

John 20

Sermon Discussion Guide

Passage Summary

John 20 begins in darkness. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early in the morning while it is still dark and discovers that the stone has been removed. Her first assumption is not resurrection, but loss: someone has taken Jesus' body, and she does not know where He has been placed.

Peter and John run to the tomb and find the grave clothes lying there, but Jesus' body is gone. John tells us that the beloved disciple saw and believed, though the disciples still did not fully understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. The empty tomb confronts them with something far greater than they had expected, but understanding comes gradually.

Mary remains outside the tomb weeping. Even when she sees angels and then Jesus Himself, grief prevents her from recognizing Him. She assumes He is the gardener until Jesus speaks her name: "Mary." That one word changes everything. The risen Jesus does not merely announce a theological truth from a distance. He comes personally to a grieving woman, knows her by name, and meets her in her sorrow. Her grief gives way to recognition and joy. Jesus then sends her to tell the disciples what she has seen. The first witness John records announcing the risen Christ is someone whose heart had just been broken by loss.

Later that evening, the disciples are gathered behind locked doors because they are afraid. Jesus comes and stands among them, speaking peace. He shows them His wounds, confirming that the One who was crucified is now alive. His resurrection does not erase the cross; the wounds of His sacrifice remain the marks of His victory. He then sends His disciples into the world, giving them the Holy Spirit and entrusting them with the message of forgiveness.

Thomas, however, is absent when Jesus first appears. When the others tell him that they have seen the Lord, he refuses to accept their testimony. He insists that unless he sees and touches Jesus' wounds, he will not believe. Thomas is often remembered primarily for his doubt, but his struggle is deeply human. He had placed his hopes in Jesus and then watched those hopes appear to die. He is unwilling to risk hope again without certainty.

Eight days later, Jesus returns. He does not shame Thomas or cast him away. He comes directly to him and addresses the very questions Thomas had expressed. Jesus invites him to see and touch His wounds and calls him to believe.

Thomas responds with one of the clearest confessions in John's Gospel: "My Lord and my God!"

His doubt is not answered with an abstract argument but with the presence of the risen Christ. Jesus meets Thomas in his questions, but He does not leave him there. He calls him from doubt into faith, worship, and surrender. John closes the chapter by explaining why he wrote his Gospel: 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. The resurrection is therefore not merely an event to study. It is the foundation of Christian faith, the source of eternal life, and the assurance that sin, suffering, and death will not have the final word.

Theological Highlights

1. The Resurrection Is a Real Victory Over Death

Jesus did not merely survive suffering or live on through His followers' memories. He bodily rose from the grave. Death was defeated by the power of God.

2. The Risen Christ Meets People Personally

Jesus meets Mary in grief, the disciples in fear, and Thomas in doubt. He knows the particular needs and weaknesses of His people and moves toward them with grace.

3. Faith Does Not Require the Absence of Questions

Thomas' questions are real, but Jesus does not abandon him. Biblical faith is not pretending uncertainty does not exist; it is bringing our doubts honestly to Christ and allowing His truth to confront them.

4. The Crucified Jesus Is the Risen Jesus

Jesus shows His wounds after the resurrection. His victory does not make the cross irrelevant. The wounds remind us that our salvation was secured through His sacrificial love.

5. Resurrection Hope Leads to Mission

Mary is sent to tell the disciples, and the disciples are sent into the world. Those who encounter the risen Christ are called to bear witness to Him.

Discussion Questions

Meeting Jesus in Grief

1. Mary came to the tomb overwhelmed by grief and unable to imagine that resurrection had taken place.

- How does grief or disappointment sometimes limit your ability to recognize what God may be doing?
- Where are you currently struggling to see beyond your pain?

2. Jesus speaks Mary's name before she recognizes Him.
 - What does this reveal about the personal care of Jesus?
 - How does it affect you to know that the risen Christ knows you personally?
3. Jesus did not rebuke Mary for weeping.
 - What does this teach us about the place of grief in the Christian life?
 - How can resurrection hope exist alongside genuine sorrow?

Meeting Jesus in Fear

4. The disciples gathered behind locked doors because they were afraid, yet Jesus came and stood among them.
 - What fears make you withdraw, hide, or close yourself off from others?
 - What does Jesus' presence offer in those places?
5. Jesus' first words to the fearful disciples were, "Peace be with you."
 - Where do you most need the peace of Christ right now?
 - How is His peace different from simply having easier circumstances?
6. Jesus sent the disciples into the world while they were still imperfect and fearful.
 - How does that encourage you when you feel unqualified to serve Him?

Meeting Jesus in Doubt

7. Thomas found it difficult to believe the testimony of the other disciples.
 - What aspects of Christianity have been hardest for you to believe?
 - What experiences have contributed to those struggles?
8. Thomas' refusal to hope again may have grown from the pain of disappointment.
 - Has disappointment or unanswered prayer ever made you afraid to trust God?
9. Thomas moved from "Unless I see" to "My Lord and my God."
 - What is the difference between wanting evidence about Jesus and personally surrendering to Jesus?
10. Are there areas where you acknowledge Jesus intellectually but struggle to trust Him as "my Lord and my God"?

Living in Resurrection Hope

11. The resurrection means that death and sorrow will not have the final word.
 - How should this truth reshape the way we face suffering, aging, loss, or death?
12. How might belief in the resurrection change your priorities, relationships, or use of time this week?

Closing Prayer Points

1. Thank God for the Resurrection

- Praise Jesus for rising bodily from the grave.
- Thank Him that sin, death, and the grave have been defeated.

2. Bring Grief Honestly to Jesus

- Name before God the losses, disappointments, or sorrows you are carrying.
- Thank Jesus that He meets His people personally in their grief.
- Ask for eyes to recognize His presence even when life feels dark.

3. Bring Doubts Into the Light

- Speak honestly to God about questions or areas of uncertainty.
- Thank Jesus for His patience with struggling believers.
- Ask Him to lead you from doubt toward deeper trust, worship, and surrender.

4. Receive the Peace of Christ

- Bring your fears and anxieties before the risen Jesus.
- Ask for peace rooted in His victory rather than in changing circumstances.

5. Confess Christ as Lord

- Praise Jesus not merely as Savior, but as “my Lord and my God.”

6. Live as a Resurrection Witness

- Ask God to make your words gentle, honest, and courageous.
- Pray that your life would display the joy, peace, and hope of the risen Jesus.

Closing Reflection

John 20 introduces us to people whose lives have been unsettled by sorrow, fear, and doubt. Mary is grieving. The disciples are hiding. Thomas is struggling to believe. And Jesus moves toward each of them. He calls Mary by name. He speaks peace to the fearful. He shows His wounds to Thomas.

The resurrection does not mean Christians never grieve, fear, or question. It means none of those things has the final word. The risen Christ meets His people in their weakness, calls them to faith, and sends them into the world with good news:

Jesus is alive, death has been defeated, and life is found in His name.