

THE DAY OF VICTORY

John 20:1-31

INTRO:

If the Resurrection of Jesus Christ did not take place, then Christianity is a joke! BUT ... if it did take place then your choice of accepting or rejecting Christ as Lord of your life is NO joke!

Most people have a hard time with believing in a Resurrection because it just seems too incredible! But only a couple hundred years ago if you had told your great great great great grandfather that you could fly from New York City to Los Angeles in a little over 5 hours on a vehicle that weighed hundreds of thousands of pounds with over 300 people on board 5 miles high in sky he would have laughed in your face, he could not believe this because it had never been done! If you told that same relative from a couple hundred years ago that men would walk on the moon, or that messages could be flashed to England or China in less than a second, or that a machine called a computer could do a billion math calculations in a matter of seconds or milliseconds he would not believe it! We easily believe it because we take it for granted, having witnessed, and even experienced these things over and over again. The same is true with resurrection power! What seems incredible to us today will be taken for granted, after the resurrection of the godly one day. It is only incredible to us today because we have not yet seen it as a widespread reality yet!

The gospel writers are careful to tell us a great deal about Jesus' resurrection, why? They wrote to make us realize that we need to take seriously the claims of Jesus Christ! No other religious leader of any other religion has risen from the dead except Jesus, so who do you want to follow?

ILLUS:

Sometimes a political candidate who wishes to be returned to office will say, "I stand on my record." Our faith stands on the record of what God has done, on the record of promises kept. John 20:31 says "These are written that you may believe." Faith is not inherited, nor does it come by accident. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God and discovering that God keeps His promises. Faith is "standing on the promises."

The challenge of God is before us this day, will you believe in Jesus Christ and thereby experience resurrection life one day?

The Bible teaches us that Jesus rose from the dead. If this is not true then it does not matter what we believe, but if it is true then it eternally matters what we believe!

1. TERROR OF THE TOMB! JOHN 20:1-9

A. 'Grave' Helplessness JOHN 20:1-7

1. It is early Sunday morning and Mary Magdalene makes her way to Jesus' tomb, heartsick over His death!

a. This is hardly the kind of person to make up a story about Jesus being alive again, she has come in tears!

b. Mary was once demon possessed with 7 demons, (see Luke 8:1) Jesus had delivered her and completely restored her!

2. The 12 disciples were hardly the type of men to steal the body of Jesus and make up His resurrection, they were hiding in fear of their lives when Jesus was dying!

a. Women were the last at the cross, and the first at the empty tomb!

b. These women (while the text here only mentions "Mary" she does say, "WE don't know where they have put Him!" thus indicating more women were with her. Indeed, the other Gospel writers indicate that other ladies were with her.

Can we take the evidence of an empty tomb and the witness of men and women from long ago seriously?

ILLUS: The Etruscans were the first known inhabitants of Italy. They were there before the Romans and had a highly developed civilization. They left no written record, no history, no poetry, no literature. All that we know of them we have learned from their tombs. Jesus Christ left us so much: sermons, parables, a sinless life, the church -- but we also learn much from his tomb, his empty tomb. –

a. We do this all the time in archeology! Why not with Jesus?

b. We can accept the testimony of both His enemies and His friends, for even the enemies of Jesus paid the frightened soldiers to make up a lie that Jesus' body had been stolen!

The grave frightens us, but it does not have to if we know Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord! We are not helpless when facing death when we know Christ!

Peter and John come running when Mary tells them that Jesus' body is gone ... and note that she says NOTHING about a resurrection, only that she does not know where the authorities took Jesus' body, that it was missing from the tomb!

a. There is no glimmer of hope in Mary's words!

b. There is no attempt to make up a story here. .

Glimpse of Hope! John 20:8-9

Both Peter and John look into an empty tomb!

And John at least believes right off ... he knew that Jesus had risen!

It would have been ridiculous for the bandages that had wrapped Jesus' body to be still in their exact death position and the head clothe folded up if Jesus' body had been taken or unwrapped, the wrappings were as if the body had simply passed through them!

There could only be one explanation ... resurrection!

3. If Jesus could simply pass through these bandages, and even later as He passed through a solid wall and door, why was the Rock rolled away?

a. The stone WASN'T rolled away to let Jesus out, it WAS rolled away to let us in!

b. Why? So, we would know that death could not hold Jesus, the Son of God!

c. To invite us into His death and resurrection life so we too can overcome death one day!

4. Can one life make this much difference, is such life possible? YES!

ILLUS:

In a cemetery in Hanover, Germany there is a grave on which has been placed huge granite and marble slabs, cemented together and fastened with heavy steel clasps. It belongs to a woman who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Yet, strangely, she directed in her will that her grave be made so secure that if there was a resurrection it could not reach her! On the grave's marker were inscribed these words: "This burial place must never be opened." In time however, a tiny seed that had been covered over by the stone slabs germinated and began to grow. Slowly this new life pushed its way through the soil and out from beneath the slabs of stone. As the trunk of this plant enlarged the great slabs were gradually lifted so that the steel clasps were forced open! The dynamic life force of a tiny seed had the power to break open her grave, how much more will the power of Christ's command one day when He shouts from the heavens for all the graves of the dead to open and the dead to come to life again? Within Christ Himself is the power of the resurrection and the life! The question is NOT "will we live again?" it is more "where will we live again?" The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most important event in human history! -- Source - Unknown

The first glimmers of hope were developing within the hearts of Jesus' followers.

a. Yet, they still struggled to believe, as evidenced by the fact that they still stayed hidden, and Mary continued crying near the tomb.

b. They still did not understand from the Scriptures, only their own eyes.

II. TRIUMPH OVER THE TOMB! JOHN 20:10-23

A. Great Heartache! JOHN 20:10-15

1. Mary was "weeping" ... actually the Greek word used here for "weeping" is "k্লাiousa" (k্লাiousa) it literally means "a loud wailing" - crying out loud.

This was not soft crying!

She was experiencing great heartache!

There is no idea here of resurrection yet in her mind, she still does not understand.

It is foolish to suggest that those closest to Jesus committed the greatest fraud on humans by inventing Jesus' resurrection, all the historical evidence suggests otherwise!

- a. Their hearts were broken.
- b. They were afraid!

B. Great Happiness! John 20:16-23

Jesus now says Mary's name ... and she finally realizes it is Jesus and not the gardener!

Great joy now replaces great weeping!

This is always the case when we come to Jesus and realize He is our Savior, the one who died for us and is now alive to redeem us from sin.

In Mary's exuberance she clings to Jesus, grasping Him!

- a. Death was not the end, Jesus was living!
- b. This is what Easter is all about, not eggs and bunnies ... those were invented by those who wished to avoid dealing with Jesus' resurrection!

Jesus tells Mary to quit clinging to Him and to go to the disciples and tell them that He is indeed alive. Mission accomplished!

Jesus then appears to the 10 disciples gathered together one night, Judas was dead, and Thomas was missing.

God went to great lengths to turn our weeping into laughter.

Jesus enters the locked room and immediately says to them, "Peace be with you." This was more than a greeting this time, it was prophetic!

Jesus then breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit "

III. TESTING OF THOMAS John 20:24-31

A. Grim Honesty! John 20:24-25

Thomas unfortunately was missing the first night Jesus appeared to the other disciples, he misses out on the experience.

. He acts like he doubts, but if he really doubted why did he continue to fellowship with them and come around?

. He is struggling with belief without seeing proof - a common feature of many today!

Jesus was crucified in "the place of the skull" (Golgotha) and indeed today Jesus is still crucified in the intellectualism (the place of the skull!) by modern man!

Thomas is unsure of what to believe, at least this was honest.

a. God doesn't mind honest doubt, only doubt that closes the door can't be dealt with, but Thomas left the door open in that he continued to fellowship and be part of the group even though he struggled to believe.

b. Note that his friends don't attack him for his disbelief, though he categorically says, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" his friends still fellowship with him and welcome him, there is no recorded rebuke by his friends.

c. He might not have believed, but he still wanted to know the truth.

3. Jesus can handle doubt from honest seekers, but those who won't even look for the truth can't be helped!

a. It is tragic when someone won't even try and see the truth!

We live among miracles all the time, why is it incredible to believe in them?

William Jennings Bryan wrote this about miracles: "Some skeptics say, 'Oh, the miracles. I can't accept miracles.' One may drop a brown seed in the black soil and up comes a green shoot. You let it grow and by and by you pull up its root and find it red. You cut the root and it has a white heart. Can anyone tell how this comes about--how brown cast into black results in green and then red and white?"

Yet you eat your radish without troubling your mind over miracles. Men are not distressed by miracles in the dining room -- they reserve them all for religion!"

4. Jesus is about to help doubting Thomas ... and He will help your doubts too!

B. God's Help! John 20:26-31

1. Jesus appears to the disciples again, but this time when Thomas is present.

a. Note that Thomas gets the same greeting of "peace be with you" and the same opportunity, to see the nail prints. In fact, he is invited one step further, to even touch them!

b. Amazingly Jesus has kept his scars even though He is raised from the dead and perfect in every other way!

c. He has kept those scars to help us remember the price He has paid for our salvation ... perhaps keeping them for all eternity!

ILLUS: An orphaned boy was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother tried desperately to get upstairs to save the boy but she died in the flames. The boy's cries for help were finally answered by a man who happened to be passing by as the boy cried from the second story window for help. The man climbed up the hot iron drain pipe on the side of the building and came back down again with the boy on his neck. Several weeks later a public hearing was held to determine who would have custody of the boy since there were no living relatives. A farmer, a teacher, and the town's wealthiest citizen all gave reasons to the judge why they should be awarded custody of the boy, but as they all plead their case the frightened lonely boy simply stared at the floor. Suddenly, a stranger stood up and approached the bench asking that he might take the boy, and slowly the man opened his hands to reveal horrible burns and scars from having held onto a very hot iron pipe! While the crowd in the courtroom gasped, the boy looked up and when he saw the scarred hands the boy jumped up and ran into the arms of the one who had saved him! The others who had come to ask for custody slowly walked back to their seats, leaving the boy with his rescuer! Those scarred hands settled the issue of who cared for him! So it is with the nail scarred hands of Jesus for us! --

One LOOK, not even a feel, and Thomas cries out, "My Lord and my God!"

His faith comes alive.

Jesus invites Him to witness the signs of His love, and it is enough to move him to faith!

Jesus today says the same thing to us that He did to Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe."

If you come with honest doubt, but at least come to Jesus He will help you move to faith.

Why not at least give Him a try?

If Thomas had quit the group, moved away, refused to explore the possibility he would never have seen Jesus or had faith.

He was honestly doubting, but he also went looking for truth.

He didn't pull away when doubting.

Jesus is wanting you to see Him today ... He is clearly seen in the Scriptures; the early disciples didn't have the New Testament record to help them like we do now. He is also seen in the testimony of millions of lives that have been lived for Him through thousands of years.

What will you do with Jesus?

What will you believe?

Christ and eternity wait for your decision!

CONCLUSION: To this world the tomb is "the end!" The tomb however is NOT the end, it is more a "womb" than a "tomb" - believers shall arise with new life as did our Lord! Jesus left the tomb open after His resurrection to show that death has no power over those who belong to Him. The stone was rolled away NOT to let Jesus out, but to let us in to see that death cannot hold Jesus, nor those who believe in Him! Do you have Jesus' resurrection power in you? You can!