

## BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED

John 20:1-31

Key Verse: 20:29

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

John’s gospel, like the other three gospels, concludes with Jesus’ resurrection. Along with Jesus’ death for our sins, his resurrection is a pillar of Christian faith. In fact, it is believing the Risen Jesus that gives us the power to live a new life. If our faith in Risen Jesus is weak, we can easily succumb to the elements of death. Sorrow, fear and doubt take up residence in our hearts. We become weak toward sin and vulnerable to temptation. The demands of daily life easily overwhelm us and we lose sight of God’s mission and great vision. But when we have faith in the Risen Jesus, we become strong. We can live a truly blessed life. As we approach the end of John’s gospel, may the Risen Jesus plant resurrection faith in our hearts.

John’s resurrection account is unique and contains many details not found in other gospels. It is because John was there! He testifies that Jesus rose from the dead based on facts and eyewitness accounts. John begins with the empty tomb. Then he tells how the Risen Jesus appeared on three separate occasions: to Mary, to all the disciples except Thomas, and, to Thomas. He testifies to us so that we may believe in Jesus and have life in his name. Let’s listen to his resurrection account.

First, John saw the facts and believed (1-10). John opens with the mention of Mary Magdalene going to the tomb. It had only been a matter of hours since she had stood beneath the cross and witnessed Jesus’ death (19:25). She had seen Jesus’ cold body being buried and heard the sound of the heavy stone roll into place to cover the tomb (Mt 27:61). Then she had to go home for the Sabbath. Her heart was broken completely. Jesus was her Lord. Jesus had set her free from the devil’s power. Jesus was so loving, understanding, gentle and kind. Jesus had given her a reason to live and was everything to

her. She did not know why good Jesus had to be crucified. She could not stop crying. As soon as the Sabbath was over, early on the first day of the week, she went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices (1; Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1). She realized that she could not move the stone; nevertheless, she went, out of love for Jesus. When she arrived, she saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. Surprised, she assumed that Jesus' enemies had taken his body out of the tomb. She felt helpless and became anxious and desperate. So she came running to Simon Peter and John and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him!" (2)

Peter and John ran to the tomb (3). It became a race. John outran Peter and reached the tomb first (4). Maybe John was younger than Peter and eager to compete with him. John bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in (5). He was overly cautious, and timid. Although Peter lost the race, once he arrived he went straight in to the tomb (6). Actually, he won. Simon Peter saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen (7). Finally John also went inside the tomb and saw the linen and cloth. It seemed that Jesus' body had simply vanished. If it had been taken by enemies, the scene would not be so orderly and neat. John saw the empty tomb and believed (8). He believed that Jesus had risen. The tomb could not contain Jesus' body because Jesus is the Author of life. God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Ac 2:24).

Jesus' resurrection was prophesied in Scripture. Now it was fulfilled. Yet Peter and John did not understand this (9). They were not weaving a story to match Scripture. They simply witnessed the event. Then they went back to where they were staying (10). Why does John tell us about this event in such detail? He wants us to realize that he was an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection. He testifies that Jesus' tomb is empty because Jesus rose from the dead. Christian faith relies on the testimony of John and all the apostles to this sure historical fact. Not only they, but numerous people in history have testified that Jesus is risen. For example, Lee Strobel was an award winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune. When his wife became a Christian

through Bible study, he wanted to disprove the Christian faith to win her back to his atheist position. So he began to investigate Christianity. As he did so, he was so overwhelmed by the evidence for Christ's resurrection that he concluded it was true. He became a Christian and has testified to Jesus' resurrection around the world. Nabeel Quereshi was a devout Muslim, the grandson of Muslim missionaries. While in medical school, he met a Christian named David Wood and began to debate the truth claims of Christian faith. After three years, Nabeel was firmly convinced by the evidence that Christ had risen from the dead and Christianity was true. By the help of the Holy Spirit, he accepted Jesus as his Savior, though it meant being disowned by his family. After that, he testified to the resurrection of Christ and led many people to faith. He went to be with the Lord about two years ago.

Why is it so important for us to believe the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection? These days many think that everyone has "their own truth" based on their experiences, opinions and feelings. They tend to interpret reality from their own perspective, claiming there is no absolute truth. We are bombarded daily with fake news, false reports and lies. Sometimes we feel that it is impossible to know what is really going on. Nevertheless, Jesus has risen! This is a historical fact and the truth. Sooner or later every knee will bow before the Risen Jesus and every tongue confess that he is the Lord (Php 2:10-11). This truth is the same for everyone in every nation and generation. We can believe it absolutely and put our full trust in Jesus.

Second, Jesus appeared to Mary, his disciples and Thomas (11-28). Now John introduces the witnesses, beginning with Mary Magdalene. After Peter and John departed, Mary remained outside the tomb, crying (11). The word for "crying" used here means to wail, lament. She loved Jesus wholeheartedly, so her tears flowed from the depth of her being. As she wept, she bent over and looked into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot (12). The presence and position of these angels, ready to serve Jesus hand and foot, reveal who Jesus is. Jesus is the King of heaven with angel armies ready to obey him. He had left two angels behind to guard the empty tomb so the witnesses would see it. However, their surprising appearance did not slow the flow of Mary's tears. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" She said, "They have

taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him" (13). At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus (14). Her deep sorrow had blinded her. Her mind was fixated on the dead body of Jesus. Indeed, the power of death had overcome her.

Jesus asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (15a) It meant, "there is no reason for you to cry. I have defeated the power of death by my resurrection." She thought he was the gardener and said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (15b). What could pierce through her sorrow and open help her see Jesus? Jesus said to her, "Mary." She cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!"--"my beloved Teacher" (16). Jesus' tender personal greeting had opened her spiritual eyes. She saw that Jesus was alive. She was so happy and awed to see the Risen Jesus. Her sorrow turned to great joy. Sometimes we can be so sorrowful that we are spiritually blind. Our sorrow may come from the death of a loved one. It may be due to a failure in school, ministry, or work. It could be because we are poor or sick. It could come from a painful relationship problem. Yet, the Risen Jesus is right here with us. Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. As we hear his voice, our sorrow turns into joy.

Upon recognizing Jesus, Mary fell at his feet and held them tightly. Then 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'" (17). There was no time for Mary to hold Jesus' resurrected body. He would only be here a short while. Then he would ascend into heaven. Jesus says nothing about his resurrection here, but mentions ascension twice. This is what his death and resurrection made possible. As he ascended he would cross the chasm which separates heaven and earth, and would sit at the right hand of God the Father. In doing so he opened a new and living way to God. Now, as we pray in Jesus' name, our prayers are carried straight to the heart of God. God has become our Father and we are his children. Our Father hears us and pays attention to us. It pleases him to answer our prayers and to bless and guide us. Last week I was in Kenya for the 30th anniversary celebration, together

with Dr. Mark Yang and Dr. Charles Kim. I had to lead many Bible studies, make a presentation on inductive Bible study, and deliver the Sunday message on Ruth 1. Frankly, it was not possible for me. But when I prayed, God answered me and gave me strength and his Spirit to do everything. A precious young Kenyan student, Allan, was so moved by the Sunday message that he wanted to move to Chicago, start an internship with me, and grow to be a pastor. This was God at work, answering prayer. Through Jesus, anyone can come to God in prayer.

Though Jesus appeared first to Mary, he was deeply concerned about his disciples. Jesus sent Mary to them as his messenger. She ran to them and exclaimed, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had said to her. But it doesn't seem that they listened very well. On the evening of that first day of the week, they were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders (19a). By standing with Jesus, they had made powerful enemies who might come after them at any moment. They were paralyzed with fear. As Mary had a sorrow problem, the disciples had a fear problem. This fear was not just a psychological symptom. It came from the devil who holds the power of death and torments mankind with fear (Heb 2:14-15). We can understand them. Sometimes fear paralyzes us. Many very talented and able people are unable to do great things because of fear. How, then, did Jesus raise his disciples as his witnesses? Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (19b) Jesus imparted the perfect peace that comes from being right with God. It restored fellowship with God and brought his blessing to all aspects of their lives. This was made possible through Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. Jesus showed them his hands and side (20a). They could see the nail marks and the spear wound with their own eyes. It was really Jesus. He had risen bodily. His wounds testified to his love for them. His love drove out their fear, and they were filled with joy (20b). Perhaps some began to dance, others formed a vocal team, and still others wrote poems. Jesus had to say to them again, "Peace be with you!" He had an important message for them.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (21). The Risen Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, gave them the same mission the Father had given him. It was to carry his gospel to a dying world. This would become the focus and purpose of their lives. Yet, how could they, when they

were often weak and fearful? Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (22). The Holy Spirit filled them with courage, love, wisdom and strength. He was given to help them proclaim the forgiveness of sins to the whole world. Anyone who believed the gospel would receive Jesus' forgiving grace. But those who do not believe cannot receive his forgiveness (23). This is the universal, absolute truth for all people in the world. We who believe in the Risen Jesus are called to share the message of forgiveness with a dying world. This is why we pray to establish 500 one-to-one Bible studies and to raise 120 disciples of Jesus in Chicago. May the Holy Spirit help us to do so.

In addition to sorrow and fear, doubt is another tormenting problem of human beings. Thomas was a representative of doubting people. Thomas was absent when the Risen Jesus first appeared to his disciples (24). They testified to him, "We have seen the Lord!" (25a) He should have accepted their testimony, seeing how joyful they were. But he said, "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" (25b). A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked. Like a contagious disease, Thomas' doubting words had made everyone fearful again. So Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" He could have rebuked Thomas, saying, "Why do you doubt all the time?" But he graciously said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (27). Jesus' words pierced Thomas' heart and helped him see who Jesus really is. Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God!" (28) This personal experience with Jesus made Thomas a man of conviction. Later he went to India as a missionary, where he died there as a martyr. Not only Thomas, but all of the disciples went as missionaries and all of them were martyred except John. Without resurrection faith, they could not have served God at the cost of their lives. Their faith testifies to us that Jesus is risen indeed.

Third, blessings Jesus gives those who believe (29-31). It is very important to accept the historical truth of Jesus' resurrection based on the gospels. But this was just the beginning. Jesus' attention turned to those who would believe in him through his disciples' testimony. Now, after briefly addressing Thomas, he speaks to us. Let's read verse 29. "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have

believed” (29). The Message Bible says, “So, you believe because you’ve seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing.” Jesus says that we who believe without seeing him are most blessed. How can we believe? Mary’s story shows us that Jesus’ personal greeting opened her spiritual eyes. Paul said that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Ro 10:17). John Calvin said, “Faith is to close our eyes and give our attention to hearing.” Apostle Peter told the early Christians: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1Pe 1:8-9).

In verses 30-31, John tells us of the blessing of believing in Jesus. He wrote: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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.” In a word, the blessing is “life.” Here “life” refers to “eternal life.” Everyone longs for eternal life because God has set eternity in the human heart (Ecc 3:11). To receive eternal life, our sin problem must be solved. Sin cuts us off from God, who is the source of life. Because of this we are miserable, regardless of how much money or power we have, or how famous we are. The wages of sin is death. We have to die. But God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son Jesus as our ransom. Jesus paid the full price of our sins through his death on the cross and rose again from the dead. We simply believe what Jesus has done for us. We cannot solve our own sin problem by doing good works or torturing ourselves. We just believe in Jesus. Jesus forgives all our sins and restores our relationship with God. God becomes “our Father,” and we become his children who inherit his kingdom. We have deep peace with God and true joy in our souls. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Jn 8:11; Ro 8:1). The Risen Jesus gives joy to sorrowful people like Mary. He gives peace to fearful people like his disciples. He gives conviction to doubting people like Thomas. The Risen Jesus becomes to each of us, “My Lord and My God.” Praise the Risen Jesus!