

## Sent by the Risen King

John 20:1-31

Today is not only a message on the resurrection, but the beginning of a new series we are calling “**Sent: How to Share the Hope You Have in Christ.**”

- We’re drawing the title from this commission in **John 20:21**...
- We will spend most of our time *today* on the story of the resurrection, **but over the next five weeks, you will hear more about how to share the good news with those your friends, neighbors, those in your various networks.**
- **We can’t keep the best news in all the world to ourselves!**
- Let’s **pray**, and we will explore John’s account of the resurrection.

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**How many of you have seen the Marvel movie “Black Panther”?**

- **It was such a great film; I actually went to see it twice.**
- **One of my favorite parts of the movie (Spoiler alert !) is when the Black Panther comes back to life.**
- **Having been considered dead, he appears to his loyal supporters, including the mighty women of Wakanda, who all declare with hope and joy, “He lives!”**
- **A great battle, and a new mission then follows.**
- **That sounds familiar, doesn’t it?**

**“He lives” changes everything!**

**Some people are frustrated with the death/resurrection themes in these Superhero movies, which have appeared a lot recently (eg., Superman, Batman, Captain America).**

**One popular writer expresses the frustration of some, “We can willfully accept people from other planets punching giant robots or mutants so powerful that they can destroy universes, *but coming back from the great beyond is a bit too far-fetched.*” (Esposito)**

**“Too-far fetched.” But what if someone did come back from the dead – not in a comic book, Superhero, fantasy world, but in the real world, according the Scriptures?**

**Welcome to John 20.**

**In John 20, John describes the early Christians’ discovery of the resurrection.**

**In describing it...**

**(1) He gives **evidence** for the resurrection.**

- **It’s not given in a propositional format, but proofs are dropped throughout the story.**
- **Intricate detail is provided to establish the historical fact of the resurrection.**

**(2) He exalts the **grace** of Jesus.**

- **Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene first** (a woman with a dark history); then to the **disciples** (nearly all of them were absent at the crucifixion); and then to **Thomas** (who was skeptical). **Grace is everywhere here**

My hope is this: You will...

**Allow the evidence build your faith; His grace to change your heart;  
and His mission to consume your life.**

We will look at four scenes....

### Scene 1: The Empty Tomb (20:1-10)

#### Verse 1

The gospel writers don't say that this took place on the **third day**, but the **first day**.

- Why? The writers indicate a shift to **something new!**
- **It's the dawning of a new creation!**
- Sunday was the first day of the week.
  - On Sabbath, Jesus *rested in the tomb*.
- From this time on, the first day of the week becomes the day believers have set aside for worship (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).
- **Some today say, "I can't believe in resurrection because those things don't happen."**  
**Exactly! That's why it's a big deal!"**
  - **It is the dawning of a new creation! Something radically new has happened.**

**"dark."** This is probably between 3-5am.

- This is also a theme in John: **darkness/light**.
- **Mary Mag and others will go from a darkened understanding to the light of truth.**

The other gospels indicate that **other women were with her**, as implied in verse 2 **"we."**

**V 2:** After seeing the stone rolled away, she gets Peter & John saying, **"They have taken the Lord..."**

- **She is worried about grave robbers (very common in that day) or she is worried about the deseccration of Jesus' body.**

Notice she was **not** anticipating the resurrection!

- **Nor were the disciples!**
- **A lot of people say "These were primitive people; gullible, first century people. We modern people can't believe in miracles."**
- **But these disciples weren't ready to believe in this miracle any more than modern man, perhaps less! No one said, "Hey, it's the third day. Shouldn't we go take a look? It can't hurt!" Not one disciple!**
- **She has to go get the disciples!**
  - **Then later, we see them *hiding*.**
  - **That doesn't look like gullible guys ready to believe anything!**

Moreover, the ladies were bringing spices to anoint the body.

- **They spent a fortune on these spices!**

Luke says that when the report was relayed that "these things seemed like **idle tale**" (Lk 24:11).

They people were just as skeptical as modern man, and maybe more so.

- **Greek and Romans** didn't believe in Resurrection. They believed that you needed to be separated from your body.
- **Jewish people** believed in a **final resurrection** when the entire world was resurrected, not many believed in a personal, bodily resurrection.
- Beyond that, **no Jew was ready to worship a man as God**, but they did!
- Further, for Jews, Romans and Greeks to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, meant breaking from your family. It involved great personal sacrifice.

**V 3:** The presence of **two witnesses** was sufficient for submitting evidence in Jewish Law. Here we have two.

**V 4: Both witnesses are running!**

- I think we should do a "Peter and John 5K" for missions!
- I love that John includes this about himself – "the other disciple" or the "disciple whom Jesus loved" // "the other disciple outran Peter"
- **Peter is a chubby old man, more like a nose guard – he's only good for about 25 yards! John's younger, quicker...**
- **Peter could later boast that he actually went into the tomb first! (v. 6)**

**5-7: John outdoes him in speed, but not boldness!**

- John peers into the tomb, but Peter goes in (v 6)
- ... and there's no body (7)
- Like the White Sox announcers after the opposing team strikes out, "**He gone!**"

Again, the details are too great for the story to be made up.

The fact that Jesus' **linen cloths** are laying there shows that his body was **not stolen** (a common myth) for **who would take time to do this?!**

- **Unlike Lazarus** who came out with his grave clothes, **Jesus' are folded up!**

Either he "passed through his clothes" or he unwrapped the clothes from his body when we awakened from death and left them behind.

- If the latter, then there would be two miracles: **Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but a single man folded his clothes! Soon he will even cook! (Lk 24). Take note single dudes! WWJD!**
- Most likely, he passed through the clothes like he later entered the locked room.

This detail is quite vivid, and isn't the sort of thing one would make up, but bears the marks of eyewitness testimony.

**8 - John believes.**

- He "saw and believed." A theme in John.
- Later Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen but believe." (20:29)

- He doesn't have a **"robust faith"** yet, but it appears that he believes.
- It seems **Peter doesn't – yet**. In **Luke 24:12**, we read that Peter 'went away, wondering to himself what had happened.'

### 9 – they didn't understand **the Scriptures**.

- Later, by the Spirit's help, and Jesus' own teaching in Luke 24, they are able to understand the Scripture through this Christ-centered lens (John 14:26, 16:13).
- **"the Scripture"** is not referring to a **single Scripture, but the entire scope of Scripture**.
- The resurrection would change the way they read the Bible.

**V 10:** They return to their homes. They are trying to put all of this together.

### **NT Wright**

At one level the continued puzzlement of the disciples is a mark of the story's authenticity. If someone had been making it all up a generation later, as many have suggested, they would hardly have had such a muddle going on. More particularly, nobody would have made up the remarkable detail of the cloth around Jesus' head, folded up in a place by itself, or the even more extraordinary fact that Jesus is not immediately recognized—either here, in the evening on the road to Emmaus, or when cooking breakfast by the shore. The first Christians weren't prepared for what actually happened. Nobody could have been. As one leading agnostic scholar has put it, it looks as though they were struggling to describe something for which they didn't have adequate language.

**There's a lot of puzzlement, but one thing is for sure – "He Gone!" The tomb is empty.**

### **How do you account for an empty tomb?**

- The disciples stole the Body?
- Jesus did not die.
- Jesus had a twin!
- Everyone was hallucinating – or "they were enthusiasts"
- His opponents stole the body.
- Jesus' body was eaten by dogs.

All of them have serious problems.

### **Why not believe the biblical record? God raised Jesus from the dead – Bodily!**

- "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" (**Acts 26:8**)

### **Scene 2: The "First Evangelist," Mary Magdalene (20:11-18)**

**Mary becomes the first to tell others the good news of the resurrection.**

- This is significant for John.
- He repeats her name fully, Mary Magdalene, in verse 18, to emphasize her identity.

**J.P. Lange: “The first Easter-message addressed by Christ to the apostolic circle itself, was discharged by a woman, a female disciple, who, without doubt, was formerly the great sinner.”**

This “great sinner” was the recipient of three particular graces: (1) She saw angels; (2) she was the first to see the risen Christ; and (3) the first to proclaim that she had seen the risen Christ.

- **God turns great sinners into new creations, and great evangelists, including ladies! Some of the best evangelists I know are women!**

**If the disciples fabricated the account they would not have told about Mary Magdalene for two reasons:**

1. **She was a woman (as most Marys are).** According to the Mishnah, a woman’s evidence was not admissible in court.
  - **Celsus**, a Greek pagan philosopher, in 2<sup>nd</sup> century opposed Christianity. Here was one of his main arguments: **“One of the reasons, we know that it can’t be true is that it is based on the testimony of women!”**... **“We all no women are hysterical.”**
  - **Celsus called it “the gossip of women about the empty tomb.”**
  - **Why did he say this? In ancient cultures, women were marginalized.**
2. **She was previously enslaved by demons** according to **Luke 8:2** – “possessed by seven demons.”
  - **If you are going to make up a story you would not pick a woman and certainly not one who was demon possessed woman as your eyewitness!**
  - **Yet, in each gospel account Mary Magdalene heads the list!**
  - **The only reason to include her is if she was actually there.**

**So here is grace for the enslaved. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene!**

### **11-14: Read**

**11:** Why did Mary return to the grave?

- We don’t know for sure, but perhaps because her grief had just taken her back there – for **“whoever has been forgiven much loves much”** – or perhaps she was hoping for someone to enlighten her about the absent body.

**12:** Mary **saw two angels in white.**

- Their presence demonstrates that God has been at work.
- The empty tomb can only be explained as **an invasion of God’s power.**

**13:** Mary is still struggling to believe in the resurrection. She still stuck with her thought in verse 2.

**14:** Enter Jesus.

**V 15:** She mistook Jesus for the gardener either because (1) it was not fully light, (2) she may have had her back turned, or (3) most likely, like other times after the resurrection, the disciples did not immediately recognize Jesus.

- He was recognizable but apparently **different** – more youthful and glorious, and certainly not disfigured like he would have been at the cross.

There is a tension here.

- On the one, the risen Christ was touched, bore the marks of the wounds inflicted (John 20:20, 27), cooks fish and eats it (Lk 24)
- Yet, at times, he is **not** recognizable immediately, and he even passes through doors (miraculously).
- His resurrection shows us that **we will be changed in our resurrection bodies.**
- **Not totally different, but new.**
- Eyasu was trying to make sense of this one day when he said, **“Papa, when Jesus rise you, you gonna get a new head.” (He meant hair).**

**15b: “Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”**

The **first question** conveys the **love and affection** of Jesus.

- **He cares about her tears.**
- But he’s saying, this is a time of **celebration, not mourning!**
  - Here is where the Gospels end differently than previous books about heroic characters.
  - **Genesis ends w/Joseph’s death. Deuteronomy ends w/ Moses’ death. Joshua ends w/ Joshua’s death. The Gospels end w/ Jesus’ resurrection.**
  - **Funeral, funeral, funeral, resurrection. It has transformed our view of death!**
  - It doesn’t end with a funeral to weep at, but with a resurrection to rejoice in!

The **second question** addresses **what kind of Messiah she is seeking.**

- **As “grand as her devotion was, her estimate of him was far too small” (Carson).**

**16:** He calls her by name, **“Mary”**

- John 10: Jesus knows his sheep by name.
- And notice Mary, knows his voice!

**16b: “Rabboni”** is not the most exalted Christological confession, but her enthusiasm is legit. She’s thrilled by this restored relationship.

**17: “Mary clings to him,”** like a child hugging her loving parents after they’ve been gone for a week.

**17-18: (Read)** Jesus is saying: “You don’t have to cling to me, I haven’t ascended yet. I’m not going anywhere right now.” And “This is not the time for sentimentalities it’s a time for joy and a time for action!”

- It’s time to “announce the good news”
- **Mary is for us a great legacy – “the first evangelist.”**
- She becomes an apostle to the apostles (Matthew Henry)

**A. Jesus offers you New Life, not some advice for a bit of self-improvement.**

- Maybe you have a past of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional), or some time of enslavement (addiction, demonic bondage, sinful relationship).
- Is there hope of change? Absolutely!
- Look no further than Mary Magdalene.
- Let the Savior’s Grace Change Your Heart.

**B. Jesus offers you a New Family.**

“My Father and **Your Father**” “My God and **Your God**” denotes a distinction in terms of Jesus’ relationship with the Father, and our relationship with the Father (he doesn’t say “our Father” or “our God” because only Jesus is the unique Son of God).

- But this statement does show they are brothers and sisters in Christ, with Jesus as our elder brother, and God as our Father.

**Apart from the resurrection we not only have nothing to preach, but we have no church.**

- We would just a club without the resurrection, but because of it, we are truly brothers and sisters; and our most wealthy elder brother, Jesus, has given us a glorious inheritance.

Jesus calls us brothers though he is ascending to the throne!

- He calls us brothers though we fail him!
- He's called them *servants, disciples, and even friends*. But now Jesus calls those who abandoned him "brothers." Mercy of all mercies!
- “He is not ashamed to call us brothers” (**Heb 2:12**);
- “He had to be made like his brothers in every respect” (Heb 2:17)

Now God is making us like our elder brother.

- He "predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn of many *brothers*." (**Rom 8:29**)
- We are family. This is a miracle of grace.
- "The world will know that we belong to Jesus by our love to one another." (John 13)

Everyone is longing for community, and this first Easter morning, the ultimate community is identified. We now know it as the church.

**App:** One of the reasons why we have so many miserable Christians is that they’re trying to live out their faith alone.

- That was never the design.
- Christianity is familial, not just personal.

### Scene 3: A Spirit Empowered Mission (20:19-23)

More Grace here. Despite turning away from Jesus at the cross, to whom does Jesus appear? These disciples.

**19:** He either miraculously passes through the door, or the door opens.

**19b:** He tells them “peace be with you.”

- Notice v 21 “Peace” on Easter is the counterpart to “It is finished” on Good Friday.
- **The work has been accomplished for us, and now peace has been imparted to us.**

**20:** The disciples are “glad.”

- That’s what grace does. That’s what peace does. It makes you glad.

**21-23:** Then he tells them they have a mission.

- **Instead of being thrown off the team, they will lead the mission!**

**V 21:** “As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you”

This is John’s “**Great Commission.**”

- Throughout John, Jesus “as the sent one” has been mentioned (cf. 3:17).
- God is a sending God. The Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit, and now we are sent into the world.
- “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” (**John 17:18**)

The call for the disciples, and us, is to **live like Jesus, as a missionary in the world.**

- Jesus was separated from sin but not isolated from sinners.
- He was in this world, on mission, but not of this world.
- He was a friend of sinners. He went about doing good.
- He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

If you are a Christian, God has sent you into the world as his ambassador to make the good news known and seen.

- “How can they hear without a preacher? How can the preach unless they are sent.” (Rom 10:14-15).
- We have a mission of word and deed in this world.

Yes. Our bodies will rise in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

In light of the hope we have, and the mission we have, let us not waste our lives.

**V: 22** - Jesus “**breathed on them.**”

- In the garden, God breathed life into our parents, and here we are reminded that he breathes spiritual life into our lives also.



## "Receive the Holy Spirit."

This is best understood as **a foretaste of what would happen on the day of Pentecost.**

- These disciples had (1) seen the miracles; and (2) sat under the greatest teaching. YET, they still needed something: **Power.**
- We are not left to ourselves to live as Christ's ambassadors. We have the Spirit's power!

**20:23** -- The idea is NOT that the church or individual Christians have the ability to forgive sins, but that when we proclaim forgiveness in the power of the Spirit, people can know that God forgives them when they trust in Christ.

- The passive voice denotes God is acting.
- Only God forgives, and our job is to proclaim that forgiveness to everyone.

This is what we hold out to the world.

Many people think, "I'm somewhere between Mother Theresa and Hitler morally."  
"Doesn't God grade on a scale?... Isn't this like college, where God grades on a curve, and if you got a "C" you are okay."

- No, you are either unrighteous or you are declared righteous.
- What will you do with your sin? **Try to pay God back? Try to earn forgiveness?** No. You must come to Jesus.
- Jesus is the one who has the authority to forgive sin, and the grace that makes him willing to forgive it.
- "If you kept a record of sin, who could stand? But with you, there is forgiveness that you may be feared" (Ps. 130:3-4)

There's forgiveness in Jesus. There's life in Jesus. That's what we hold out to the world.

### Scene 4: The Call to Believe (20:24-31)

"**Doubting Thomas.**" What kind of doubt did he have?

There are various patterns of doubt:

#### A. **Some doubt is grounded in one's moral preferences and desires.**

- Some don't want belief to interfere with choices like sexual preferences, so they start doubting everything theologically – though their doubt is really driven by personal/moral desires.

#### B. **Some doubt stems from a thousand of small choices over time.**

- A husband begins to drift away from God slowly, gradually, and one day finds himself in the bed with another woman. He's lonely. He's disconnected. **And he says, "Well, I never believed any of that rubbish anyway."** It comes from a slow drift morally.

#### C. **Some doubt is triggered by confrontation with others.**

- Students go to college and aren't prepared to answer objections, and it can lead them to doubt.

**D. Some doubt is the result of ignorance.**

- A person has simply not been taught.
- This is the case with the "Nones." Those with no religious affiliation. They're not hostile to the gospel; they don't have deep atheistic/agnostic arguments; they simply don't know what we believe and they don't seem to care.

We will talk about all of these in the coming weeks.

What about Thomas? What kind of doubt was his?

**E. Thomas' doubt was the result of massive religious disappointment.**

- He wasn't a philosophical materialist – the only thing that exists really is matter.
- He was a Jew. He believed in miracles.
- But he was crushed because his hopes were in the tomb.
- He felt as though he got snookered.

**24-25:** So Thomas says, "Unless it is the same Jesus that went into the tomb, I will not believe." No twin. No swap.

- I love Thomas. He has a healthy skepticism.
- Anything worth believing is worth questioning.
- He's got his own decision to make, like all of us do.
- Thomas doesn't say, "The other ten voted 'yes,' so I guess will."

**26a:** Eight days later.

- **You can imagine the wrestle.**
- "He can't be alive, right? ... I mean, what kind of Messiah dies on a cross!... But he appeared to the women, and the disciples.... But he did say some remarkable things... I thought they were just enigmatic ideas, you know metaphors, not realities..."

**26b** – Jesus appears to him! He pronounces peace.

**27** – He tells Thomas to **check his hands and side...**

- Jesus meets each of these people in John 20 in their **conditions and transforms them.**
  - **Mary Magdalene: From Enslaved to Evangelist**
  - **Disciples: From Fearful to Fearless**
  - **Thomas: From Doubter to Devoted Missionary.**
    - According to tradition, Thomas died in India as the first missionary.

**28:** Here is one of the greatest **confessions of the deity** of Jesus in the NT!

- It provides a link to the prologue (John 1:1; 14).
- "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

It's also **a personal confession** that we must make.

- “My Lord. My God.”
- It’s the confession we make to **enter** the Christian life.
- It’s also the **daily confession** of the believer’s life.
- **Don’t distance yourself personally from the Jesus of the text.**
- **Every day, we must bow down like Thomas and say to the Living Lord, “My Lord and my God.”**

### **29-31: Grace for Anyone Who Will Believe**

**29:** John includes **us** in his story.

- Though Jesus appeared before over 500 people (1 Cor 15), millions did not, and hve not seen him.
- **Here, Jesus says that we are at no disadvantage!**
- “Blessed” are those who have not seen and believe.
- Blessed are you \_\_\_\_\_ if you believe.
- “Though you have not seen him, you love him, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 8-9)

**30-31: The purpose of John’s book** – “that you may believe.”

- Like he says to Thomas, “Do not disbelieve, but believe.”
- Following our brief outreach series, we are going to study John, and this is our title: “That You May Believe.” We will spend about a year in John.
- If you are not a Christian, I would invite you to come week after week.
- If you are a Christian, I could think of no better book to be bringing your friends.

And you can have **“life” in his name!**”

### **Conclusion:**

Let the evidence build your faith.  
 Let Jesus’ grace change your heart.  
 Let His mission consume your life.

Edward Shillito (1872-1948) lived during the horrors of World War I, as a Free Church Minister in England, and published this poem in the wake of the war, in 1919, reflecting on the sufferings of those around him, and the suffering and glory of Jesus:

### **“Jesus of the Scars”**

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
 Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
 We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,  
 We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;  
 In all the universe we have no place.

**Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?  
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.**

**If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
We know today what wounds are, have no fear,  
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.**

**The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.**

My Lord and My God. There is none like you.

- **He was wounded for our transgressions – removing our guilt and judgment.**
- **Because he was wounded, can sympathize with our wounds now.**
- **He was wounded, and crushed, but rose victoriously.**
  - **He is weak no more!**
  - **He now gives power and hope to all who will be wounded in this life.**
  - **And He will make all things new.**

**Let us join these early disciples and devote our lives to the Crucified and Risen King.**