

John on Jesus - The Resurrection Changes Everything

September 1, 2013

Good morning Faith Church. We are in the home stretch of the Gospel of John. Next week, we finish the Gospel of John. After that, Pastor Leland will preach for a week before we start our new series called, *Fingerprint: What makes Faith Church unique?*

In our previous study of this book, we were in John 19. Jesus died on the cross. Today, Jesus busts out of the grave. I will tell you up front what I want you to remember from today's sermon. It is, "The resurrection changes everything." In the church, what Christ accomplished on the cross is usually the focus of our preaching. In the early church, the focus of its preaching was not on what transpired on the cross but on what Christ accomplished by the empty tomb. In the book of Acts, there are 12 sermons that God uses to grow the church. All of those sermons are about what is true because of the empty tomb, not what is true about the cross. This morning, we will see why the resurrection eclipses the cross to be the greatest event in the history of the world. As a result, it changes everything.

Two weeks ago, when we were last in this Gospel, Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb. Jesus' body was taken down by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both secret disciples of Christ. They did a rush job on the burial. They wrapped Jesus' body in strips of cloth mingled with 100 pounds of spices. He was placed in a rich man's tomb, probably Joseph of Arimathea's. Jesus died

on a Friday afternoon. Friday evening was Jesus' burial. Nobody had time to pay their respects.

In our culture, the weekend is a time to travel. It is a time to buzz around on a jet ski, catch some fish and just generally unplug from life. In the Jewish culture, Saturday is the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, you can't do anything. You can't even walk a distance. Even Wal-Mart is closed on Saturday. On Saturday, the Sabbath, everybody pushes pause. We pick up the story and it is Sunday, the first day of the work week.

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. John 20:1 (ESV)

Mary Magdalene, who loved Jesus deeply, took the first opportunity she could to visit Jesus' grave once the Sabbath was over. She headed to the grave sometime between 3-6 a.m.. It was still dark.

Before we get into the story, I want to pause and give some historical background. The Christian church worships on Sunday, the first day of the week, not Saturday, the last day of the week. How did the day of worship change? It changed because of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus rose on a Sunday, the first day of the week. We worship on Sunday in honor of him. As you study this, you will see there is much more to Sunday worship than just Jesus' resurrection. When the dates of Jesus' appearances for 40 days after the resurrection before returning to heaven are given, they are all on Sunday. The dates of earth-shattering New Testament events, such as Pentecost, all happen on Sunday. It appears that God moved the day of emphasis.

Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. Later in this chapter we will see Jesus appeared to Thomas eight days after his resurrection. The Jews count inclusively, which simply means they count the day they are on as one day. Eight days is their version of saying one week. Jesus appeared to Thomas on the Sunday following resurrection Sunday.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost happened on a Sunday. Leviticus 23:16 tells us Pentecost is 50 days after the Passover. Seven weeks of seven days would be 49 days. Remember the Jews count inclusively. That means you add one to our counting system. The Holy Spirit came on a Sunday.

In honor of Christ's resurrection, the early church met on Sunday.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. Acts 20:7 (ESV)

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)

The early church was not trying to ignore or replace the seventh day Sabbath. It taught there was a new day to be observed called, "The Lord's Day," the first day of the week. Early Christians called it the Lord's day because that is the day their Lord and savior rose from the dead.

Does anyone know what day of the week the apostle John received the book of Revelation? It was a Sunday.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet. Revelation 1:10 (ESV)

There are numerous early church fathers who talk about the church choosing to meet on Sundays in honor of Christ's resurrection. Sunday was not a day off. Most likely church services were held early in the morning before work. Church was like attending men's prayer and pancakes Bible study. You needed to be up early to make it. It wasn't a day off until Constantine made Sunday a holiday around 400 A.D.

Jesus' resurrection was so earth-shattering that God choose to reformat the rhythm of the seventh day Sabbath around Jesus. The seventh day Sabbath was a day of rest given to us by God that looked back in celebration of the old creation. The Lord's day is a day celebrated unto Jesus as the first fruits of the new creation. Jesus was the first installment of the coming creation. We will be with Christ in our deaths. Eventually, we will receive our resurrection bodies that are like Christ's. We will ultimately reign with Christ and under Christ on a whole new heavens and earth. We worship on Sunday looking forward to that.

The resurrection of Christ is such a big event that it eclipsed the celebration of the seventh day Sabbath, an old creation ordinance, because it is a celebration of the new creation we look forward to. This is similar to what Christ's resurrection did to the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law was eclipsed by the grace given us in Christ. This is why we no longer need to live under the law. We studied this a few years ago in the book of Hebrews.

As I said, our theme this morning is "the resurrection changes everything." It changed the day of worship. Let's study the resurrection.

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. 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." John 20:1–2 (ESV)

Just so you know, the other Gospel accounts don't sound identical in their description of the resurrection story. Don't let that weird you out. They tell it from the perspectives of different authors. Nobody was trying to harmonize their accounts and blend them together to make it appear more palatable. Each author was telling his own unique story of that special day. John told us the resurrection story from what he experienced. His experience of the empty tomb began with Mary.

Mary showed up early in the morning. It was probably dark. The guards were gone. The tomb was open. She figured the body was stolen. She freaked out. She was already emotional from watching Jesus die on Friday. She assumed somebody took the body to further desecrate it and add insult to injury on Christ's death. She didn't check things out but took off in a sprint. She came to Peter and the other disciple. In this Gospel, when the disciple is anonymous it is talking about the apostle John who wrote the Gospel. How do we know this? It tells us at the end of the book. We will read it next week. In addition, you notice the text is in the plural. The other Gospel accounts tell us Mary was not alone. There were at least four women with her. At a first glance of John's account, it appears Mary was alone, until you read verse two. John hinted there were other women with her. The Gospel accounts of the resurrection are different but they are not in conflict with one another.

We do not know where they have laid him. John 20:2 (ESV)

Remember, it was very early in the morning. It was dark. The entrance into the tomb was small. They couldn't see inside. If you have ever gone caving, you know how dark it can be in a cave.

So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple 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 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. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. John 20:3–10 (ESV)

You have Peter and John running together to get to the tomb. John was obviously frustrated because Peter was out of shape. Peter was probably carrying extra weight from eating too much of the profit from his fishing business. John sprinted ahead and got to the tomb first. The sun was coming up. The entrance was small so John stooped down and looked in.

There are interesting twists in the original language that you can't see in the English. John looked in and the word for *saw* is *blepo*. It means he looked in a cursory manner. He glanced in, and with the early morning light, he didn't catch the details inside the empty tomb.

Peter finally arrived huffing and puffing like the big bad wolf. In typical Peter fashion, he shoved John aside, got on his hands and knees and crawled into the tomb. It tells us he saw the strips of linen lying there. The word for *saw* is different word. It is the word *theoreo*, from which we get our word theatre. It means to take a long careful look. The sun was coming up. Light was coming in

the opening of the tomb. The inside of the tomb was coming into focus. The linen cloths were just lying there.

Jesus was wrapped in 100 pounds of spices and linen strips. This was a unique burial custom of the Jews. The Romans cremated bodies. The Jews buried bodies. Typically, the Jews wrapped the entire body up to the shoulders. They then wrapped the head with a separate cloth to keep the jaw bone in place during decomposition. Let me show you a typical

Jewish tomb. A typical tomb had three benches on which the deceased could be laid. Clues in the text tell us Jesus was lying on the bench opposite the door. A



year after burial, the Jews returned to the tomb when the soft tissue was decomposed. The strips of linen kept the bones in place. The bones were then gathered and placed on a shelf in the side of the tomb wall.

What Peter and John saw, as the rays of light pierced the darkness of the tomb, was that everything was still in place. The strips of linen and spices were still wrapped around where the body was, but the body was missing. The language used to describe the head cloth could mean it was folded up or it was still rolled up like it was when it was around Jesus' head. Peter and John were scratching their heads. You can't slide a body out of the burial clothes that are wrapped around it. You can't wrap a head with strips of clothes to hold the jaw in place then pop it off like a motorcycle helmet. It was like the body vaporized through the clothes and left everything empty and limp, like a deflated balloon.

Now it tells us what happened with John. It says he saw and believed. John was the first person on the planet to believe Christ rose from the dead. Jesus' teaching about his dying on the cross and rising from the dead after three days began to connect in John's mind. We will see in a few minutes that John didn't get the whole picture. He was beginning to get the picture. The good news is he was the first to believe and begin putting the pieces of the resurrection puzzle together.

John and Peter left the tomb scratching their heads. They were clueless. John was thinking Jesus might be alive.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 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." Having said this, she 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." 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.' " Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her. John 20:11–18 (ESV)

While John and Peter were home scratching their heads about the vaporized body. Mary, who began our story, was outside the tomb just wailing. These were not little sobs. The Greek lets us know she was wailing with a completely broken heart. In the middle of her loud sobbing, she got up the courage to finally look in the tomb. She saw one angel sitting at the feet and the other at the head of where Jesus was laid. This is why we know Jesus was

probably on the bench opposite the door. Without getting into the tomb she wouldn't be able to see both sides of the body. The angels looked at her and asked, "Why are you crying?" She told them she was heartbroken because somebody took away Jesus' body. She didn't know what happened to it.

I find this interesting. Apparently Mary was in such an emotional state she can't see or think clearly. In the Bible, when people see angels, what is their reaction? They fall down in fear. Mary just talked with them. I think she was so emotional at this point that she didn't recognize anybody, even Jesus.

She got her head out of the entrance to the tomb and turned around to see Jesus. She was so emotional she didn't even recognize him. She thought he was the lawn boy.

Finally Jesus said her name. "Mary!" I don't think he said it softly. I think he said it with some authority to snap her out of her delirious grief. All at once when she recognized the sound of his voice, it clicked. She screamed, "Teacher!" She grabbed him and wouldn't let him go. I think what happened here took at least 10 minutes. I think she had him in a death grip hug.

If you have ever lost a child at the mall, you know what kind of emotions wash over a parent when you think you lost someone you love. We lost Deanna once at a wrestling meet. I went into such a panic that once I got her back I held her so tight I thought I wouldn't let her go until she was a freshman in high school.

These are the kind of emotions Mary was experiencing, but a thousand times worse. Mary was holding Jesus, and she was so happy to see him she just

wouldn't let him go. After 10 minutes, Jesus told Mary he needed a little airspace. He gave Mary a job. She was to go and tell the other apostles he was alive.

This is interesting. One of the things I noticed about the Gospel of John is that it is a series of sendings. The Father sends the Son. The Father and Son send the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit send us to tell others the good news that Jesus is alive. Mary was the first one who was sent.

One other thing that we don't want to miss is all the Gospels are clear that Mary was the first person to see Jesus alive. If you were making this up, this wouldn't be the way to write the story. In that day, women had no legal standing. In addition, of all the women you could use, Mary would be the worst one to pick. We know from other passages that Jesus cast seven demons out of her. You don't catch demons like you catch a cold. You have to be involved in a sick demented life to get demon-possessed. She had seven demons. This was a woman with a colorful past. Jesus cast them all out and gave her a completely new life. This was why she loved him.

The Scriptures tell us those who have been forgiven little, love little. Those who have been forgiven much, love much. Do you understand why Mary was weeping uncontrollably for Jesus? He was her hero. He forgave all of her past . He gave her a new life.

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." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and

said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” John 20:19–23 (ESV)

The disciples were cowering in fear. They were having dinner together behind locked doors. That way, if somebody tried to bust in the door, like they do on the show “Cops,” they would have a moment to jump out the window and get away.

Jesus just showed up. How did he get there? I don’t know. I don’t think he was hiding in the closet. The text leads us to believe he did the Star Trek transporter room thing and materialized in their presence. The guys were obviously freaked out so he let them see his hands and side. You know how guys are about showing off their scars.

I love the way the Bible describes this, “The disciples were glad.” Something tells me that was the understatement of the year. I think they were overwhelmed. I love the way Jesus kept saying, “Peace be with you.” That was the standard greeting in that day but I think there is plenty of truth to it. Jesus was telling the disciples they could calm down. He is alive.

Then Jesus sent them. Just as the Father sent Jesus to the world to die in our places for our sins, now Jesus was sending this little group of 10 into the world to tell others the good news. Jesus was alive. The odds don’t look good: Ten cowards behind locked doors sent to change the world. Something tells me they couldn’t do it on their own strength. Thankfully, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit that transformed them, empowered them and even went before them to soften the hearts of people to God’s good news.

Now it gets a little tricky. Jesus breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. What happened? Nothing seemed to change in their lives until the day of Pentecost. Here is my take. I think this goes back to the creation narrative where God breathed into the dust of the earth and gave life to Adam. Here we have Jesus breathing new creation life into his disciples with the Holy Spirit just as God breathed old creation life into Adam in the Garden of Eden. I don't know all the connections. It seems what happens is the Holy Spirit came on them in a new a powerful way at Pentecost. Something, and the Bible doesn't tell us exactly what, happened here.

In addition, a big misunderstanding often comes about in verse 23.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” John 20:23 (ESV)

This leads some people to think the apostles were the ones who had the power to forgive sins or to withhold forgiveness of sin. That wouldn't ring true with the rest of the Bible. Who is the only one who can forgive our sins? Jesus. The apostles don't forgive or withhold the forgiveness of sins. What did Jesus send them to do? Share the message that Jesus rose from the dead. If they tell others Jesus rose from the dead, and call people to repentance, like Peter did on the day of Pentecost, people have their sins forgiven in Jesus' name. If they don't talk, will anyone have their sins forgiven in Jesus' name? No! This is why Jesus was sending them and why he is sending us. We love to talk about football and the stock market but Jesus is sending us to tell others that the tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. When we choose not to talk about the empty tomb, we withhold life. When we talk to others about the empty tomb, God promises to use

that to give life. The only way someone's sins are forgiven is by responding to the message of the empty tomb. Jesus is alive!

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 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." 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." 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:24–29 (ESV)

Now Jesus appears to Thomas. Apparently, he wasn't in the room a week earlier when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. Thomas gets a bad wrap because he didn't believe. Before you bust on Thomas, I want you to know, I like him. He didn't believe everything he heard, even if it came from his best friends. He didn't believe rumors. He checked things out for himself. He didn't read the National Enquirer at the checkout line. He was not going to get pressured into believing that Jesus was alive just because his friends said it was true. Thomas didn't just go along with the crowd. He was willing to think for himself. I like that about him.

Eight days later, since the Jews count inclusively that puts us back on a Sunday, Jesus showed up again, Star Trek style, in a locked room. He told Thomas to touch his side and touch Jesus' hands. Thomas didn't take him up on his offer. Apparently seeing was believing. By the way, the text is clear that Jesus was not a ghost. He has a real physical body that could be touched.

What happened next is priceless. Thomas went from being the hardest disciple to convince to being the first disciple to get it. He proclaimed Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” He understood Jesus was in charge of everything and Jesus was God in the flesh risen from the dead.

This is one of the clearest declarations of Jesus being God in all of the Bible. Notice that Jesus didn’t correct him. He affirmed him. “Good job Thomas. You get it.”

Some cults, who say Jesus never claimed to be God, have an interesting way of attempting to explain away Thomas’ words. They say Thomas was swearing because he was so shocked to see Jesus. Thomas swore and said, “Oh my God!”

I am sorry. This was not Thomas swearing. This was Thomas declaring Jesus is indeed God.

Jesus said to Thomas, “You believed because you did see. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

Now we come to the purpose statement of this Gospel.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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. John 20:30–31 (ESV)

There is a reason that everything in this book was written. John wanted us to believe, just like Thomas, that Jesus rose from the dead. If we believe Jesus is the risen Son of God who is alive today, we will have life in his name.

The resurrection changes everything.

You see, the resurrection changes everything. It is the resurrection that proves Jesus is the Son of God. It is only belief in a resurrected Jesus that forgives our sin and brings life.

What I noticed, when I studied the book of Acts, is every sermon in the book of Acts is not about what Jesus did on the cross but what he achieved through the empty tomb. Jesus rose from the dead. He conquered Satan, sin and death and is alive today.

We already saw that it is such a big event that it eclipsed the Sabbath day, replacing the celebration of the day of rest in the old creation order with the celebration of Christ's resurrection as anticipation of the new creation order.

The resurrection changes everything. It proves Jesus is who he claimed to be. The resurrection is the only escape from the eternal penalty of sin and the present power of sin in our lives.

When I finish studying the Bible, I ask myself two questions. "So what?" and "Now what?" The "So what?" question was already answered. So what do we need to know? The resurrection changes everything.

Now what do we do with this? There is one simple application. Tell others Jesus is alive. He is just as real as the person sitting next to you! Every sermon in Acts is about telling people that Jesus is alive, and that birthed revival.

Charles Spurgeon, a great evangelist 100 years ago in England, had a tremendous ministry. Thousands upon thousands came to Christ under his preaching. One day, he was asked what made his preaching so effective. You

know what he said? “I am convinced that preaching the resurrection is what changes lives.” There are 3,563 published sermons from Spurgeon. In those sermons, he mentions the resurrection 7,620 times, almost two times per sermon.

It is not just the early church in the book of Acts that focused on Jesus’ resurrection with incredible results. It was not just Charles Spurgeon 100 years ago. It was also Billy Graham. When you enter the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, clips are played from his preaching. Let me give you a sentence heard again and again in his sermons.

Jesus died for you, but not just that --- he was raised! He’s a living Jesus, and he’s here today, wanting to have a relationship with you.

Our take away this morning is to tell our friends that Jesus is alive. He forgives our sins. He hears our prayers. He wants to have a relationship with you. He is just as real as the person sitting next to you.

As the Father sent the Son and the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are sending us to carry the message that Jesus is alive in the world. It is a message that will change the world because the resurrection changes everything.



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