

John 20:11-31

Resurrected Christ – Resurrected Faith

Resurrection Doubt

We have read and studied the great trials of our Lord Jesus during the last week He was in Jerusalem for the Passover. It should have been the last Passover for the Jews, but they rejected the true Passover Lamb and continue until this day. Why did the crucifixion and resurrection happen? Paul wrote in his letter to the believers in Rome, “It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:24b-25) Jesus was the final and complete atonement for the sins of those who believe in Him as the Christ. Further, #1 God made it clear that only those who believe in Jesus Christ as God will be in heaven. Jesus said “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6) I believe this is true and some may call me intolerant, I am intolerant concerning the truth of God and His inspired Bible and the truth of Jesus the Christ and Savior of those called by God. The world has been in the process of decay and dying since the fall in the garden. The only true life, life that lasts, comes from Christ. History has a tendency to repeat itself, because men do not learn from the mistakes of the past. I saw this quote by Aristotle and realized its truth all through history and its truth in the world today. He said, “Tolerance and apathy are the last virtues of a dying society.” One only needs to look at the state of our world and closer to home, the American society to observe the truth of this statement.

To deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ one has to set aside overwhelming historical and biblical evidence. There have been a number of man-made stories or theories to deny the resurrection. Some common theories are that Jesus did not die on the cross but fell into a coma because of the loss of blood and was revived in the tomb by the spices and coolness of the tomb. This fails to deal with the Roman guards pronouncing Him dead and putting a spear in His side. Then there is the hallucination theory that Jesus' followers were so overwhelmed with grief and so desperately wanted to see Him risen from the dead they imaged that they saw Him. However, we know that the disciples did not expect Jesus to be resurrected, as we will explore later on. Another theory argues they went to find the body in the wrong tomb and Jesus lay dead in another. This would imply that in two days they forgot which tomb, that there were multiple new tombs near the garden and that the Roman guards had somehow changed which tomb they were guarding.

Of course, the Jewish leaders concocted the oldest story. We know from Matthew 28 that they claimed the disciples had stolen the body. By this claim they, in fact, admitted the tomb was empty! Why would the disciples attempt to steal the body? We know from Luke that they did not believe He had risen. The angels told the women to remember the words of Jesus, *“And they women remembered his Jesus' words, 9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11 but (now listen how the disciples respond to what the women have told them) but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”* (Luke 24:8-11) Followers did not believe.

Unbelieving men have not wanted to believe so they may continue in their sin. People will go to great effort to disprove the resurrection, but history and the testimony of over 500 eyewitnesses is beyond dispute.

Here is something else I thought was interesting to consider. When Jesus appears to the eleven and then to 500 He only appears to His followers. He never appears to unbelievers. He does not appear to the Scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees to prove to them He is indeed the Messiah. He appeared only to those who are His chosen. Now, wouldn't you think Jesus would show off His risen body to prove to the doubters that they were wrong? **#2** The truth is, even His followers were **doubters**. They were shocked whenever He appeared and they doubted that it was for real, like Thomas wanting to touch to make sure. Some even thought they saw a ghost.

Still we ask, "Why didn't Jesus appear to the Jewish leaders? Why didn't Jesus walk through Jerusalem saying, "Now you can see I still live! I have fulfilled the prophecies of the Scriptures." There are several possible reasons Jesus did not "go public." Jesus was done with Israel as a nation. Jesus' focus was now on His church. In Matthew, beginning in chapter 12, Jesus had begun to turn away from Israel and lay the foundation for His church. Secondly, Jesus Christ never used miracles as the only way to communicate who He was. Jesus' plan for all of the ages of the church was that, men and women, such as, you and I would be His witnesses. Even if Jesus showed Himself to unbelievers they would not believe, for their hearts worshipped the ruler of this world. His plan was to confirm the faith of those who already believed in Him and then they, in turn, would go out empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to bring men to repentance and to announce

the gospel of the resurrection. If He had appeared to one unbeliever, He would have had to go around appearing to all of them to convince all of them. So, He appeared to those who were His own, then energized them with the Holy Spirit of God and then He sent them out to tell and proclaim the gospel of the resurrection. We see from our vantage point in history that it was more strategic for Jesus to appear to His own.

The Word of God says, that a rich man went to Hades and asked if he could go back to warn his brothers. The man is told, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise (rise from what?) rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:31) #3 Even if Jesus had appeared to the unbelievers, the evidence of His resurrection would not have convinced them to believe. The god of this world blinded their minds.

Jesus appears to His followers because they are the key to everything that is going to happen in the years to come. They are the very instruments with which the gospel is going to be presented throughout history, they must believe in faith and they must have confidence in a resurrected living Christ. If they are convinced beyond doubt and if the Holy Spirit of God indwells them, He will send them out to do the job He wants done. These might be some of the reasons Jesus appeared only to His chosen.

Today it is the same as it was for the Jews at the time of our study passage in John this morning. As the Apostle John wrote, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” (John 3:36) Let us obey the Son, share His love with each other and the truth of the Bible with those God places in our lives. May the scriptures

continually increase our love for Christ and each other for this will be a strong witness to the world. Since we live under God's grace, certainly we can have grace towards the world and still hold true to the scriptures.

Let me add another thought here. Out of all of these appearances, the Apostle John writes only of three. John is careful in what he included in his gospel account. John wants to proclaim to us who Jesus is and that is He is God. He also wants to tell us what Jesus as God is like. John then paints three scenes to give us special insights into the person of Christ. John selects three that have unique and direct purposes. This morning we will see faith lost, Christ's love for those who had lost faith, the peace of Christ given and restored faith in Christ.

Faith Lost

On a Friday afternoon, Jesus was dead nailed to a cross. He was taken down and placed in a tomb. A large stone was rolled in front of the tomb sealing it. Roman guards were placed outside of the tomb to make sure no one would be able to enter or for that matter, leave. In the days following the crucifixion those who were the closest to Jesus were filled with profound discouragement and despair.

#4 Jesus had told them of His death and resurrection, but they did not comprehend. When Jesus died, their hope for the future died. For three years these followers had put their faith in Jesus and some had come to believe He was more than a prophet; He was the Messiah. They did not understand all of what He taught; they tried, but it was difficult. However, what they did understand they came to believe. But now even their faith and belief lay dead in the tomb.

Their loss of faith was evident by the scattering of those who had called

themselves Jesus' disciples or followers. Many had believed, but between Friday and Sunday their faith faded and they believed it had all come to an end. Their faith had died with Jesus and they were making their way home. The remaining disciples now feared what would become of them. They were hiding out in a room closed off from those who might seek to put them to death as they had Jesus. Cleopas was returning home on the road to Emmaus on Sunday afternoon when Jesus joined him and another disciple. Cleopas did not recognize Jesus, and said, "we had **hoped** that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21) Cleopas was speaking in the past tense for his hope faded with the death of Jesus. Cleopas even knew the tomb was empty, but he did not understand what this meant. If he understood that Jesus would be resurrected and live, well then, he would not have started for home. Remember Peter is recorded as saying to Jesus in Matthew 16:16, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" but even for Peter this statement is in the past tense.

Mary did not know what to make of the empty tomb. Without hope she finds herself back at the tomb.

Love From Christ .v 11-18

With our understanding of this crisis of failing faith in what Jesus promised, let us read John chapter 20, beginning in verse 11, "But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. **13** 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.' " *Matthew gives more detail concerning the conversation between Mary and*

the angels. “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here, for he has risen.’ ” (Matthew 28:5-6a) *Continuing in John, verse 14* “Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Mary may not have recognized Jesus for her last memory of Him was that of a beaten, bloody and dead Christ. Mary’s devotion to Jesus was total and she now wants to make sure His body is properly taken care of. She still has no thought of Jesus as resurrected.

I can hear the compassion and love in Jesus’ voice as He says to Mary His devoted and faithful servant, ... “**Mary.**” It is Jesus who opens the eyes of one’s heart to know truth. Verse 16 continues, “She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher)” *This translation is OK, but it lacks depth, it more accurately means more than just teacher – it means “great teacher” or my teacher of all that is important, these would be more of the meaning John wrote here. We continue in our reading at verse 17, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’* Mary having found Jesus again doesn’t want to chance losing Him. Mary wants Jesus to be with her always, but Jesus would remain physically on earth for only 40 more days. **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’—and that he had said these things to her.” Faithful Mary does not want to leave Jesus, but she is obedient to what He commands.

One of the things I would like to take note of is Jesus elevated the status of women. In Israel women had very little legal rights. Males inherited not women. The fact that the resurrected Jesus appears first to a woman says a great deal. We can see the current status or value of women by the reaction of the disciples when Mary tells them she has seen the risen Christ. As recorded in Luke 24:11, “**these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.**” One would have thought that the disciples would have valued Mary more. She had been ministering to Jesus and the disciples for a couple of years.

Mark and Luke fill in some gaps concerning Mary in their accounts. “**Now when he Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.**” (Mark 16:9) “**Some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.**” (Luke 8:2) There is no historical evidence or indication in the Bible that Mary was a harlot. However, there is some indication that Mary was a person of means from her ability to support Jesus. Also she had a leadership position among the women; her name is mentioned more than most and often is listed first among the women’s names. **#5** She was at Jesus’ crucifixion and was the first to arrive at the tomb Sunday morning. Now, she is the first to see the risen Christ. She takes the good news of Jesus resurrection to the eleven and others who are with them. To the shame of the remaining eleven disciples, Luke records, “**they did not believe Mary.**” How their view of Mary would change in just a few hours.

Peace of Christ .v 19-23

This story of Jesus’ first day as the incarnate God resurrected from the dead

continues in verse 19, "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Here we find 10 of the remaining 11 holed up in a room, possibly the upper room where the night before they had the "Last Supper" with Christ. These disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews. Now that Jesus is glorified walls and doors are of no consequence. "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' Jesus speaks calming words to comfort the terrified disciples. We know from Luke's account, "they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit." (Luke 24:37) To reassure the disciples that He was real and not a ghost, 20 "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Luke adds depth, Jesus says, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:39) #6 Luke even says Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish, which gave additional proof Jesus was not a spirit. Back in John 20, verse 21, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'" To me this is an exciting statement, for this is a precursor to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20 that Jesus gave on the day of His ascension. These 10 disciples and 11 when Thomas arrives 8 days later are being commissioned to be the founding fathers of Jesus' Church. This will then complete the transition from the Old Testament promise, Jesus' fulfillment of the promise and people living this fulfilled promise before a Holy God. This is the commission that you and I are to continue until Jesus returns for the second time. I hope you understand what a great privilege the disciples received and by way of the disciples example, and the Word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we too have been entrusted with a great privilege.

Now we come to a symbolic act of Jesus that is often misunderstood and misrepresented in verse 22, “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.’” Why do I say this was a symbolic act? **#7** Jesus is indicating the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit that would come at Pentecost for all who believe. Up until this time, the Holy Spirit was given to specific people at specific times for specific purposes. We know from John 16:17 that the Spirit would not be given until after Jesus’ ascension. On the day of Jesus’ ascension He told His disciples, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8) So we know the morning of Jesus’ ascension they were still waiting for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ breath symbolized that Jesus would breathe spiritual life into people who believed He was the Christ. God had breathed into Adam and gave him physical life. Jesus now gives spiritual life. In Ezekiel the Holy Spirit is referred to as God’s breath. These concepts of physical life, spiritual life and life enabled through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all come together in Christ and waits only for a few more days for His ascension.

As part of their witness to the world Jesus give them His authority. We know from both Daniel and Mark that only God can forgive sins. What Jesus is saying is that the disciples and His followers and believers to come, like you and me are able to declare to anyone who gives their life to Christ, repents of their sins and believes in Jesus of the Bible, that their sins have been forgiven. Conversely believers can

declare to unbelievers that by rejecting Christ they will die in their sins. Jesus said this clearly, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20:23) **#8** In declaring the gospel, believers have authority to announce to the world who is freed from sin and who remains bound by the prince of this world. This is not intolerance but truth. We often remember Matthew chapter 18 as speaking of the process of dealing with a Christian who is in sin. This passage both empowers the church to deal with pronouncing those who have not been saved and are outside of the church and it is also the process for dealing with unrepentant people in the church. If someone is taken through the process in Matthew 18 and is put out of the church, the truth is they were not truly believers. The Word of God is the standard and the church is to employ this standard for dealing with each other and with judgment of unbelievers.

The church’s authority comes from the Scriptures given by God. Because Jesus is the head of the church, those living the Word of God speak for Christ and they can live and act knowing they are in accord with Christ. This is why we know we will be hated by the fallen world and this is OK for we belong to Christ Jesus not the world.

Faith in Christ v. 24-29

Now we continue our study this morning with Jesus’s appearance to Thomas. Reading at verse 24, “*Now Thomas (Aramaic), one of the Twelve, called the Twin, (also called Didymus [did.oo.mos] in the Greek meaning twin, found 3 times in John. He was also called Judas Thomas – meaning Judas the Twin) Thomas was not with them when Jesus came.* **25** So the other disciples told him, ‘We have

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.’ Not much is known about Thomas after Jesus’ ascension. Eusebius wrote that Thomas ministered in Persia or today what is called Iran and then India where he was martyred. Clement of Alexandria wrote Thomas died of natural causes and is buried in Alexandria. So, we know little of Thomas. But here in John we see where the name “Doubting Thomas” came from.

Reading at verse 26, “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ **28** Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ **29** Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Thomas’ reaction of wanting proof further demonstrates the disciples were not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead and they were shocked when they realized Jesus lived, which again, dealt a blow to all the non-resurrection theories. Once Thomas sees Jesus he makes the statement, “My Lord and my God!” and in an instant has moved from doubting to full throttle belief. Jesus looked ahead to the time after His ascension when physical and tangible evidence will no longer be available. Jesus says of the future believers, **#9** “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Blessed means the believers will be blessed because by their faith for they will be accepted by God. This applies to you and me. God blesses us for our believing faith in Jesus Christ.

Believing the Resurrection v.30-31

We close this morning with **#10** John's statement of his purpose for writing his gospel account. Reading from verse 30, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** 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." This is John's summary statement – John wants people to read his gospel account and know Jesus is the Christ by the miracles He performed, His teachings and most importantly by the greatest miracle, Jesus' resurrection. John lays a foundation of evidence for one to believe Jesus is God incarnate, He is the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world and by His life and resurrection we can believe and by believing in Jesus our sins are forgiven and we receive eternal life through Him. This morning we have observed faith shaken, faith lost, the love of Christ given that faith might be restored. As Paul wrote, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The gospel message is simple and yet, one of the deepest spiritual journeys anyone could ever imagine. I praise God that you and I are traveling this amazing journey together as brothers and sister in Christ. I pray the Word of God, not just John's, but the entire Bible will fill you with the riches of God and bless you so that you will bless many in Jesus' name. Let us live for Christ in every aspect of our lives.