

Whether you have lived twenty, thirty or eighty years; that's not much considering the total history of mankind which goes back thousands of years. Wouldn't it be amazing to travel back through time and witness some events of the past?

Novelists have frequently made use of that theme. The Time Machine (1895), by English author H. G. Wells, became a popular book and Hollywood film. In it, the central character actually moves forward in time and is discouraged to find a dark and dangerous society up ahead. Other books have also captured this theme but all of these books are fiction. In the nineteenth century the means of taking still photographs was developed and later movies were invented. Experimental sound recording began in 1860 and movies with sound began to appear in the early 1900's. Earlier times than this, history was only preserved in written records.

Of special significance to Christians is the fact that we have no photographs of the Lord Jesus, or sound recordings of His teaching. We have artist perception of what they thought Jesus looked like and we all recognize and have accepted those images; but truth of the matter is that we don't know what he looked like. All we have is the trustworthy record of the Bible, particularly the four Gospels that describe His days on this earth, books that include some extended times of teaching, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

One unusual thing about those four biographies is that while they cover the entire time Christ was on earth, all the way from before His birth to His ascension back into heaven again, much of the Gospel record deals with a single week of His life. Nearly a third (32.75%) of the Gospels is taken up with the final week from Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, to His death and resurrection a week later.

There was an incident at the time of Jesus' resurrection that illustrates the issue of not being personally present to experience or confirm a historical event. The Lord appeared to His disciples at a time when one of them, Thomas, was absent, perhaps purchasing food or doing some other errand. When he returned, the others excitedly told him they had seen the risen Christ. But Thomas said he could not believe it. ***Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. (Jn. 20:25b).***

Then, days later, Christ visited the disciples once more, when Thomas was present. He was then convinced (vs. 27-28). But the Lord gently chided him for his reluctance to believe, saying, ***John 20:29 Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*** This includes each one of us, today.

We were not actually there. Separated by nearly two thousand years from those events, we know about them through the inspired record. We're those who Jesus says, ***John 17:20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall***

believe on me through their word;

Among the New Testament authors, Peter and John were witnesses of those long-ago events. ***2 Peter 1:16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.***

1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; ... (3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

None of us have seen these events. We cannot witness for Jesus because we are not eyewitnesses; but we can testify on Jesus' behalf. It was this background that led Anne R. Richter to pen the words to "We Saw Thee Not." She was an English poet in the 19th Century. She grew up in a religious environment. Her father, Robert Rigby, was a minister in England's Anglican Church. Later she married W. H. Richter, a rector in the church, so one can presume she was fully indoctrinated in the basics of her faith when she sat down to craft her poem in 1834. Whether she doubted her faith or wanted to express it is hard to tell as she penned the poem that was later put to music that we know as ***We Saw Thee Not***. The present hymn is based on the Lord's comment to Thomas in John 20:29. The song describes different events in Jesus life, saying, "We saw Thee not...but we believe."

Verse 1

*We saw Thee not when Thou didst come
To this poor world of sin and death;
Nor yet beheld Thy cottage home,
In that despisèd Nazareth.
But we believe Thy footsteps trod
Its streets and plains, Thou Son of God.*

In deed Jesus came into a poor world of sin. Actually this could be said of all ages at all times. Man has always had a sin problem, but when the time was just right, God sent his only begotten in this world. ***Galatians 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (5) To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.***

As Jesus was beginning his earthly ministry, he told Philip to follow him. Soon after Philip went and found Nathanael. ***John 1:45-46 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (46) And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.*** Taking notice that Philip said that Jesus was of Nazareth, which at once prejudiced Nathanael against Jesus as being the Messiah; knowing very well that that the prophets such as Micah 5:2 said Bethlehem was to be the place of his birth.

Generally, the whole country of Galilee had contempt with the Jews; but Nazareth was so mean a place, that it seems it was even despised by its neighbours, by the Galileans themselves. Nathanael was a Galilean who said these words. It was so miserable a place that he thought no good man could arise from Nazareth. The wickedness, and meanness, and obscurity of Nazareth made it an unlikely place for the Messiah to live. But Jesus did live and grow up there. As a young boy he walked those streets. He grew up in a modest home where honest work prevailed.

Verse 2

*We did not see Thee lifted high,
Amid that wild and savage crew;
Nor heard Thy meek, imploring cry,
“Forgive, they know not what they do!”
Yet we believe the deed was done,
That shook the earth and veiled the sun.*

As the verse suggest, we were not there to see Jesus lifted high on the cross as those roundabout made sport with him. They laughed and mocked him as he was suspended between heaven and earth. They were a wild and savage crew. ***Luke 23:35-37 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save***

himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. (36) And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, (37) And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. In John 19 we read how the soldiers divided his garments between themselves and cast lots for his coat. *Mark 15:29-32 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, (30) Save thyself, and come down from the cross. (31) Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. (32) Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.* Yet through it all Jesus withheld any wailing, instead he gave the imploring cry. *Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

While not there, we believe the deed was done and when Jesus died, the sun was shielded by darkness for three hours *Mark 15:33 And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.* Finally when Jesus took his last breath, the earth shook from an earthquake. *Matthew 27:50-51 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. (51) And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.*

Verse 3

*We stood not by the empty tomb,
Where late Thy sacred body lay;
Nor sat within that upper room,
Nor met Thee on the open way.
But we believe that angels said,
“Why seek the living with the dead?”*

Once the body was removed, it was taken to a nearby garden and placed in a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. Then three days later the tomb was empty; the resurrection had taken place. Early on Sunday morning some women came to where Jesus was buried only to find the tomb open and the body gone. *Matthew 28:5-6 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. (6) He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.*

Come, see the place where the Lord lay. They stood by the open tomb where the body of Jesus lay, but we haven't. Yet we believe the tomb was empty and we believe that the angels said, "Why seek the living with the dead?"

verse 4

*We did not mark the chosen few,
When Thou didst through the clouds ascend,
First lift to Heaven their wondering view,
Then to the earth all prostrate bend;
But we believe that mortal eyes
Beheld that journey to the skies;*

Indeed there were only a small chosen few that saw Jesus ascend into the heavens. And what a spectacular sight that must have been. ***Acts 1:9-11 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (10) And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; (11) Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*** This is perhaps one of the more spectacular miracles witnessed by those disciples. Jesus defies gravity and begins floating up off the ground and into the air. Then he goes higher and higher until he eventually he is engulfed in a cloud. Try if you can to imagine being there and beholding this ascension. We were not there as were the eleven apostles, but we believe the deed was done and that mortal eyes beheld the journey into the skies.

Just as certain as Jesus ascended into the heavens, one day we will bow down to him and confess him as Lord.

Philippians 2:9-11 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: (10) That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; (11) And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. While today there may be skeptics, one day they will be believers and will prostrate themselves before Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord. *When Thou didst through the clouds ascend, Then to the earth all prostrate bend.*

The original poem had five verses. The fifth has been omitted from some song books. It speaks of Jesus reigning on high, i.e. heaven. But he is not just setting in heaven. He is waiting for the faithful.

Verse 5

*And now that Thou dost reign on high,
And thence Thy waiting people bless,
No ray of glory from the sky
Doth shine upon our wilderness;
But we believe Thy faithful Word,
And trust in our redeeming Lord;*

May we be among those who see Him, by faith. ***1 Peter 1:8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.***

Does that describe you?

Invitation