

Session 7

April 12, 2020 (Easter)

Unit 1: Jesus Is . . .

The Resurrection and the Life

Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!

The Word

John 20:1-18

Session Outcome

To celebrate the truth of Jesus' resurrection and reflect on the ways Jesus' resurrection impacts our lives.

Discover:

Illustrated Bible Life looks at the burial and resurrection of Jesus, as told by the four gospel writers, and provides verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

Last Week:

We discovered the way in which Jesus' life defined what it means to be Messiah and Redeemer.

This Week:

We will discover the way in which Jesus' resurrection brings good news to the world.

Listen:

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com looks at how the gospel of John differs from the other gospels regarding the burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Discover:

In the New Testament accounts of Jesus' empty tomb, each gospel narrative has its own unique audience in mind, including details that were helpful in making the author's theological point.

Thus, many of the details diverge. In this week's Illustrated Bible Life article, "The Empty Tomb," we'll look at the differences and similarities of these gospel accounts of the most important event in Christendom.

Engage the Word

The Empty Tomb as Evidence of the Resurrection John 20:1-10

John's story of the first Easter unfolded slowly. It began with Mary Magdalene noticing that the tomb was open. Rather than investigating herself, she concluded that someone had stolen Jesus' body and she ran to tell Peter and another disciple. They run to the tomb. John slows the narrative down enough to tell us the other disciple ran faster than Peter! When they arrived they investigated the tomb and found it empty as Mary Magdalene had assumed.

By itself the empty tomb is insufficient evidence for the resurrection. Mary Magdalene's fear could have been true and that would have explained the empty tomb. However, all four gospels begin their account of the resurrection of Jesus by describing the empty tomb. It is evidence, though not sufficient evidence, of the resurrection.

The detail in John 20:7 that the cloth that had been on Jesus' head was rolled up separate from the linen wrapping that had enclosed the body suggests something more orderly than a tomb robbery. John then notes that the other disciple believed. This is significant because the purpose of John's gospel (John 20:30-31) is that people believe. However, neither Peter nor the other disciple understood "the scripture, that He must rise from the dead."

The empty tomb led to believing without understanding, hoping without seeing, and uncertainty about what all this meant.

The Early Confusion about the Resurrection John 20:11-15

The story of Mary at the tomb captures the difficulty in believing the resurrection for the first followers of Jesus. Presumably she followed Peter and the other disciple back to the tomb, though she did not run. They had observed the empty tomb and left. Mary stayed and wept. When she finally looked inside the tomb she saw two angels who tried to help her. But she was still convinced the tomb had been robbed and seemed completely unaffected by the appearance of the angels.

Then Jesus himself appeared to her. The appearances of the risen Jesus to more than 500 followers (1 Corinthians 15:5-6) provided the proving evidence of the resurrection. Yet the impossibility of resurrection was so powerful in the minds of the first disciples that some did not recognize Him when He stood face to face with them. That was the case with Mary who saw

Jesus, but even after looking at Him assumed He was the gardener. She was still convinced Jesus' body had been stolen.

Realizing the reality of the resurrection was difficult for the first people who met the risen Lord. Their minds created confusing alternative reasons for what they were seeing. It is easy, but unfair, to judge them for their confusion and failure. They did not have the benefit of 2,000 years of Christian witness to the resurrection.

The Encounter with Jesus Confirms the Resurrection

John 20:16-18

It was only when Jesus called Mary's name that she finally recognized Him. In this way Mary has become the pattern of all followers of Jesus who respond when we hear Him calling us by name. The call to believe is not an anonymous, mass invitation; it is personal, direct, and compelling.

Mary's response was "Rabboni," an Aramaic variant of rabbi. It is possible that "Rabboni" was a more personal and affectionate title than rabbi with a meaning like, "Oh, my dear teacher!" However, that endearment is not present in the other use of "rabboni" in the New Testament (Mark 10:51). Clearly Mary recognized Jesus as who He was and as alive. The personal relationship between the two confirmed the reality of the resurrection for Mary.

Relationship with the risen Christ would be different from the relationship enjoyed by the first disciples before His death and resurrection. Jesus commands Mary to "not hold on to" Him. The closeness of face to face relationship would be relinquished as Jesus ascended to the Father. Close relationship would continue, but it would be different, experienced spiritually rather than physically.

Relationship with the risen Christ came with an assignment. Instead of receiving the enjoyment of listening to and watching Jesus, Mary was now charged with telling others about the resurrection. Her first task was to go to the disciples and witness to them that she had seen the Lord. It is likely that they were as hard to convince of the resurrection as anyone else who had not seen the risen Lord.

Christians today need to remember that faith in the resurrection is not easy for many people. Jesus gave His first disciples time and space to come to terms with the reality of His presence as one alive from the dead. We need to do the same. But in the final analysis it is hard to imagine someone could believe in the resurrection and not tell anyone else about it.

Did You Know?

Many tombs in the area of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus were carved out of the stone visible on the side of a hill. The entrance to the tomb was controlled by a stone that could be rolled into place to seal the tomb or rolled away to provide entrance.

Think About It

Most Jews (other than the Sadducees) believed in the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. They would have understood Jesus' resurrection as evidence of the end of time breaking into the present.

Reflect

Take time this week to think about the meaning and message of the resurrection.

Roger Hahn

Discussion Guide

Insight

What a difference a day makes. In the darkness that pervades our world, the news that Jesus has been raised can shine forth like a clear morning sunrise. Jesus is still the light of the world, and His victory over sin and death shines just as brightly today as it did 2,000 years ago.

Connect to My Experience

Share with the group this illustration from the writer: I grew up in a Christian home, a faithful parishioner in our local church. My siblings and I attended the school attached to the church, all of our friends were a part of this congregation, and our social life was governed by the church's calendar. This church, almost exclusively, shaped my identity. Yet, like Mary in this text, I had not experienced nor come to embrace the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, on a personal level right away. The good news is that I did come to know Jesus in a personal way. He was no longer someone I knew about, He was someone I now knew intimately.

If you grew up in the church, what was your experience like before and after you met the risen Lord on a personal level?

If you did not grow up in church or in a Christian home, what was your perception of Jesus at that time? How did that change once you came to know Jesus personally?

Transition:

In today's session, we are going to study one of the resurrection accounts of Jesus and reflect on its impact upon us today.

Connect to the Word

Invite a group member to read John 20:1-10, then discuss the following,

Verse 1 begins by telling us that Mary came to the tomb and found it empty.

What do you think Mary thought at that moment?

Understanding the circumstance prior to this event, what do you think would have been going through your mind if you had been in Mary's situation? Why?

The first part of this resurrection account contains a lot of commotion and nervous energy. Things just didn't compute for Mary and the other disciples.

Why do you think these three faithful followers of Jesus had such a frantic response to the empty tomb? What emotions would they have experienced?

Does the 2,000 years of history make it easier or more difficult for people in our context to believe in the resurrection? Why?

All four gospels include the resurrection account (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20). Why was that important to those living then? Why is it important for us living today? (Jesus' resurrection vindicates Him as Messiah, Lord, and God's Son [Acts 2:36; 3:13-15; Romans 1:4]. It also completes God's saving work through Christ, which atones for our sins and sets in motion the new creation that encompasses raising God's saints and restoring the whole created order [Romans 4:25; 8:18-23]*).

We get a glimpse of the character of these three disciples in the way they approach the tomb. With which disciple do you identify most closely? Why?

How are these responses a window into how people approach Jesus still today?

Invite a group member to read John 20:11-15, then discuss the following,

By John's account Mary Magdalene was not overcome by the presence of two angels sitting in the tomb, nor was she aware that Jesus was present right beside her.

What do you think kept Mary from seeing God in this moment? (She, nor anyone else, had experienced resurrection before; resurrection seemed impossible; there seems to be something different about the resurrected Jesus)

Can we sometimes fail to see God's presence among us today? If so, in what ways?

What life circumstances make it more difficult to recognize God's presence in our lives?

It may seem to us a little preposterous for Jesus to ask Mary why she is crying. And it seems like it would have been more efficient to address her as "Mary" from the outset, rather than calling her "Woman."

Why do you think Jesus didn't initially call her by name? What does His question allow her to do? (Jesus gives her space to vocalize her grief and sadness.)

Why do you think both Jesus and the angels asked, Why are you crying? (Mary was grieving over Jesus' death. However, there was reason for joy. Jesus had risen just as He said. See also Revelation 5:1-5.)

John says that Mary thought Jesus was the gardener.

Other than this being a case of mistaken identity, what might John be trying to tell us? (Mary, in her distress, did not recognize Jesus.)

Are there times that our emotions can cloud our spiritual vision/understanding? If so, when? Invite a group member to read John 20:16-18, then discuss the following,

Mary finally recognized Jesus when He called her by name.

How does Jesus' intimate knowledge of us draw us toward a relationship with Him? What does it mean to us that Jesus knows our name?

In what way is Mary's encounter the pattern for all who would believe?

Connect to My Life and the World

There is much to this resurrection narrative that should shape how we live out our faith today. Jesus reveals himself: How might this truth impact the way we understand evangelism and sharing our faith?

A new day has dawned: Knowing that death has been defeated and new life has begun, how should that impact the way you live on a daily basis?

Mary's recognition of the resurrected Lord came with a charge to go and tell the disciples what she had witnessed. They, too, would be charged with telling this great news to others.

How is Jesus charging you to share the good news of His resurrection?

As you close your session, give thanks to God for His intimate knowledge of you. Thank God for the many ways God has demonstrated His love for you. Then, pray that the Holy Spirit might work through you in sharing the good news of God with others.

*Al Truesdale, ed. *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2013), 465-66.