



Believe!

Jesus offers salvation to all who believe in Him.

JOHN 20:1-17

Daily we are presented with information that requires us to make a choice to believe it or not. It may be something as simple as a weather forecast that will affect what we choose to wear that day. What we believe about some things may not matter all that much, while what we believe about other things may be a matter of life or death. This is true when it comes to believing in Jesus. He said, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life” (John 3:36).

What does it mean to “believe in” Jesus?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOHN 19–20

John 19 can be divided into three sections. It begins with Jesus’s second trial before Pilate (vv. 1-16a). Apparently, Pilate did not want to execute Jesus, even though having someone flogged usually precluded a crucifixion. Pilate hoped he could satisfy the mob’s thirst for blood by having Jesus flogged. To add insult to injury, the soldiers placed a crown of thorns and a purple robe on Jesus, taunting Him with symbols of royalty. Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd and stated he had no grounds for charges against Jesus. But the Jewish religious leaders were intent on seeing Jesus crucified. They claimed that if Pilate released Jesus, who said He was a king, then Pilate was in collusion with someone who opposed Caesar. Pilate capitulated and handed Jesus over to be crucified.

The second section of chapter 19 describes Jesus’s crucifixion and death (vv. 16b-30). John emphasized how everything that happened to Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament (vv. 24,28,36). John also emphasized how Jesus voluntarily gave His life. After crying out in victory, “It is finished,” Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

The final section of chapter 19 describes the events that occurred immediately after Jesus’s death and burial (vv. 31-42). The Jews did not want bodies hanging on crosses on the Sabbath during Passover. Therefore, they appealed to Pilate to have the legs of the three crucified men broken. This would result in the men dying quickly from suffocation. The bodies could then be removed from their crosses and buried. However, by this time Jesus had already died. To confirm this, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’s side with a spear. After that, Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus, requested Jesus’s body. He and Nicodemus prepared it for burial and placed it in a new tomb.

 **As you read John 20:1-17, identify reasons for believing in the risen Jesus.**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

A REMOVED STONE (JOHN 20:1-2)

¹ On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!”

VERSE 1

Like the other Gospel writers, John began his account of Jesus’s resurrection with the discovery of the empty tomb on *the first day of the week*. Each Gospel writer also indicates *Mary Magdalene* was among those who first discovered the tomb was empty. The word “we” in verse 2 indicates there were other women with her when she made her discovery, though John’s account focuses on Mary Magdalene.

In the pre-dawn darkness of Sunday morning, Mary went to Jesus’s tomb to anoint His body with spices (Matt. 28:1). Tombs like this one were cut into the rock and sealed either with a large, disc-like stone fitted into a sloping groove so that it could roll down in front of the tomb’s entrance or with a heavy cork-shaped stone that fit snugly into the opening. To her astonishment, Mary saw that the tomb’s large *stone had been removed* from its entrance.

DID YOU KNOW?

Numerous Marys are mentioned in the New Testament: (1) the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-33; John 19:25-27); (2) Mary Magdalene, who had been possessed by demons until Jesus drove them out of her (Luke 8:2), the first person to encounter the risen Jesus (John 20:11-18); (3) the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1-2; 12:2-3); (4) the mother of James the younger and of Joses and Salome, she was part of the group of women who encountered the empty tomb (Mark 15:47-16:1); (5) the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); (6) the wife of Clopas, she witnessed Jesus’s crucifixion (John 19:25) and may be the same character as Mary, the mother of James, Joses, and Salome in the Synoptic Gospels; (7) Mary from Rome, an individual Paul greeted in Romans 16:6.

VERSE 2

Immediately upon her discovery, Mary ran to **Simon Peter** and John, **the other disciple, the one Jesus loved** and writer of this Gospel, to inform them what she saw. She feared someone had stolen Jesus's body. Perhaps she thought it was Jesus's enemies wanting to further express their contempt for Him. Or she may have believed grave robbers were the culprits. This makes sense given that grave robbing was prevalent at that time. It is at least one of the reasons a large heavy rock was used to seal tombs, especially the tombs of the wealthy. Not long after these events, the Roman emperor made a decree that anyone who stole a body from a tomb "with wicked intent" would incur the death penalty. This may have been an attempt to squelch the growing claims that Jesus had risen from the dead. In an attempt to refute Jesus's resurrection, the Pharisees concocted the story that Jesus's followers had stolen His body (Matt. 28:11-15).

- What are some elements of faith that are hard to understand? How does that help or hinder people when it comes to accepting Christ?
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AN EMPTY TOMB (JOHN 20:3-10)

³ At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. ⁵ Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. ⁷ The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. ⁸ The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. ⁹ For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

VERSES 3-5

Alarmed by Mary's report, Peter and John ran to the tomb as fast as they could. John, who most biblical scholars believe was a younger man, **outran Peter and got to the tomb first**. This small detail speaks to

the authenticity of what happened. When John got there, he **did not go in**. Instead, given that entrances to such tombs were usually low, John stooped so that he could peer inside. Enough time apparently had transpired since Mary first went to the tomb for there to be enough sunlight to see the inside of the tomb.

The Jewish practice of preparing a body for burial first involved the washing of the body. To mask the odor of decay, it was anointed with costly perfumes, such as a mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). Then those preparing the body either wrapped it in a linen shroud or with linen strips, along with binding the hands and feet with strips of linen cloth (19:40). They used a separate cloth to cover the face. When John looked inside the tomb, he saw **the linen cloths** that had been used to prepare Jesus for His burial.

DID YOU KNOW?

Grown men typically did not run in the culture of first-century Palestine. The fact that Peter and John ran (v. 4) perhaps demonstrates an unusual degree of curiosity and excitement on their part. Matthew reported that the women who came to the tomb ran to tell the disciples the news of Jesus's resurrection (Matt. 28:8).

VERSES 6-7

Unlike John, Peter did not hesitate to enter the tomb and look around. Peter also saw **the linen cloths lying there** but noticed that the wrapping that had been used on Jesus's head was not located with the other linen cloths. It was lying in **a separate place**, neatly **folded up**. The orderly arrangement of everything was apparent.

It is interesting to contrast John's description here to his description of what happened when Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave. Lazarus emerged from his tomb still bound hand and foot in his linen strips, with his face still wrapped in its cloth (11:44). Jesus's burial cloths were all left behind. It is possible that, as He was raised from the dead, He passed through His graveclothes. After neatly folding them, He left them behind because He no longer had need of them.

VERSES 8-10

After Peter entered the tomb, **the other disciple** followed behind him. When John **saw** the arrangement of the linen cloths and folded facial

cloth separate from them, he **believed**. Many believed in Jesus because they saw Him after the resurrection. John *believed* before actually seeing the risen Savior. This also was in spite of the fact that he and Peter, along with the rest of Jesus's followers, did not yet understand that the Old Testament had foreshadowed the Messiah's resurrection from the dead. (For example: Psalm 16:9-11; see also Luke 24:27,44-45.)

 **How does evidence of the empty tomb bolster a person's willingness to believe in Jesus?**

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary and multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Look up the word *resurrection* in a Bible dictionary. How does resurrection differ from resuscitation? What difference did Christ's resurrection make in the lives of the early disciples? Read Paul's teachings on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Why is the resurrection of Jesus essential to our Christian faith? What difference has Jesus's resurrection made in your life?

THE LIVING TEACHER (JOHN 20:11-17)

¹¹ But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. ¹⁵ "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic,

“Rabboni!” — which means “Teacher.”¹⁷ “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus told her, “since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

VERSES 11-13

With everything Mary had experienced the week leading up to Jesus’s death, and now with the discovery that His body was missing, it is no surprise she was *crying*. As she wept, she stooped to look inside the tomb and discovered *two angels in white sitting where Jesus’s body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet*. The place where Jesus died was between two criminals, but the place of His resurrection was between two angels.

The angels’ question in verse 13 was a way of communicating that there was no reason to grieve. Jesus’s resurrection was a time to rejoice. At this point, Mary did not know Jesus had risen. She was convinced someone had stolen or at best moved His body. In her extreme sense of loss, even the appearance of angels was not enough for her to recognize something wonderful had happened.

VERSES 14-15

Realizing someone was standing behind her, Mary turned to look. It was Jesus, though she did not initially recognize Him. It is possible her eyes were blurry because of her weeping. However, there would be others who knew Him before His death who would not readily recognize Him in His resurrected body (Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:16,37; John 21:4). It seems there was something different about the appearance of His resurrected body from what it was before.

Like the angels before Him, Jesus asked Mary: *Why are you crying?* Then He asked her, *Who is it that you’re seeking?* Taken together, Mary understood these questions to be the expressions of a concerned stranger who worked in the garden. She still did not realize her tears were unwarranted. Apart from her sense of desperation, it is difficult to know what caused Mary to think that this *gardener* may have removed Jesus’s body and taken it somewhere else. Regardless, she was ready to do whatever was necessary to retrieve it and give it the honorable burial her Lord deserved.

VERSES 16-17

Verse 16 is a beautiful picture. It is reminiscent of the words Jesus spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd: His “sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. . . . The sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:3-4). Here, Jesus called Mary by name, and she recognized Him. Mary responded by calling Him **Rabboni** in Aramaic, which John translated for his Greek readers, **Teacher**. This is a wonderful reminder that Jesus knows each of His followers by name, and that they hear and recognize His voice when He speaks to them.

When Mary recognized Jesus, she apparently fell to His feet and clung to Him. Jesus told her not to cling to Him because He had **not yet ascended to the Father**. It is probable He was communicating that she would have more opportunities to see Him before His ascension, thus there was no need to cling to Him. Instead, she needed to get up, go to the rest of His followers, and tell them that He was alive and getting ready to ascend to His Father. Mary was the first one of Jesus’s followers who was mandated to go and tell others the good news of the risen Savior. The statement, **my Father and your Father, to my God and your God**, recognizes that while Jesus’s relationship to the Father is unique, now, because of what He accomplished through His death and resurrection, Jesus has made a way for every believer to have direct access to the Father through the Son (Heb. 4:14-16).

 **How does Jesus use others to help people understand His identity more fully?**

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-8,12-19.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Everyone needs to inquire about the truth of Jesus's resurrection.
- + Believers can express faith in Jesus.
- + Believers can tell all people about the resurrected Jesus.

○ **Discuss as a group reasons people today doubt the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and reasons people believe. What are ways your group can be a welcoming place for people who are seeking the truth about who Jesus is.**

○ **How would you explain to someone why and how the reality of Jesus's resurrection changes everything? Who needs to hear that? What are some specific ways you will express your faith in Jesus this week?**

○ **Memorize John 20:8.**

Prayer Needs
