

# John 20

Can you believe it?

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# Can you believe it?

## John 20

The Resurrection is the key. So...

Two principle questions:

- 1) DID IT HAPPEN?!
- 2) WHAT DOES IT MEAN?!

Let's hold these two questions in our minds as we study the passage.

As we read this chapter - think through the following question:

- If you were in court, what details from John's evidence would you pick out to convince the jury?

### Incident

1

Read John ch 20: *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." <sup>3</sup> So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to their homes.*

### Incident

2

*<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Having said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> 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.'" <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.*

### Incident

3

*<sup>19</sup> 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, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he*

**Incident  
4**

*showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*

*<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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."*

*<sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

*<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> 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.*

## ***Did it happen?***

- 1) Just look at the sheer detail – it's so graphic!
  - v1: ***...it was still dark***
  - v2: ***...she ran***
  - v4: ***Both of them were running together...***
  - v4 : ***...the other disciple outran Peter***
  - v5: ***...he saw the linen cloths lying there***
  - v7: ***...and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.***

THIS is eye-witness testimony!

- 2) Clearly the last thing that the disciples were expecting was a risen Jesus. This makes is unlikely that they would just have made it up...

We can see from the text that they weren't expecting a risen Jesus:

- Mary thinks his body has been taken...
  - v2: ***"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."***
  - v13: ***"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."***

- v9: **...as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.**
- vs 14-15: Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener:

v15: **Supposing him to be the gardener...**

- vs 24-29 Thomas was clearly NOT expecting him!

Read vs 24-25: *Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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."*

3) It is Jesus who is physically risen – the same Jesus – not “a swap” – physically alive!

- v20: **Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord**
- ...as was Mary vs 16 +vs 18: **“I have seen the Lord”**
- Why did they believe? –

v20: **When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.**

...It was his body!!

Why did Thomas believe?

Read vs 27-28: *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." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"*

In the face of this eye witness testimony to the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead we have to ask: what alternative explanations are there?

In other words, if you won't believe this account then how do YOU explain it all?!

Jesus had certainly died. We saw that in the last study. He was dead and buried! You could suggest that he had not really died but had resuscitated in the tomb – but then you would have to believe:

- That the experienced Roman executioners had failed
- That the blood and water from his side (which is medical evidence of death) had not flowed
- That Joseph and Nicodemus did not spot that he was still alive as they embalmed him!!
- That he had resuscitated in the cool tomb

- That without food and water and after the most brutal bodily treatment he had simply come round and recovered
  - That he summoned the strength to roll the vast boulder back up the hill away from the tomb entrance
  - That he had then overpowered all the guards!!
  - That he convinced his disciples that he had risen!
  - And ALL of this AFTER surviving the act of crucifixion!!
- That would take some belief....wouldn't it!?

How else would you explain the empty tomb and the disciples' growing belief?

- The Romans had nothing to gain from stealing the body, nor had the Jews.
  - If they had stolen it they could have "scotched" all talk of Jesus resurrection just by producing the body!
- The disciples had NOTHING to gain from stealing the body
  - How would they have gone all out preaching that Jesus is risen and how would most of them gone to HORRIFIC deaths for this message if secretly they knew it was a hoax!
- They are fearful, they were not expecting the Resurrection, they had given up on Jesus...

Therefore, this could not have been a hallucination caused by wishful thinking.

*For more consideration of the evidence – look up Professor Sir Norman Anderson's "The Evidence for the Resurrection"*

## ***What does it mean?***

Verses 1-10 also show that the disciples didn't yet understand what the Resurrection was all about:

*v9: ...for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*

Let's look now at Jesus' gradual explanation of what is going on. There are FOUR incidents to explain.

### **Incident 1: vs 1-10**

Why does John tell us v9:

*v9: ...for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*

- It seems that we will find the evidence and explanation from the Scriptures as to why Jesus must rise.

For example:

Psalm 16 v 10: *For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.*

Isaiah 53 v 11: *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*

Psalm 22 vs 19-20: *But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! <sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!*

- We need to be clear that we will only understand Jesus' resurrection properly as we grasp that it is what all of the Old Testament is heading towards. It '**must**' happen – it fulfils and completes all that was promised in the Old Testament.

#### Incident 2: vs 11-18

What does Jesus mean by what he says to Mary in v 17:

John 20 v 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.'"*

This is a statement packed with meaning: **"Do not cling to me"**

- First – Jesus' command to Mary means that his physical work on earth is accomplished
  - ...So we shouldn't try to cling on to him on earth,
  - ...nor should we suggest that there is still more earthly work for Jesus to do.
  - You could paraphrase this: *"Don't treat me as if I've still got stuff to do down here – let me go to my Father"*
- Secondly – Jesus' message to his disciples means that his work is accomplished!

**"...Go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."**

Let's compare this with Jesus' words earlier in John's gospel:

Read John 1 v 51: *And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

Read John 17 v 5: *“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”*

- Thirdly - Jesus’ language about membership in God’s family means that his work really is accomplished - because as promised in John 1 v 12 - he has brought us into the family of God:

Read John 1 v 12: *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*

Why does he call God: **“my God** and **your God, my Father** and **your Father”**?

John 16 gives us the answer:

Read John 16 vs 26-28: *“In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; <sup>27</sup>for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.<sup>28</sup> I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”*

So then, following the death and resurrection of Jesus full and free access is available to the family of God. We can have **“the right”** to be his family.

This means we must be careful that we don’t fall into the trap of thinking that there are *NEW WORKS* or *MORE WORK* for Jesus to do here on earth in order for us to have full assurance of being full family members – either through repeated offering of the Mass or through fresh miracles, signs and wonders.

NO!! Jesus has finished his earthly work- there is nothing more for him to do!!

We can have full, assured membership of God’s family because Jesus’ work is accomplished.

- Why is this the case..?

### Incident 3: vs 19-23

What does Jesus mean when he speaks the following words to the ten Apostles?

Read John 20 vs 19-23: *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, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”*

Once again this statement is packed with meaning! What does **“Peace be with you”** mean?

The phrase **“Peace be with you”** was an early day greeting. BUT spoken by the crucified, risen, Jesus it is FAR more significant than simply that!!

- Remember Jesus’ earlier words to his disciples in the Upper Room:

Read John 14 v 27: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*

Read John 16 v 33: *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

With sins forgiven by the crucified, risen Jesus... peace with God IS NOW AVAILABLE!!

And what does it mean that Jesus breathes on them and tells them they are receiving the Spirit?

v22: *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

The actual receiving of the Spirit didn’t happen for another 40 days.

- Just as with the foot washing (which was an enacted parable to show what was going to happen at the Cross) NOW Jesus breathing on them is a picture of what will happen at Pentecost.
- This is a picture to show that after the Cross and Resurrection - as forgiven and cleansed people – the disciples can now receive the Holy Spirit.

And what does Jesus mean by saying:

v23: *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”*

Do you recall John 14 vs 25-26:

John 14 vs 25-26: *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

...and John 16 vs 12-15:

John 16 vs 12-15: 3: *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”*

In the Upper Room Jesus promised that when the Spirit came to the Apostles he would lead them into all the truth.

- This is the key to understanding the apostles “forgiving sins”. Of course, only Jesus can forgive sins, but as the Apostles proclaim the truth of the Gospel as delivered by the Spirit – so the Apostles, uniquely as witnesses of Christ, have power to point us to the finished work of Jesus.

Expressed differently – it is the Apostles’ Spirit- inspired message about Jesus (and only the Apostles’ Sprit-inspired message about Jesus) that has power to enable the forgiveness of our sins.

So then, following the death and resurrection of Jesus we can know full and free forgiveness through the Gospel message that the Apostles proclaimed.

#### Incident 4: vs 24-29

The story of THOMAS:

*Read John 20 vs 24-29: Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>26</sup> 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.” <sup>27</sup> 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.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

What is Thomas’ main problem?

- He fails to trust the Apostolic word of his fellow disciples:

*v25: 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.”*

- He should have TRUSTED their WORD - THAT was the point of the Upper Room Discourse and of vs 19-23 ...But did he?
- NO!! ...“***I will never believe***”!!
- We’ve already looked at the physical proof of his resurrection that Jesus has given here ...but the key point of this incident is summed up in v29:

***“Have you believed because you have seen me?”***

Question: Do we yet believe in THE WORD?!

If we do now believe in the WORD – what is the right response..?

“My Lord and my God”

➤ With what result?

***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed  
(in the Apostles’ Word about Jesus’ Resurrection)”***

## ***Summary***

What have we seen?

The Resurrection did happen...and has been witnessed... and it is a historic event!

This means:

- 1) Jesus’ work is FINISHED (completed) – therefore we are not to cling to him... but revere him – the Creator God!
- 2) Peace with God is now possible - through the Apostles’ teaching about Jesus
- 3) We should not doubt Jesus! This word of the Apostles should be TRUSTED – not doubted. And we are blessed if we believe it!
- 4) He IS Lord – we should all submit to him.

And what will this mean...

We close with a word from John the author as to the purpose of his book:

*John 20 vs 30-31: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> 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.*

➤ If we believe... Life in his name!

## ***Next time...***

Now what?

## John 20

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." <sup>3</sup> So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to their homes.

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