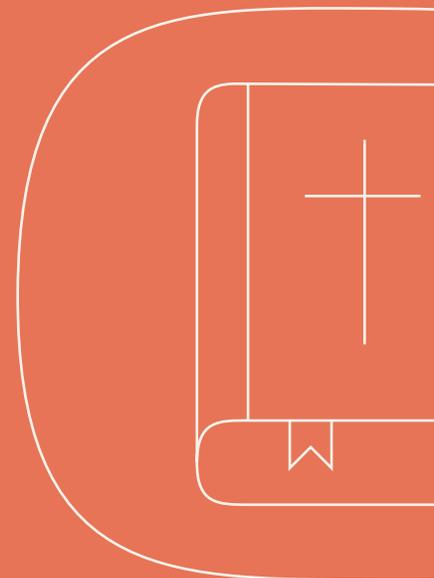
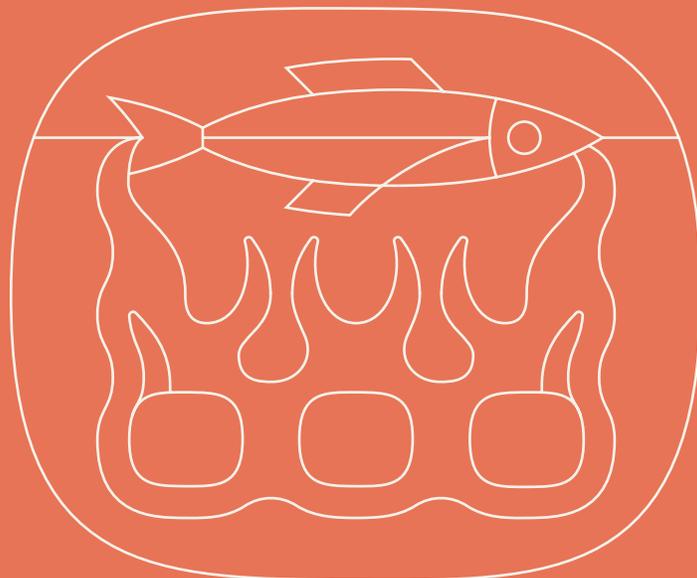


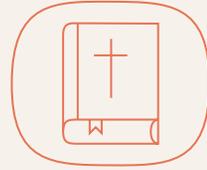
JOHN'S GOSPEL

THE TRUTH

Finding Life in Jesus's Death

A Three-Week Study





Welcome to our “Finding
Life in Jesus” Death”
mini-study, taken from
our 30-week course
on John’s Gospel.

This mini-study is an opportunity for you to study BSF content for yourself. Whether you are intending to try a class or simply do the study on your own, we hope God speaks to you through His Word.



What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 450,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

How does the Bible study work?

This sample study includes three lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

To get started:

1. Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
2. If completing the study in a BSF group, discuss your answers collectively each week.
3. Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).
4. Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Repeat for each lesson!

How do I join BSF?

If a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to join.bsfindernational.org.

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!





The Burial of Jesus Christ

LESSON
SCRIPTURE
JOHN 19:31-42

Lesson Questions

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day. If completing the mini-study in a BSF group, answer the questions before the group meets to discuss the answers.

First Day.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help you grasp the gravity and meaning of Jesus's death on the cross?
2. What truths in the lecture helped you appreciate the sacrificial cost Jesus paid to cover your sin and the sin of humanity?

Second Day: Read John 19:31-33.

With Sabbath approaching, the Jewish leaders wanted the bodies removed from the crosses.

3. Why did the Jewish leaders ask Pilate to break the legs of the crucified men? (See also Deuteronomy 21:22-23.)

8. a. What do you learn about Jesus from the Old Testament prophecies that speak of His pierced side? (See also Isaiah 53:5-6 and Zechariah 12:10; 13:1.)
- b. How does this impact your worship of Jesus?

Fourth Day: Read John 19:38-42.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus removed Jesus's body from the cross.

9. Describe the men who buried Jesus. (See also Luke 23:50-52 and John 3:1-21; 7:47-52; 12:42-43.)
10. a. What did these men lose while they did not publicly identify with Jesus?
- b. What did these men risk but also gain by coming forward to bury Jesus?
11. a. What fear or compromise keeps you or someone you know from fully following Jesus?
- b. How might God be challenging you to step into open faith in Christ and courageous obedience?

Fifth Day: Reread John 19:38-42.

Jesus's body was anointed and buried in a new tomb.

12. How do the details of Jesus's anointing and burial fulfill biblical prophecy? (See also Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53:9; and Matthew 2:9-11; 27:57-60.)

13. In what ways does the tender care for Jesus's body impact your reverence for your Lord?

Sixth Day: Review John 19:31-42.

Jesus's burial prepares us for His glorious resurrection.

14. Consider the death and burial of Jesus. How do you participate in Jesus's death and burial?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders:
John 19:31-42

*Next step: Listen to the lecture.*

Lesson 26 Notes

Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

John 19:31-42

Focus Verse

"These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'" (John 19:36-37)

Outline

- The Reality of Jesus's Death – John 19:31-37
- The Royalty of Jesus's Burial – John 19:38-42

Engage

We often struggle as we read Scripture's account of Jesus's torturous agony on the cross. Our natural inclination is to scurry to the narrative of His victorious resurrection. However, the time between the cross and empty tomb presents precious moments to pause and reflect. **This week's lesson allows us to catch our breath and attempt to grasp the enormity of Jesus's sacrifice.** The depth of God's sovereignty and grace, the cost of Jesus's sacrifice, and God's profound love shine through these 12 verses.

Jesus's persecutors subjected humanity's Savior to utter indignity, piercing His injured body to validate His death. In notable contrast, Jesus's friends courageously secured, lovingly tended, and honorably anointed Jesus's battered body. With heavenly shouts of victory over death on the horizon, we come to this quiet Sabbath eve to reflect and worship. The scene surrounding Jesus's death positions us to ponder the incalculable value of His victory. **Jesus's burial prepares us for His glorious resurrection.**

✦ The Reality of Jesus's Death – 19:31-37

By design, crucifixion on a Roman cross brought a slow and torturous death. The suffocation, exposure, and blood loss causing death could take up to two days or even much longer. Rather than bury the executed, the Romans often left bodies hanging publicly to communicate contempt over those they ruled and to warn against rebellion. The bodies of the executed were sometimes thrown to the ground for the vultures.

The sinless Son of God took sin's curse for us on a cruel cross. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."¹ Jesus bore disgrace and

1. **Curse for us:** Galatians 3:10-13

shame He did not deserve, out of His great love for humanity. The details of Jesus's actual death present corroborating evidence that validates His resurrection.

The Leaders' Request – 19:31

The law of Moses forbade leaving a body "hanging on the pole" overnight.² God's curse would be upon anyone executed this way. To leave a body impaled, crucified, or hanging overnight desecrated the land. God's provision of this law foreshadowed His Son's death on a Roman cross.³

In Israel, sunset marked the end of one day and the beginning of the next.⁴ **The Passover Sabbath began at sundown on the day of Jesus's crucifixion.** The Jewish leaders anxiously and urgently wanted the crucified men to die quickly, but this was not out of compassion. They wanted the men's bodies removed before the holy day began.

To hasten the deaths of Jesus and the two men alongside Him, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to order the soldiers to break the legs of the crucified men. This cruel practice left the men unable to push themselves up to breathe. In such a state, death by suffocation would quickly follow. **With the corpses out of sight, the leaders could celebrate Passover with a clear conscience.** Their concern for compliance with the external formalities overshadowed the callousness of their request.

The Soldiers' Task – 19:32-33

The Roman soldiers probably welcomed the order to break the prisoners' legs. The sooner the prisoners died, the earlier their gruesome duty ended. This responsibility could even be considered an act of mercy, hastening the death and ending the cruel suffering of the cross. These experienced executioners approached the three crosses, prepared to smash the legs of the condemned men. After breaking the legs of the two thieves, they approached the center cross. **To the soldiers' surprise, they discovered Jesus had already died, so they did not break His legs.**

Jesus's Pierced Side – 19:34

Seeking assurance of Jesus's death, the soldiers pierced Jesus's side with a spear. John records an extraordinary physical phenomenon when one of the soldiers pierced Jesus's side after His death. **A stream of blood and water flowed from the Savior's lifeless body.**

Several possible explanations for the blood and water have been suggested:

- This represents a rare but natural event resulting from a ruptured heart. The blood would mix with normally clear fluid surrounding the heart.
- This signifies a miracle—the supernatural preservation of Jesus's body to prevent decay. The flow of blood and water visibly revealed God's intervention.
- Many interpret the blood and water spiritually and symbolically.

2. **Desecration:** Deuteronomy 21:22-23

3. **Plan for the cross:** Acts 2:23-24

4. **Marking of a day:** Genesis 1:5; Leviticus 23:32

The Significance of Blood and Water in Scripture

Blood

Humanity's sin results in separation from God, who is perfectly righteous, holy, and set apart from everything evil.¹ **In love and grace, God provided a substitute, His own Son, to pay the penalty our sin deserves.**

In the Old Testament, God declared to Israel, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."² The New Testament confirms, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sin]."³ The sacrificial system of the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, who died as the ultimate offering for sin.⁴ Animal sacrifices are no longer necessary.⁵ **Jesus's death provides reconciliation to God for all who trust in Him.**

At the Last Supper, Jesus lifted the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."⁶ John, who wrote this Gospel, drank from that cup. Surely the significance of that night resonated deeply within his memory. John later wrote a message he longed for God's people to know: "The blood of Jesus ... purifies us from all sin."⁷ As an elderly apostle imprisoned on the Greek island of Patmos, John declared the truth that sustained him: **Jesus "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood."**⁸

Water

Jesus said the water He gives to believers is "a spring ... welling up to eternal life."⁹ He promised, "Whoever believes in me, ... rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit."¹⁰ The water that flowed from Jesus's body may point to the new spiritual life that is given to all who believe and receive Jesus.¹¹ The Bible's final chapters repeat Jesus's promise. God invites all who thirst to receive "water without cost from the spring of the water of life."¹² The Spirit and the Church repeat the invitation: "Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life."¹³

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1. **Set apart from evil:** Habakkuk 1:13
 2. **Atonement:** Leviticus 17:11
 3. **Shedding of blood:** Hebrews 9:22
 4. **Sin offering:** Romans 3:25-26; 8:1-4
 5. **Animal sacrifices not necessary:** Hebrews 10:1, 4
 6. **Last Supper:** Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20
 7. **Purification from sin:** 1 John 1:7
 8. **Freed from sin:** Revelation 1:5
 9. **Living water:** John 4:14
 10. **Spirit:** John 7:38-39
 11. **New life:** John 1:12-13
 12. **Water of life:** Revelation 21:6
 13. **Let the thirsty come:** Revelation 22:17

Whatever explanation accounts for this detail, John wanted his readers to grasp the essential historical fact that the Lord Jesus truly died physically. **Jesus Christ was pierced for our transgressions.** His lifeblood was poured out for us.⁵

5. **Blood poured out:** Luke 22:20

A Corroborating Witness – 19:35

John—“the man who saw it”—presented himself as another personal witness to Jesus’s death. Throughout his Gospel, John clearly and consistently expressed his desire that people recognize who Jesus is and come to faith in Him.⁶ Here, John offered his own testimony to support his highest purpose—“so that you also may believe.”

Fulfilled Prophecy – 19:36-37

John also included the corroborating witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. **The Holy Spirit inspired John to recognize God’s sovereignty over the circumstances surrounding Jesus’s death.** Earlier, the soldiers had unconsciously fulfilled prophecy by casting lots for the Lord’s clothes.⁷ Similarly, God worked through the Roman soldiers to fulfill other prophecies about Jesus’s crucifixion.

The Roman soldiers likely knew nothing about God’s requirements for the Passover lamb. Yet their treatment of Jesus fulfilled another specific detail God had ordained. **Scripture dictated that none of the Passover lamb’s bones could be broken.**⁸ David recorded a similar prophecy regarding God’s preservation of a righteous man.⁹ Amazingly, God protected His Passover Lamb¹⁰ from any broken bones. Jesus gave up His spirit at exactly the right moment so He was unmistakably dead when the soldiers approached.¹¹

God again fulfilled prophecy when the soldier callously pierced Jesus’s side to verify His death. Hundreds of years earlier, Isaiah foretold, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”¹² Centuries after Isaiah, and still four centuries before Jesus’s crucifixion, the prophet Zechariah’s words also pointed to Jesus as he wrote, “They will look on me, the one they have pierced.”¹³ Zechariah clearly identified the speaker of these words as “the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth.”¹⁴

God’s work continues among the people He calls to Himself. In Zechariah’s prophecy, the Lord promised He would “pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly.”¹⁵ At Pentecost, God fulfilled more of Zechariah’s prophecy. Peter preached of Jesus’s death and resurrection, and many “were cut to the heart and said ... ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” About 3,000 repented and were baptized that day.¹⁶

God’s prophetic words about His Son’s atoning death apply to both Jews and Gentiles who personally receive Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. All who understand Jesus’s suffering on their behalf experience both profound joy and grateful grief. **As Zechariah foretold, through**

6. **John’s consistent aim:** John 20:31

7. **Casting lots:** Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24

8. **Unbroken bones:** Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12

9. **Righteous man:** Psalm 34:19-20

10. **Passover Lamb:** 1 Corinthians 5:7

11. **Jesus’s control of timing:** John 10:18; 19:30

12. **Pierced for our transgressions:** Isaiah 53:5

13. **The one pierced:** Zechariah 12:10

14. **Stretches out the heavens:** Zechariah 12:1

15. **Mourning:** Zechariah 12:10

16. **Baptized:** Acts 2:37-38, 41

Jesus's blood God opened a "fountain" to cleanse us "from sin and impurity."¹⁷ In addition, God promises a day when the people of Israel will mourn that they pierced the Lord God, the Messiah that God sent. For all who repent and believe, Jesus's blood will wash away their sins and set them free.

Jesus will return in His glorified body—the same body that was pierced for us on the cross. On that day, every person will see Him. Those who have received His sacrifice for sin will rejoice. Revelation 1:7 promises: "'Look, he is coming with the clouds,' and 'every eye will see him, even those who pierced him'; and all peoples on earth 'will mourn because of him.'"

The Royalty of Jesus's Burial – 19:38-42

Three bodies were taken down from their crosses. A new day would soon begin. However, this Passover celebration in Jerusalem incorporated so much more than an ordinary change of day. The beginning of God's promised Sabbath rest,¹⁸ the completion of the old covenant, and the blessings of a new and better covenant awaited redeemed humanity.¹⁹ **Our crucified Lord was buried between these two eras.**

The Bold Request – 19:38-39a

Jesus's enemies could no longer touch Him. **Jesus remained in the company of His friends until He ascended to heaven.**

Joseph – 19:38

One friend, a man named Joseph, came from the Judean town of Arimathea. **Joseph, known as a "good and upright man," served as a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership council.**²⁰ Because no one defended Jesus at His trial, Joseph may not have been aware of the hastily called trial until it was too late. If he was present, fear silenced him.

Joseph was "waiting for the kingdom of God,"²¹ indicating his faith in God's promise to send the Messiah. **Joseph saw Jesus as God's promised Messiah and became a secret disciple of the Lord.** However, fear kept him from following Jesus openly. John wrote that "many even among the leaders" believed in Jesus but "would not openly acknowledge their faith ... for they loved human praise more than praise from God."²²

For all who repent and believe, Jesus's blood will wash away their sins and set them free.

While others fled, Joseph dared to go publicly to Pilate. There was no turning back. According to the law of Moses, touching a body would render him ceremonially unclean. Joseph would have to postpone celebrating Passover.²³ There would be no way to keep his act of tender devotion to Jesus private. Joseph risked not only his position with the Sanhedrin but also excommunication from the synagogue.²⁴

17. **Cleansed:** Zechariah 13:1

18. **Sabbath rest:** Hebrews 4:1-11

19. **New covenant:** Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Luke 22:20

20. **Joseph's background:** Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51

21. **Waiting for the kingdom:** Luke 23:51

22. **Love of praise:** John 12:42-43

23. **Postponed celebration:** Numbers 9:6-13

24. **Joseph's risks:** John 9:22; 12:42

The Deadly Cost of Our Sin

The Doctrine of Humanity: Fall and Judgment

Though we struggle to consider the battered body of our sinless Savior on the cross and in the grave, His death remains necessary. Every member of humanity deserves death as the just penalty for sin. Jesus's willingness to take our place and suffer the Father's wrath makes His crucifixion an act of amazing grace and an expression of unfathomable love.

God created humanity for a pure and eternal relationship with Him. Genesis 3 records that our original parents, Adam and Eve, wanted to be like God. They disobeyed God's will and sinned against their Creator. The damage inflicted by their choice to sin impacts all of us. Everyone born since has inherited Adam and Eve's sinful nature.¹ Rather than seek God and His righteousness, we all naturally rebel against God² and hide from Him.³

Sin requires judgment, and the just penalty for sin is death.⁴ Because sin infects our internal nature, we are born destined for death. God provided the solution that makes it possible for us to escape the judgment we rightfully deserve. His Son died in our place as the perfect sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath and conquered sin and death.⁵

To refuse God's gift of salvation through His Son means bearing the judgment for our own sin, in this life and for all eternity. When we do not believe in Jesus Christ and accept His blood to cover our sin, we will experience eternal death and will be forever separated from God and all believers.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are born again and made alive in God.⁶ After our life on earth, we will receive a renewed body patterned after Jesus's resurrected and ascended body.⁷ God has provided the righteousness He requires by sending His Son to save us.

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1. **Inherited sinful nature:** Romans 3:23; 5:12
 2. **Rebellion against God:** Deuteronomy 9:24; Romans 3:10-12; 8:7-8
 3. **Hide from God:** Genesis 3:8
 4. **Death penalty:** Genesis 3:19
 5. **Overcome sin and death:** Romans 3:9-20; 5:12-14; 6:23
 6. **Made alive:** 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13
 7. **New bodies:** 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49-57; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3

Nicodemus – 19:39a

Nicodemus, another member of the Sanhedrin, joined Joseph. Earlier in Jesus's ministry, Nicodemus approached Jesus late at night.²⁵ He had also defended Jesus in the council.²⁶ Did Joseph and Nicodemus share quiet, guarded conversations about Jesus? Had Joseph heard about Jesus's earlier statement to Nicodemus that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again"?²⁷ We cannot fully understand how these two prominent Jewish leaders kept their growing faith to themselves. But now they came together in shared grief to offer Jesus the burial He deserved.

25. **Nicodemus's visit:** John 3:1-15

26. **Nicodemus's defense of Jesus:** John 7:50-52

27. **Born again:** John 3:3

The Majestic Anointing – 19:39b-40

Joseph and Nicodemus carried Jesus's lifeless body to a nearby garden and to Joseph's own new tomb.²⁸ Other Gospel accounts record that a few faithful women followed at a distance, forming their own small funeral procession for the Savior of the world.²⁹

We can only imagine the grief and pain involved in preparing Jesus's body for burial after such a brutal death. A thorny crown scarred Jesus's head. Nails pierced His hands and feet. A spear had been cruelly thrust into His side. These two "secret" disciples now took a bold stand as they attended to Jesus's wounded body with tenderness and care.

The two men followed Jewish burial customs. Joseph brought linen strips to wrap the body.³⁰ Both men, wealthy by the world's standards,³¹ honored Jesus with extravagant gifts. They gave the Lord in death what they failed to give him in His life—their best. Nicodemus brought a costly gift of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. Joseph offered the unused tomb he had purchased for his own burial. These lavish gifts represented a burial fit for a king.³² These two men risked temporal loss as they performed this humble, difficult task out of love for the Lord. **Jesus's death was cruel, but His burial was regal.**

The Prepared Tomb – 19:41-42

As with Jesus's death, the circumstances of Jesus's burial also fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah prophesied: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death."³³

John included details that offer important insights into Jesus's burial. **Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus in a garden tomb.** God placed the first man and woman in the garden of Eden,³⁴ also the place where sin entered the world.³⁵ Jesus prayed and was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.³⁶ Jesus victoriously rose from the dead and left behind the empty tomb, also situated in a garden. One day, those saved from sin will thrive in the presence of the Lord God in a garden in the New Jerusalem.³⁷

John emphasized Jesus's burial in "a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid." Typically, family members shared a tomb.³⁸ This points to another prophecy. David foretold how the Messiah's body "would never see decay."³⁹

The place of Jesus's burial was located near the place of His death. This location offered practical benefits. As sundown drew near, Joseph and Nicodemus hurried to complete the burial preparations. Convenient proximity expedited their work, as the law prohibited work on the Sabbath. God also timed the day of Jesus's death near the soon-coming day of His glorious resurrection. Sorrow and sadness loomed large, but great joy awaited nearby.

28. **Joseph's tomb:** Matthew 27:60

29. **Women followed:** Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55

30. **Burial linen:** Mark 15:46

31. **Costly gifts:** Matthew 27:57

32. **King's burial:** 2 Chronicles 16:14

33. **Rich in His death:** Isaiah 53:9

34. **Eden:** Genesis 2:10-15

35. **Sin entered in a garden:** Genesis 3:5

36. **Garden of Gethsemane:** Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32; John 18:1

37. **God's garden in New Jerusalem:** Revelation 22:1-6

38. **Shared tomb:** Genesis 23:19; 25:9-11

39. **Never see decay:** Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:25-31

After wrapping the body, Joseph and Nicodemus laid Jesus's anointed body on a shelf in the tomb. A heavy stone was rolled over the entrance, and they left. In the quiet of dusk, on this Day of Preparation preceding the Passover, God set the stage for the burst of victory to come. **Jesus's burial prepares us for His glorious resurrection.**

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Our Lord Jesus Christ truly died on the cross. Scripture and God-appointed witnesses leave no doubt. Jesus did not merely lose consciousness or pretend to die. Jesus's executioners and John, the author of this Gospel, witnessed and confirmed His physical death. Joseph and Nicodemus fulfilled prophecy as they lavishly prepared Jesus's body for burial in Joseph's new, undefiled tomb. **The evidence of Jesus's cruel death, royal burial, and victorious resurrection prove God's love and power to accomplish His plan for His people.**

The details of Jesus's death point to the cruelty of Jesus's enemies, the kindness of His friends, and God's sovereignty. Human plots and divine plans converged when Jesus died as the ultimate Passover Lamb. Religious leaders wanted Jesus to die. Governmental officials made it happen. Soldiers drove the nails and pierced Jesus's side but did not break His legs. God ordained it all.⁴⁰ His grace resonates through every detail of Jesus's death and burial. **Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, took our place and died the death we deserve.**

Apply It

Jesus lived His perfect life for you. He satisfied the Law's requirements for you. Jesus was mistreated for you, suffered for you, died for you, and was buried for you. **To participate in Christ's life means also participating in His death and burial.**⁴¹ Have you trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation? If you are a believer, Jesus has paid the penalty and has broken sin's power over you. In glory, He will free you from sin's presence forever. With this in mind, we join Paul's proclamation of freedom: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."⁴²

If you are a believer, Jesus has paid the penalty and has broken sin's power over you. In glory, He will free you from sin's presence forever.

Nicodemus and Joseph came out of hiding to offer Jesus a respectful burial. What does it take to bring your commitment to Christ into the open? Many times, we prefer to confine our faith to "safe" spaces where we can avoid disdain or criticism. For Nicodemus and Joseph, it took Jesus's cruel death at the hands of His enemies for them to realize that aligning with Jesus was worth it. What does it take for you to be willing to stand up and stand out for the cause of Christ? In what ways are you attempting to be a secret disciple of Jesus? **The Savior who willingly bore open shame on your behalf deserves your uncompromising loyalty.**

40. God-ordained circumstances: Acts 2:23

41. New life through death: Romans 6:3-4

42. Crucified with Christ: Galatians 2:20

A deep look at Jesus's death and burial calls believers to ponder their identification with Christ. Those who trust Christ for salvation recognize that He suffered and died in their place. Not only that, by God's grace, a believer's sins are removed from His sight—buried with Christ.⁴³ Too often, Christians feel imprisoned by past sins—their own or injustices committed against them. If you are a believer, how might you be enslaved by your past? This is as senseless as digging up a rotting corpse. If you are united with Christ, your former life was buried with Him in His tomb. God has raised you to live a transformed life.⁴⁴ How might you experience the new life God intends for you?

Through this study, we have looked at God's amazing gift through Jesus's sacrificial death. This story offers more than sad or interesting facts. The cross of Christ represents the pinnacle of human history and a decision point facing every human. God brought you here. You can look at Christ and live—*truly live*—in this life and for eternity. Or you can choose not to believe and remain outside God's forgiveness. Neutrality is not an option. Those who refuse His sacrifice will mourn forever. If you have never trusted Jesus for salvation, perhaps today is the day you move from death to life. **By faith, believe that Jesus's precious blood powerfully cleanses the darkest corners of your heart and frees you to experience a vibrant relationship with God.** Jesus died so we might live. What will you do with Jesus?

43. Buried with Christ: Colossians 2:12-14

44. New life in Christ: Romans 6; Colossians 2:1-14

9. Describe the lessons or encouragement you draw from Mary's announcement to Jesus's disciples in verse 18.

Fourth Day: Read John 20:19-23.

Jesus encountered His fearful disciples.

10. a. How did the Lord show His kindness and desire to build His disciples' faith?
- b. In what ways has the Lord shown you kindness to build your faith?
11. Give several proofs that Jesus's physical body was resurrected. Why is this evidence important? (See also Luke 24:40-43; Acts 1:3; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.)
12. Explain how the Lord's commission to His disciples in verses 21-23 relates to the following:
- Their honor and opportunity
 - Their authority
 - Their power to accomplish His commission
 - Their message

Lesson 27 Notes

John 20

Focus Verse

“Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (John 20:29)

Outline

- Encounters with the Empty Tomb – John 20:1-10
- Encounters with the Risen Lord – John 20:11-31

Engage

Pivotal encounters set the course of our lives. A first date, a newborn child, a job interview, the exchange of marriage vows, or a farewell to a loved one represent significant milestones that shape us. Each is memorable. These destiny-defining moments create a textured mountain range of experience and emotion that mold the relief map of our unique lives.

Jesus Christ’s death sent His disciples into the depths of dark despair. They hid in fear, paralyzed by an uncertain future. The disciples had no idea they would soon witness a gloriously empty, suddenly vacant tomb. As a new day dawned, first Mary Magdalene, then John and Peter, and then the rest of the disciples encountered their risen Savior. One by one, they became witnesses of the greatest news the world would ever know—Jesus is alive! **The empty tomb proclaims Jesus’s victory over death.** The risen Christ gives transforming new life to all who turn to Him for salvation. God the Father vindicated His Son when Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.

✦ Encounters with the Empty Tomb – John 20:1-10

After a full day and restless night mourning the loss of their beloved Shepherd and Savior, a new day offered little to lighten the grief of Jesus’s most faithful followers. The image of their longed-for Messiah, mangled and lifeless on a cross, remained fresh and raw in their broken hopes and hearts. They did not expect the unimaginable victory and reunion that awaited them as the sun rose on that morning.

Mary Magdalene – 20:1-2

Mary Magdalene, after obediently waiting Sabbath’s end, made her way to Jesus’s tomb before Sunday’s sunrise. Accompanied by other women,¹ Mary brought spices they had prepared

1. With other women: Mark 16:1

to anoint Jesus's body. Whether unaware of the myrrh and aloes provided by Nicodemus² or simply eager to perform one final service for the Lord they loved, Mary and her friends discovered something amazing.

To her shock, Mary saw the heavy stone sealing Jesus's tomb had been rolled away. She concluded that someone, perhaps grave robbers, had stolen Jesus's body. She ran quickly to inform the disciples of the distressing news.

John and Peter – 20:3-7

The Sprint to the Tomb – 20:3-5

Upon hearing Mary's news, Peter and "the other disciple, the one Jesus loved," ran to the tomb. The "other disciple" refers to John, who never mentions himself by name in his Gospel. Interestingly, John noted that he outran Peter. **Upon arriving at the empty tomb, John stooped to look into the low entrance without entering, taking in the details before his stunned eyes.**

The Scene at the Tomb – 20:6-7

While John continued to peer into the empty tomb, Peter arrived and entered without hesitation. John details the condition of Jesus's grave clothes that he and Peter observed. **The strips of linen that Joseph and Nicodemus had so carefully wrapped around Jesus's body lay right where He had been laid to rest.** The noteworthy orderliness of the linen strips and nearby head cloth communicated something important. A grave robber would never have left the linen strips in this condition or have taken Jesus's unwrapped body. These details seemed to indicate that Jesus had passed through the grave clothes, leaving them undisturbed as He rose from the dead.

The Response of John – 20:8-10

As John entered the tomb, his growing faith took a mighty leap forward: "He saw and believed." Scripture clearly indicates that Jesus's disciples had neither understood Jesus's death nor anticipated His resurrection.³ However, at the empty tomb, the seed of understanding planted in the fertile soil of John's heart took root. Jesus had risen from the dead!

John also noted that he and the disciples did not yet fully comprehend Scripture's teaching that "Jesus had to rise from the dead."⁴ A deeper understanding awaited them. After time with Jesus following His resurrection⁵ and Pentecost,⁶ the Holy Spirit would expand their understanding and empower the apostles to boldly proclaim Old Testament prophecy⁷ and its fulfillment.⁸

2. Nicodemus's care: John 19:39

3. Slow to believe: Luke 24:25-27, 44-46

4. Prophecy of Jesus's resurrection: Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:38-41; 16:4; 17:23; Luke 11:29-32; John 2:19

5. Post-resurrection appearances: Acts 1:3

6. Pentecost: Acts 2

7. Prophecy of no decay: Psalm 16:10

8. Fulfillment of no decay: Acts 2:25-31; 13:34-35

Jesus's Resurrection: The Witnesses and Evidence

Supporting evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ surpasses many events recorded in ancient history. The testimony of many witnesses and the detailed accounts compiled shortly after the events offer compelling proof that Jesus rose from the dead.

- The disciples expressed no hope of Jesus's physical resurrection before it happened.¹
- The tomb was empty when the angel rolled away the stone and announced Jesus's resurrection, despite the Roman soldiers assigned to seal and guard the tomb.²
- Had Jesus not risen, the Roman and Jewish leaders would have found evidence. Instead, the chief priests bribed the guards to say they fell asleep on duty.³
- The grave clothes remained in place in the empty tomb where Jesus's body was laid.⁴
- At least two women physically clasped Jesus's feet and worshiped Him.⁵
- Jesus showed and allowed His disciples to touch His wounds.⁶
- Jesus walked, talked, taught, and ate with believers at various times and places.⁷
- Jesus appeared to 500 at one time. When Paul published this fact, most of the 500 were still alive to confirm the truth.⁸
- Many witnessed Jesus ascend bodily into the clouds of heaven.⁹
- The witnesses to the truth of Jesus's bodily resurrection gladly suffered ridicule, persecution, and even death.¹⁰ No witnesses suffer willingly for what they know to be untrue.
- The changed lives of believers offer enduring evidence of Jesus's resurrection.¹¹

1. **No hope:** Luke 24:13-24

2. **Sealed, guarded tomb:** Matthew 27:62-66; 28:2-4; Luke 24:1-10

3. **Bribed guards:** Matthew 28:12-15

4. **Grave clothes:** John 20:6-8

5. **Clasped:** Matthew 28:1, 9

6. **Wounds shown:** Luke 24:37-43; John 20:27

7. **Met believers:** Luke 24:13-34; John 20:19, 24, 26; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7

8. **Met 500:** 1 Corinthians 15:6

9. **Jesus's ascension:** Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-11

10. **Persecution:** Acts 2:1-41; 4:1-31; 5:17-31; 12:2; Revelation 1:9

11. **Believers' lives:** 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:9

✦ Encounters with the Risen Lord – John 20:11-31

At this point, the empty tomb raised many questions. Where was Jesus's body? What did all this mean? **Soon, Jesus would not only provide the answers but replace mourning with rejoicing.** First with Mary, then with the frightened disciples, and finally with a doubting Thomas, Jesus progressively and joyously shared His victory over death with His beloved brothers and sisters of faith.

From Tears to Joy: Mary – 20:11-18

Mary Arrives Crying – 20:11-15

John's account of these events differs slightly from the other Gospels and may represent a synopsis of the events surrounding Jesus's resurrection. Though the accounts regarding Jesus's resurrection differ among the four Gospels, they harmonize in a complementary rather than contradictory manner. **After Peter and John examined the tomb and returned to the disciples, Mary stood again outside the tomb.** Bewildered and downcast, she looked into the tomb with tear-filled eyes and saw two angels. One angel sat at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus's body had once been. The angels asked Mary, "Why are you crying?" Her answer indicated more concern about locating Jesus than about the two individuals at the tomb. "They have taken my Lord away," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

Mary turned around and Jesus stood before her. Not recognizing Jesus, Mary assumed He was the gardener. **Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"** Still overcome by grief, Mary replied, "If you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him."

Mary Leaves Rejoicing – 20:16-18

Jesus simply said her name: "Mary." Jesus spoke one word and she immediately knew who He was. **Instantly, Mary recognized the voice of her Shepherd calling her name.**⁹ She poured out her love and joy for her Master, also in one word: "Teacher."

"Do Not Hold on to Me."

Jesus's words to Mary can be difficult to interpret. **Jesus's relationship with His followers was changing through this time between His resurrection and ascension.** He would soon ascend to heaven and would no longer dwell with them physically. Jesus would appear many times after He was resurrected, strengthening the faith of His followers.¹⁰ Mary and Jesus's closest followers would learn to live by faith rather than by touch and sight.

After His ascension, Jesus's relationship with all who believe in Him would be far closer than ever before.¹¹ He would, through the Holy Spirit, come to live forever within them.¹² **Jesus's purpose for every believer is permanent communion with Him.** The Apostle Paul proclaimed this new relationship by saying, "The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."¹³

"Go and Tell."

Mary Magdalene was among the first to see, talk to, and touch the resurrected Jesus. However, embracing Jesus always carries responsibility. **The Lord immediately gave Mary a task: to tell others of His resurrection and ascension.** Jesus entrusted Mary with a profound message, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." All people who believe in Jesus are privileged to tell others about Him.

9. **The Shepherd's voice:** John 10:3-4

10. **Encountering Jesus:** Matthew 28:8-10; Luke 24:39; John 20:27

11. **Relationship with Jesus:** 1 John 4:13

12. **Indwelling Holy Spirit:** John 7:38-39; 16:5-16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 1:27

13. **Live by faith:** Galatians 2:20

Mary wasted no time. She returned to the disciples with the glorious and miraculous news: “I have seen the Lord!” She reported what she had seen and heard. After Jesus’s ascension, He would cause all His people to see and to share in His glory. **Made in God’s image and redeemed by Jesus’s blood, believers are children of the Father and heirs to all He possesses.**¹⁴

From Fear to Courage: The Disciples – 20:19-23

Cowering – 20:19a

This first Easter morning found Jesus’s disciples overloaded with information. Though they had not expected Jesus to rise from the dead, His tomb sat empty. Peter and John reported the oddly positioned grave clothes. Mary Magdalene delivered the radiant news of the Lord’s message. **Despite the good news, fear gripped the disciples as they huddled together behind locked doors.**

Comforted – 20:19b-20

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst. **Without entering through the locked door, Jesus stood among them and extended the customary Jewish greeting of *Shalom*, “Peace be with you!”**

Peace was precisely what the disciples desperately needed.¹⁵ **Jesus answered their fears with His peace.** The disciples had seen Jesus arrested by Roman soldiers and had fled in fear. Jesus displayed sensitivity to their searching hearts and questioning minds. The Lord opened His hands so they could see the nail marks. He showed them His pierced side.

Profound peace abounds when we encounter Jesus and believe in Him. Forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with God is real—not wishful thinking.

Just four days earlier, Jesus prophetically said, “But I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”¹⁶ **The Lord’s presence filled the disciples with overwhelming gladness.** Believers today can experience this same joy. Profound peace abounds when we encounter Jesus and believe in Him. Forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with God are real—not wishful thinking. Jesus’s physical death and bodily resurrection provide the source for peace and joy that transcend everything that causes us alarm.

Commissioned – 20:21-23

To a Mission Grounded in Peace – 20:21a

Jesus’s provision of peace invites more than a personal sense of refuge from fear or trouble. **Jesus establishes our personal peace with God to propel us toward other people who desperately need Him.**¹⁷ God equips believers as ambassadors of His peace, a priceless blessing to us and to others. Jesus’s peace includes the blessed assurance of complete forgiveness of our sin,¹⁸ new life in Him,¹⁹ the indwelling Holy Spirit,²⁰ eternal security,²¹ the fruit

14. **Heirs:** Romans 8:16-17

15. **Startled and frightened:** Luke 24:37-38

16. **Promise of joy:** John 16:22

17. **Peace with God:** Romans 5:1-2

18. **Forgiveness of sin:** 1 John 1:9

19. **New life:** John 3:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17

20. **Indwelling Holy Spirit:** 1 Corinthians 3:16

21. **Eternal security:** John 10:27-29

Resounding and Indisputable Victory over Death

The Doctrine of Resurrection

The indisputable fact of Jesus's resurrection displays glorious proof of God's sovereignty over all creation. The One who was with God in the beginning and creates life from nothing¹ has overcome death and now reigns with the Father in heaven.² Jesus's resurrection demonstrated God's validation of Jesus's mission and all He claimed about Himself.

Through faith in Christ, all believers are raised into resurrected life with Him.³ Jesus promised that all who believe in Him will be given new life and saved from God's condemnation of their sin.⁴ Believers await future resurrection in imperishable, glorified bodies but also walk in new life today. The Holy Spirit raises the spiritually dead to abundant life and implants new desires and priorities within them. God supplies the power to overcome sin and point others to our Savior.

To refuse to believe in Christ means remaining dead in sin. To turn away from Jesus necessitates accepting the judgment we deserve. There is no hope in anything or anyone but Jesus. Without Jesus, death reigns without hope of deliverance.

Faith in Christ's resurrection breathes new life and hope into every believer. God's children look forward to joining heaven's chorus of fellow believers—past, present, and future—in eternal worship in the presence of our Lord. The Holy Spirit allows believers to radiate the joy and beauty of Jesus, drawing others to faith in Him.

1. **In the beginning:** John 1:1-5

2. **Reigns with the Father:** Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 11:15-18

3. **Raised into eternal life:** John 6:40; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:9-14

4. **New life in Christ:** John 3:16-17

of the Spirit,²² gifts of the Spirit,²³ the full armor of God,²⁴ and eternal life with God.²⁵ The peace believers know and experience rests on unshakable truth.

Jesus's peace includes conscious possession of His resources—God's gift of Himself and all we need to fulfill His call. The Lord's invitation to serve Him comes with a commission of peace. Jesus promises His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light."²⁶ Fruitful lives of serving the Lord and eternal victory, despite suffering or obstacles, rest on the certainty of Christ's resurrection.²⁷

To a Mission Shared with Jesus – 20:21b

Just as God the Father sent His Son into the world, so Jesus sends His children to carry on His mission. Sharing Jesus's message means sharing in His sufferings as well as His power, presence, and peace.²⁸ When God's people face some of the same opposition Jesus faced, He

22. **Fruit of the Spirit:** Galatians 5:22-23

23. **Gifts of the Spirit:** Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 28; Ephesians 4:11

24. **Armor of God:** Ephesians 6:10-18

25. **Eternal life:** John 3:16-17; 5:24; Revelation 3:5; 1 John 5:13

26. **Jesus's yoke:** Matthew 11:30

27. **Blessings of faith:** 1 Corinthians 15:58

28. **Sharing:** Matthew 10; Philippians 3:10-11

equips them with the same resources with which He engaged the world—the Word, prayer, the Holy Spirit, and an abiding relationship with the Father. He promises present satisfaction and eternal rewards to those who follow His will and ways.²⁹ The privilege to bless others, just as Jesus did, comes from heaven into the earthly lives of His children.

To a Mission Fueled by the Holy Spirit's Power – 20:22

When Jesus calls you, He empowers you to fulfill His commission to share the gospel. Jesus breathed His resurrection life into the disciples. Here, in their hiding place, Jesus offered His disciples a foretaste of Pentecost.³⁰ The disciples would carry out their commission in and through the Holy Spirit, whom the Father gives to all who believe in Christ.³¹

To a Mission Based on Jesus's Authority – 20:23

No human has the authority to forgive sin or remove God's judgment from another person.³²

Jesus came to carry out the work of redemption and to send His people to declare what He accomplished on the cross. The Holy Spirit empowers believers with divine authority to proclaim the gospel's call to repent, believe, and receive forgiveness. Accompanying the commission to share the gospel, God gives believers His authority to declare forgiveness to all who repent and believe.

God also gives believers the authority to warn those who reject Jesus Christ that they will die in their sins.³³ All people are accountable to God,³⁴ and God's wrath remains on those who refuse to believe.³⁵ Sharing the truth of the gospel is the great privilege and solemn responsibility of every believer.

From Doubt to Faith: Thomas – 20:24-29

Thomas's Crippling Unbelief – 20:24-25

Thomas stands out as a devoted follower among Jesus's 11 remaining disciples. **But in the wake of his Lord's death, debilitating doubt consumed Thomas.** Earlier, Thomas begged Jesus not to go to Jerusalem, knowing His life was in danger.³⁶ He was right. Now that Jesus was dead, perhaps an "I-told-you-so" attitude clouded Thomas's willingness to accept the testimony of Mary, the other women, or the 10 brothers of faith with whom he had spent the past three years following the Lord.

To Thomas, news of the resurrection seemed too good to be true. Absent that first night Jesus appeared to the others, Thomas closed his mind to convincing testimonies, Jesus's promises, and the Scriptures. **Thomas stubbornly declared, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."**

Thomas exemplifies people who refuse to examine the evidence. Reliable people whom Thomas knew and loved told him Jesus had stood among them in the locked room, eaten with them, and displayed His wounds. As earlier with Peter,³⁷ a humbling failure would catapult Thomas forward in faith and utter dependence on His Lord.

29. **Jesus's promises:** John 4:34; 12:24; 15:5, 16; 17:1-5

30. **Pentecost:** Acts 2

31. **Power of the Holy Spirit:** John 14:16-17; 16:7; Romans 8:9

32. **Forgiveness:** Matthew 9:2-6; Mark 2:7

33. **Die in sins:** John 8:24

34. **All accountable to God:** Hebrews 4:13

35. **God's wrath:** John 3:36

36. **Thomas's warning:** John 11:8, 16

37. **Peter's denial:** Matthew 26:69-74

Thomas's Growing Faith – 20:26-29

Proving his basic loyalty, Thomas was with the disciples a full week after declaring his doubts. Once again, Jesus suddenly entered the room and granted His peace to the gathering. **Jesus pursued Thomas to strengthen his faltering faith.** Human weakness never repels or surprises Jesus. With clarity and gentleness, Jesus offered Thomas the proof he desired.

Despite Thomas's unbelief, Jesus still loved him and called him to believe. Jesus entreated Thomas, saying, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Jesus confronted Thomas with a direct command bearing eternal consequences: continue a life of deadly unbelief or choose a life of obedient faith in the One who offers eternal life.³⁸

The Lord precisely understood the underlying causes of Thomas's unbelief. Jesus repeated the words Thomas had spoken. What Thomas saw drained him of his unbelief. **The light of God's glory radiating in Jesus's face generated a glorious exclamation reserved only for the Almighty: "My Lord and my God!"** In an instant, Thomas believed in Jesus with all his heart.

John believed before he saw the risen Lord.³⁹ He saw the physical evidence of the empty tomb and grave clothes. Thomas missed the initial opportunity to believe in response to the testimony of other witnesses. **Now, however, Thomas physically saw the Lord, repented, and believed.** Jesus's response to Thomas demonstrates His grace in pursuing us.

Jesus's words to Thomas speak directly to every reader of this Gospel—to all generations of believers. He tells us, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." **Jesus pours rich blessings on all who believe in Him through the testimony of His Word and Spirit.**

In Christ, we share His life, His joy, His peace, His purpose, His Father, His heaven, and His eternity.

John's Purpose – 20:30-31

John could not include all of Jesus's countless miracles and precious words in his Gospel. He would later write, "The whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" if all Jesus did were recorded.⁴⁰ **John chose every sign and word he recorded with one overarching purpose.** He wrote so we would believe Jesus is the Messiah and the unique Son of God and, through faith in Jesus, receive new life in His name.

Eternal life involves more than just deliverance from sin and destruction. God wants us to experience a new quality of life that begins now and never ends. New life in Christ is life to the full⁴¹ with Jesus forever. In Christ, we share His life, His joy, His peace, His purpose, His Father, His heaven, and His eternity. This is God's destiny for His people. It is the purpose for which God created you. This new, abundant life comes because of the resurrection. **The empty tomb proclaims Jesus's victory over death.** With generous love, Jesus shares that victory with His children.

38. **Choose life:** Deuteronomy 30:19-20; John 3:16-17; 14:6; 15:1-8

39. **John believed:** John 20:8

40. **Jesus's works:** John 21:25

41. **Life to the full:** John 10:10

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Mary Magdalene approached her Lord's burial place downcast, in despair, and unaware that her greatest joy waited just around the corner. Confused by the rolled-away stone and empty tomb, two of Jesus's closest disciples soon joined Mary. **With intentionality and tender love, Jesus personally allowed real people to reliably witness His resurrection.**

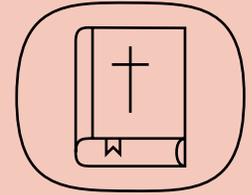
Gradually, Jesus encountered His loved ones and stabilized their fainting faith with proof of His resurrected life. Jesus deliberately transformed Mary's grief-filled morning into an assignment to deliver a hope-infused message. Jesus entered a locked room where His disciples hid in fear to call them to peace and joy. Jesus confronted Thomas's specific doubts with faith-building proof. Jesus Christ can break any barrier standing against belief in Him. **This is the power of the One who has defeated death.** Grief, fear, perplexity, and doubts cannot hinder the One who came to save.

Apply It

The empty tomb shocked Mary, John, and Peter, despite Jesus's previously stated promises. Who would imagine that ultimate victory would come through death? Would anyone expect the dead to come back to life? We are also invited to peer into the empty tomb and ponder its significance. Jesus's resurrection promises that death, our worst enemy, has been defeated. Jesus rose so that our dead hearts could come alive in Him. The risen Jesus calls you by name. He calls you to trust Him for eternal salvation and through life's challenges. He will steady your doubts and fortify your faith. **The risen Christ brings life and hope to God's people.**

Jesus's disciples witnessed the wonder of Jesus's life yet cowered in fear when He died. Their risen Lord showed up to fill them with faith, joy, power, and authority to represent Him to the world. They would courageously face opposition while embracing the joy of serving their Master. Like the disciples, believers can easily lock themselves away from a world that desperately needs Christ. Will you hear Jesus's commission: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"? Where is Jesus sending you? **The resurrected Savior commissions His children to take the life-giving gospel to the world.** Will you go where He leads?

Like Thomas, there may be times when questions and doubts leave us paralyzed. Nothing that troubles you surprises God. Jesus will meet you right where you struggle. **Our relationship with Jesus is intimate and personal.** Will you listen and learn from Him—in His Word, in prayer, and in your community of believers? Your daily encounter with the eternal, risen Jesus offers glory no grave, heartache, or enemy can steal. Will you believe?



John's Epilogue

LESSON
SCRIPTURE
JOHN 21

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 27 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What points from the lecture helped you understand the impact of Christ's resurrection?
What does His resurrection mean to you personally?

2. How did the notes impact your life and give you strength this past week?

Second Day: Read John 21:1-14.

Jesus met the disciples after a long night of fishing.

3. Describe the circumstances the disciples encountered before they went fishing and as they fished.

7.
 - a. Describe the conversation, including Jesus's questions, Peter's replies, and Jesus's commands.

 - b. Why do you think this conversation took place in front of the other disciples?

 - c. What changes do you see in Peter's relationship with Jesus?

8. Give examples of how God calls His people to fulfill Jesus's command to Peter today. How is God leading you to obey His command?

Fourth Day: Read John 21:18-23.

Jesus commanded Peter to follow Him.

9. How did Jesus describe Peter's future?

10.
 - a. What clarity might Peter have been seeking in his question about John?

 - b. What did Jesus say about John, and what lessons do you learn from Jesus's reply?

11. How might the Lord's rebuke of Peter be applied to His people today, including you?

Fifth Day: Read John 21:24-25.

John testified of Jesus.

12. Verse 24 may have been written by others to validate John's testimony. What makes John's testimony believable for you?

13. From verse 25, how does John describe the magnitude of Jesus's time on earth?

14. What do you most want to tell others about Jesus, and how will you share it?

Sixth Day: Review John 21.

Jesus equips His people to do His work.

15. How have the truths in John 21 provided for you or equipped you to serve Christ?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: John 21

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lesson 28 Notes

John 21

Focus Verse

“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25)

Outline

- Jesus’s Catch of Fish – John 21:1-14
- Jesus’s Command to Feed His Sheep – John 21:15-17
- Jesus’s Call to Follow Him – John 21:18-25

Engage

What most deters you from speaking for and serving Jesus? Are you afraid you might fail? Life regularly exposes our weakness and inadequacy. We can feel either proud or deflated when we compare ourselves with others. Does fear that you could never say or do things right keep you from stepping out for the Lord? **Jesus returned to heaven and left His work in the hands of His flawed but empowered people.** What a privilege! What a responsibility! How do we enter wholeheartedly into God’s work despite our frailty?

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He prepared His disciples to carry on the mission of His kingdom. He met them where they were and prepared them for where they would go in His name. Jesus does the same for His children today. He provides physically, spiritually, and practically so believers might lead others to saving faith. **Jesus equips His people to do His work.** Our weaknesses and failures do not hinder His eternal purposes. God works through flawed people who rely on His power and go forward in His name.

Jesus’s disciples faced unexpected challenges when Jesus died. They struggled to process all that had happened. After He rose again, Jesus sent His puzzled disciples to Galilee.¹ True to His word, He met them there. **Jesus helped, fed, and then equipped His faltering disciples with promises and encouragement regarding their future work in His name.**

John’s Gospel begins with his prologue² and ends with an epilogue—John 21. Some scholars believe someone other than John added words to the epilogue to validate the authenticity of John’s account, based on the “we” in verse 24. Jewish law required two or more witnesses to validate testimony as reliable.³ John’s authorship of the entire epilogue has also been defended.

1. **Go to Galilee:** Matthew 26:32; 28:7, 10

2. **John’s prologue:** John 1:1-18

3. **Corroborating witnesses:** Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 26:60; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28

Regardless, the events and conversations in John 21 present an important message for all who follow Jesus. **This chapter completes John's Gospel in beautiful balance with his prologue.**

✦ Jesus's Catch of Fish – John 21:1-14

A Failed Attempt and Empty Nets – 21:1-3

Seven disciples gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had told His disciples that He would see them in Galilee. Peter announced, "I'm going out to fish." Did Peter's action indicate a decision to return to his former occupation or just his choice of a familiar activity amid uncertainty? We cannot know for sure, but the disciples waiting with him joined the expedition. Peter's leadership and influence stood out among the group. They immediately boarded the boat and set sail. Hours passed yet they caught nothing. Likely worn out after a disappointing fishing trip, the disciples rowed toward the shore at the light of dawn.

An Instructed Attempt and Overflowing Nets – 21:4-6

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, unrecognized by His disciples. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" Jesus asked this question not to gain information but to prepare the disciples for His provision.

When they acknowledged their fruitless fishing, Jesus said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." Though they had not yet recognized Jesus, the disciples heeded His advice. Almost immediately, they felt a tug so heavy they could not draw the net into the boat. Their previously empty net was filled with an abundant catch of fish. **Jesus provided what their human efforts could not.**

A Miraculous Catch – 21:7-8

Without hesitation, John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Perhaps John recalled an earlier life-changing event. Three years earlier, John, his brother James, and Peter faced empty nets after a long night of fishing. When Jesus told them where to fish, their nets broke and their boats began to sink under the weight of the miraculous catch of fish. The men pulled to shore, left their boats, and followed Jesus from that day forward.⁴ The disciples' previous experience set the context for this one.

Peter, upon hearing John's exclamation, immediately put on his outer garment and jumped in the water. He swam and waded toward His Lord until he reached the shore. **All that mattered to Peter was being near Jesus.** The remaining disciples followed in the boat and slowly towed the heavy, unbroken net.

4. Following Jesus: Luke 5:1-11

Breakfast with Jesus – 21:9-14

Landing on shore, the disciples saw a fire of burning coals with fish cooking on it and some bread. The Gospels record a similar fire one other time—when Peter denied Jesus as he warmed himself by the fire in the high priest’s courtyard.⁵ Perhaps this fire reminded Peter of that painful night and prepared him for Jesus’s words recorded later in this chapter.

With the aroma of fire-cooked fish in the air, Jesus called to the men, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” Peter returned to the boat and helped drag the heavy net ashore. **Despite the weight of 153 large fish, the net remained un torn.** John’s accounting of the exact number of fish verifies his presence as an eyewitness.

Jesus called to the men to “come and have breakfast.” Though the disciples recognized Jesus, none of them sought confirmation of His identity or understanding about His resurrected state by asking Him the question, “Who are you?” As He fed them bread and fish, did they remember a prior miracle that included bread and fish?⁶ As Jesus prepared His disciples for His soon-coming departure, this breakfast reminded them He would meet their needs as they continued His work.⁷ We can only imagine the conversation around the fire as they ate together.

Jesus brings ultimate satisfaction to all who call Him their Lord and Savior.

This scene portrays the third appearance of the risen Christ to the disciples in John’s Gospel.⁸ They would soon carry on God’s work after Jesus ascended to heaven. This experience reinforced the stabilizing security and comfort only Jesus can offer. Surely this seaside breakfast prepared them to recognize they needed Jesus’s presence at all times, even when He was not physically in their midst.⁹ **Jesus showed these men His desire to satisfy His servants with His presence.** Jesus brings ultimate satisfaction to all who call Him their Lord and Savior.

✦ Jesus’s Command to Feed His Sheep – John 21:15-17

On the night of Jesus’s arrest, Peter had boasted before all the disciples that even if all others fell away, he would not. **Jesus warned Peter that, far from remaining faithful, he would deny Jesus three times before the next dawn.**¹⁰ Peter rejected Jesus’s words and claimed he would die before he disowned Jesus. The other disciples joined in with the same vow. Later that same night, Peter denied Jesus three times.¹¹

Jesus knew that Peter, rightly humbled by his failure, needed personal and public affirmation to move forward. As Jesus had predicted, Peter indeed denied Him three times. Jesus now offered Peter three opportunities to reaffirm his love and commitment. Full of mercy and grace, Jesus restored Peter, preparing him to carry on as a leader of Jesus’s apostles and the early Church.¹²

5. **Peter’s denial:** Luke 22:54-60; John 18:17-18

6. **Bread and fish:** John 6:1-15

7. **Provision of needs:** Matthew 6:25-33; Philipians 4:19

8. **Third appearance to disciples:** John 20:19-23, 26-29

9. **Jesus’s presence with His people:** John 14:15-18; 16:4-7

10. **Peter’s boasting and Jesus’s warning:** Matthew 26:33-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34

11. **Peter’s denial:** Matthew 26:69-75

12. **Peter’s leadership:** Acts 1-15

Jesus's Post-Resurrection Appearances

Resurrection Sunday, in and near Jerusalem

- **To Mary Magdalene** in the garden outside the tomb; early morning (John 20:11-18)
- **To Mary Magdalene and the other Mary** returning from the tomb; early morning (Matthew 28:1-10)
- **To two disciples** on the road to Emmaus, about 7 miles (11 km) from Jerusalem; late afternoon (Luke 24:13-35)
- **To Peter privately** (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)
- **To all the apostles except Thomas** in a locked room; evening (John 20:19-23)

A Week Later, in Jerusalem

- **To all the apostles, including Thomas**, in a locked room (John 20:26-29)

Later, Likely in Galilee

- **To the 11 apostles and a group of more than 500 believers** (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- **To the apostles and others** on a mountain; perhaps the same occasion as 1 Corinthians 15:6 (Matthew 28:16-20)
- **To James**, probably in Galilee (1 Corinthians 15:7)

The 40th Day, near Bethany

- **Jesus was taken up** bodily into heaven as the apostles watched (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-10)

On the Road to Damascus

- **To Paul** (Acts 9:1-16; 1 Corinthians 15:8)

Future

- **The Lord Jesus will return** bodily and visibly to stand on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7)

Jesus's Questions to Peter – 21:15-16

Imagine Peter's emotions as Jesus's attention turned toward him. Peter's recent experience denying Jesus certainly loomed large. **Jesus asked a well-aimed question: "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"** What was Jesus asking Peter? Did Peter love Jesus more than the other disciples did? Did his love for Jesus exceed his love for fishing? He had earlier boasted of superior devotion. Whatever Jesus meant, He deeply pierced Peter's heart.

No Longer Enemies

The Doctrine of Reconciliation

Jesus offered reconciliation and restoration to Peter, who had denied Him three times.

Reconciliation describes the process by which parties at odds with each other are restored and brought together again. We need to be reconciled to God because our sins separate us from Him.

In His grace, God sent Jesus Christ—His own Son—to bear sin’s penalty on behalf of Peter’s sin and ours. Though sin blocks humanity’s fellowship with God, Jesus removed sin’s curse when He shed His blood on the cross to cleanse all who believe in Him.

Without Jesus, we remain estranged from God, placed under His wrath, and face nothing but His just condemnation. Like Peter, we can be reconciled to God.¹ We are called by God to care for His sheep and be agents of reconciliation for others, as Peter was.² Believers can share the greatest news of all time—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To reject Christ’s work of reconciliation leads to utter hopelessness and eternal peril.

Without Jesus’s intervention on our behalf, we remain God’s enemies. No human effort can sufficiently bridge the gap between sinful people and holy God. Only Jesus can reconcile us to God.³

Accepting Christ’s reconciliatory work on the cross brings peace that surpasses all understanding. Though we still stumble like Peter, Jesus has borne the punishment for our sin and offers the way of repentance and restoration. We long for the day we see Jesus face-to-face and no longer endure sin, sorrow, or tears.⁴ Jesus reconciled Peter to Himself and does the same for us. Our reconciliation rests solely on Jesus and His completed work. He calls us to follow Him with repentant hearts and receive His sacrifice on our behalf. His victory becomes our victory.

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1. **Reconciled to God:** Romans 5:18; Colossians 1:19-20
 2. **Agents of reconciliation:** 2 Corinthians 5:18-19
 3. **No longer enemies:** Romans 5:7-10
 4. **New heaven and new earth:** Revelation 21:1-5

Jesus asked Peter this question twice. **Both times Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”** Peter’s simple response no longer claimed superiority over any of the disciples. Hearing his confession of love, Jesus exhorted Peter to feed His lambs and take care of His sheep.

Jesus’s Final Question – 21:17

A third and final time, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Once confident of his own love, zeal, and faithfulness, Peter had declared, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”¹³ Now Peter painfully realized the weakness of his imagined strength. He knew that Jesus

13. To whom shall we go?: John 6:67-68

intimately and accurately discerned the hidden truth about his fainting heart. Peter humbly replied, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Two Greek words used for love in the New Testament are *agapao* (*agape*) and *phileo*. *Agapao* is often considered a purer and higher love, while *phileo* refers to brotherly affection. **John seems to use the two Greek words interchangeably in his writing.** Therefore, the importance of different usages in verses 15-17 may be regarded as minimal. For example, John used both Greek words to refer to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”¹⁴ In this conversation, John used *agapao* in the first two questions. *Phileo* is used in Jesus’s third question and all of Peter’s responses. In Aramaic, possibly the original language of this conversation, there is no distinction in the use of the word for love.

In three successive responses, Jesus commissioned Peter to lead and nurture His people: “Feed my lambs”; “Take care of my sheep”; and “Feed my sheep.” These indicate Peter’s future role of leadership for Christ’s cause. God can use flawed people in His plan because they depend on His power and strength, not their own. Those who love Jesus serve Him by serving others.

✦ Jesus’s Call to Follow Him – John 21:18-25

Jesus’s Plan for Peter – 21:18-19

Jesus had designed His questions to restore Peter’s position of leadership and commission him to shepherd God’s people.¹⁵ Jesus now revealed the future for Peter. Despite Peter’s previous vulnerability, God would enable and empower Peter to serve Him. In Peter’s younger years, his choices seemed to be his own. However, Peter’s future would involve persecution and martyrdom. **The frailty of Peter’s early commitment and limited understanding would mature into a life and ministry that counted commitment to Jesus more important than anything else.** Jesus ended His prophetic words to Peter with a simple command, “Follow me!” Though the journey God directs may include suffering, following Jesus to it and through it is always right.

One day, Peter would willingly stretch out his hands to be bound as Christ’s had been bound. His own interests and priorities would yield to God’s higher call. Some sources suggest that Peter was crucified around AD 64 in the wave of intense persecution under the Roman Emperor Nero. People who follow Jesus offer humble submission and obedience to the Lord, who paid the price for their sin. Peter fed Jesus’s sheep for the remainder of his life, and his letters recorded in Scripture¹⁶ prove that Jesus’s power enabled a repentant sinner to feed His beloved flock.

Jesus’s Plan for Others – 21:20-22

After hearing Jesus’s prediction of the sacrificial commitment in his future, Peter’s eyes landed on “the disciple whom Jesus loved”—John. Whether motivated by curiosity or concern, Peter asked the question rising in his mind: “Lord, what about him?”

Jesus’s response came swiftly and clearly, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” **Peter had his marching orders; his primary concern must**

14. **The disciple whom Jesus loved:** John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20

15. **Commissioned to shepherd:** Acts 1:15; 2:14

16. **Peter’s letters:** 1 Peter; 2 Peter

simply be following Jesus. Peter would not flourish by comparing his path to that of others but by trusting God with his unique call to obedience.

God has an individual and personal course charted for each of His children. He designs His plan to call each believer to flourish and live life to the full,¹⁷ whether through suffering or perceived success. **God customizes His call to faith to challenge, encourage, and stimulate spiritual growth in tailor-made ways.** Like Peter and John, all believers have different gifts, personalities, and ministries. God used both Peter and John in mighty ways. Both men glorified God as they served and testified to the truth of Jesus.

John's Clarification – 21:23

The words Jesus spoke to Peter about John likely fueled speculation that John would not die.

John addressed this circulating rumor by clarifying the exact words spoken by Jesus. John redirected the focus away from himself or Peter and toward Jesus's return to earth, the next great event to unfold in God's plan of redemption. Every believer joyfully anticipates future restoration when Jesus returns. Until then, God calls His children to steadfastly seek Him. Though every Christian walks a unique path, Christ's followers unite in the glorious hope awaiting them.

John's Witness – 21:24-25

Some believe the closing words of John's Gospel may have been written by church elders who served under John as their seal of authenticity on the Gospel. Regardless, these verses underscore the reliability of what John wrote as well as the impossibility of fully reporting the vastness of Jesus's character and all He did. John states that, if written down, the words about Jesus would fill the world. The Gospels record a mere fraction of Jesus's profound impact while on earth. **Even so, the complete Word of God—the Bible—gives us all we need to know, love, and serve God.** Believers will discover and celebrate the countless aspects of Christ's glory for all eternity.

Living with God's revealed truth as a beacon for life, believers enjoy fellowship with Christ as they follow Him and feed His sheep. **Jesus equips His people to do His work.** He bids us to follow Him and provides everything we need to serve Him wholeheartedly.

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

John's epilogue closes his Gospel by affirming Jesus's presence with and provision for those who serve Him. While waiting at the Sea of Galilee, Peter and the other disciples decided to go fishing. They fished all night and caught nothing. As dawn lit the morning sky, the weary men headed toward the shore. Jesus, though unrecognized, told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. **The disciples experienced not only a miraculous catch of fish but recognized the risen Jesus in their presence.** Peter rushed to shore ahead of everyone but went back to

17. Life to the full: John 10:10

the boat to help bring the unexpected catch of fish ashore. The disciples enjoyed breakfast and fellowship with Jesus, who prepared and served their meal.

Following breakfast, Jesus publicly restored Peter to prepare him for future leadership.

Three times, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” and three times, Peter declared his love for Jesus. Three times, Jesus also exhorted Peter to feed and care for His sheep.

Reconciled and ready for the future, Jesus commanded Peter to follow Him even into death. John’s Gospel ends with a declaration: the works and worth of Jesus exceed the bounds of human expression.

Your effectiveness for the Lord never depends on your sense of adequacy or record of success.

Apply It

The confusion of Jesus’s disciples did not surprise Him. They did not understand what was happening or what was ahead. Jesus met His exhausted disciples with custom-fit intervention. God often allows us to face situations that rob us of self-sufficiency to show us our absolute dependence upon His provision. The abundant supply of fish that Jesus provided for these experienced yet empty-handed fishermen allowed them to recognize His nearness and care in a realm they understood. In what situation do you feel weary, confused, or empty-handed? What does trusting God to provide what you need look like for you? **God knows where you are and what you need most.** He has greater purposes for us than a carefree life. What Jesus desires for us far exceeds what we can supply for ourselves.

What past failures haunt your memory or limit you? Peter’s story offers hope. The same man who denied Jesus around a courtyard fire came full circle as Jesus offered him restoration and renewed purpose around a seaside fire. Your effectiveness for the Lord never depends on your sense of adequacy or record of success. **God can use your failures as a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block.** Peter’s past was marked by frailty and his future by suffering. Jesus allowed Peter to verbalize his love for Him, called Peter to selfless service, and reminded Peter to follow where He led. God never leaves His beloved children stuck in a place of shame. How will you trust God to bring fruit from your failures?

Jesus firmly instructed Peter to focus on his own path of obedience rather than comparing his future with John’s. **God has the right to lead you where He chooses; you have the responsibility to follow.** We never do well to compare our experiences of trauma, toil, or tragedy with the apparent comfort or ease of others. Can you rejoice when someone else gets the easy assignment, promotion, obedient children, or happy marriage? Do you struggle to understand why you face relatively little conflict or trouble while those you love suffer? A sideward glance at others cannot bring the needed perspective gained by a steady gaze on Jesus. God’s purpose for every believer is different. Can you trust that God’s plan for you will not look like God’s plan for anyone else? There is no better path through life than trusting God and following Jesus.

John’s Gospel could not capture all that could be said about Jesus. The incomparable, uncontainable, unstoppable worth of Christ cannot be overstated. Do you run out of things to say about Jesus? Keep walking with Jesus and talking about Him! **A lifetime of study and devotion cannot exhaust the wonder of the Savior we will unceasingly praise for all eternity.**

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