

Group Study Outline

Launching Question

What would it take to persuade you that somebody was God's chosen king?
What would they have to do to impress you into believing?

This last story will give the crowning piece of evidence that Jesus is just that!

Getting Stuck Into The Story

READ John 20:1-3

What did Mary see?
What did Mary think had happened?
What did Mary do?

READ John 20:3-10

What did the disciples see?
What did the disciples think had happened?
What persuaded them? Why hadn't they twigged sooner? (9)

READ John 20:11-18

What did Mary see this time to begin with?
Then what did Mary hear and see?
What is Jesus saying to her in v17? What's significant about it?

READ John 20:19-23

What's the mood among the disciples at the start?
What do the disciples see? What is significant about that?
How do they respond?
What message does the risen Jesus have for them?

Putting Two And Two Together

What are we supposed to learn from this story? (*check v30-31 for help...*)
How does this story prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
How does this story prove that Jesus can give life?

Think back over this series in John's Gospel. Can you remember all 8 signs?
What did each of them show us? (*Either one by one, or in summary.*)
What is the impact of all this evidence we've piled up?
How is it persuasive for the non-Christian?
How is it strengthening for the Christian?
Where is the challenge for us?

Pray

- for us to believe and go on believing
- for us to share what we believe as those who are sent
- for others to believe and have life

John 20:1-23



John at a glance

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' (John 20:30-31)

This is why John wrote his Gospel (and this is why we're spending this term considering each of the miracles he includes): so that we can 'read' the signs (which, of course, we are not able to 'see') so that we may believe something about the identity of Jesus: namely, that he is the long-promised Christ. For it is only through him (and therefore through believing this about him) that we can have the life that God had promised to give to us through his Christ.

Where this passage fits in...

This is the final climactic signpost; *the* ultimate miracle which points to Jesus' identity our need to believe in Him. Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves Him to be the Christ, the Son of God, who is able to give life to believers.

These notes also serve to recap and summarise the entire John series.

Theme Sentence

Jesus rose from the dead to prove He is the Christ, the Son of God, who gives life to all who believe.

Application

- Recognise who Jesus is based on this sign
- Believe in Him (trust in Him) to have life
- Tell others to look at the signs and believe as well

Commentary

1-2 *Mary sees the empty tomb*

Jesus had been buried in a hurry on the Friday. They'd wrapped Him in linen and put Him in a nearby tomb. Saturday passed in silence as it's the Sabbath and everyone was resting at home. But when Sunday comes, Mary Magdalene gets up early to do all the stuff you'd normally do before a burial if you weren't in such a rush. When she gets there, it's her worst nightmare. The stone's taken away; like visiting a grave and finding it dug up, with an empty coffin where your loved one should be. She runs to the disciples to tell them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they've laid Him." She isn't thinking 'resurrection' but 'robbery'! Someone's taken Him!

3-10 *The disciples see the empty tomb*

Having heard Mary's report, Peter and the disciple Jesus loved (which is a codename for John who wrote this Gospel) sprint to the tomb. Note the eye witness details of who got there first and having to bend down to look in. They too see an empty tomb. All that is inside are the linen cloths which Jesus had been wrapped in; the bandages for the body in one pile and the face cloth folded separately. What kind of grave-robber would do that?!

In v8 John finally steps inside and we're told "he saw and believed." Saw what? Nothing! Literally no body. And he believed. No longer doubting Jesus is the Christ. No longer despairing that their friend has died. The big theme of John's Gospel is reaching a climax as people see and believe.

As a side-note, John explains why he had to see before he believed in v9 – because "as yet they did not understand the Scriptures, that He must rise from the dead." The Bible on its own should have been enough for them to be expecting the resurrection! But as they hadn't figured it out yet, it was a surprise and he had to see it before he began to believe it. This is encouraging for us today who cannot see it but can read about it in the Bible (cf v29-31).

11-18 *Mary sees the risen Jesus*

By v11, the disciples have gone home and Mary is back at the tomb weeping. Looking in, she sees two angels inside who ask why she's crying. She doesn't seem to twig who they are but rather just gives the same speech from earlier about how someone has taken the Lord and she doesn't know where.

Then another voice asks why she's crying. On one level, that's a strange question to ask in a graveyard! But on a deeper level as somebody put it, "nothing is more incongruous than tears at the empty tomb of Jesus." Mary thinks she's talking to the gardener! Until He calls her name and she realizes it's Jesus Himself risen from the dead. Note how much more substantial this evidence is. Not simply the absence of a corpse but the presence of a person.

She hugs Jesus and is told not to hang onto her in v17. Some stumble on this verse as if Jesus is being impersonal or unfriendly. Or as if His resurrection body is immaterial and so is not to be touched. It's nothing as spooky as that. The ascension into heaven is the next thing on the agenda but it hasn't

happened yet. So yes at some point Mary will need to 'let go' of Jesus as He isn't staying forever. But right now Mary doesn't need to grab on for dear life as if He's about to disappear! The more pressing reason to stop being clingy (!!) is that she needs to go and tell the disciples!

Part of what she is to tell them is not only that He has risen but that His death and resurrection have accomplished what He set out to do. Back in John 1:12 we're told that those who believe in His name will be given the right to become children of God. So there is huge significance when the Son of God calls His God and Father "*your* Father... and *your* God" in v17. If death is about separation from God, this is a sign of the life Jesus brings as, freshly resurrected, He describes the new relationship with God His disciples can enjoy.

19-23 *The disciples see the risen Jesus*

Later that day the disciples are together, no doubt talking about the morning's bizarre events. They have locked themselves in because they are still worried about the Jewish authorities coming for them just as they came for Jesus. Into this context of fear and unbelief, walks Jesus. We can't know how He got into the room when the doors were locked but this is not the appearance of a ghost. He is real flesh and blood, but presumably without some of our limitations.

He shows them His hands and side in v20, the marks where the nails had been driven through His wrists and where the soldier's spear had been rammed under His ribcage. These scars prove He was the same person as the man crucified not 48 hours earlier. They see it and so they believe it.

Like Mary, they are not to keep this news to themselves. Jesus come to them to send them out, just as the Father had sent Him (21). They are to go in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring the message of forgiveness (23).

Putting two and two together...

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God

This final signpost of raising Himself from the dead proves Jesus' identity. As Romans 1:4 says, he "was declared to be the Son of God in power... by His resurrection from the dead." It fulfills all kinds of Old Testament promises about the Christ, such as not being left in the grave to decay (Psalm 16) and being a King forever (2 Samuel 7). Jesus really is who He says He is.

Jesus can give life

This miracle is all about life. Jesus not only gets life back after giving it away, He is able to then give life to others. Spiritual life now as we come to believe in Him, and physical resurrection life later when He returns.

We must believe in Him

If Jesus didn't rise again, we should not believe in Him. But since He did, we should. This story is full of people seeing the signs and believing. v30-31 tells us the reason they saw and it passed on is so that we (and others) can believe even though we weren't there to see it. All the signposts in John point to this.