

Resurrection Day 2025 – Exposition of John 20

Introduction

Good morning! He is risen! Today, on this Resurrection Sunday, we dive into John 20, the heart of the resurrection story. This chapter isn't just a historical record, it's the foundation of everything we believe. The cross provides the payment for our sin; the resurrection is the basis for the promise of life. John 20 shows us the empty tomb, the risen Lord, and His interaction with His followers. As we walk through this chapter, let's realize that the death and resurrection of Jesus are still the most important events in human history. It is the content of the Gospel for our salvation and the basis for what we believe and how we live; it is why we hope, and why we love.

Context

I like to imagine someone reading John for the first time without any prior information, no spoilers. What would they think is next? Jesus, the Messiah, has demonstrated that He is the Promised One through many signs, leading to Peter's statement, "We have believed and have to come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

In John 18, Jesus has been betrayed, arrested, beaten, falsely accused, and turned over to Pilate for condemnation. In John 19, as we have just learned, Pilate tried Jesus and, through pressure from the Sanhedrin and the mob, condemned Jesus to be crucified. Jesus was crucified, and as He proclaimed, "It is finished," He died. His body was taken and prepared, bound in linen wrappings, and laid in a new tomb.

How does it end? Does He actually come back from the dead? In John, we saw that He was able to save others and even resuscitate Lazarus. Jesus could have saved Himself, couldn't he? Does He have the ability to come back from the dead?

Exposition of John 20

John 20 can be divided into five sections: the empty tomb (1-10), Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene (11-18), His appearance to the disciples (19-23), Thomas' encounter with the risen Christ (24-29), and a conclusion (20-31).

• The Empty Tomb (John 20:1-10)

- *Verses 1-2:* Three days later, Mary Magdalene heads to the tomb early in the morning to honor Jesus' death. She comes to the tomb and finds the stone rolled away. Alarmed, she runs to tell Peter and John, thinking someone has stolen Jesus' body.
- *Verses 3-7:* Peter and John run to the tomb. We can joke here that the author has beaten Peter in a race.
 - John arrives first and he peers in: the Greek word for *look* is "βλέπω blepo" – to see and perceive with understanding. What did he see? The burial clothes lying there.

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- Peter, bold as ever, goes inside. He also sees the burial clothes, not torn or scattered. The face cloth is rolled up and by itself.
- In verse 2, we have the proposed premise, “They have taken away the Lord.” But now we have the evidence that Jesus is risen. Grave robbers or someone nefarious would not have taken the time to remove the burial clothes or be careful with the head covering.
- *Verse 8:* John entered and confirmed what he initially observed: Jesus is not there, the burial clothes are still there, and the head covering is by itself. John “saw and believed.” This evidence was enough.
- *Verse 9:* This is a summary verse of why these events took place. Jesus has risen from the dead, but Mary, John, and Peter’s actions do not demonstrate hope; they are full of doubt and fear.
 - Even after seeing the evidence of Jesus being raised from the dead, they were confused over the events. Why? Because they had not yet understood the Scripture (Luke 24:25-26, 44-46).
 - The empty tomb with the burial clothes is the first clue of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. John believed it, by implication Peter and Mary were yet to be convinced.
- *Verse 10:* John and Peter leave Mary standing outside the tomb.
- **Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)**
 - *Verses 11-12:* Mary stays at the tomb, weeping. Then she sees two angels and an amazing picture.
 - Two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet.
 - The word *at* is the word “πρός pros.” This is a preposition of direction, “forward, toward.” The angels were sitting, one sitting at the head (toward the head) and one sitting at the feet (toward the feet). This is a picture of the Mercy Seat.
 - *Verse 13:* The angels said, “Woman, why are you weeping?” It is in the form of a question, but posed not as curiosity, but because there is no reason for her crying.
 - Her answer demonstrates that she is so emotional that she cannot perceive the evidence or their question for what it is.
 - She repeats the premise from verse 2, which demonstrates that she has not considered that Jesus has risen from the dead, just as He promised he would.
 - *Verses 14-16:* Jesus Himself appears, but Mary doesn’t recognize Him. Jesus, like the

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angels, states the question in such a way that indicates that there is no reason for her weeping, and the question “Whom do you seek?” implies why are you looking for Me, I am right here.

- Some think that Jesus was unrecognizable after His resurrection, that he bore the marks of His scourging. That may be the case, but I think that the emotion is so great that Mary could not see Him through her tears.
- When Jesus speaks her name, she turns and recognizes Him.
- *Verses 17-18*: Jesus tells Mary to stop holding on to Him. This is not an injunction to stop doing something (a negative particle with a present tense verb). The verb can mean to light (a lamp), kindle (a fire), make close contact, touch, take hold of.
 - The “stop” indicates something that she has been doing, not a prevention of physical contact. He told His disciples to touch Him and feel His flesh and bones.
 - Mary wanted to hold onto Jesus; He was back. But Jesus was informing her, I am not here to stay, but “I am going to ascend to the Father, go tell the brethren....” This was a command/reminder for them to witness His ascension.
- **Jesus Appears to the Disciples (John 20:19-23)**
 - If Jesus told Mary to give them a message, why does He appear to them Himself?
 - They are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. They were supposed to meet Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 26:31-32, 28:5-10).
 - *Verses 19a*: That evening, the disciples are locked in a room, afraid of the authorities.
 - The explanation is clear: they were fearful of the Jewish authorities, the Sanhedrin. But they had already received the testimony of Mary and maybe John. Emotion, particularly sadness, is hard to overcome with testimony.
 - *Verses 19b-20*: Jesus does a pop-in: His “Peace be with you,” is necessary as that would absolutely terrify anyone.
 - Jesus shows His wounds; this demonstrates that He is truly risen, and once the evidence overcomes their sadness, they rejoice.
 - *Verses 21-23*: Jesus reiterates His intentions: Peace be with you, but now He does something that is often misunderstood.
 - Jesus commissions them: “As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.”
 - He breathes on them, giving them the Holy Spirit and authority.
 - The authority is not to forgive sins.

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- The literal translation is “of any you forgive the sin, they have been forgiven.”
- “They have been forgiven” is in the Perfect Tense, indicating that the forgiveness has already occurred; the disciples have the authority to communicate this truth of God, not dictate it.
- **Thomas’ Encounter and Belief (John 20:24-29)**
 - *Verses 24-25:* Was Thomas doubting or was he jealous? The evidence seems to be overwhelming, but his statement indicates, “Unless I see the evidence, I will not believe.”
 - *Verses 26-27:* Eight days later, Jesus does not respond to Thomas immediately. He lets that stir for a bit and then presents Himself again.
 - Notice that Jesus knows exactly what Thomas said, a demonstration of His deity.
 - Do not be unbelieving but believing
 - These are adjectives
 - Be characterized by belief, not unbelief
 - *Verses 28:* Thomas’ response demonstrates one of the classic statements about Jesus’ deity: Thomas said to Him, “My Lord and my God.” Thomas’ statement is also a foreshadowing of the purpose of the book.
 - *Verse 29:* The point of Thomas’ disbelief and subsequent belief once he sees Jesus is Jesus’ declaration of blessing, which directly impacts all of us.
 - Blessed are they who did not see and yet believed.
 - That is us, and what a blessing indeed.
- **Conclusion (John 20:30-31)**
 - The resurrection is the greatest of the signs.
 - This sign, along with the rest, has been recorded for those who read it to consider the true identity of Jesus Christ so that they would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (a declaration of deity) and in believing, would have life in His name.