



The Gospel of John - Chapter Twenty

III John 13:1-20:31 - The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty

The tomb is discovered empty by Mary Magdalene and other women not recorded by John and then verified by two of Jesus' closest disciples. In his resurrection appearances Jesus continues to reveal the glory of God by manifesting the grace and love that characterise God. This love is seen in the gentleness, care and humility with which he deals with his disciples.

This chapter contains a series of encounters with Christ that show him overcoming a variety of barriers to faith, including ignorance, grief, fear and doubt. Five occasions of faith are mentioned, forming a chiasm. In the first and last, Jesus himself is not seen. In the first, the disciple John's faith is based on the evidence of the grave clothes; in the last, Jesus says future believers will have the witness of those who did see him.

The other three occasions are actual sightings of the resurrected Jesus. Mary sees both angels and Jesus but only believes when she hears him call her name. Thomas also requires something more than sight to believe; he had to touch Jesus' wounds. Between these two individuals, at the centre of the chiasm, is Jesus' appearance to the disciples as a group, who recognise him by seeing his wounds and in whose presence Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit.

John ends the chapter with a statement summarising the purpose of this Gospel account. While many of Jesus' signs were done in the presence of others, most of which John does not record, the presence of his disciples is the crucial fact, for it is they who have believed and been enabled to, by the Spirit, understand their significance and bear witness to Jesus and Jesus' witness to the Father.

III.c John 20:1-29 - Jesus' resurrection, appearances, and sending of his disciples

This section covers the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion and burial: the empty tomb, the risen Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene, and Jesus' appearances to his disciples and their commissioning.

III.c.i John 20:1-10 - The Resurrection of Jesus

Early on the Sunday morning, several women had come to the tomb to minister to Jesus' body, although John only records the presence of Mary Magdalene. When she sees the tomb open she ran back to tell the disciples. John and Peter immediately run to the tomb. John arrives first but waits at the entrance until Peter arrives, who goes straight into the tomb, followed by John.

They find the body gone and just the strips of linen that bound Jesus' body lying in the tomb. On seeing this, it seems that John may finally have believed that Jesus had risen but they still did not understand the meaning of the Scripture that said he would. The disciples then left the tomb and returned to their home.

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

John 20:1

The first day of the week is Sunday morning, which from then on has been the day that believers set aside as the normal day of worshipping the Lord: <<*On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight*>> (Acts 20:7), and: <<*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come*>> (1 Corinthians 16:2).

While it was still dark. This confirms the slightly different points in the timeline of the process depicted in Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2 and Luke 24:1, none of which detract from what happened. Matthew's Gospel explains that the stone had been removed from the tomb by 'an angel of the Lord' (Matthew 28:2).

Mary Magdalene left before dawn to go to Jesus' tomb to complete the burial preparations: <<*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared*>> (Luke 24:1), which had to be left undone due to the beginning of the Sabbath, refer to the comment on John 19:42. The Synoptic parallel passages indicate that other women were with her, as is also implied by the 'we' in v.2. On the identity of Mary Magdalene, refer to the comments made on John 19:25.

As noted in comments on 19:42, the approach of the Sabbath may have prevented Joseph and Nicodemus from completing the preparations of Jesus' body. Alternatively, bodies were frequently cared for during the first few days following the death to offset decay as the Jews believed that the spirit of the dead hovered outside the body for three days and could be reunited with the

body, thus restoring life. This was commented on in John 11:17 indicating the importance of raising Lazarus after four days.

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.'

John 20:2

The other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, is accepted as being the author of this Gospel and is the way he described himself in 13:23, 18:15-16, 21:7 and 21:20.

They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him. John gives no explanation as to who the 'they' might be. It is often assumed that they would have been the authorities because they would not have wanted Jesus' tomb to have become a shrine or a point for rallying opposition to those who were responsible for having Jesus put to death.

At this point Mary has no thought of resurrection. The plural we suggests the presence of other women besides Mary, as described in: <<***When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him***>> (Mark 16:1).

³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

John 20:3-5

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. Luke only records Peter as running to the tomb: <<***But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened***>> (Luke 24:12). However, this does not negate John's account that he too went with Peter. The Gospel writers were selective in their facts in order to make a particular point from the story. Whether the others followed later is not made clear. They may simply have remained in the locked upper room because there was still fear in the group that, now they were leaderless, they might also be sought by the authorities (v.19).

The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. There is much speculation for the reason for this statement. Some believe that it was because John loved Jesus more than Peter or that Peter was weighed down with guilt for having disowned Jesus a few days earlier. The most likely explanation is that John was younger and a faster runner and there is no need to overanalyse the fact that John arrived first.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there. Apparently by now there is enough daylight to see inside the burial chamber through the small, low opening in the cave tomb.

He, the other disciple, did not go in, perhaps he was apprehensive about what he might find or it may have been in deference to the status of Peter among the Twelve for, although there was no hierarchy in the apostolic team, Peter often put himself forward in a position of leadership and spokesman.

⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

John 20:6-7

The linen wrappings lying there are clear evidence that Jesus' body had not been taken by grave robbers or by his disciples attempting to steal the body: <<*While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, 'You must say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep." If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'* So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day>> (Matthew 28:11-15), and: <<*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again." Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, "He has been raised from the dead", and the last deception would be worse than the first.'* Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone>> (Matthew 27:62-66), or by his enemies, who would not have taken the time to remove these cloths (19:40).

The Greek text simply says that the linen wrappings were lying, Greek *keimai*, which is a common word. Although it is sometimes suggested otherwise, nothing in the text indicates that Jesus' body passed through the cloths or that the cloths were lying in the shape of Jesus' body. The NT elsewhere affirms the real physical materiality of Jesus' resurrection body: <<*Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him>> (Matthew 28:9), <<*Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have>> (Luke 24:39), <<*but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead>> (Acts 10:41), as well as verses in this chapter. Most likely Jesus, the Holy Spirit or perhaps an angel removed these wrappings from Jesus' body when he awakened from death and left them behind. Unlike Lazarus (11:44), Jesus would have no further need for grave cloths and so they were discarded.***

The reference to the head cloth being rolled up in a place by itself suggests that Jesus himself may have taken it off and folded it neatly.

⁸ Then the other disciple, who 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.

John 20:8-9

The other disciple went in and joined Peter in the tomb. The presence of two male witnesses rendered the evidence admissible under Jewish law: *<<A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained>>* (Deuteronomy 19:15).

The other disciple saw and believed. John did not yet fully comprehend what had happened but he did detect that this was something done by the hand of God, allowing him to have faith that it was something of great significance.

As yet they did not understand the Scripture proves that the disciples did not fabricate a story to fit their preconceived notions of what was predicted. Rather, they were confronted with certain facts, which they were initially unable to relate to Scripture. Only later, aided by the Spirit's teaching ministry, were they able to do so; refer to the comments on 14:26 and 16:13. In referring to the Scripture, John may be thinking of specific OT passages, such as: *<<For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit>>* (Psalm 16:10), *<<Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors>>* (Isaiah 53:10-12), *<<After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him>>* (Hosea 6:2), and: *<<But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights>>* (Jonah 1:17); or of broader themes in the entire scope of Scripture: *<<Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures>>* (Luke 24:25-27).

He must rise from the dead. Jesus had made it clear in his teaching that he was to die but he was equally as clear that he would also be raised back to life on the third day: *<<See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised>>* (Matthew 20:18-19),

and: <<*After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again*>> (Luke 18:33).

¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

John 20:10

When the disciples returned to their homes, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, in all likelihood brought the good news of Jesus' resurrection to Jesus' mother, whom he had taken <<*into his own home*>> (19:27b).

Despite the claims of those who try to play John off against Peter in their faithfulness as disciples, it is clear here that John did not see it that way. Both he and Peter were equally witnesses to the empty tomb but neither of them set out to witness to the people of what they had discovered. Instead, they went to their homes. However, both would take up their roles as faithful witnesses once they had been finally commissioned by their risen Lord and received the Holy Spirit.

III.c.ii John 20:11-18 - Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

John does not describe when Mary returned to the tomb but does describe her great love and dedication as she weeps for her beloved Lord. She looks into the tomb to see two angels sat where Jesus' body had lain.

Her conversation with them appears to have been brief for, after she tells them she is weeping for the missing body, she turns and sees Jesus and, thinking he is the gardener, asks him if he knows where the body is so that she can tend to it.

It is only when Jesus speaks her name that Mary realises it is the Lord. He tells her not to cling to him as he has not yet ascended to God and instructs her to return to the other disciples to tell them what she has seen. Mary immediately complies with this command.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

John 20:11-12

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. Although John does not provide detail of whether Mary followed Peter and John back to the tomb or whether she arrived after they had returned, it is known to have been still Sunday. She is demonstrating here love of Jesus for even the removal of his body, preventing her from tending to it, causes her great sorrow.

Mary Magdalene saw two angels in white. Angels often appeared in pairs, e.g. <<*While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them*>> (Acts 1:10), and are often depicted as clad in white: <<*And six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand; among them was*

a man clothed in linen, with a writing-case at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar>> (Ezekiel 9:2), <<I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude>> (Daniel 10:5-6), <<and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests>> (Revelation 15:6).

Sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. The angels were most likely sat on the loculus or rock shelf where Jesus' corpse had been placed by Joseph and Nicodemus on the previous Friday. For the types of tombs used refer to the comments on 19:41.

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 When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.¹⁵ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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.'

John 20:13-15

Woman, why are you weeping? The angels engage Mary in conversation. She does not appear to have been phased by this experience for her driving concern is that Jesus' body has been removed and she did not know where it had been taken to.

They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. Mary virtually repeats what she had said to the disciples in v.2, still not making it clear who they are.

Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener, perhaps because it was not fully light and perhaps because she had turned and seen someone there but had then turned immediately back toward the tomb as she spoke, for in v.16 she turned round again to speak directly to Jesus. At other times after his resurrection the disciples did not immediately recognise Jesus: <<*but their eyes were kept from recognising him*>> (Luke 24:16). Alternatively, his body may have looked somewhat different, and he may now have had a more youthful appearance of perfect health, in contrast to what he had become through his tremendous suffering and disfigurement: <<*For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account*>> (Isaiah 53:2-3).

Jesus is well aware of Mary's emotional condition, and he comes to her with great love and gentleness. The good news is not just that he has risen from death but

that the character of God is revealed in him. He is life, and he is also love. He asks the same question asked by the angels, Woman, why are you weeping? but immediately he focuses it further: For whom are you looking? This question, the first thing the risen Lord says, echoes the very first thing he said at the beginning of this Gospel (1:38). It is a question that reveals the heart.

Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Mary's focus remains undiminished as she wants only to find Jesus' body and ensure that it is placed in an appropriate tomb.

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

John 20:16

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' Hearing only her name, Mary recognises the voice of Jesus. As Jesus had clearly stated prior to his crucifixion: <<*He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice*>> (John 10:3b-4).

Rabbouni could mean 'my dear teacher', and such endearment would be in keeping with Mary's attachment to Jesus. However, the term is not always used in this way, as confirmed in: <<*Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again'*>> (Mark 10:51), and John simply translates it as Teacher.

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because 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."'

John 20:17

Jesus calls her by the name he used for her before, and she responds with the title she used before. She would naturally assume that their relationship could pick up where it left off and continue on as before. Jesus' response, however, lets her know there has been a radical change in him and consequently in his relationship with his followers. This change is indicated when Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me'.

Since John records this command in the present tense it should be read more as, 'do not continue to hold on to me'. Mary may have taken hold of Jesus to reassure herself that he was real or from a standpoint of 'do not leave me again'. Jesus wants to reassure Mary that he is real but that she must not hold on to him as he has to go away as he had told the disciples during his Farewell Discourse as recorded in Chapters 13-17.

I have not yet ascended does not deny the fact that Jesus' spirit went to the presence of the Father in heaven at the moment of his death, refer to the comment on 19:30, but affirms that his bodily ascension after his resurrection had not yet occurred: <<*While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven*>> (Luke 24:51), and: <<*When he had said this, as*

they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'>> (Acts 1:9-11).

Go to my brothers and say to them. Mary is given a commission that makes her an apostle to the apostles. It is quite remarkable that Jesus should decide to appear first to a woman because their testimony was not accepted in the culture of the day. Jesus is again defying convention by showing that the witness of women is as equally valid as that of the men.

To my Father and your Father, to my God and your God maintains a distinction as to the sense in which God is Christ's God and Father and the sense in which this is true for the disciples, refer to the comment on 1:14. However, he also calls believers my brothers, implying a personal relationship; refer to the comments on 15:13-14, as well as Hebrews 2:12 and 2:17.

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:18

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples what she has seen and heard. John does not mention the poor reception that was given to her message: <<*But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it*>> (Mark 16:11), and: <<*But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them*>> (Luke 24:11), although the fearful, doubting state of the disciples in the next sub-section implies as much. All witnesses can do is share what they know to be true.

Christian witness should not attempt to share an experience; it should direct people to Jesus so they can encounter him for themselves. Mary's message could alert the disciples to the fact that Jesus was alive, but they had to come to faith for themselves. Jesus met Mary in a way that was best for her. Now he will do the same for the disciples as a group.

III.c.iii John 20:19-23 - Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Despite the testimonies of Peter, John and Mary, the apostolic group had locked themselves away in their house for fear of the Jews. It was the evening of the day of Jesus' resurrection and the Festival of Unleavened Bread was being celebrated, yet this group were not celebrating.

Jesus suddenly appeared among them and offered them his peace. This brought great joy to them all. Jesus then commissioned them to go out into the world just as he had been sent by the Father. He then breathed on them so they could receive the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of

the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

John 20:19

The first day of the week. John wants to make it quite clear that the evening on that day refers to Easter Sunday, the day that the empty tomb was discovered and on which Mary's encounter with Jesus had occurred.

Some interpreters understand the doors were locked to imply that Jesus miraculously passed through the door or the walls of the room, although the text does not explicitly say this. Since Jesus clearly had a real physical body with flesh and bones after he rose from the dead, one possibility is that the door was miraculously opened so that the physical body of Jesus could enter, which is consistent with the passage about Peter going through a locked door some time later: *<<After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him>>* (Acts 12:10). However it had occurred, Jesus came and stood among them.

For fear of the Jews. This is a reference to the Jewish authorities and the crowd that had supported them in having Jesus executed.

Despite the locked doors, Jesus came and stood among them, and greets them with the greeting still common today in that part of the world: peace be with you. In his Farewell Discourse Jesus had given them his peace and charged them not to fear (14:27), and now he will begin to lead them into that experience. This may be a common greeting, but in this context the full significance of the word peace is present.

In the OT peace is closely associated with the blessing of God, especially the salvation to be brought by the Messiah: *<<May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!>>* (Psalm 29:11), *<<For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace>>* (Isaiah 55:12a), *<<I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore>>* (Ezekiel 37:26), *<<and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth>>* (Zechariah 9:10b).

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.

John 20:20-22

He showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus had said they would have joy when they saw him again (16:21-

22), and now they do, once the wounds have certified it is really him. Such joy, like peace, for Jesus repeats peace be with you, was viewed as a mark of God's salvation, including the expected time of salvation in the future: <<**Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it**>> (Psalm 96:11), <<**Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones**>> (Isaiah 49:13), <<**O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before**>> (Joel 2:23), <<**yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation**>> (Habakkuk 3:18), and: <<**Then the people of Ephraim shall become like warriors, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and rejoice, their hearts shall exult in the Lord**>> (Zechariah 10:7). Both the peace and the joy come from the presence of Jesus himself, the very presence of God come to earth.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. These verses contain the Johannine version of Jesus' Great Commission as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, which serves here as the culmination of this entire Gospel's presentation of Jesus as the one sent from the Father, something referenced over 40 times in this Gospel; refer to the comment on 3:17. The Sent One, Jesus, has now become the 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 the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends his disciples, equipping them with the Holy Spirit. Whatever else, mission is at the heart of discipleship.

When Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit', it is best understood as a foretaste of what would happen when the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, refer to Acts Chapter 2. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit had no presence in the disciples' lives prior to this point; refer to the comments on John 7:39 and 14:16-17.

The word used for breathed on is Greek *emphysao* and is the same word used in the Septuagint to describe God's action in the creation account: <<**then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being**>> (Genesis 2:7). George Beasley-Murray says, 'Strictly speaking, one should not view this as the beginning of the new creation but rather as the beginning of the incorporation of man into the new creation which came into being in the Christ by his incarnation, death and resurrection, and is actualised in man by the Holy Spirit'.

²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

John 20:23

The expressions they are forgiven and they are retained both represent perfect-tense verbs in Greek and could also be translated, 'they have been forgiven' and 'it has been retained or withheld', since the perfect tense gives the sense of completed past action with continuing results in the present. The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not

forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the Gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit (v.22), it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven, which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done, refer to the comment on Matthew 16:19.

III.c.iv John 20:24-29 - Jesus and Thomas

Thomas had been absent when Jesus appeared to the others and was told what happened on his return. Thomas would not accept what they were telling him and would not believe that Jesus had risen unless he saw him and was able to place his hands into the wounds.

A week later Jesus again appeared to the group and this time Thomas was there. Jesus offered to let Thomas touch the wounds. Thomas' response was to declare that Jesus was his Lord and his God! Jesus declared that Thomas believed because he had seen Jesus, yet there will be those who will be blessed because they will believe without seeing Jesus in person.

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

John 20:24

Thomas had been prominent on two previous occasions in this Gospel. Despite the danger Jesus faced from the Jews, he announced that he was to return to Judæa because of the death of Lazarus. His disciples objected but: <<*Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him'*>> (John 11:16). It was also Thomas who admitted that he did not know the way to the place where Jesus was going to which: <<*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'*>> (John 14:6).

²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

John 20:25

Unless I see I will not believe. Apparently, Thomas thinks the disciples may have seen a ghost, as they first thought on a previous occasion: <<*But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear*>> (Matthew 14:26). Yet John is careful to affirm that Jesus is the incarnate Word: <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14), <<*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world*>> (1 John 4:2-3), and: <<*Many deceivers have gone out*

into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!>> (2 John 7), which entails that his resurrection body is not a phantom or spirit apparition but a real, albeit glorified, body. Thomas' reaction coined a common noun 'Doubting Thomas' that refers to a sceptic.

Unless I put my hand in his side should not be taken to mean that Jesus still had a gaping wound in his side from the spear, or indeed that the mark of the nails were still open to allow Thomas' finger to be placed inside. This is most likely an overstatement by Thomas and quite understandable in the situation he faced.

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

John 20:26

A week later refers to the following Sunday, one week after Easter (v.19), because the starting day was also included in counting the number of days, for the original states eight days later. Now that the Festival of Unleavened Bread was over, the disciples would soon be returning to Galilee. Jesus' resurrection and his appearances on consecutive Sundays formed part of the reasoning for the early church to meet on a Sunday. They would not have wanted to meet on the Sabbath as that would contravene what they had always been taught through their Jewish heritage. Meeting on a Sunday has long since been the tradition of the Christian church.

The doors were shut or locked. Refer to the comment on v.19.

Peace be with you. As with the previous meeting, Jesus offers his peace to the disciples who are present, as he had promised he would: <<*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*>> (John 14:27).

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'

²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'

John 20:27-28

Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Jesus revealed his body to Thomas, as he did to all his disciples as proof that he was real: <<*And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet*>> (Luke 24:40). There is no indication that Thomas tried to touch Jesus' wounds or even felt the need to do so. Once he saw Jesus for himself, his faith was made complete.

Do not doubt but believe. Although spoken to Thomas this is a statement that should be applied to all who would choose to follow Jesus, especially when life gets difficult and prayers do not seem to be heard, let alone answered.

Thomas' confession of Jesus as his Lord, Greek *Kyrios*, and God, Greek *Theos*, provides a literary link with the references to Jesus as God in the prologue (1:1 and 1:18). This is one of the strongest texts in the NT on the deity of Christ. Some cults try to explain away this clear affirmation of Jesus' deity by arguing that Thomas' statement was merely an exclamation of astonishment that, in effect, took God's name in vain. Such an explanation is unthinkable, however, given the strong Jewish moral convictions of the day and because it is not consistent with the text, which explicitly says that Thomas said these words to him, that is, to Jesus. Thomas' statement is in fact a clear confession of his newly found faith in Jesus as his Lord and God. John's entire purpose in writing this book is that all readers come to confess Jesus as their Lord and God in the same way that Thomas did.

²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

John 20:29

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. If 'seeing is believing' then Jesus now confirms that believing is seeing. What matters now is the relationship that is established by faith. Therefore, the readers of John's Gospel are at no disadvantage as compared to Jesus' first followers. Note the possible echo of this text in: <<*for we walk by faith, not by sight*>> (2 Corinthians 5:7), and: <<*Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls*>> (1 Peter 1:8-9).

However, this faith is not a vague or general feeling, nor is it merely an intellectual assent to a position. It is openness and acceptance and trust directed toward God in Jesus. In John, as in the rest of the NT, the concern is not simply with various conceptions of God or various ideas, but with the events in history that demand an interpretation and a response.

III.d John 20:30-31 - The Purpose of This Book

John provides a summary statement outlining his key reasons for writing this Gospel account. It is written as one long sentence in the Greek and is clearly aimed at those who come to faith in Jesus without having physically seen him, or the signs and wonders he performs.

Some scholars believe the original Gospel ends here, with Chapter Twenty One added later either by John or someone else. Study of John's other writings support the following chapter as a natural way of following on to these summary verses.

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31

John's purpose statement and conclusion of the Gospel proper rehearse the major themes of the Gospel: Jesus' identity as the Messiah and the Son of God, his selected messianic signs, the importance of believing in Jesus, and the gift of eternal life in his name: <<***And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life***>> (Matthew 25:46).

Which are not written in this book. John acknowledges that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, and indeed many other people as well, which are recorded in part in the other Gospel accounts. John did not feel it necessary to repeat the record of these signs but calls on his readers to trust in them as historical facts pointing to the reality of who Jesus really is.

Jesus has the unique status of the Son of God, not in the sense of being created or born, but in the sense of being a Son who is exactly like his Father in all attributes, and in the sense of having a Father-Son relationship with God the Father.

These are written so that you may come to believe. The aim of John, in writing this Gospel, was to allow those who have not had the privilege of seeing and hearing Jesus in person to still have the opportunity to come to a true understanding of who Jesus is and what he has achieved, and is still achieving, by coming to earth, revealing the Father and taking upon his own mortal body all the sins of mankind: past, present and future.