

By believing you have eternal life (John 20:1-31) 31-Mar-2024 (Easter Sunday)

John 20:1-31

The Empty Tomb

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “**Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?**”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “**Mary.**”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “**Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “**Peace be with you!**” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “**Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of John’s Gospel

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon: By Believing you have Eternal Life

Please have your Bibles opened at **John 20:1-31**.

There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

Intro/Context

[Slide-Emotions]

After the events of the first Good Friday, the **disciples and women who followed Jesus** would have likely experienced a wide range of emotions:

- Witnessing the crucifixion of their beloved teacher and friend would have given them a **profound sense of loss and sorrow**.

- They would have felt **confused and disoriented**. They had believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the one who would save them, and his sudden arrest, trial, and execution would have challenged their understanding of his identity and purpose.
- They would have been **afraid** for their own safety in the aftermath of Jesus's crucifixion. They had seen what had happened to their leader, and they may have feared that they would be targeted next by the authorities.
- They might have had **feelings of betrayal and disillusionment**. Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus would have been particularly devastating, and it may have caused some of the disciples to question their own loyalty and faith.
- And they would have felt a profound sense of **hopelessness**. Their leader had been killed, and it may have seemed like all of their hopes and dreams had been shattered.

But all those emotions were unnecessary

If they'd only remembered Jesus' words...

Jesus had foretold His death and resurrection – like in Mark 8:31:

³¹ ... the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

We pick up the story from our passage from John 20 – verse 1 – it's now the third day - since Jesus' death on Good Friday – and it's the **first day of the week** – It's the **Sunday**

And it's **no surprise** that **the tomb** - Jesus' body was placed in – is **Empty** – and **Jesus has risen from the dead** – just like He said He would.

[Slide-Points]

This morning – we're **going to look at**

1. **The reactions to the Empty Tomb** (vv1-13)
2. **The reactions to the Risen Jesus** (vv14-29)

Then we'll look at how we can **apply the events of Easter Sunday** to our lives today!

Reactions to the Empty Tomb (vv1-13)

1st then – the **reactions** to the empty tomb

[Slide-Mary]

Mary Magdalene's Reaction

Mary Magdalene – went to the **tomb** to **anoint Jesus' body**.

The **other Gospels** say she came with **3 other women**.

John here focuses only on **Mary**.

It's **very early in the morning** – and still dark.

Why does she come so early?

Well, it's fair to say **Mary loved Jesus very much** – Jesus had **cast-out 7 demons** from her (Luke 8:2) – and **transformed her life** - and **she had become His follower**.
So as soon as the Sabbath restrictions are over – **Mary's keen to see her Lord, Jesus.**

A lesson perhaps for all of us – **to be seeking Jesus each day - at the earliest opportunity.**

When she arrived at the tomb - she **saw the stone rolled away** from entrance (v1)
Mary's immediate reaction – v2 - was to **run and tell Simon Peter and the other disciple** (which is of course John)

Mary's first assumption is that **someone has taken the Lord's body**.

It's a natural assumption that someone has taken the body – because at that time in history there were **a lot of grave robbers** [**people sometimes buried with their valuables**] – and also, **Mary had no expectation of Jesus' resurrection**.

Her sole purpose is to **anoint Jesus' body and say goodbye properly**.

See v11 – she **bent over to look in the tomb** – and – v12 - **saw two angels** seated where Jesus body had been – **one angel at the head and one at the foot**.

John mentions the **two angels facing each other** – because in the Old Testament – on the **Day of Atonement** – when the High Priest made an atonement sacrifice for the people's sins – the **blood of the animal sacrificed** – was **sprinkled on top of**

the Ark of the Covenant cover/lid. That cover/lid had two gold angels/cherubim facing each other. John wants us to see – how the two angels in OT atonement connect to the two angels at Jesus death – and that **Jesus' death was an atonement** [*made right with God because of our sin – at-one-ment*] for sin.

With no body to anoint – **Mary cries** – v11

The angels – v13 – ask Mary “*why she is crying?*”

She explains that – *her Lord has been taken away* – and *she doesn't know where they have put Him*

Mary's reaction is one of **grief and sadness** at the empty tomb.

Peter's Reaction

[Slide-Peter]

Even though Peter was outrun by John, who gets to the tomb first

It's the **usual bold Peter** who goes straight into the tomb first.

And in verse 6 – *Peter saw the strips of linen there* – the Greek word for “saw” here means ***he considered what he saw*** – this fits in with Luke's version of the events – Luke says – *Peter went away wondering to himself what had happened to Jesus?*

We should also take **note of verse 7** here too:

The **Greek** in this verse **suggests** that the **neat orderly arrangement of Jesus' grave clothes** – the linen wrapped around His body and the linen wrapped around His head – show that this was no grave robbery and that something absolutely unique had happened in that tomb. The Greek words indicate that the **linen wrapped around Jesus was still lying in a circular form** (our English word – would be like “*entwined*” or “*twirled*”) – it's like Jesus' body has come out of the wrapped linen – **like a sleeve or cocoon and left the linen intact.** A bit like a butterfly coming out of a chrysalis!

So, **Peter's reaction** to the empty tomb is – that **he wondered what had happened.**

[Slide-John]

John's Reaction

Which brings us to **John's reaction.**

After Peter went in to the tomb

Then John went in - and look at v8 – it says - ***John saw and believed.***

The word for “**saw**” here - is a different Greek word than v6 – and it **means** he **understood or perceived** the significance of the empty tomb.

It would be like us saying – “***now I see what's going on here***”

And **John believed straight away** – that **Jesus is risen!**

Even though as verse 9 says – even though - at this stage none of them understood from Scripture - **that Jesus had to rise – and that this was all part of God's plan.**

Sometimes faith requires us to believe – without fully understanding or explaining – that's the nature of faith!

(pause)

[Slide-Reactions today]

Those reactions at the empty tomb are the same reactions available to us today:

1. ***Grief and sorrow – Jesus is dead and gone***
2. ***Not sure what has happened – I need to think about it***
3. ***I believe Jesus is risen – as He said He would***

(pause)

The Bible passage now moves on to the Risen Jesus appearing to various people

Let's look at the reactions to the Risen Jesus now – that's verses 14-29.

Reactions to the Risen Jesus (vv14-29)

[Slide-Mary]

Mary Magdalene's Reaction

Mary's grief and sorrow are **short lived**

When she **turned around** in v14 – she **saw the risen Jesus**

But she didn't recognize Him at first – she **thinks He is the gardener** (v15) – maybe because of her tears

But more likely because Jesus' resurrected appearance is somewhat different to his appearance before His death.

For example, the two men Jesus met on the **Road to Emmaus** (Luke 24) didn't recognize Jesus initially - until Jesus broke bread with them!

But Jesus only has to say one word - in v16 - “**Mary**”

And **she recognizes Him**

Remember Jesus said in John 10:27 – “**My sheep listen to my voice**”

Mary is ecstatic she cries out “**Rabboni**” (Aramaic=Teacher)

And **she grabs hold of Jesus** – and she’s not letting him go in hurry!

Jesus says to Mary - in v17

“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

What does Jesus mean by ‘*Do not hold on to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father*’?

Don Carson paraphrases it this way: *Stop holding on to me Mary, I am not yet in the ascended state, so you don’t need to hang on to me as if I was about to disappear permanently. This is a time for joy and sharing the good news – not for clutching me as if I was some jealously guarded dream come true. Stop clinging to me, but instead go and tell my disciples that I am in the process of ascending to my Father and your Father.*

Once Mary realizes **Jesus is not going anywhere just yet**

V18 - She is able to go and share the news with the disciples that she has seen the risen Lord Jesus

The fact that **Jesus makes a woman the first witness of His resurrection** is significant. The law courts of that day would not recognize the testimony of a woman, but Jesus did!

This also **proves the historical truth of John's account of the resurrection.**

If someone made up the story of Jesus rising from the dead, **would they make the first witness of the resurrection, a woman; when women were commonly and unfairly regarded as unreliable witnesses?**

[Slide-Disciples]

The Disciples' Reaction

In the evening of that same resurrection day – v19 – **Jesus appeared to the disciples who were behind locked doors – afraid of the Jewish leaders.**

What compassion Jesus shows His disciples – **he knows all the emotional responses they're going through - and wants to assure them everything is going to be fine.**

They were **perhaps expecting a rebuke from Jesus** – as they'd pretty much **all ran away when He was arrested and crucified**. But Jesus reassures them with these words: "*Peace be with you!*"

V20 – Once they see Jesus and see His wounds – they are **overjoyed!**

We can only imagine the joy and relief they felt!

Jesus is alive!

We can **be overjoyed this morning – Jesus is alive!**

Thomas' Reaction

[Slide-Thomas]

When Jesus appeared to His disciples – **Thomas** – v24 – **was not with them.**

When they told Thomas – v25 – that they'd seen Jesus – **Thomas refuses to believe them** – unless - **he sees Jesus' wounds for himself** – and **puts his fingers where the nails were!**

When Jesus appears a week later – He know Thomas doubts – v27 –so Jesus **tells him to touch His wounds** – and to stop doubting and believe!

Immediately – **Thomas believes** – and **his belief** – is just as strong - as his doubt was – and **Thomas makes the most emphatic statement** about Jesus – v28 –

Thomas says to Jesus – “*My Lord and my God*”

Thomas addresses Jesus with **titles of deity** – and Jesus doesn't object!

And notice **Thomas makes it personal** – MY Lord and MY God.

It must be personal for us too!

(pause)

[Slide-Application for us]

How can we apply the **events of that first Easter Sunday** to our lives this morning?

Application for us

a. Death has no sting for us!

[Slide-Death no sting]

1st – ***Death has no sting for us!***

Let me **explain with a little story** I came across.

A Father and his young son were driving to Sydney on the freeway, when a bee flew through an open window. The young boy was highly allergic to bee stings – so they both knew how dangerous it was for the boy! The boy was jumping around the back seat trying to keep away from the bee.

His Dad calmly reached out his hand and grabbed the bee. When he opened his hand, the bee began to fly around again and the boy started screaming again. His Dad held out his hand to his son and said “look son, the bee has no stinger, it’s in my hand, it can’t hurt you anymore!”

Just like a bee loses its stinger when it stings – **death lost its sting when it stung Jesus.** Death can’t sting us – **IF - we believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection!**

b. **We can encounter the Risen Jesus**

[Slide-Encounter Jesus]

2nd – ***We can encounter the Risen Jesus***

Just as Mary Magdalene and the disciples and Thomas - encountered the risen **Christ.** We are invited to experience a **personal encounter with Jesus** in our lives. Through prayer, meditation on Scripture, and fellowship with other believers, we can **cultivate a deeper relationship with the living Christ** and experience His presence, peace, and guidance.

c. **Our doubts can be transformed into faith**

[Slide-doubts to faith]

3rd – ***Our doubts can be transformed into faith***

The story of Thomas demonstrates how **doubt can be transformed into faith** through encountering the risen Christ.

Like Thomas, **we may have doubts or questions about our faith,** but when we encounter Jesus personally, **our doubts can be replaced with a firm belief in his**

divinity and lordship. This encourages us to bring our doubts to Jesus honestly – like Thomas did - and to **seek Him for the assurance we need.**

Jesus even says – in v29 – that people like us – who haven't actually seen Jesus – are **blessed**. Jesus says “*blessed are we who have not seen [the risen Jesus] and yet believe!*”

We have no need to doubt. The evidence of Jesus' resurrection is compelling.

- The **risen Jesus appeared** for **40 days** (Acts 1:3)
- The **risen Jesus appeared** to the **disciples** and **Mary** and **others** in John 20;
- Plus - Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 - **Jesus appeared to Peter; the 12 apostles; and more than 500 people; then to James, and all the Apostles and lastly to Paul himself.**
- How many eye-witnesses are enough?

d. We are commissioned for Mission

[Slide-Mission]

4th – ***We are commissioned for Mission***

In verses 21 & 22 - Jesus commissions His disciples to go and share the good news of His resurrection with others. This commission applies to us too.

We shouldn't be like Mary – and cling to Jesus – and not let Him go – and keep Him to ourselves.

We need to go and tell others that Jesus is alive – like Jesus told Mary to do – and like Jesus told the disciples to do! Jesus commands us - to **actively engage in sharing our faith and in making disciples of all nations.**

And we're not on our own – when Jesus sent out the disciples – **He gave them the Holy Spirit.** **We also have the Holy Spirit** – to help and guide us!

e. We can live with purpose:

5th – ***We can live with purpose***

In verses 30 & 31 – John gives us - the **purpose of his Gospel** – which is: **to lead people to believe in Jesus Christ so that they can have life in Him, leading to eternal life.**

As we reflect on this purpose, **we are encouraged to live our lives with the deliberate intention of:** seeking to glorify God and fulfill his purposes for us. This involves sharing the message of salvation, loving others sacrificially, living in obedience to God's Word and being ambassadors of Jesus – for the sole purpose – of encouraging others to follow Jesus!

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that Jesus is alive – and because He is alive – we have the assurance of eternal life in Heaven to look forward.

Help us to live our lives with the joy of this assurance and enable and equip us to be ambassadors of Jesus – leading others to follow Him.

In Jesus' Name. Amen

Benediction (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Amen.