

SESSION 5

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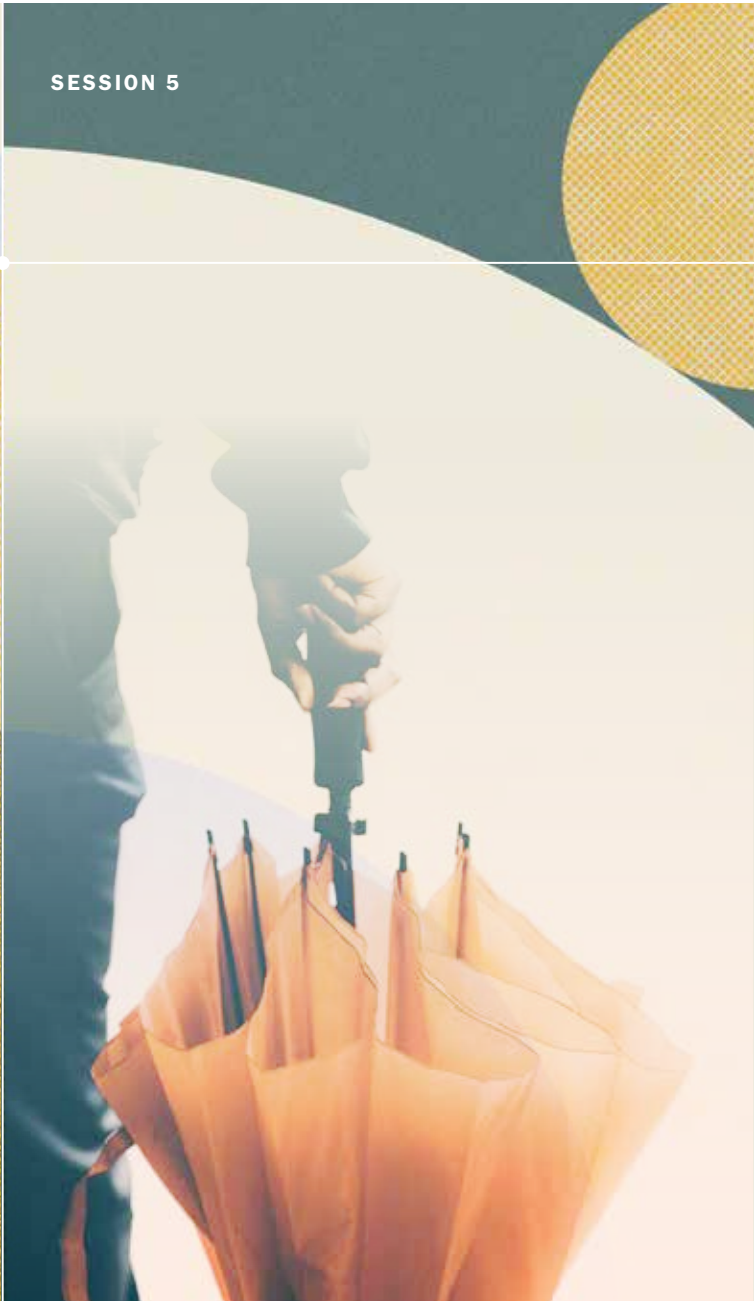
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Believe!

JESUS OFFERS SALVATION TO ALL WHO BELIEVE IN HIM.

JOHN 20:1-17

Daily we are presented with information that requires us to make a choice to believe it or not. It may be something as simple as a weather forecast that will affect what we choose to wear that day. What we believe about some things may not matter all that much, while what we believe about other things may be a matter of life or death. This is true when it comes to believing in Jesus. He said, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life” (John 3:36).

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

John 19 can be divided into three sections. The chapter begins with Jesus’s second trial before Pilate (vv. 1-16a). Apparently, Pilate did not want to execute Jesus, even though having someone flogged usually precluded crucifixion. Pilate hoped he could satisfy the mob’s thirst for blood by having Jesus flogged. To add insult to injury, the soldiers placed a crown of thorns and a purple robe on Jesus, taunting Him with symbols of royalty. Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd and stated he had no grounds for charges against Jesus. But the Jewish religious leaders were intent on seeing Jesus crucified. They claimed that if Pilate released Jesus, who said He was a king, then Pilate was in collusion with someone who opposed Caesar. Pilate capitulated and handed Jesus over to be crucified.

The second section of chapter 19 describes Jesus’s crucifixion (vv. 16b-30). John emphasized how everything that happened to Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament (vv. 24,28,36). John also emphasized how Jesus voluntarily gave His life. After crying out in victory, “It is finished,” Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

The final section of John 19 describes the events that occurred immediately after Jesus’s death and burial (vv. 31-42). The Jews did not want bodies hanging on crosses on the Sabbath during Passover. Therefore, they appealed to Pilate to have the legs of the three crucified men broken. This would result in the men dying quickly from suffocation. The bodies could then be removed from their crosses and buried. However, by this time Jesus had already died. To confirm this, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’s side with a spear. After that, Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus, requested Jesus’s body. He and Nicodemus prepared it for burial and placed it in a new tomb.

John 20:1-17

1 On the **first day**^A of the week **Mary Magdalene**^B came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. **2** So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the **one Jesus loved**,^C and said to them, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!” **3** At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. **4** The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. **5** Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. **7** The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. **8** The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and **believed**.^D **9** For they did not yet understand **the Scripture**^E that he must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying. **11** But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus’s body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. **13** They said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “Because they’ve taken away my Lord,” she told them, “and I don’t know where they’ve put him.” **14** Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. **15** “Woman,” Jesus said to her, “why are you crying? Who is it that you’re seeking?” Supposing he was **the gardener**,^F she replied, “Sir, if you’ve carried him away, tell me where you’ve put him, and I will take him away.” **16** Jesus said to her, “Mary.” Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, “‘Rabboni!’” — which means “Teacher.” **17** “Don’t **cling**^G to me,” Jesus told her, “since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am **ascending**^H to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

Key Words

A. Meeting on Sunday became the pattern of the early church since Jesus rose on the first day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

B. A woman who followed Jesus and supported His ministry. Mary is mentioned in all four Gospels and at key moments, including the cross and the empty tomb.

C. This was John’s way of identifying himself in his Gospel. See John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7,20.

D. Belief and faith are incredibly important themes in John’s Gospel (John 1:8,12; 20:31). However, it is not clear exactly what John believed.

E. Specifically, the Old Testament prophecies. The disciples did not yet grasp that Jesus must die and rise, even though He had told them three times on the way to Jerusalem (Mark 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34).

F. In her grief, Mary did not recognize Jesus. Her assumption is understandable since no one except a gardener could be expected to be at a tomb so early in the morning.

G. Jesus told Mary not to cling to Him, emphasizing that He had a task for her to accomplish.

H. Jesus had already told His disciples that He would be leaving (John 14:12-26; 15:26-27). This would allow the Holy Spirit to come and empower His people.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. A Removed Stone

(John 20:1-2)

Everyone needs to inquire about the truth of Jesus's resurrection.

- **What are some elements of faith that are hard to understand?**
- **How does that help or hinder people from accepting Christ?**

2. An Empty Tomb

(John 20:3-10)

Believers can express faith in Jesus.

- **How does evidence of the empty tomb bolster a person's willingness to believe in Jesus?**

3. The Living Teacher

(John 20:11-17)

Believers can tell all people about the resurrected Jesus.

- **How does Jesus use others to help people understand His identity more fully?**

Apply the Text

Discuss as a group reasons people today doubt the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and reasons people believe.

- **What are ways your group can be a welcoming place for people who are seeking the truth about who Jesus is?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

God the Son

He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion.

(See 1 Corinthians 15:1-8,12-19.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a Bible dictionary and multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Look up the word *resurrection* in a Bible dictionary. How does resurrection differ from resuscitation? Read Paul's teachings on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Why is the resurrection of Jesus essential to our Christian faith? What difference has Jesus's resurrection made in your life?

DID YOU KNOW?

Numerous Marys are mentioned in the New Testament: (1) the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-33; John 19:25-27); (2) Mary Magdalene, who had been possessed by demons (Luke 8:2; John 20:11-18); (3) the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1-2; 12:2-3); (4) the mother of James the younger and of Joses and Salome (Mark 15:47-16:1); (5) the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); (6) the wife of Clopas (John 19:25), she may be the same character as Mary, the mother of James, Joses, and Salome in the Synoptic Gospels; (7) Mary from Rome, an individual Paul greeted in Romans 16:6.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on John 20:8. Why is seeing something with your own eyes so important?

All four gospel accounts tell the story of Jesus’s resurrection. And with one exception, nobody believed Jesus had actually been raised from the dead until they saw Him with their own eyes. The women who came to the tomb didn’t. The disciples didn’t, especially not Thomas (see John 20:25). Even when Jesus did appear to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they didn’t believe immediately. The one exception is John. In John 20:8, he didn’t see Jesus, but he still believed.

Other than God Himself, what is something you believe even without seeing it for yourself?

In today’s world of AI, CGI, and special effects, seeing is not always believing. On the other hand, there are many things we’ve never seen that we still believe in, such as places we’ve never visited or historical events we didn’t experience. When Thomas did believe, Jesus gently rebuked him for having to see before he believed. In John 20:29, He said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.” That is good news for us today. None of us have seen Jesus physically, but we have put our trust in Him and believe in Him.

How has your relationship with Jesus blessed you?

This week, call or text a friend you haven’t seen in years. After the conversation, remind yourself that you can have a relationship with someone you never see.

Prayer Requests

DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: John 20:1-2

Review Mark 16:9 and Luke 8:1-2 to learn more about Mary Magdalene.

Each Gospel writer indicates Mary Magdalene was among those who first discovered the tomb was empty. The word “we” in verse 2 indicates there were other women with her when she made her discovery, though John’s account focuses on Mary Magdalene. In the pre-dawn darkness of Sunday morning, Mary went to Jesus’s tomb to anoint His body with spices (Matt. 28:1). To her astonishment, she saw that the tomb’s large “stone had been removed” from its entrance. Immediately, she ran to Simon Peter and John, “the other disciple, the one Jesus loved” and writer of this Gospel, to inform them what she saw. She feared someone had stolen Jesus’s body. Perhaps she thought it was Jesus’s enemies wanting to further express their contempt for Him. Or she may have believed grave robbers were the culprits. Not long after these events, the Roman emperor made a decree in that region that anyone who stole a body from a tomb “with wicked intent” would incur the death penalty. This may have been an attempt to squelch the growing claims that Jesus had risen from the dead. In an attempt to refute Jesus’s resurrection, the Pharisees concocted the story that Jesus’s followers had stolen His body (Matt. 28:11-15).

What factor do you think Mary’s past (Mark 16:9) played in her coming to the tomb to anoint Jesus’s body? How do you express your gratitude to Jesus?

Day 2: John 20:3-7

Pay attention to what Peter and John saw inside the tomb.

Alarmed by Mary’s report, Peter and John ran to the tomb as fast as they could. John “outran Peter and got to the tomb first.” This small detail speaks to the authenticity of what happened. When John got there, he “did not go in.” Instead, given that entrances to such tombs were usually low, John stooped so that he could peer inside.

The Jewish practice of preparing a body for burial first involved the washing of the body. To mask the odor of decay, it was anointed with costly perfumes, such as a mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). Then those preparing the body either wrapped it in a linen shroud or with linen strips, along with binding the hands and feet with strips of linen cloth (19:40). They also used a separate cloth to cover the face. When John looked inside the tomb, he saw the linen cloths that had been used to prepare Jesus for His burial.

Unlike John, Peter did not hesitate to enter the tomb and look around. Peter also saw “the linen cloths lying there” but noticed that the wrapping that had been used on Jesus’s head was not located with the other linen cloths. It was lying in “a separate place,” neatly “folded up.” The orderly arrangement of everything was apparent. This had the looks of something other than a crime scene.

How does the detail of the face cloth being neatly folded strengthen your faith in the resurrection of Jesus?

Day 3: Text John 20:8-10

Compare John 20:9 to Luke 24:27,44-45.

After Peter entered the tomb, “the other disciple” followed behind him. When John “saw” the arrangement of the linen cloths and folded facial cloth separate from them, he “believed.” The Greek verb for “believed” is closely related to the Greek noun that is translated “faith.” It conveys the idea of trust and a firm conviction regarding the veracity of a person or claim. In the New Testament it is a personal, trusting response to God’s revelation of Himself in Christ. As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus is the perfect means by which a person can know God and experience eternal life (John 17:3). Jesus offers salvation to all who believe or trust in Him.

Many believed in Jesus because they saw Him after the resurrection. John believed before actually seeing the risen Savior. This also was in spite of the fact that he and Peter, along with the rest of Jesus’s followers, “did not yet understand the [Old Testament] Scripture” had foreshadowed the Messiah’s resurrection from the dead. John may have been thinking of Isaiah 53:10-12. This Suffering Servant passage, long interpreted to describe the Messiah, refers to His resurrection following His agonizing death and burial. Another possibility is Psalm 16:10.

How would you explain to an unbeliever the basis of your belief in Jesus?

Day 4: John 20:11-15

Underline the question the angels and Jesus asked Mary.

As Mary wept, “she stooped to look into the tomb” and discovered “two angels in white sitting where Jesus’s body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.” The place where Jesus died was between two criminals, but the place of His resurrection was between two angels. Their question in verse 13 was a way of communicating that there was no reason to grieve. Jesus’s resurrection was a time to rejoice.

Realizing someone was standing behind her, Mary turned to look. It was Jesus, though she did not initially recognize Him. There would be others who knew Him before His death who would not readily recognize Him in His resurrected body (Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:16,37; John 21:4). It seems there was something different about the appearance of His resurrected body from what it was before.

Like the angels before Him, Jesus asked Mary: “Why are you crying?” Then He asked: “Who is it that you’re seeking?” Mary understood these questions to be the expressions of a concerned stranger who worked in the garden. She still did not realize her tears were unwarranted. It is difficult to know what caused Mary to think that this gardener may have removed Jesus’s body and taken it somewhere else. Regardless, she was ready to do whatever was necessary to retrieve it and give it the honorable burial her Lord deserved.

How has Jesus’s resurrection turn your grief into joy?

Day 5: John 20:16-17

Compare John 20:16 to John 10:3-4.

Jesus called Mary by name, and she recognized Him. She responded by calling Him “Rabboni” in Aramaic, which John translated for his Greek readers, “Teacher.” This is a wonderful reminder that Jesus knows each of His followers by name, and that they hear and recognize His voice when He speaks to them.

When Mary recognized Jesus, she apparently fell to His feet and clung to Him. Jesus told her not to cling to Him because He had “not yet ascended to the Father.” It is probable He was communicating that she would have more opportunities to see Him before His ascension, thus there was no need to cling to Him. Instead, she needed to get up, go to the rest of His followers, and tell them that He was alive and getting ready to ascend to His Father. Mary was the first one of Jesus’s followers who was mandated to go and tell others the good news of the risen Savior. The statement, “my Father and your Father, to my God and your God,” recognizes that while Jesus’s relationship to the Father is unique, now, because of what He accomplished through His death and resurrection, Jesus has made a way for every believer to have direct access to the Father through the Son (Heb. 4:14-16).

How has God used other people to help you understand His identity more fully?

APPLY THE TEXT

How would you explain to someone why and how the reality of Jesus’s resurrection changes everything? Who needs to hear it?

What are some specific ways you will express your faith in Jesus this week?

