

# The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

**Text: John 20:1-18**

**Introduction:** Many of you have heard the name Lee Strobel before. Strobel is a Christian apologist. He is the author of the bestselling book *The Case for Christ* in which, as an investigative journalist, he lays out his own personal investigation of the evidence for Jesus.

But Strobel hasn't always been a Christian. In fact, before he was a Christian, he was an atheist. He was convinced that "people created God because they were afraid of death."

However, everything began to change for Strobel when his wife, Leslie, was befriended by a Christian woman in their condo building. She heard the gospel and made a decision to turn from her sin and trust in Jesus. Strobel was frustrated by this development in their marriage. In fact, he feared it was the beginning of the end of their marriage. He wasn't interested in being married to a Christian.

But he loved Leslie. And eventually Leslie was able to get Lee to attend church with her. It was in that church that he says he heard the message of Jesus taught in a way that was different from anything he had ever experienced before. This time he could understand it. The pastor explained the message of the gospel. The fact that our sin separates us from God. The truth that Jesus lived and died to pay for our sin. And the reality that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Strobel didn't walk the aisle that day, turn from his sin, and place his trust in Jesus. But that encounter with Jesus led him on a search for the truth. He realized that if the gospel is true, it had massive implications for his life.

Strobel came to understand that the central claim of Christianity is that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. So, he put his investigative journalist skills to work. He really set out to prove that Jesus was not raised from the dead.

But by the end of his investigation, Strobel came to the conclusion that it would require more faith for him to continue being an atheist, than it would for him to follow Jesus and become a Christian. So, on November 8, 1991, Lee Strobel turned from his sin and placed his trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

This morning, I want to talk to you about the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. I realize that there are a number of different reasons why you have come to this place this morning. Many of you are members of our church. You love the Lord Jesus. And you're here to worship our resurrected Lord.

But some of you are here, like Lee Strobel, because someone you love wanted you to be here this morning. Maybe you don't know what to make of this Jesus stuff. Maybe you're inclined to believe it, but you've never turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus. Maybe you're a skeptic. Maybe an agnostic. Maybe, like Strobel, you're an atheist.

Whatever your reason for being here this morning, I'm glad you're here. We're going to do what we do every Sunday. I'm going to open the Bible, read a passage of Scripture, and explain it to you with the prayer that the Holy Spirit of God will do a good work in your heart and mind and draw you to Himself.

I believe that Jesus really is alive. He really was raised from dead. And because He is alive, that changes everything.

Turn in your Bible to John 20. It's on page 852 in the black pew Bible in front of you. We've been making our way through the latter part of John's Gospel. Last Sunday we looked at the crucifixion of Jesus. This morning we're looking at His resurrection.

(Read John 20:1-18...Pray)

The Bible contains four books that we call the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each one gives an account of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

John is very clear about why he has written his Gospel. He writes in verse 30, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

There are a lot of ways that we might respond to the resurrection of Jesus. John's goal is that we would respond in belief. Not just mental ascent. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is extremely compelling. But John desires unwavering trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. It's why he writes his resurrection narrative in the way that he does.

In fact, John identifies three responses to the resurrection of Jesus. And as we make our way through these responses, I want you to consider, “Where do you see yourself in these responses?” Where are you with the resurrected Jesus? That’s the most important question you can answer this morning.

So, let’s begin looking at the responses. First, we see...

**I. Mary’s concern – “They have taken the Lord” (John 20:1-2).**

(Read vs. 1-2)

**A. Mary Magdalene was apparently a leader among the women who followed Jesus.**

- 1. We assume this is the case because she is specifically named in the Gospels as being among those who were first to see the resurrected Jesus.**
- 2. We really don’t know a lot about her other than that.**
- 3. We know, as we saw last time, that she was there with the women who were present at the cross.**
- 4. We also know from Luke’s Gospel that she had formerly been possessed by seven demons, and she gave financial support to Jesus (Lk. 8).**

**B. John doesn’t tell us why Mary came to the tomb, but Mark and Luke tell us in their Gospels that it was to bring spices that she and the other women had prepared for anointing the body of Jesus.**

- 1. While John doesn’t mention any of the other women here in John 20, we know that they were present because the other Gospel writers tells us they were there.**
- 2. But John focuses on Mary because he wants to focus on her particular response to the resurrection of Jesus.**
- 3. And what is her response here in verses 1 and 2? It’s one of concern, isn’t it?**
- 4. She comes to the tomb early in the morning while it is still dark and discovers that the stone has been taken away from the tomb.**

- 5. So, she got out of there. She doesn’t know what’s going on. The only thing that she can figure is that someone has moved the body.**
- 6. In one sense, that’s a reasonable assumption. Imagine if the funeral director at Covenant Funeral Service shows up at the funeral home early one morning and discovers that a body isn’t where he left it. What would be his first assumption? That someone moved the body.**
- 7. That’s what Mary Magdalene assumes here.**
- 8. So, John writes that she ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (vs. 2).**
- 9. Mary is concerned, and understandably so.**
- 10. The only problem with Mary’s response is that she doesn’t consider the possibility that Jesus had been resurrected.**
- 11. While, in the case of a missing body at Covenant Funeral Service, we wouldn’t expect the funeral director to entertain the possibility of a resurrection, there was reason for Mary to at least entertain that possibility.**
- 12. She had come to believe that Jesus was Lord. She calls Him “Lord” in verse 2 where she says, “They have taken the LORD out of the tomb.” How could Jesus be Lord if He was dead? Surely there had to be more to the story.**
- 13. In fact, Jesus had predicted His resurrection. We’ll talk about that more a little later in the sermon. We can’t say for certain if Mary ever heard directly from Jesus His statement that He would be resurrected. But it seems plausible, maybe even likely.**
- 14. At the very least, if Mary had come to believe that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah. If she had come to believe that He has power over sickness. If she had come to believe that he has power over life and death. Then surely it is possible that more is going on here than “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb.”**

**C. Here's the reality: The tomb where Jesus was laid on Friday was empty when Mary and the other women arrived there early Sunday morning.**

- 1. You need an explanation for how Jesus who was buried in a tomb on Friday wasn't there on Sunday when Mary and the women arrived at the tomb.**
- 2. How did the tomb where Jesus was buried become empty?**
- 3. Mary assumed that someone had moved the body. Maybe they stole it. She doesn't say stole it. But maybe that's what she's thinking.**
  - a. Here's what Mary knows: Dead men don't just get up and walk out of a tomb on their own.**
  - b. She doesn't have any reason to believe that the disciples have moved the body. They're the ones she goes and tells that the body has been moved.**
- 4. So, how is it possible that Jesus who was buried in a tomb on Friday wasn't there on Sunday when Mary and the other women arrive at the tomb?**
  - a. Mary doesn't yet believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead. She hasn't even considered the possibility.**
  - b. She's concerned.**
  - c. What about you?**

Hold that thought as we move from Mary's concern to...

## **II. The disciple's faith – "He saw and believed" (John 20:3-10).**

Mary tells Peter and the disciple, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

- A. So, what do Peter and the other disciple do? They run toward the tomb. (Read vs. 3-4a)**

- 1. As I mentioned last Sunday, it is most likely that the disciple John refers to as the disciple whom Jesus loved is John himself.**
- 2. So, Peter and John are running toward the tomb, and notice what John tells us. (Read vs. 4b)**
- 3. Don't you just love that? John says, "We were running toward the tomb. But I got there first. I outran Peter.**
- 4. So, John gets there first, and what did John do? He tells us in verse 5. (Read vs. 5)**
- 5. Peter finally arrives, and what does Peter do? John tells us in verse 6. (Read vs. 6-7)**
- 6. Now, the presence of the grave clothes is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it's significant because it's evidence that no one had simply moved the body. If someone had simply moved the body, the grave clothes would have still been on the body. If a thief had stolen the body, there's no way he would have left behind expensive linen and even more expensive spices. The presence of the grave clothes in the tomb but no Jesus is evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead.**
- 7. The presence of the grave clothes is also significant because this is actually the second time that grave clothes are mentioned in John's Gospel. The first was at the tomb of Lazarus, which you can read about in John 11.**
  - a. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus came out of the tomb still wrapped in the linen cloths.**
  - b. But here, where Jesus was buried, the linen cloths are still in the tomb. This is an indication to us that the resurrection of Jesus was different from the resurrection of Lazarus.**
  - c. See, Lazarus was raised from the dead. But ultimately, he died again. He needed his grave clothes again.**
  - d. But when Jesus was raised from the dead, He was raised to live forevermore. Jesus would never need His grave clothes again.**

- e. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he was raised exactly the same as he had been before.
- f. When Jesus was raised from the dead, He was raised with a glorified, resurrection body. The kind of body that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 is imperishable and immortal.
- g. Please do not misunderstand me. This was not merely a spiritual resurrection. Jesus was raised with a real, physical body. The kind of body, we're going to see down in verse 17, that Mary could cling to. The kind of body, we're going to see next week, that Thomas could touch. The kind of body, Luke tells us in His Gospel, that could eat fish.
- h. A real body. A physical body. But a glorified body.

**B. Now, notice what John tells us about himself (vs. 8). (Read vs. 8)**

1. What did he see? He saw the empty tomb. He saw the grave clothes lying there.
2. What did he believe? He believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead.
3. For John, the only explanation for what he saw with his eyes was that Jesus who was crucified and buried in that tomb had been raised from the dead.
4. This is fascinating. D.A. Carson points out that "most of the early witnesses came to faith in Jesus as the resurrected Lord not because they couldn't find his corpse but because they found Christ alive; but John testifies that he came to such faith before he saw Jesus in resurrected form."
5. It's most likely that Peter did not yet know what to think. Luke tells us that Peter "went home marveling at what had happened" (Lk. 24:12). John simply says that the disciples went back to their homes (vs. 10).
6. John also tells us that neither of them yet understood the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead (vs. 9).

- a. The Psalmist prophesied in Psalm 16:10, "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption."
- b. The prophet Hosea wrote, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hos. 6:2).
- c. Jesus had certainly told His disciples that He would be raised from the dead.
- d. Matthew 17:22-23 says, "As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day. And they were greatly distressed.'"
- e. The disciples heard from Jesus' own mouth that He would be raised from the dead. But they had not understood or believed.
- f. We do know that, during the days that followed His resurrection, Jesus taught His disciples the biblical significance of His resurrection.
- g. And by the time that John wrote his Gospel, the early church had worked out a detailed understanding of the Old Testament by which to understand and explain the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- h. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, as was read for us this morning in our Scripture reading, that Christ died, was buried, and was raised all in accordance with the Scriptures.
- i. But at this point, in the immediate aftermath of the resurrection, Peter and John did not yet understand the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.
- j. This also is evidence for the truthfulness of the resurrection. The disciples were not expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead. It doesn't make sense that they would have tried to manufacture a resurrection by removing the body or spreading lies saying that Jesus had been raised if he had not really been raised.

**C. The truth is that you and I have more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus than John had at the moment he first believed.**

- 1. The question you have to answer is what you will do with the evidence.**
- 2. How will you respond?**
- 3. Mary's initial response was concern. Peter's response seems to have been uncertainty. John believed.**

As you continue to contemplate your own response, let's turn our attention now to...

**III. Mary's testimony – "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:11-18).**

**A. After running to report to Peter and John that the tomb was empty, Mary has apparently returned to the tomb alone.**

- 1. Peter and John have returned to their homes by now.**
- 2. Where previously Mary was accompanied by the other women, this time it seems that she is by herself.**
- 3. The text says... (Read vs. 11)**
  - a. Mary clearly still thinks that someone has moved the body of Jesus.**
  - b. She doesn't know who has done it or where they have put him**
  - c. So, she's weeping. But she looks into the tomb...**
- 4. And notice what she saw. John writes... (Read vs. 12)**
  - a. She sees two angels. You would think that maybe this would be a clue to her that something unusual is going on.**
  - b. But Mary can't see past her grief. She's still caught up in her own narrative. Someone has moved the body.**

- 5. We know because the angels ask her a question. They ask, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (vs. 13a).**
- 6. And Mary responds, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (vs. 13b). It's the same thing she said to the disciples. Nothing has changed. YET.**

**B. Until she encountered the resurrected Jesus. Look at verse 14. John writes... (Read vs. 14)**

- 1. As far as Mary was concerned, Jesus was supposed to be lying down in that tomb.**
- 2. But He wasn't in the tomb or lying down! He was standing right there in front of her very eyes.**
- 3. Now, she didn't know it was Jesus.**
  - a. How is this possible? Mary Magdalene knew Jesus. She was one of His followers.**
  - b. But remember, she's not expecting to see Jesus alive. She expects to see anyone but Jesus.**
  - c. On top of that, Jesus has now been glorified. He's in a real physical body, as we talked about earlier. There's continuity between the body that was buried and the body that has now been raised.**
  - d. But this body is also different. It has been raised immortal and imperishable. This body is a resurrection body.**
  - e. And Mary doesn't recognize Jesus at first.**
- 4. Jesus asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" (vs. 15a).**
- 5. Mary thinks Jesus must be the gardener. She says, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away" (vs. 15b).**
- 6. To which Jesus simply responds, "Mary" (vs. 16a).**
- 7. And in that instant, her eyes were opened. She recognized who He was. And she exclaimed, "Rabboni!" Which in Aramaic means Teacher (vs. 16b).**

8. **She must have also grabbed on to Jesus. Because Jesus says... (Read vs. 17)**
- a. **What is Jesus saying here?**
  - b. **This is no time for Mary to latch on to Him as if He might disappear any moment. It's not yet time for His ascension into heaven. That time will come. But only after 40 days.**
  - c. **It's time for rejoicing in the fact that Jesus is alive. It's time for sharing that truth with others.**
  - d. **And first on the list should be the disciples. Mary should go and report to them that Jesus is alive.**
  - e. **Notice also how Jesus refers to His disciples. He calls them "my brothers."**
  - f. **Mary is supposed to say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."**
  - g. **Matt Carter points out that Jesus refers to God as "Father" one hundred eight times in the Gospel of John. Twenty-seven times He says "my Father." Seventy-one times He says "the Father." And only one time does he refer to God as the disciples' Father. This is also the only time in John's Gospel where Jesus calls the disciples His "brothers."**
  - h. **The point is that when Jesus is raised from the dead, the position of His disciples is radically altered. They're no longer cut off from God. They're no longer enemies of God because of their sin. They're no longer dead in their trespasses and sins. They're family members. Adopted into God's family. They can now relate to God as their father. They can now relate to one another as brothers. Understand that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sin, and the divine acceptance of that sacrifice demonstrated in the resurrection, ushers them into a new family with God as their Father and Jesus as their brother.**
  - i. **And if you are in Christ. If you have turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus. The same is true of you.**

- j. **This is the very reason that Jesus came to earth, lived a sinless life, and then died on the cross to pay for our sin. To bring us to God!**
  - k. **God made us for relationship with Him. He made us for His glory. He made us to worship Him. But our sin has separated us from Him because God is holy. Our relationship with God is broken by sin. But Jesus came so that we can have a restored and renewed relationship with God.**
  - l. **And we see that here in the way that Jesus tells Mary to speak to His disciples.**
9. **Notice also what Mary now says about what she has seen and heard (vs. 18). (Read vs. 18)**
- a. **In verse 2, out of deep concern, Mary said, "They have taken the Lord."**
  - b. **But here she testifies, "I have seen the Lord."**

**Conclusion:** This morning, as we have made our way through the first 18 verses of John, we have seen Mary's concern, the disciple's faith, and Mary's testimony.

But the question that still remains for you this morning is "Where are you with the resurrected Jesus?" What is your response to the truth of His resurrection?

See, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 that the whole Christian faith rests on whether Jesus of Nazareth really was raised from the dead. He says, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14).

Do you realize that? If Jesus is not alive, we are wasting our time this morning. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, this is all for naught. Paul says, "We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised" (1 Cor. 15:15).

But then Paul says, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:20-21).

What Paul is saying there is that one day we're all going to die. And what happens to you when you die is dependent on how you respond to the resurrected Jesus.

You can deny that He really was raised from the dead. You can consider it as possible but never truly believe it. You can believe it intellectually but never truly trust in Jesus.

And the Bible says that if those are your responses to the resurrected Jesus, you will remain cut off from God. Dead in your trespasses and sins. And one day you will receive God's just penalty for your sin, eternal separation from God and punishment in hell.

Or you can come to believe that Jesus really was raised from the dead and that the resurrected changes everything. You can turn from your sin. You can place your trust in Jesus. You can recognize that Jesus is your only hope.

And the Bible says you will be brought into right relationship with God and given the promise of eternal life.

It all hinges on how you respond to the resurrected Jesus. Blow Him off. Or turn from your sin and place your trust in Him. And give Him the worship He is due.

How will you respond?