



The Resurrection of Jesus Christ John 20:1-31

Introduction

A. Significance of the Resurrection

We come this week to the glorious climax of Christ's earthly ministry - His literal bodily resurrection from the dead. This is the greatest of all affirming truths about the Son of God. It is the keystone of our Christian faith and has been tantamount to our belief system since Pentecost. Without the resurrection, there is no identity or meaning to Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:13-19). Jesus accomplished our redemption through His death on the cross. He made our justification sure by His resurrection from the dead. The resurrection is the cardinal doctrine and conviction of the evangelical church - the very citadel of our Bible-based, Christ-centered faith. All other doctrines derive from that. W.J. Sparrow-Simpson wrote, "If the resurrection is not historic fact, then the power of death remains unbroken, and with it the effect of sin."

B. Distinctions

Aside from the sects and cults, most of the major religions of the world are based on philosophical propositions. Four, however, are based on personalities: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. There are multiple, significant differences between each of these belief systems, one of which concerns the subjects of death and resurrection. Of these four, only Christianity claims an empty tomb for its founder, Jesus of Nazareth. Abraham (Judaism) died about 1900 B.C. and was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Mohammed (Islam) died in 632 A.D. at Medina where his tomb is visited annually by devout Muslims. The original accounts of Buddha (Buddhism) record that he died "with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind." Christianity alone stands on God Himself intervening in time and space with Jesus Christ's incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

B. Proof

The evidence is historically overwhelming that Christ came out of the tomb. The physical and spiritual impact of His life and ministry on the world

is phenomenal. For example: 1) the B.C./A.D. division of the millennial ages; 2) annual celebrations honoring His birth and resurrection (Christmas and Easter); 3) 2000-year history of giants of the faith giving their lives for His cause; 4) His post-resurrection appearances over forty days to more than 500 eye witnesses; 5) His complete fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and 6) dozens of historians, philosophers, theologians, and pastors explaining their proof-statements in Josh McDowell's book, Evidence That Demands a Verdict. All of these sources proclaim, without reservation, the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical fact of supernatural character. A thorough examination of the historical records proves beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ was, is, and forever will be the Son of God.

C. Josephus, Jewish Historian

The well-known Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote this at the end of the first century A.D., "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to Him many Jews, and also many Greeks. This man was the Christ. And when Pilate had condemned Him to the cross, upon His impeachment by the principal man among us, those who had loved from the first did not forsake Him, for He appeared to them alive on the third day, the divine prophets having spoken these and thousands of other things about Him. And even now, the race of Christians, so named from Him, has not died out."

Outline of John 20:1-31

- I. The First Day of the Week (20:1-10)
- II. Christ's First Appearance (20:11-18)
- III. Appearance to the Disciples (20:19-23)
- IV. Appearance to Thomas (20:24-29)
- V. Purpose of John's Gospel (20:30-31)

I. The First Day of the Week (20:1-10)

A. Mary Magdalene

John records that Mary Magdalene was the first person to go to Jesus' tomb on Sunday morning. The other Gospels noted that several women went with Mary Magdalene to anoint His body with spices (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-7). John probably spoke of Mary Magdalene and none of the other women because she had a more significant role in the resurrection story. She was the first to discover His empty tomb, to meet and talk with Jesus in His glorified, resurrected body outside the tomb and to report the miracle to the disciples. In addition, whenever she is listed in the Gospels with other women as followers of Christ, she is always at the head of the list. This seems to imply a sort of unofficial leadership position. What a glorious privilege and blessing for Mary Magdalene to be God's first messenger to the world that Christ had risen!

B. The Race to the Tomb

When Mary saw that the stone covering the entrance had been removed, she ran to tell Peter and John. They raced to the tomb. John outran Peter, but stopped at the entrance and peered in. He saw the burial linen, but did not go in. Perhaps he did not want to violate Jewish tradition or incur ritual defilement. However, impulsive Peter barged right in wanting to know what had happened to Jesus. John then went in. They both noted that the linen burial wrappings were lying flat as though the body had evaporated. The handkerchief around Jesus' head had been folded neatly and placed nearby.

C. John Believed

The glorious truth suddenly came into John's mind and he believed. The Lord had risen from the dead and left the tomb. John was probably the only disciple who believed in the resurrection before he saw the resurrected Christ. The disposition of the burial clothes in the empty tomb instantly made the truth clear to him. After this astonishing revelation, John and Peter apparently went to their own homes.

D. The Disciples' Expectations

John then explained that the resurrection had been unexpected by the disciples. They did not understand even though Jesus repeatedly had told them that He would rise again after three days. They had believed Jesus, but did not grasp His teaching or the Old Testament prophecies about His conquering death. They had expected Him to overturn all of Israel's difficulties and opposition and display His

divine power to the world. They wanted Him to free them from Roman domination and regenerate the Jewish nation to serve God. And now their expectations were down the tube. Jesus was dead and buried.

II. Christ's First Appearance (20:11-18)

A. Rabboni

After Mary Magdalene had run back to tell Peter and John about the empty tomb, she returned to grieve and be close to where Jesus' body had lain. The other women had departed. The two angels at the tomb asked her why she was crying. Then Jesus appeared, but Mary, thinking He was the gardener, did not recognize Him. The Good Shepherd spoke to her as one of His sheep, "*Mary!*" She knew her Shepherd's voice and responded with one word, "*Rabboni!*" meaning Teacher.

B. Spiritual Faith Without Sight

She reached out to Him, but Jesus told her not to hold on to Him. The implication is that He did not want her to cling to Him in the old relationship, on the physical plane, but to enter into a more permanent spiritual relationship of faith. He had not yet ascended to His Father and He wanted her to inform the disciples of His resurrection. All of His disciples and followers would have to adapt to this new situation in which they would no longer see Him and touch Him. Instead they would have to relate to Him by spiritual faith rather than physical sight and touch.

Application:

Mary's responsibility to go back and share the good news of a personal confrontation with the living Christ has meaningful significance for each of us. Jesus never meant for us to keep our belief and positive convictions about Him to ourselves. He wants us not to cling to Him selfishly or self-centeredly, but to reveal and share Him with others. The task that the Lord gave to Mary is still His unceasing command for every Christian. Are you watching for opportunities to share the "good news"?

C. Synoptic Accounts

John did not mention three other first appearances which are described in the Synoptic Gospels: 1) Jesus' appearance to the other women after He talked with Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:9-10); 2) Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the Emmaus road (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32) and 3) His appearance to Peter (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians

15:5). John also did not record the tomb guards reporting the empty tomb to the Jewish leaders (Matthew 28:11-15).

III. Appearance to the Disciples (20:19-23)

A. The Mourning Disciples

The evening of resurrection, the grieving disciples had gathered in a secure room because they feared the Sanhedrin authorities. Mary had told them that Jesus was alive, but they did not believe her (Mark 16:10-11). They probably were excitedly discussing Peter and John's report of the empty tomb and Mary's report that the risen Christ had talked with her. However, skepticism still reigned.

B. Can This Be Jesus?

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst. There was no knocking or opening of doors. Jesus' glorified, physical body had not only come out of the burial clothes and the sealed tomb, He had passed through the walls of this secluded room. His resurrected body had enabled Him to pass through impassable structures and to appear and disappear at will. Jesus showed Himself to the disciples in a risen physical body, the same body in which He had died, with even the scars of the wounds still visible. This was to show believers that they may have absolute certainty that He really conquered death in all its horrible aspects, including its disastrous effect on the physical body. Notably, Thomas was not with the disciples at this time.

C. Undeniable Proof

Luke 24:37 reported that the disciples were terrified, frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit. Jesus broke their stunning silence with His reassuring greeting, *"Peace be with you."* At first, the disciples were joyous but still doubtful. Luke 24:38-39 states, *"And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have'."* Then, Jesus asked for food (Luke 24:41-43). He ate a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. He showed them the nail scars in His hands and the spear scar in His side. This removed all doubts from their minds forever. Their fear turned to faith and they were joyous.

D. Jesus' Commission

Jesus then told them what their job would be from this time on. Their mission, like His mission, was to take the "good news" from God to all peoples,

make disciples of them and teach and train them to obey Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (Matthew 28: 18-20). Then, He told them again to be at peace in their inner souls because God would supply all the strength and resources they would need. He breathed on them and told them to receive the supernatural enabling power of the Holy Spirit to carry out their mission.

E. The Holy Spirit

Jesus' act of breathing on them is considered by many scholars to be symbolic of the entering of the Holy Spirit to indwell them, which was later fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 1:8). His breathing on them did not complete this action. When the Holy Spirit did come upon them, they would have the power to carry out their commission. Christ's breathing on them was preparation for them to choose to receive the Holy Spirit.

F. Authority to Forgive Sins

Christ's commission to the disciples carried with it the authority of the Holy Spirit and the revelation of Holy Scripture. He told them that, as true believers, they have the authority to declare forgiveness to any person genuinely confessing and repenting of his or her sin. On the other hand, when a person chooses not to believe in the deity of Christ and His death for their sin, then the disciples have the authority to tell that person that his or her sins are retained, and the wages of sin is death. The point is that God, as the final authority, and the only one who can forgive sin, has trusted all true disciples to boldly act in His name and by His authority.

IV. Appearance to Thomas (20:24-29)

A. Thomas' Skeptical Demeanor

Thomas was a devoted, courageous disciple, but slightly pessimistic and stubborn. He was not with the disciples when Jesus came to their secluded room on that first Sunday evening because he did not believe what Peter and Mary Magdalene had said. Thomas was determined not to be deluded. So, when they told him later that Jesus had been in their midst, eating with them and showing them his crucifixion scars, he flatly persisted in his unbelief. In effect, he was telling them that he was going to retain his sensibilities even while they were letting their imaginations run wild.

Application:

Like Peter, Thomas' obstinacy and pride were destined to be followed by a humiliating fall. His self-

confident flesh was about to be jolted by a profound awareness of the frailty of his own fallen humanity (Proverbs 16:18). Do you keep this Scripture close to your mind when pride takes over and says, “You are right and they are wrong?” God wants us to use discriminating judgment and discuss our disagreements humbly, graciously and seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6).

B. Jesus’ Loving Response

Eight days went by and Thomas was with the disciples in the closed room. Suddenly and quietly, there was Jesus again standing in their midst. He said, “*Peace to you!*” and singled out Thomas, the only disciple who had demanded scientific observation and a personal demonstration from the Lord. Jesus said to him, “*Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.*”

C. Thomas’ Profound Declaration

Thomas was overwhelmed by Christ’s appearance and by His repeating the exact words that Thomas had said in Christ’s absence. His attitude of stubborn obstinacy changed instantaneously to obedient, adoring faith. He didn’t need to touch Jesus’ wounds because he could see that Jesus was alive and well. Thomas was so deeply impacted that he uttered one of the most profound declarations of saving faith in the New Testament. The light of the glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ so overpowered him that he boldly proclaimed the deity of Jesus in words that had never been expressed by any of the disciples, “*My Lord and my God!*”

D. The Opportunity of Believing

Then, Jesus brought all of mankind into the arena of opportunity of believing by stating a decisive and determinative truth. Thomas believed because he saw the resurrected Christ in person. However, an even higher blessing is in store for those whose trust, commitment and responsiveness to truth causes them to believe without seeing. Jesus is referring to everyone who will become a believer as a result of hearing the gospel from these original eye-witnesses of His victory over sin, sorrow, doubt and death.

V. Purpose of John’s Gospel (20:30-31)

A. Now and Forever

John closes this chapter with an explanation of the purpose for which God inspired him to write this outstanding historical record. Jesus had performed

many sign miracles during His ministry, but John could not include them all. So, he selected those which associated most closely with his purpose for writing. His purpose was to provide solid, foundational evidence upon which to base one’s faith in Jesus Christ, and to encourage believers to grow and mature in Him as loving, obedient disciples of Christ’s Kingdom.

B. Evangelism and Discipleship

Clearly, the Gospel of John was written with both unbelievers and believers in mind. John wanted to bring unbelievers to a saving faith in Jesus Christ (the result of evangelism), and to teach and train believers to possess and experience the life of God here and now (the result of discipleship). John used all of the natural abilities and spiritual gifts that God gave him to convince his readers that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God who lived on this earth and now provides life for those who accept it and follow Him.

Application:

In Lesson 1, there were heart questions asking, 1) if you had ever read the written record of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and 2) if you could share a brief testimony of your faith in Jesus Christ. How do you answer these two questions now that you have studied Chapters 19 and 20?