

Seeing and Believing
John 20
September 13th, 2026

1. Peter and John saw the _____ and believed. (20:1-10)
2. Mary saw the resurrected _____ and believed. (20:11-18)
3. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the _____. (20:19-23)
4. Thomas moved from doubt to belief when he saw the _____. (20:24-29)
5. These words are written so that _____ may believe. (20:30-31)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 20

1. Jesus' resurrection takes place "on the first day of the week" (20:1). Thus the early Christians set aside Sunday as the day for gathering and worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). What does this say about how Christians are to view their work week?
2. Why do you think Mary didn't immediately assume Jesus was resurrected when she saw the empty tomb? (John 20:1-2; 11-15)
3. In several post-resurrection appearances, people don't immediately recognize Jesus (John 20:14; Luke 24:15-16, 31-32; John 21:4). Why do you think that is?
4. How can the scars on Jesus' body comfort a suffering person?
5. What portrait of Thomas is painted from the limited scenes we have from his life? (John 11:16; 14:1-6; 20:24-29)
6. How can a person struggling with doubts be comforted and challenged by the story of Thomas?

Note: Some questions adapted from *Knowing the Bible: John and The Characters of Easter* by Daniel Darling

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Big idea: Doubt turns to belief when people realize that Jesus rose from the dead.

Intro

Timothy Keller, “If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.”

Not a blanket endorsement of Keller, but I appreciate the crispness of this quote, laying bare our only two options.

Jesus claimed He would rise from the dead.

Matthew 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

The gospels describe His resurrection as fact.

The apostles base the validity of their message on the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 2:32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

1 Corinthians 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

“Did Jesus really rise from the dead?” Is a critical question.

If the answer is no, what are we doing here?

The songs we sing, the messages we give, the traditions of baptism and communion – those are all just sentimental things that make us feel better and maybe motivate us to be good people.

Religion makes a lame hobby if it isn't true.

If the answer is yes, then what we believe is really real.

Not just your life, but your eternity depends on what you do with Jesus.

The resurrection is the Father's “amen” to the Son's “It is finished.”

The cross is Jesus signing His name on the check to pay for your debt. The resurrection is that check clearing the bank.

He is reliable. God's Word is reliable.

John 20 is full of accounts of people who see and believe. Jesus affirms that and then says, blessed are those who did not see and yet believe.

1. Peter and John saw the **empty tomb** and believed. (20:1-10)
 - a. Mary arrived first and then went back and told Peter and John.
 - i. The narrative returns to Mary in v. 11, so we'll pick back up with her then.
 - b. It's the first day of the week, Sunday.
 - i. This is why since the early days of Christianity, Christians have gathered on the first day of the week, Sunday. This day begins your week, it doesn't end your week. How appropriate that we start each week with fresh worship, renewing our minds with truth.

- c. Mary's reaction when she saw the empty tomb was not, "Hallelujah, He is risen!" but "someone must have stolen His body."
 - i. Her assumption was not "resurrection" but foul play – someone has taken the body of Jesus!
 - ii. Carson – the robbing of graves was a crime sufficiently common that the Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) eventually ordered capital punishment to be meted out to those convicted of destroying tombs, removing bodies, or even displacing the sealing stones.
- d. Peter and John ran but John was faster and got their first. (4-5)
 - i. That appears to be a quick brag imbedded in scripture, since John was the one who wrote it.
 - ii. But it is intended to show the different responses – John got their first, looked, but didn't go in. It was Peter who went in first.
 - iii. The linen wrapping lying there are a contrast to the resurrection of Lazarus.
 - 1. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but he came out of the grave covered in the wrappings (John 11:44).
 - 2. Something is different with Jesus. The grave clothes are lying there, but He is not. Emphasized in both what John saw and Peter saw.
- e. John entered, saw, and believed (v. 8)
 - i. John connects the dots. Mary saw the same evidence and said, "someone took Him!" John saw it and believed.
 - ii. Peter maybe is contrasted with John
 - 1. **Luke 24:12** But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.
- 2. Mary saw the resurrected **Jesus** and believed. (20:11-18)
 - a. What do we know about Mary Magdalene? Not a lot.
 - i. Magdalene comes from Magdala, a city on the sea of Galilee.
 - 1. Like "Mary Pocatellan" if she was from Pocatello.
 - ii. But we know she had "demons" and they had gone out from her, meaning Jesus had cast them out as He had so many other times.
 - 1. **Luke 8:1b-2** The twelve were with Him, ² and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,
 - iii. There is a tradition of identifying her as the sinful woman in Luke 7 who, in a similar though different act as we saw in John 12 last week, pours oil on his feet and washes his feet. But the text doesn't identify her there and it would seem unusual for Luke to bring her up in the next chapter without saying it was the same woman. So, it's possible but unlikely the same woman.
 - iv. Accounts we see in the NT of someone affected by the demonic are awful.
 - 1. Matthew 8:28ff – two men demon possessed and extremely violent, coming out of the tombs, when the townspeople heard what happened to the demoniacs, they asked Jesus to leave

2. Matt 17:15ff – father asked Jesus to have mercy on his son, lunatic, very ill, casts him into the fire, Jesus cast the demon out
3. Luke 8:26ff – man possessed, unclothed, living in the tombs, shackled by would break chains, would be driven by the demons into the desert
- v. Also used as an accusation of someone with unusual behavior or teaching things they didn't like.
 1. Matthew 11:18 – John the Baptist accused of having a demon, likely because of his unusual behavior
- vi. And Jesus rescued her. Delivered her from the demonic forces and the oppression and from the stigma of the people that we see in most other cases in the NT.
 1. Jesus had power over the spiritual forces.
 - a. **Colossians 1:13-14** For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
 2. So she followed Him, learned from Him, along with many other men and women.
 3. She had likely been with him most of the past two or three years. She had heard His wise, gentle, authoritative teaching. She may not have been the sinful woman of Luke 7, but she may have been there. She may have been there when He fed hungry people, when He rebuked the proud religious leaders, and when He welcomed little children.
- b. Is it any wonder that she was at His tomb, weeping?
 - i. The word means sobbing, wailing.
 - ii. Hughes - This was the traditional Eastern death wail, and it came from the depths of her broken heart.
 1. Some friends in our body from eastern Europe described how funerals in their home countries would often involve professional weepers whose job is to wail at funerals, and then when it's done, the waterworks turn off. I thought they must really have to hydrate.
 2. Mary isn't a professional weeper. And she isn't gullible. If anything, she might be a bit skeptical.
 3. Jesus has told His followers that He would go to Jerusalem, be killed, and on the third day rise again. Here it is the third day and she sees the empty tomb and doesn't think, "He arose!" She thinks, "someone took His body."
- c. When she saw Jesus, she didn't recognize Him at first.
 - i. True of several other post-resurrection appearances also.
 1. On the road to Emmaus in Luke 24
 - a. **Luke 24:15-16, 31** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and *began* traveling with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. ... ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.
 2. Disciples in the boat
 - a. **John 21:4** But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.
 - ii. Jesus asked the same question as the angels, "why are you weeping?"

- iii. She recognized him when he called her name and she replied with a title of honor and reverence – *Rabboni*.
- d. Stop clinging to me, I have not yet ascended.
 - i. Carson – summarized – stop holding on to me because I have not yet ascended so you don't have to hang on to me as if I were about to disappear permanently. This is a time for joy and sharing the good news, not for clutching me as if I were some jealously guarded private dream come true.
- e. She is given a message to communicate loaded with family language and unity with Christ.
 - i. His Father is now their Father as well
 - ii. His God is their God
- 3. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the **Lord**. (20:19-23)
 - a. On the same day, later on the Sunday, the disciples were gathered, locked in a room, afraid of the Jewish officials who had already killed Jesus and they worried might be coming for them next.
 - i. The locked doors were there to emphasize the miraculous nature of Jesus' appearance to them. He came and stood in their midst, but not reference to them opening the doors or unlocking.
 - b. He showed them evidence that it was really Him.
 - i. What was the evidence? Was it an inside joke with Andrew that only He knew? Was it a secret handshake?
 - ii. The evidence was the scars. Even in His resurrected state, He kept the scars.
 - iii. It's been said that Jesus' wounds are his credentials to the suffering race of human beings.
 - iv. Edward Shillito, a Free Church pastor in England during WWI wrote a poem called, *Jesus of the Scars*, in response to the savagery of WWI.

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.
 - c. The Spirit they received was likely a precursor to the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost.
 - d. The gospel they are sent with is the source of forgiveness.
 - i. They can assure those who repent and believe in Jesus that their sins are forgiven.
 - ii. They can warn those who reject the gospel that their sins remain.

- iii. That doesn't place them in the position of judge, nor us, but rather in the position of a herald with a message.
- 4. Thomas moved from doubt to belief when he saw the **scars**. (20:24-29)
 - a. But when the disciples told him what happened, that Jesus rose and appeared to them, he didn't believe them. He wanted proof. He wanted to see and touch and verify.
 - i. It was 8 days later when Jesus appeared to them again.
 - ii. Eight days! Thomas was left thinking about this for 8 days. Imagine what the difference was like between him and the other disciples. They had seen Jesus, he had not. But he was still with the disciples, so perhaps his heart had softened and his disbelief was being replaced by hope.
 - b. When Jesus appeared, He spoke peace upon them and then invited Thomas to do just what He said He wanted to do.
 - i. Jesus matched each of the specifics of his request, even though he wasn't there when Thomas spoke those words.
 - ii. You can see the kindness of Christ – He doesn't rebuke or yell at Thomas. He invites Him to feel His wounds and believe.
 - iii. **Jude 1:22** And have mercy on some, who are doubting
 - 1. Jesus models this with His mercy.
 - 2. He also doesn't say, "I can see why you would have a hard time believing. Sorry about that."
 - iv. Thomas responds in belief, "My Lord and my God!"
 - 1. Kent Hughes - Thomas may have been slow to believe, but he was not slow to grasp the implications of Christ's resurrection. Jesus was not only his Lord but his God. The evidence was palpable, substantive, and clear. Thomas's faith rested on solid rock.
 - 2. The Jesus before him was not a failed political messiah. He was Lord and God. Not just "a" Lord but "my Lord."
 - c. Jesus doesn't chastise His belief from the evidence of seeing, but He does commend a posture of those who don't see Him and yet believe.
 - i. Who is that?
 - ii. How many of you did not see and yet believed? All of you who have come to faith in the resurrected Jesus! None of us were there. All of us have access to the evidence in the Word. We believe as the Spirit opens our eyes.
 - 1. *Raise your hand if you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, even though you didn't see it yourself*
 - d. Dan Darling: There is a bit of Thomas in all of us, walls of hurt and pain that fuel our doubts and fears. But Jesus turns to us with His scars, the wounds on His body that was beaten for us and says to us, "Peace be with you." In a sense, this is what we do every time we gather together for the Lord's Supper. This is what we are doing this Good Friday. We are pulling each other from despondency and despair back to the body and blood of Christ. We are reminded anew of His love for us.
 - e. Church history records that Thomas traveled as far as the east coast of India, sharing the gospel and planting churches until he was killed by a spear in modern day Chennai, India.
- 5. These words are written so that **you** may believe. (20:30-31)

- a. John is clear about the purpose statement.
 - i. Breaking the fourth wall – not “so that people might believe” but it’s like he looks at the reader and says, “so that you might believe.”
- b. Another school year means another batch of students are exposed to the joys of writing essays.
 - i. What they learn is, you need to be clear with your topic sentence. What are you arguing for? What’s your point?
 - ii. John would pass English 101.
- c. So that you might believe that Jesus is
 - i. The Christ – the long promised Messiah
 - ii. The Son of God – Not just a man
- d. And that by believing you might have life in His name.

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The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

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