

Jesus is Raised and Appears to Disciples (John 20:1–21:25)

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Session 20

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Abstract

This session examines the final two chapters of the Gospel of John, focusing on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his subsequent appearances to his disciples in Jerusalem and Galilee. The narrative highlights the discovery of the empty tomb, Jesus's revelation to Mary Magdalene, his commissioning of the disciples with the Holy Spirit, and the overcoming of Thomas's doubts through physical evidence. It then shifts to Galilee, detailing the miraculous catch of fish and Jesus's poignant restoration of Peter through a threefold inquiry of love and a recommission to care for his sheep. Ultimately, the lesson explores the theological, geographical, and canonical significance of these events, emphasizing the relationship between faith, signs, and obedience.

Outline

I. Introduction to John Chapters 20 and 21 (Resurrection and Appearances)

- A. Narrative progression from Christ's burial to His resurrection
- B. The purpose of rolling away the stone
 - 1. Not to let Jesus out of the tomb
 - 2. Rolled away so that observers could see that he was already risen and gone

II. The Flow of Thought in John Chapter 20 (Jerusalem Appearances)

- A. The Discovery of the Empty Tomb (John 20:1-10)

1. Mary Magdalene's discovery of the removed stone while still dark
2. Mary's running report to Peter and the beloved disciple (believing the body was stolen)
3. The footrace to the tomb: beloved disciple arrives first; Peter enters first
4. Observations of the orderly burial cloths and the separate head cloth
5. The beloved disciple's reaction: "saw and believed" despite not yet understanding the scriptures

B. Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)

1. Mary encounters two angels inside the empty tomb
2. Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener, asking where the body was laid
3. Jesus speaks her name ("Mary"), prompting her recognition ("Rabboni")
4. Jesus's instruction: "Do not hold on to me," and the distinction of "my God and your God, my Father and your Father"
5. The first commission: Mary sent to report the resurrection and ascension to his "brothers"

C. Jesus Appears to the Disciples behind Locked Doors (John 20:19-23)

1. Disciples hiding surreptitiously out of fear of the Jewish leaders
2. Jesus's miraculous appearance and greeting: "Peace be to you"
3. The second commission: "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you"
4. Bestowal of the Holy Spirit (breathing on them) and the authority regarding forgiveness of sins

D. Jesus Appears to Thomas (John 20:24-29)

1. Thomas's absence from the first appearance and his demand for empirical proof
2. Jesus's appearance one week later under similar locked-door conditions
3. Jesus's invitation to Thomas to touch His wounds ("stop doubting and believe")
4. Thomas's climax of faith: "My Lord and my God" as a Christological inclusio with John 1:1
5. The blessing on those who have not seen yet still have believed

E. Summary and Purpose of the Gospel (John 20:30-31)

1. Selection of signs written so that readers may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God
2. The resulting gift of life in His name through belief
3. Debates on the purpose: evangelistic outreach to all humans versus strengthening existing believers (Richard Bauckham's "The Gospels for All Christians")

III. Geographical and Archaeological Context of Jerusalem Resurrection Sites

A. The Western Side Trial Site vs. Traditional Fortress Antonia

B. The Walk of Crucifixion (Via Dolorosa)

C. Two Competing Tomb Sites in Jerusalem

1. Gordon's Calvary / The Garden Tomb (North of Damascus Gate)

- a. Late 19th-century identification based on cliff erosion resembling a skull (Jeremiah's Grotto)
- b. Archaeological challenges: cistern dates to First Temple period rather than Second Temple period (no rolling stone channel)
- c. Kept as a beautiful devotional place by Anglican caretakers without explicit historical claims

2. Church of the Holy Sepulcher (4th-Century Tradition)

- a. Located on the traditional western/northern side
- b. Two major domes: smaller dome over Golgotha (crucifixion); larger dome over the aedicule (burial)
- c. Physical evidence of contemporary 1st-century tombs ("kochim" or burial niches of Joseph of Arimathea) proving plausibility of the gospel accounts

IV. The Narrative Flow of John Chapter 21 (Galilee Appearances)

A. The Miraculous Fishing Catch (John 21:1-14)

1. Geographic transition from Jerusalem back north to the Sea of Galilee
2. Peter's decision to go fishing, joined by six other disciples
3. Unsuccessful night fishing followed by Jesus standing on the shore at dawn

4. Casting the net to the right side of the boat resulting in a catch of 153 large, unbroken fish
5. Peter's impetuous swim to shore; other disciples towing the net
6. Breakfast of bread and fish cooked on a charcoal fire by Jesus (Mensa Christi / Church of the Primacy of Peter)

B. Jesus Restores and Recommissions Peter (John 21:15-19)

1. The threefold inquiry ("Do you love me?") designed to heal Peter's threefold denial
2. Exegesis of vocabulary variations
 - a. Love: "agapao" (volitional/rational commitment) vs. "phileo" (emotional/fervent affection)—treated as synonymous literary variation
 - b. Care: "bosko" vs. "poimino" (feed/shepherd)
 - c. Sheep: "arneon" (lambs) vs. "probiton" (flock)—literary variation for stylistic interest
3. The prediction of Peter's martyrdom ("stretch out your hands") and his eventual crucifixion in early church tradition

C. Peter and the Beloved Disciple (John 21:20-23)

1. Peter's distraction/rivalry regarding the beloved disciple's future
2. Jesus's correction: "If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you? You follow me."
3. Clarification of the rumor that John would not die

D. Gospel Conclusion and Author Signature (John 21:24-25)

1. Identification of the beloved disciple as the eyewitness and recorder of these testimonies
2. Hyperbolic concluding statement: the entire world could not contain the books if everything Jesus did were written down

V. Major Theological and Interpretive Synthesis

- A. The role and historical inflation of Mary Magdalene (e.g., Dan Brown's speculative "The Da Vinci Code" vs. New Testament accounts)

B. The theme of the disciples' slow comprehension of the resurrection predictions
(excused in John due to more open and less explicit predictions than the Synoptics)

C. Johannine Pneumatology vs. Lukan Pentecost

1. The puzzle of Jesus breathing the Spirit on Easter (John 20:22) vs. Pentecost 50 days later (Acts 2)
2. Interpretive options: factual contradiction (critical view), temporary/partial endowment, or a prophetic acting-out of Pentecost

D. The theology of signs: signs-based faith as a stepping stone versus a deeper, sightless, persevering faith

E. The canonical role of Peter: prominence from Gospels through Acts 15 (Cornelius's house, Jerusalem Council) as the one who validated Paul's Gentile mission

F. The call to obedience: demonstrating love for Christ by feeding and caring for His sheep on earth