

GREATER

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JOHN

GREATER: the book of John

SCRIPTURE: John 20: JESUS > DEATH

John 20:30-31

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. **31** But these are written **that you may believe** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John says that he has written these things down, **"that you may believe."** The gospel of John, but specifically this chapter about the resurrection.

There is no other event in the Bible, and maybe in all history, which garners more skepticism than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Our hope is to give you maybe **a reason to believe.**

Five theories which have attempted to deny the historic reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

- (1) **A Stolen Body** *(the Roman guards were there to make sure this didn't happen)*
- (2) **The Swoon Theory** *(is it really believable that Jesus suffered what he did, appeared to be dead, then in a damp cold tomb he resuscitated himself, freed himself from the burial cloths, moved the stone and made it past the Roman guards?)*
- (3) **The Wrong Tomb** *(this was a named tomb, owned by Joseph of Arimathea, guarded by Roman guards)*
- (4) **Hallucination** *(It is not feasible for more than 500 people at one time to have the same hallucination)*
- (5) **Myth** *(would these followers all completely change their lives and die martyrs deaths for a made up story?)*

The resurrection is the most pivotal event in all of human history.

If it is true then Jesus is who he claimed to be and Christianity is the answer to the world's problems. If the resurrection didn't happen then I am following a dream and one day will wake up to a harsh reality.

1 Corinthians 15:14

14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

"Even if you can't believe in the resurrection, you should want it to be true." -Tim Keller

John 20:1-2

1Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. **2**So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

On Friday afternoon and Saturday evening the women must have busied themselves with the purchasing and preparing a fragrant ointment for Jesus' burial. Typically it would have been too late to cover up the smell of a decaying body which had been in the grave for a couple days, but Nicodemus had already provided some 75 lbs of ointment for the job.

And even though the ointment that Nicodemus had provided was sufficient, anointing a dead body was an act of devotion and love which these women would not be deprived.

When they arrived, Jesus body was missing.

So the women, particularly Mary Magdalene, went and found Peter and John. Her message was simple... *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*

John 20:3-10

3So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. **4**Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5**He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. **6**Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, **7**as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. **8**Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **9**(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) **10**Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

After all that Jesus had told them. That he would die. That he would raise from the dead on the third day. They still don't get it. (vs. 9)

So they go back to where they were staying.

John 20:11-18

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb **12** and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." **14** At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Again, this even is so unbelievable that Jesus appears to Mary and she still does not recognize or understand that it is Jesus until he calls her by name.

Maybe it's that she hadn't looked up. Maybe her eyes are blurry from tears. Maybe it's that her head is spinning. Maybe it's that this is just too much to take in. Either way, it's not until Jesus calls her name that she recognizes him.

The angels tell Mary that Jesus is alive. Jesus appears to Mary

John 20:19-23

19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" **20**After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." **22**And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23**If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

The disciples are together, BEHIND LOCKED DOORS! They are still afraid for their lives. Still not willing to fully believe. Still not fully emboldened to go public.

And Jesus appears to them.

What an incredible scene. But there was one disciple who was not there.

John 20:24-28

24Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25**So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

**Where would you stand if you were in the disciples shoes?
Would you be afraid? Would you be skeptical? Would you have
to see for yourself?**

JESUS > DEATH

Last week we talked about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross at Calvary. That selfless act paved the way for us to be brought back to God. You see we deserve to be accountable for our own actions, but Jesus stepped in and took our punishment.

2 Corinthians 5:21

21God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

But if Jesus did not resurrect from the dead, his sacrifice would have lost its power. He would have just been a man who died for a cause. The disciples would have scattered. And Christianity would not exist today.

1 Peter 1:3

3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

If Jesus sacrifice on the cross brings the opportunity for forgiveness, then the resurrection brings us the opportunity for hope.

Hope in something greater than ourselves...

Hope in something beyond death...

Hope in something eternal...

JESUS...

hope for the skeptic.

THOMAS FELT... LEFT OUT.

John 20:24-25

24Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25**So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

No one likes to be left out.

a. THE OTHER'S EXCITEMENT ONLY ALIENATES THOMAS

- ▶ Thomas misses Jesus' appearance and then feels left out.

Sometimes excitement makes others feel left out. And that feeling of being left out drives us to skepticism.

b. THOMAS DRAWS A LINE IN THE SAND

- ▶ Thomas' skepticism forces a conditional response
- ▶ Unless I see the nail prints in His hands and feet and put my finger where the nails were. Unless I put my hand into his side. I'm not going to believe.

Have you ever done this to yourself? Get yourself backed into a corner you created? We do the same thing with faith.

"God is going to have to give me some kind of sign."

or

"If there is a God, He better show up in this situation."

or

"Unless this or that happens, I'm never going back to church."

In our skepticism - or as a result of some pain we have suffered, we make our faith conditional.

JESUS ASKED HIM... TO REACH OUT.

John 20:26-27

26A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

a. JESUS GOES STRAIGHT TO THOMAS

- ▶ **No one tells Jesus He needs to convince Thomas, He knew**

Jesus immediately addressed Thomas and offered to meet His challenge, holding out His hands for the touch of Thomas and commanding him to reach out his hand and put it into His side.

There's no evidence in the text that Thomas actually touched Jesus (though he may have.) His presence convinced him.

God also knows what your questions are and where you need to be touched. He will put things in your path to answer your doubts, if you are open to seeing and believing.

b. JESUS ANSWERS HIS QUESTIONS

- ▶ **God is not afraid of our questions or doubts**

THOMAS BELIEVED... AND CRIED OUT.

John 20:28

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

a. THOMAS SEES JESUS AND IMMEDIATELY BELIEVES

- ▶ He did not let his questions hinder him from believing
- ▶ The line he had drawn he now immediately forgets about

b. THOMAS' DOUBT GIVES WAY TO BELIEF

- ▶ Thomas gives one of the strongest statements of faith in all the Bible
- ▶ That Thomas calls Jesus "Lord," indicates his submission to Jesus
- ▶ That Thomas calls Jesus "God," reveals the highest possible statement of faith

Hebrews 11:1

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Believing Jesus was alive while he is standing right there is one thing, but Thomas gives Jesus credit as God

True faith includes BELIEF and TRUST. Thomas believed and trusted that Jesus was who he said he was.

- ▶ **Thomas' statement is not only accurate and powerful, it's personal.**
"My Lord and my God."

There was now no question about what Thomas believed. He would give the rest of his life in service to his lord and God.

I love skeptics. The great thing about those of us who are skeptics is this, once a skeptic is convinced, they are hard to convince otherwise. This was true about Thomas...

According to tradition, Thomas was killed in India around 72AD because of his faith in and preaching about Jesus.

Vs. 29 gives us this great promise...

John 20:29

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Small Group Questions.

1. What causes you to be skeptical about things that happen in your daily life?
2. Is there anything in the Bible that cause you to scratch your head and go, "What? O.K. Did that really happen" Why do you struggle with these things?
3. There are 5 major theories people use to try to explain away Jesus' resurrection; The Stolen Body, the Swoon, The Wrong Tomb, the Hallucination, and the Myth. How many of these theories have you heard of? What are some Biblical accounts to refute them?
4. Try to put yourself in the place of the disciples. Would you be afraid? would be you skeptical? would you doubt? Should we give Thomas a hard time for doubting?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 - this is who Jesus is. How does this help with strengthening your faith? How can we use this passage to help others understand and accept who Jesus is?
6. What causes doubts in your faith? How do you overcome them?
7. Jesus says that our faith is greater because we believe yet we have not seen. What things in your life that has happened that has caused your faith to be greater?

8. Jesus asked Thomas to stretch out his hand. We have the invitation, all we need to do is stretch out and accept it. How do we help people understand that we can come to him just as we are, even with doubt?
9. Pray for each other that your faith be made stronger.