

The Best News in the World

John 20:1-31

If you're new we are going through the gospel of John.

We started the series on **May 13**, and planned to be on this passage on Easter.

This was also **last year's Easter text**, as we used it to kick off a brief series on our mission, which we entitled "Sent," just prior to starting John's gospel.

- **So if you haven't been here since last Easter, welcome back.**
- **You're hearing the same passage!**

We don't preach on John 20 every week, but we do make it a point to exalt the Crucified and Risen Christ every week – not only on Easter weekend.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 11

³ For I delivered to you as **of first importance** [a lot of things are important, and Paul knew a lot of important things, but this is most important] what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.... ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Paul's sermons always went somewhere, where all sermons should go: to Christ.

Some preacher's sermons deviate from this purpose, reminding us of the hymn, "**Prone to wander,**" to which the congregation could say, "**Lord, I feel it!**"

Let's fix our eyes on this chapter & **not wander away from the best news in the world.**

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

In describing it, **we find what makes the gospel good news:**

1. The Empty Tomb: Hope for the World
2. Jesus and Mary Magdalene: Grace for the Broken
3. Jesus and the Disciples: Peace for the Fearful
4. Jesus and Thomas: Truth for the Skeptic

The Empty Tomb: Hope for the World (20:1-10)

1: The gospels don't say that this took place on the **third day**, but the **first day of the week**.

- Why? The writers indicate a shift to **something new!**
- **It's the dawning of a new creation! It's a word of glorious hope.**
- 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.

- It's also a major 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: 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 desecration of Jesus' body.**

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

- **Nor were the disciples!**
- **A lot of people say “These were primitive, first century people. We modern people can't believe in miracles.”**
- **But these disciples were not 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 say, “We hoped he was the one to redeem Israel” (24:21)**
- **These 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 love that John includes this about himself –“**the other disciple outran Peter**”

- Peter is a bit pudgier, more like a nose guard – he’s good for about 25 yards!
 - John’s a little point guard, younger, quicker...
- But 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!”

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 (1) he “passed through his clothes” or (2) he unwrapped the clothes from his body 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.
- 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**.

“the Scripture” is **not referring to a single Scripture, but the entire scope of Scripture**.

- 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 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.

They will put it together in due time.

- The book of **Acts** shows how the resurrection is central in the apostles’ message; and later in the epistles. (Acts 2:31; 3:26; 4:2; 10:41; 13:33; 17:18)
- Two of the OT texts most often cited in the NT are Psalms 2 and 110, which focus on Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation.
- It’s central in the NT gospel summaries (Rom 1:3-4; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 15; 2 Tim 2:8).
- **Paul calls it the objective grounds for our salvation:** “He was delivered over the death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Rom 4:25); if he hasn’t been raised, we are still in our sins. (1 Cor 15)

- The presupposition behind the prophecy of Revelation are the words of Jesus to John: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” (Rev 1:18)

It's the Big E on the eye chart.

It's not a footnote to our faith.

It's not the intro, it's the entree.

The tomb is empty; there's **hope for the world...**

- **By faith in Christ, we have been raised with him!**
- **We will receive a new body! (I'm getting bangs; I'll be in the band... hair return)**
- **We will inherit a new earth!**
- **We will never weep again!**
- **We will never grieve again! We will never attend a funeral again!**
- **We will never have a relational conflict again!**
- **We will never have aches and pains again!**
- **We will never need to lock our doors or have police protection again! For peace and righteousness will reign.**
- **Our faith will end in sight, and we shall see him as he is!**

When Peter speaks of evangelism he says, “be ready to give a reason for the hope you have within you” – **hope is attractive to this world.**

We live in a day in which people struggle with both the fear of death and the meaningless of life – but the resurrection solves both problems!

- It's the best news in the world because it answers the question of life now, and life beyond the grave.
- You don't have to fear death because Christ has risen!
- You can have new life because Christ has risen.
- Your life does matter because Christ has risen!

Notice now the appearances of Jesus to various individuals.

We find three hope-filled applications from them: (1) grace for the broken, peace for the fearful, truth for the skeptic.

Jesus and Mary Magdalene: Grace for the Broken (20:11-18)

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

- 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 3 particular graces: (1) She saw angels; (2) she was the first to see the risen Christ; & (3) the first to proclaim that she had seen the risen Christ.

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 2nd 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 broken/enslaved.

Jesus, the one who came to crush the head of the serpent, overcame her demonic life, and made her his disciple!

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.

Q) she may have had her back turned, or (3) most likely, like other times after the resurrection, the disciples did not immediately recognize Jesus. (4) John may also have a symbolic meaning echoing the garden?

- Remember, Adam was called to be a Gardner.
- Jesus is the Second Adam, the one who has appeared to destroy the works of the devil. He has now begun to restore the garden.

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 (Jn 21, Lk 24)
- Yet, at times, he is **not** recognizable immediately, and he even passes through doors.

- His resurrection shows us that **we will be changed in our resurrection bodies.**
- **Not totally different, but new.**

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 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)

Behold the grace here.

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.

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).

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

- He calls us family 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**);

Everyone in the world 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.

Jesus and the Disciples: Peace for the Fearful (20:19-23)

Despite turning away from Jesus at the cross, Jesus appears to 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, and now peace has been imparted.**

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.**”

- “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” (**John 17:18**)

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.**

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.

Jesus and Thomas: Truth for the Skeptic (20:24-31)

“Doubting Thomas.” What kind of doubt did he have?

There are various patterns of doubt. 4 Causes of Doubt:

#1: Moral. 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.

#2: Gradual. 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.
- The slow drift is destructive, and Satanic.

#3: Gullible. If one’s faith remains immature, then doubt may stem from being unable to answer opposing views.

- Students go to college and aren’t prepared to answer objections, and it can lead them to doubt.
- Eph 4, “tossed to and fro by the waves – by every wind of doctrine”

What about Thomas? What kind of doubt was his?

#4: Sorrowful. 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.
- Often doubt stems from being greatly hurt in life.

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...**

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).

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 have 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.”

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

The risen Christ meets each of these people in their **conditions** and transforms them.

- **Mary Magdalene: From Enslaved to Evangelist**
- **Disciples: From Fearful to Fearless**
- **Thomas: From Doubter to Devoted Missionary.**
- **And he can do the same for you too.**

John Chrysostom:

Christ is risen! And you, O death are annihilated!

Christ is risen! And the evil ones are cast down!

Christ is risen! And the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen! And life is liberated!

Christ is risen! And the tomb is emptied of its dead!

For Christ having risen from the dead,

Has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be glory and power, now and forever, and from all ages to all ages.

Amen.