

Gospel of John Chapter 20 - John Karmelich

The good news is we're done with the gruesome details of Jesus suffering and death. Now we get to the important part of what makes us Christians, faith that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. If you have never done a study of the evidence that Jesus is God and rose from the dead, it's overwhelming to consider how much proof of the fact that's true. OK then, as I love state I write these lessons for fellow Christians who already believe Jesus is God, so "now what"? Of course, it is important to study all that so we can give answers to people who ask about our faith. That's a given.

Again now what? What does God wants us Christian veterans to know about the resurrection we have not accepted a long ago? The first thing is about putting that information in perspective: no matter how long we'll live, how long is that versus eternity? Ponder what really matters in life! I know we have to deal with problems and difficult decisions. Still it is important to think about the eternal perspective as we use our lives as a witness for Him. If we exist for that purpose and keep that in mind, then we'll be a great witness for Him! Therefore the question to ponder for this lesson is, "What's really important in life?" As we go through this chapter and study the resurrection, ask how does all this affect how I use my time versus whatever is the crisis of the moment?

Chapter 19 ended with Jesus being buried on the Friday before "Easter Sunday". Some argue the death was on a Thursday, but I'll spare you that debate. The point is Chapter 19 ends with "Jesus dead" while Chapter 20 opens with Jesus alive as we're about to find out. Chapter 20 opens with Mary, not that one but a women who Jesus cast seven demons out of (Mark 16:9). Anyway she was at the gravesite! The text doesn't say why she went there. She didn't believe Jesus would rise again. Maybe it's just a matter of grieving at the site. She noticed the stone covering the grave was moved. She didn't go to see inside but just figured the body was stolen. She ran to tell Peter and John that. Then those two ran there to go check it out. John didn't want to go in. (Was he scared?) Peter came a bit later and he led John into the tomb. They noticed that the cloth used to cover Jesus head was rolled up. It eliminates robbery, since a thief wouldn't do that. Notice the text makes a point of saying the disciples did not believe at this point Jesus would rise from the dead. (Imagine how hard the authorities worked to find Jesus dead body!)

The next thing we read is that same Mary was back at the tomb again. Even after Peter and John left, it was Mary (other gospels mention other women there but apparently she's the prominent one). She does not believing He is alive yet, but just went there to investigate. While she was looking in the tomb, the next thing we read is two angels dressed in white were sitting there. Mary didn't jump in fear. She was aware they were angels because she spent time with Jesus. They asked why she was weeping. At that moment Mary turned around. (I suspect, but can't prove the angels were looking at Jesus, and since the focus was on Him, that got Mary to turn around!) She thought Jesus was the gardener and asked about Jesus body! In the last chapter Jesus was buried with about 75 pounds of spices, yet Mary asked if she can take the body! That part always got me! I don't know how differently Jesus looked. I figure Jesus still has the scars from the cross, but for whatever reason Mary didn't recognize Him. When Jesus said her name, that's when she knew it was Him! She called Him "teacher" (in Aramaic) and He said to her to not cling to Him since He still has to go to the father!

Let me pause to explain that one quickly: The idea is the risen Jesus in heaven can know all things and interceded for us which is His role in heaven to this day. Yes Jesus still had other appearances to make but He needed Mary to accept the fact He's risen and she's to tell the disciples that fact.

Meanwhile the disciples were together on that Sunday morning in a locked room. Remember that Jesus was taken away to be crucified so now the others feared for their lives. Jesus then appears in that room! One reason I argue we'll exist in more than three dimensions is that Jesus entered that room. Skeptics argue Jesus was already in the room. If that's true how come no one noticed? The truth is He rose from the dead and could "be anywhere at once" since we'll He's God! He showed the disciples the damage to His hands to prove it was Him. Then we get a reference to Jesus giving the "Great Commission" which in effect is our marching orders! It's the idea that God sent Jesus into the world, so He sends us into the world to be His witnesses. Jesus then mentions the Holy Spirit. So how is that different from when the Spirit comes on the church on Pentecost (about two months later)? I'd argue it was so the disciples got the power of the Holy Spirit to communicate what they knew at that point. I'd argue when all of it sunk in by Pentecost the Spirit came on all of those present (more than the "12").

The last thing Jesus said to them was that He was giving them the power to forgive sins. No, it doesn't mean we can forgive on our power. It's simply the Gospel message that if someone believes in Him it is then a "done deal" that the person receiving Jesus has their sins forgiven. I assume you know that, it is important to emphasize that because wrong doctrine is based on the idea that we can forgive all sins as Christians. Only God can forgive that way!

Meanwhile there was another problem: One of the disciples was not there. That one became known as "Doubting Thomas". The last verse of this story in effect tells us why this story was included. It reads, "Blessed are those who don't see and believe". With that said, let me back up and contemplate this part of the chapter for a second. Thomas was obviously friends with the other disciples as he's known them for a good three years now. Even with the rest of them telling Thomas that Jesus rose from the dead, it was not enough to convince him. As most of us know, Jesus then appeared in the locked room to show Thomas all evidence that it was Him and He was crucified. Obviously, the key point is we're blessed if we believe it without seeing it. To state what also is obvious Jesus doesn't physically appear to us (yes, I know the stories of miracles of Jesus' appearances in modern times, but putting that aside)! The point is a blessing comes to those of us who believe and accepting it as well, "The Gospel Truth". Of course I believe Thomas is saved. In Chapter 17, Jesus said in effect none are lost except Judas. John wanted to include that story to encourage belief in Jesus despite Thomas' lack of faith. Note that story ended as Thomas proclaiming, "My Lord and My God" so that ended that.

Speaking of proving Jesus is God, the chapter ends by stating the fundamental reason why John wrote this book to prove that fact as truth. It also adds that by simply believing in that fact we're saved with nothing we can do to add to our salvation. As my regulars know, then we're called to live as a witness for Him, which is why we were created in the first place.

For those who don't know, Jesus only appears to believers from the time He was resurrected. The only exception was Paul before he got converted. The point being that when we've cross that line and make that commitment, we discover "the water's warm in the pool", with the only regret is we didn't do it at a date earlier in our lives. As I state a lot, I write this for believers, so let me end this with a few thoughts for those of us who none of this is "news" to us.

Again we know this story well. The point for us is if we believe Jesus rose from the dead, now what? I hope it inspires us to see our lives differently enough to not just say, "Go to church Sunday then just go back to life". The reason this story is repeated in all four gospels isn't just to remind us of those facts, it is also the reminder to continue to use our lives to glorify Him! The good news of Jesus paying the full price for sin is we never, ever have to worry about whether or not we're saved. What matters now is do

we use our time for His glory? It's one thing to say you believe, it's another to put our time & resources where "our mouth is". With that bit of guilt to finish the lesson, thanks for reading!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John