

The Gospel of John

Lesson 26: The Resurrection and the Purpose of the Gospel -- John 20:1–21:25

It is still dark when Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb, and the stone is rolled away. She runs, breathless and grieving, certain that someone has taken the body of her Lord. Peter and John race to the tomb and find it empty, the grave clothes lying there, the cloth that had been on His head folded by itself. And then, in the garden, Mary, weeping, mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener, until He speaks one word, her name: “Mary.” And everything changes. The grave is empty. Death has been defeated. The One who said, “I am the resurrection and the life,” has walked out of His own tomb. The darkest day in history is followed by the brightest morning the world has ever known.

The risen Jesus comes to His frightened disciples, hiding behind locked doors, and speaks peace over them, and shows them His hands and His side, the wounds that prove it is really Him, really risen, really alive. Thomas, who was absent and refused to believe without seeing, gets his moment a week later, and falls before the risen Christ with the highest confession in the whole Gospel: “My Lord and my God!” And Jesus speaks past Thomas to us: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” That is us. We have not seen, and yet, through the testimony of these witnesses, we are invited to believe.

And here John tells us, plainly, why he wrote all of this down. “Now Jesus did many other signs... 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.” There it is, the purpose of the entire Gospel. John did not write to entertain or merely to inform. He selected these signs and stories so that we would believe in Jesus and, believing, have life. Every chapter we have studied has been building toward this: that you would come to a living, life-giving faith in the Son of God.

The Gospel ends on a beach at dawn, with a charcoal fire and a restored disciple. Peter, who denied Jesus three times around a charcoal fire, is gently and fully restored beside another charcoal fire, as Jesus asks three times, “Do you love me?” and three times commissions him: “Feed my sheep.” The risen Christ does not discard those who fail Him; He restores them and calls them back to service. Our long journey through John ends not with an ending but with a commission, “Follow me,” spoken to a forgiven man and to every reader who has come this far. Read this final chapter and meet the risen Lord, and hear Him call you, by name, to believe, to be restored, and to follow.

Group Discussion: John tells us he wrote his Gospel “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” (20:31). After studying all of John, how would you describe the kind of “believing” that leads to life, and how is it more than mere agreement that Jesus existed?

Personal Reflection: By a charcoal fire, the risen Jesus gently restored Peter, who had denied Him, and recommissioned him (21:15–17). Where do you need to receive Christ's restoration after failure, and how does it move you that He calls failures back to love and service?

Read John 20:1–21:25

Study Questions

1. The tomb was empty, the grave clothes were left behind, and the risen Jesus appeared to His disciples (20:1–20). What is the significance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and why is it the foundation of the Christian faith?
2. The risen Jesus came to His fearful disciples and said, "Peace be with you" (20:19, 21). Where do you most need the peace of the risen Christ in your life right now, and how does His resurrection ground that peace?
3. Thomas refused to believe without seeing, then confessed, "My Lord and my God!" (20:25, 28). What is significant about Thomas's confession, and how does it affirm the deity of Jesus at the climax of the Gospel?
4. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:29). Since you are among those who believe without having seen, what helps your faith stay strong when you cannot see, and where is it being tested?
5. John states his purpose: these things "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" (20:30–31). What is John's stated purpose, and what does it tell us about why the signs and stories were chosen?
6. The whole Gospel aims at producing faith that leads to life. As you finish this study, how has your own faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, grown or been challenged, and where do you most want it to deepen?
7. By a charcoal fire, Jesus three times asked Peter, "Do you love me?" and three times commissioned him to feed His sheep (21:15–17). What does Peter's restoration teach us about how the risen Christ deals with those who have failed Him?
8. After restoring Peter, Jesus said simply, "Follow me" (21:19, 22). After all you have seen of Jesus in this study, what does it look like for you to follow Him from here, and what holds you back?
9. This is the climax and stated purpose of the whole Gospel. John says he wrote "that you may believe... and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31), and the believing he describes throughout the Gospel is a living, obedient faith that confesses Jesus as Lord and God (20:28), receives Him, and follows Him (21:19). How does the whole Gospel of John frame saving "belief" as this living, obedient faith rather than mere mental agreement, and how does this connect to the way the New Testament describes coming to Christ in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, and then following Him in faithful discipleship?
10. Look back over the entire Gospel of John, from the Word made flesh to the empty tomb and the call to follow. What is the one most significant way Jesus has formed you through this

study, and what is one specific step of believing, obedient discipleship you will take in response?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, 14, 17–20, the resurrection as of first importance and the ground of our hope; Acts 2:36–41, believing, repenting, and being baptized in response to the risen Lord; Romans 10:9–10, confessing Jesus as Lord and believing God raised Him; Romans 6:3–4, baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life; Acts 2:42, the early church continuing steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.