

John 20:1-31

Resurrection!

If someone wanted to disprove Christianity—to destroy the credibility of Christianity—what one thing would they seek to disprove? Jesus' resurrection

Why? If Christ is not raised, then all we have is another martyr dying for another cause. This would mean that Jesus is no different than any of the other great religious leaders. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith....And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

All the Gospels honor Mary Magdalene by mentioning her as the first person to come to the tomb. What does that say about her? She had great courage, devotion, and love for Jesus because she had been forgiven much. She came prepared to anoint the dead body of Jesus. She did not come with the intention of becoming a witness to His resurrection, but that is precisely what happened.

What do we know about Mary Magdalene? Mary Magdalene is the woman from whom Jesus had earlier cast out seven demons (Luke 8:1-3). From that point in time, she seems to have faithfully followed Jesus, along with other women who supported Jesus and His disciples out of their own means.

Where did we last see Mary Magdalene? She was at the foot of the cross in John 19:25.

In verse 7, what is the significance of the description of the burial cloth? The way the cloths were left indicate that Jesus' departure from the tomb was orderly/unhurried. His body could not have been taken by grave robbers. They would never have left the cloths wrapped neatly. They would have either taken the body with all of the cloths or else torn the cloths off and scattered them.

What does verse 8 say John believed? He believed that Jesus was alive—because of the tomb's appearance.

Who does Jesus pick to be the first person to see Him after His resurrection? Mary Magdalene, an obscure Jewish woman. Not Mary His mother. Not a prominent person.

Mary Magdalene does not immediately recognize Jesus nor does she recognize Him the first time He spoke. Why does she recognize Him in verse 16? This time He calls her by name, speaking with tenderness and compassion—like she had known Him.

Why does Jesus tell Mary Magdalene not to hold on to Him?

- He might be saying, "You have to let me go Mary. Don't cling to me emotionally. If I don't go, the Father can't send the Holy Spirit. When He does, I will be closer and dearer to you than was possible during My life here on this earth."
- Or it could mean physically holding on. The Greek means "Stop clinging to me."

Before wrapping up verses 1-18, compare them with the resurrection as recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, and Luke 24. What differences seem significant? The angel(s) appearing the women, angel telling them to tell Peter and the other disciples, the women being concerned about rolling away the stone, and the earthquake. Remember that the Gospels don't contradict each other, but simply reflect four very different people recording how things happened.

Why are the disciples afraid in verse 19? They are afraid of the Jewish authorities because they are disciples of Jesus, and He has just been crucified for sedition so it was reasonable to think that they might come after them as well. And now, the story is circulating that they stole His body. (See Matthew 28:11-15.) Contrast this with their boldness following Jesus' ascension just a few weeks later.

How does that fear change in verse 20? By verifying Jesus' resurrection, all fear disappeared and the disciples were elated.

"As the father has sent me, I am sending you." What does this say about the mission Jesus has given to His disciples? Jesus gave the baton to the twelve with the command to make disciples—to carry on the work of reaching the lost with the gospel.

Application: In what ways do you see that baton as being passed to you, as a disciple of Jesus?

In verse 22 do the disciples receive the Holy Spirit at this time? More than likely they do not. John does not report anything out of the ordinary happening as a result of our Lord's actions. The disciples are not transformed, as they will be at Pentecost. There is no immediate evidence that the Holy Spirit has been received. The gospel is not preached. In fact, the next thing to happen in John's Gospel is that some of the disciples go fishing. Most scholars do not believe that the Holy Spirit is immediately bestowed upon the disciples at this moment, as a result of what Jesus says and does. Most believe Jesus is *symbolically* bestowing the Spirit upon His disciples, although it will not actually take place until Pentecost. Jesus will have ascended to the Father then, and so this gesture indicates to the disciples that when the Spirit comes at Pentecost, it will be as a result of what Jesus had promised earlier, and is symbolically indicated here. John 7:39 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit could not come in His fullness until Jesus had gone back to heaven.

What does verse 23 mean? (Caution: this is difficult and controversial.) Jesus is giving the apostles the authority to declare men and women to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. God does not forgive people's sins because we (imperfect human beings) do, nor does He withhold forgiveness because we do. Would God give fallible human beings the power to forgive? The rest of Scripture—including 1 John 1:9—indicates that forgiveness is not delegated.

What do these passages suggest about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances—especially concerning His body? He's not easily recognizable—maybe having a different appearance. Verse 19 indicates that He's able to pass through walls. Verse 20 says there were scars on His hands and side, so His body must have been similar. Mary recognized Him by voice so that must have been similar.

Was Thomas' response to the news of the resurrection unreasonable? No. Before we become too harsh with Thomas, we need to remember that the other disciples believed because they saw. Thomas is really demanding to see the same things that convinced the others. He is not asking for anything more than what the others saw. Jesus doesn't rebuke him—and he is willing to believe when confronted with the evidence.

Who is Jesus referring to in verse 29? Us—along with all the other believers who never saw Jesus in the flesh.

In verses 30 and 31 John speaks about Jesus' miracles.

- **Who doesn't John list more of Jesus' miracles?** Another dozen miracles would not convince non-believers or strengthen Jesus' credibility.
- **Why does John include these specific miracles?** He told us everything we need to know to believe and have life in Jesus' name.

Application: How are we like the eleven disciples of our Lord? Often times we are so frightened and lacking in faith that when called to action we do nothing, or like the women who are mis-focused and preoccupied with fears about how we can move a stone (Mark 16:3). How foolish these fears seem to us later, and yet often our own fears keep us from attempting what our Lord commands us to do.

MEMORIZE: John 20:21