



## The Risen Lord (John 20)

*Notes: Week Twenty*

### John 20 (HCSB)

#### The Empty Tomb

**20** On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed<sup>[a]</sup> from the tomb. **2** So she ran to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!”

**3** At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. **4** The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. **5** Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, yet he did not go in. **6** Then, following him, Simon Peter came also. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. **7** The wrapping that had been on His head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. **8** The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then entered the tomb, saw, and believed. **9** For they still did not understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples went home again.

#### Mary Magdalene Sees the Risen Lord

**11** But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus’ body had been lying. **13** They said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“Because they’ve taken away my Lord,” she told them, “and I don’t know where they’ve put Him.” **14** Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus.

**15** “Woman,” Jesus said to her, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you’ve removed Him, tell me where you’ve put Him, and I will take Him away.”

**16** Jesus said, “Mary.”

Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, “*Rabbouni!*”<sup>[b]</sup>—which means “Teacher.”

**17** “Don’t cling to Me,” Jesus told her, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father—to My God and your God.”

**18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them what<sup>[c]</sup> He had said to her.

#### The Disciples Commissioned

**19** In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”

**20** Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” <sup>22</sup> After saying this, He breathed on them and said,<sup>[d]</sup> “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

### **Thomas Sees and Believes**

<sup>24</sup> But one of the Twelve, Thomas (called “Twin”), was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples kept telling him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “If I don’t see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe!”

<sup>26</sup> After eight days His disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace to you!”

<sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don’t be an unbeliever, but a believer.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas responded to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed.<sup>[e]</sup> Those who believe without seeing are blessed.”

### **The Purpose of This Gospel**

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,<sup>[f]</sup> and by believing you may have life in His name.

#### **Footnotes:**

- a. [John 20:1](#) Lit *She saw the stone removed*
- b. [John 20:16](#) *Rabbouni* is also used in [Mk 10:51](#)
- c. [John 20:18](#) Lit *these things*
- d. [John 20:22](#) Lit *He breathed and said to them*
- e. [John 20:29](#) Or *have you believed?* (as a question)
- f. [John 20:31](#) Or *that the Messiah, the Son of God, is Jesus*

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

### John 20

[20:1-21:25](#) The final two chapters of John's Gospel cover the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, specifically the empty tomb, the risen Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene, three resurrection appearances to His disciples ([21:14](#)), the commissioning of the disciples ([20:21](#)), a special commissioning of Peter ([21:15-23](#)), conclusions to the Gospel proper ([20:30-31](#)), and the epilogue ([21:24-25](#)). The concluding statement in [20:30-31](#) rehearses some of the major themes of the Gospel, particularly Jesus' identity as Messiah and Son of God, His messianic "signs," the importance of believing in Jesus, and the gift of eternal life. The conclusion to the epilogue identifies the "disciple Jesus loved" (who was one of the Twelve; cp. [21:20](#); [13:23](#)) as the writer of John's Gospel ([21:24](#); cp. [19:35](#)) and affirms the truth of his testimony about Jesus ([21:24](#)).

[20:1](#) The **first day of the week** was Sunday. **Mary Magdalene** (and several other women) decided to attend to some matters that had been left undone because of the beginning of the Sabbath (see note at [19:42](#)). The need to complete the care for the dead may have overridden the customary seven-day mourning period (see note at [11:20](#)). On **while it was still dark**, compare the slightly different time frame depicted in [Mt 28:1](#); [Mk 16:2](#); and [Lk 24:1](#).

[20:2](#) At this point Mary had no thought of Jesus' resurrection. The Jewish charge that His disciples stole His body ([Mt 27:62-66](#); [28:11-15](#)) shows that grave robbery was not uncommon. The plural **we** suggests the presence of other women besides Mary. On **the other disciple**, see note at [18:15-16](#).

[20:5](#) Apparently by now there was enough daylight to see inside the burial chamber through the small, low opening in the cave tomb. The other disciple **did not go in**, presumably in deference to Simon Peter, a leader among the Twelve.

[20:7](#) Jesus' resurrection body apparently passed through the linen wrappings similar to the way in which He later appeared to His disciples in a locked room ([vv. 19,26](#)). The reference to the head wrapping being **folded up in a separate place by itself** counters the notion of grave robbers, who in their haste would not have taken the time to fold up this cloth.

[20:8-9](#) The presence of two witnesses rendered the evidence admissible under Jewish law ([Dt 17:6](#); [19:15](#)). The **other disciple** believed based on what he saw, not on an understanding from Scripture that Jesus **must rise from the dead**. This lack of expectation of a resurrection shows that the disciples did not fabricate the resurrection story to fit their preconceived expectations. Rather, the resurrection shocked them and did not fit with what they understood from Scripture. Only later, aided by the Spirit's teaching (see notes at [14:26](#) and [16:13](#)), did they come to see that Jesus' resurrection was foretold in the OT.

[20:10](#) When **the disciples went home**, "the disciple Jesus loved" in all likelihood told the Lord's mother, whom he had taken "into his home" ([19:27](#)), that He was risen.

[20:11](#) Mary was **crying**, not because Jesus had died, but because His body had vanished.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "John 20".

**20:12** She saw **two angels in white**. Angels often appeared in pairs ([Ac 1:10](#)) and are often depicted as dressed in white ([Ezek 9:2](#); [Dan 10:5-6](#); [Rev 15:6](#)). The angels were **sitting... one at the head and one at the feet** of the burial shelf.

## The Missional Church

*Ed Stetzer*

*"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" ([Jn 20:21](#)).*

Most believers readily grasp the idea of Jesus being sent to the world. While speaking to His disciples at the well of Samaria, Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who *sent* Me." In John chapters 4-8 Jesus spoke of being sent by His Father on 14 separate occasions, such as saying, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who *sent* Me" ([6:38](#)) and "I am the One who testifies about Myself, and the Father who *sent* Me testifies about Me" ([8:18](#)). Paul wrote of the same truth in [Romans 8:3](#) referring to God's "*sending* His own Son in flesh like ours." When Jesus says, "the Father has sent Me," it is not a surprise. The fact that Jesus was the "sent One" is one of the most fundamental identifications of Jesus. The incarnation of Christ is the definitive occurrence of being sent on mission—and a model for us to represent Christ in the world.

Believers know that they are sent on mission into the world. The word "sent" is replete through Paul's epistles as he mentions those such as Timothy and Titus who have been entrusted with a message and a mission. In the book of Acts, sending is a common occurrence as well. Ananias is sent to pray for Paul and open his eyes. Paul and Barnabas are sent out from the church in Antioch as missionaries with the gospel. "As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.' Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off" ([Ac 13:2-3](#)). Most know that Jesus "sent" some, but often do not consider the breadth and depth of that sending (cp. [Gen 12:1-3](#); [Ex 19:5,6](#); [Isa 6:8](#); [Mt 24:14](#); [28:18-20](#); [Lk 24:46-48](#); [Ac 1:8](#); [1Pe 2:9-10](#)).

All of God's people are sent on mission, the only questions are "where?" and "among whom?" So, God has a kingdom mission and He entrusts that mission to the church—in other words, the church does not have a mission, but the mission has a church. Some are sent cross-culturally as missionaries (we call that missions), but all are sent (we call that being missional).

To understand the depth of this *sentness*, consider that the source of our missional identity is located in the nature of God. Further consider that this sending is as central to God's nature as His love, forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness. It must be since we are given example after example of it in His Word. Without God's sending nature we would know little else of His other attributes. Without His sending nature, we would not see the "groom coming from the bridal chamber" in creation ([Ps 19:5](#)) culminating in Jesus "present[ing] the church to Himself in splendor" in the gospel ([Eph 5:27](#)).

God's sending is as tangible as any other attribute of the Godhead. And sending does belong to the Godhead: The Father sent His Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Spirit in indivisible unity send the church. We are to be missional, we are to live *sent*. Our sent-and-sending identity is connected ontologically with the very existence of the church. That is, just as it is the nature of God, it is in the nature of the church. When Jesus proclaimed, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" ([Jn 20:21](#)),

His mandate was a commissioning act for the disciples of that day. His command then develops into the missional task described by Peter in his first letter. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" ([1Pe 2:9](#)).

The concept of a missional church is recognition that God is a sending God and we, the church and individual believers, are to live *sent*. The missional church is shaped by the idea that every believer is to live on mission. Being *sent* means that we move outside the walls of our church buildings and our Christian homes in order to engage all people with the gospel. The missional nature of the church calls for us to engage in and support the work of international missionaries to take the gospel across the world and the local mission-shaped believers to take the gospel and show the love of Christ across the street. There is a *sentness* inherent to being a follower of Jesus. It is the way of Jesus in us.

We are not sent on mission alone. God's people join Him on His mission. We are commanded and empowered to participate with Him. We know this because Jesus promised, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" ([Mt 28:20](#)). We are sent on a mission with the Sender. As believers, we don't decide if we are on mission. We are by our calling—and because of God's nature. The only question is whether or not we are living up to the calling we have been given. Is our identity (sent on mission) aligning with our life (living on mission)?

Missional churches engage the people with the redemptive message of the gospel. To do so, the church emulates Christ in the engagement of the mission. He came announcing that He would serve the hurting ([Lk 4](#)) and save the lost ([Lk 19:10](#)). We are called to join Him on that mission and show and share the good news of Jesus to a world Jesus loves. The missional church contends for the truth.

The missional church engages and inhabits the culture while seeking to remain separate from its sin and sinful structures. Jesus Christ was a thoroughly Jewish, first-century man who engaged believers, doubters, scoffers, friends, and foes, yet never sinned. He was truly in the world without being of the world. We can engage the greedy without becoming greedy, the hateful without becoming hateful, and the proud without becoming prideful. The existence of temptation should not hinder us from missional living. Instead, we are to be a culturally relevant, counter-culture community for the kingdom.

Last, being sent by Jesus as the Father sent Him means that the seed of the gospel will take root. The seed of the gospel must be sown in the soil of the culture, which necessitates Christians being engaged there. Scripture calls us salt and light and that requires presence and proclamation.

The sending nature of the Father, the commission by Christ, and the empowerment of the Spirit creates a missional church. As believers, we should revel in the invitation by Christ to join His missional people.

[20:15](#) Mary mistook Jesus for **the gardener**, which suggests that Jesus was indistinguishable from an ordinary person. Gardeners often tend to their grounds in the early morning.

[20:17](#) **My Father and your Father** maintains a distinction between how Jesus and the disciples relate to God. Even so, Jesus called believers His **brothers**.

[20:19](#), [21](#), [26](#) The common Jewish greeting **Peace to you** (representing Hb *Shalom alekem*) is still used today. Peace was Jesus' gift to His followers by virtue of His sacrificial death on the cross. On the disciples' **fear of the Jews**, see note at [7:13](#).

[20:21-22](#) These verses contain the Gospel of John's version of the Great Commission, which culminates in the presentation of Jesus as the One sent from the Father (see note at [3:16-18](#)). Now the sent One (Jesus) had turned Sender, commissioning His followers to serve as His messengers and representatives ([17:18](#)). All three persons of the Godhead are involved in this commissioning. As Jesus was sent by *God the Father*, so He, *the Son*, was sending out His disciples ([20:21](#)), equipping them with *the Holy Spirit* ([v. 22](#)). John thus demonstrated that each member of the Godhead is involved in the redemption plan and the mission of spreading the gospel to the world. **The Holy Spirit** was given dramatically and permanently a short time later ([Ac 2](#)).

[20:23](#) The reference to forgiveness or lack thereof may echo the reference to "the key of the House of David" in [Isa 22:22](#) (cp. [Rev 3:7](#)). Jesus bestowed on His followers authority to announce access or disbarment from God's kingdom based on reception or denial of the gospel message. For those who reject Jesus, His messengers are commissioned to say that they do not have forgiveness of sins.

[20:24](#) On Thomas as **Twin**, see note at [1:38](#).

[20:25](#) Apparently Thomas thought the disciples had seen a ghost ([Mt 14:26](#)). Yet John was careful to affirm that Jesus' resurrection body was not that of a phantom or spirit apparition but a genuine (although glorified) human body ([Jn 20:27](#)).

[20:26](#) **After eight days** refers to the following Sunday, one week after Easter ([v. 19](#)).

[20:29](#) Readers of the Gospel of John may **believe without seeing** because John, by aid of the Holy Spirit, has written the truth about God's Son.

[20:30-31](#) On Jesus' **signs** in John's Gospel, see note at [2:11](#).

## The Apologetics Study Bible<sup>2</sup>

### John 20

[20:1-2](#) Who went to the tomb when? All the Gospels agree that Mary Magdalene went along with several other women. She may have run ahead to be the first to see the empty tomb, or else John just didn't mention the other women with her. [Verse 2](#), after all, has Mary saying, "We don't know where they have put Him" (emphasis added). Similarly, she may have been the first to get back to the disciples, or else John simply left out Jesus' first appearance to the women as a group. As for going while it was still dark, this scarcely contradicts [Mk 16:2](#) ("at sunrise"), since the minutes before and after dawn always resemble "twilight"—part dark, part light.

[20:11](#) Mary obviously went back to the tomb, this time probably alone, for this separate special encounter with Jesus. That so much emphasis is placed on her witness ([vv. 2, 18](#)) is doubly significant, since women's testimony was not often admitted in ancient law courts. Early Christians, if they were making up a story about Jesus' resurrection, would not likely have had a woman, and especially not one with a history of being demon possessed ([Lk 8:2](#)), as their primary witness.

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<sup>2</sup> Ted Cabal, ed., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understanding Why You Believe*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1613-1616.

Doubt might be defined as uncertainty regarding God or our relation to Him. Questions arise in many forms, including factual or philosophical issues, assurance, suffering, or unanswered prayer.

Doubt may be divided into three general areas. *Factual doubt* usually raises issues regarding the truth of Christianity. *Emotional doubt* chiefly concerns our moods and feelings, often posing questions pertaining to assurance of salvation. *Volitional doubt* is a category that ranges from weak faith to a lack of motivation to follow the Lord.

Few subjects are characterized by more misunderstandings than this one. Contrary to popular opinion, doubt is not always sin. Neither is it necessarily the opposite of faith nor the product of weak faith. It is experienced by many believers in Scripture, such as Abraham, Job, David, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist. And almost all believers, as well as unbelievers, experience doubt at times. As strange as it seems, doubt can produce positive results, and many doubters are very much in love with the Lord.

The answer to *factual doubt* is the facts. In other words, questions concerning God, Jesus, the Bible, or the resurrection are answered by the data. No other religion can claim the kind of foundation upon which Christianity is based. A frequent mistake made by factual doubters is to confuse disputed areas among Christians (e.g., sovereignty versus free will, the age of the earth, the sign gifts, or eternal security) with the core truths: the deity of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. A remedy for this kind of doubt is to start with these basics: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" ([Rm 10:9](#)). When we believe these basics, our understanding and appropriation of other doctrines will follow.

*Emotional doubt* is the most common as well as the most painful variety. Frequently, these doubters repeatedly wonder whether they are saved, while exhibiting signs of their obvious love for the Lord. They often tell themselves that what they most desire is just beyond their grasp—hence their pain. Here the chief issue is not what is being said but the distraught moods in the background. The remedy is to treat the latter.

Many passages in Scripture command us to address our unruly emotions (see [Ps 37:7-8](#); [39:2](#); [42:5-6, 11](#); [55:4-8, 16-17, 22](#); [56:3-4](#); [94:19](#)). Often we must move from our perspective to God's and replace our uncertain feelings with trust in Him.

For instance, in [Philippians 4:6-9](#), Paul tells us to replace our anxieties with prayer and thanksgiving. The apostle promises peace for those who do so ([vv. 6-7](#)). Then he commands us to explicitly change our worrisome thoughts to God's truth ([v. 8](#)) and to model ourselves after his pattern, again promising the result of peace ([v. 9](#)).

The key is to change how we think and behave. Simply diverting attention from our worries can provide temporary relief. The best response, every single time a doubt arises, is to weed out and correct the improper thought by concentrating on God's truth rather than on our shaky beliefs.

*Volitional doubt* covers a wide range of uncertainty. The more extreme versions are often characterized by formerly committed believers who now seem not to care anymore. Perhaps they even appear to live no differently from unbelievers. This is probably the most dangerous species of doubt, since the individual may be in danger of turning from the Lord. But how do we motivate someone who does not wish to be energized? Friends and loved ones must get involved.

Any biblical means of stirring the dying embers may be helpful here. In Scripture, probably the most frequently prescribed methods are being convicted of sin ([Heb 3:12-13](#)) or being challenged by the truth of heaven. Everyone experiences the lure of living forever ([Ec 3:11](#)). Believers more specifically seek heaven ([Heb 11:16](#), [35](#); [13:14](#)). Dozens of times we are challenged to pursue our eternal home, applying its truth deeply to our lives ([Mt 6:33](#)). After all, what we do for the Lord after salvation helps determine and shape our capacity for enjoying eternity ([Mt 6:19-21](#); [Mk 9:41](#)).

Perhaps the key is to assist the volitional doubter in charging his spiritual batteries. What could be worse than failing the God of the universe and falling short of His kingdom? Conversely, what could be better than living with Him and our believing friends and loved ones for a truly blessed eternity? We need to drive these truths home to those who waver, by the power of the Holy Spirit ([Jms 5:19-20](#); [Jd 20-23](#)).

Doubt can sometimes be a positive incentive to change and grow. But other times, intervention is necessary. Members of the body of Christ need to be alert and sensitive, helping each other focus on the Lord and His kingdom.

[20:12](#) Matthew referred to "an angel" ([Mt 28:2](#)); Mark, to "a young man" ([Mk 16:5](#)); and Luke, to "two men" ([Lk 24:4](#)). John harmonized the three accounts. Two angels, appearing like men (as consistently in Scripture), were present. Only one is ever said to speak, so abbreviated accounts could easily have left the second one out. Since no Gospel says that only one angel or man was present, there is no contradiction.

[20:17](#) The Greek reads literally, "Don't touch me," but the sense is "Stop clinging to me." It's not that there was something dangerous about Jesus' body (or that it was not really a body) but that Jesus had not come back to be with Mary permanently in bodily form. These were temporary appearances en route to His ascension and were not to be prolonged.

[20:19-23](#) Is this John's massively reworked counterpart to Pentecost ([Ac 2](#))? No. Only ten of the disciples were present and nothing "spiritual" happened afterward. They simply went fishing ([21:3](#)). More likely, this was a dramatic object lesson or initial bestowal of the Spirit to prepare them for the more dramatic filling that would happen seven weeks later in Jerusalem. The authority He bestowed parallels that given first to Peter ([Mt 16:16-19](#)) and then to the Twelve ([Mt 18:18](#)). It was fulfilled in the disciples' preaching ministry in Ac. Nothing is taught here about papal infallibility or apostolic succession.

[20:25-29](#) This story depicts Thomas in so poor a light that it was not likely invented by the disciples. It also portrays the disciples cowering behind locked doors for fear of the authorities, hardly in any psychological frame of mind to receive visions of a resurrected Christ. The text also confirms that Jesus was genuinely, bodily raised from the dead. Two theological themes coalesce: This kind of miracle (or sign) should have been adequate to convince people that Jesus was truly Lord and God ([v. 28](#)), and the testimony of the disciples should have been adequate to demonstrate that even without firsthand empirical proof ([v. 29](#)).



[20:30-31](#) These verses explain the highly selective nature of this Gospel's contents as well as its purpose. The book is one of testimony to the identity of Jesus as Messiah and divine Son. Because these verses seem like an appropriate ending, some have wondered if chapter 21 was added later as a kind of appendix. But it contains numerous references to "unfinished business" from the rest of the Gospel, and other ancient works also exhibit the phenomenon of seeming to end a little bit before they actually do (cp. the location of the purpose statements in John's other writings—[1 Jn 5:13](#); [Rv 22:6](#)).

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### *John 20*

[20:1](#) Other women came to the tomb along with Mary Magdalene. The other Gospel accounts give their names. For more information on Mary Magdalene, see her Profile on page 1797.

[20:1](#) The stone was not rolled away from the entrance to the tomb so Jesus could get out. He could have left easily without moving the stone. It was rolled away so others could get *in* and see that Jesus was gone.

[20:1ff](#) People who hear about the Resurrection for the first time may need time before they can comprehend this amazing story. Like Mary and the disciples, they may pass through four stages of belief. (1) At first, they may think the story is a fabrication, impossible to believe ([20:2](#)). (2) Like Peter, they may check out the facts and still be puzzled about what happened ([20:6](#)). (3) Only when they encounter Jesus personally are they able to accept the fact of the Resurrection ([20:16](#)). (4) Then, as they commit themselves to the risen Lord and devote their lives to serving him, they begin to understand fully the reality of his presence with them ([20:28](#)).

[20:6, 7](#) The linen wrappings were left as if Jesus' body had simply vacated them. The cloth that covered Jesus' head was still rolled up in the shape of a head, and it was at about the right distance from the wrappings that had enveloped Jesus' body. A grave robber couldn't possibly have made off with Jesus' body and left the linens as if they were still shaped around it.

[20:9](#) As further proof that the disciples did not fabricate this story, we find that Peter and John were surprised that Jesus was not in the tomb. When John saw the linen wrappings looking like an empty cocoon from which Jesus had emerged, he believed that Jesus had risen. It wasn't until after they had seen the empty tomb that they remembered what the Scriptures and Jesus had said—he would die, but he would also rise again!

[20:9](#) Jesus' resurrection is the key to the Christian faith. Why? (1) Just as he said, Jesus rose from the dead. We can be confident, therefore, that he will accomplish all he has promised. (2) Jesus' bodily resurrection shows us that the living Christ, not a false prophet or imposter, is ruler of God's eternal Kingdom. (3) We can be certain of our own resurrection because Jesus was resurrected. Death is not the end—there is future life. (4) The divine power that brought Jesus back to life is now available to us to bring our spiritually dead selves back to life. (5) The Resurrection is the basis for the church's witness to the world.

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<sup>3</sup>, *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), *WORDsearch CROSS e-book*, 1798-1801.

Thomas, so often remembered as "Doubting Thomas," deserves to be respected for his faith. He was a doubter, but his doubts had a purpose—he wanted to know the truth. Thomas did not idolize his doubts; he gladly believed when given reasons to do so. He expressed his doubts fully and had them answered completely. Doubting was only his way of responding, not his way of life.

Although our glimpses of Thomas are brief, his character comes through with consistency. He struggled to be faithful to what he knew, despite what he felt. At one point, when it was plain to everyone that Jesus' life was in danger, only Thomas put into words what most were feeling, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus" ([John 11:16](#)). He didn't hesitate to follow Jesus.

We don't know why Thomas was absent the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection, but he was reluctant to believe their witness to Christ's resurrection. Not even 10 friends could change his mind!

We can doubt without having to live a doubting way of life. Doubt encourages rethinking. Its purpose is more to sharpen the mind than to change it. Doubt can be used to pose the question, get an answer, and push for a decision. But doubt was never meant to be a permanent condition. Doubt is one foot lifted, poised to step forward or backward. There is no motion until the foot comes down.

When you experience doubt, take encouragement from Thomas. He didn't stay in his doubt but allowed Jesus to bring him to belief. Take encouragement also from the fact that countless other followers of Christ have struggled with doubts. The answers God gave them may help you, too. Don't settle into doubts, but move on from them to decision and belief. Find another believer with whom you can share your doubts. Silent doubts rarely find answers.

## Thomas

### **Strengths and accomplishments**

- One of Jesus' 12 disciples
- Intense both in doubt and belief
- A loyal and honest man

### **Weaknesses and mistakes**

- Along with the others, abandoned Jesus at his arrest
- Refused to believe the others' claims to have seen Christ and demanded proof
- Struggled with a pessimistic outlook

### **Lessons from his life**

- Jesus does not reject doubts that are honest and directed toward belief
- Better to doubt out loud than to disbelieve in silence

### **Vital statistics**

- Where: Galilee, Judea, Samaria
- Occupation: Disciple of Jesus
- Contemporaries: Jesus, other disciples, Herod, Pilate

### **Key verses**

"Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!' 'My Lord and my God!' Thomas exclaimed" ([John 20:27-28](#)).

Thomas's story is told in the Gospels. He is also mentioned in [Acts 1:13](#).

**20:17** Mary did not want to lose Jesus again. She had not yet understood the Resurrection. Perhaps she thought this was his promised second coming ([14:3](#)). But Jesus did not want to be detained at the tomb. If he did not ascend to heaven, the Holy Spirit could not come. Both he and Mary had important work to do.

**20:18** Mary didn't recognize Jesus at first. Her grief had blinded her; she couldn't see him because she didn't expect to see him. Then he spoke her name, and immediately she recognized him. Imagine the love that flooded her heart when she heard her Savior saying her name. Jesus is near you, and he is calling your name. Can you, like Mary, regard him as your Lord?

**20:18** Mary did not meet the risen Christ until she had discovered the empty tomb. She responded with joy and obedience by going to tell the disciples. We cannot meet Christ until we discover that he is indeed alive, that his tomb is empty. Are you filled with joy by this good news, and do you share it with others?

**20:21** Jesus again identified himself with his Father. He told the disciples by whose authority he did his work. Then he passed the job to his disciples of spreading the Good News of salvation around the world. Whatever God has asked you to do, remember: (1) Your authority comes from God, and (2) Jesus has demonstrated by words and actions how to accomplish the job he has given you. As the Father sent Jesus, Jesus sends his followers... and you.

**20:22** This may have been a special filling of the Holy Spirit for the disciples, a foretaste of what all believers would experience from the time of Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)) and forever after. To do God's work, we need the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. We must avoid trying to do his work in our own strength.

**20:22** There is life in the breath of God. Man was created but did not come alive until God breathed into him the breath of life ([Genesis 2:7](#)). God's first breath made man different from all other forms of creation. Now, through the breath of Jesus, God imparted eternal, spiritual life. With this inbreathing came the power to do God's will on earth.

**20:23** Jesus was giving the disciples their Spirit-powered and Spirit-guided mission—to preach the Good News about Jesus so people's sins might be forgiven. The disciples did not have the power to forgive sins (only God can forgive sins), but Jesus gave them the privilege of telling new believers that their sins *have been* forgiven because they have accepted Jesus' message (see the note on [Matthew 16:19](#)). All believers have this same privilege. We can announce forgiveness of sins with certainty when we ourselves have found repentance and faith.

**20:24-29** Have you ever wished you could actually see Jesus, touch him, and hear his words? Are there times you want to sit down with him and get his advice? Thomas wanted Jesus' physical presence. But God's plan is wiser. He has not limited himself to one physical body; he wants to be present with you at all times. Even now he is with you in the form of the Holy Spirit. You can talk to him, and you can find his words to you in the pages of the Bible. He can be as real to you as he was to Thomas.

**20:25-28** Jesus wasn't hard on Thomas for his doubts. Despite his skepticism, Thomas was still loyal to the believers and to Jesus himself. Some people need to doubt before they believe. If doubt leads to questions, and questions lead to answers, and if the answers are accepted, then doubt has done good work. It is when doubt becomes stubbornness and stubbornness becomes a prideful lifestyle that doubt harms faith. When you doubt, don't stop there. Let your doubt deepen your faith as you continue to search for the answer.

[20:27](#) Jesus' resurrected body was unique. It was not the same kind of flesh and blood Lazarus had when he came back to life. Jesus' body was no longer subject to the same laws of nature as before his death. He could appear in a locked room; yet he was not a ghost or apparition because he could be touched and could eat. Jesus' resurrection was *literal and physical*— he was not a disembodied spirit.

[20:29](#) Some people think they would believe in Jesus if they could see a definite sign or miracle. But Jesus says we are blessed if we can believe without seeing. We have all the proof we need in the words of the Bible and the testimony of believers. A physical appearance would not make Jesus any more real to us than he is now.

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### Jesus' Appearances After His Resurrection

<b>Mary Magdalene</b>	<a href="#">Mark 16:9-11</a> ; <a href="#">John 20:11-18</a>
<b>The other women at the tomb</b>	<a href="#">Matthew 28:8-10</a>
<b>Peter in Jerusalem</b>	<a href="#">Luke 24:34</a> ; <a href="#">1 Corinthians 15:5</a>
<b>The two travelers on the road</b>	<a href="#">Mark 16:12, 13</a> ; <a href="#">Luke 24:13-35</a>
<b>Ten disciples behind closed doors</b>	<a href="#">Mark 16:14</a> ; <a href="#">Luke 24:36-43</a> ; <a href="#">John 20:19-25</a>
<b>All the disciples, with Thomas (excluding Judas Iscariot)</b>	<a href="#">John 20:26-31</a> ; <a href="#">1 Corinthians 15:5</a>
<b>Seven disciples while fishing</b>	<a href="#">John 21:1-14</a>
<b>Eleven disciples on the mountain</b>	<a href="#">Matthew 28:16-20</a>
<b>A crowd of 500</b>	<a href="#">1 Corinthians 15:6</a>
<b>Jesus' brother James</b>	<a href="#">1 Corinthians 15:7</a>
<b>Those who watched Jesus ascend into heaven</b>	<a href="#">Luke 24:44-49</a> ; <a href="#">Acts 1:3-8</a>

The truth of Christianity rests heavily on the Resurrection. If Jesus rose from the grave, who saw him? How trustworthy were the witnesses? Those who claimed to have seen the risen Jesus went on to turn the world upside down. Most of them also died for being followers of Christ. People rarely die for halfhearted belief. These are the people who saw Jesus risen from the grave.

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[20:30, 31](#) To understand the life and mission of Jesus more fully, all we need to do is study the Gospels. John tells us that his Gospel records only a few of the many events in Jesus' life on earth. But the Good News includes everything we need to know to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, through whom we receive eternal life.