

The Gospel of John

Believe and Live!

Lesson 21

John 20:1–31

Our Living Hope

Fifty years had passed from the time of the events happening in John 19–20 and John writing them down, but the account is as fresh and dramatic as today’s breaking news. We must be careful not to scan the details too quickly because the outcome of that first Easter morning has changed the course of history and forever altered the eternal destiny of countless lives!

At a glance ~ **Read John 20:1–31.**

According to the other gospel accounts, there were several women who arrived at the tomb before daybreak. John, however, chooses to focus his attention on just one woman—Mary Magdalene. In your initial reading of chapter 20, see if you can pinpoint why John highlights her. Record your thoughts below.

1. What does Mary find upon reaching the tomb? vv. 1–2

Disturbed by her discovery, Mary leaves the other women and runs to tell Peter and John (referred to as the “other disciple”) that the tomb was robbed of the Lord’s body.

2. Upon hearing Mary’s news, what do Peter and John do? vv. 3–4
 - a. John arrived first; what does he do when he gets there? v. 5
 - b. What does Peter do when he arrives? What does he observe? vv. 6–7

When Mary saw the empty tomb she was troubled. John looked and saw the linen cloths lying there but did not go in. Peter saw the linen cloths and the handkerchief that had been around the Lord's head; but the word used for saw (v. 6) actually means to take notice or scrutinize closely.

3. What happened to John once he entered the tomb? v. 8

John went in and he saw and believed. In this case the word *saw* means to *perceive with understanding*. He believed, but exactly what did he believe? As an interesting postscript, he adds the words of verses 9–10: *“For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.”* John believed that Jesus was indeed alive but he did not know how or what would come next and neither did the others. Remember, the disciples had just the Old Testament scriptures on which to base their limited understanding.

- a. What might John have had in mind from Isaiah 53:10–12?

- b. What does Psalm 16:10 say that would have been familiar to him?

- c. The disciples had only the Old Testament; but today we have the whole counsel of God. What words did Peter leave us regarding the basis for our belief?
See 1 Peter 1:12–25.

Take a closer look ~ 1 Peter 1:3

(Memorize and meditate on the memory verse each time you open your lesson.)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Read this week's verse in the context of the bigger picture in Romans 5:1–5. What do you learn about the value of your salvation?

In focus ~ (Key words) **Resurrection**

Using the resources you have on hand (Bible translations, dictionary, concordance), look up the word and write a definition.

Resurrection: _____

What does Romans 5:1–5 reveal to you about the living hope that is yours through the resurrection of Christ?

The Risen Lord

Outlook ~ **Read John 20:11–18.**

The disciples returned to their own homes but Mary remained at the tomb, inconsolable with grief. Just a moment earlier when Peter had searched the tomb, it was empty. Now, bending in to look for herself, Mary sees two angels in white, one at the head and one at the foot where Jesus had lain (vv. 11–12).

1. When asked, why does Mary say she is weeping? v. 13

2. Who comes up behind her to speak to her? Who does she mistake Him to be? vv. 14–16
 - a. What does He ask her?

 - b. When does she recognize Him?

In verse 17, Jesus tells Mary not to cling to Him because a new relationship exists between them. Very soon He would ascend to the Father, but His followers would be united by the Holy Spirit who would remain in them and with them forever. Notice that Jesus no longer refers to them as His “disciples” but His “brethren,” or brothers. Mary then becomes the first witness to testify that she saw the Lord and spoke with Him (v.18).

Selah ~

Twice Mary is asked why she is weeping, once by the angels in the tomb and again by Jesus. Mary shouldn't be weeping but rejoicing—it is Easter morning! But in her grief, she does not realize what has just taken place. Would *you* have recognized Jesus at this moment? Have you ever been grieving when you should have been rejoicing? You may weep now, but there will one day be no more tears in heaven—no sorrow, only joy! What does God promise you in the not-too-distant future? Write out the words of Revelation 21:4. Listen to Him speak these words to your heart today.

Seeing and Believing

Outlook ~ **Read John 20:19–31.**

Earlier in the Upper Room (John 14), Jesus promised His bewildered disciples that He would come to them and they would see Him; He would manifest Himself to them. Now He will fulfill that promise by replacing their grief with joy, their fear with His presence.

1. On the evening of the same day as the Resurrection, the disciples are locked behind closed door for fear of the Jews. When Jesus appears to them what does He say? v. 19
 - a. How does He identify Himself? v. 20
 - b. Once they knew it was Jesus, how did they feel?

It is difficult for us to grasp the significance of this moment for these men. He had risen up from the grave, His body still bearing the marks of the crucifixion. His last instructional words to His disciples before His death were words of peace (16:33); and now the first words following His resurrection from the dead are also of peace.

2. As Jesus says to them the second time, *peace to you*, He also gives them their mission. What does He say? vv. 21–23

- a. What does He do next to prepare them for their mission?

The Holy Spirit earlier came upon Jesus in the likeness of a dove to mark the beginning of His ministry. In much the same way, Jesus breathed the Spirit into His disciples to mark the beginning of their ministry. The full manifestation of the Holy Spirit would take place shortly on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) but for now, as Jesus was sent to restore lost and broken lives, so too He sends His followers out as His ambassadors.

Theologians have long debated the meaning of Jesus' words in verse 23: *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* To help us understand, we refer back to two earlier occasions when Jesus told His disciples that they had authority to bind or loose on earth and it would be done in heaven (see Matthew 16:19 and 18:18). Here in John 20, Jesus commissions the disciples to proclaim the gospel of forgiveness. They did not have the authority to forgive sin—only God can do that—but when they led others to saving faith in Christ, the sins of that person were forgiven in heaven.

John now turns his attention to Thomas, the man in scripture who has unfairly gained the reputation for being known as "doubting Thomas" because he was reluctant to believe until he could see for himself. Up to this point in time the disciples were telling Thomas they had seen the Lord, but Thomas must have grown weary of hearing it repeatedly. He was frustrated over the recent events to the point of separating himself from the others.

3. When the other disciples told Thomas, *"We have seen the Lord,"* how did he reply? vv. 24–25

As He had done a week earlier, behind locked doors Jesus appears to the disciples greeting them the same way. But this time He turns to Thomas and shows him the evidence he needs to see for himself: *"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"* (v. 27).

- a. This time how does Thomas answer? v. 28

Jesus does not reprove Thomas for doubting, He merely tells him to stop doubting and believe. Thomas then willingly moves from being a skeptic to a worshiper! Jesus follows by making a statement about the millions of others who do not have the opportunity to "see for themselves" what Thomas saw and yet they have believed.

- b. What does Jesus declare about them? v. 29

Selah ~

What lesson can you take away from Thomas' example that will help you to overcome negative thinking and being a skeptic when you should believe what God says? Please share your thoughts.

John states clearly in verses 30–31 that Jesus did many miracles in the presence of His disciples which are not recorded in this gospel. In fact, John only records ten, but he was not concerned about numbers; rather, he carefully chose the words and miracles of Jesus that would induce faith in the reader. His ultimate desire is that others would come to faith through the reading of this book and countless individuals have over the centuries since it was written.

- ❖ Personal: Is there one miracle or word of Jesus recorded in John's gospel that has helped you grow in your faith this year?

More like Jesus ~

Are *you* becoming more like Jesus? Absolutely! Every time you open the Word and spend time getting to know Him more intimately, you partake in the life-long process of drawing near—going deeper—bearing fruit—becoming more like Him. As you close your lesson today, determine to put into practice what you've learned by noting it below.

- Recite your memory verse _____

- Reflect on a lesson you received _____

- Respond with prayer and praise to God _____

Notes