

BELIEVE!

JOHN 20:1-17

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

1. What are some of your favorite Easter hymns and what is the theme?
2. How do these songs reflect your attitude this Easter Sunday morning?

While we may greet Easter Sunday with hope, newness, and rejoicing, the first Easter Sunday dawned with confusion, grief, and agony. As we see how Mary Magdalene, Peter and John grasped the reality of Jesus' resurrection, we too can believe for ourselves and declare to others "He's alive!"

3. What does it mean to "believe in" Jesus? (I place my faith in the fact that He came to die for me and that He arose from the grave and has conquered sin, death, and the grave.)

We make many large and small decisions in our lives but the biggest decision we will ever make is what we believe about Jesus.

A REMOVED STONE! Read John 20:1-2

1. Why did Mary go to the tomb? (Mark and Luke reported that Mary and some other women brought spices to the tomb around dawn. Their intent was to finish what Joseph and Nicodemus did in haste on Friday—as far as preparing Jesus' body to be buried.)
2. We know what Mary intended to do once she arrived at the tomb, but what was her motivation? ("In 1 Cor. 13:13 Paul declares to us "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." If we were to seek an illustration of Paul's great accolade for love, we could do little better than Mary Magdalene at the tomb of Jesus. As she approached the empty tomb on the resurrection morning, love is all that Mary had left: her faith in Jesus, and the hope that went with that faith, had died on the cross the previous Friday. With her faith and hope gone, only love drew Mary with affection and concern for the body of Jesus. Because of her love, Mary would be the first to see the resurrected Lord, and it would be through her rekindled faith that Jesus would send news of his triumphant resurrection from the grave."—Richard D. Phillips.)
3. When did Mary go to the tomb?
4. Why did she not go the day before? (The day before was the Sabbath.)
5. What did Mary expect to find at the tomb? (She expected to find Jesus' dead body and Roman soldiers guarding the tomb and a huge stone blocking the entrance to the tomb.)
6. What did she find instead? (The stone had been removed and the tomb was empty.)

Instead of finding closure to a grief-filled weekend, she at first found only more questions.

7. What did she assume when she saw the stone had been removed? (She assumed that someone had moved the body—perhaps Jewish authorities or grave robbers. It may have been moved to another tomb site.)
8. Why did she assume the worst instead of a miracle? (Surely Mary knew about Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection. Even the chief priests and Pharisees knew Jesus claimed He would rise from the dead, but the thought that Jesus was alive never crossed Mary's mind. This seemed to be a further tragedy instead of a final triumph. She wasn't looking for a miracle, so she didn't notice it when it was right in front of her.)
9. What are some elements of faith that are hard to understand? ("Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Heb. 11:1)

As we will see later, we can believe without understanding.

10. How does that help or hinder people when it comes to accepting Christ?

Mary's reaction reminds us that the empty tomb does not in itself convince people the Lord has risen. It is, though, a starting place. The empty tomb is the first concrete evidence we can rely on that Jesus lives. Some people believe that the resurrection accounts are fictional; that the Gospels are fabrications designed to mislead people into believing in the deity of Jesus. One detail makes this highly unlikely. All the gospel accounts report women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb. First-century Roman society did not value the testimony of

women. If the writers had made this up and was trying to pass off a lie as truth, they would not have placed women at the empty tomb first. John and the other writers simply reported the facts as they witnessed them.

Who would be willing to die for a lie!

Confused and grieving, Mary turned to Peter and John. Upon hearing her report, they immediately set off for the tomb.

AN EMPTY TOMB! Read John 20:3-10

Peter and John ran to the tomb, but John got to the tomb first but did not go in. He stooped to look in and saw the linen cloths laying there. When Peter got there, he rushed right into the tomb.

1. What did he see in the tomb? (The linen cloth and the scarf that was covering the head was folded and laying by itself.)

This was not consistent with a tomb disturbed by grave robbers.

2. What was John's reaction to what he saw?

3. What did he believe? (Mary's report that the body was missing? That Jesus had truly been raised from the dead? Perhaps he remembered what Jesus had said about his resurrection and felt a glimmer of hope although he still did not understand it all.)

4. What did the disciples do after this incredible sight?

5. Does this indicate belief, disbelief, or shock?

Perhaps they needed some time to reflect on what they had just seen.

6. Can we believe in Jesus without understanding all the biblical teachings about Him and the salvation God offers through Him?

The empty tomb is compelling evidence for believing in the resurrection of Christ. His enemies could not produce a body, which would have ended the rumor that Jesus was alive. The linen cloth Jesus had been wrapped in was an empty shell collapsed by the weight of the spices that was in it.

7. Christians believe the grave was empty. What evidence is there that it is true? ("The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so persuasive, including what Peter and John saw in the empty tomb, that it has been described as "the best attested fact in history." Many legal scholars have scrutinized the evidence in the light of legal standards. One of them, the famous English jurist Sir Edward Clark, wrote, "As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidence for the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling." Peter was the first of many who honestly considered the facts of Jesus' resurrection and responded by trusting him as their living Savior and Lord."—Richard D. Phillips.

There are three Greek words for "to see" used in this passage. The first was applied to John when he looked in the tomb and it simply means "to look and see." The second is used when Peter entered the tomb, and it means "to wonder regarding something's meaning." He was trying to understand what he saw. The third is used when John entered the tomb and saw what was there. It means "to see with comprehension and understanding."—This information came from Richard D. Phillips in vol. 2 of *Reformed Expository Commentary*.

8. How does evidence of the empty tomb bolster a person's willingness to believe in Jesus? (Jesus enemies did everything they could do to prove the resurrection of Jesus to be false. They could not! There were too many witnesses. All they would have had to do is produce Jesus' body, but they could not because He was alive.)

THE LIVING TEACHER! Read John 20:11-17

Evidently Mary went back to the tomb, arriving just after Peter and John left.

1. What did the angels ask her?

2. Why do you think they asked that question?

God often asks questions to get us to think about the truth in front of us. Mary's answer indicates that she did not recognize them as angels appearing in human form. The white clothing should have told her something, but her grief was still in control.

The term "woman" is not meant in a disrespectful or demeaning way. In that society it was a term of affection and tenderness.

3. Why do you think Mary thought Jesus was the gardener? (grief, tears, emotions, only glanced at him, did not look at his face, etc.)
4. Jesus knew for whom Mary was looking; why did He ask her? (When we ask someone why they are doing something aren't we asking them to evaluate their actions.)
5. What did Mary say to the person she thought was the gardener? (If you have moved Him, please tell me where He is, and I will take care of it for you. Just tell me where He is.)

Mary was totally devoted to Jesus, but her assumptions and preconceived ideas blinded her to the truth the Lord wanted her to see. She should have realized it by now. The evidence had been mounting. The empty tomb, the undisturbed cloths, and the angels in white all pointed to the resurrection of Jesus, and now Jesus stood before her, but she did not recognize Him.

6. Could our preconceived ideas stop us from seeing what He wants us to see?

Even when we know and believe that Jesus lives for us, we sometimes fail to recognize His presence and His work in our lives. Too often we do not recognize the Lord in our midst because we have fixed our eyes on our problems and grief.

7. What caused Mary to finally recognize Jesus? (When Jesus called her name, He probably used a tone and inflection she often heard Him use. Her anguish and despair turned to astonishment and delight.)
8. Why did Jesus say, "Don't cling to me?" (Jesus had work to do and so did Mary. Neither could get their work done with Mary clinging to Jesus' legs.)

This wouldn't be the last time she'd see Him, but she needed to quit relying on sight and touch. Her relationship with Him would change. After His ascension, Mary would relate to her Lord in faith and without seeing Jesus' physical presence.

9. What job did Jesus give Mary? (Go share the Good News of His resurrection and coming ascension with His disciples!)
10. How did Jesus refer to the disciples? (The term brothers expresses a much closer relationship than that of Teacher and learner and friend. That closeness is also reflected in "My Father and your Father...My God and your God.")

Jesus was saying that now their relationship and our relationship with the Father is identical to His. We are sons and joint heirs with Jesus. See Gal. 4:6-7.

11. What can you do to tell others about the resurrected Savior? What holds you back?

CHALLENGE!

1. What are some reasons people doubt the reality of Jesus' resurrection?
2. Why do others believe in Jesus' resurrection?
3. What are some ways we can be a welcoming place for people who are seeking the truth about who Jesus is?