostle, Missionary, Theological Architect Paul. John Mark to writer of the First Gospel, Mark.**

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1. **He was a humble \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for the Faith. The first Pastor / Leader in Antioch. Brought Paul along. A bold and holy leader of the Faith with Paul! Was not proud, as he stepped back and let Paul blossom in ministry. Leaders not only lead; but let others who can lead, lead. Good leaders also know when to follow well and take a more supportive role. (Even though he was mistaken as Zeus!)**

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1. **He was a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the Faith. He was missionary and church planter with Paul and then Mark all over the Mediterranean world. He took the Gospel to the world. Mark 16:15. He took Christ to People and brought People to Christ! He helped lay the groundwork for the Church today.**

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1. **The third non-eyewitness believer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Witnessed to by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, a Roman Centurion, the first Gentile convert to the Faith.**

**Acts 10:1-6 – At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!” 4Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.”**

**Acts 10:24-27 – The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. …27While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.**

**Acts 10:44-48 – While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. 46For they heard them speaking in tonguesand praising God. Then Peter said, 47“Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” 48So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.**

1. **He was a really \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ man, but without Jesus in his life. He was God – fearing. He gave to charities and prayed a lot. These are great virtues, but his life did not have the missing piece / peace! Jesus!**

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1. **He was a wonderful \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ man who loved his family. Not an all in the family, family man. Not a married with children family man. Not a Simpsons family man. Not an American dad family man. Not the Family guy family man. Not modern family family man. He was a praying, Godly family man!! He had them all gather together at his house to meet and hear Peter when he came. Excited because company was coming over? Dressed up for the occasion? Did they clean the house? Did they have snacks? Yes…probably! A sweet picture of a family! How does my family picture look?**

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1. **He and his family \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, were \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with The Holy Spirit, and were \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (In the family pool out back.) “Today, salvation has come to this household.” Zacchaeus’ house in Luke 19:9. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua in Joshua 24:15. “The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God - he and his whole family.” Philippian Jailer in Acts 16:34. Families are transformed by Christ. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
2. **Home improvements are needed! Today, there is a strong emphasis placed on households and families. Spring cleaning? Family time? Projects? What is your home mission statement? Good time to write one. What is the faith story for your household? Have one. Like Cornelius, gather your family around, pray together, and lead and help each person come to know and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. We will baptize them at church when we start meeting again. Yippee!**

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1. **The fourth non-eyewitness believer. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Official, witnessed to by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and treasurer of the Queen.**

**Acts 8: 26-39 – Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” 27So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopianeunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” 30Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. 31“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 33In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” 34The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” 35Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 36As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” [37] 38And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.**

1. **He was a \_\_\_\_\_ person to get saved. Educated, trustworthy, honorable, influential. He had clout and knew people in high places. He was 2000 miles away from home. He had to travel a long distance through other places. Is this Africa for Jesus! Yes, and more will follow. What about us and places?**

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1. **He was a \_\_\_\_\_\_-fearing and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_-seeking man. On his way home from worshipping God, he was reading his Bible. He asked Philip to help him understand the scriptures! This was a man - hungry - for - God mission. God sent Philip to him to get him saved. Where is God sending us?**

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1. **The Ethiopian \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ what Philp told him and wanted to be baptized right then and there. His heart was tender, his mind was open, his life was needing a change. He was good soil for the Gospel. Luke 8:15. “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a good and noble wheat, who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”**

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1. **Went back to Ethiopia \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_! We have heard the joyful sound. Jesus saves, Jesus saves. Spread the tidings all around. Jesus Saves, Jesus Saves. Bear the news to every land, climb the steeps and cross the waves. Onward, tis our Lord’s command. Jesus saves, Jesus saves! Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them, and I am with you.**

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1. **And now, The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of \_\_\_\_. Witnessed to by those who have lived \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ us. The other non-eyewitness believers. We are the new I - witnesses.**

**John 17:13-23 – I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17Sanctify them bythe truth; your word is truth. 18As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. 20“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

**Revelation 12:11 – They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**

1. **From about 100 A.D. to 2020 A.D. there have been non-eyewitness believers. We thank God for them. We owe them our faith. We are inspired by the blood of the martyrs and the diligence of the devoted. We carry on the heritage of their witness. We continue the legacy of their lives.**

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1. **We are the non-eyewitness believers. We are the new I – witnesses for Jesus. We will continue to take Jesus to the world and bring the world to Jesus. Sanctified by Christ, unified in Christ, and someday glorified with Christ. Then, on that day, like Stephen…we will see Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father in His glory.**

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1. **Until then, let us remember that we will always triumph over the enemy of our faith…by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony.**

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