

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for April 24: Believing the truth

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It almost goes without saying that believing “the truth” is vital to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, belief often is taken for granted and its importance downplayed. The stakes are high because at the heart of belief is commitment—an important self-directed commitment to live according to a system of truth.

In John 14:6, Jesus calls himself “the way and the truth and the life.” Christian faith depends on Jesus as its source for truth. Paul taught in Romans 10:9 that those who focus their faith on the risen Jesus are saved. The touch point for our lesson is Paul’s statement that belief in Jesus’ resurrection is significant for salvation.

This week’s lesson treats John’s resurrection story. The concept of belief is central to the Gospel of John. The matter rises to a climax in chapter 20. This chapter could be titled, “Belief in the Context of Jesus’ Resurrection.” The key observation is that “Believing in the truth” has faith in Jesus’ resurrection at its core. In this lesson, we see the belief of Mary Magdalene and John energized by Jesus’ resurrection.

I don’t know (John 20:1-2)

Verse 1 describes Mary Magdalene’s movement in the early morning darkness to tend to her Lord’s tomb. At this time of day, households were rising for a work day. Mary, however, slipped away to Jesus’ tomb. This provides a great picture of devotion for believers to emulate.

Mary found the stone removed from the tomb. This was the first sign of Jesus' resurrection. Mary was alarmed and ran to find Peter. Verse 2 states Mary had investigated the tomb enough to know that Jesus' body was missing.

The Gospel of John has a feature whereby the writer repeatedly calls himself the "the beloved disciple." Careful study reveals this disciple as John. John did not elevate himself as beloved, as if the others weren't. He adopted this humble method of self-reference to downplay his presence.

I don't understand (John 20:3-7)

Mary's news compelled two prominent witnesses to Jesus' resurrection to race to Jesus' tomb. John and Peter's flight to the tomb set in motion human reflection on Jesus' resurrection that continues to this day.

Of note is that no one witnessed the moment of Jesus' resurrection. The stone already was rolled away when Mary arrived. The other Gospels differ slightly regarding moving the stone and how many women were present, but all state Jesus' body was missing. The timing of Jesus' resurrection is unknown, but the fact of his resurrection is certain, due to the number of witnesses.

The discovery of the risen Lord began with the empty tomb. Jesus' associates had known him for years and witnessed his death. They could personally identify Jesus. They also could state he was alive because they saw him die. Jesus' companions became strong witnesses to his resurrection.

In the tomb, the two disciples saw Jesus' grave clothes. Though we don't have the forensics on the burial cloths, their presence in the tomb is hard to explain if someone had removed Jesus' dead body.

Curiously, John waited outside the tomb, while Peter entered the tomb.

Perhaps John saw the empty cloths and waited to discuss matters with Peter. Perhaps Peter's loyalty to his Lord drove him to investigate.

I do believe (John 20:8-9, 14-16)

From our perspective, no apparent conclusions can be made from the evidence. Verse 8 indicates this evidence was sufficient for John to believe. How he processed the information is unknown. John, who knew his Lord personally, sized up the situation and the evidence and believed.

Verse 8 seems to indicate John believed his Lord had risen. Verse 9 indicates John based his faith on the evidence because at this point, the disciples did not understand the Scripture's teachings about Jesus' resurrection. John's faith in the Lord soon be rewarded by seeing his risen Lord. Here is the first instance of a faith that has survived the experience of Jesus' death. Jesus is alive and so is faith in him.

Verses 10-13 state Mary returned to Jesus' tomb. She had not moved as far forward as John in her post-resurrection faith. At first, she did not recognize him. It is unexplained why Mary, a devout follower of Jesus, did not realize she was talking to her Lord. Nevertheless, her words express her faithfulness to her Lord.

Recognition came when Jesus spoke her name. The impetus for Mary's recognition of Jesus was her relationship with him, not the empty tomb, nor the cursory conversation to this point. This insight speaks strongly regarding the level of assurance a relationship with the Lord can attain.

I can tell (John 20:17-18)

Jesus' reference to ascension in verse 17 is puzzling for many. It appears as if Mary interrupted Jesus' ascension. Mary embraced him with great joy and relief. Perhaps the moment lengthened to the point that Jesus reminded her that he would not always have a physical presence in the

world. Verse 18 shows she fully understood as she exclaimed to the disciples that she has seen the Lord.

Thus two persons come to belief in Jesus, as a result of his resurrection. These are strong testimonies for people today. These two witnesses show a credible and satisfying relationship with the living and reigning Lord can be experienced by all who believe in Jesus.