

SESSION 6

I Have Seen

Jesus is the resurrected Savior.

JOHN 20:1-18

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 20:8

FIRST THOUGHTS

When our mother uses our first name, we usually stop in our tracks. We know better than to ignore that call. The same thing is true when our boss uses our first name, especially if they're doing so to congratulate or recognize our work. Hearing our first name changes the relationship. When Mary heard her name called by the One she thought to be the gardener—it changed everything.

(In PSG, p. 55) **How does using first names in a business setting impact interactions between people with different roles?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 20:1-18

The resurrection of Jesus may be one of the most controversial topics in history. The same skeptics who question divine creation and divine incarnation also discredit divine resurrection. The resurrection provokes such hostility because of what it implies. It's one thing to say that Jesus died. But if we say that He rose again, we are acknowledging the validity of who He claimed to be: God the Son, the Messiah, the Savior. And a personal Savior means personal sin, which many would rather ignore. But Scripture offers solid evidence for Jesus's resurrection.

If the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection were trying to prove preconceived ideas, one might legitimately question their accounts. However, Mary, Peter, and John were not expecting to find an empty tomb. Mary went to the tomb to anoint Jesus's dead body with spices appropriate for burial (Mark 16:1). She and the women with her even worried about getting past the guards and the stone that stood between them and their Lord's body.

At the same time, the disciples remained in hiding for fear of the Jews. They initially discounted reports of an empty tomb as so many idle tales (Luke 24:11). While Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves, they did not fully understand what they saw.

Mary must have followed the two disciples since she remained by the tomb after they went back to Jerusalem. Two angels asked why she was crying, but their question did not relieve her distress. Only after encountering the living Christ did Mary finally realize that He had risen from the dead. Returning to the disciples, she had exciting news. No longer did she merely report an empty tomb; she had met the risen Lord!

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXAMINE (JOHN 20:1-10)

Verses 1-2

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¹ On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene 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, and said to them, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!”

Before Christ’s resurrection made Sunday special, it was merely *the first day of the week*. The word translated *week* is related to the word Sabbath. For Jews, Sabbath began on Friday at sundown and concluded at the same time on Saturday. The Sabbath (basically Saturday) was the seventh day, a day of rest, while Sunday began a new set of seven days in a week.

This particular Sunday was the third day since Jesus’s crucifixion. Some writers argue that Jesus died on Thursday to account for three days and three nights in the tomb, fulfilling the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:38–41). However, in Jewish thought any part of a day counted as a day. Given that, it seems best to accept Jesus’s crucifixion on Friday, his silent day in the tomb on the Sabbath (Saturday), and His resurrection on Sunday.

While John only mentioned *Mary Magdalene*, other Gospel writers name several women who went to Jesus’s *tomb* in the *early* hours of Sunday morning (Matt. 28:1-8; Luke 23:53-24:10). John concentrated on Mary as representative of the entire group. Since Mark 16:2 indicates that they arrived around dawn, it was *still dark* when they left their homes. By waiting until the day after the Sabbath, the women avoided prohibitions regarding work or touching a dead body (Ex. 34:21; Num. 19:11-22).

Although initially worried about the *stone* blocking the tomb, Mary discovered that it had been *removed* from the tomb’s entrance. In Matthew’s Gospel, an angel told the women that Jesus had been raised from the dead and they should go and tell the disciples (Matt. 28:5-7).

Just as the singular reference to Mary does not exclude the presence of other women, John’s focus on Mary going to *Simon Peter* and *the other disciple* does not mean more disciples were not present. Other Gospel accounts clarify the inclusion of “the Eleven” when the women brought the news of the empty tomb (Matt. 28:8; Luke 24:9-11). John may have only mentioned Peter and John because they reacted to Mary’s news.

The *other disciple* was identified as *the one Jesus loved*. Throughout his Gospel, John refused to mention himself by name (John 13:23-24; 21:7,20). Only at the end of his book did he identify himself (John 21:24).

Even viewing the empty tomb, Mary still did not accept the fact that Jesus was risen. She thought someone had *taken the Lord out of the tomb*. Mary’s use of the plural *we* confirms that she was accompanied by other women. She was distressed because they did not know *where they’ve put him*. She assumed someone had moved Jesus’s body because she did not recall His statements about His resurrection.

Verse 3

³ At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb.

Upon hearing Mary’s report, Peter and John headed *for the tomb*. Seeing a woman running through the city in the early morning hours would have raised eyebrows. Watching two grown men run down the streets would have aroused suspicion. Mary’s news was so amazing that Peter and John did not consider their danger. They rushed to see *the tomb*.

Verses 4-5

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.

At first, Peter and John *were running together*. They were not in a race, but they were in a hurry to see what the women had described. The distance could have been around two miles to the north of the city. At least two locations of the tomb have been suggested, with one being more than a mile farther from Jerusalem than the other.

Perhaps because he was younger, John *outran* Peter and *got to the tomb first*. His eagerness outweighed his fear or his concern about maintaining pace with his colleague. He only wanted to get to where Jesus had been.

The tomb probably included an inner chamber where the body was laid. The entrance would have been smaller and a carved stone was rolled in front of the opening. Though he arrived first, John *did not go in*. *Stooping down* because of the low entrance, he *saw the linen cloths lying* where Jesus's body had been. Typically, Jewish burial practices involved anointing the body with spices and wrapping it in *linen*. The sight must have overwhelmed John, as he considered what this scene meant.

Verses 6-7

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.

Peter was *following* John, but he did not hesitate at the opening. Peter *entered the tomb*. He was not being disrespectful, but he was eager to see everything for himself. He passed John and went into the burial chamber, where he *saw the linen cloths*. No other evidence was found for Jesus's body. Scholars observe that if Jesus's body had been taken by the authorities or by grave robbers, they would not have removed the burial shroud.

Two different words describe the way John and Peter viewed the burial cloths. While the difference in terms may be slight, they are significant. John only needed a brief glance to comprehend their meaning. Peter's attention was drawn to the *cloths* and the absence of a body.

The reference to "cloths" in the plural includes the main shroud and a smaller *wrapping* that covered Jesus's face and head. It was *not lying with the linen cloths*. The Greek wording suggests the cloth was rolled rather than folded. The difference would be similar to folding a handkerchief for a pocket versus rolling a napkin at a restaurant.

Jesus's glorified body was physical but no longer limited by time or space. He could exit the tomb before it was unsealed. Later, He would appear to the disciples in a room where the door was locked. Apparently, upon resurrection, the grave bindings simply fell away. By taking time to roll the head covering, Jesus was pointing to His mastery over the situation.

Verses 8-10

⁸ The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. ⁹ For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

After Peter entered the tomb, John *went in*. John's self-description includes several interesting details. As usual, he referred to the *other disciple* in the third person. Second, he reiterated that he *had reached the tomb first*. Most importantly, after he entered the grave, John *believed*.

Exactly what John believed remained somewhat unclear. At this point, neither he nor Peter completely understood the *Scripture that he must rise from the dead*. Jesus had prophesied His resurrection in the context of His crucifixion (Matt. 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:21-22; 18:31-34). In addition, Old Testament Scriptures like Psalm 16:9-10 also should have led His followers to expect His resurrection. But the disciples' limited insight hindered connecting Jesus's words to the empty tomb in front of them.

John and Peter may have discussed what they saw after they left the tomb. Leaving Mary behind, they *returned to the place where they were staying*. Having run to the tomb, it's possible they walked back slowly in deep contemplation.

The evidence of Jesus's resurrection includes guards and a government seal, the stone and grave cloths. Most of all, it includes a missing body. Still, acceptance remains a matter of faith. Ultimately, one must simply follow John's example and believe.

(In PSG, p. 58) **How can we help others investigate the truth of the resurrection?**

QUESTIONS (JOHN 20:11-13)

Verse 11

¹¹ But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb.

To understand why *Mary stood outside the tomb crying*, several other passages are vital to the timeline. While Jesus appeared to several of the women who came to the tomb with her, Mary encountered the Lord separately (John 20:11-17). After seeing the empty tomb, Mary ran back and told Peter and John what she had seen. The other women met Jesus as they returned to Jerusalem separately (Matt. 28:1-10). Some commentators believe this occurred after Mary's encounter with Jesus. Mary must have followed Peter and John to the tomb and was outside during their encounter. After they left, she saw Jesus and then went to tell the other disciples (John 20:18). Other scholars think the story of Peter and John was inserted into Mary's account to provide perspective.

At this point Mary still believed that someone had removed Jesus's body. The original wording indicates incessant weeping. After Peter and John left, Mary went to the opening to see more. With her eyes wet with tears, *Mary stooped to look into the tomb*.

Verses 12-13

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."

Surprised, Mary *saw two angels in white*. Mark and Matthew only mention one angel, but they also include the other women in this encounter (Matt. 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-5). The difference should cause no concern since each writer focused on different aspects of the account. Peter and John did not see the angels, but Mary saw them *sitting where Jesus's body had been*. Their presence, *one at the head and the other at the feet*, means one sat where Jesus's head would have rested while the other was at the opposite end of the burial bench. Some scholars have compared this to the mercy seat that sat upon the ark of the covenant. The mercy seat had two cherubim, one on either end, spreading their wings over the place where the high priest offered blood for the people's redemption.

Mary was not frightened by the angels. Their appearance in human form may have caused her to mistake them for men. When they asked why Mary was *crying*, the question was not intended to gain information. They were challenging Mary to consider what she was experiencing. Her response shows her concern that unknown persons had *taken away* Jesus's body. Since Mary had received miraculous deliverance through Jesus's ministry, she naturally referred to Him in a personal way. He was not merely "the Lord," but *my Lord*. And she grieved because she did not know what had become of His body. She still did not grasp the meaning of the empty tomb.

While Mary did not ask the question, she had many concerns. God does not rebuke us when we are confused. Instead, He invites us to bring our concerns to Him. He is the answer to all our questions and needs.

(In PSG, p. 60) **What questions and preconceived beliefs get in the way of believing the resurrection?**

WITNESS (JOHN 20:14-18)

Verses 14-15

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, she replied, “Sir, if you’ve carried him away, tell me where you’ve put him, and I will take him away.”

After speaking to the angels, Mary *turned around*, not waiting for an answer. As she did, Mary *saw Jesus standing there*. The fact that she *did not know it was Jesus* could be explained several ways. Some scholars think her eyes were blurry from tears, while others believe she may have been supernaturally prevented from recognizing Him, much like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16). It’s also possible that she only took a quick glance at the man beside her without really looking at Him.

At first Jesus addressed her simply as *woman*. This term was not demeaning but referred to any adult female. He asked her “*Why are you crying?*” Jesus knew the reason for her tears, but He also asked whom she was *seeking*. Any stranger seeing an unknown woman looking into a grave might have asked the same question. Jesus wanted Mary to confront her feelings before revealing Himself to her.

Reasonably, the only person likely to be present at that hour at a garden tomb (John 19:41) was a *gardener*. Mary may have thought he had moved the body and could tell her where he had *put him*. If so, Mary would happily *take him away*. Speaking from her heart more than her head, she didn’t take time to think about how she would handle the corpse of an adult male.

Verses 16-18

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”—which means “Teacher.”

¹⁷ “Don’t cling 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 to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them what he had said to her.

Mary only needed one word to change her life: *Mary*. Jesus’s familiar voice must have shocked her. In reply, she answered *Rabboni* in *Aramaic*, the common dialect of Jews following their return from the Babylonian exile. Formerly subdued, Mary’s voice lifted in hope and amazement. *Rabboni* was a title of respect meaning *Teacher*. The term carries a personal connotation, indicating that Jesus was not just any teacher but that He was Mary’s teacher.

As she recognized Jesus, Mary must have reached for Him since Jesus told her not to *cling to Him*. This phrase should not be mistaken to mean Mary had embraced Jesus in some type of improper manner. In India, I’ve observed women grasp the feet of pastors to show their respect and deep emotions. When the other women met Jesus after the resurrection, they also clung to His feet (Matt. 28:9). Some commentators suggest a similar meaning here.

Jesus said this because He had not yet *ascended to the Father*. John’s Gospel ends before the ascension. Instead, Jesus instructed Mary to *go to my brothers*. By *brothers*, Jesus did not mean His family but His disciples in Jerusalem. Previously, Jesus elevated them from servants to friends (John 15:15-17). Now, they were His brothers (Heb. 2:11).

Mary was to tell the disciples that Jesus would be going to *my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*. This unusual combination has several connotations. First, *God* was not only Jesus’s *Father*, but through faith in Jesus, Mary could also know Him as Father. Second, the Father was God.

Mary had already made a preliminary report to the disciples about the empty tomb, now she returned to tell them, “*I have seen the Lord!*” Her faithful witness testified not only to the vacant grave, but also to the reason the tomb was empty—Jesus had risen! She had met the living Lord! She also shared what *he had said to her*. They should expect to see Him soon. In fact, all of the remaining disciples except Thomas would see Him later that evening when He appeared in a locked room (John 20:19).

Believers can tell others about Jesus. Ours is not a theoretical theology, but a personal experience with the risen Lord Jesus. We do not offer second-hand testimony, but we can share about our dynamic relationship with a risen and living Christ.

(In PSG, p. 62) **How does Jesus reveal Himself today as the resurrected Savior?**

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 John 20:27-28; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.)

BIBLE SKILL

Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

Create a two-column chart to compare the experience of Peter and John with that of Mary. Analyze John 20:1-18 and record your ideas about how they approached the empty tomb, noting these elements: motivations, expectations, emotions expressed, and reactions.