

The Word Became Flesh

The Resurrection

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 20

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August 16, 2026

So today, one of my 2026 New Year's resolutions is almost complete. It was my desire this year to finish our series on the Gospel of John that we have been calling "The Word Became Flesh" that I started 7 years ago, so it has been long, and we have 2 weeks left. So this week and next week we'll wrap up the Gospel of John. And today, as we are in John chapter 20, we are going to see again the reason that John wrote the Gospel in the first place.

Why do we have this that has been preserved for us 2,000 years later? John's desire was to convince you and I in joining his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him we may have life in His name. That is the reason that John is writing this Gospel, because he wants you and I to come to the same conclusion he did, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

It is the same reason that later the Apostle Paul would go on three missionary journeys around the known world, planting churches and enduring persecution, because of his experience on the road to Damascus. He also would believe that Jesus is the Messiah. John has been sharing with us specific stories of his time, firsthand experiences over the last 3 or 4 years that he has had with Jesus.

And of course, he is going to let us know he can't share everything, but he is giving us the cliff notes version, right? He is sharing with us what he believes are the most important parts of what Jesus said and what he did. And so last week, if you weren't with us, we spent our time in the most difficult chapter, that's chapter 19, where John had to share with us the most difficult part of his journey, the death and crucifixion. And as hard as it was to read through that, it was necessary to share it because you and I need to know the extent that Jesus went to for us.

John chapter 19, though it was difficult to read, helps us understand God's plan and the fulfillment of that plan and the lengths that God's love would go to for us. Today, as we get back into the story in chapter 20, it is going to be much better. Good news. Chapter 20 is a chapter that is filled with hope. It's filled with excitement. It truly is filled with the foundation of why you and I believe what we believe. So let me set the stage. In John chapter 20, it is now early on Sunday morning, and things are pretty quiet.

It's just around sunrise, and those who are early risers are just beginning their day. It has been a crazy few days in Jerusalem, but the Passover is finished now, the Sabbath is complete, and it feels like the calm after a storm. Even though Sunday morning is a peaceful setting, there is still an endless mess to pick up. Think about the moments after a bad storm here in northeast Indiana. Maybe the sun comes out and the clouds go away, but when you get that first look outside the windows, you see that trees are down and limbs need to be picked up.

There's a mess that needs to be cleaned. That is the situation that we find ourselves in in John chapter 20. Jesus has been crucified. His body has been laid in the tomb, and somebody needs to go and finish the burial process. Jesus's mom and His disciples are erect. Of course they are. They fear that they might be next. Maybe in the next weeks or months, they will be the ones that are hanging on the cross. This was the last thing that they

expected. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but in their hearts and in their minds, the Messiah could never die.

And so they must be questioning, was Jesus of Nazareth actually the Messiah? Or did we have it wrong this whole time? And so what happens next? That's where we are in John chapter 20, verse 1. So I encourage you to open your Bibles today. John chapter 20, verse 1. We have a lot to cover, and so I'm going to do my best to get through it in a timely fashion. Let me pray, and then we will jump in. Heavenly Father, as we gather today, I pray that as always You would open our hearts, You would open our minds.

Father, that You would open our eyes and our ears to hear from You as well. As we read what John wrote nearly 2,000 years ago, that these words would truly be living and active, and they would transform us, and they would change us, and they would draw us closer to You. Today, as we read about the resurrection, may we place our hope in that resurrection. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John chapter 20, starting in verse 1, John says this: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one that Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him.'" Now, we know from the other Gospels that Mary was not alone when she went to visit the tomb.

There were other women that were with her. Some other ladies had gone because they were going to finish this burial process of Jesus's body, which Joseph and Nicodemus had started earlier. If you remember, in John chapter 19, Joseph and Nicodemus go and take down the body of Jesus, and they are preparing it. Remember, Nicodemus brings 75 pounds of ointments and oils to prepare the body of Jesus. But since it was late in the afternoon and Passover was approaching, they had to get back, and so they were not able to finish the process.

And so imagine the mindset that Mary and the other women had when they were going to the tomb, knowing that they must finish this process. But notice her first thought when she gets to the tomb. When she sees that the stone has been rolled away, her first thought is that someone had stolen the body. Mary Magdalene and none of the other women there were expecting a resurrected Jesus. They assumed that somebody came and took the body. So she immediately goes to tell the disciples.

And so John tells us in verse 3, "So Peter and the other disciples started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first." John was humble enough not to mention his name, but competitive enough to let everyone know that he outran Peter. I do think this is funny that John puts this in here. It makes sense, though. Most theologians believe that at this point, Peter would have probably been in his later 30s or early 40s, and John would have probably been in his early 20s.

So it makes sense that John could probably outrun Peter. But as a man in my mid-40s, I like to think I would have given John a run for his money to the tomb. Based on the traditional sites of the upper room and where the tomb of Jesus was, it was roughly three-quarters of a mile. So that's how far away they were. Now, the news that Peter and John hear was shocking enough that they dropped whatever they were doing, whatever fear they had at that moment, whatever they thought was going to happen, and they ran to the tomb as fast as they could so they could see for themselves what was going on.

And it's here that we find our first challenge. And the challenge is this: Are we ever that excited to see what Jesus is up to? That regardless of the fear we're experiencing, regardless of what's going on in our life, that we would drop everything just to see what Jesus is up to. We get excited about lots of things. Everybody has those things that cause excitement, whether it's sports and your sports team or shopping or whatever it is, where you will do whatever it takes to do what is necessary.

And the question is, do we have that same passion and excitement for what Jesus is up to? John goes on to say that he bent over and he looked in at the strips of linen that were lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon

Peter came along behind him. John wants to make sure he reminds us of that. And he went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus's head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

Finally, the other disciple, John, who had reached the tomb first, again he tells us, also went inside. And he saw and believed. John says they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. So in verse 10, then the disciples went back to where they were staying. So here are some questions I have as I read this. Why didn't John go into the tomb? So he arrives there first, and he wants to let us know, "I got there first, but I didn't go in ." Now, there's lots of theories as to why John didn't go in, and it doesn't necessarily change the story, but one possibility is that he had a respect for the body.

Like he just wasn't going to go in. Another common theory is that John didn't want to become ceremonially unclean. And if you were in the presence of a dead body as a Jew, you would have to be unclean at least for that day and have to go through the cleansing process. And so maybe he didn't want to do that for whatever reason. Or maybe John was just afraid. Maybe he was afraid to go in. I mean, we are talking about a dead body of somebody that would have been there that you cared for and loved that had been mutilated just a few days earlier. So maybe he was just fear. What we do know is that John took a moment to think, at least.

As he arrived at the tomb, sprinting, his heart racing, sweating, he at least takes a moment to think. But he tells us, "Peter, on the other hand, just runs right in ." Which isn't this common for Peter, right? I mean, now that we know Peter and we've been shared stories about Peter, it's not surprising he just runs right in. But when they both get in there and look, John tells us that the cloths were there, maybe still in the form of a body, because these linen cloths that they would have wrapped around Jesus's body would have started to harden from the ointments that had been placed on them.

John tells us specifically that the head covering or the head cloth was there as well, but it was still separated from the linen cloths. John is telling us it certainly didn't look like the scene of a grave robbery, but instead it looked as if the body had just evaporated. Now, I understand that you guys are not familiar with the burial process for the Jews and what they would do. It was similar to mummification, but not so in the sense that they would wrap the body in cloths, and as the cloth would harden, it would harden around the body until it would decompose.

John is saying, "When I walked in, it's almost as if all of those cloths were still in the form of a body because they had hardened, but Jesus's body wasn't there." And the head covering was separate. It was not a grave robbery. The arrangement of the cloths suggested that no human hand had unwrapped him. John says then that he saw and he believed. Now think about that. Think about where we're at in the story. Don't think about the rest of John chapter 20.

Even before he saw the resurrected Jesus, John says, "Just by the layout of the cloths themselves in the tomb, he already believed Jesus wasn't there and that he hadn't been stolen, but he had been resurrected." Now, as a side note, some of you have heard of the Shroud of Turin. How many of you have heard of the Shroud of Turin before? Many of you have. I figured that. It's been around for a long time, many, many years. And some people believe that this is the actual burial cloth of Jesus. You can see a negative impression there of a man that has been crucified.

People will often want to ask me, "Pastor, what do you think? Do you think this is the actual cloth of Jesus that was around him that they talk about?" And my answer is always, "I have no idea," right? It doesn't change my faith one way or the other. If it is, that's pretty amazing. If it isn't, it doesn't change my faith. But I will encourage you, as they continue to study this cloth, more has come out. Just go online and search it this afternoon. If you want to look up some exciting things or interesting things, go check it out. It very well could be, "I don't have any idea." But what we do know for sure is here in John chapter 20, we have some very convincing proofs for the resurrection of Jesus.

And if the resurrection is true, which is the case that John is trying to make, it means that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of Holiness. If the resurrection is true, it means that you and I can have assurance of our own resurrection in Jesus. If the resurrection is true, it means that though it looked like Jesus died on the cross as a common criminal, that he actually died as a sinless man out of love and self-sacrifice to bear the guilt of our sin.

If the resurrection is true, it changes everything. The resurrection changes everything. It changes everything that we think is important. It changes everything that we know about life. It changes everything. John goes on in verse 11. "Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. And as she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus's body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

And they asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' They have taken my Lord away,' she said,' and I don't know where they have put him.'" John tells us that as Peter and John have gone back to the upper room, that Mary works her way back to the tomb to try to find Jesus's body. But something has happened between the time that Peter and John have left and made that examination and when she goes back. But when she goes back, she's definitely not thinking Jesus could still be alive. She didn't even notice the burial cloths because of the angels, which we will find out she apparently mistook for men.

She didn't even know they were angels. We go on to verse 14. "At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!'" Which means teacher. Here are a few questions I have as I read the scene that John is describing.

First, we're told that Mary doesn't recognize Jesus. So how does she not recognize him? I guess there's a few options and we aren't told. Option number one is that Jesus hid his identity from her in some way. Option number two is that he actually physically looked different. His physical body was different than what they knew and what they would have known. Option number three is that Mary was so upset, she was crying, she was emotional, a lot of things were going on, that she didn't really even look at the person that was talking. She maybe would have glanced at him sideways, but would have had tears in her eyes.

And so maybe she just didn't recognize him. But what John tells us is Jesus only had to say one word and all was explained. Mary had heard her beloved Messiah. Great theologian and preacher Charles Spurgeon has said, "Jesus can preach a perfect sermon in one word." He called Mary to himself in one word, and in that one word, everything changed. And so today I ask the question of you, is Jesus calling your name?

Sometimes it is in the midst of our pain, it's in the midst of our tears and our hurt and our suffering that we see Jesus most clearly. Here was Mary an emotional wreck. She has just witnessed who she believed to be the Messiah. He has been beaten, he has been tortured, he has been crucified, his body has been placed in a tomb, and now she believes that somebody has stolen the body. Everything that she thought to be true has all been upended. And it's in this moment, as she hears her name, that everything becomes clear.

Maybe today you and I would ask him to reveal himself to us as well. John goes on. "Jesus said to Mary, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers,'" which is the first time that he called his disciples his brothers," and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" So Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them all that he had said to her. First thing we realize here is John is making sure we recognize that Jesus's body was real.

It was tangible. It could be touched. Mary gives him a hug. And some people question, "Why did Jesus say, 'Don't touch me, let me go, you know, it's okay'?" Why does he tell her that? I believe the truth is it wasn't that he was saying, "Don't touch me, there's something weird going on," or whatever else. I think that he was telling

her, "It's okay to let me go because I haven't fully left yet and you're going to see me again." Think about the mind of Mary in that moment. Put yourself in that situation. You have just lost somebody that you love and you care about deeply. And it's been three days and now you see them again.

If you were to see them again, don't you think you would wrap your arms around them and think to yourself, "I'm never letting you go. I'm never letting you out of my sight again." And so Jesus has to affirm to her, "It's okay. Go tell the disciples that I'm alive. You'll see me again. It will be okay ." So he tells her, "Don't touch me. Let me go. It's okay ." The other interesting thing here is the truth that Jesus made the first witness of his resurrection a woman. Now for you and I, you think, "Well, big deal, not a problem." But back in this culture, as unfortunate as it was, a woman's testimony wasn't as valid as a man's testimony.

And so the fact that it was a woman that Jesus would reveal himself to first and she would go and tell the other disciples, this truly is more evidence for the historic truth of the resurrection. Because if somebody were making up the story, it never would have been a woman who witnessed the resurrection first. And yet Jesus chooses Mary. We go on in verse 19.

"On the evening of that first day of the week," so we're still on that same day," when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" So this happens on the same day that the tomb was found empty that morning, and Mary has already met the resurrected Jesus, and she came back and told the disciples that she has met the resurrected Jesus, and we have a whole day that goes by that I have to imagine all of the disciples were thinking, "Mary's lost her mind," right? She's gone crazy.

What is she talking about, a resurrected Jesus? And so Jesus now appears to them that evening. It's interesting that John tells us that they were in a locked room because they were afraid of what was going to happen. And John doesn't tell us how Jesus entered that locked room, but the sense certainly that I receive when I read it is that he didn't enter that room in an ordinary way, but in a supernatural one. And so people want to ask, "What are our bodies going to be like after the resurrection? What are our resurrected bodies going to be like?" This is one of the things that we can point to and say, "Well, I don't know.

Maybe Jesus had the ability to walk through walls. His body was certainly different ." But then I often will caution people that this is Jesus too, right? Like he might be able to do things that you and I can't do. But he shows up in this room, and I love that his first words to his disciples are, "Peace be with you." I want you to remember what took place in John chapter 19 and in John chapter 18. Jesus doesn't come and blame them for abandoning him. Remember, they left him in the garden. He doesn't come and condemn them for hiding in an upper room that is locked because they're afraid of what is going to happen.

Instead, Jesus's first words are words of comfort. "Peace be with you." Now I don't know if he was saying like, "Peace be with you," or if he was like, "Okay, I know this is going to be shocking, so just, okay, just take a breath. It's really me," right? Like, "Peace be with you." Like, "I come in peace ." But he wants to comfort them. I love that that is his first desire over and over again is to comfort, not to condemn. We go on in verse 20. "After he said this, he showed them his hands in his side, and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. And again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that, he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For if you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. But if you do not forgive them, then they are not forgiven.'" When Jesus shows up to meet the disciples, he gives them physical proof of who he is. He says, "Look at my hands, look at my side." And so it causes me to ask the question, because as we read about heaven, we know it's a place where there's no more tears, no more suffering, no more hurt.

Is it possible that Jesus will be the only one with scars in heaven, right? We won't have scars, but he will. And again, as he's speaking to his disciples, he offers them peace. Peace that your sins are forgiven. Peace that slavery to sin is broken. Peace that should take away their fears and their concerns. Peace that their life is now

settled in eternity because of him. And then John tells us this weird thing that Jesus breathes on them and he tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Now what you need to understand is that as somebody that would have been reading this and as John, who was raised in Jewish tradition, as soon as he or any Jew would hear this idea that Jesus breathed on them, their mind would immediately go all the way back to Genesis chapter 1, 2, and 3, where we read that God breathed life into us. Jesus is giving them a new life, that connection. The other part of that connection, which you may not have picked up on, if you remember when Mary was there and Jesus is speaking to her and John puts in this little hint or clue that I think is interesting.

Who does she think is talking to her? Says the gardener. Well, who is the gardener? God is the gardener. She was right. It was the gardener, just not the one she was thinking about. All of these visions would have come back as people were reading this and the connection that John wants us to make that when Jesus breathed onto them, he was breathing new life. He tells them to receive the Holy Spirit, but he also gives them further authority in this world. He's saying, "Yes, when God breathed life into you, those original purposes all still exist from the garden.

You still are supposed to do everything that God commanded you to do, but now you have a new purpose that Jesus is giving to us. We now have a new authority. And what is that authority? It is pretty amazing. He says, "As believers, as my followers, I now give you the authority to announce forgiveness and to warn of guilt." That as followers of Jesus, you can now tell others with confidence that if they repent, you can be sure you will receive forgiveness.

Here, Jesus is laying down the duty of the church to proclaim forgiveness to the repentant believer, and it's also the duty of the church to warn the unbeliever that they are in danger of forfeiting the mercy of God. Jesus is not saying that you and I create the forgiveness or deny the forgiveness. That is not up to us. That's between God and them. But we do announce it with truth and according to God's word and to his Spirit. I want you to notice that Jesus didn't say it was the church's responsibility to judge those outside the church.

It was to warn them in love and in concern. Let's keep going as we wrap up verse 24 and 25. John tells us, "Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and I put my finger in them where the nails were, and I put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'" So Thomas is the only one that's not there.

Try to put yourself in Thomas's shoes for a little bit. Everybody else claims they have seen the risen Jesus. Mary claims it. And now he's thinking, "You guys have lost your minds too, right? You guys are all crazy. I am not going to believe it." But I want you to notice that in the story, as John is sharing this, he's not criticized for his absence. We don't know why he was gone. We don't know where he was. We don't know if he was doing some tasks that he had to do. We don't know, but he was not criticized for his absence. But because of his absence, he did miss out on something.

And so I want to encourage you, just as we try to read into this and truths into our own life, I want to encourage you not to miss out. There are many people that I talk to today that say to me, "You know what, Pastor? I don't need to go to church to have a relationship with Jesus." And my answer to them is, "You know what? That's true. You don't need to go to church to have a relationship with Jesus, but I just want you to know you could be missing out on something that God has for you, right? You're not going to be condemned for that, but you might be missing out. Let's not miss out on what God has in store for us." What was it like for Thomas?

Eight days are going to pass. We're going to read. Jesus is going to show back up. But what was it like for those eight days when everyone else has seen Jesus, they've put their faith and their belief in him, but Thomas still hasn't seen him and so he doesn't believe? Think about those eight days of what was going on in his mind. And then we come to verse 26. "A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them this

time. And though the doors were locked," do you notice that? It is a week later and the doors are still locked, which means what? They're still afraid.

They have seen the risen Jesus and they're still afraid in that moment. "The doors were locked and Jesus came and stood among them and said again, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" One of the interesting things that I find about this is that Jesus wasn't present when Thomas had the conversation with the disciples saying, "I need to put my fingers where the nails were and put my hand in his side," but he already knew what Thomas needed to believe.

Here we learn truths about who Jesus is, that he is all-knowing, all-powerful. He wasn't physically there, but he knew. Also notice again that the doors are still locked. Jesus somehow enters through the locked doors. And the disciples, even though they had believed in the resurrection, the truth of that and the meaning and the significance of that had not sunk in yet. And yet still, God does not condemn their doubt or their fear. He doesn't condemn them that they're still hiding in that locked upper room, but he helps them work through it. He says, "Peace be with you." He offers them comfort.

And so I am reminded that when you want assurance, look to the wounds of Jesus. When you want assurance of his love, look to his wounds. When you want assurance to his power, look to his wounds. When you want assurance to his love and to his goodness and to his care and to his concern, look to his wounds. Those are the evidence of his love, the evidence of his sacrifice, the evidence of his victory, and the evidence of his resurrection, verses 28 and 29. "So Thomas says to him, 'My Lord and my God.' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed.

But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" Do you notice the change that Jesus makes? Thomas goes from declaring unbelief, "I will never believe unless I can see his hands and his side. I am never going to believe," into a radical belief. He recognizes Jesus, and you see what he proclaimed. He said, "My Lord and my God." I want you to pay attention that when he says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God," Jesus doesn't correct him because that is who he is.

Jesus does not correct Thomas and say, "Oh, sorry, you confused me for God or for the Father." You know, no. He doesn't correct him at all because that's who he is. These are titles of deity. And if they were untrue, it was the most blasphemous thing that any Jew could say. But Thomas says, "I believe that Jesus is my Lord and my God. And so I ask you and myself, have you made that same declaration?" This is the reason that John is writing the gospel, that you and I would proclaim with the same words as Thomas, "My Lord and my God," or as Mary would say, "Teacher, Rabboni." We wrap up in verses 30 and 31.

John tells us that Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. Jesus wants to inform us that there were many other signs, many other stories that he could share, but his hope is that in the ones that he has presented, that he is explaining with reason and with evidence that Jesus is the Messiah and that those that would read his story would also put their faith in Jesus as Messiah and God.

The purpose of the book is not to share about signs and wonders. It's a book about Jesus. And the greatest signs and wonders that John has are John chapter 19 and John chapter 20, the death and the resurrection. And collectively, these signs, John believes, give a strong evidence for faith in Jesus as Messiah and God. He has laid out his evidence. And so this in fairness, putting your faith and your trust in God, is not simply a blind leap. It is a reasonable step based on strong evidence.

And so the question for you and the question for me as we wrap up, John, is where does the evidence lead you? Do you agree with John that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, that he is God in the flesh who came to sacrifice his life in the greatest act of love so that you and I could have a relationship with him? And if you believe that,

have you put your faith and your trust in him? John has made his case. He claims to have seen the risen Jesus. And if Jesus has been raised from the dead, as we said earlier, it truly changes everything.

It changes what's important to me. It changes what I should fear. It changes what I live for. It changes my entire thought process about life and about where we came from and why we exist. It changes my goals and my ambitions. Today, Jesus may be calling your name. And my prayer is that you would respond in the words of Thomas by saying, "My Lord and my God ." The apostle Paul says that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And so if you are here today and you're still wrestling with that, know that today is a great day to make that proclamation. The altars are always open. If you want to come and do business with God, there'll be people on both sides that would love to pray with you. If you have a struggle or something that you're going through, we would love to work through that with you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus. Thank you for the life that he lived and for the ways that he loved. Lord, may we honestly consider the case that John has laid out for his belief in Jesus.

May we understand this is not just some leap of faith. There is some evidence. It's a logical step. It's my desire that everyone here would be able to proclaim, "My Lord and my God ." We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.