

## **He is Risen Indeed! – Easter Sunday**

**John 20:1-18**

**Covenant Waterfall, 12 April 2020**

Good morning Covenant Waterfall family, on this Resurrection Sunday. Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed! I pray that you and your family have a blessed day as you gather to worship our King and enjoy fellowship over a meal, and most importantly remember the powerful significance of this day – that Jesus Christ was crucified, died in our place for our sins, was buried, and on the third day, God raised him from the dead.

Read Scripture – Gospel of John, 20:1-18

Pray – we don't worship a dead hero, we worship the Living Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead and reigns right now over heaven and earth together with the Father and the Spirit!

### **Introduction**

Today is the most significant day on the Christian calendar. Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Why is this so significant? Our very salvation depends upon it. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we are wasting our time here, Christianity is a sham, no one has forgiven us our sins – and therefore we are separated and cut off from God. Basically - we have no gospel.

What we are going to see this morning from our text is that the resurrection is absolutely central to our faith and the truth of the gospel – and that we are not wasting our time here. This is all very real and has huge implications for us.

The account of the resurrection we are going to look at this morning is from the Gospel of John. As we shall soon see, he was an eyewitness to the resurrection. He didn't hear about it from other disciples, he witnessed it for himself. So in his account, we have a powerful testimony to the truth of these events. Throughout John's Gospel, he writes in order to persuade us that about the truth of the gospel – that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and by believing in him, we

would have gospel life (Jn 20:31). So when he describes the resurrection of Jesus to us in these verses that we are going to look at, his purpose is no different. He wants to convince us of the truth of these events in order that we may believe in Jesus and in doing so, have true life in him.

So what we're going to see is that: ***Because Jesus rose from the dead, we can believe in the truth of the gospel.*** (repeat).

I'm going to unpack this, 3 points:

- John believed
- Mary believed
- We can believe

Let me give you some context to the text before we get into it. In the previous chapter, Jesus is put on trial by the Jewish authorities on charges of blasphemy. He is found guilty by a kangaroo court and then executed by crucifixion on the Friday of the Passover weekend (we looked at his crucifixion on Friday). In chapter 19:39-42 John tells us that after his death, he is taken off the cross, embalmed with a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about 40 kgs and then bound up in linen cloths and placed in a tomb, sealed closed with a large stone. Chapter 20, our text, picks up at this point on early Sunday morning...

#### **A. John Believes vv. 1-10**

Mary Magdalene, one of the women who had followed Jesus around during his ministry, was the first to arrive at his tomb on Sunday morning, while it was still dark. She sees that the stone had been taken away, and then runs to call the disciples – Peter and John (“the one whom Jesus loved.”). They both arrive. Peter looks into the tomb, but John is the first to enter it, followed by Peter. There John sees the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus’ body, neatly folded up by themselves. There is no trace of Jesus’ body whatsoever. For John, the empty tomb with the folded linen cloths is enough evidence for him that Jesus had in fact been raised

from the dead. Verse 8 shows this: **“Then the other disciple [John], who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.”**

We need to understand at this point how profound that moment was for John. The reality was that up until then, he had no expectation that Jesus would be raised to life. Now as one of Jesus’ disciples, he would have heard Jesus say numerous times that he would have to die and on the third day, rise again. Here is one example of Jesus saying this in Mark 8:31:

**“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.”**

Pretty black and white, isn’t it? But for whatever reason, John, like the rest of the disciples didn’t grasp what Jesus was saying. Jesus, knowing that he was God’s Messiah, as prophesied in the OT, knew what the OT said about the Messiah. One of these expectations was that the Messiah would rise from the dead. This is evident in places like Psalm 16:10, **“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”** (Peter quotes this in Acts 2 in his Pentecost sermon, with reference to the resurrection).

Verse 9 shows John’s ignorance in all these things, specifically that the OT Scriptures spoke of Jesus’ resurrection:

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

John therefore had no expectation that Jesus would rise from the grave. This fact makes John’s testimony to the resurrection all the more credible. It was not as if he had a point to prove by making it up, he was genuinely taken by surprise when it happened. For him, the sight of the linen cloths with no body in the tomb changed everything. Dead bodies do not suddenly disappear from their tombs, especially after being wrapped up in 40 kgs worth of spices and linen! The evidence was clear – Jesus had been raised from the dead – and he **“saw and believed”** and realised that this meant that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

What significance does John's encounter in the empty tomb have for us today? Well here we have the first eye-witness account of the empty tomb. John importantly notes that Peter was with him, having also witnessed the empty tomb. NB – Law of Moses, Deu 19:15 – a single witness is not enough. Evidence is only admissible with at least two witnesses. John is clearly making a point here on the truth of what he saw.

What I love about Christianity is that it is rooted in historical fact. It is qualitatively different from other religions which are either based in mythology or philosophy – think of Hinduism, Buddhism and the many forms of paganism, for example. They are not historical, nor rooted in actual true events. They are made up stories – that is the nature of myth. We don't need to believe myth, or let myths transform our lives, as they are not true. Yet the Gospels, John's included, are eye-witness accounts of actual events that took place in history (cf. Luke 1:1-4). They describe real and true events. True events have to have a bearing on our lives. John's eyewitness account here of the empty tomb is therefore of utmost importance. Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead. This is not mythology, but real, verifiable history. It happened – John bears witness to it. John's testimony to the resurrection gives us great confidence to believe that the gospel is indeed true.

### **B. Mary Believed vv. 11-16**

Once John and Peter realise that Jesus has been raised, they leave the tomb and go back home. Mary stays there, and she is crying. Then she looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where Jesus' body had been. They chat to her and then she turns around and Jesus is standing in front of her, but she doesn't recognise him (v. 14). Now remember that in Luke's Gospel, in chapter 24, the resurrected Jesus is walking along the Emmaus Road with some of his disciples and they also don't recognise him. Let's read again from verse 15 & 16:

**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. Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means teacher).**

This is a very intimate moment. Mary only realises that she is speaking to Jesus when he calls her name, and she believes – she sees for herself the resurrected Jesus in front of her and is beside herself with delight and cannot contain her joy!

What is the significance of this for us? Apart from providing an eyewitness account of the resurrected Jesus, it reveals something to us about the nature of the resurrection body. There was a reason that Mary and the other disciples in Luke's Gospel did not initially recognise the resurrected Christ. Jesus' body had undergone a transformation at his resurrection. There was something different about him after his resurrection which prevented both Mary and the other disciples from recognising him at first.

Paul gives us some insight into the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15. He calls it a "spiritual body." It is not earthly, but heavenly (v. 48), it is raised in glory and power (v. 43) – indicating that it is incorruptible, it can't decay, it has a heavenly brightness – it is completely adapted to the Holy Spirit, to life in the new creation, being the Spirit's perfect instrument, incapable of sin. Those of us in Christ who will be raised on last day will also have a resurrection body like Christ's (v. 49).

Yet it being a "spiritual body" does not mean that it is not physical. Later on in chapter 20, when Jesus appears to Thomas, he touches Jesus and sees his wounds from the cross – physical body. In Luke 24:40-42, the risen Jesus makes a fish braai on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and eats with his disciples there. The Risen Jesus was no ghost! Yes - his body had been transformed through the resurrection into an incorruptible body fit for the age to come – it was different in some respects, that's why Mary couldn't recognise him at first. Yet it was still his own actual physical body with his own scars from the cross, that could be touched and that could eat food.

This is important for us to believe, as if Jesus had just risen as a spirit or a ghost, but his body rotted away somewhere, then he didn't really rise from the dead at all. His physical resurrection in an actual, transformed, incorruptible, heavenly body – which Mary herself encountered and spoke to outside the tomb – is proof to us that the gospel is true.

### C. We Can Believe vv. 17-18

We have seen from above that Mary was overjoyed when she encountered the Risen Christ. She was so overjoyed that she wanted to hold on to him. Jesus in response, kind of rebukes her “Do not cling to me” and tells her that he will soon be ascending. Instead of clinging to him, he tells her to tell the other disciples that he is risen. So, in verse 18, it says:

**“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”**

“I have seen the Lord”! Here in Mary’s confession of faith lies the heart of the gospel: the resurrection.

Why is the resurrection at the heart of the gospel?

Because without it there is no gospel. Paul explains it like this in 1 Cor 15:13-20

**“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. But in fact Christ *has* been raised from the dead...”**

Every single one of us deserved death as the just payment for breaking God’s law - sinning and rebelling against God. Because God is good and just, as Exodus 34:7, he cannot “clear the guilty”. Sin must be punished, God doesn’t just wink it away. Romans 6:23 says that the punishment for sin is death. Just let that sink in for a while, we can often get desensitised to the gravity of this truth. You and I deserve to be killed because apart from Christ, we stand guilty before a holy God.

Thankfully God doesn’t leave us in our mess. Jesus came to earth as God’s Son, the promised Messiah. He lived the perfect life we could not live – he was sinless, he obeyed all of God’s laws that we have been unable to fully obey. He went to the cross, and as we saw on Friday, he endured the punishment that we should have endured, taking upon himself the punishment for our sin and died. If the story ends there, there is still no good news though...

But Acts 2:24 says that: **“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”** Jesus could not remain dead in the grave because death had no right over him as he was sinless. Remember – death is the punishment for sin. Therefore God vindicated him and raised him up from the dead – in so doing defeating the power of death and our sin which he took upon himself.

In short – because he rose again, he has broken the power of sin over us, forgiving us our sins, if we trust in him. Our relationship with God is restored – we can approach our Father with confidence as his redeemed sons, clothed in Christ’s perfect righteousness. Instead of receiving death, we receive new life in Christ and will be raised up with him in incorruptible bodies on the Last Day, where we will enjoy his presence forever.

This is the wonder and glory of the gospel – this free gift of life that God has granted to us through Jesus. It is indeed good, life-changing, awesome news! And it is only possible because Jesus rose from the grave.

But maybe you are still thinking that this is too good to be true. Maybe you think this stuff is made up stories and mythology. Friends, there will be a Day when all of us will have to stand before the Living God and give an account of our lives. You may think you’re a decent, moral person, but before God who is holy, your good works are to him like filthy rags. Because everyone’s natural tendency is to flee God and rebel and sin against him, you will stand before him guilty as a sinner. Because of your own sin, you will have to face God’s justice and therefore receive his wrath, for eternity.

But it doesn’t have to be that way...

Today we celebrate that Jesus Christ has risen indeed. This is no myth and no children’s fairy tale. John the Apostle and Mary Magdalene both believed as they witnessed for themselves the Risen Christ before their eyes. Their testimony, and the testimony of many others in Scripture, have been the basis for 2000 years of faith in the truth of the resurrection of Christ, the foundation of the gospel – for billions of people on earth.

Because of their trustworthy testimonies, you too can believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He faced God's wrath for our sins instead of us, so that when we do stand before God, clothed in Christ's righteousness, he welcomes us as his beloved sons. Believe in this truth that Christ has been raised from the dead, receive him, his undeserved love, his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness for our sins and know this gospel life that is truly life, and this hope that no one can take away from you!

Amen, pray