

Lesson Twenty-Five

(John 20:1-31)

Joseph and Nicodemus had placed the bruised and bloody body of Jesus "in a new tomb where no one had ever been buried" (19:41). On the Sabbath day Pilate gave orders for his soldiers to guard the tomb to prevent any real or imagined escape from taking place (Matt. 27:62-66). But nothing — neither puny man nor powerful Satan — could keep the Son of God in that tomb!

The Resurrection of Jesus

(John 20:1-10)

¹Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. ²She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. ⁴The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and saw the linen cloths, but he did not go in. ⁶Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there ⁷and the cloth which had been around Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. (⁹They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back home.

"Early on Sunday morning" (literally, "on the first day of the week") was the time of Jesus' resurrection. And that day became the special day on which New Testament Christians met for worship. It is important to realize that Jesus left his followers two memorials: the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day. There is a strong, divine link between the two memorials, for when we assemble for worship on the day on which Jesus was resurrected we are vividly reminded of his sacrificial death by our participation in the Lord's Supper each and every Sunday.

Lewis Sperry Chafer pointed out that "following the resurrection of Christ, there is no injunction given to Jew, Gentile, or Christian to observe the Sabbath, nor is Sabbath-breaking once mentioned among the numerous lists of possible sins" (*Systematic Theology*, IV, 255).

When Mary Magdalene got close enough to the tomb to see that the large stone had been removed from the entrance, she naturally assumed that something had happened to the body of Jesus. So she turned and ran to Peter and "the other disciple" for help (20:1-2). And both men, alarmed by her words, ran toward the tomb.

"The other disciple" arrived first and saw the neatly-folded grave clothes, but he remained outside the tomb until Peter caught up and went in first (20:3-8). It was still "early" in the morning (the Greek word *proi* was a technical word for the period between 3:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.), but it was light enough to see . . . and to believe (20:9). For the grave clothes "were lying there in their regular folds as if the body of Jesus had simply evaporated out of them and left them lying" (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, II, 310). It was clear to them that Jesus' body had not been carried off; it had miraculously changed. The physical body had taken on a new spiritual dimension (1 Cor. 15:20,44,50).

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

(John 20:11-18)

¹¹Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb ¹²and saw two angels there dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³"Woman, why are you crying?" they asked her.

She answered, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!"

¹⁴Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵"Woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it that you are looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener, so she said to him, "If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned toward him and said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means teacher.)

¹⁷"Do not hold on to me," Jesus told her, "because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God."

¹⁸So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.

Peter and John had left Mary Magdalene far behind them when they ran to the tomb. And by the time she arrived, they were gone. She had not been inside the tomb, so she was unaware of what the two men saw and its impact upon them. All she knew was that Jesus' body was gone. And the possibility that the Romans or even grave robbers had removed and mutilated the body was too much for her to bear. So she stood there weeping her heart out until, finally, she recovers enough to look inside.

Suddenly she was face to face with two angels who were sitting in the tomb. They asked her why she was crying. After all, the victory had been won. Satan and death had been defeated! But she didn't know it.

Blinded by her grief, Mary Magdalene didn't even recognize Jesus when he appeared before her (20:14-15). But when he spoke her name, she immediately recognized her Lord and held on to him for dear life (20:16-17)! Although Jesus allowed others to touch him (Matt. 28:9; John 20:27; Luke 24:39), he commanded her to let him go and to tell the other disciples what his plans were

(20:17). And she did exactly as Jesus instructed (20:19), for she knew that belief and obedience always lead to greater blessings.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

(John 20:19-23)

¹⁹It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁰After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." ²²Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

John does not mention the event, but soon after the appearance to Mary Magdalene Jesus also appeared to two of the disciples as they were on their way to the village of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

Concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, G. Campbell Morgan wrote: "His enemies thought they had done for him, and they were glad. His friends thought he was done for, and they were sad. But heaven watching was preparing the music that should ring around the world declaring the defeat of evil, the mastery of sin, and the ransom of the race" (*The Gospel According to John*, p. 306). No wonder, then, that the ten apostles who were present behind locked doors "were filled with joy at seeing the Lord" (20:20)! What a wonderful climax to a glorious day!

Jesus reminds them of their great responsibility to carry on his work (20:21). And then Jesus "breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' " (20:22). Burton Coffman says, "Jesus' appearance in this verse as conveyor of the Spirit is no contradiction of the fact that Jesus sends the Spirit from heaven, as on Pentecost. Furthermore, even in this verse, the Spirit came from both God and Christ who are one . . . , there being thus no possible denial of the Spirit's coming, even here, from heaven" (*Commentary on John*, p. 348).

Verse 23 has been abused by the Roman Catholic Church, as they teach that their popes and priests succeeded the apostles and so have the authority to absolve or forgive people of their sins. The fact is, however, that this "passage" does not grant the apostles the power of absolution. The verbs *apheontai* (they are forgiven) and *kekratentai* (they are retained) of this verse are in the perfect tense in the Greek. Now the perfect tense means 'an

action having been completed in past time with a continuing result.' Literally translated verse 23 would read, 'whose soever sins ye forgive, they have already been forgiven them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they have already been retained.' It is very interesting indeed that in the other two instances where Jesus similarly commissioned the disciples (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18) the verbs are also in the perfect tense! There the verbs are *dedemena* (has already been bound) and *lelumena* (has already been loosed)" (Paul Butler, *The Gospel of John*, II, 431).

Jesus and Thomas

(John 20:24-29)

²⁴One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

Thomas apparently had a stubborn streak in his personality and tended to be pessimistic. When Jesus told the apostles that Lazarus had died and that they were returning to Bethany, it was Thomas who in a "gloom and doom" fashion said, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!" (11:16). He was not a coward; but he wasn't very optimistic, either.

And here he flatly refused to believe the testimony of the other disciples that they have actually seen the risen Lord (20:25). This self-imposed unbelief continued for an entire week. It was not until his personal encounter with Jesus on the following Sunday (note the day of the week) that he accepted the fact which the other apostles had been rejoicing in for seven days!

But there is something to be said for demanding evidence. As Burton Coffman says, "Neither Christ nor his religion has anything to hide, nothing to conceal or cover up, no issues to avoid or problems to evade. To every unbeliever of all ages, the

challenge of the risen Christ still thunders across centuries and millennia: *investigate!* Test the evidence; make your own examination of the facts; and be not faithless but believing. Thus infidelity was rooted out of the sacred group, and thus it has been rooted out of the heart of every unbeliever throughout history who took the trouble to investigate" (*Commentary on John*, p. 440).

However, it is not necessary (or even possible) to personally verify every statement before it can be accepted. I have never been to London, but I believe that the city exists because of the testimony of other reliable people. I believe that heaven exists, not because I have personally been there, but because of the testimony of Jesus and the inspired apostles. And that is the point which Jesus makes in 20:29. From that year to this, millions of people around the world have accepted Jesus as their Lord because of the written testimony of the apostles (the New Testament).

Why John Wrote This Gospel

(*John 20:30-31*)

³⁰In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

John could have written a much, much longer account of the life and miracles of Jesus (20:30). But the Holy Spirit guided him to include only enough information to provide the honest inquirer with sufficient evidence to induce belief in Jesus, the Christ or Messiah, as the divine Son of God (20:31).

The Importance of the Resurrection

John Allen Chalk wrote: "The resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity. Here, by this mighty act of God in time and history, Jesus' claims to be God's Son and man's Savior were fully vindicated. The hope of future life for all men, the authentic Christian faith, the truthful testimony of eyewitnesses, the reality of forgiven sins, and a faith for eternity make it clear that Jesus' resurrection is no sideline affair."

Are you aware that Christian baptism is a symbolic reenactment of the resurrection of Jesus? In immersion we share in both the death and the resurrection of the Lord: "For surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our

baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, 'so also we might live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4). It stretches the imagination to think of sprinkling or pouring as being a *burial*, much less something from which one can be *resurrected*. Only immersion fulfills that symbolism. But without the resurrection of Jesus, baptism would be meaningless.

Thought Stimulators on John 20:1-31

1. Who was the first person to go to the tomb on Sunday morning?
2. Who were the first two men to view the empty tomb?
3. What was there about the tomb that caused the men to believe that Jesus had risen?
4. What did Mary Magdalene see when she looked inside the tomb?
5. What two instructions did Jesus give to Mary Magdalene?
6. Why did the apostles meet behind locked doors?
7. How did the apostles react when Jesus appeared to them?
8. On what day are Christians to gather for worship?
9. Did the apostles personally have the authority to forgive peoples' sins?
10. Name the apostle who did not believe that Jesus had been resurrected.
11. What was it that caused the doubting apostle to believe?
12. Why did John write his account of the life of Jesus?
13. Immersion symbolizes what two events in the life of Jesus?
14. What would have happened if Jesus had never been resurrected? (1 Cor. 15:1-23)