

That You May Believe

Text: John 20:19-31

Introduction: We have spent the last three months reading and studying John's account of the last hours of Jesus' life before His crucifixion. Two weeks ago, we focused our attention on Jesus' death on the cross to pay for our sin. And then last week, we rejoiced in the fact that Jesus is not dead anymore. He is alive. And He lives forevermore.

We saw that when Mary Magdalene first arrived at the tomb early Sunday morning, she was concerned. She reported to Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter and John then took off running toward the tomb to see for themselves.

John outran Peter and arrived at the tomb first. He looked in and saw the linen cloths, but he did not go in. When Peter arrived, he went right in. He too saw the linen cloths lying there. John then went into the tomb with Peter, and the text says that he "saw and believed." But neither of them yet had a full understanding of what had transpired and how it was all in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Sometime after Peter and John had left, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb. This time she was confronted by two angels who asked her why she was weeping. Mary again expressed her concern, saying, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

When she turned around, Jesus was standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus at first until He called her by name. Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary then went and told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

We considered the responses of Mary and the disciples to the resurrected Jesus and examined our own hearts concerning our response to the resurrected Jesus. This morning, we want to continue John's narrative of the resurrection of Jesus in the second half of John 20.

I encourage you to go ahead and turn in your Bible to John 20. I'm going to be reading verses 19-31.

(Read John 20:19-31...Pray)

The emphasis of John's account of the resurrection appearances is belief. He uses a form of the word belief seven times in these 13 verses. So, as we make our way through our text this morning, we're going to look at three testimonies concerning the resurrected Jesus that you should believe rather than disbelieve.

I. The testimony of the disciples – "We have seen the Lord" (John 20:19-25).

A. We saw Peter and John's experience with the empty tomb last week, but John does not record their having seen the resurrected Jesus.

- 1. Instead, Peter and John went back to their homes.**
- 2. But by evening that day, they were apparently gathered with the other disciples.**
- 3. John writes, "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews" (vs. 19a).**
- 4. So much had transpired that day. Peter and John had been to the tomb. They had seen that the tomb was empty. They had seen the grave clothes lying there. There was also the report of Mary Magdalene that she had seen the Lord.**
- 5. You can imagine the conversation that was taking place. What do you think is really going on here, Matthew? I don't know, what do you think, Andrew? Do you think Jesus could really be alive?**
- 6. You can understand their fear. Just a few days before, Jesus had been unjustly arrested. He had been given a mockery of a trial. He was swiftly executed by crucifixion. And now the body was missing from the tomb. There were reports that Jesus had been resurrected. But maybe the Jewish authorities would blame them. They may be accused of stealing the body. Would they suffer the same fate as Jesus? You can understand their fear.**

B. But suddenly, John tells us that “Jesus came and stood among them.”

1. This is fascinating because John clearly gives the impression that Jesus appeared to the disciples without entering the door.

- a. This would of course be impossible for a normal human body. People don’t just appear. If you want to enter somewhere, you have to go through the door.**
- b. But the doors were locked where the disciples were, and the text says that “Jesus came and stood among them.”**
- c. This indicates to us that there was something different about Jesus’ resurrection body.**
- d. Jesus did not do things like this during His time on earth prior to his death and resurrection. We know of one occasion where He walked on water. But we understand that to have been a miracle. It wasn’t something that Jesus just did regularly. In His humanity, apart from divine intervention in the form of a miracle, He was bound by the same laws of nature that we are. If He jumped, gravity would pull Him back down. If He walked into a wall, He would bump His head. You get the picture.**
- e. But Jesus’ resurrection body was apparently not subject to the same laws of nature. He could freely pass through unopened doors, and at will, He could manifest Himself.**
- f. As I sought to make clear last week, Jesus DID have a real physical body following His resurrection. He has it even now. We’ll see that in a moment as He shows His disciples the wounds in His hands and His side. Luke records that He took a piece of broiled fish and ate it (Lk 24:41-43).**
- g. The resurrection of Jesus was not merely a spiritual resurrection. Jesus really was physically raised from the grave. But there was something different about His resurrection body.**

h. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

- i. He goes on later in the chapter to write, “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53).**
- j. There’s continuity between the body that was buried and the body that has now been raised.**
- k. But this body is also different. It has been raised immortal and imperishable. This body is a resurrection body.**

2. After appearing before them, John tells us that Jesus spoke to them. He said, “Peace be with you.”

- a. This greeting probably served several functions.**
- b. First, this would have been a common way to greet someone when you saw them. In fact, it is still in use today. Peace be with you.**
- c. But we also know that the disciples were afraid. They were locked in a room together because they feared what the Jewish authorities may do to them if they came looking for them and found them. Now someone has just appeared in the room in front of them. Yes, it’s Jesus. But you can imagine how disorienting this all would have been for them. This was a way of saying, “Fear not.”**
- d. It’s funny though because Luke tells us in his Gospel that when Jesus said, “Peace be with you,” they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit (Lk. 24:37).**
- e. But this was no mere spirit. This was the Lord Himself. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus asked them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? (Lk. 24:38).**

- f. That gives you an idea of where their heads were at this moment. They were scared. They were confused. They didn't know what to make of all that had transpired over the last 76 hours.
- g. But I think the words "Peace be with you" also serve another function because we see that Jesus repeats them in verse 21 and then again in 26.
- h. If you can remember all the way back to our sermon on John 14 and Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said something similar there concerning peace. In John 14:27, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."
- i. Then in John 16:33, Jesus said, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace."
- j. Jesus speaks these words, "Peace be with you," to settle their troubled hearts. To turn their anxiety to peace.
- k. I wonder if you know, brothers and sisters, that the resurrection of Jesus allows you to live in His peace rather than being overcome with anxiety.
- l. We live at an anxious time in an anxious culture, don't we? I think it may be true that people are more anxious today than they've ever been before. And there's plenty going on in the world around us to make us anxious, isn't there? Wars and rumors of wars. Economic uncertainty. Political instability. We hear on the news reports of crime. We read about natural disasters. Then there's the circumstances of our own lives that make us anxious. Maybe it's a health scare. Maybe it's family discord. Students, maybe you feel anxious about what you're going to experience at school from day to day. Parents, you feel anxious about what your kids may experience at school from day to day. Whatever it is that makes you anxious, I think we can all agree that there's plenty of things to make us anxious.

- m. But the resurrected Jesus says to you this morning, "Peace be with you." He says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."
- n. As Jesus says in His Sermon on the Mount, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matt. 6:25-26).
- o. The answer is YES. You ARE of more value than they. If God cares for the birds of the air, how much more does He care for you whom He has made in His image? How much more does He care for you for whom He gave His Son to die in your place?
- p. "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matt. 6:34).

- C. John goes on to tell us of the evidence Jesus provided the disciples that He really was Jesus in the flesh, raised from the dead.
 - 1. John writes, "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side" (vs. 20a).
 - a. I don't have to tell you the significance of this. This would have confirmed His identity. It would have shown that He really was the one who was crucified. He really was their Lord.
 - b. It also would have demonstrated for them very clearly that He really had been raised from the dead. Everything they had heard about Jesus being raised from the dead was true. He was standing right in front of them.

- c. They were looking at His hands where the nails were driven when He was crucified. They were looking at His side where He was pierced by the spear. This really was Jesus. He really had been crucified. And He really had been raised from the dead.
2. John writes, “Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (vs. 20b).
- a. You can imagine their joy. The one they followed. The one they served. The one they loved. He was alive!
 - b. I wonder if the resurrection of Jesus brings you joy. Yes, it should bring you peace. But it should also bring you joy. Jesus is not dead anymore! He is alive! And He lives forevermore!
 - c. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we can have the joy of the Lord in our hearts no matter the circumstances we face in life. As Paul says, we can “Rejoice always!”
 - d. Christians ought to be the most joyful people around. Not because life isn’t hard sometimes. Not because we don’t face difficult times just like everyone else. But because we have the joy of the resurrected Lord in our hearts.
 - e. If you’re not joyful, ask God to help you. Sometimes joy doesn’t come easy. Sometimes we have to fight for joy. And how do we fight as Christians? Through prayer and the Word. Read your Bible and pray. Ask God to give you the joy of the resurrected Lord. I believe that’s a prayer He will delight to answer in your life.

D. Jesus speaks again in verse 21. He says... (Read vs. 21)

- 1. This verse has been called John’s Great Commission.
- 2. God the Father sent Jesus into the world to save sinners. Soon He would ascend into heaven. And His disciples would remain as His representatives. His ambassadors.

- 3. He is sending them out into the world.
- 4. We’re going to talk about the Great Commission in a few weeks, so I won’t say a lot here except to say that the resurrection of Jesus changes everything for us.
- 5. Since Jesus is alive, we have a message to proclaim. Our lives have been transformed by the resurrected Jesus. And we seek to see others transformed by Jesus as well.
- 6. Since Jesus is alive, we can’t keep this message to ourselves. It has to be shared.
- 7. Just as Jesus sent His disciples 2,000 years ago, He has sent us as well. May we go forth faithfully as His sent ones proclaiming the gospel of the resurrected Jesus.

E. Then John writes... (Read vs. 22-23)

- 1. A lot has been written about Jesus breathing on the disciples and telling them to “Receive the Holy Spirit.”
- 2. The first thing we should say is that despite every English translation I could find saying that Jesus “breathed ON them,” the Greek text does not require us to read it that way. The Greek text does say that Jesus breathed, but it does not necessarily say that He breathed ON them.
- 3. Carson argues that the verse should be translated, “And with that he breathed, and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Carson, 652).
- 4. There is then a lot that has been written trying to harmonize Jesus’ instruction here to “Receive the Holy Spirit” with the actual reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.
- 5. It seems to me that commentators make it more difficult than it really has to be. John has already emphasized Jesus’ teaching on the Holy Spirit during the Farewell Discourse. Jesus’ departure is closer now than it was then. Jesus is going to leave. His followers are going to receive the Holy Spirit. And they are going to go forth with a message of repentance and forgiveness.
- 6. Turn from your sin. Place your trust in Jesus. And be forgiven of your sin. That’s the gospel message, isn’t it?

7. **Forgiveness of sin is only found in Jesus. The people responsible for sharing that message are Jesus' followers. Those who have already experienced His forgiveness. Then it was the disciples. Now it's all who follow Jesus.**

F. **Now, John hasn't yet told us anything about the belief of the disciples in the resurrection other than that they were glad when they saw the Lord.**

1. **But in verse 24, we're told that one of the disciples was not with them. Thomas. The one called the Twin.**
2. **So, the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."**
3. **There you go. That's their testimony. Their statement of belief. We have seen the Lord.**
4. **Jesus had appeared to them. They had seen Him. He was not dead anymore. He was alive.**

That takes us to...

II. **The testimony of a skeptic – "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26-29).**

A. **Thomas hears their testimony, but he isn't so sure.**

1. **He says, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (vs. 25).**
2. **Now, we like to give Thomas a hard time. Should he have believed the testimony of the disciples? Of course he should have. But the disciples also should have believed the testimony of the women.**
3. **The disciples had just had Jesus give them the very evidence that Thomas is now requesting. So, Thomas' unwillingness to believe without seeing the evidence for himself was not any different from the other disciples. They were all in the same boat.**

4. **And if we had been there, we likely would have felt the exact same way. Show me. I want to see it for myself.**
5. **Thomas' doubt is actually evidence for the truthfulness of the resurrection. See, Thomas and the other disciples were not expecting a resurrection. We can make the case from Scripture that they SHOULD HAVE been expecting Jesus to be resurrected. But they clearly were not. So, the theory that they stole the body or made up the whole resurrection story doesn't make any sense. Resurrection was the furthest things from their minds until Jesus appeared in front of them in the flesh.**
6. **But despite Thomas' lack of belief after hearing the disciples' testimony...**

B. **John tells us that Jesus met Thomas where He was.**

1. **(Read vs. 26)**
2. **Notice how similar this appearance is to the one we just read about with the other disciples. The doors were locked. Jesus appeared. And what did He say? "Peace be with you." Jesus gave Thomas all the same evidence that He gave the other disciples. He met Thomas where he was. He didn't leave Thomas in his unbelief. He helped his unbelief.**
3. **Keep reading in verse 27... (Read vs. 27)**
4. **Jesus invited Thomas to see and touch His hands and His side. He gave Thomas the same evidence that He had given the other disciples. And then He exhorted Thomas, "Do not disbelieve, but believe."**
5. **And look at Thomas' response. (Read vs. 28)**
6. **Then Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (vs. 29).**
7. **We saw last week that John believed before He saw. But we also know that this is the testimony of most believers throughout church history. Only a relatively small number of the Christians throughout history had the privilege of seeing the resurrected Jesus.**
8. **Yet we believe based on the testimony of those who did see Him, including a skeptic like Thomas.**

9. **And for that, we are blessed. Matt Carter writes, “Blessed doesn’t simply mean happy. It means a person is accepted by God. They have, through faith, become recipients of all God’s blessings. God’s favor is permanently placed on them through the person of Jesus Christ.”**

C. Some say that Thomas spoke for the world, “Give me proof and I’ll believe!”

1. **But as one commentator put it, “I think the world’s view is more like, ‘Show me the facts, and I’ll invent another theory.’”**
2. **You kid yourself if you think that what you need to believe in the resurrected Jesus is more evidence. You don’t need more evidence. You need to believe the evidence you already have.**
3. **How did the tomb where Jesus was laid become empty?**
 - a. **Dead men don’t just get up and walk out of a tomb on their own.**
 - b. **The disciples didn’t steal the body. Most of them died for their faith in the resurrected Jesus. People do not die for something they know to be a lie.**
 - c. **The best explanation for the empty tomb is that there was a resurrection.**
 - d. **Reasonable scholars (even secular scholars) accept some basic facts.**
 - 1) *There really was a man named Jesus from Nazareth.*
 - 2) *He really was crucified.*
 - 3) *His followers really did believe that He had been resurrected and went around proclaiming that message.*
 - 4) *Many of them lost their lives proclaiming that message.*
 - e. **You have to decide what to do with these facts.**

4. **Thomas started out a skeptic. But he didn’t stay that way for long. Why? Because He saw the resurrected Jesus.**
5. **It’s okay to start out a skeptic. You remain that way to your own peril.**
6. **As Jesus said to Thomas, “Do not disbelieve, but believe.”**

We’ve seen the testimony of the disciples. We’ve seen the testimony of a skeptic. Finally...

III. The testimony of the Bible – “These are written so that you may believe” (John 20:30-31).

John writes... (Read vs. 30-31)

A. John gives us the purpose of His Gospel.

1. **He has written so that we “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.”**
2. **See, that’s really what it comes down to, isn’t it? Who are you going to believe?**
 - a. **God, who has given us His Word?**
 - b. **Or the world who says that this is all just a big myth. Jesus was a nice guy, but he was in over his head. He wasn’t really God. He didn’t really die to pay for your sin. He certainly wasn’t raised from the dead.**
 - c. **Brothers and sisters. Friends. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is compelling.**

B. Trust in Jesus.

1. **He is the Christ, the Messiah. He is the Son of God.**
2. **And the only way for you to have abundant life and eternal life is by believing in Him.**

3. Not just believing that He existed. Not even just believing that He was raised from the dead. But placing your complete trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

Conclusion: Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.