

JOHN

I. Introduction

A. Today, we are going to look at **John 20**. And like last Sunday, rather than reading the whole chapter at once, we will read sections at a time and consider the truths or lessons in those sections to see what God may want to say to us today.

B. Prayer

C. Three preliminary comments about this chapter

1. **First**, there are several similar acknowledgments concerning who the resurrected Jesus is.
 - a. In **John 20:18**, Mary Magdalene said, “I have seen the Lord.”
 - b. In **John 20:25**, the disciples said to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord.”
 - c. Upon being convinced Jesus had risen from the dead, Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” (**John 20:28**).
 - d. And in **John 21:7**, the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.”
 - e. The point here is that it is not enough to believe Jesus rose from the dead, we must also believe He is the risen Lord, and in believing, live accordingly – for as Jesus said, “Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?” (**Luke 6:46**).
2. **Second**, this chapter points out five different ways people came to believe in the resurrection – which gives credibility to the fact that there is more than one way to come to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. The beloved disciple believed upon seeing the empty tomb and the linen wrappings left in the tomb (**John 20:5,8**).
 - b. Mary hears Jesus call her name, and believes (**John 20:16**).
 - c. It appears the disciples believed when Mary told them she had seen the Lord (**John 20:18-20**).
 - d. Thomas believed after being given tangible proof that Jesus had risen from the dead (**John 20:27-28**).
 - e. And Jesus praises those who believe without seeing, that is, without needing tangible proof (**John 20:29**).
3. **Third**, in all four gospels, the women are identified as the first witnesses to Christ’s resurrection, and Mary Magdalene is specifically named as one of them.

II. Lessons from **John 20**

A. **John 20:1-2** . . . Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. [2] So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."
1. Mary is the first to find the tomb empty, and as we will see in **vs 14**, the first to see the risen Jesus.

B. **John 20:3-10** . . . So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. [4] The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; [5] and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. [6] And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the **linen wrappings** lying there, [7] and the **face-cloth** which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself (*It is possible John tells this part to affirm that Jesus' body was not stolen, because body snatchers would not take the time to neatly fold or role the grave clothes.*). [8] So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he **saw** (*the grave clothes*) **and believed** (*This disciple was the first to believe Jesus had risen from the dead.*). [9] For as yet **they did not understand the Scripture**, that He must rise again from the dead (*The best understanding of this statement is that the disciples did not as yet understand the NT interpretation of the OT scriptures that foretold the resurrection of Jesus, such as **Psalms 16:10**, "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." Nor did they as yet understand Jesus' own words in **John 2:19**, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Luke adds his own explanation as to how the disciples came to rightly understand the OT scriptures and Jesus' own words in **Luke 24:44-47**, "Now [Jesus] said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [45] Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, [47] and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."*). [10] So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

C. **John 20:11-17** . . . But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping (*It is probable that Mary was weeping because she loved Jesus and was now facing a double loss – the first being His death and now the loss of His body from the grave. Have you ever wept out of love for Jesus and what He has done or is doing for you? Oh that Jesus, himself, and His love for us would be that precious to us!*); and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; [12] and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. [13] And they said to her, "**Woman, why are you weeping?**" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." [14] When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. [15] Jesus said to her, "**Woman, why are you weeping?** (*These two questions were not asked to imply she should not be crying, but rather to find out what the problem was. In most cases, it is important to hear why someone is doing what they are doing before giving advice.*) Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, (*I realize this has nothing to do with anything meaningfully spiritual, but what was Jesus wearing? Remember, He most probably was crucified naked – because that was the practice, and His grave wrappings were in the tomb.*) she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." [16] Jesus said to her, "Mary!" (*She had heard that voice and her name spoken in that way before – and she knew who it was.*) She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). [17] Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father (*Two things to notice here. **First**, Mary touches Jesus out of faith and love in contrast to Thomas who touched Jesus out of a skepticism that led to faith and reverence. **Second**, no one – and that includes me – has a good explanation as to what ascension Jesus was talking about when He told Mary to stop clinging to Him.*); but **go to My brethren and say to them**, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

1. Notice, Mary is the first to find the empty tomb, the first to see the risen Jesus, and now she is the first to be commissioned by the risen Jesus to do a specific task – "Go to My brethren and say to them."
2. For those who think God and God's word treats women as second class citizens, let me remind you that it was a woman God made for Adam, and it was a woman who birthed God's son, and in John's gospel, it was a woman (Jesus' mother) who got Jesus to perform His first public miracle (*water to wine*), and it was a woman's testimony (*the woman*

at the well) that brought out the whole town to meet and listen to Jesus, and it was a woman who was the first one Jesus talked to after rising from the dead, and it was a woman who was the first one commissioned by the risen Lord, and a husband is to love his wife as our risen Lord loves the church, and if a husband fails to love his wife properly, and hence mistreats her, he will hinder, that is, it will block his prayers.

D. **John 20:18** . . . Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

1. This announcement by Mary is in contrast to her first announcement in vs 2, where she said to the disciples, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."
2. And this change of perspective took place in one day – Sunday.

E. **John 20:19-20** . . . So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week (*Sunday*), and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, **for fear of the Jews** (*The disciples were facing the possibility of being treated like Jesus had been treated – just as John's first readers were facing the probability of persecution from the Jews and the Romans. But notice, Jesus does not remove that possibility or tell them to ignore that possibility. Rather Jesus calls them to be at peace in spite of the probability of being persecuted.*) Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "**Peace be with you.**" [20] And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

1. In showing His scars, Jesus was not inviting faith but rather affirming and therefore strengthening the faith that was already there.
2. And so it is with us. If we already trust God and believe we are safe in His hands, or at least want to believe we can be safe in His hands, then as we see God working in current or future situations and people to bring about good, the faith we have is confirmed and strengthened to the point where we become convinced we are safe in God's hands.
3. This is important, because it is confirmed and strengthened faith that leads to inner peace and joy in the midst of life's worst circumstances. And it is confirmed and strengthened faith that produces a strength of character that stands for justice and righteousness – even when standing alone. And it is confirmed and strengthened faith that makes us bold in witnessing.

4. Therefore, Jesus does not remove the disappointments and difficulties and injustices, or even the cruelties of life, but rather He confirms and strengthens our faith through those circumstances and says to us in the midst of them, "Peace be with you."
- F. **John 20:21-23** . . . So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." [22] And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of any, their sins (*already*) have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they (*already*) have been retained."
1. This time, Jesus says the peace that He gives, and therefore wants us to have, is for the purpose of doing His works in our world.
 2. But He doesn't stop there. He gives us the Holy Spirit –
 - a. And it is the Holy Spirit who brings the new creation to life within us, just like God breathed into Adam's nostrils and he became a living being (**Genesis 2:7**).
 - b. and it is the Holy Spirit who purifies us, and who teaches us all things, and who prays for us when we know we must pray but do not know what to pray, and who empowers us to do the work and works of Jesus.
 3. You see, the power that is within us is as real as the Holy Spirit. We may not be aware of His power within us, but if we are yielding to His purifying work within us we have His empowering power within us.
 - a. And how do we know this is true? Because Jesus said that He would ask the Father, and the Father will give us a Helper in place of Jesus – that is the Spirit of truth. He will be with us and in us. In other words, Jesus did not leave us as orphans – that is, without His presence and empowerment, but rather Jesus has come to us in the form of the Holy Spirit (**John 14:16-18**).
 - b. And along with all that, here in John 20:21, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."
 4. Therefore, we can be changed, transformed, and made into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And as we are being transformed and conformed to the likeness of Jesus, we can do the works Jesus has called us to do, and we can do them with boldness.
- G. **John 20:24-25** . . . But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. [25] So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in

His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

1. Thomas had as much as we have before coming to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and as much as we have at the beginning of the Christian life – the word of God and the word of others. In other words, most of us start the life of faith in God and in Jesus' redemptive work having only heard about God, His love, His goodness, His faithfulness, and Jesus' work on the cross.
2. Therefore, though we easily see the failure of Thomas, my question is, "How are we different from Thomas?" Is it not true that in certain circumstances or when dealing with certain people, many of us are just as skeptical as Thomas when it comes to trusting God and the word of God, and when it comes to patiently waiting for God to act?

H. **John 20:26** . . . After eight days (*probably the following Sunday – which some use to lend support that it was the disciples of Jesus who started Sunday worship in place of Saturday worship*) His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut (*It is wise to take precautions against those who are against God, the Christian life, and the church, for in **Matthew 10:23**, Jesus said, "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes." But it is wrong to hide our faith as if we are not followers of Jesus Christ.*), and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

I. **John 20:27-29** . . . Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." [28] Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" [29] Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

1. I don't believe Jesus is condemning needing a sign or some kind of proof in order to believe – for even Gideon asked twice for a sign before committing to the call of God on his life, and God honored his request.
2. But what Jesus is doing is comparing two basis of faith and saying one is a better basis than the other.
 - a. Those who need proof to believe and come to faith after getting the proof they wanted, at least experience the results of coming to faith. But this is a weaker, less respectful of God, less reverential toward God, and less honest basis for faith.

- b. However, those who believe on the basis of reading the Bible, or hearing God's word, or hearing truth from a trusted servant of God or a trusted friend not only experience the common results of faith, but also receive blessing from God.
- 3. Why? Because skepticism toward God and what He says in His word is based on a low view of God that distrusts Him – at least in part, and distrusts the quality of His character – at least in some areas, and distrusts the goodness, love, and faithfulness of God – at least enough to be skeptical of **God's worthiness** to be implicitly trusted.
 - a. In other words, the skepticism toward God that breeds distrust of God is based on the belief that God is in some way flawed, imperfect, defective, weak, or just plain uncaring. And this is a low, disrespectful, and unworthy of God view of God.
 - b. It is only when we have a high view of God, or what we might call a proper and worthy view of God, that we are willing and realistically able to trust God and trust God's word without needing any tangible proof that who God is and what He has says is true and dependable. This is the faith that results in those who trust this way being blessed.

III. Conclusion

- A. **John 20:30-31** . . . Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.
 - 1. Notice, John wrote with the expectation that what he said about Jesus was proof enough to believe in Jesus and to believe what is true about Jesus.
 - 2. May we be like those who are blessed, and believe on the basis of a faith that is convinced God is good and His word is true.