

I. The Empty Tomb and the First Witness (John 20:1–10)

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." (John 20:1 NKJV)

Mary Magdalene was the first to discover the empty tomb, revealing the early morning reality of the resurrection. While other gospels mention additional women, John focuses on Mary because she becomes the key messenger.

When she says, "We do not know where they have laid Him" (v. 2), it affirms the presence of others without contradiction. Her reaction reflects sorrow, not expectation of resurrection, revealing that even Christ's closest followers were slow to grasp the implications of His earlier predictions (Luke 24:6–7).

Personal Application: God often reveals profound truth to ordinary people in ordinary settings. Don't underestimate what He may show you in your faithful, early seeking.

II. Peter and John at the Tomb (John 20:3–10)

Peter and John both ran to the tomb. John arrived first but hesitated, while Peter entered immediately. They saw the linen cloths lying undisturbed—evidence that Jesus' body had not been stolen, but supernaturally resurrected.

"Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed." (John 20:8 NKJV)

John believed not merely in an empty tomb, but in a risen Christ, even though he did not yet fully understand the Scriptures (v. 9).

Personal Application: Faith often precedes full understanding. God honors hearts that believe even when the picture is incomplete.

III. Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18)

Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, who lingered at the tomb, weeping. Her love and longing brought her into the presence of the risen Christ.

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher)." (John 20:16 NKJV)

Mary recognized Him not by sight, but by His voice. The sheep know the Shepherd's voice (John 10:27). Her instinct to cling to Him is met with Jesus' gentle instruction:

"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father... but go to My brethren." (John 20:17 NKJV)

Jesus entrusts her with the first post-resurrection commission. Her testimony to the disciples marks her as the first messenger of the gospel.

Personal Application: Love for Christ opens our eyes to recognize Him. He calls us by name and sends us as witnesses of what we've seen and heard.

IV. Jesus Appears to the Disciples (John 20:19–23)

Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors:

"Peace be with you... As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (John 20:21 NKJV)

He then breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). This moment recalls Genesis 2:7 and symbolizes new spiritual life. This is not the empowering of Pentecost (Acts 2), but the regenerating work of the Spirit, restoring the fellowship lost through sin.

Personal Application: The risen Christ brings peace and sends His followers. Regeneration begins when He breathes new life into a believing soul.

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them..." (John 20:23 NKJV)

This is not a license to independently absolve sin, but an authority to proclaim forgiveness on the basis of Christ's finished work to those who repent and believe. Conversely, rejection of Christ leaves sin unforgiven.

Personal Application: You are entrusted with the message of forgiveness. Use it faithfully and biblically, always pointing to Christ.

V. Thomas Doubts, Then Believes (John 20:24–29)

Thomas, absent from the first appearance, refused to believe without seeing. Jesus graciously appeared again and invited Thomas to touch His wounds.

"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here... Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'" (John 20:27 NKJV)

Thomas responded with one of the clearest confessions in the Gospel:

"My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28 NKJV)

Jesus affirmed his faith, but praised those who would believe without seeing.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29 NKJV)

Personal Application: Faith is not about seeing but trusting. Jesus meets honest doubt with mercy, not rejection. But He calls us to move beyond doubt into full-hearted belief.

VI. The Purpose of John's Gospel (John 20:30–31)

John concludes the chapter with this:

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31 NKJV)

The Gospel's purpose is not to record everything, but to reveal enough for salvation. The aim is clear: belief that leads to life.

Personal Application: God's Word is sufficient to bring you to saving faith. Believe the testimony, and you will have eternal life in Jesus' name.

Conclusion:

John 20 is not just a record of the resurrection; it is a call to belief, peace, purpose, and spiritual life. The risen Christ calls each of us by name, breathes His Spirit into us, and sends us to proclaim forgiveness in His name. Those who believe—without seeing—are blessed indeed.

Reflection Prayer:

"Risen Lord, You called Mary by name, You entered locked rooms with peace, You met Thomas in his doubt. Call me, breathe on me, send me. Help me to believe and walk in the power of Your resurrection. In Jesus' name, Amen."