

Jesus' Ultimate Sign

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Signs / Sign; Johannine Sign; Resurrection / John 20:1-31

The ultimate sign in John 20:1-31 teaches us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the only Savior of sinners.

Introduction

Today, I plan to conclude our sermon series that I have called “Signs.”

Jesus performed thousands of miracles in his short ministry of two-and-a-half years. By these miracles, Jesus demonstrated that he had power over sickness, demons, nature, and even death itself.

The Apostle John selected just seven of Jesus’ miracles, which he called “signs,” to demonstrate “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” ([John 20:31](#)).

In these seven signs, Jesus turned water into wine (2:1-11), cleansed the temple (2:12-17), healed the official’s son (4:46-54), healed the invalid (5:1-15), fed the multitude (6:1-15), healed the man born blind (9:1-41), and raised Lazarus from the dead (11:1-57).

Today, we are going to look at Jesus’ ultimate sign: the resurrection of Jesus himself from the dead.

Scripture

Let’s read [John 20:1-31](#):

¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward

the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, '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 that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ 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.

Lesson

The ultimate sign in [John 20:1-31](#) teaches us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the only Savior of sinners.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Giving of the Ultimate Sign (20:1-10)
2. The Responses to the Ultimate Sign (20:11-31)

I. The Giving of the Ultimate Sign (20:1-10)

First, let's examine the giving of the ultimate sign.

Jesus was crucified on Passover Friday. He was buried in a tomb that same day.

The disciples observed the Sabbath on that Saturday.

The next day was Sunday, the first day of the week.

John said in verse 1a, **“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark.”**

By looking at the other Gospel accounts, there were at least four women who went to the tomb that first Sunday morning. Matthew said that the group included Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, that is, Mary, the mother of James ([Matthew 28:1](#)). Mark adds that Salome was present ([Mark 16:1](#)). And Luke said that Joanna was along with the others ([Luke 24:10](#)).

On reaching the tomb, the women were astonished to see that **“the stone had been taken away from the tomb”** ([John 20:1b](#)).

We can imagine that the women stopped in their tracks. They must have wondered what had happened to the Roman guards (who were no longer there). Who had moved the stone? Had the tomb been robbed? Had the body of Jesus been taken away?

At that point, not one of them imagined that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

John said that Mary Magdalene **“ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved** [that is, John, the writer of this Gospel], **and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him”** (20:2).

Peter and John then quickly ran to the tomb.

Outrunning Peter, John arrived at the tomb first, stooped to look through the narrow opening, and saw the grave clothes—but no body of Jesus.

Then Peter arrived, out of breath and in a hurry; he brushed John aside and burst right into the tomb. Peter carefully scrutinized the grave clothes. He also saw the linen cloths lying there, but no body of Jesus.

Over the years, various theories have been proposed to say that no miracle took place. Skeptics have asserted that Jesus was not raised from the dead.

One theory is that the women and other disciples of Jesus simply went to the wrong tomb. But that is not likely. They carefully watched where Jesus was buried (see [Matthew 27:61](#); [Mark 15:47](#); [Luke 23:55-56](#)). Moreover, if they had gone to the wrong tomb, it would have been very easy later to find the correct tomb and produce the body of Jesus. But, the disciples did not go to the wrong tomb of Jesus.

A second theory is that Jesus did not die but merely swooned. In the cool of the cave, he revived. That theory is absurd. Remember that Jesus was brutally scourged, which was often enough to kill a man. Then he was nailed to the cross in his hands and feet. Finally, a spear was thrust into his side to confirm that he was dead. A professional Roman executioner certified that Jesus was dead.

A third theory is that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb by his disciples. But then how did the disciples get by Roman guards that had been placed at the tomb? The disciples did not understand that Jesus was to be raised back to life from the dead. So, why would they steal the body? Moreover, every apostle—except for John—died a martyr’s death proclaiming that Jesus had risen back to life again.

A fourth theory is that the disciples did not see Jesus alive again. They merely hallucinated that they had seen him alive. The difficulty with that view is that the disciples did not expect to see Jesus alive again. That is not the kind of psychological preparation from which hallucinations are made. Furthermore, how could more than 500 people have the same hallucination at the same time (see [1 Corinthians 15:6](#))?

No, the simple explanation is that Jesus was gloriously and miraculously raised back to life from the dead.

That is the ultimate sign.

II. The Responses to the Ultimate Sign (20:11-31)

And second, let’s notice the responses to the ultimate sign.

I would like to look very briefly at three responses to the ultimate sign of Jesus’ resurrection.

A. Jesus Transforms People from Tears to Joy (20:11-18)

The first response to the ultimate sign of Jesus’ resurrection is that Jesus transforms people from tears to joy.

John recorded in his Gospel that **“Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb”** (20:11). This would have been after Peter and John had returned to the other disciples.

She looked into the tomb and **“she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him’ ”** (20:12-13).

The angels were in the tomb after Peter and John left.

Then Mary **“turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus”** (20:14).

Jesus asked her why she was weeping and whom she was seeking. Not recognizing his voice, Mary thought that she was talking to the gardener. So, she asked him where he had taken the body of Jesus.

John noted that **“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary’ ”** (20:16a). There was something in the way in which Jesus said **“Mary”** that helped her recognize that she was talking to Jesus!

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher)” (20:16).

Her beloved Lord Jesus was alive! She was so ecstatic that she threw her arms around him.

Jesus told Mary not to cling to him but to go and tell the disciples that he was **“ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”** (20:17).

John wrote in verse 18, **“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’—and that he had said these things to her.”**

We understand that Mary was heartbroken by the death of Jesus. When the tomb was empty, tears of confusion were added to her tears of sorrow.

But when Mary saw Jesus alive, she was ecstatic!

Bobby Henline, a U.S. Army veteran, was severely injured in a roadside bomb attack in Iraq. He was the sole survivor of the attack, but his family was initially told he had died. Miraculously, he survived, but it took time for him to recover. When he finally reunited with his family, it was an emotional and joyous moment, as they had already mourned his loss.

That is what happened with Mary.

Jesus' resurrection transformed her tears to joy.

B. Jesus Transforms People from Fear to Courage (20:19-23)

The second response to the ultimate sign of Jesus' resurrection is that Jesus transforms people from fear to courage.

The disciples were filled with fear. They did not know what had happened to Jesus. The body of Jesus was gone. And they were afraid that they would be accused of taking his body.

Then Mary arrived and told the disciples that she had seen Jesus alive!

I wonder what they made of her story. They could see that she was no longer tearful. She was ecstatic with joy!

Undoubtedly, they peppered her with question after question.

Later, John wrote in verse 19, **“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ ”**

I imagine that the disciples were at first stunned to see Jesus. But then, John said, Jesus **“showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord”** (20:20).

We know that Jesus spent the next forty days with the disciples. It must have been the most amazing six-week-long seminar in history! Jesus helped the disciples understand the Old Testament, his life, his ministry, and his resurrection.

As I mentioned earlier, every one of the twelve apostles—except for John—died a martyr's death because they had seen Jesus alive.

Jesus transformed their fear to courage.

And he still does the same for people today.

One of the most inspiring examples of courage in the history of the church was the martyrdom of Polycarp, who was burned at the stake for his faith. The aged Polycarp had been arrested by the Roman authorities and brought to the arena for execution in front of the cheering crowd.

The proconsul pressed him hard and said, “Swear, and I will release you. Revile Christ.”

Polycarp replied, “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; and how can I now blaspheme my King that has saved me” (Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching: Over 1500 Sermon Illustrations Arranged by Topic and Indexed Exhaustively*, Revised edition of: The expositor’s illustration file.]Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989]).

Jesus transforms people from fear to courage.

C. Jesus Transforms People from Doubt to Faith (20:24-31)

The third response to the ultimate sign of Jesus’ resurrection is that Jesus transforms people from doubt to faith.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on that first Resurrection Sunday, Thomas was not with them.

Later, when they met up again with Thomas, they excitedly told him, “**We have seen the Lord**” (20:25a).

But Thomas said to them, “**Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe**” (20:25b).

This is undoubtedly where Thomas earned the moniker “Doubting Thomas.”

It is somewhat astonishing that the changed attitude of the disciples had no impact on Thomas. He was skeptical. He wanted to see for himself that Jesus was alive.

A week later, on the second Resurrection Sunday, the disciples were together again. This time, Thomas was with them.

John recorded in verses 26b-27, “**Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’**”

John recorded Thomas’ answer in verse 28. He said, “**My Lord and my God!**”

You know that Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Jesus. If you show them this verse, they say that Thomas looked at Jesus and said, **"My Lord."** Then Thomas looked up to heaven and said, **"My God!"** Thus, they try to deny the deity of Jesus.

Clearly, this is not what happened.

Jesus received Thomas' affirmation of faith. He said to him, **"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** (20:29).

According to historical tradition, Thomas eventually traveled to India. He went there to preach the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. He was killed with a spear at what is now known as St. Thomas Mount in Chennai, India in 72 AD.

Why did Thomas go to India?

Thomas went to India to preach the good news of Jesus' resurrection because Jesus had transformed his doubt to faith.

Conclusion

John concluded this chapter with these words in verses 30-31, **"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the 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."**

Friends, the ultimate sign is the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus is alive!

Jesus' resurrection is an irrefutable fact of history.

And because Jesus is alive, he still transforms people from tears to joy, from fear to courage, and from doubt to faith.

If you have never done so, let me encourage you to put your faith in Jesus today. Amen.