

The Gospel According To John

The Resurrected Christ

John 20:1-31

Introduction

John 20:1-31 is a thrilling passage in which Jesus, after His resurrection, confronts those who love Him. Jesus physically, literally, and bodily resurrected from the grave just as He said He would. To announce and authenticate His resurrection, Jesus appeared no less than ten times to no less than five hundred different people (according to the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 15:6).

The resurrection is crucial to us. Our faith depends upon the testimony and transformed life of those who had actually seen the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:14-17).

Many critics of Scripture have said that if Jesus really rose, then He would have appeared to the skeptics, not to believers. But the believers were the skeptics. The idea that they manufactured the resurrection is ridiculous because they never expected Him to rise. Even Peter and John acknowledged this fact in John 20:9: Since they did not know or believe that He would rise, they would not manufacture a resurrection. They were shocked whenever He appeared, and even doubted that He was for real.

Jesus Christ would not make personal, spectacular, supernatural appearances to every unbeliever to prove Himself. Jesus planned that men and women like us, empowered by the Spirit of God, would be His witnesses (see also Luke 16:31).

An amazing picture of the mercy seat (v. 1-12)

It is fitting that this is the first day of the week, for this is the beginning of something new. It was still dark when Mary approaches. This is the perfect counterpart to the darkness that still shrouds Mary's understanding. The stone that had sealed the tomb has been rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let others in that they may see that He was risen even as He said!

Mary finds Peter and John, and they run to the tomb. What they see when they enter the tomb clearly shows this is a different kind of resurrection than that of Lazarus. Lazarus was still wearing his grave clothes. Jesus' grave clothes were still there – leaving an empty shell of linen cloth (Ezek. 42:14). Jesus had passed through the grave clothes. The cloth that had been around his head was neatly folded, revealing that the body was gone (Ezek. 44:18-19). John believed, even before he saw the resurrected Christ (v. 8).

Verse 9 is clear that they weren't expecting a resurrection. They had not yet realized that the Scriptures had foretold this. John was not trying to fulfill Scripture. He didn't even know the Bible talked about Jesus' resurrection! What fun it must have been for the disciples to go back and reread the familiar Scriptures with their eyes open to the Christ-centered hermeneutic (1 Cor. 15:3-7).

In verse 12, we are given a description that to me echoes of the mercy seat (Ex. 25:17-22; 1 Sam. 4:4; Lev. 16:2, 30-34; Heb. 9). Here is where God would meet with them (Ex. 30:6; Num. 7:89, 17:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Isa. 37:16; Psalm 80:1ff;), and not just the sons of Aaron; Christ is the true *meeting-place* between God and man! Jesus begins with a woman. Indeed things have become new!

John selects three appearances: one, to Mary Magdalene; two, to the ten disciples; and three, to Thomas. In each case the appearance verifies Jesus' bodily resurrection.

Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (v. 13-18)

Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene. Under Jewish law a woman's testimony was not usually admissible in court. Perhaps this also indicates a new day, where men and women, one in Christ, will testify of the resurrected Lord. God honors this woman – delighting to honor whom He will.

Mary was nobody spectacular. She had been saved out of a life of horrible sin--Christ had cast seven demons out of her (Lk. 8:2). She was not an apostle, but Jesus appears to her for the express purpose of showing His personal, loving faithfulness to one disciple, no matter how insignificant that one disciple may assume she is. It is a powerful lesson. We would naturally have thought that the first appearance of Jesus would not have been to a woman like Mary, but to Peter or John or one of the other Apostles.

Mary was weeping just like Hagar in Genesis 21:19, who was by a well of water and didn't know it. All that Mary needed was right there--the risen Christ. Jesus wouldn't leave her in this sorrow.

Did you know that Jesus knows your name (John 10:3; Isa. 43:1)? Not only that, but the Lord knows the number of hairs on your head (Mt. 10:30). The Lord knows everything about you, and He loves you in a personal way. We do not have an indifferent Christ, or a cold, calculating Christ; we have a warm, intimate, loving Christ.

Finding Jesus alive was overwhelming, and so Mary just poured out love and hung on to Him, as if she were saying, "Lord, You will never get out of my grip again. I'm not letting go anymore." Mary reminds me of the Shulamite woman in Song of Solomon 3:4 who said, "...when I found the one I love, I held him, and would not let him go...."

The Greek means, "Don't cling to Me. Stop clinging to Me." It is in the imperative. Mary wants to hang on to His physical presence, but this can't happen because He says, "...go and tell my brothers, (a whole new relationship!) for I am in the process of ascending to **My** Father and **your** Father" What a glorious result of the cross! In other words, "Mary, our mode of fellowship is not going to be like it was. I won't be here in a physical body communing with you. I'm going to go to the Father. When I go to the Father, I'll send the Spirit. When that happens, I just won't be with you physically, but I'll be in you." See also 2 Corinthians 5:16 which reminds us we don't have a fleshly relationship with Christ; we have a spiritual relationship. So He says, "Mary, the whole thing is going to be different. There is a new kind of fellowship--a personal communion." The old relationship is gone, but the new is better! Jesus has risen – not just to be alive again, and to go back to the way things were – but to ascend to glory as Lord, having established His kingdom!

Notice that Jesus says, "...go to my brethren...." This is a whole new thing. The disciples had been called servants, they had been called friends, but they had never been called brothers until now. Here is something exciting, thrilling, and new: a whole new relationship to Christ. (Heb. 2:11; Rom. 8:15-17, 29; Gal. 4:4-7)

Jesus appears to His disciples (v. 19-23)

The disciples were locked up because of their fear of the Jews. They were scared to death, but then Jesus came. How did He get in there? He walked through the wall. If He could ascend out of His grave clothes, what's a wall? If Jesus Christ, even in His physical form prior to His resurrection, could walk on water, don't you think He could rearrange the molecules to walk through a wall?

v. 20 – Their grief was turned to joy as Jesus had foretold (14:18; 16:20-22).

v. 21 - "Peace to you" repeated 3 times (v. 19,21,26), making it significant. He had spoken of peace in 14:27 and 16:33. He has brought about the fulfillment of that which He taught them of in the upper room. (See Isa. 9:6-7; 26:12; 52:7; 53:5; 54:10,13; Micah 5:2-5; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 9:9-10). Peace is a complement of "it is finished" on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted.

v. 22 - The text does not say the disciples did receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us in Acts 2:1-4 that the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. This seems to be a symbolic act anticipating the bestowment of the Spirit that the church, at the time of John's writing, had already experienced. John wants to clearly establish the connection between Jesus' work on the cross, His resurrection and ascension, and the sending of the Spirit. The promised Kingdom had been established through Christ's atoning work on the cross.

Notice "them" is in italics (i.e. not there). I believe this breath reveals Jesus Himself as the source of the Spirit which He would send. If the disciples had truly received the Holy Spirit, they would not have been still locked in the same room eight days later (Jn. 20:26). Jesus Himself said later, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me..." (Ac. 1:8). So, this is simply a pledge that they would receive the Holy Spirit a few days in the future. By giving them the pledge of the Spirit, Jesus would then cause them to remember when they did receive the Holy Spirit, that He had personally commissioned and dispensed the Holy Spirit to them.

v. 23 - This obviously is not teaching that we have an arbitrary right to forgive sin (Mark 2:7). He is saying that you have the right to say someone's sins are forgiven and someone else's are not forgiven. To any man who is conscious of his sin, and who repents toward God and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can say to that man, "Your sins are forgiven." To any man who willfully rejects and does not believe, and refuses Christ, you can say, "Your sins are retained."

Forgiven (tense – passive perfect) – i.e. if you forgive the sins of any they have been forgiven. Therefore they don't actually forgive – but the declaration of assurance of forgiveness. The statements could be rendered "they are in a state of forgiveness" (i.e. they stand forgiven and they stand not forgiven). The passive voice implies that it is God who is acting. The conclusions are simply the results of preaching the gospel. To reject the gospel is to be left in your sins (9:41).

Forgiveness of sins is part of the New Covenant (Heb. 10:15-18). If you have repented and believed in Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Luke 24:45-49 is the parallel passage and it sheds light for us. Jesus is charging His disciples to preach the forgiveness of sins in His name. That is what Jesus is charging His disciples to do. We can announce peace and forgiveness on the basis of repentance.

Jesus appears to Thomas (v. 24-29)

Now, the Lord meets Thomas at the point of his faithlessness. The Lord never forsakes one of His own. I love the fact that the disciples cared about him and went to him. They didn't write him off. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass,...restore such an one in a spirit of gentleness...." And the disciples did just that.

Again Jesus came right through the wall and stands in the middle of the room. Now, He is there for one purpose, and that is to meet Thomas. You say, "He is so busy running the whole universe, what does He care about one weak, faithless disciple? Jesus did not come in that room and say, 'Shame on you.'" But He said, "...Peace to you." Aren't you glad that when your faith wanes, He doesn't browbeat you, but He meets you at the weakness of your faith and lifts you up? Jesus is so gracious in bringing His loved ones to faith (Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 5:7)..

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (v. 30-31)

Those who have not seen the risen Christ and yet have believed are blessed, therefore this book has been composed – that you may believe. Jesus is the Christ – the One of whom the Old Testament Scriptures wrote.