



SERMON TITLE: Faith in the Risen Christ

DATE: April 3 & 4, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 20:1-10

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## SERIES SUMMARY

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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Happy Easter. ... "He is risen! ... He is Risen Indeed!" ... This weekend we're celebrating Easter—an amazing event that's the foundation, the centerpiece, of everything we say we believe as followers of Jesus. You see, unlike any other religion, Christianity is not built on the teachings of a religious person. Christianity isn't built on the teaching of Jesus. And, this may be new news for some of you, but Christianity—the *thing that holds Christianity together*—is not the teaching of Jesus—it's this *event—the resurrection*—and if you pulled the resurrection out of Christianity, Christianity would completely collapse. We might as well shut down, sell the buildings, and go to the lake next week. The whole thing rises and falls, not on Jesus' teaching, not on a "Christian" philosophy of life, not on a view of heaven or hell or eternal life. No, Christianity rises and falls on something that happened on one single day in history—the day Jesus rose from the dead. You see—*If Jesus died on the Cross and he stayed dead, your faith is useless. It means nothing.* The apostle Paul wrote about this. He said: "*If Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain*" (1Cor15:4). That is, everything in Christianity *rises or falls* on this one day in history, and, if there is no resurrection, there's no Christianity. The apostle Peter agrees. He wrote: *God, in his great mercy, has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* No new birth—no living hope—without the resurrection and you coming to know the risen Christ by faith. *So you see*, it's not enough to believe in the teaching of Jesus. It's not enough to believe that Jesus was a great teacher or a great prophet. ... If you say, "Well, I believe in Jesus, but I don't believe in all the miracles he's supposed to have done and I certainly don't believe he rose from the dead." If that's you, then according to the Bible, your "faith" doesn't mean anything. And if you are not a Christian, I understand your skepticism about Jesus' rising from the dead, *especially since, none of Jesus' closest followers* believed it either. At least not initially that is—let me show you—

READ John 20:1-10 — Now here's what I want you to see. John writes his account of the resurrection in a way that *highlights* how Mary, Peter, John, and later Thomas and the other disciples came to faith in the risen Christ. For John, his resurrection story focuses on faith, real faith, God-connecting faith. And there's a sense in which this passage is a summary of everything John has been saying about Jesus and what faith in Jesus looks like from the very beginning of his Gospel. If you go to the end of chp 20, you see that John tells us *why* he wrote this book. He tells us his purpose—look at it in v31—"I've written these things so that you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life in his name." So, all the stories that John includes in his biography of Jesus and the way he writes all those stories, they're all written for one, single purpose, and that is, to bring you and me to faith in Jesus and to grow our faith in Jesus. *But what exactly is "faith?" What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus so that it changes your life the way it changed the first followers of Jesus? ...*

Well, first of all, look at how these people who "believed" in Jesus, didn't really believe Jesus (read 20:1-2). What we see here is that Mary did not come to the tomb expecting that Jesus would rise from the dead just like he said he would. She thought his body had been stolen, not resurrected. Peter and John weren't expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. They weren't waiting outside the tomb on the third day to greet the Risen Lord. No, not one of the disciples expected Jesus to rise from the dead even though he told them he would. Why not? ... The sermon will explain the rest of this point.

An odd thing that John emphasizes in this story is how he outran Peter to the tomb. He mentions it three times, which is hilarious to me. But that little detail speaks to the historicity of the resurrection. If you were making up a fictional story or a myth or a legend, you wouldn't include details like this. They serve no purpose. But for John, this little detail helps us see that this is in fact an eyewitness account of what actually happened. John included this strange factoid because it really happened this way and so we would "see and believe" in Jesus the way he did.

Now, there's something else in this story that I want you to see—something we miss in our English translations of our Bibles. And that is, the three words for "saw" (vv6,7,8) are all different words for "see." ...In v4, John "saw" the linen clothes lying there. Meaning, he observed them. He took note of them. ...In v6, Peter "saw" the linen cloths lying there, but this word for "saw" means he studied them, pondered over them. Something about them didn't make sense to him, so he was thinking hard to try to make them make sense. By the way, faith is not thinking, but it is not less than thinking. God draws us to himself, reveals himself to us, but he does so in a way that causes us to think and weigh out what he shows us and tells us. ...In v8, we're told that John "saw and believed"—a different Greek word for "see" which means to "see with perception." In other words, something clicked for John. He had an "aha" moment where it all came together for him. Well, almost all. Verse 9 tells us he still did not understand the Scriptures that said that Jesus "had" to die and rise from the dead. But, because he had an open mind, he became convinced of something that in his mind was previously beyond belief. Jesus was alive from the dead, and now everything would change. (For an explanation on exactly what they saw, tune into the sermon.)

To me, John tells this story in a way to get us to think about his own conversion experience—that moment when he "saw and believed." He saw the evidence that Jesus was alive from the dead before he actually saw the risen Christ face-to-face. And for John, that meant everything had changed. He knew if Jesus rose from the dead then everything he said about himself was true, and everything he said about us—our need for forgiveness, our need for eternal life—was also 100% true. And for John, everything did change. He began a life-long journey with the risen Christ that turned him from being a rambunctious "Son of Thunder"—*as Jesus called him*—into a man of wisdom and love and grace. And John spent the rest of his life telling people that Almighty God had come in the person of Jesus—and that he died on the Cross so our sins could be forgiven—and that he rose from the dead to give us eternal life—just as the Scriptures tell us. ...If you are a Christian, that means the foundation of your faith is this amazing, life-changing, world-changing event in history. It's not about how you feel or what you've experienced. Our faith rests on the testimony of men and women who "saw" it and "believed" it and experienced it, and they spent their lives telling people about it. That's why we celebrate Easter.

I wonder—Has there ever been a time or a moment in your life when you personally "saw and believed" in the real, risen Jesus yourself? ...If not, why not take that step now? ...Follow this link to a booklet that I wrote to help you "see and believe" that Jesus really is the Savior, the Son of God, and how you can have life in his name.

<http://pdf.fellowshipgreenville.org/runawaybride-booklet-web.pdf> And if you do, please, let us know what you think.

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#### Discussion Starters —

1. Begin by reading John 20:1-10.
2. Then ask the question: How is John's stated purpose for writing his biography of Jesus (cf 20:31) reflected in what he wants us to see in how he tells this part of the resurrection story with Mary, Peter, and John?
3. What does it mean that these three followers of Jesus "believed," but they didn't believe?
4. Why do you think they didn't believe Jesus would rise from the dead despite the fact that Jesus told them so many, many times?
5. What is the significance of the fact that John tells us three times that he outran Peter to the tomb?
6. What is the significance of John's choice of using three different words for "saw" to help us understand what real faith looks like?
7. End your time together by talking about your own personal "I-saw-and-believed" moment.