

Believing is Seeing

John 19:31-42; John 20:1-18; 24-29; 1 Peter 1:3

Don't you love Resurrection Sunday? It is celebrated as both a holiday and a holy day, and that's why our culture is filled with so much confusion. We send mixed messages: the Easter Bunny, Easter eggs and the Resurrection of Jesus all thrown in together. The resurrection is the proof that the things that Jesus taught were true. It is not His death that sets Him apart. It is not His teachings that set Him apart! It is not even His miracles. It is His resurrection!

1 Corinthians 15:17 ***"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."***

Easter has been called a moveable feast because it doesn't fall on a set date every year. It's observed every year on the first Sunday *following* the full moon *after* the vernal equinox that happens on March 20th or 21st. We know this day as the first day of Spring. The vernal equinox is when the sun is exactly above the equator and the time of daylight and nighttime are equal. **So, Easter can be anywhere between March 22 and April 25.**

As we get started today, turn with me in your bibles or bible app or follow along on the screen in [John 19, verses 31-42](#)

"Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. 32The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. 33But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," 37and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

38Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was

a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. 39He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. 40Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. 41At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. 42Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there." (NIV)

The title of my Resurrection Day Message is: **Believing is Seeing.**

We've all grown up saying, "I'll believe it when I see it." But when it comes to understanding the bible and our spiritual growth it must involve faith. The bible says, "**1Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2This is what the ancients were commended for. 3By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." (Hebrews 11, NIV)**

Believing is Seeing. You've got to believe, and trust, then you will see.

Let's Pray

John Donne was an English writer and poet who lived from 1572 - 1631. As a Catholic in a time when that denomination was illegal in England, he endured constant prejudice and harassment. He wrote an interesting poem called;

For whom the bell tolls

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.

Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

Just so you know, there's a difference between 'ringing' a bell and 'tolling' a bell. When you RING a bell, the clapper hits the INSIDE of the bell and gives a loud and sweet sound. But when you TOLL a bell, you hit the OUTSIDE of the bell and the sound is somewhat somber and sorrowful.

Tolling a bell is what some churches (even today) do when a person has died. The bell is tolled once for every year the deceased had lived. THAT'S WHAT THEY DO... FOR THE DEAD.

According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy.

HUMOR: Jack Handy said, "When I die, I want to go peacefully like my grandfather did, in his sleep - not screaming, like all the passengers in his car."

What I found intriguing in these verses is that everyone in this part of the story believed Jesus was dead, and that - once they buried Him – that would be it. The Jews, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, and the Roman soldiers - they all believed Jesus was dead and He was not coming back.

What do you with Jesus if you don't believe He's coming back? What do you do with a dead Jesus?

ILLUS: In 1804, Thomas Jefferson wrote his own version of the New Testament. And on the dust jacket of that book, he wrote that he had: "set out to edit the Gospels to uncover the essence of true religion in the simple story of the Life of Jesus. Jefferson was convinced that the authentic message of Jesus could be found only by extracting from the Gospels Jesus' message of absolute love and service, rather than the miracles of the Incarnation, Virgin Birth, or even the resurrection." It's not surprising, then, that the last sentence in the "Gospel According to Jefferson" reads: **There they laid Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher and departed.'**

We read here that Joseph and Nicodemus were *secret* followers of Jesus. They spent a lot of time with people who doubted Jesus and wanted Him dead, so they believed that Jesus wasn't coming back from the dead either.

Matthew 27:62-64 tells us – ***“The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the***

chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63“Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” (NIV)

Nicodemus and Joseph probably knew what Jesus had said, they just didn't believe it. I say that because John 19:39-40 tells us Nicodemus 'came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So, they (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea) took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.'

75 POUNDS OF MYRRH AND ALOES!!!! That's a lot of spice. And there's a lot of money wrapped up in those spices. If they truly believed Jesus would rise from the dead in 3 days that would have been huge waste of money and they wouldn't have gone to so much trouble.

You see, Jesus' resurrection is the core of our faith. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, our faith is empty, and we're doomed to be dead in our sins.

The Church in Corinth had that problem. So, Paul writes in I Corinth. 15:12-20 ***“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (NIV)***

In one philosophy class, the professor told the students, 'Jesus did not die on the

cross, and I can prove it.' 'When a person dies,' he said 'their heart stops pumping, and gravity takes over. If you were to die right now, seated at your desks, your blood would eventually settle in your waist and below. But, when Jesus 'died' on the cross, a Roman soldier pierced his side and blood, and water came out. That proves he hadn't died. If he'd been dead, the blood would not have been there.'

That sounds convincing, but many believe Jesus died because His heart burst. When that happens, the blood from the heart mixes with the liquid in the pericardium - a sack that surrounds the heart. If you were to pierce that sack, what you'd see come out would be 'blood and water.'

Biblically, it would be logical for the physical heart of Jesus to burst from "stress". The Scriptures tell us that when Jesus died on the cross, He bore all the sins of mankind on that one body, at that one point in time. When Jesus died, it wasn't from the cross, it was from a broken heart.

Psalm 69:20 prophesied this moment, ***“Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.” (NIV)***

Luke 23:46 tells us ***“Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last.*** At that moment, all the pressure of all our sins would have broken His heart.

The gospel of John is the only Gospel that records the Roman soldier piercing Jesus' side. The part about the "blood and water" seems to be a passing comment on the way to something very important as noted in verses 35-37:

35The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” 37and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.” (NIV)

John wanted to prove that Jesus' bones didn't need to be broken, because a Passover sacrifice was unacceptable if its bones were broken.

Jesus fulfilled scripture and became the perfect sacrifice for sin.

But some have a problem with the Resurrection: not only whether it happened, but whether it matters if it happened. Does Jesus' resurrection have any significance for us today. Does it really matter?

So central was the Resurrection to the early believer's message—that Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, describes Peter and John as "preaching Jesus and the Resurrection." And it was the same with Paul when he wrote, "I passed on to you as the first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that on the third day he rose again, and that he was seen." So, the resurrection of Jesus is at the very heart and core of the Good News.

We're not talking about Jesus' survival, and we're not talking about His resuscitation. It doesn't mean that, having died, he was brought back to life. God rescued Jesus out of the realm of death; and transformed his body, so that he had a new power and was now immortal, never to die again.

The story continued in John, chapter 20.

1Early 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. 2So 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!"

3So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, 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.) 10Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

11Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13They 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." 14At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was

Jesus. 15He asked her, "Woman, 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."

16Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").17Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "18Mary 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.

Illustration: On May 4, 1865, after weeks of his body being on display in Washington D.C. and a few other cities, Abraham Lincoln was 'laid to rest' in a cemetery near his home in Springfield, Illinois. But Lincoln didn't "rest in peace." In 1876, there was a plot to raid his grave and steal his body. It didn't work. Then 11 years later, because of rumors that his body wasn't in that grave, his coffin was dug up and opened to confirm it was there. It was. But the rumors continued, 14 years after that, the coffin was dug up again. Both times witnesses were present who testified Lincoln was still in the grave. In all, Lincoln's body was moved 17 times and his coffin opened 5 times before finally resting in peace thirty-six years later inside a steel cage, beneath two tons of concrete poured ten feet high over his coffin.

<https://www.thehistoryreader.com/us-history/plot-kidnap-dead-president>

Lincoln is still in his grave and there were witnesses to that. But Jesus is NOT in His grave, and there were witnesses to that as well.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8: "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.'

Over 500 witnesses saw the risen Savior, and most of them were still alive when Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

Now, what's intriguing about what we just read is that John only focused on 3 of those 500 people who witnessed the resurrection of Christ. First, there was John who always referred to himself as "the other disciple" OR "the disciple whom Jesus loved". Then there was Peter, and finally Mary Magdalene. Three witnesses! **Let's look at WHAT each of them saw, and HOW it affected them.**

We're going to start with **John.**

John was with Peter when Mary Magdalene came and reported Jesus body was missing. We're told 'the other disciple (John) outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.... Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.' John 20:4-5,8

In the Gospels, whenever we read about Jesus' inner circle of disciples, it's always PETER, JAMES, and JOHN. John was always last, and Peter was always first. Here John gets to be first. He outran Peter to the tomb.

And when John got to grave it says that he looked inside and **"he saw and believed."** But then we're told 'AS YET they (Peter and John) DID NOT UNDERSTAND the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (John 20:9). But if John didn't understand the Scripture about Jesus rising from the dead...**why did he believe and what did he believe?**

Well, all John knew about anything was what Jesus had taught him.

Mark 9:31 says Jesus told them, **"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and AFTER THREE DAYS HE WILL RISE."**

And as Jesus was going into Jerusalem for the last time, He again told them in Mark 10:33-34; **"the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. THREE DAYS LATER HE WILL RISE.'**

Over and over again, Jesus drove home the fact that the grave would not hold Him. He'd rise on the third day. And now John SEES that the grave is empty, and he

remembered what Jesus had said. He may not have known the Old Testament prophecies that spoke of Jesus' resurrection, but he knew Jesus... and He believed Him.

By contrast, it almost seems like Peter... DIDN'T believe. ***"Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself."*** (John 20:6-7) Then we're told: ***"Then the disciples went back to their homes."*** John 20:10

Nowhere in the Gospels are we told that Peter believed (at this point) that Jesus had risen from the grave.

Peter would have seen the grave clothing off by themselves 'the face cloth... folded up in a place by itself.' No grave robber would have messed with that. He wouldn't have taken off the grave clothes, he wouldn't have removed the face cloth. He would simply have picked up the body and walked away. There was no reason for a grave robber to leave the rest behind.

I think the old Easter song by Don Francisco ***"He's Alive"*** best described what Peter's emotions might have been after seeing empty tomb:

"Well, something strange had happened there, but just what I did not know.
John believed a miracle, but I just turned to go.
Circumstance and speculation couldn't lift me very high,
cause I'd seen them crucify Him, and then I saw Him die.

"Back inside the house again, the guilt and anguish came.
Everything I'd promised Him just added to my shame.
When, at last, it came to choices, I denied I knew His name.
And even if he was alive, it wouldn't be the same.'

Francisco's take was that Peter's faith had been crippled by his denial of Jesus. He didn't think Jesus would love him anymore, so what difference would it make if He was alive?

The problem for Peter was that he believed that he'd messed up so badly that Jesus would never love him again. What difference would it make if He was alive.

And until Peter realized that Jesus DID love him, he would struggle with the idea of resurrection.

Lastly, we come to **Mary Magdalene**.

She seems like a minor character in the resurrection. I mean, Peter and John are headliners, they were way more important than she was. But if you count the verses in this passage. Peter is referred to in 6 verses, John is referred to in 4 verses... but Mary Magdalene gets 10.

Most of the verses about Christ's resurrection involve Mary Magdalene. In every one of the Gospels, she shows up. In fact, Matthew, Mark, and Luke tells us about the other women at the tomb, but in every Gospel - Mary Magdalene is mentioned FIRST! And EVEN at the crucifixion, when it was the women (not the men) that showed up, Mary Magdalene was there.

So, who is this woman? We don't know much. Mark 16:9 tells us ***"when (Jesus) rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons."*** And that's it! The reference to her having 7 demons cast out is also mentioned in Luke 8:2 where it says she helped support Jesus' ministry financially.

Once Jesus touched her life, once He healed her pain, she was a faithful follower of Jesus forever after that. And here, we find her at the grave. John 20:1 tells us, ***"Now on the first day of the week (Sunday) Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."***

She jumped to the conclusion that somebody's robbed the grave, and she goes and tells Peter and John. Mary is a single-minded woman. Somebody's stolen the body of Jesus... she's going to steal it back! "I will take Him away." She's willing to do whatever was necessary to honor Jesus who changed her life.

When she returns to the tomb a little later, and turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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.'***

And then "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni' which means Teacher. 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.'" John 20:14-17

What does this tell us about Mary?

First it tells us that Mary Magdalene was NOT an important person. She's only mentioned in 3 places. And we hardly know anything about her. She didn't give any speeches, write any books, she didn't have a YouTube channel, Twitter account, or "I saw the risen Jesus first" podcast.

But this is also good news. **God uses people we would think are unimportant to do important things.**

In Mark 16:9 we're told that "when (Jesus) rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared FIRST to Mary Magdalene." Jesus didn't appear 1st to Peter or James or John - those are IMPORTANT MEN. Instead, He appears to Mary Magdalene, someone we don't much about! And she's the person Jesus sends to tell the Apostles about His resurrection.

Think about this: The most important person to God is not the person who's famous, or powerful, or well-connected, or wealthy. The most important person to God is the person that will do what God asks.

So, God used an unimportant person to do an important task, because He could trust Mary Magdalene to do what He asked.

Secondly, despite what I just told you about Mary Magdalene NOT being important - she was VERY important to God; and by the way, so are all of you.

She's mentioned in ALL the Gospels, and she's shown to be a woman of courage and determination. Nothing is going to stand between her and Jesus. The men are all in hiding. They've locked their doors, but not her! She stands firmly at the cross... and goes early to the tomb. She's even willing to get Jesus' body back from whomever took it - and may the Lord have mercy on the guy who tries to stop her. This is a woman you DO NOT want to mess with!

So let me ask you:

Are you like Peter?

Have you messed up somewhere in your life? Have you done something that's brought you shame? And you're just not sure Jesus can love you. That He cares for you. Peter recognized that Jesus has risen from the grave - he just didn't want talk about it. He didn't think Jesus loved him.

Is there something holding you back from telling others about Christ. Has the shame and the guilt of the past so overwhelmed you that you don't think Jesus loves you? If so, that's not true. Jesus DOES LOVE YOU!

Are you like John?

Do you believe that Jesus loves you deeply, but you're not ready to talk about it. That's where John was at, I think. John believed Jesus loved him, but he didn't feel he had enough evidence. Until he had enough evidence, he wasn't going to talk about the resurrection. Do not accept the idea that you don't know enough. Look for it. Seek it out. **Believe so that you can see.**

Or are you like Mary Magdalene?

Are you bold and confident in your faith? Are you ready to do whatever is necessary to let others know what Jesus has done in your life and what He means to you?

CONCLUSION:

During World War II a Nazi war ship torpedoed a United States submarine and immediately a distress signal was sent out by the sub. When the rescue team arrived at the place where the torpedo had struck the US submarine, all they found was debris and an oil slick on top of the water. So, immediately divers were sent down to see whether there would be any survivors on that day.

And as the divers went down, they found the sunken sub and they went around it on all sides. They took out their knives and they began to tap on the side of that submarine, hoping that survivors inside would tap back. Sure enough, as they listened those on the inside began to tap back in response. And as they tapped the divers listened and they heard this message sent to them in Morse Code by the survivors inside the sub - **“is there any hope?”**

In that sunken sub these men who thought they were in a watery grave said is there any hope? And I believe that is what our world is asking. I believe that we

are living in a world that has been torpedoed by the enemy, Satan.

We live in a world that has sunken to the bottom morally and spiritually. We live in an age where sin abounds and all the social evils we face have brought our society to its lowest depths. We live in an age where people's lives have been torpedoed by sin. And they lie in the depths of an ocean of despair.

And the question people are asking today is - is there any hope? Is there any hope for my marriage? Is there any hope for my country? Is there any hope for my future? Is there any hope for my life?

Listen to what Simon Peter, the denier and doubter, came to believe, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3, NIV)

1. The resurrection of Jesus assures us of God's forgiveness.

Several times during his public ministry, Jesus said to somebody, "Your sins are forgiven." And in the upper room on his last night on earth, he referred to the Communion cup as his "blood which was shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." He linked our forgiveness with his death.

Paul says, ***"If Christ was not raised from the dead, our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, we are unforgiven, and those who have died have perished."***

2. The resurrection of Jesus assures us of God's power.

In addition to forgiveness for the past, we all need power in the present. God has power to change us into a new creation. He has power to transform you and me to make us like Christ.

That same resurrection power, which God displayed in Jesus Christ when he raised him from the dead, is available to us today. He can raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. He can raise us from the death of alienation into a life of close, personal communion and fellowship with God.

Becoming a Christian is nothing less than a resurrection from spiritual death and the beginning of a new life in the power of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus

assures us of God's forgiveness, and it assures us of God's power, and it assures us of God's ultimate triumph over death, hell, and the grave.

3. The resurrection of Jesus gives us a Living Hope

A. HOPE FOR THOSE WHO WEEP IN DEATH

B. HOPE FOR THOSE WHO WORRY IN DESPAIR

There are so many people who are worried. They are worried about their jobs. They are worried about their future. They are worried about their retirement. They are worried about everything. Those who don't believe that Jesus rose from that tomb will worry, but we have a living hope.

C. HOPE FOR THOSE WHO WONDER IN DOUBT

Some of you decided as a child, you made some commitment to Christ, maybe you were baptized and joined a church, but today you are filled with doubt. You are wondering if the resurrection is true. You are wondering if Christ really answers prayer. You doubt your own commitment to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ calls to you today and reaches out to you today and He says, **believe in me, so that you can see and know the truth.** Come and see that I am alive from the dead. For those who weep, and worry, and doubt, the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us a living hope today and for all eternity.

I love that old song

"I SERVE A RISEN SAVIOUR, He's in the world today.

I know that He is living, WHATEVER MEN MAY SAY.

I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer.

And just the time I need Him He's always near."

Sing the chorus with me:

"He lives (He lives), He lives (He lives), Christ Jesus lives today.

He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives (He lives), He lives (He lives), Salvation to impart.

You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.'