

“The Resurrection” John 20:1-10 Shane Hatfield 6/20/21

Tonight, we’re going to cover a lot of ground, so buckle up and hold tight. We’re going to start out by reading the first ten verses of chapter 20 of John and then I’m going to take the rest by bits and pieces. Hear the word of the Lord from John 20:

“¹Now 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. ² 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.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

In John 20 verses 30 and 31 John says, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you may have life in His name.” So, let’s listen to these words that John has left us and believe in them that we might find life in Jesus’ name.

In my first year as a campus minister, we had a student named Joe that we met during welcome week. We met a lot of students during welcome week. Joe thought we were fun, and he enjoyed us, and so he thought he would come and check out our meeting. He came to our meeting, he checked it out, and he was surprised that we were Christians! Joe was a non-Christian and Joe really didn’t have any interest in going to a Christian meeting, but he thought, ‘Hey, these people are fun. I like them. I like to sing. So, I’m going to keep hanging out with them.’ So, Joe kept coming, week after week after week to RUF just to be with the people, to sing the songs, and to go to the events. And we were happy to have him! At the end of the year, he went to summer conference with us which is our big week-long beach trip and he got the most legendary sunburn ever in the history of RUF summer conference. He was very fair-skinned and he put zero sunblock on, so just imagine what happened to him on the first day at the beach. Well, that next semester rolled around, and we saw a little bit less of Joe, and a little bit less of Joe, and the next semester rolled around, and we didn’t see him at all. Pretty soon, he just stopped coming altogether. After a couple years, he reached out to me and said, ‘Shane, I know it’s been a while but, I have to do an interview for a project, I’d love to grab lunch and interview you and just talk and catch up.’ I said, ‘That sounds great man, let’s do it.’

So Joe and I went to lunch, we did the interview, we talked about his project, we made small talk about life, and I said, ‘Hey Joe, how come you quit coming to RUF?’ He said, ‘Well, you know, I got busy. I got a girlfriend. I got busy with school. I got a job. You know, frankly, I just felt like I didn’t really need RUF anymore and so, I quit coming.’ I said, ‘Oh, that’s sad. We miss you. I was just wondering... what about Jesus?’ He goes, ‘What?’ I said, ‘Well Joe, what about Jesus? Do you need Jesus?’ He said, ‘Well, no, I think my life’s pretty good. I like my

girlfriend and my family. I feel pretty happy and content with them. I feel pretty happy with where school is and yeah, I don't really feel like I need Jesus.' I said, 'Huh. What about the resurrection?' He said, 'What? What about the resurrection?' I said, 'Well Joe, if the resurrection is true, and Jesus rose from the grave, then everything that Jesus said about sin and salvation is true! You can't really dismiss that.' He said, 'Huh. I never really thought about it that way.' So, we spent the rest of lunch reading 1 Corinthians 15 and just talking about the resurrection.

To my knowledge, Joe never professed faith in Christ, but what I wanted him to think about that day, and what I want us to think about this week, and right now, is that the resurrection is not something that we can just be apathetic about. It's not something that we can say, oh, you know, hey yeah, the resurrection. Jesus, friends, church, worship, that's all good, but I don't know what I think about the resurrection. The resurrection is something that matters greatly because if the resurrection is true, then everything that Jesus said and did is true and we have to take His word seriously. The good news is that what Jesus said and did comforts sinners and sufferers like us. It challenges the apathy and the unbelief of our hearts. It comforts sinners and sufferers, and it challenges the apathy and the unbelief of our hearts. It really does bring us good news, and so, that's what we're going to talk about this week. We're going to look at the truth of the resurrection, and then we're going to look at resurrection truths. Kids, if you're listening, here are three things I want you to listen for. One is proof of the resurrection, two is a story with a happy ending, and three, a person who was changed by the resurrection.

First, let's look at the truth of the resurrection. So, as we read in John verses 1-10, Mary, Peter and this disciple, probably John, found the tomb empty on the Sunday after Jesus' crucifixion and death. Now, nobody disputes that the tomb was empty. The question is, why was it empty, right? Some people say that Jesus didn't die, that He just passed out, or He fainted. Now, the problem with that is, Romans were professional killers, especially the Roman soldiers. Nobody left those crosses without dying. They knew exactly what they were doing. There's no way Jesus could have faked His death on the cross. He had to have died. They wouldn't have let Him come down from there alive.

Some people say, 'Well yeah, He died. But the disciples stole the body.' Well, there are two problems with that. One is the Roman soldiers were guarding the tomb! Again, how was this misfit band of hapless disciples going to get past these trained Roman soldiers? And even if they did, a dead Savior is no good to them. Jesus isn't any good to them dead. What they needed was a resurrected Savior. So, some people say, 'Yeah, well, they saw this risen Savior but really it was just hallucinations. They all just hallucinated these post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.' Well, there's a problem with that too. The problem is there's no scientific evidence anywhere of mass hallucinations. Never. Hallucinations are always individual experiences. So, it is highly improbable, if not impossible, that all the disciples hallucinated all these appearances of Jesus, and the five hundred other people who saw Jesus after He was resurrected.

Also, why would you make up a woman being the first person at the tomb? Women weren't admissible in court, so, if you were trying to create a fabricated story, you wouldn't put Mary Magdalene at the tomb because she wouldn't help your case. Why would you have, throughout the gospels, all of these disbelieving disciples who were scared and running from the Jews? You wouldn't! You wouldn't make this story up. Everything in the story undermines this faith. It doesn't explain the details that John put in the gospel like the running? I almost laughed out loud when I was reading about the disciples running to the tomb. It's just so funny to me thinking of Peter and John racing to the tomb and I almost laughed out loud at the linen cloth that's folded up and lying there. Those details only get in there from an eyewitness account. The

most probable explanation for this empty tomb is the most miraculous one. Jesus rose from the grave. He appeared to the disciples and over 500 other people over the course of the next forty days and He ascended into heaven where He rules and reigns until He will come to judge the living and the dead. It's hard to believe, but the resurrection is true. It's true!

Now, if you doubt the resurrection, after all that, if you're still like, 'I don't believe it.' Let me just ask you to try one thing, deconstruction is kind of the cool buzzword of the day, right? Let me challenge you: deconstruct your doubts. Spend some time doubting your doubts. Spend some time deconstructing your secular truths which are a lot of times actually secular beliefs, and ask yourself, what if it's all true? Lee Strobel was a world class journalist, and something happened to him that he didn't like at all, his wife became a Christian and she came home, and she started talking to him about Jesus, and she started praying for him and reading her Bible, and he got mad. He said, you know what? I'm a world class journalist! I'm going to investigate this and I'm going to prove her wrong. And so, he set out, as an investigative journalist, to interview and research as well as he could to prove that Christianity is wrong, and when he came to the end of the search, do you know what he found? It was right! It was true. He believed in the resurrection. His life was dramatically changed by it, and he wrote "A Case for Christ," his first book, and then he's written many that spawned after that tell this story about how he became a Christian and they make a case for the truth of the resurrection. So, if you are here tonight and you still doubt, I want to encourage you to read that book, and then as we go through the rest of the sermon, just ask yourself: what if it is true? What if all of this is true?

So now, we're going to look at these resurrection truths that Jesus shares after the resurrection. He comes and He has these three visits that John tells us about, and we're just going to sort of frame this in an "if/then" sort of statement. If the resurrection is true, then everything Jesus said is true, and He gives us these three truths. The first one is if the resurrection is true, then death is not the end of the story. Look at verses 11-18:

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her."

Now, think back to John 14-17. Remember, Jesus promised the disciples that He had to leave but He was going to go to prepare a place for them in His Father's house, then He would return, and He would take them to Himself. So here, Jesus is reminding those disciples of this promise that He gave them. He told them, 'Look, you're going to be sad. I'm going to go away, but I'm going to come back to you and I'm going to take you with me to be in my Father's house.' What He's telling them is that death is not the end of their story, because it's not the end of His story. Death, for them, will be the beginning of their life with their God and Father in heaven.

This truth is important for us too. For all who believe in Christ, death is not the end of our story, rather, we have eternal life with God our Father. As Paul said, "Death is swallowed up in

victory. Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?" Our story will not end in death, but in eternal bliss with our God and Father. Because of the resurrection, there will be a happy ending to our story.

I have a love/hate relationship with Ernest Hemingway. Here's what I love about Ernest Hemingway: I love his writing style, it's brief, it's concise, it's vivid. I love his honesty. I hate the endings to all of his books. They always end sad. They never have happy endings. One time I was reading one of Hemingway's books, I won't spoil it because Lizzy told me last week that I spoil everything. I said, 'Lizzy, that's kind of my job.' I won't spoil it, but I got to the end of this book and I literally closed the book, threw it across the yard, and said, 'No! The story will not end that way!' It made me sad for Hemingway because I thought, he doesn't even believe a happy ending is possible. And you contrast that with someone like Tolkien, right? You get to the end of Lord of the Rings and what does Tolkien say? He goes through all of the suffering in this world, he gives it the most vivid, powerful images, he gets to the salvation point, and then, at the end of Lord of the Rings, he says, "And everything sad will come untrue." Because of the resurrection, Tolkien had hope. He had hope that death wasn't the end of the story. Because of the resurrection, we have hope for a happy ending.

If you have gone through any sort of suffering in this life, but especially deep, immense suffering, you need this truth. You need to know that death is not the end of the story and happy endings are possible, and whatever you're going through right now, by faith in Jesus Christ, by believing in Him and the resurrection, death will not win. There will be a happy ending to your story. Suffering and death are not the end of your story. That's the first thing we see in this. If the resurrection is true, death is not the end of the story.

The second thing we see is that if the resurrection is true, sin is not the end of our story. Look at verses 19-23.

"¹⁹ 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."²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

I just want you to see the grace in this passage. Who did Jesus want to be with right after His resurrection? After He had gone through the most traumatic war in the history of the world with Satan, sin, and death, who did He want to be with? He wanted to be with His disciples. Who were those disciples? They were the guys who betrayed Him, deserted Him, and left Him for dead. They were the backsliders. That's a term we don't use in the church much anymore, but it used to be used a lot. The backsliders are the people who fall away from the faith. Jesus wanted to go and be with the backsliders after His resurrection. When He's talking to Mary, He called them brothers. He called God their God and their Father. He visits them after His resurrection and in the face of His sin, what does He meet them with? He meets them with grace and forgiveness. He gives them the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Remember in the Farewell Discourse, again, He said, 'I'm going to give you the Holy Spirit,' and here He gives them the Holy Spirit. He breathes it on them, and then He commissions them to go out and share the grace of forgiveness with others. Their sin was not the end of their story, grace and forgiveness was. God used sinners like them to bear witness to the truth of the resurrection, to lay the foundation of the church for the proclamation of the gospel, so that sinners like you and I could be forgiven

as well. If the resurrection is true, then it's good news for sinners like us because it means that sin is not the end of our story.

Remember last week we talked about guilt? Guilt is that feeling that says, 'I've done something bad,' and we said we often experience guilt as a malaise or a discontent. It's just sort of this feeling of never measuring up, always falling short. We talked about how on the cross Jesus removed our guilt by paying the debt that we owe. All of our sin was placed on Him, and by faith all of His righteousness is given to us. It's like a bank account, right? We had a spiritual debt that needed to be paid and all the righteousness in Christ's bank account came to us. Well, the resurrection is proof that that debt has been paid. One of the things I love is paying a debt and then getting that final statement in the mail that says, 'Paid in full.' The resurrection is the statement that our sins have been paid in full. What is the sin that you still feel guilty about? Or the sins that you feel guilty about? Where is that nagging sense of malaise or discontentment or just falling short that you continually have in your life? When you feel it, look at the empty tomb. That's the sign. That's the statement that your debt has been paid in full and that your sin is not the end of your story. Your story will end with grace and forgiveness. Jesus has paid your debt for you.

So, if the resurrection is true then death is not the end of the story. If the resurrection is true, sin is not the end of our story. Lastly, if the resurrection is true, then doubt and disappointment are not the end of our story. Look at verses 24-29.

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." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now, Thomas is often called Thomas the Doubter because of this passage, and I think normally, at least what I thought about Thomas the Doubter, and I think when we think about Thomas the Doubter, we probably think the modern day parallel is someone who is a non-Christian who doesn't believe in Jesus and doesn't know anything about Him, and so, doubts Jesus. That certainly would be a doubter, but I don't think that would actually be a parallel to Thomas, because Thomas was a disciple. Thomas spent three years of His life walking around with Jesus, learning from Him, living with Him. He knew about Jesus! Aside from probably Peter, James, and John, he probably knew more than anyone else about Jesus! So, it wasn't lack of knowledge that caused his doubts, and it wasn't lack of dedication. In John 11 after Lazarus was raised from the dead, they were going to kill Jesus, and Thomas said, 'Let's go die with Him.' Thomas was dedicated. He was dedicated to Jesus. It wasn't lack of asking good questions. In John 14, in the Farewell Discourse, Thomas is asking questions, he's trying to figure out, 'How do we get to God the Father?' Right? He knew Jesus. He was dedicated to Jesus. He was seeking Jesus.

And yet, he had doubts about the resurrection. Why? I don't know. But as I thought this week, I really empathized with Thomas. I think if I were Thomas, I think I would have doubted because of the disappointment. I think I would have doubted because I would just have been disappointed. I think in my spiritual life, in my life in general, I struggle with disappointment.

It's my disappointment that leads to doubt, not my knowledge or dedication or anything else. Most of the time, I'm disappointed in myself. Sometimes I'm disappointed in family, friends, work, and that sort of stuff, but most of the time I'm just disappointed in me. When I'm disappointed in me, I come back to questions like why does it matter? Is any of this real? Am I helping anyone? Am I always going to be discontent and disappointed? Am I ever going to change? Will anyone else change? Maybe if you've been following Jesus for a long time, you've struggled with this as well. There have been some real, deep disappointments in your life that have caused you to doubt.

I was talking with a friend this week and he had had a rough day at work, and we were talking and he just said, 'You know, my work just doesn't fulfill me.' He's a Christian. He loves Jesus. He's trying to work for the Lord; he's trying to serve the Lord with gladness. He's doing the best he can. But, he doesn't find fulfillment. He's disappointed. I think there's probably a lot of us there with him. I think that what it means to believe the resurrection is to believe that disappointment is not the end of our story, that following Jesus, worshipping and serving Him through the sin and suffering of this world, does not end in disappointment. It ends with blessing. That's what Jesus tells Thomas here, He says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We're the ones who have believed without seeing. We don't get to see the physically resurrected Jesus. We get to see Jesus through the body of Christ and through His word. Jesus says we are blessed when we believe in Him and we trust Him even when we don't see Him. We are blessed when we believe in Him through His word and through His people. That word, blessing, probably the most straightforward modern translation is 'happy.' Those who believe in Jesus and live by His words can be reasonably happy in this life, and ultimately, happy in the next, by trusting Him and trusting in His word.

I don't really know what that looks like. I'm going to be honest with you, I thought about this a lot this week: what does it look like to practice the resurrection? What does it look like to believe in it on a day-to-day basis and to practice it and to live it out, to put it out into actionable steps? The best I could come up with is it looks like the Sermon on the Mount. It looks like trying to believe the Sermon on the Mount and press into it and live it out. So, I'm just going to read it to you as sort of a closing. Just think about, what would it look like for me to believe this is true in light of the resurrection?

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:3-11).

Let's read that this week and just meditate on it. Ask the Lord, 'What would it look like for me to be happy living out this sort of life and believing that these things are true because of the resurrection?' If the resurrection is true, then death, sin, and disappointment are not the end of our story. Our stories will end with eternal life, eternal forgiveness, and eternal happiness with God our Father. If you're here and you're doubting and you're still like, 'I don't believe this is true.' I would just encourage you to press into it. Take your doubts, your fears, your frustration, your disappointment, take all those things to Jesus the way that Thomas did, and He will be gracious to you and kind. I believe He will meet you there and will show you that believing in the resurrection does bring life, both in this life and in the next, and that there really is a consequence to rejecting Jesus and to rejecting the resurrection. It's not a neutral choice. To reject Jesus and to reject the resurrection is to reject everything that Jesus has promised you. It's not a neutral choice. If the resurrection is true, then everything that we believe about it is important and it matters and God has true life, eternal life, deep life, a life that is too good to be true for you and Him. I want you to believe it and experience it. None of us can do that without the Holy Spirit so let's pray that the Holy Spirit would help us. Please bow your heads and pray with me.