

# **Bible Study September 20, 2023**

## **When Did You Believe? John 20 (ESV)**

### **John and Mary Believe**

***<sup>1</sup> Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.***

Mary Magdalene had taken Jesus' call to follow him very seriously. Her name indicates that she was likely from Magdala, a town near Capernaum in Galilee. She had followed Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, and other women from Galilee had come with her (Luke 23:55). In Jerusalem, these women followed him to the foot of the cross and to the empty tomb.

The stone was not rolled away from the entrance to the tomb so Jesus could get out. He could have left easily without moving the stone. It was rolled away so others could get in and see that Jesus was gone.

***<sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."<sup>3</sup> So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.***

The linen wrappings were left as if Jesus' body had simply vacated them. The cloth that covered Jesus' head was still folded up in the shape of a head, and it was at about the right distance from the wrappings that had enveloped Jesus' body. A grave robber wouldn't have left the expensive linens behind, and certainly not so neatly.

***<sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;<sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.***

When John saw the linen wrappings looking like an empty cocoon from which Jesus had emerged, he believed that Jesus had risen. It wasn't until after they had seen the empty tomb that they remembered what the Scriptures and Jesus had said—he would die, but he would also rise again!

Jesus' resurrection is the key to the Christian faith. Why? (1) Just as he said, Jesus rose from the dead. We can be confident, therefore, that he will accomplish all he has promised. (2) Jesus' bodily resurrection shows us that the living Christ, not a false prophet or imposter, is ruler of God's eternal Kingdom. (3) We can be certain of our own future resurrection because Jesus was resurrected. Death is not the end—a future life awaits. (4) The divine power that brought Jesus back to life is now available to us to bring our spiritually dead selves back to life. (5) The Resurrection is the basis for the church's witness to the world.

***<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to their homes.***

### **Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene**

***<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>14</sup> Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”***

Mary did not want to lose Jesus again. She had not yet understood the Resurrection. Perhaps she thought this was his promised second coming (14:3). But Jesus did not want to be detained at the tomb. If he did not ascend into heaven, the Holy Spirit would not come. Both he and Mary had important work to do.

***<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.***

Mary didn't recognize Jesus at first. Her grief had blinded her; she couldn't see him because she didn't expect to see him. Then he spoke her name, and immediately she recognized him. Imagine the love that flooded her heart when she heard her Savior saying her name. Jesus is near you, and he is calling your name. Can you, like Mary, regard him as your Lord? Mary did not meet the risen Jesus until she had discovered the empty tomb. She responded with joy and obedience by going to tell the disciples.

### **The Disciples Believe**

***<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”***

Jesus again identified himself with his Father. He told the disciples by whose authority he did his work. Then he passed the job to his disciples of spreading the Good News of salvation around the world. Whatever God has asked you to do, remember that (1) your authority comes from God and (2) Jesus has demonstrated by words and actions how to accomplish the job he has given you. As the Father sent Jesus, Jesus sends his followers—including you.

***22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.***

Jesus gave his disciples a special filling of the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of what all who believe would experience at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2) and forever after. To do God’s work, we need the intimacy, love, direction, and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Avoid trying to do his work in your own strength.

The breath of God has life. The first man was created but did not come alive until God breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). God’s first breath made humans different from all other forms of creation. Now, through the breath of Jesus, God imparted eternal, spiritual life. With this inbreathing came the power to do God’s will on earth.

***23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”***

Jesus was giving the disciples their Spirit-powered and Spirit-guided mission—to preach the Good News so people’s sins might be forgiven. The disciples did not have the power to forgive sins (only God can do that), but Jesus gave them the privilege of telling new believers that their sins have been forgiven because they have accepted Jesus’ message (see the note on Matthew 16:19). All believers have this same privilege. We can announce forgiveness of sins with certainty when we ourselves have come to repentance and faith.

### **Thomas Believes**

***24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”***

Jesus’ resurrected body was unique. It was not the same kind of flesh and blood Lazarus had when he came back to life. Jesus’ body was no longer subject to the same laws of nature as before his death. He could appear in a locked room, yet he was not a ghost or an apparition because he could eat and be touched. Jesus’ resurrection was literal and physical—he was not a disembodied spirit.

***28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”***

Jesus wasn’t hard on Thomas for his doubts. Despite his skepticism, Thomas was still loyal to the believers and to Jesus himself. Some people need to voice their doubts before they believe. If doubt leads to questions, and questions lead to answers, and if the answers are accepted, then doubt has done good work. It is when doubt becomes stubbornness and stubbornness becomes a prideful lifestyle that doubt harms faith. When you doubt, don’t stop there. Let your doubt deepen your faith as you continue to search for the answers.

## Future Christians Believe

***<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”***

People who hear about the Resurrection for the first time may need time before they can comprehend this amazing story. Like Mary and the disciples, they may pass through four stages of belief: (1) At first, they may think the story is a fabrication, impossible to believe (20:2). (2) Like Peter, they may check out the facts and still be puzzled about what happened (20:6). (3) Only when they encounter Jesus personally will they be able to accept the fact of the Resurrection (20:16). (4) Then, as they commit themselves to the risen Lord and devote their lives to serving him, they will begin to understand fully the reality of his presence with them (20:28).

Have you ever wished you could actually see Jesus, touch him, and hear his words? At times do you wish you could sit with him and get his advice? Thomas wanted Jesus' physical presence. But God's plan is wiser. He has not limited himself to one physical body; he wants to be present with you at all times. Even now he is with you in the person of the Holy Spirit. You can talk to him, and you can find his words to you in the pages of the Bible. He can be as real to you as he was to Thomas.

***<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> 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.***

John tells us that his Gospel records only a few of the many events in Jesus' life on earth. But the Good News includes everything we need to know to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, through whom we receive eternal life.