

**John 20: 1-31**  
**April 24, 2011**  
**Easter**

**EXHORDIUM**

Why did John write this gospel? We are explicitly told by him in verse 31., **that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.**

In this gospel, John has been telling the story of Jesus and this chapter is the climax of the story and comes to his main thesis statement. He has declared the Christ to us in the person of Jesus. From the initial verses of this gospel he was showing us that the word was with God and was God, that He came to earth to dwell with men. He then shows us Jesus, his life and works, the stark rebellious unbelief of the Pharisees and the limping belief of the disciples. But all along the goal is to display the person of Jesus in this world but not of this world, someone whom God has sent for a special purpose. This all culminates in the Resurrection story. If what had gone on before were not enough to convince us, there is nothing greater that Jesus can do than rising from the dead.

The Resurrection is the final proof. Who will believe? What must Jesus do? Can He do more than rise from the dead? Well, yes, He can do miracles. He can ascend up to the Father. He can take His Holy Throne of dominion over earth and heaven. He can send the Holy Spirit of power. He can dwell with us always. But the point remains. He has already done all of these things. And He has proven Himself most gloriously in rising from the dead, defeating death, declaring life to his disciples and destroying the work of the devil. Men who are waiting for Jesus to *do something* to prove Himself must wait until the final judgment. He need not prove anything more. His work on earth is finished. His rule from heaven over the New Creation has begun. Men must simply believe.

Why did I say the limping belief of the disciples? This chapter gives us a good example. But lest we be too hard on the unbelief of men today or even the limping belief of Christian men, let us look at the response of those who lived with Jesus. There were many levels of response to Christ and His work. Jesus was patient with them all. He spoke to them, built them up and brought them to see Him as the risen Christ.

But here at the crucial moment, they were not believing, but unbelieving. John wrote these things so that we might believe and have eternal life. He does not pull any punches here. He does not make the disciples heroes that had it all figured out or did not waver in their

steadfastness. Were it not for the grace and mercy of Jesus, they would not have gotten it. But Jesus is both gracious and merciful and spoke to them so that they would believe. And so He speaks to us and brings us to belief.

There are four main characters in this chapter, Mary Magdalene, John, Peter, and Thomas. They are all believers in Jesus but all of them are representative of a great deal of unbelief as well. They are Christians but they are displayed to us as both believers and unbelievers.

## **EXEGESIS**

The first is Mary Magdalene.

**John 20 20:1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.**

Mary went to the tomb with some other women. She was with Mary, the mother of James, and Joanna. They arrived early bringing spices to finish the job of preparing Jesus properly for his burial.

**Mary Magdalene**-could not get her mind around the idea that Jesus was not dead. She could not see Jesus through her tears. After she ran and told Peter and John about the empty tomb, she came back and went into the tomb herself. Apparently, John and Peter had already gone in and then went back to their house. This is when Mary has an encounter with an angel first and then with Jesus, Himself.

**2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. 3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.**

Upon seeing the tomb empty, she panics in distress and runs to tell Peter about it. Peter and John jump up and begin to run to the tomb. At this point, we might expect them to be running in happy anticipation of an empty tomb. But that is not what they are doing. They still do not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. It is more likely that they are running to the tomb as mortified mourners that the body has been stolen.

**4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. 5 And he stooping down, and**

**looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, 7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.**

**Peter**-ran with anticipation, fear, anger? He also apparently saw Jesus before the other apostles.(1Cor. 15:6) Or perhaps, He appeared to Peter as representative of the apostles.

John and Peter run but John outstrips Peter and arrives at the tomb first. Here is some super spiritual boasting. John says that he outruns Peter.

The scene they see is not one of grave stealing. The linen clothes that Jesus was buried in are neatly put aside. This would not have fit grave robbers. Even if the Jews had meant to steal the body and then blame it on the disciples to take away the punch of their story of His resurrection, they would not have done so this way. They would not have left evidence of an orderly rising and putting aside of the garments.

But even though the unbelieving Pharisees seem to remember that Jesus said that He would rise again from the dead, the mourning disciples completely forget this teaching of Jesus. Given the fact of Lazarus being raised from the dead, this is an astounding blindness.

**8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. 9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.**

Verse 8 is a bit confusing. John goes in, sees the empty tomb and believes. What does He believe? That Jesus is risen. Or that Mary's story is true? Given verse 9, I think it is clear that he now believed in the Resurrection but he is not able to persuade the other disciples. Even after the women come back and report to the other disciples that they have seen Jesus, their report seems to them to be idle tales. You would think that if John already believed, he would have been able to persuade the disciples to believe Mary and the other women.

**Luke 24:45-48 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And ye are witnesses of these things.**

**11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.**

This is after Mary has fetched Peter and John and returned to the tomb. She now looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where Jesus had been. She is weeping and wailing. Given her perspective on the events transpiring before her, her response is not unreasonable. She is in shock and dismay at the death of Jesus. She has come to pay her last respects to the body and do Jesus one last kindness. But to her dismay, He is gone. She still has not even conceived that He is risen.

Imagine what her response should have been. Having come early that morning to spice the body of Jesus, she sees the stone rolled away. Initially, she is horrified and angry. She begins to cry but in that instant remembers the things that Jesus has said. That He must go to Jerusalem, be killed there and rise on the third day. The light dawns on her and instead of crying, a joy begins to well up within her. Instead of being blinded by a face full of tears, she begins to run around the garden looking for Jesus. She laughs as she looks behind trees. She runs around in such an exhilarating flurry of excitement that she is winded and sits down to rest, with a smile on her face. And then she begins to laugh some more as she thinks about her own sorrows, fears, and anger and what they mean in the light of the Resurrection. It is all okay, Jesus is alive. But that is not what happened.

Perhaps the angels see Jesus behind Mary and make some motion that causes her to turn around. But she sees Jesus without knowing that it is Jesus. She cannot see Him either because her tears were blocking her vision or her grief was blocking her understanding or both.

**15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.**

Jesus is outside the tomb and Mary is looking into it. Jesus asks her why she is weeping and whom she is seeking. He knows why she is weeping. He knows whom she is seeking. His question seems almost a statement that she should not be weeping because the one she seeks is not

dead. However, she does not get the hint and still blinded by her belief that Jesus is dead. This amounts to unbelief that Jesus is alive.

**16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.**

When Jesus speaks, eyes are opened. Faith cometh by hearing. She says, Rabboni, which is a stronger word than Rabbi. It is a form of the word used in prayer and addressed to God.

**17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.**

She is overjoyed and clings to Him. Stop touching me, I am not yet ascended to my Father. Or I am not leaving just yet. My Father and Your Father, My God and Your God. Some believe Jesus uttered these words to show His special relationship to the Father. That is true but He adds, your, to show the special relationship of the disciples to the Father.

**18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.**

They do not believe her.

**19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.**

In Mark 16:14, we are told that Jesus appears to the eleven at this time and upbraids them for their unbelief. Here we are told that Thomas is not there, so 'the eleven' there must be a term used to describe the apostles.

When Jesus speaks, ears are opened. Even though they had been hitherto unbelieving, yet now Jesus is speaking and they are believing. They finally see Jesus.

Jesus comes to them even though the doors are shut and locked. He comes to them in their fear and grief, through any obstacles that they have put up between Him and them.

They are fearful of the Jews but in just a few weeks they will be bold and openly defiant to any that doubt that Jesus is risen from the dead.

**21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.**

Jesus now commissions them with the same commission the Father had given Him. They are to be witnesses that Jesus is the Christ. This witness is born to the world so that men might believe and believing have everlasting life. All of Jesus's life is to be declared but the preeminent aspect of the proof of Christ is His Resurrection. This shows His power over death and the victory of the cross.

V.23-The authority of the church in declaring forgiveness and bringing discipline.

**24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.**

Thomas-did not believe, not even the testimony of his dearest friends. Did he think that they were all having a group grieving delusion?

But Thomas did not believe and of the disciples. Was he so bold that not even Peter or John could tame him? This is a striking case of unbelief. And it is accomplished with a steadfast assertion that he is in the right. He is a skeptic's skeptic. While many modern men look upon this kind of thinking and behavior as a virtue, it is not. Thomas was not wise or godly in maintaining his Humian position. He should have believed upon the authority of those who had already seen Jesus. Certainly, he is blessed for finally believing but he could have been blessed more had he believed on their authority. How do I know he would have been blessed more? Because he would have believed sooner. Instead of moping about for a week, wondering if all the disciples were going mad and nearly driving himself mad in the mean time, he could have been filled with joy and anticipating another sitting of Jesus.

**26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. 27 Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy**

**hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. 28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.**

When Jesus speaks to Thomas, he believes. Faith cometh by hearing. Be not faithless but believing.

**29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.**

Jesus pronounces a blessing upon all those who believe in His Resurrection by the word of witnesses. We have the witness of the apostles and of Scripture. But we now also have the witness of millions upon millions of saints, passed into heaven and saints still living. They testify of the truth of Christ. Preachers declare His Word and all men everywhere hear it and come to faith. For faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. They are blessed.

**30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.**

We are to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We now see these two things as synonymous. That is because John has done his work well. His point was to show us that Jesus is the Christ and that the Christ is the Son of God and God in the Son.

## **EXHORTATION**

To each is given a measure of faith. But that faith can grow and it must. The disciples were all believers but they still had a hard time believing. But John is telling us about Jesus so that we can believe and believing, have life. Our measure of belief is related to our measure of life. The greater the belief, the more abundant the life.

The disciples were already entering joy while Thomas was still discouraged and disillusioned. He remained in this state for a considerable time. The Lord encourages him but not without upbraiding him for his delayed belief. And that delayed belief caused Thomas a great lack of joy.

We have every reason to believe and that to the fullest. We have the testimony of the saints that saw Jesus. We have the testimony of innumerable saints that have lived and died in Christ. We have the testimony of those gathered here who have heard and seen Jesus and that live in that joy.

We are the body of Christ and we are called to bear one another's burdens, to restore brothers weak in faith; to encourage, to exhort, to pray. We are not unlike those disciples, believers but having a hard time believing. This is why we are gathered in Christ. But we have seen Jesus and as Jesus said to Thomas, be not unbelieving but believing.

And this is the same encouragement you should render one to another. This is what it means to be a body. The hands put shoes on the feet. The feet carry the mouth to food. The ears bring the entire body Bach's St. Mathew's Passion. One lady carries food to another who is weak from childbirth. A brother rebukes another brother like Thomas who refuses to be convinced. In all of this, our faith grows that Christ is risen and working in His body. We are knit together and the risen Christ is displayed among us to build us up further. So, let us believe and build one another up to greater belief so that we have a great and growing abundant life together.