

The Gospel of John
Week Twenty-Nine
John 20:1-31

Day One

¹ 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.

v. 1 – The first day of the week in Israel is Sunday. It is a normal business day after the Saturday Sabbath shutdown. So early on Sunday before dawn, Mary from Magdala, a village on the Sea of Galilee, went to the tomb for the purpose of anointing Jesus' body properly (we know this from another gospel). As she approached the tomb, she saw something strange: The stone had been removed from the entrance. It was a heavy stone that would have required more than one person to move.

v. 2 – John did not provide the detail that we read in Mark 16. Instead he skipped right to the part where Mary went to report her findings to Peter and the "other disciple." Mary had to know where the disciples were at the time, even though they were in hiding for fear that they too would be seized.

v. 3 – Peter and this other unnamed disciple ran to the tomb to see what Mary had reported. Mary went early and the disciples ran. The things of God require diligence and operating on God's timetable, not yours. I have found most people passive where the Lord is concerned, worried that they will miss or get ahead of the Lord. Most are concerned that they will get ahead of the Lord; I find that most lag behind. Mary got up early and Peter ran. Those are two good responses to anything you want to do for God.

Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor (Proverbs 12:24)

The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions (Proverbs 12:27).

vs. 4&5 – These two disciples weren't running; they were racing! The anonymous disciple beat Peter to the tomb, but did not go in. He observed the evidence of the burial strips of linen on the floor of the tomb, but he did not enter for some reason. He stopped short of going all the way, for whatever reason – perhaps fear or not wanting to become unclean by entering a tomb. **Is there anything you need to do for the Lord? Have you stopped short of completing it? Are you on the edge but haven't followed through?** I urge you to do it quickly and urgently, without delay.

Day Two

⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally 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.)

vs. 6&7 – Peter arrived and went all the way into the tomb, typical of his personality. Peter was brave, brash, impulsive and bold. It would not have been like him to stop at the entrance. He would go all the way into the tomb. Peter first saw the strips of linen that had been around Jesus' dead body. Then Peter saw the burial cloth that they put over Jesus' face and around His head.

The strips of linen were strewn randomly over the floor, but the linen cloth was folded by itself apart from the linen strips. This obviously meant something to the disciples. If Jesus' body had been stolen, it is doubtful that the thieves would have taken time to fold a face cover. Maybe the cloth was folded in a way that was distinctive of how Jesus folded things and was a calling card of sorts. Whatever it was, the face cloth meant something to those men.

I have found that the Lord will do things in people's lives that are special to them and only them. **Is this true in your life?** The Lord encourages me by giving me assignments, usually involving travel. Those are his gifts to me. Then He speaks to me or shows me things when I go. That is how God works in my life. **How does He work in yours that is distinctive?**

vs. 8&9 – The other disciple entered after Peter, saw the condition of the empty tomb and believed. **What did He believe?** He must have believed the Jesus was raised from the dead. It implies that Peter did not believe, even though he went in first and saw. The other disciple saw the evidence through the eyes of faith and believed. It is true that two people can behold the same event and come away with two different reports and insights. That is what happened here.

The Lord worked with and through both personalities here. Peter was impetuous and ran ahead, the other disciple was more cautious and observant. **Which one got the insight here?** In this case, it was the one who waited. Yet on other occasions, Peter was the one who received the insight while the other disciples were blind. This is a good indication of why we need one another. No one will see everything there is to see, so we need to rely on one another for wisdom, insight and direction. **What do you see now? What are you learning from what others see?**

The one thing that can be said for the anonymous disciple is that he figured prominently in the death and resurrection saga. Because he seemed to be there at every event in Jesus' death and resurrection, God rewarded him with special insight as he observed the details.

That is how I want to be. I want to be present at many things so hopefully God can open my eyes to see what others miss or can't see because they aren't there.

Also I want to be true to who God made me to be. That requires that I know who I am. **Do you know who you are – your gifts, tendencies, personality traits, quirks and things that motivate and de-motivate you?** Both disciples in this case, Peter and the anonymous one, acted in a manner that was consistent with who they were. **Are you trying to be someone you are not?** If so, you can stop and relax. God is happy with the way He made you.

Day Three

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹ but 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.

v. 10 – The two disciples at the tomb did not know what else to do, so they went back home. They had no direction or understanding of what was next, so they went back to the place they knew, which was home. Home is a good place to go when you don't know what else to do or where else to go. These disciples would not be home for long, however, for the events of the coming days would take them from the familiarity of their homes to the rigors of life in the limelight and on the road as they took the gospel to the world.

v. 11 – Mary did not go home. Instead she chose to stay at the tomb. She was distraught, convinced that Jesus' body had been stolen. The anonymous disciple at least had waited and received his insight into what had happened in the tomb. Then Mary stayed behind after the others went home and received her insight. In these two cases, it certainly paid to wait and be more deliberate. Both Mary and the other disciple saw more than those who stayed home, ran ahead or left early. I will leave it to you to draw conclusions about the spiritual lessons from that insight.

v. 12 – When Mary looked in the tomb, she saw two angels, but did not know they were angels. These two were sitting where Jesus had been laid. I am not sure what they were doing there, probably present to deliver the word to Mary about what had happened. Angels have many duties, not the least of which are taking care of God's people. I am not talking about a guardian angel, which is not a biblical concept. Yet there is ample evidence that angels play an important role in the lives of God's people, even when God's people are unaware of who or what they are.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14).

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

v. 13 – The angels asked Mary a question. This means they have intelligence and can communicate with humans. They also appear as humans with the shape of a body and are clothed in white. Mary's response was indicative of the lack of understanding that the disciples had. She had come to the conclusion that someone had taken the body and put it in an unknown place. Mary wanted to complete the task of anointing Jesus' body and could not. Little did she know that there was no reason to do so.

v. 14 – Mary turned around and saw Jesus, but did not realize it was Jesus, probably because she did not expect to see Jesus there. Very often your comprehension is affected by your assumptions. Mary assumed Jesus was dead, so she was not looking for Him to be standing behind her. Therefore, she missed the obvious. You and I do the same thing all the time. Answers to our questions and provision for our needs are all around us, but we cannot see them. It's not because we aren't smart or spiritual, and it's not because we don't love the Lord. It's because we have wrong thinking that leads to blindness and wrong conclusions. **Ask the Lord to show you any place in your life where you may be doing just what Mary did?**

Day Four

¹⁵ "Woman," he said, "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 returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning 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.

v. 15 – First the angels asked and then Jesus asked Mary why she was crying. Mary assumed that Jesus was the gardener. So consuming was her assumption Jesus was dead that she did not even recognize His voice. Mary assumed that Jesus was the gardener and asked for the whereabouts of Jesus' body so she could retrieve it. You have to admire her diligence and willingness to honor her Lord by giving Him a proper burial. I can see why the Lord chose to reveal Himself to this woman before the other disciples.

This is an indication that the Lord honors women by granting them insight and gifts. **If God chooses to equip a woman for ministry and service, then why should man not utilize her? If God did not want her to be involved, then why would He give that woman the gifts and insight to perform tasks in the church?** Jesus seemed very comfortable working with women in ministry. I think the Church should do the same. **Do you agree?**

v. 16 – Jesus called Mary’s name and finally she recognized who He was. She referred to Him as the Teacher in the Aramaic dialect. The Lord speaks every language and can relate to anyone in every culture. He understands everyone everywhere and can respond to the needs of men and women from every culture, tongue and tribe. I say this because other religious movements like Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are tied to a certain culture, language or region. Christianity has always had a worldview for all nations, which of course has been limited by the bias and prejudices of the Lord’s followers. Where Christianity has been taken, however, it has taken root and grown. Now the other major movements are also moving out and growing, but they are simply emulating what Christianity has done all along in response to Jesus’ instructions:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

v. 17 – Mary probably tried to cling to and embrace Jesus out of pure joy, adoration and surprise. Yet the Lord instructed her not to embrace Him but rather to go inform His disciples of His whereabouts. Perhaps if the two men had stayed, they would have seen Jesus; but instead they went home. It is unclear exactly what Jesus meant when He said what He said here. Maybe He was indicating that the nature of His relationship with the disciples was going to be radically different than what they had previously known.

It is interesting that Jesus referred to the Father as His and theirs, and God in the same manner. He was certainly identifying closely with His disciples as one of them, with the same spiritual heritage. Jesus was especially eager for Mary to inform His brothers the disciples that He was back. That was more important to Him than Mary worshipping or holding onto Him at that point in time.

v. 18 – Mary was obedient and went straightaway to report to the disciples for a second time that she had seen the Lord. **I wonder how the men felt when they realized that the Lord had not appeared to them first but instead to Mary? Perhaps they felt nothing at all. Are you obedient to and report to those whom the Lord sends you? Is there anyone you need to contact today with a message for them from him? Are you biased against any group so that you could not receive the report from the Lord that they have for you?**

Day Five

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, 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 his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

v. 19 – This is almost a laughable picture. The disciples were huddled together behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews. They already had the message that Jesus was back from the dead and they had a whole host of things He had said to them that they could draw on that moment. Yet they chose to stay behind locked doors, like as if locked doors could keep out the Jews and Roman guards! What flimsy defenses we construct when we choose anything or anyone but God for our refuge and fortress!

What have you constructed to protect yourself? Is it adequate for the job or do you need to abandon it and choose one that is eternally safe?

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Proverbs 18:10).

Jesus came right through their locked doors and stood in the midst of them, uttering the words, “Peace be with you!” Jesus was talking peace while the men were thinking danger. When you focus is the Lord, the end result is always peace. **Do you have peace? If not, then what is your focus?**

v. 20 – Jesus showed them His hands and side. By doing so, He was proving to them that it was really He and not a phantom or replica. It wasn’t a ghost, as they had thought when He came walking to them on the water. It was the Jesus they knew, the one who had been crucified. This wasn’t a new version but rather a changed version of their Lord and Master. He bore the scars of the past but the glorified flesh of the future, just like you and I will.

The disciples’ fear turned to joy with just one revelation, just one sighting of the risen Christ. That may be all you need as well – just one new perspective, one insight from Scripture, one promise from God. **What do you want to live in today – fear or peace and joy?** If you choose the latter, then the source for your peace and joy is in seeing Jesus and not your circumstances.

v. 21 – Jesus again told them to have peace. Yet immediately He indicated that He wasn’t just back to reveal Himself but to send them on a mission, just as He was on a mission. **I wonder if His reiteration of peace wasn’t trying to connect the peace that He was imparting at that moment in the midst of their fear so they would also bring that same peace into the fearful situations they would encounter where He was about to send them?**

Jesus did not just appear to make them feel more at ease and to relieve their anxiety. He appeared to remind and renew their sense of mission, that they were apostles, the “sent forth” ones, who would soon be sent forth as His witnesses to the ends of the earth. **What is your mission and purpose, do you know? Do you have peace in the midst of it?**

v. 22 – Jesus breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. This indicated that Jesus would send the Spirit from heaven, and that He would be the disciples’ helper in their mission ahead. **Do you have the power and help of the Spirit in the work that you do? Can you feel and sense His assistance? If not, what can you do to reconnect? If so, what more can you do with the power and Spirit of Jesus as your partner and guide?**

v. 23 – Jesus gave them a first indication of their mission, which would be to forgive men’s sins. Of course, they were only acting as God’s agents, for only God can forgive sins, since God is the One offended when we sin. Yet Jesus was giving the disciples authority to accomplish their mission and that mission was reconciling man to God and men to one another:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Are you involved in the ministry of reconciliation? What more can you do to help set men free from their sins and be right with God?

Day Six

²⁴ Now Thomas (called 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 it." 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."

vs. 24&25 – Thomas happened not to be with the disciples when Jesus first appeared. **I wonder why he wasn’t afraid to venture forth while the others were huddled together for safety?** At any rate, the men reported to Thomas that they had seen the Lord. Probably to their surprise, Thomas did not receive their report! At that point they must have felt how Jesus did when they did not receive His reports and words over the years.

I have to ask why Thomas was so adamant in rejecting the disciples’ report to him? These men had been together for more than three years. **Did he have any reason from the past that would cause him to think they were lying? Did he not hear the same things that the others had heard when Jesus spoke of His resurrection?**

This gives us an indication of how unbelief can cling to us like cat hair to dark fabric! Here was a man who saw and heard great things, yet he could not believe the report of the Lord through His fellow disciples! He demanded and required proof beyond any doubt that what they were saying was true. What's more, Thomas wanted to touch the evidence for himself.

Thomas put himself in a dangerous place, for he was setting the terms under which he would have faith. Unless I am mistaken, God sets those terms and not man. Yet you and I have done the same thing. We have determined what must happen for us to believe. God must prove Himself to us, when it should be the other way around! **Is there any report that you are not believing today because of the terms of faith that you have set before you will have faith?** If so, perhaps you and I need to repent and ask God to forgive our unbelief. God is not out to trick us. **Why do we sometimes act like He is?**

v. 26 – The disciples heard Jesus' words of peace and assurances that He and Spirit were with them. **So what did they do?** They retreated behind locked doors once again. They still did not comprehend the situation for what it really was. Yet we see God's grace and I am so glad He is full of grace! Jesus repeated the process one more time, and came through the locked doors to bestow on them the gift of peace.

This gives us some indication of what our own resurrected body will be capable of doing. Jesus passed right through locked doors as if they were not there. The barriers of hunger, space and fatigue seemed to be eliminated in this new form with glorified human flesh. Remember, this life is just a precursor to the life to come, which will be much more spiritual and less restrictive than the current life is.

v. 27 – By God's grace, Jesus came not just to give peace to the frightened disciples, but also to have a one-on-one meeting with Thomas. Thomas' requirement somehow touched God's heart and Jesus came to give Thomas what he had requested. Jesus showed Thomas His nail scarred hands and feet.

Jesus body could be touched after the resurrection. Jesus had memory of what happened before He died and He also bore the marks and scars of what had happened prior to the resurrection. Those marks became a part of Jesus' bodily existence and were an important mark of who He is and what He did on behalf of His people. Jesus offered His hands and side as proof that it was really Him, but then He ordered Thomas to stop doubting and believe! It was not a suggestion that he stop doubting; it was an imperative command.

Jesus commands you to stop doubting as well.

[Day Seven](#)

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." ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous 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 Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

v. 28 – Thomas’ response was to worship the Lord! He identified Jesus as God and worshipped Him as such. As I have said throughout these studies, if Jesus accepted this worship and He was not God (which of course He is), then He is worse than a false prophet. I sat that because some will read scripture and determine that Jesus was a holy man, a righteous prophet, and a moral leader. He is all those things, but He is also the Lord God, who is worthy of all our worship and praise.

Thomas responded as every human should respond to Jesus. **Do you like or admire Jesus, or do you worship Him?** There is a big difference.

v. 29 – Jesus told Thomas that he believed because Thomas had seen Jesus scarred body. Yet He proclaimed that those who have not seen and believed are blessed. God by His grace appeared to Thomas, giving Thomas what He had required in order to believe. Jesus did not have to do that, but He did it out of love for Thomas. This makes me think of what the Lord did for Gideon when Gideon requested and received more than one confirmation of God’s will to bolster Gideon’s faith:

Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised- look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water (Judges 6:36-38).

While you can ask for a “fleece’ like Gideon and Thomas did, there is no guarantee that the Lord will provide one for you. So best to settle the faith issue once and for all, and learn to trust the Lord with as few stipulations as possible.

v. 30 – John reported that Jesus did many other miraculous signs for the disciples, also aimed at bolstering their faith for the future work He had for them to do. **Have you seen any miracles? Do you expect to see any? When was the last one you witnessed? Was it personal or for someone else?**

v. 31 – John was clear in his purpose for writing and for including the material that he did: he wanted the reader to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It’s good to work with purpose. **Do you know why you are doing what you are doing?**

John knew that once the reader believed in Jesus that he or she would then have life in His marvelous name. **Do you have life in all that you do? Answer truthfully. Are there activities and roles you play that take life from you and don’t give life to you? Then how connected are those activities to your faith in Christ? What adjustments do you need to make so that you will have life?**

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).