

John 20:1-9 - Jeffrey Smith

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, Knowing Jesus, Making Jesus Known. This morning, we continue our study on the Gospel According to John.

Alright, good morning. For those that missed our Sunday school, Wally is wide awake this morning. So, Wally, thank you for that solid good morning.

I hope everyone's week went well. We've had beautiful weather, right? Spring is here. It's exciting. Spring has sprung. And, you know, I just want to say, while the weather is changing and spring is in the air and we're looking forward to summer and a lot of good things, you know, I know personally everyone's situation is different.

You may feel like you're in a great situation in life right now. You may feel like it's a bad, tough, challenging situation. It may be fairly indifferent. Regardless of where you are, I just want to make the comment that it is good to be a believer.

[1:14] It is good to be a Christian. It is good to have a relationship with God. And the reason why I say that and the reason why I'm reminded of that is any time you turn on the news, what do you see?

You see very, very negative things. And I think about just this past week, you know, here locally, there was a story about a boiler exploding in Souldard.

This giant, you know, piece of equipment flying through the air, going 500 feet a block across and landing on another building and killing three people.

Two of those people were new employees. They were a married couple. They're probably excited to start this new job. And they're gone. You think internationally, you think of what's happening in Syria right now, right?

We hear these reports of hundreds, I don't know if it's maybe thousands of people, gassed by their own people. And this is something that's been going on for many years. And beyond this, we hear the constant report of murder, theft, rape, just a ton of bad things.

[2:25] And for many people that don't have this personal relationship with the Lord, it worries them, right? There's a colleague of David and I's at work, and he's a very concerned person, right?

And when he sees all this happening, what does he do? He goes out and he buys a bunch of gold, and he stocks up on his guns, and he's got plans to flee the country in the case of a new war with Russia. And I think, and this is why I'm reminded that in 2017, it is good to be a Christian.

There's a verse in 1 Peter 1, verse 3 through 6, it says, In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

You know, it says we've been given a new hope through the resurrection, and this inheritance never loses value. This hope is through the resurrection.

The resurrection is what we're going to look at this morning. It's something we're going to continue to celebrate next week with Easter. So before we jump into this passage, and if you want to turn in your Bibles, we're going to be looking at John chapter 20, and we're going to be looking at the first 10 verses.

[3:49] So John 20, verses 1 through 10. So I'm going to start this morning off with a trivia question. As many of you know, Missouri is known as what?

The show-me state. Okay, show-me state. Does anyone know, and there's not an official answer to this, does anyone know why we are called the show-me state? Uneducated, that's what people say.

There is one popular reason as to why we are called the show-me state. It goes back to 1899, and that is when the congressman Willard Vandiver declared in a speech, and he said, I come from a state that raises corn and cotton, cockleburrs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces or satisfies me.

I'm from Missouri, and you have got to show me. So when we say we're from Missouri, the show-me state, that means that we're skeptical, right?

We need physical proof to be convinced otherwise. Now, I really hope this is the reason for our state motto. There was a second reason why we are also called the show-me state, and I hope this is just kind of a tall tale and it's not true.

[5:16] The second reason was that long ago, some miners, some workers from Missouri went to Colorado, and they were so dumb and incompetent in their job that people constantly had to show them how to do their job, and so that's why they called them the show-me state.

I don't think that's the case. We're going to stick with the first one, right? That we are somewhat skeptical, and we need the physical proof to be convinced otherwise. In sticking with that first reason as to why we're the show-me state, this morning we're going to look at why the Apostle John, why the Apostle John would have fit in perfectly with us here in Missouri, the show-me state. So let's open in prayer. Lord, thank you for sending your son to be that perfect sacrifice for us, to set himself apart by not only dying but raising from the dead, Lord, and fulfilling the law, Lord, and giving us an opportunity to come into a relationship with you.

Even as sinners, Lord, we just appreciate that. So we just thank you for this morning. I want to thank you for your word, and I pray that, Lord, you speak to us through it. Amen. So again, John chapter 20, verses 1 through 10.

And before we jump in, I like to do this. I just want to give you guys some context as to what's happening, a sense of what is in the air, what is the environment like.

[6:53] So many believe that Jesus was crucified on a Friday, and then by dusk on Friday, Joseph and Nicodemus took the body and buried it in a tomb.

Imagine yourself, put yourself in the shoes of a disciple, right? And you're probably feeling a bunch of emotions. Your friend, your leader, who you perceive to be the Messiah, has just been crucified. There's sadness. There's mourning. There's grieving. There's probably a little confusion, right? You were supposed to be the Messiah.

Maybe just an inkling of doubt is starting to creep in. The guy that we had believed to be the Messiah died. And while, you know, everybody else is out celebrating the Passover feast, right, this roughly week-long celebration, everybody's here in Jerusalem, and instead of out celebrating with your fellow Jews, what are you doing?

You're hiding? You're in fear of your own arrest? You're in fear of potential torture? Maybe your own crucifixion as well?

[8:14] And all of those dreams of national freedom and a spiritual revival have died when Jesus cried, it is finished. It's a very somber, somber attitude and feeling amongst the disciples right now.

And so we go from Friday, and then we have the Sabbath, and as the Sabbath passes and all of your Jewish colleagues are out enjoying their rest, enjoying their day off, you feel numb, and you feel like you're filled with heartache.

Jesus is dead. Jesus is dead. So that's where we pick it up in verse 1 of chapter 20. It says, Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was still dark and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.

So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

[9:40] Then Simon Peter came following him and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples went back to their homes. If you noticed, I emphasized a portion of that, where it says, John saw and he believed.

And we're going to come back to that. That's going to be one of our main points. But to give you a better understanding of this account, let me fill in a few of the gaps by just pulling some things from the other Gospels.

You know, when I first read this, and I started to compare it to the other Gospels, you're like, oh man, this seems like maybe some blatant contradiction here.

[10:49] It says Mary did this, but Mary over here is talking to the angel, and you're like, what is happening? So here's the important thing, or here's kind of the full picture of what's happening. Mary Magdalene is mentioned here in this account, John.

Mary Magdalene was not alone. She had several other women with her, at least two others, maybe more. There was at least one other Mary. There was actually the potential of four other Marys with Mary Magdalene, so they needed some creativity with some names back in the day.

But potentially five Marys were there. And then another lady named Joanna. Okay, so there's a group of women. And before dawn, while it's still dark out, they were on the way to the tomb, and they have spices.

And they're going to anoint Jesus' body, and essentially they're going to finish the job that Joseph and Nicodemus had started on Friday. Right? No work on the Sabbath. They're going to continue things on that Sunday.

And they're going to finish the burial process started by Joseph and Nicodemus. So all these women are walking to the tomb. And naturally, the question is, hey, you know, there's this giant stone in front of the tomb.

[12:05] We've got to get inside this tomb. How are we going to do it? Right? How are we going to get this large stone moved away from the entrance of the tomb? And so as they get closer, we know the story that there's an earthquake, and the Lord uses the earthquake and an angel to literally lift up the stone and move it.

The stone is in an indented area, and it's not just, hey, it can roll back and forth. It's really in there. So it's got to be lifted. And so the women are walking to the tomb, and while it's still very, very dark, they can see the tomb, and they can see that the stone is moved away.

So they now have their access to the tomb. And so as they get closer, they come up against a second realization.

That is, not only has the tomb been rolled away, but there is no body in this tomb. Okay? There's no body in this tomb. This is an important point to understand.

At this moment, Mary Magdalene turns around, and she goes to tell John and Peter, while the other ladies stay and go into the tomb.

[13:20] Okay? If you read the account in Matthew, this is when we read that the angel descends into the tomb and has the appearance, this white appearance like lightning, and tells the remaining women, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who has been crucified.

He is not here. For he has risen just as he said. So that is awesome news, right? If you're reading the account in Matthew, you're like, wow, Mary got the message directly from the angel.

If you go to John and read that alone, and you see just one Mary listed there, you're like, well, why is Mary Magdalene going back to John and Peter and saying they've taken the body? Do you see where the contradiction initially looks to be?

That's where you have to understand there were multiple Marys there, there were multiple women there. And so going back to Mary Magdalene, she gets John and Peter, she delivers the message that, hey, Jesus' body's been taken, the tomb is empty, and so she gets John and Peter to race back to the tomb.

As they need to see this for themselves. Like I said, they would have fit right in with us Missourians here at the Show Me State. So John was a little faster, and he beats Peter to the site, but when he gets to the site, he just kind of stops and stoops in.

[14:43] He doesn't actually go in the tomb, okay? And he peeks in, and he sees that the linen cloths are lying there.

And as you would expect with Peter, I mean, Peter, you know, Peter's Peter, and he runs, he's a little slow, but he gets there, he brushes past John, he gets into the tomb, he doesn't stop on the outside.

And he also sees the linens neatly in their place, and the face cloth folded separately. And the important point is this, you know, when they wrap the body, I think I read that they wrapped it up to about shoulder length, and then you have the face cloth on the face, on the head.

And so when the body's laying there, there's obviously a gap, kind of the neck area that was exposed. And what they're saying is, when John and Peter observed that the linen cloths were neatly in place, and the face cloth was folded as if it was folded on a face here, it was almost as if Jesus' body had vaporized, or just kind of disappeared out of the linen, okay?

So for you and I, they're like, yeah, Jesus rose from the dead. Of course that's the case. At the time, they thought maybe the body had been stolen, okay? And if the body had been stolen, the linen would have been taken off, it would have been thrown aside, they would have taken the body, and they would have gone.

[16:08] So the significance here is that the body wasn't just stolen by grave robbers. The body had risen from the linen, had almost vaporized out of the clothing, okay?

And it was after this observation of the neatly arranged linen cloths, that John comes out of the tomb, and this is important. It says in, let's just turn to it here.

It says in verse 8, The Greek word for saw is horaro, which means to see with understanding, okay?

To see with understanding. And then it said he believed. And so, my initial thought is, what did John and Peter believe?

What did John and Peter believe? Was this the first time that they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he had risen from the dead, and he was here, and he had fulfilled the Old Testament, that he is who he says he is?

[17:28] Well, first of all, it says that he saw and he believed, and I think that is in reference to actually what Mary said. Mary said that the tomb is empty, right?

And so they went and saw it for themselves, and they recognized what Mary said was true, right? We understand that. We believe that. But, but, I think there's also a point here, and this is supported by, you know, quite a few scholars and commentators, that not only did they see and believe that the body was not there, and the tomb was empty, but this is the moment that they had realized Jesus was risen to life again.

This is the point where they understood Jesus had risen to life again. So you have to understand that, as Jews, they understood what the Old Testament spoke of when it talked about the resurrection of the Messiah, right?

That was, they got that, and Jesus told them that he was the Messiah and that he would rise again, but there was some disconnect there, okay? There was some, they didn't quite have the presence of mind to make the connection that, yes, this is the Messiah that we believed in, and factually, we understand that there is going to be a resurrection.

Ah, here it is. This is why the tomb is empty. This is why it looks like a body has simply disappeared out of these linen cloths. Jesus has risen.

[19:02] Can you imagine the excitement in John's voice when this clicks for him, right? When the light bulb goes off and he tells Peter, Jesus is alive. He's alive. The stone has been rolled away so that we could see that Jesus is gone.

His body is gone. Praise God. Like I said, you know, in verse 9, it says, for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead.

There was this, this factual comprehension of the resurrection, but they didn't connect the dots between Jesus, the Messiah, and then his death and now resurrection.

And suddenly it was becoming clear to them. You know, for me on one hand, and maybe you guys feel this way too, you look at the disciples and you're like, guys, you've been with him for a few

years now.

You know, he's been telling you consistently that this was going to happen. How are you just now understanding what's happening? You guys are firsthand experiencing some of the miracles that he performed.

[20:09] But on the other hand, I'm like, eh, Jesus, he could have been a little clearer when you said some of this stuff, right? I would have had no idea. But the reality is it's a little bit of both, right?

I mean, Jesus was speaking their language. You think about it in John 2 when he says, I'm going to tear down this temple and rebuild it in three days. Well, for me, as someone that, you know, didn't study the Old Testament scriptures like they did, I would have been like, Jesus, I have no idea what you're talking about.

But, what does it say in John 2? It says that, obviously, Jesus was referring to his body dying, but then being resurrected.

It says that the disciples remembered what the Old Testament scriptures said, and they believed, right? So, on one hand, the disciples believed what was happening. Ah, Jesus, I know what you're talking about.

Tear down the temple in three days and rebuild it. But then there were other times that he was, they were confused, right? I mean, there were plenty of examples like this. If you look in John 13, Jesus tells them, don't you realize what I'm doing?

[21:18] But later, you will understand. I'm telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I am. Thomas in John 14 says, Lord, we do not know where you are going.

How can we know the way? How can we know the way? We don't know where you're going. And then Jesus, in a very famous verse, says, on the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

I think it's almost comical in John 16 when his disciples finally say, ah, Jesus, thank you. You're finally speaking in plain language, in plain English, as we would say, and not using figurative speech.

Now we know that, now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. This is why we believe that you came from God. I mean, do you see this back and forth of understanding and confusion and understanding and confusion?

And so this just gives you an idea of, of what the, what the disciples were thinking at this time. One minute, it was very clear. The next minute, they were confused. And so here in this passage, John and Peter saw the empty tomb.

[22:26] They saw the linens just neatly laid there and they believed that Jesus had risen. You know, the other day, a colleague of David and I's, another colleague, a different one than the first example, but I got into work and he stopped me before I got to my desk and he said, hey, I gotta tell you, I've been reading this book on the historical evidence for Jesus.

I was like, ah, that's interesting. And so coming from this friend who's an agnostic guy, I was interested to hear what he had to share. And so amongst other things, he had some really interesting observations.

He's like, I didn't realize, you know, that the sacrificial system and the amount of blood that it took to wash away supposedly these sins and to, I didn't understand that, you know, when Jesus came, the veil was torn.

I mean, that's no longer needed. And I'm like, yeah, it is. You're right, it's not needed anymore. But he made an interesting comment. He said, did you know that at this time there were many others claiming to be the Messiah?

I said, yeah, you know, I do know that. You know, Matthew and Mark, it both makes reference to those falsely claiming to be the Messiah. But my friend went on to make another comment and he said, hey, you know, amongst these other pretenders, we'll call them, some of them had very large followings.

[23:51] And I didn't factually check this, but it could very well be true. In some cases, some of these followings were bigger than Jesus' following. Right? And he gave the example of this shepherd name, and I'm

going to butcher his name, Athrongus?

Does anyone know? Okay. So Athrongus lived around the same time of Christ. Right? And Athrongus was, even though he was a humble shepherd, he had a very, very bold personality. And it was him and he had four brothers, and it says that they were all tall, they were all muscular, they were all very military-minded, and they all, they were all very successful in attacking, you know, Roman guards and Roman armies.

And so, you know, we all know, in a way, this is what the Jews thought they were looking for, right? They thought they were looking for this military deliverer, you know, this victory from Roman oppression.

And it was at this point that my friend made a very interesting observation. You know, he said, despite, you know, maybe differences in outward appearance or military success, my friend pointed out one very key difference between a throngous and these other pretenders and Jesus.

[25:17] And he said, do you know what the difference is? He said, everyone else besides Jesus died, and that was the end of their story. I was, I was like, yes, that is, that is 1,000% true, right?

Every other person died. When I mentioned this guy's name, you guys have no idea who I'm talking about, right? It's 2017 and we're talking about Jesus because he died and he rose again. The differentiator is that Jesus rose from the dead and that's why we're still talking about him.

You know, we're going to celebrate Easter. And in many ways, to me, Easter has kind of become this very cute holiday, right? We get our nice clothes on. This is when some people come to church when they normally don't.

After church, we all meet up with our families, right? We have our Easter lunches and we do the Easter egg hunt and there's bunnies and all this stuff. But the point is, the very real point is, without the resurrection, there is nothing, right?

We do not celebrate Easter. We're not here right now. Do you remember what happened to John the Baptist in prison? This story really struck a chord and I just saw some parallels to what I was seeing with John 20.

[26:48] You know, John the Baptist, the one that leapt in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's voice, right? The one that has been chosen to go forth before Jesus to declare, you know, behold, the Lamb of God.

The very same John the Baptist that would baptize Jesus and see the Spirit descend down like a dove, right?

This is the very same John the Baptist who stood up to the king and now he's sitting in prison, okay? And we all know what's about to happen. He's about to get his head lopped off, right?

He didn't know that yet, but he probably knew that, hey, my future's not looking too bright here. And as he's sitting in this jail cell, he's starting to have just a hint of doubt.

And he's probably having some of the same thoughts that John and Peter had just after Jesus died, right? You know, they believed Jesus was the Christ.

[27:57] They believed he was the Messiah, but then suddenly he dies. And the thoughts of doubt and, you know, just second questioning start to creep in and they start to wonder, what if, what if we were wrong?

You know, there's a lot of false prophets out here like a throne just. You know, what if Jesus was just another one of those guys? What if he had led thousands of people astray?

You know, so far Jesus' ministry wasn't quite what John was expecting, right? You know, maybe something like a throne just, what he was doing was a little bit more in line with what they thought. Could John be in prison for, you know, because of God's judgment for declaring, you know, the Messiah to the wrong person? I mean, think about it.

Put yourself in their shoes. They didn't have this, right? They couldn't turn to the last chapter of the Gospels to say, how did this thing turn out? I mean, they were living it in real time.

[29:07] You know, it's one thing to die for what you know 1,000% to be true and just and righteous. John couldn't bear the thought that he might have been wrong about Jesus.

And so, even with his doubts, you know, there still remained in John a deep, unshakable trust in Jesus. He just needed to hear it one more time, right? He just needed to hear it one more time.

So, what does he do? When John the Baptist is in the prison cell, he takes two of his closest disciples and says, hey, just please go to Jesus and ask him this question. Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? This is John the Baptist saying this, right? This is the one that baptized Jesus himself.

Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? And as perfect of a question as that is, you know, I just love Jesus' response.

[30:16] The question resonates with Jesus, and he was familiar with John's sorrow and grief. He knew that he was sitting there weak and alone in the prison. So what does Jesus say?

Does he bring his disciples over and says, yeah, tell him yeah, tell me, the answer is yes. No, he doesn't. He says, hey, come over here. Go and tell John what you hear and see.

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them, and blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

Jesus could have said, yeah, go tell him, yep, the answer is yes. Or he could have said, look at the body of work. I am who I say I am. I am the son of God. I am the Messiah.

What a beautiful picture. Jesus loved John. It says, you know, he goes on and tells the people that he was around when the disciples came up. He says, among those born of women, there has arisen no greater than John the Baptist.

[31:18] John the Baptist, he just had some doubts, right? Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another? Please, just give me that confirmation.

I just need that confirmation. So, my question to you is this, how do you relate to the apostles, John and Peter?

How do you relate? Maybe, you know, you've been a believer for a long time, and it's the equivalent of spending three years with Jesus every day.

And you need to be reminded, and I need to be reminded, of how important and how real it is that Jesus rose from the dead. Sometimes it becomes a little bit more of a factual understanding, but sometimes there needs to be the true realization that Christ is alive.

Christ is alive. That means he's all powerful. That means he's omnipresent. He gives us life and purpose, not only here on this earth, but he gives us life eternity, right?

[32:31] He is a living Christ who has given us victory. You know, it's evident in my life that I often forget that Christ is alive.

I'm not saying that I necessarily see him as, oh, he's still in the tomb, he didn't resurrect, but truly alive, being with me, even now, that's something I often forget.

You know, when temptation to sin arises, what do we do? What do I do? Do we flee that temptation and run to the Lord who's right there with us? Or do we fulfill that temptation with the thought that, hey, Jesus can't see me, God's not around.

You know, that's the attitude of one that just doesn't truly understand that Christ is alive. When we're faced with a challenge or a hardship, again, do we run to the Lord who is right beside us? Or do we search for ourselves to find the answer, thinking, hey, we're at team of one. It's just me here. I'll dig deep. I'll get the answer. That's what I do, oftentimes, and wrongly so.

[33:45] Jesus is readily available to provide the peace, the guidance, the love, the hope, and everything else only a risen Savior can provide.

John and Peter were closely aligned with Jesus for about three years, and yet, even with all that time, they still struggled to comprehend how Jesus, the one they trusted to be the Messiah, would fulfill the Old Testament scripture and rise from the dead.

They had every opportunity to turn away after Jesus' crucifixion, yet it was made so clear to them that he had risen, that they would go on to face martyrdom, right?

John was the only guy that wasn't killed, but what happened to him? He was boiled in oil, okay? I mean, they could have gone to this tomb and said, yep, he's gone, body must have been stolen, we're going to turn away and find someone else.

But no, they saw and they believed, and it was such a conviction that what, Peter was crucified upside down in Rome, every other disciple was killed, John was the only one that wasn't, but lucky for him, man, he was only boiled in oil.

[34:55] That's awful. Is the resurrection real in your life? Are you having any second thoughts like John the Baptist? And don't be ashamed.

If there's sometimes that thought of doubt that creeps in, don't be ashamed. While we don't have necessarily Jesus that we can go send a message to here in bodily form today, where we can visually see miracles being performed, we have God's word, right?

We have God's word. And this is powerful. In the beginning of John, it says, in the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God, right? We have the word. Jesus was that expression, that word, that expression of God, of salvation to us.

So if the musicians want to come up, I just want to leave everyone with two thoughts. First, never forget that the resurrection is the differentiator.

People like to lump Christianity and Jesus with every other religion out there and, you know, I can't tell you what I think when I see the coexist, intolerance sign, bumper stickers.

[36:10] That cross is different than every other one of these religions, okay? And that differentiator is that Jesus not only claimed to be the Messiah like a lot of other people did, he fulfilled it by dying and rising again.

And second, I would just challenge you to focus on the reality that Christ is alive, that Christ is alive, and understand what that implication means for your life.

What does that imply to you? Understanding that Jesus is alive, and that as believers, we have a relationship with him, okay? And he is with us.

You can have a personal relationship with the Lord that isn't just for eternity after death, but for a close fellowship here in this life as well. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for making this clear to us and to, you know, John and Peter here, Lord, that there was no second guessing.

[37:20] Your body was not stolen. Your body was not still there. Lord, you had risen from the dead. Lord, and that is the difference. That is different than any other false prophet, teacher, whatever out there.

Lord, we thank you for that. We put our trust in that, Lord, that your sacrifice paid for our sins. Thank you for this day.

In your son's name, Amen. Amen.ater