

The Resurrection and the Life

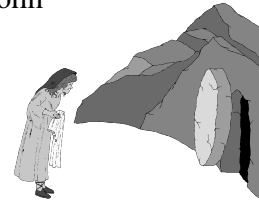
John 20:1-31

The Empty Tomb

- ❑ Read John 20:1-9. Early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.¹ However, the tomb was empty! Mary ran to Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved”² and reported that Jesus’ body was missing.³ So Peter and John ran to the tomb and went inside.

1. When John went inside, he “saw and believed” (20:8). What did John “see”? What do you think he “believed”?⁴

📖 Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25a).



- ❑ Though the tomb was secured and guarded by Roman officials (*Matthew 27:61-66*), it was found empty on Sunday morning.⁵ The empty tomb was not denied, and Jesus’ dead body was never found. Instead, the Jewish authorities bribed the Roman soldiers and claimed that the disciples had stolen the body (*Matthew 28:12-15*). But this was not true.⁶

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

- ❑ Read John 20:10-18. After Peter and John had left, Mary Magdalene was crying outside the tomb. As she looked into the tomb, she saw two angels. They asked her, “Why are you crying?” (20:13) Mary still thought someone had taken away Jesus’ body. Then the risen Jesus appeared to her, but she did not recognize him at first.⁷
- ❑ When Jesus spoke her name, Mary realized it was Jesus (20:16). Perhaps Mary fell down and grabbed Jesus by the feet.⁸ Jesus told Mary to stop clinging to him, but instead go and tell his “brothers” (i.e., the disciples) that he was returning to the Father (20:17).⁹

¹ Only Mary Magdalene is mentioned, but other women may have gone with her (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1), or else she went alone on a separate visit. “We” in John 20:2 may indicate that Mary was not alone. The women took spices to anoint Jesus’ body, hoping someone could roll away the stone from the tomb entrance (Mark 16:1-3). However, the stone had already been removed. Matthew reports that an angel removed the stone (Matt. 28:2).

² “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) is traditionally believed to be John.

³ Mary thought that someone had taken Jesus’ body (20:2, 13, 15).

⁴ Like Peter, John saw “the strips of linen lying there...as well as the burial cloth...folded up by itself” (20:6-7). This was strong evidence that Jesus’ body was not stolen. Most likely, John “believed” that Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter’s belief is not reported. Luke 24:12 says Peter “went away, wondering to himself what had happened”. Though John believed, neither he nor Peter understood how Scripture (our Old Testament) pointed to Jesus’ resurrection (20:9). This may include Psalm 16:10, Hosea 6:2, Isaiah 53:10-11, or Scripture as a whole.

⁵ What happened to the guards? When the angel rolled away the stone, which was accompanied by an earthquake, “the guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men” (Matthew 28:4).

⁶ See the supplement to this lesson, “Jesus was Raised” for a defense of the resurrection of Jesus.

⁷ She thought he was the gardener, since the tomb was in a garden (John 19:41). Perhaps the tears in her eyes (or something else) obscured her vision, and/or Jesus was hidden in some way (Luke 24:15-16; Mark 16:12).

⁸ Matthew 28:9 says the women “clasped his feet and worshiped him”.

⁹ “Do not hold on to me” (*mē mou haptou*) – “Stop clinging to me” (NASB). There are various interpretations of verse 17, but Jesus’ words may simply mean that he is not about to disappear, so Mary does not need to hold on to him. Instead she needs to take a message to the disciples. Or Jesus may be speaking of his changed conditions, and the new way of relating to him, which is no longer by physical presence and contact. “I am returning” (*anabainō* – “I am ascending”). At this time, Jesus was in an intermediate state. This world was no longer his home, so he would not be physically dwelling with his disciples. After 40 days, his ascension would be complete (Acts 1:3, 9-11).

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

- ❑ Read John 20:19-23. On Sunday evening, the disciples were together behind locked doors, and Jesus suddenly appeared among them¹⁰ and said, “Peace be with you” (20:19). This was a standard greeting, but Jesus gave it greater meaning.¹¹
- ❑ Jesus showed his wounds to his disciples, thus proving his resurrection.¹² The disciples were overjoyed (20:20). As Jesus had promised, their grief turned to joy (16:20).
- ❑ Then Jesus told them, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (20:21). The disciples must continue Jesus’ work, in the power of the Holy Spirit.¹³ Jesus’ disciples must share the Truth, so that people can know God, enter into his family and kingdom, and have eternal life.

Jesus Appears to Thomas

- ❑ Read John 20:24-31. Unlike the other disciples, Thomas had not seen Jesus. When they told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!”, he did not believe it.
 2. What did Thomas say were his requirements for believing? (20:25)



- ❑ A week later, the disciples were together again behind locked doors (20:26). This time Thomas was there. Like last time, Jesus suddenly appeared among them, and spoke to Thomas. Thomas responded, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28)
- ❑ Thomas, like the others, “saw and believed”. Even when John “believed” prior to seeing Jesus, he “saw” physical evidence of Jesus’ resurrection (20:6-8). However, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (20:29b).¹⁴
 3. If you *do not* believe, what do you think is needed for you to believe? If you *do* believe, how did you come to believe? What part has “seeing” played in your belief or unbelief?

The Life & You

- If you *do not* believe, keep listening to the eyewitness testimony recorded in the Bible, and also the testimony of believers throughout history, including today. Seek the truth. If you *do* believe, you have a job to do. In what specific ways are you being a witness to the Truth?

¹⁰ “locked” (*kekleismenōn* – “shut” or “shut securely”). Jesus’ sudden appearance could mean he passed through a solid door or wall. In any case, the disciples were “startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost” (Luke 24:37).

¹¹ Jesus earlier told his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you” (14:27), and also, “*in me* you may have peace” (16:33a). In the Bible, “peace” has the general meaning of wholeness, wellness, harmony, security or fulfillment (in other words, salvation). Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, God (the Source of true peace) provided the way of salvation. True peace is found only “in Jesus”.

¹² Though the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body is difficult to determine, it is obviously physical; and, in some sense, there is continuity between Jesus’ pre-death body and his resurrection body. Why does Jesus’ resurrection body still have wounds? Shouldn’t his glorified body be “perfect”? The risen Jesus’ wounds not only give evidence of his resurrection, they are permanent markers of his priestly work. Jesus’ sacrificial death is part of his glory.

¹³ There are various interpretations of this verse 22. Some say that Jesus imparted the Spirit, or a gift of the Spirit, at this time. However, it is likely that this was only a foretaste of the anticipated outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, 50 days later (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). Concerning verse 23, “The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have the authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit, it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe do not have their sins forgiven – which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done” (*ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton: Crossway], 2071).

¹⁴ This does not mean that people must believe without any evidence. The first disciples believed because they “saw” Jesus. Since that time, millions have believed because they have accepted the eyewitness testimony of the first disciples, as recorded in the Bible. John wrote his gospel, which is full of eyewitness testimony, so that people would believe (20:31; cf. Luke 1:1-4). Blessed are those who have accepted this testimony and believed!