

The Resurrection of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] But you might find it helpful just to have the Bible open in front of you as we look at this passage together in John chapter 20. Over this Easter weekend, we've been looking at John's account of the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

And so we're here on Friday evening, Good Friday, to reflect on the death of Jesus from John chapter 19. And so this afternoon, we're on to John chapter 20 as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity just would not make any sense. But if Jesus did rise from death, then it changes everything for everybody.

Because believing in the risen Lord Jesus will transform your life forever. We just read an account of the resurrection of Jesus from the Gospel of John, John chapter 20, where John tells the impact that the resurrection of Jesus made on the lives of those who were there at the time.

And the reality of the resurrection completely changed them. It transformed them forever. And the resurrection of Jesus changes us too. How does the resurrection of Jesus change us?

[1 : 1 3] Well, because the resurrection is historical, and because the resurrection is rational, and because the resurrection is personal. And so those are the three things we're going to think about this afternoon.

And we see them all in John chapter 20. The resurrection is historical, it is rational, and it is personal. So first of all, the resurrection is historical. You'll notice that as John records the resurrection of Jesus, he records the time and the people and the place.

Just look again at verse 1 and 2. We read earlier 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.

So 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.

So John is talking about a real time in history. So the first day is the first day of the week after the Jewish Passover. He is talking about real historical people.

[2 : 1 7] He names them Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and the other disciple, who we understand as John, who is the author of this gospel, John's gospel. And he is talking about a real historical place, the place where Jesus was buried, the actual tomb that people could go and visit.

And what is fascinating about his account is that nobody was expecting Jesus to rise from death. Even though Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that he would die, and then three days later he would rise.

And so when Mary Magdalene went and made her way to the tomb on that first Easter Sunday, she wasn't expecting to find a risen Jesus.

Even when she saw that the stone had been removed, she concluded that the body had been taken away. Not that Jesus was alive. And the other disciples didn't even bother going to the tomb.

That's clear from our reading. And it didn't even occur to anyone to ask. Could it possibly be that Jesus has risen from the dead?

[3 : 24] Remember those things that he said to us? Just maybe, maybe it's worth us going to check this out. But nobody was thinking in that way. Nobody expected to see Jesus alive.

Despite all that they had seen Jesus do, despite all that they had heard Jesus say, nobody was expecting a resurrection. And it's worth emphasizing this because, as readers of the Gospel today, we might just assume that it was far easier for ancient people, people who lived a long time ago, far easier for them to believe the resurrection than it is for us modern people today.

As if those people back then were far more gullible, far more accepting of things that were of a supernatural nature, like the resurrection of Jesus.

But that obviously isn't the case. Because a bodily resurrection is unimaginable in any age. It's what C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery.

That is, the assumption that we modern people are far more sophisticated, and we are far more intelligent than people who lived a long time ago. But we know that that simply isn't true.

[4 : 43] The resurrection of Jesus was just as inconceivable to people back then as it is inconceivable to people today. People that you and I know. Maybe even you're thinking it's inconceivable yourself.

But there's another significant piece of evidence that adds to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Because what John reports here is that Mary Magdalene is the first witness of the empty tomb.

And she's also the first witness to see the risen Jesus with her eyes. In fact, every Gospel states, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus were all women.

So why does that matter? Well, it's significant because in those days, the testimony of a woman didn't count. Unbelievable, isn't it?

Because of a woman's social status, their testimony was pretty much worthless in the ancient world. Bible experts and historians tell us that in Jewish and in Greek and in Roman culture, women weren't even able to give testimony in court.

[5 : 56] In the court of law, they would not listen to a woman. And so, here's the point. If you were making this stuff up, if you were trying to fabricate the story of the resurrection, you would never use women as your main witnesses.

You would use men so that people would believe what you were saying. It just would make sense to use women. It would be too problematic for the early church to have women as the main witnesses.

It would completely undermine the credibility of the resurrection of Jesus. So why does John include Mary here? Well, it's because Mary was there.

She saw the empty tomb. She saw the risen Jesus. She was first, you notice, to see the empty tomb. And she was first, you notice, to see and meet the risen Jesus.

So, John had no reason to record Mary as the first witness, unless, of course, Mary was the first witness.

[6 : 59] So, can you see? All of this helps to confirm that the resurrection is historical. But that's not all. Firstly, it is historical. But secondly, the resurrection is rational.

And we see this in verse 3 to 10. It's rational. In other words, no matter how improbable the resurrection of Jesus seems, it actually makes sense.

It is something that can be explained in the way that lots of things can be explained. And so the claim that Jesus rose from the dead makes best sense of the evidence.

So, Christian belief or Christian faith is more than rational. Of course it is. But it's certainly not less than rational. Christianity isn't mythical.

It's not some made-up story. It is based on evidence. And you notice, that is what Peter and John discovered. So let's read verses 3 and 4.

[7 : 58] So Peter and the other disciple, that's John, started for the tomb. Both were running. But the other disciple outland Peter and reached the tomb first. So John and Peter made their way to the tomb.

Remember, they made their way to the tomb not because they were expecting to see the risen Jesus, but because mainly he told them that the tomb was empty. John was a faster runner than Peter.

He was better at the park run, obviously. But John doesn't go in. He waits. But Peter rushes in. Verse 5. He bent over, this is John, and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in.

Now, the word for what John saw when he looked is a word that means more than just to see. It means to observe.

It means to pay close attention to. And so John was thinking about what he saw. He was pondering over the sight of the grave clothes lying there.

[9 : 01] He was processing it in his mind. And so next we read, verse 6, 7. Then Simon came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head.

The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. So Peter charges straight into the tomb. But the word that's used for what Peter sees is different from the word that's used for what John sees.

It also means to see, to look at, to watch closely, and to perceive. But it's where we get our word theory from, or theorize.

It comes from this Greek word here. And it's the same kind of reasoning process that a scientist might use to work out how to explain something. We might speak about Einstein's theory of relativity.

And so what Peter is doing here is he is trying to make sense of what he saw. To find some kind of explanation for the evidence that he could see in front of his eyes.

[10 : 11] And so Peter and John, they began to rationalise all that they were seeing. To try and figure out what was going on. To take account for what they were seeing.

Because the great clothes were lying there, all arranged in an orderly way. The strips of linen wrapped around Jesus' dead body. And the cloth wrapped around Jesus' head were neatly lying there in place.

Probably folded. And this is the evidence that Peter and John were working with. Now, back then, dead bodies were wrapped from head to toe with these long strips of linen right the way around the body.

And the linen was filled with expensive spices like perfume. Just imagine a mummy. You think that mummy is wrapped up with this kind of linen.

And so, you can imagine also it would be a tough job to try and rip off all these great clothes. Which makes any suggestion that the body was stolen as being highly improbable.

[11 : 20] Because it was clear that nobody came in and simply took the body. If they hadn't broken into the tomb, then why would they strip a dead body naked and then carry it out?

Why waste time removing the grave clothes, let alone leaving them in a nice neat pile on the ground? Or, as has been suggested, that Jesus wasn't actually dead and somehow he had managed to revive himself.

But even if that was so, the grave clothes would have been ripped off and would be lying in a heap. Not lying in an orderly fashion. And so, what Peter and John did was they used their reason, their powers of deduction, to work through all the possible scenarios before them to figure out the best explanation.

Wasn't it Sherlock Holmes? In fact, it wasn't Sherlock Holmes. It was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who said, When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

And so the truth, or the conclusion that Peter and John came to, was that Jesus had risen from the dead. Look at verse 8. Finally, the other disciple, that's John, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.

[12 : 40] He saw and believed. Get that? John saw and believed. So the rational explanation, based on the evidence, was that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

And so, what he saw, even though he hadn't seen Jesus alive yet, led John to believe. It's interesting, because pretty much everybody else who came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus believed because they met the risen Lord Jesus.

But John says that he believed before he saw Jesus, on the basis of the empty tomb and the empty grave clothes that were inside. And that's why he gives us his interpretation in verse 9.

They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. So what he's saying is, he's saying, actually, the Scriptures, the Old Testament, it gives us all the evidence we need to know that Jesus would rise from the dead.

But, we hadn't thought that fact yet. We hadn't realised that's what the Old Testament was telling us. And so John is saying here that he came to believe in a rational and in a reasoned way.

[14 : 01] Of course, belief in Jesus isn't just rational. It isn't just an intellectual thing. It isn't just a head thing.

But belief in Jesus certainly is never less than rational. It does make sense to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. And that's why John is a dream model for us.

Because without having literally seen the physical body of the risen Jesus, he reasoned on the basis of the evidence and he believed.

And guess what? So can we. Because we are not going to see the physical body of the risen Jesus today. It is not going to happen. But like John, we have every good reason to believe in Jesus and then trust our lives to him.

In fact, it would be irrational not to. We'd be ignoring the evidence that's there in history that is staring us in the face about the resurrection of Jesus.

[15 : 05] Because the resurrection of Jesus, it's a rational thing. And because it's rational, the Christian faith is rational. It is a wise thing to believe in what Christianity teaches.

You don't have to remove your brain. You don't have to be under your seat. Or set your powers of reason aside to become a Christian. Listen to what N.T. Wright, a New Testament scholar.

Actually one of the foremost scholars on the resurrection of Jesus in history. This is what he says in his book, The Resurrection of the Son of God. This is on page 707. It's a big book.

He says, You live in a fantasy world if you believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

He's saying you live in a fantasy world if you don't. In other words, only the resurrection of Jesus makes best sense of all the evidence. And so that's our second point.

[16 : 31] The resurrection is rational. It is historical. And because it is historical, it is rational. And because it is rational, our third point is the resurrection is personal.

Because it happened. Because it makes sense. It changes people's lives. So the resurrection is personal. And we see this in verse 11 to 18. Because we shouldn't just approach the resurrection of Jesus with our heads, with our intellect.

Because the resurrection of Jesus, when we believe it, impacts our hearts. And it transforms our lives. That's why the resurrection is personal.

And we see this as the focus in John, chapter 20, turns back to Mary. It begins with Mary, moves on to Peter and John, and then it comes back to Mary again. Because she is the first eyewitness to see, and to hear, and to touch the resurrected Jesus.

But it's not because she figured this out for herself. That really wasn't happening. Just look at verse 11 to 14. Now, maybe stood outside the tomb, crying.

[17 : 42] As she went, she bent over to look into the tomb, and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been. One at the head, and the other at the foot. They 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. At this, she turned round, and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

So see, this Mary had no idea. She did not understand the significance of the empty tomb, with the empty grave clothes. Even with the angels in front of her, and with Jesus behind her, she still didn't figure out that Jesus had risen from the dead.

That Jesus was alive. Because the resurrection was never, ever on Mary's radar. And that's why, you notice, Jesus had to take the initiative with Mary.

Verse 15. He asked her, Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you are looking for? Notice how he gently questions her.

[18 : 52] But he does it in order to challenge her. To wake her up to the reality that he is alive. And yet she thought he was the gardener.

She still didn't realise the identity of the one who was speaking to her. And that only happened when Jesus addressed her personally. Verse 16. Jesus said to her, Mary.

She turned towards him and cried out to Adam, which means teacher. The voice of Jesus saying, Mary, was powerful.

You notice that if somebody calls you by name, it's because they know you. They know you. They have a personal relationship with you.

They know your name. So by calling her Mary, you see what Jesus does? He breaks through to her heart.

[19 : 56] Because it's only after Jesus takes the initiative in calling her name that Mary then responds with the word teacher. And it's a beautiful picture of what it means to be a Christian.

So yes, Christianity is historical. The death and resurrection of Jesus did happen in history. And yes, the Christian faith is rational. The resurrection makes the best sense of all the evidence.

But there's more. Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And it's never one that we initiate ourselves.

Because our salvation isn't something that we achieve through our efforts or through our intellect. Thankfully, God doesn't wait for you or me to come to him because we never would.

It would never happen. Salvation is all by grace. God has come to us in the person of Jesus and he calls us to himself.

[21 : 03] And isn't that Mary's life experience? Jesus sought her out. Jesus went to her. Jesus spoke to her. Jesus called her by name. And he does the same for us.

And so notice it's only when Mary recognizes Jesus that she grabs hold of him. Because verse 17 tells us, Jesus 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. So Mary claims to Jesus like she never wants to let him go.

She thought he was dead. She thought she had lost him forever. But now that he is alive, it's hardly surprising that she hugs him with all her might.

But Jesus says, do not hold on to me or do not cling to me. And it might sound like a strange, slightly odd thing to say, especially when later on in John chapter 20 Jesus lets Thomas reach out to his hand and put it in Jesus' side.

[22 : 14] So why is Mary not allowed to touch Jesus? Jesus could be saying that Mary will see him again before he ascends to the Father so she doesn't need to cling to him as if this is the last time she's going to see him.

But I think there's more to it than this. Because Jesus is probably saying that she doesn't need to hold on to him because when he does ascend to the Father Jesus won't actually be leaving her at all.

In fact, Jesus going away will result in him coming closer to Mary than ever before. Because Jesus has already explained in John's Gospel, John chapter 14 to 16, he's explained that when he ascends to the Father he's going to send his spirit.

So Jesus doesn't need to physically be there to be seen or to be touched for the intimacy of this relationship between Jesus and Mary to continue. It will continue but it will just continue in a new way and in a different way when the Holy Spirit comes.

Because Jesus said that the Spirit would be with them and he would be in them. So Jesus himself would be with his people. And so through the Spirit Mary and every believer like us today who does believe can know the presence of Jesus with us all the time.

[23 : 48] That's why we should never think that it would be far easier to believe in Jesus if only we could see Jesus in the flesh. So many people I know who are Christians say to me I will believe.

If only Jesus walked up to me right in front of me and I saw him with my own eyes then I believe in him. But here Jesus is saying we don't need that. And that's why we should never think that we could have a better experience of Jesus if only we could audibly hear Jesus speak to us.

Or even if we could physically touch Jesus or feel his touch. But Jesus is saying to Mary don't hold on to me. Don't cling to me.

Because when he tells Mary not to hold on to him he doesn't mean that the relationship will be any less. What he's saying is that the relationship will be better when he ascends to the Father.

Because you know when any of us believe in Jesus Christ we not only receive the salvation we need from the penalty for our sins but we are brought into a personal relationship with Jesus.

[25 : 07] He can be known. You and I can know him. And that's why the resurrection is personal. It is personal and the resurrection leads to the ascension and then the ascension leads to the sending of the Holy Spirit to God's people.

And then the Holy Spirit makes his home in us when we believe in Jesus. So it is just as if Jesus is with us. And so we get this amazing privilege for the triune God, God is Trinity, the triune God welcomes us into relationship with himself.

And so in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection God then becomes our father. And I think that's why Jesus says to Mary in verse 17, I am ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God.

So all those terms of intimacy that Jesus had used before to talk about his relationship with the father, he's now saying to Mary, you can use those terms too. You can talk to God and about God in the same way as I can.

He's my father but he's also your father. And that's why the resurrection of Jesus can change you forever. So can you see that the resurrection of Jesus isn't just an objective truth?

[26 : 31] Of course it is an objective truth. But it is also a subjective reality. It's an objective truth because it's not historical and it's rational but it's subjective because it is personal.

The resurrection of Jesus will transform your life. It will give you hope in the face of death. It will change your destiny forever.

And so the resurrection of Jesus should convince our heads but it will also change our hearts. Because you and I can't know the risen Lord Jesus Christ in a personal way because Jesus died for my sins.

Jesus died for our sins and Jesus was raised to life and Jesus is with us. And he will be with us forever. So the resurrection is objective and it's subjective.

And so this gospel, the good news of Christianity is that we are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Shortly after John's resurrection account of Jesus he says this, chapter 20 verse 31, these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[27 : 51] And so the challenge for every single one of us is do I believe? If you don't believe then I would encourage you to investigate further.

Because when you realise what Jesus has done and how it changes everything, it won't just convince your mind, it will actually help your heart.

So can you see that this is our only hope for you, for me, for this world? And it is the good news that our world needs to hear.

And that's why when Jesus told Mary to go and pass the message on to his disciples, guess what Mary did? She didn't. Verse 18, Mary mightily went to the disciples with the news, I have seen the Lord, and she told them that he had said these things to her.

So remember John was a model for us, just as he was a model for us, Mary is also a model for us too, showing us what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is somebody who believes that Jesus died and has been raised from the dead.

[29 : 00] A Christian is somebody who has had an encounter, a personal encounter with the risen Jesus. A Christian is somebody who goes and tells others what they know and what they've experienced because it's changed their lives.

But just one final comment before we close, I'm going to be a Christian. You notice that John's account here of the resurrection of Jesus shows us how different people came to believe.

So there's John, there's Mary, and then later on there's Thomas, you know, a doubting Thomas. But for each of them, John, Mary, Thomas, it was different.

And so if you have yet to meet the risen Lord Jesus Christ, don't think that meeting Jesus has got to happen in a certain way. Like you've heard of somebody else and how they became a Christian and how they met Jesus and you think it's got to be like that or you're told it's got to be like this.

The fundamental thing is not how it happens. The fundamental thing is that it does happen, that you do believe. So can I plead with you, please don't walk away from this Easter Sunday thinking that the resurrection of Jesus has no personal or practical application for you.

[30 : 22] Because it does. if Jesus rose from the dead it has an impact and an application and an implication for every single one of us. But it's those of us who do know there isn't Jesus, who have met him, then let's go out from this Easter Sunday into the week, into the world and share this good news.

The good news that Jesus came, that Jesus lived, that Jesus died and that Jesus rose again. Because that is her hope. And it's the world people. it's addictive, and that yeah.

So that she until once she caught up.