

John 20

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[0 : 00] John 20. It's on page 906 if you've got a church Bible. And I want us to begin at the end.

And I want you to look at verse 31. Because John tells you in verse 31 why he's written this gospel. And why he's written this chapter that we're going to look at this morning. So let me read it to you. Jesus did many other signs, miracles, in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

These are written, these particular things that I've written about John says, these particular miracles, these particular signs, this particular account of the resurrection is written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the King, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you might have life in his name.

John says, I put pen to paper to give you belief about Jesus and life in Jesus. In other words, the miraculous signs and certainly the resurrection show you who Jesus is.

[1 : 27] They show you he is the Messiah, that he is God's King. And as you see that, John says, as you grasp that, it floods your heart with wonder and love and awe and worship.

As you see that happen, you have life. So if this morning, as we gather to worship made up of family and friends, all the people that make up our church family week by week, if you believe that Jesus Christ is God's King, you have life. If you don't believe that, well according to John, you are physically alive, your heart is beating, your pulse is operating, your pulse is operating, but you are dead. And it's something so easy that we miss, I think, when we come to this chapter.

This word life here at the end of verse 31. A chapter which is about one man coming back from the dead, but John says, he came back from the dead, because without him, everyone else is dead. He came back to life to give us life, because without it, we are dead.

We know what this is like. So you have a father and a son, and they have a terrible falling out. And eventually the father says to the son, from this day on, you are dead to me.

And although the son, he keeps on living and he keeps on breathing, as long as that door is closed, as long as that relationship, it is over. He is dead.

[3 : 10] Without Jesus, you are the son in that scenario. Without Jesus, that is me. Dead in my sins and my guilt and my shame.

And the gates of God's kingdom are firmly closed to me. So John says to you this morning, do you want to come in? Do you want to be granted privileged access, right into the king's palace, into heaven itself?

Do you want to sit at the father's table? Do you want to have life? Well, let me show you who Jesus is. So that you will believe in him. But more than that, so that as you believe, you cross over from death to life.

As you believe, the doors of the palace swing open and you enter in. And as you believe, the father pulls up a chair at his table and says, welcome. So I want to see four life-giving ways in which John shows you who Jesus is.

First of all, there is no body in the tomb. There is no body in the tomb. And so Jesus brings the dawn of a new world. And this is the great sticking point, isn't it?

[4 : 17] For many, many people this Easter. The claim that on Easter morning, the tomb was empty. For this same Jesus who died, rose bodily from the grave.

Now, if it is hard for us to believe that this morning, I want to say to you, it was no less hard for the people in the ancient world. So notice with me, that John has written his narrative to stress the factual, historical reliability of what we read.

Whether we believe it or not, John wants you to see this morning that he believed it. For all sorts of reasons. So look, the first witnesses are the women. The women.

The gender who you would choose in the first century if you were going to make up an incredible story that you wanted to be passed off as the truth.

No, you wouldn't. They weren't even allowed to testify in court. Look at the details. The timing. It was early and it was dark. Look at the race.

[5 : 18] The race between two disciples outrunning the other. And especially notice the grave clothes. John sees strips of linen lying there but won't go in.

But Peter does go in. And it's not just the clothes that wrap the body, but lying separately, the cloth that wrap the head. He takes the time to tell us that.

That it was folded up by itself, separate from the other linen. Now why? Why tell us that? Well, because he says that is just what I saw. That's what I saw.

I am telling you the precise details so that you will know I was there. No grave robber would take the time to unwrap the body. Certainly would not take the time to separate the head and the body clothes and leave them to one side.

No grave robber would do that. No, you see, John has stressed all the way through his gospel that they were eyewitnesses. He was an eyewitness. He saw what he is telling us with his very own eyes so that we can believe him.

[6 : 24] And it's the same here. The empty tomb is not empty thinking. It is not grief stricken imaginings. It is real. The body was gone.

And that's what John saw. But look at verse 8. John saw and believed. He believed that Jesus was alive again.

And that is the whole point of the chapter. John is not out to give you hard, cold facts. It's logical, loyal, loyal-like evidence that the tomb was empty.

John writes, To say to you and to me, everything changed that morning. Everything he'd ever thought about who Jesus was. Everything he'd ever thought about life and about death was turned completely on its head.

As light dawned into his heart. Death is not what I thought it was, John is saying. It is not the end. You see, if you were a Jew in the first century, you were waiting for God to act in history.

[7 : 30] To free you. To save you. To kick out the Romans who were waiting for the king. Who would bring in a whole new creation. That's what you were waiting for.

You were waiting for the king who would make everything sad in the world come and true. You were waiting for the king who would rewind death itself. Who would raise people from the dead and raise them to life.

Restore them to life. With God in a world made new. And that is what you were hoping for. That was your hope. The greatest longing. And as John looks and sees, so he begins to really see.

He believes. As he realises, the world for which they have all been waiting and wanting has suddenly arrived. You remember the awful story of Joseph Fritzl?

Does that name ring a bell? Joseph Fritzl in Austria. He was a chap who imprisoned his daughter under his house in a sala. In 1984. He fathered children by her.

[8 : 36] Some of whom died. Some of whom he brought up from under the sala. But three of those children lived in that sala. Without ever seeing daylight.

Can you imagine it? All they knew was the narrow corridors and the low ceilings of their sala world. That's all they knew. That was it. As far as they were concerned.

That was life. This is how everyone lives. There's a sense in which that's true, isn't there?

Darkness. Swallow. That is the world. Can you imagine what it was like for those children as they were freed?

As Fritzl was captured and arrested. Now, there would be, wouldn't there, for those three children, all sorts of problems readjusting into this world. But if that process was handled well, and handled carefully, just think about that for a moment.

Think of a child discovering for the first time the beach. And oceans. And waves.

[9 : 45] And sand that exists. Imagine a child realizing that they were real. They were really real. You could feel the sand.

And the water. Imagine a child discovering there was coke. And ice cream. And hamburgers. And cars.

And toys. And dolls. And sky. And grass. And sunshine. And rainbows.
And swings. Think of the best things that would ever thrill a child's heart. And imagine there now being a new world which dawned into their heart. That's what happened that day.
For Mary. For John. And for Peter. Not that the Jesus that they loved was alive. But the way that they viewed the world changed. The confines of their lives have been shattered forever.

[10:52] We are born. We grow. We live. We work. We grow old. We die. Some in happiness. Some in prosperity. Others in hardship. Others in poverty. And we think this is it.

Three score years in turn if you're lucky. And then the end. You see we live in the cellar. Our vision blinkered. Our growth stunted. Unless we can see that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead holds out to us a cast iron guarantee that the new creation is coming.

It is coming. It is coming. It is coming. How do we know that the new creation is coming? How do we know? How do we know that one day the dead will be raised?

That the bodies placed in the furnace or in the grave will rise to stand before Almighty God? How do we know that one day all suffering will end?

How do we know that all tears will be wiped away by God's tender hand? How do we know? How can I possibly believe that this morning? When it hurts so much in the here and now?

[12:01] Do you know that if this morning you are a skeptic looking on in the Christian faith. Wondering if this is true. Can I say to you that you should want with all your heart for the resurrection to be true.

You should want it. The resurrection of Jesus is God's promise of a new world given in advance while we still live in the old one.

The resurrection is God's promise of a new world given in advance while we still live in the old one. We know don't we what it's like when we see the first daffodils in the springtime.

You don't see so many in London as where I grew up. But when you see the first daffodils. It doesn't matter does it if there are wintry days still ahead.

And the wind is lashing. The rain is lashing down and the wind is blowing. We've seen the daffodils. There's no going back. Summer is coming. And so it is with death.

[13:06] Death is still with us very very painful isn't it. But Christ's resurrection stands in history as the evidence that death's stranglehold is broken. A new world is coming.

Well second look at how John shows us there should be no tears in the garden. No body in the tomb. And now no tears in the garden because a new relationship is possible.

The whole passage as Emma and I read it. I don't know whether you saw it. It pulses with emotion and with energy. We've had Mary and the disciples running here and there. Breathless with confusion and excitement.

And in verse 10 we are invited to witness Mary's grief. Notice she is not just crying here because she thinks Jesus is simply dead. No Mary is crying because her grief has been violated.

Interrupted. The body is missing. And isn't that exactly what happens? There's no closure when there's no body. I've got a very good friend whose father disappeared last September.

[14:15] And has not been found. And there are no signs of his body being found. I spoke to him this week. And he said it's just that there's no closure. He said it's just that we just have no idea what has happened.

And so it's the same with Mary. Her trauma is intense. Because of that. Don't you think that it's strange. That first the angels. And then Jesus asks her. Why are you crying?

Isn't that a strange question? You don't need to be sure you're not countless, do you? To work out why somebody's crying in a cemetery. Do you? You see somebody crying in a cemetery.

You don't close it. Oh, what's wrong? Is it obvious? Notice the subtleties of John's narrative. This is a gentle rebuke to Mary.

You can see it Mary. So like John. Can't you see it and believe? Mary, there's no place for tears in this garden.

[15:14] And she turns to see Jesus. No doubt her sight is blurred with tears, isn't it? And he gently pushes her level of understanding. Who is it you're looking for?

Yes, sir. There is no place for tears, Mary. Don't you see who I am? And he says her name, Mary. She sees and believes and anguish and despair are swallowed up in astonishment and delight.

And in what Jesus says next in verse 17, he shows us that not only are Mary's tears unnecessary, but so are ours if we grasp who he is. Isn't that another strange thing to say?

In verse 17. Do not cling to me. Do not cling to me. For I have not yet ascended to my father. What Jesus is saying to Mary is he's not yet in his ascended state.

He hasn't yet left the earth. So Mary doesn't need to cling to him as if he's about to disappear at any moment. But she must go and tell the disciples that Jesus is en route to his father.

[16:24] What's happening is this. Mary is weeping in the garden looking for the teacher. That is what she calls him in verse 16. The teacher. But the Jesus that she now finds.

The Jesus that she clings to. Is now returning to his rightful place on the throne of the universe. You see we like to think of Jesus don't we as a baby in a manger.

Or as a wandering teacher. Or as a man who wandered on a Roman cross. Actually he's the king who rules the world. The resurrection means that Jesus sits at God's right hand.

But instead of that meaning that Jesus is distant from you this morning. And he's distant from us in all our ways. We think of that don't we. A king is normally so distant.

A king is not interested in us. He is too powerful for us. Do you see what Jesus says to Mary? He says doesn't he. Look at verse 17.

[17:27] I am ascending to my father. And your father. To my God. And your God. In other words Mary.

My death was not a failure. It was a success. I came. And I did what I was supposed to do. I have restored my followers. To the relationship with God.

That they were created to enjoy. Now when I go home to Swansea. And to my parents. I have a key. If only I could find it. I can turn up unannounced.

I can unlock the door. And I can go right in. To wherever my parents are. If they're at the back of the house. And find them. If you visit. As nice as you are.

And as nice as my parents are. You would ring the bell. And you would wait outside. And you would wait. To be welcomed in. Because you are not their child.

[18:29] Sonship gives me rights. And it gives me privileges. Which include me in their family. And Jesus says. Mary what I've done. Now grants you. The key.

It grants you privileged access. To the father. You are now adopted. You belong now and forever. You belong now in my family. I'm going to my father. And your father.

To my God. And your God. There are all sorts of reasons. This morning aren't there. Why we tend to stand far off. From God. I don't believe he's real.

It seems made up to me. I'm not good enough. He'd never ever be interested. In someone like me. Whatever the reason. For your distance this morning. The resurrection is like a rescuer.

Who breaks into the cellar. Where the child lives. In darkness and squalor. All alone. And the rescuer says to them. There is a palace. There is a table.

[19:26] That you can sit at. There's a palace. Which is more beautiful. Than you can ever imagine. There is a king more loving. Than you could ever possibly. Understand. And he sent me to get you.

And he is preparing a banquet. Of food and drink. The likes of which. You've never seen. And there's a place. At the table. For you. There's a place. At the table. For you.

Isn't that what Jesus is saying? Everything that is mine. By right. As the true son. By nature. I am sharing. With you.

Sons. And daughters. By. Adoption. So no tears. Come. A relationship. Is possible.

Thirdly. When Jesus appears. To his disciples. And he gives them a new commission. He says there's no need for guilt. There's no need for guilt.

[20:27] To repress the human heart. Three times. From verse 19. Can you see it? Jesus tells the disciples. Peace. Be with you. Peace.

Be with you. It's pretty much a standard greeting. In the ancient world. But by repeating it. Three times. Doesn't John. Want you to see. That it is pregnant. With meaning.

Peace. Be with you. In verse 20. When he said this. He showed them his hands. And his disciples. The sides. Side.

And then the disciples. Were glad. When they saw the Lord. And Jesus said to them again. Peace. Be with you. Earlier on in John's gospel. Jesus has said.

Whoever believes. John has told us. That whoever believes in Jesus. Has eternal life. But whoever rejects him. Will not see life. For God's wrath.

[21 : 23] Remains on him. So how does somebody this morning. Move from being under God's wrath. And anger. To being under God's mercy.

And grace. How does somebody. Move from. Wrath and anger. To mercy. And what is John saying. Jesus showed them his hands. And his side. It's as if Jesus.

Is standing there. Saying look. Just as I said. On the cross. It is finished. Now that I am alive. And you see me.

And you believe. That you are reconciled. To God. And he breathes on them. And he gives them his spirit. And he commissions them. To go into the world. With a message. That they have just believed. That is the best way.

To understand verse 23. This verse. Does not refer to some priest. Going around today. Simply pronouncing to one person. Oh you are forgiven. And saying to another.

[22 : 18] You are not forgiven. That is how some Christian traditions. Have understood the verse. But there is no record. In the New Testament. Of that ever being done. Of a Christian leader. Simply announcing.

Forgiving us like that. No. What he refers to. Is simply the result. Of the preaching of the gospel. The message of the gospel. Which either. Brings us to repent. And believe.

Or Jesus death. Leaves us cold. And unresponsive. So if this morning. You see who Jesus is. And you cast yourself. On him. Then I am entitled.

To tell you. Your sins are forgiven. And if the person. Sitting next to you. Believes in Jesus. And trusts in him. You are entitled.

To say to that person. Your sins are forgiven. If the person. Sitting beside you. Over tea and coffee. Says I don't buy into this. Jesus stuff. It's not for me.

[23 : 13] You are entitled. To say to them. Your sins are not forgiven. And you know. Things don't get much simpler. Than that. Do they? As Jesus sent. These first disciples.

Into the world. With a message. That whoever you are. Whatever you've done. Whatever you're. Wherever you're from. You can have.

A fresh start. You can know. Full forgiveness. You can know. Free forgiveness. Because the God. You've rebelled against. And ignored. The God.

You've been at war with. Has made peace. Think what this must have been like. For Peter. The Lord. The Lord. Whom he disowned.

And left to die. Now standing in the same room. Bringing peace and forgiveness. Imagine the joy. The freedom. The peace. A new commission to fulfil.

[24 : 08] And many of us know. Don't we. This morning. We know what it's like. To feel what Peter felt. Tears. Of regret. And shame. The kind of guilt. Which weeps you.

In the small hours of the morning. And the message of the resurrection. Is that. Whoever you are. And whatever you have done. And wherever you're from. And whoever you've offended.

First and foremost. Your offence was against God. And God can forgive you. You can wipe the slate clean. And now I see the peace that Jesus offers.

There is no need for guilt in my heart. There is no need for guilt in my heart. Well finally and famously. All of this is happening.

One disciple is absent. Isn't it? Doubting Thomas. But Jesus says. There's no need for unbelief. There's no need for unbelief. Thomas simply won't believe it.

[25 : 10] He's heard what the others tell him. He's felt the excitement. He's heard the voices. And as he can tell. Something is happening. But he says. Unless I see the wounds.

And feel the flesh with my fingers. I will not believe. I will not believe it. Now I think this incident with Thomas. Is often misunderstood. The interpretation goes like this.

We say Thomas wanted evidence. Thomas wanted things to match up. He wanted to check the facts. But when Thomas says in verse 29. Have you believed because you've seen me.

Blessed are those who've not seen and yet have believed. Now people say. What he's saying is that it's better to believe without evidence. Now that is often what we think. Thomas.

You'd be better off. Just close your eyes. Take a blind leap of faith. Blessed are those who just believe. But I don't think that's right at all. There is a rebuke for Thomas.

[26 : 09] Certainly. Stop doubting and believe. That is what Jesus is telling him. Stop. Stop doubting and believe. But notice Jesus graciously gives him the evidence he's looking for.

Touch me. Feel me. Feel where the nails went in. But when Jesus says what he says in verse 9. He is saying. Thomas you've seen me and believed. But know now.

This. Know this. Generation after generation after generation. Are going to believe even though they've not seen. And that is wonderful. But they will not come to believe without evidence.

Now they will not believe because they're taking a blind leap of faith. A step into the dark. But because verse 31. Do you see it? These are written so that you may believe.

They're written down as evidence. What was Thomas' problem? Thomas' problem was not that he wanted evidence. It's not at all. His problem was that he would not accept the evidence of the apostles' testimony.

[27 : 11] Is that your problem? Your problem is not that you want evidence. But actually you will not believe the evidence of the apostles' testimony. And blessed said Jesus. Blessed is the man or woman in Ealing or in Africa or in Japan or in Asia.

Blessed is the man or woman in the 18th century or the boy or girl in the 21st century or any other age. Blessed is the man. Blessed is the person who believes the word.

Holocaust!!!

body revived his heart started working and he left it to him it really is a very foreign concept to get your head around and accept if you are on the outside looking in on the Christian faith you are not sure what to make of it but can I assure you of this can I say to you, biblical Christianity never ever encourages you to believe something that isn't true Christians never ever say let's pretend I know he couldn't really have risen from the dead but he's alive in my heart it's nonsense the Christian faith never says take a blind leap of faith jump and it will work out take a step into the dark the only thing that happens if you step into the dark is going to hurt isn't it the Christian faith never says it will all work out alright in the end just take a blind leap of faith you know the Christian faith says look at the evidence join up the dots and it makes sense there is no other believable explanation test the evidence check it out see for yourself and if you are a believer this morning somebody who loves Jesus you will know you will know what it is to have doubts from time to time anybody who lives in the real world and sees its sorrows anyone who suffers and hurts from time to time aren't we left scratching our heads wondering where is God is he real and sometimes it feels like this massive distance between the world of the Bible and the world in which I live and it seems to be separated by a huge gulf and it often leads us to say is this really true evil suffering natural disasters predestination

I don't know what the nature of your personal doubts are but I do know that they are often there for many of us well what I have discovered in my own life is that wherever they come for whatever reason they come they always each and every one every single time collapse on the rock of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead my doubt leaves when I take it to the empty tomb and as I look at the gospels and I look at the evidence as I weigh up the alternatives I can give no other explanation for the empty tomb which led to the transformation of fearful and broken men into the greatest fastest growing missionary movement the world has ever seen and if the resurrection is true if Jesus really is who he said he is if he really did put his foot on death's throat and crush it if he did that then I can trust him and you can trust him in all the other areas that you and I are tempted to doubt if he did that if he is who he says he is

[31 : 24] I will bow my knee to him and I will worship him with the words of Thomas in this chapter and I will worship him for the new world that he begins I will worship him for the relationship with the father that he gives me and I will worship him for the guilt that he washes away forever and that says John is something to be believed a king like that a king like Jesus well don't we want to say this Thomas this morning in verse 28 my lord and my god amen