

## Messiah

John 20:1-31

Key Verse: John 20:31

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Last weekend was Memorial Day weekend, the unofficial start of summer. The beaches in Chicago opened, the weather was hot and sweltering, and blockbuster season opened in the theaters. It really felt like summer. The Godbox felt like a sauna and it was just gorgeous outside. Who doesn't love summer? It's a season that is vibrant and warm and just begs you to come outside. There is newness to it and it's just glorious. The funny thing is that last week's message seemed like a juxtaposition compared to the weather. Bob told us about Jesus' death on the cross and how Jesus had finished all that he came to do. Jesus paid the price of our salvation. He had done everything to reestablish our relationship with God. We were terrible...we were wretched, but Jesus took our punishment and there is nothing more for us to do. At Jesus' cross, we can be thankful for what he has done, but we can also be a bit forlorn. Jesus' death on the cross is a horrible and sad event, and many point to it as being proof that Jesus is not God. How can God die? What kind of God could be arrested and killed by his own people? Death is so final in our eyes, and we can become blind to the truth. Jesus did say just before he died, "It is finished," but he did not say, "It is over"! Jesus' death was not the end; he came back. Jesus' death was like Memorial Day, the start of summer...the start of something glorious. When Jesus rose from the dead, summer was in full swing and it is proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

When we last saw Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had buried his body by wrapping it in linen and treating it with 75 pounds of spices. Then they placed it in a new tomb that was in a garden and sealed it with a stone. The following day was the Sabbath and the tomb was left alone because of Jewish regulations. "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance." (1) On Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene went out to the tomb before the first light of day. When she got there, the big stone that covered the entrance of the tomb wasn't there any more. It must have been quite a startling scene. Who could have moved the stone? Mary ran back to the other disciples and told Peter and John that someone had taken Jesus' body and she didn't know where it was. (2)

On hearing the news, Peter and John run to the tomb. John outpaces Peter, probably because he is younger, and gets to the tomb first. When John gets there, he stops outside the tomb and looks in and he sees strips of linen lying on the ground. When Peter finally arrives, he goes straight in to the tomb. He sees the linen lying on the ground and he also sees that the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head was folded up and set aside. It was a perplexing scene. John comes in and joins in the investigation and CSI: Jerusalem was on the scene. If someone had taken Jesus, as Mary had suggested, then why was Jesus' cloth set aside so neatly? If someone had stolen Jesus' body, they wouldn't have unwrapped it in the tomb. That would have taken hours. Instead, they would have taken the body somewhere and then proceeded to unwrap it. Amidst this investigation, John realized what had happened. He recognized that no one would have stolen the body, but that Jesus had risen from the dead. As the passage says, John knew what had happened, but did not know why or how it had happened. This scene kind of reminds me of the last scene of many summer movies. Just when everything is all wrapped up and Jesus said that he finished everything, there is a closing scene that gives a twist and sets up the sequel. In this case, the scene goes black when John realized what had happened and that Jesus was no longer dead.

At the beginning of the would-be sequel, Peter and John return where they were staying, but Mary stayed behind. "Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot." (11-12) What a great way to begin the next great revelation! Mary, while weeping, looks into the tomb one more time, and this time there are two angels seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the foot and the other at the head. These two angels had come to show the divinity of Jesus. They had concern for Mary and asked her, "Why are you crying?" To them, there was no need for tears. Jesus was alive and that was a joyous occasion, not one for tears, but Mary was so overcome with grief. She was so certain that somebody had stolen Jesus that she was blind to anything else. So when Jesus comes to Mary and reveals himself to her, she doesn't recognize him. "Jesus asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'" (15) Jesus wasn't doing some Jedi mind trick on Mary, but overcome by so much emotion, Mary couldn't see the truth that was right in front of her. She thought that Jesus was the gardener. I mean, who else would have been there so early? It was a tomb in a garden.

However, with one word, Jesus was able to dispel all grief and doubt. "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher')." (16) When Jesus just said Mary's name, she knew exactly who it was. Jesus, himself said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me," (John 10:14) and also, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). Jesus knows those who are his and he calls them by their name. When Jesus called Mary, he called her in that way, and then as the verses say, Mary then recognized Jesus and she was led out of her grief and despair. It's amazing! The once-dead Lord was standing alive in front of Mary! When Mary realized it, her grief was gone and was replaced with so much joy. It was like Jesus said, "You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." (John 16:20) Mary was so overjoyed, that she didn't want to let Jesus go again, but he told her to tell the others what she had seen and that Jesus had to go back to the Father. She ran back to the others and told them that she had seen the Lord and then she told them everything that had happened to her and what Jesus said.

That evening, the disciples were together behind a locked door. Jesus' death happened just days before and the emotions of the city were still electric with hatred for Jesus. The disciples were afraid that someone was going to come for them, so they locked the door to the room where they were. In the midst of their fear, in the midst of the locked room, Jesus appeared to his disciples. "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'" (19) Jesus just appeared in this locked room like a person from Star Trek; he just beamed right on into the room. It must have scared the life out of them. Just suddenly, there's Jesus. They must have thought that Jesus was a ghost, and that's why Jesus showed them his hands and side. Jesus still bore the wounds from his crucifixion, but he was risen and alive. Nobody heals that quickly. When they realized that Jesus was no ghost, but that he had truly risen from the dead, the disciples were overjoyed. Their fear and grief were, too, dispelled by Jesus' appearance.

There was one person that was not there when Jesus appeared to the disciples, and that was Thomas. The other disciples told him that they saw Jesus, but he was skeptical. "He said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'" (25) A lot of times, we call Thomas "Doubting Thomas". A lot of people told him that they saw Jesus, but it wasn't enough for him. He wanted

to see the proof for himself. He couldn't believe merely based on someone else's word. He simply wanted to touch Jesus to know that he was truly there. Thomas is full of both commendable qualities and sinful qualities and Jesus, despite the brash request, came to Thomas and showed him the wounded hands and side. When he saw Jesus he proclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (28) He finally believed.

This is the full narrative of the passage. That's the story, but it is important to know what each of the people determined when they saw Jesus. We had a retreat around Easter called, "Witness Jesus". The point of that conference was to show that people saw Jesus' life, death and resurrection and each of these things pointed to the Jesus' identity, and this passage follows a very similar feel. To the people in this passage, seeing Jesus alive and well after he had been crucified and died was proof that Jesus is God. It didn't take much for them to believe, they simply saw Jesus. They didn't need any more. Each of them saw Jesus hanging on the cross. They saw Jesus give up his life and they saw his body come down and go into the tomb. They knew that he was dead, but here and now in this passage, his disciples had seen the risen Jesus. He had to be God, who else but God would have such power? That is the point of what John had written in this gospel. He wrote in verses 30 and 31, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

John wrote the gospel so that people could believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, God's appointed Savior, the Son of God himself, and he gave many convincing proofs from the miracles he chose to write about. More than that, though, John shared Jesus' words about what was going to happen. John recorded that Jesus said about his life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." (John 10:18) Jesus chose to go to the cross to bear the sins of humanity. Nobody took his life; Jesus chose to lay down his life for us. But Jesus also chose, just as simply, to take his life back up again. Some people wonder how God could have died. How can an all powerful God succumb to death? The great and wonderful thing is that God chose to die, but he did not choose to stay dead. Jesus instead chose to prove his power over death by defeating it at its own game.

Jesus said a couple of times in John's gospel that he is life. He says in chapter 11 that he is the resurrection and the life and in chapter 14 that he is the way, the truth and the life. Also, John wrote in chapter 1 that Jesus was the author of all things (John 1:2) and, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:4) Peter later concluded, "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." (Acts 2:24) Peter said that it was impossible for death to keep ahold of Jesus and that is because he is life. Death had been swallowed up in the beauty of life. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead killed death itself and it is something that we no longer have to be afraid of. Who but God has the power to kill death?

The implication of this is incredible. The Bible says, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-22) Jesus is the first to rise from the dead. With his resurrection, life can spread through him to all who are Christ. Verse 31 says, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” By believing in Jesus, by accepting that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah and accepting that he died on the cross and rose from the dead, a person is able to have life in his name. This life is a life everlasting and it differs very much from the life that we currently live.

Jesus said in a prayer in chapter 17, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3) Knowing God is the definition of eternal life, and that is something that is not set in the future, but something that begins the moment we believe in Jesus. Jesus’ death on the cross wipes away our sin, the very thing that keeps us from God. It wipes away any barrier that prevents us from coming to God, and Jesus’ resurrection provides us with a way to return to the Father. It gives us a new path to walk. No longer are we bound by death and defined by our sins, but through Jesus’ name, he is our proxy and we are set free from the power of sin and death and our identity is defined by Jesus.

Unfortunately, the allure of what the world offers is very hard to pass up. We’re bombarded by images of success and pleasure. There are so many people out there who seem to have it all together. They have a great job that makes lots of money. They are able to have anything that their hearts desire. They roll in fancy cars, live in beautiful place, vacation in exotic destinations, and have a life made to envy. They look like they have everything and they are so happy and at peace. Yet, it is all a façade. It is an illusion with very little basis in reality. In the movie *The Matrix*, the world that everybody seems to know is all an illusion by a machine race to keep humanity subjugated. The machines have put everybody into a shared dream world called the Matrix to use people as batteries. Everybody thinks that they are living their lives, but in fact, they are living in pods and are unconscious. The reality is that the world is a harsh wasteland and everyone has to eat this goop. One person, Ciphher, is fed up with the reality of things and agrees to betray his friends to return to the bliss that ignorance gives. That fake steak sure tastes a lot better than the real goop. The allure of the illusion was more enticing than reality.

The illusion of our world is that you will be happy if you have a little more money or the perfect job or the perfect spouse or fame. We seek after those things, but they don’t satisfy us. We can have all the money we want or fame or whatever we seek and it will not be enough. Just look to those who have what their hearts desire like celebrities. They have everything they want, but more often than not, they end up in a self-destructive spiral. There once was a man named Solomon, he was a great king and he wrote, “I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man’s heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My

heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11) Solomon denied himself nothing. He had everything he wanted, money, fame, women, but he realized that all of it was meaningless and it is no different now.

This world is harsh. The most recent jobs report wasn't good. Europe has been teetering on the brink of financial disaster so long. There are wars still raging around the world. There is famine and death occurring to the poorest of the poor. One man was eating another man's face and was shot dead by the police, and it seems like everyday there is a new shooting in Chicago. More people are murdered in Chicago than in Baghdad. However, the life that Jesus brings to us is vastly different than anything the world offers. Jesus said that he came to give us life to the full (John 10:10). The life that Jesus gives is a life full of peace. Three times in this passage, Jesus tells his disciples, "Peace be with you." He wasn't just greeting them, but extending the offer of peace. It is a peace that ceases the war that man has declared on God. It is a peace that is offered when we surrender to God and let his glory wash over us. A man named Paul wrote, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13) Paul endured a lot of things, but he always had peace because of Jesus. He was a man that, despite his circumstances, was at peace and joyful because he accepted Jesus as his own savior and God. It was through Jesus that gave Paul strength to be content at all times.

The result of Jesus being the Messiah, the Son of God is that the war between God and us is over. We don't have to struggle for survival. We don't have to plod through life with a dead end job. We don't have to carry the pain of uncertainty. These are things that are results of living a life without God. With God, it doesn't matter what our circumstances are because our life is not defined by our circumstances; it is defined by God. Thank God that Jesus is the Messiah. His resurrection from the dead is the ultimate proof that Jesus is Son of God. We each have to come to know it. We each have to come to accept it, and just like he did with Thomas, Jesus is willing to give us the proof that we need and thank God that because of Jesus, we are able to have life, real, full and content life in his name.