



THE ULTIMATE SIGN – RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD!

BIG IDEA: The resurrection of Jesus changes everything!

DATE: Wednesday, March 25 and Sunday, March 29, 2026

SCRIPTURE: John 20:1-2; 11-18

OPENING QUESTION

What percentage of Americans would you say believe the biblical account of the physical resurrection of Jesus is *completely* true?

Would you be surprised to hear that 66%, or 2 in 3, believe in the resurrection - with it going up to 70% in the Midwest and the South? And 58% of younger Americans (18-34) accept it as fact.

YET...

Many Americans have conflicting thoughts about the Bible and seem to see little connection between Jesus rising again and their daily lives.

In 2022, for the first time in the history of the State of Theology study, 53% of Americans say the Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not *literally* true. And 40%, the highest percentage yet, say modern science disproves the Bible.

What percentage would say God is unconcerned with their day-to-day decisions?

A growing percentage, up to a high of 32%, says God is unconcerned with their day-to-day decisions. And 3 in 5 (60%) say religious belief is a matter of personal opinion, not objective truth.

There is a big disconnect going on. Today we are going to look at the Resurrection of Jesus and why it matters not just for salvation – but for our everyday life.

SETTING THE STAGE

Just three days earlier, Jesus had experienced excruciating death on the cross, as He voluntarily surrendered His life for the sins of the whole world. For those who witnessed that horrible moment, it was both painful and unfathomable. The long-awaited Messiah, Son of God, was dead.

SCRIPTURE READING

John 20:1-2; 11-18 (CSB)

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!"

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, 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 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.

DISCUSSION

THE TOMB IS EMPTY

READ John 20:1-2

What do you appreciate about Mary Magdalene in this passage?

What was Mary's first response to the empty tomb? What did she think had happened?

Not only was the tomb empty, but Jesus was alive!

JESUS IS ALIVE!

READ John 20:11-16

After telling Peter and John they all went back to see the empty tomb. Peter and John left confused, but Mary stayed behind crying at the tomb.

- What convinced Mary the man she was speaking to was Jesus?
- What was so significant about Jesus first appearing to women?
- How did you respond when you first heard Jesus call *your* name?
- How do *you* know that Jesus is alive? How does that impact your everyday life?

SHARE THE MESSAGE

READ John 20:17-18

What do you notice about Mary's response in v. 18? (Mary went and announced Jesus's resurrection to the disciples; she shared a simple message, "I have seen the Lord!"; she didn't add or take away from the message of Jesus, as she "told them what he had said to her" (v. 18).

How can we follow her example? (keep it simple; we don't have to have all the answers before sharing how Jesus has changed our lives)

When we accept Jesus as our Savior there is a clear **BEFORE JESUS** and **AFTER JESUS**. Write those phrases on the board and ask people to share how Jesus has changed their lives.

For example:

<u>BEFORE JESUS</u>	<u>AFTER JESUS</u>
lost temper easily	more patient/gentle
selfish with time	generous
without purpose	found purpose
hopeless	hopeful
identity in success	identity in being a child of God
guilt/shame	freedom in forgiveness

LEADERS: Be sensitive to those who may not have an AFTER because they have not surrendered their life to Jesus's Lordship. Invite members to talk with you if they have questions about what it means to accept Jesus as their Savior and follow Him.

Christianity does not exist without the resurrection for it is the crux to all we believe. It is all about Jesus and His perfect substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. Despite all the eyewitness accounts, the hundreds of prophecies fulfilled and the detailed accounts of the four Gospels, people are still skeptical. Over the centuries, people have come up with many explanations for Jesus's empty tomb.

How would you respond if a friend made one of the following claims? Turn to your neighbor and discuss.

- "The disciples taught that Jesus lives in our hearts, but over time, that idea of a *symbolic* resurrection became a belief in a *literal* resurrection."
- "Some of the disciples must have taken Jesus's body during the night. They hid His corpse and then claimed He had risen."
- "Jesus must have fainted or gone unconscious until He was placed in the tomb. Then He woke up and walked out."

What claims have *you* come across for denying the resurrection of Jesus? How do you respond?

What about people who believe in Jesus's resurrection but do not see how it affects their day-to-day life? How would you disciple them? (without His resurrection we do not have forgiveness of sins or be under the New Covenant; after His ascension the Holy Spirit descended and now every Christian has the power of the Holy Spirit within them – as their comforter, helper, strength, and guide; because Jesus is who He said He was we can surrender our life to Him and trust Him as the Lord and Leader of our everyday life)

RESPONSE

The resurrection is both a historical and spiritual reality. It truly happened and Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave changes everything. It is the foundation of our belief system

and makes eternal life possible. Yet many people do not believe it. It is now our turn to echo Mary's message and excitedly share, "The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive!"

READING PLAN

3/29 – Luke 24; 3/30 – Matthew 28; 3/31 – Psalm 16; 4/1 – John 20; 4/2 – Hosea 6; 4/3 – 2 Timothy 1; 4/4 – 1 Corinthians 15; *Memory Verse: Matthew 28:18-20*

NEXT WEEK: Easter Sunday! (No LifeGroups) The following week we start a new 6-week series "Leverage Your Life" – *learn how to leverage your job, skill, and passion where you live, work, and play for the glory of God.*

COMMENTARY

JOHN 20:1-2 The tomb in which Jesus was buried was found empty.

Mary Magdalene (v. 1). She is a well-known figure in the New Testament. She shares her name with Mary the mother of Jesus, who in turn derives her name from Miriam, the sister of Moses. Magdalene is probably not a surname but an indication of her hometown – Magdala. Along with the woman at the well in John 4, Mary Magdalene has been called the first Christian evangelist. At least one New Testament scholar believes that Mary Magdalene and Mary the sister of Lazarus are the same person, and that this same woman is the one whose story Luke tells in Luke 7:36-50.

The other Gospel writers mentioned other women who came to the tomb with Mary Magdalene – Salome and Mary the mother of James (Mark 16:1). John did not mention the other women. This exclusion does not mean that John was incorrect or even unaware of the other women with Mary Magdalene. It simply means that John did not include them in his telling of the story.

Early, while it was still dark (v. 1). The Jewish Sabbath ended on Saturday at sundown. By telling us that these women went when it was still dark, John was stressing that the women were going as early as possible. Jewish law and custom prohibited them from working on the Sabbath. Going to the grave overnight on Saturday night would not have been wise or safe.

The stone (v. 1). Tombs in the ancient Near East were often small, dug-out caves with a bench on which the body would be laid. A large stone was then rolled in front of the opening to the cave to prevent predators from mutilating the body. The stone was large and difficult, but not impossible, to move. It would be moved when people wanted to access the tomb in order to care for the dead body. The Gospel of Mark includes a dialogue between Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James discussing who would roll the stone away from the tomb on their behalf.

Went running (v. 2). Running would have been an undignified act for a woman in the first century. Mary was not worried about cultural norms and taboos. Instead, she responded out of passion and love for her Lord.

Simon Peter...the other disciple (v. 2). Mary Magdalene rushed to tell about the moved stone and missing body to Peter and another disciple. The phrase *the one Jesus loved* is John's preferred description of himself. While this self-description may sound arrogant to modern readers, John

was actually being genuinely humble. If John had called himself “the disciple who loved Jesus,” he would have been bringing attention to himself. Instead, by referring to himself as the one whom Jesus loved, John was expressing how he was the recipient in the relationship. Jesus is the initiator – not John. Elsewhere John reported that Jesus said, “I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you” (15:15-16a). Jesus has a genuine relationship with His followers. Additionally, Jesus is still greater. He is primary. Jesus has called us friends, but we are not friends with Jesus in the same way we are friends with one another. Jesus remains the primary in the relationship. Being His friend is complex and always depends on God’s inclination to reveal Himself to us.

RECAP: Mary Magdalene and several other women agreed to go to the tomb early on the first day of the week, so that they might show their love for Christ by completing the burial preparations. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had been forced by circumstances to prepare his body hastily, and the women wanted to finish the task. Their great concern was how to get into the tomb. Perhaps the Roman soldiers would take pity on them and give them a hand. What they did not know was that an earthquake had occurred and the stone had been rolled back by an Angel! It seems that Mary Magdalene went ahead of the other women and got to the tomb first. When she saw the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, she concluded that somebody had broken into the tomb and stolen the body of her Lord. We may criticize Mary for jumping to conclusions; but when you consider the circumstances, it is difficult to see how she would have reached any other conclusion. It was still dark, she was alone, and, like the other followers of Jesus, she did not believe that He would return from the dead. She ran to give the news to Peter and John. Mary’s use of the pronoun “we” is interesting, for it included the other women who at that moment were discovering that Jesus was alive! The women left the tomb and carried the angel’s message to the other disciples.

It is significant that the first witnesses of the resurrection of Christ were believing women. Among the Jews in that day, the testimony of women was not held high in high regard. “It is better that the words of the law be burned,” said the rabbis, “than to be delivered to a woman.” But these Christian women had a greater message than that of the Law, for they knew that their Savior was alive!

John 20:11-16 Jesus revealed Himself as alive!

Context: Upon hearing Mary Magdalene’s news, Peter and John ran to the tomb. John ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first. However, he hesitated at the entrance of the tomb and did not go into the cave where Jesus’s body had been laid. Peter acted like Peter normally acted – brashly and with a great deal of passion. He went onto the cave where Jesus’s body had been placed on Friday and found no body. He only found burial clothes – including the wrapping that had been used to cover Jesus’s head. Curiously, the head covering was not with the rest of the clothes but had been carefully folded and laid in a separate place. After that, John entered the tomb and saw everything Peter had seen. The Bible says that John “believed” (v. 8), but it is unclear what he believed. Did he believe Jesus had risen from the dead? Did he believe Mary’s assertion that someone had taken Jesus’s body and put it somewhere they didn’t know about?

Crying (v. 11). The Greek word here conveys deep sorrow. She was not merely letting a tear run down her cheek. She was weeping and sobbing with the kind of emotional display that only comes from deep grief and genuine heart ache.

Mary loves her Lord and came early to the garden to express that love. Peter and John had gone home by the time Mary got back to the tomb, so they did not convey to her what conclusion they had reached from the evidence they had examined. Mary still thought that Jesus was dead. Mary's weeping was the loud lamentation so characteristic of Jewish people when they expressed their sorrow. There is certainly nothing wrong with sincere sorrow, because God made us to shed tears; and weeping is good therapy for broken hearts. The sorrow of the Christian, however, must be different from the hopeless sorrow of the world, because we have been "born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3, NASB). We weep - not because our believing loved ones have gone to heaven - but because we miss them.

Two angels (v. 12). When Mary looked into the sepulcher, she saw two men in white. Their position at either end of the shelf where the body had been lying makes us think of the cherubim on the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant. It is as though God is saying, "there is now a new mercy seat! My Son has paid the price for sin, and the way is open into the presence of God!" Mary apparently was not disturbed at seeing these men, and there is no evidence that she knew they were angels. The brief conversation neither dried her tears nor quieted her mind. She was determined to find the body of Jesus.

Why did Mary turn back and not continue her conversation with the two strangers? Did she hear a sound behind her? Or did the angel stand and recognize the presence of their Lord? Perhaps both of these speculations are true or neither is true. She was certain that the Lord's body was not in the tomb, so why linger there any longer? Why did she not recognize the One for whom she was so earnestly searching? Jesus may have deliberately concealed Himself from her, as He would later do when he walked with the Emmaus disciples. It was still early and perhaps dark in that part of the garden. Her eyes were probably blinded by her tears as well.

Seeking (v. 15). The Greek word indicates an intense activity and not simply casually looking. From Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 onward, God has sought out sinners to save them from themselves and their own sin. Now the perfectly righteous Son of God appeared to Mary Magdalene at a garden tomb, where He had been raised from the dead. Jesus was the firstborn from among the dead (Col. 1:18), and His appearance to Mary was the first of several to His followers over forty days. The irony here is that while Mary is said to be seeking for someone, Jesus is the One who comes "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

The gardener (v. 15). Jesus's post resurrection body apparently looked like an ordinary human body. It was so ordinary that Mary could not distinguish Him from a gardener. In this setting, a gardener's job would have included ensuring that the garden tombs were well-kept. Gardeners also would have made sure grave robbers, vandals, and crooks did not disturb the tombs.

Jesus asked her the same question that the angels had asked, "Why are you crying?" How tragic that she was weeping when she could have been praising, had she realized that her Lord was alive! Then He added, "Whom are you seeking?" (He had asked the mob the same question in the Garden - John 18:4) It is encouraging to us to know that "Jesus knows all about our sorrows." The Savior knew that Mary's heart was broken and that her mind was confused. He did not rebuke her; tenderly, He revealed himself to her.

All He had to do was to speak her name, and Mary immediately recognized him. Apparently, Mary had turned away from Jesus, for when He spoke her name, she had to turn back to look at Him again. What a blessed surprise it was to see the face of her beloved Savior!

"Rabboni" (v. 16). All she could say was, "Rabboni - my Master, my Teacher." The title *Rabboni* is used in only one other place in the Gospels, Mark 10:51. In later years, the Jews recognized 3 levels of teachers: rab (the lowest), rabbi, and rabboni (the highest). Mary not only spoke to Him, but she grasped His feet and held on to Him. This was a natural gesture: now that she had found Him, she did not want to lose Him. She and the other believers still had a great deal to learn about His new state of glory; they still wanted to relate to Him as they had done during the years of His ministry before the cross.

John 20:17-18 The message of the resurrected Christ is to be shared with others.

"Don't cling to me" (v. 17). Jesus permitted the other women to hold His feet, and He did not forbid them. Why did He say to Mary, "Do not cling to me?" One reason was that she would see Him again because He had not yet ascended to the Father. He remained on earth for 40 days after His resurrection and often appeared to the believers to teach them spiritual truth. Mary had no need to panic; this was not her last and final meeting with the Lord. The second reason is that she had a job to do - to go tell His brothers that He was alive and would ascend to the Father.

"Not yet ascended" (v. 17). By ascending to the Father, Jesus verified His work on earth was complete. Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father indicates two important truths. First, the right hand is a place of honor. Second, He is seated because His work is completed. The ascension established Jesus's unique position as the anticipated successor to King David, who would reign not merely for an extremely long time but forever. Another reason the ascension is vital is because it was a prerequisite to Jesus' later works. Jesus continues to work after His ascension. These works are His sitting at the right hand of God, His sending the Spirit at Pentecost, His intercession on behalf of His people, and His second coming. The sending of the Spirit by the Father and Son at Pentecost is a foreshadowing of Jesus's second coming - when He will consummate His kingdom. In the second coming, Jesus's followers will experience the most complete manifestation of the mercy, grace, beauty, and power of God anyone has experienced.

My brothers (v. 17). He had called His own *servants* and *friends* but now He called them *brothers*. This meant that they shared His resurrection power and glory. This theme of "the brethren" is central to John's letters. John stresses that love for the brethren is a key indicator of someone truly being a Christian and that hating the brethren is proof someone is outside Christ's saving work. (1 John 2:9-11)

"My Father and your Father" (v. 17). Just as Jesus used familial language to discuss His relationship with the disciples, He continued to use familial language to describe His disciples' relationship to God. Jesus is the unique Son of God. No one else is like Him. However, Jesus's followers are frequently described as God's children, as well as the sons and daughters of God throughout the New Testament.

Christians today also share this familial relationship to God. We have been brought into the family and are Jesus's coheirs. We are to be a family community whose love for one another would distinguish them from a watching world. The church is a community of people who have been saved by the work of Christ and are an imperfect picture of what the kingdom of God will be like after Christ returns.

"My God and your God" (v. 17). There is only one God, so Jesus was clearly not trying to distinguish which God He was talking about as if there are multiple gods. Instead, Jesus assured Mary Magdalene that her faith had made her a citizen in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God

is open to those who will put their faith and hope in Jesus. By belonging to Jesus, they belong to God the Father. In his first letter, John would go on to assure Christians that belonging to the Son means belonging to the Father. He would also teach that those who do not recognize Jesus as God in the flesh are outside of salvation and instead are still in the darkness of sin and death.

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