

# John 20

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[ 0 : 00 ] And turn your Bibles to John chapter 20. John finishes this chapter by saying, 'Now Jesus did many other signs 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 believing you may have life in His name.'

Think of John writing this book. This is toward the end of his life that he's writing this. John has a purpose in writing. He says, 'there are so many things I could have included, but I was selective in what I put in.'

Selective for the purpose of your knowing that Jesus Christ, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. So John is thinking about what else has been written.

In the years since Jesus died and was raised again, up to this time when John is writing, Mark and Matthew and Luke had written Gospels, each of them from a little bit different perspective, covering a lot of the same accounts and things that Jesus said.

John is thinking what needs to be said still so that people can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that people can have life in His name.

[ 1 : 33 ] In my experience in preaching in different places, John is thinking, 'what is it that has been lacking perhaps? What is it that people have been struggling with in the years since Jesus' resurrection?'

And how can I answer those things in writing this Gospel? How can I help them to understand better? So John thinks about the things that have been written already.

He thinks about the things that are established, the things that people can believe already. But when he comes to the resurrection, he thinks, 'how can I answer the questions that are still there for certain people?'

And so that's why he thinks, well, let me portray two different people who have certain issues with the resurrection and show how Jesus answers those issues and how Jesus satisfies the concerns that they have.

In doing that, Jesus is not just thinking about people in his own day, but he's writing this down so that after he's gone, people like us can read it.

[ 2 : 40 ] And he can answer those questions as well. And in the goodness of God and the work of the Holy Spirit who helps John in writing this Gospel, he doesn't just answer questions of his own day, but he answers questions from our own day.

For example, there are people, particularly in Islam, who would say, 'well, Jesus didn't really die on the cross because he was a good man and Allah would not let a good man die on the cross.'

But John has already told us of a conversation between himself, the beloved disciple, and Jesus' own mother talking about how John is to become like her son and take care of her after Jesus is gone.

So Jesus has put two very trusted people who intimately know Jesus, who could not be deceived, having a conversation with Jesus at the cross.

How can we possibly say it wasn't really Jesus who died? So John, there in the goodness of the Holy Spirit, is answering a question that he didn't even know was going to come up and showing that it really was Jesus who died.

[ 3 : 53 ] Some people, like liberals in the past, have said, 'well, Jesus didn't really die because we don't believe that a resurrection is possible. We have to have an explanation that is scientifically possible.'

So we will just believe that Jesus seemed to die on the cross, and then they took him and they buried him in a tomb and laying there in the cool darkness, he just kind of revived and came back. Well, I find that harder to believe than the resurrection, but if you want to, if you, if you want to consider that, John is already, along with the other writers of the gospel, he's already answered all those questions.

He had the most professional execution team of that day, the Roman soldiers, who have certified that Jesus has died.

They didn't do a sloppy job of it. They were certain that he was dead. And not only that, but Joseph of Arimathea went to Pontius Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus so that he could bury him.

[ 5 : 01 ] And Pontius Pilate certifies with the, with the, the man in charge, the centurion in charge, that Jesus was indeed dead. Now, what about witnesses?

Who would be the best witnesses that he had died? Well, if you want to get reliable witnesses, how about two members of the council of the Sanhedrin that was responsible for Israel?

Here are two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who didn't just send some, some low level servant and say, go get the body and put it in a tomb someplace.

But John makes it very clear that they went personally, they got the body, and even if others were helping them, they were involved in not just carrying the body and quickly dumping it into a tomb, but wrapping it in spices and linen, linen, strips of linen.

So they knew for certain. Here are two members of the Sanhedrin who were witnesses. So it is clear that Jesus has died. There's no question about that at all.

[ 6 : 06 ] John is also thinking about his own day when he hears people outside the window of his home marching down the street and chanting, Caesar is Lord, Caesar is God.

That's the thing that people want to believe. And John wants to answer that with Jesus is Lord and Jesus is God.

And so he picks these two people to help him answer those questions. The two people he chooses are Mary Magdalene and Thomas Didymus.

There's also a belief that a lot of people in our own day would set forward, and that is that the disciples really needed to have erased Jesus or to resurrect Jesus.

And so they made this plot, this scam to put over other people that they stole away his body, that they hid it in some other place and then they all agreed, made a compact together, that they would proclaim that Jesus was raised from the dead even though he was not raised from the dead.

[ 7 : 18 ] But the problem is, and John answers this, the problem is that the disciples didn't believe that Jesus would be raised from the dead. And we see that very clearly in these two people, Mary and Thomas.

We see it in others as well, but we see it very clearly in them. It wasn't a plot they came up with. It was something that they did not even believe at the time until they were compelled to believe despite what their heart and mind told them.

The first of these is Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene, Luke tells us, was one of the women who followed Jesus. She came down from Galilee with them. They cared for Jesus and the disciples.

They provided for them out of their own resources. Mary Magdalene was a woman who was devoted to caring for Jesus. And a reason that she was devoted to that is because Luke tells us that Jesus cast seven demons out of her.

So her life was transformed by what Jesus had done. Jesus had made her into a new person and set her free. And therefore, she was devoted to caring for him.

[ 8 : 31 ] Now when Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb, she comes early upon this morning. You would read that in the first few verses of the chapter. Also, we're told else in Luke believe that she came with other women and they brought the spices.

They brought these things to care for Jesus. Were they expecting a resurrected Jesus? They were expecting a corpse. And that's why they came prepared to care for a corpse.

So Mary Magdalene comes. She's the first one that John talks about at the beginning of John chapter 20. But when she gets there, she finds the body's gone.

She comes back and she reports to the disciples, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb. We do not know where they have laid him.

The idea that Jesus is raised from the dead doesn't enter her mind. Instead, she's thinking, we came to wrap this corpse and to take care of it, but it's gone.

[ 9 : 33 ] They have taken it. I don't know who's taken it. Is it Joseph and Nicodemus, have they taken it to another tomb? Have the officials come and taken it?

Has someone stolen it away? All she thinks is the corpse is gone. So she's weighted down with the impact of her faith has lost its object.

Even the corpse that she longs to express her grief by caring for has disappeared. What's going to happen to her now? So she goes back to the tomb and she's weeping there.

Weeping and wondering, where will my life go from here? Will I go back to Galilee? What purpose will I have? Will my demons come back without Jesus there to protect me?

So she is clearly grieving the death of Jesus and the loss to her. She has no hope that he is raised. She only is full of grief.

[ 10 : 44 ] She doesn't know who might have taken him away. In verse 2 she talks about they have taken him away. And in verse 13 and 15 as well she says to the angels, they said to her, woman, why are you weeping?

She said to them, they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him. That's the reason she's weeping. But also when Jesus appears, she thinks he's the gardener and thinks, have you taken him away?

And asks him that question. She's wondering what has happened to Jesus. In contrast to her sense of hopelessness and just being loaded down with grief, the angels respond to her, they say, woman, why are you weeping?

From the heavenly perspective, it doesn't make sense to weep because Jesus is raised. And when Jesus responds to her in verse 15, he says, woman, why are you weeping?

Whom are you seeking? Then she turns when she hears this man speaking to her, she says, supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, sir, have you have carried him away?

[ 12 : 02 ] Tell me where have you laid him, and I will take him away. She turned around, in verse 14, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Even when Jesus spoke to her, woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? It's a bit of a mystery why she didn't recognize Jesus. Maybe it was the early morning light.

maybe it was her face being covered over in the early morning chills, she was covered over and even Jesus may have had something over his head. Maybe she's just being culturally reserved and not looking in the face of a man that she doesn't recognize.

But what is it that turns her heart so that she recognizes Jesus? Obviously, the most serious problem with her recognizing him is she had no anticipation whatsoever that it would be Jesus speaking to her.

She only thought it might be the gardener. What is it that turns her heart and changes her perspective? Jesus said to her, Mary.

[ 13 : 14 ] That one word brings her response. She turned and said to him in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. It was a personal recognition.

It was Jesus speaking her name. Not just her name in a generic sense, but her name, Miriam. The name that she knew from her own heart language.

When she heard him speak her name, she knew who he was. And her response to him is to call him Rabboni. Not just rabbi as a general class of people, but specifically this word is my teacher, my beloved teacher.

She is relating to him personally. It's a personal recognition, a personal connection with Jesus which is reestablished.

He's transformed in her own perception from being some gardener unknown to her to being the one who has delivered her. What does Jesus say to her?

[ 14 : 19 ] Jesus says, do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my father.

But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my father and to your father, to my God and to your God. Mary in her heart reaching out to Jesus, her devotion to him, one of the other gospels says, she took a hold of him by the feet.

Jesus says, don't cling to me before I have not ascended to my father. In a way he's saying to her, Mary, what you need is not me here, that you can touch me.

What you need is me resurrected, me at my father's side, that I can be your Lord and Savior from there, that I can save not just you, but many others as well.

Don't cling to my body, but hold on to who I am. He says, go and tell my brothers, I am saying to them, I'm ascending to my father and to your father, to my God and to your God.

[15:32] Again, the focus is on the relationship and a change in relationship. Instead of I'm ascending to my father and to my God, because I have raised from the dead, I'm also ascending to your father, your plural father and to your plural God.

All of you belong to him because of my going to him, because of that relationship. Notice what she says when she goes back, verse 18, Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord.

And that he had said these things to her. The first thing she says is not the quote. The first thing she says, I have seen the Lord. Her eyes have been opened.

She knows he's raised again. She knows that the one that she is certain was dead is just as certainly alive. The needs of Mary's heart are satisfied by Jesus' resurrection.

Her heart is at peace and at rest because she's compelled to believe what she thought was impossible to believe. The second person that John writes about is specifically is Thomas Didymus.

[16:57] The name Thomas means twin. The name Didymus means twin in Greek. So Aramaic and Greek he's twin twin.

We often think of him as doubting Thomas. But I'd like us to think of him differently. Thomas is the one who sees the side of things that we don't necessarily want to see.

Sometimes we're trying very hard to be an optimist and Thomas is the one who brings us back to reality and points out the way things really are. In John chapter 11 verse 16 Jesus is getting this report that his friend Lazarus has died.

They have been near Jerusalem and there were threats on Jesus' life and Thomas like the others knew that threats on Jesus' life were also a threat to them. Jesus says he died and now we're going to go to him.

And Thomas is the one who says well then let us go back to Judea and die with him. Thomas is not saying well if you want to go to Judea that's your own business take your own risks we're going back to Galilee where it's safe.

[18:14] Thomas says if you're going to Judea we're all going to go with you even if it means to death. Thomas is committed and he sees the reality of things as they are.

In John chapter 14 we hear from Thomas again. Jesus is in the upper room and he's talking to his disciples about how he is the way and he's going to prepare a place for them.

And Thomas is they're all asking these various questions but Thomas is the one who just brings it right down to the focal question and he says Lord we don't know where you're going so how can we know the way?

Thomas is the one who's going to ask the question that the rest of us haven't thought of or the question that we don't dare to ask. The question we think is just a little bit too bold faced.

Thomas is the one who's going to ask that question. So Thomas serves us well because he's the one who asks questions that we need to ask. The questions that are going to be on our hearts later on.

[19:15] If you think about the Lord of the Rings you remember the character of Gimli. Gimli is that dwarf with a heavy beard and his big axe and he's the one where they come to the point and they realize that if I was thinking Frodo but it's not Frodo is it?

Who's going to go and get rid of the ring? Frodo. Okay. Why does that slip away from me? So they think well how is Frodo going to go and get rid of the ring when he's got to go right to the enemy territory?

And so they say well we need to fight as a distraction. We need to go and take on this enemy army. And Gimli is the one who states the obvious.

The thing that nobody else wants to say. He says overwhelming odds? Certain chance of death? What are we waiting for? He's Thomas.

Thomas Didymus. He's the one who's stating the obvious. There's not a question about Thomas' commitment. His faith. His willingness to die.

[20:26] He's committed to the cause. He's ready. But he's the one who's going to state the things that we don't see. Thomas wasn't at the cross. The only disciple there was John.

Thomas was not there on that first Sunday. And so on that first Sunday, the day that's being recorded here, the day of the resurrection, Mary comes back and says, I've seen the Lord.

Thomas misses that. Peter and John come back and say, the tomb is empty. And John says, I believe, I believe he's resurrected. Thomas is not there. Later that evening, Cleopas and another man who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, they come back and they say, we've seen the Lord. Thomas is not there. And then they're all gathered together when those men come in. And Jesus himself appears. And Thomas is not there. So Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

And the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. The same thing that Mary Magdalene said, we have seen the Lord. And it doesn't just say that they told him, it says they kept telling him.

[ 21 : 39 ] That's the word there. He's hearing this over and over. Everybody he talks to says, we have seen the Lord. And Thomas' response is, I'm just not ready to believe.

I'm just not ready to believe. John, in a way, is asking the question that needs to be asked for our own day, so that Jesus can satisfy that.

Thomas has been the scientist. I need to be able to see it and to touch it. I need to have verifiable evidence that Jesus is raised.

I can't just believe what the rest of you are saying. So he's asking that question, a question that we need to have asked. So Thomas was not with him.

The other disciples keep telling him, we've seen the Lord. But he said to them, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

[ 22 : 46 ] Eight days later his disciples were inside again and Thomas was with them, although the doors were locked just as they were last week. Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

The same thing he said last week. But then the next, very next thing he says is to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands. Put out your hand, place it in my side.

Stop, do not disbelieve, but believe. Jesus doesn't say, Thomas, what's wrong with you? Why can't you believe?

But instead Jesus says, Thomas, here's what you need to touch, to see. Do that, Thomas, and then stop your unbelieving and believe.

Did Thomas touch Jesus? It doesn't say, does it? But Thomas' response, Thomas' answer was my Lord and my God.

[ 23 : 52 ] And John hears people chanting outside his place as the procession passes, Caesar is Lord, Caesar is God. And what those words really mean is Caesar is a certain kind of Lord.

He's in charge of the Roman Empire and we hold him in great honor because of that. He is one kind of Lord, he is a political Lord. Lord. And when they say Caesar is God, they mean Caesar is, he's part of all this great collection of gods.

He fits in there someplace. He fits in the category of being a God. But John answers that slogan of his day by putting these words in Thomas' mouth.

Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. He's not just a Lord, he is Yahweh, the covenant keeping God who takes us as his own.

He is not just a God, but he is El Shaddai. He is Elohim. He is the living and the true God. In Thomas' eyes, Jesus is nothing but the most supreme God because he has seen, because he has understood.

[ 25 : 11 ] and that's what Thomas wants us to understand as well, and what John wants us to understand. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you have seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. The questions of Thomas' mind were satisfied by Jesus' resurrection.

What about us as those who read John's letter, John's gospel? What about us who have not seen and yet have believed? Some of you may share Mary's concerns.

You may feel like there's brokenness in my life, and the Lord put those things together. Is he really raised from the dead? Is he really the Lord who is able from heaven to help me, to continue to care for me?

Or did he die and just leave behind ideas? behind. We need to be satisfied like Mary that he is the one who, even from heaven, is bringing personal healing to us.

[ 26 : 18 ] Some of us may be more like Thomas. We may have questions. We want answers to those questions. We don't want to believe easily.

We don't want to believe just because we try hard to believe. We want to be convinced of what Jesus has taught us, the reality of his resurrection, and know that it's true.

And Thomas helps us to have that kind of affirmation that Jesus is who he claims, that he is alive, that he is Lord, that he is God.

For Thomas, like the other disciples, it wasn't a scam that they somehow managed to pull off. It was something they all stuck to to their deaths. Tradition tells us that Thomas took this message all the way to southern India.

That's how committed he was to what he saw, and what he touched, and what he believed. We need to be like Mary and to listen to the voice of Jesus.

[ 27 : 20 ] Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice, they know me and they follow me. We need to be like Thomas, and our response needs to be worshiped. Not, yes, I believe, I can certify that these things are true, but to say, my Lord and my God.

John helps us to understand that it's not just a matter of his writing a credible account, it's a matter of the Spirit working in us as well. That we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

It's not just mental things, it's not just believing things are true, it's a transformed life, a new life. And we need to do like these disciples are doing, like we're doing tonight, we need to gather in his name, we need to affirm to each other the truth, we have seen the Lord, this is what he has done, this is who he is.

And we need to be like Mary, just saying to other people outside of this room, we have seen the Lord, and he offers you life in his name.

Let's pray. Let's pray.