

## LESSON 13 \*March 20-26

# The Power of the Resurrection



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### SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 20:1–21:25.*

**Memory Text:** “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (*John 20:31, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** The resurrection of Jesus provides both the assurance that the claims of Jesus are true and a living parable of God's mighty power in our lives today.

**T**he power of the Resurrection is real. John 20 brings us to a crucial point in the Gospel of John. There is a sense in which the story is “finished” with Jesus' death on the cross (*see John 19:30*).

But there is also a sense in which it is unfinished. There would be no Christian church if Jesus had remained in the tomb. The resurrection of Jesus turns apparent defeat into victory. The Resurrection is a mighty act of God on the level of the Creation and of the Exodus.

The New Testament records eleven separate post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus, four of which are recorded in chapters 20 and 21 of the Gospel of John, three of them in chapter 20 (*John 20:10-18, 19-23, 24-29*). And, perhaps, the most important message here is one that's been seen all through the book: A true Christian experience comes not by seeing and touching but by believing in the words of Jesus, whether spoken in the flesh or in the written testimonies of His disciples.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 27.*

## **At the Tomb** (*John 20:1-18*).

The many witnesses to the Resurrection help assure us the accounts of the Resurrection were not made up by the disciples in order to save face. As long as these witnesses lived, their stories could be compared and checked out (*Luke 1:1-4*).

For the second generation, however, the greatest evidence of Jesus' resurrection was the empty tomb. The empty tomb is a central feature of this Gospel. Indeed, given the circumstances, the emptiness of the tomb is extremely hard to understand unless Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead. Did the enemies of Jesus come and remove His body from the tomb? Did the disciples steal His body in order to create the illusion of a resurrection? We will see in tomorrow's study that none of these scenarios makes sense. The best explanation for the empty tomb (unless one is predisposed to deny the possibility of resurrection) is that Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead.

**Read John 20:3-10, the account of the first two disciples at the tomb. Focus specifically on verse 9. How could they not understand that, especially after all that Jesus had told them about His resurrection? See Matt. 12:40, 27:63, Mark 9:30-32, 10:32-34, John 2:19.**

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**How does Mary Magdalene understand the empty tomb at first, and how does she come to realize that Jesus was alive? *John 20:10-16*.**

To the next generation of Christians, the message in the little scene between Jesus and Mary was powerful. Although Mary was in the personal presence of Jesus, her eyes were so blinded by tears that she had no idea with whom she was talking. His physical presence was of no use to her until she gave attention to His word. We, too, have that word, through the Gospel of John.

**Look at the initial reaction of those who found the empty tomb. Despite everything that Jesus had taught them, all thought there was a natural explanation: Someone took away His body. With all the supernatural things they had seen with Jesus, their first reaction was toward doubt and skepticism. What lessons can we learn from this for ourselves?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

**Key Text:** *John 20:31*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To grasp the significance of the Resurrection as evidence for Jesus' claims.
2. To understand the importance of our own belief in making the Resurrection real to ourselves.
3. To see the meaning of the Resurrection in our lives today.

### Lesson Outline:

#### **I. The Empty Tomb** (*John 20:1, 2*).

- A. The Resurrection occurred before many witnesses, which helps debunk the charges that it was fabricated.
- B. There are few satisfactory explanations for the empty tomb other than the Resurrection.
- C. Objective examination of the facts supports the Resurrection.

#### **II. Knowing He Lives** (*John 20:17*).

- A. The disciples had little concept that Jesus was to be resurrected; therefore, they were not prepared when He appeared to them.
- B. Mary, in her encounter with Jesus in the garden, struggled with accepting the reality of His resurrection.
- C. Without our acceptance and belief, the Resurrection is merely academic.

#### **III. He Lives Within My Heart** (*Rom. 8:11*).

- A. The resurrection of Christ heralded the defeat of death, the ultimate enemy.
- B. If resurrection is possible, anything is possible; if not, it does not matter whether anything else is possible.
- C. The Resurrection offers us hope in our own lives, with our inevitable reverses and defeats.

**Summary:** Of all the world's many religions and belief systems, only Christianity can claim a founder who defeated death. The Crucifixion shows God's love for humanity; the Resurrection shows the power behind that love.

### COMMENTARY.

"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. . . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (*1 Cor. 15:14-18, NIV*).

To Paul and the rest of the apostles, Christ's resurrection was the basis of their faith and preaching. What made the Cross the power of God unto salvation is Jesus' resurrection. Jesus died for our sins; when He rose from the grave, He became victorious over sin and

**MONDAY** *March 22*

## **In the Upper Room** (*John 20:19-29*).

**How** do the rest of the disciples come to know that Jesus was raised from the dead? *John 20:19, 20*. **How does Thomas?** *John 20:24-29*. **What do their reactions reveal about their faith? Did they really have “faith” before seeing Him, as we understand faith? How much faith does it take to believe in what you see, hear, tell, and touch?**

The first generation of Christians was very slow to believe, despite the evidence of the empty tomb and the witness of Mary. All needed to see Jesus for themselves before they could forsake other explanations for the empty tomb. Only the beloved disciple believed without seeing Jesus first (*John 20:8*), representing the kind of faith the second generation would have to exercise and Jesus would bless.

**Read John 20:29. What is Jesus saying here, and what does that mean to us, today? Is Jesus asking us to have “blind” faith? Explain your answer.**

How did the tomb become empty? Certainly the enemies of Jesus had no motive for removing His body from the tomb, and if they had done so, why did they not produce the body to prove He had not risen?

It is equally clear that the disciples had neither the ability nor the intention of stealing Jesus’ body. The fact is that the disciples did not believe that Jesus would allow Himself to die, in spite of His repeated assertions of what lay ahead. On top of this, if the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, their later behavior is totally unexplainable. Who would suffer ridicule, torture, and death over an event that never took place?

Thus, the Lord has given us, besides the clear testimony of the Bible, rational and historical evidence to help us believe in the resurrection of Christ. And if Jesus rose from the dead, no other miracle is impossible. Anything we possibly could ask of Him can be done when it is according to His will. Our own resurrection also is guaranteed by the certainty of His. The same divine power that raised Jesus from the dead can bring life and healing into even the most hopeless human situations.

**Who has not, in his or her walk with the Lord, at some time experienced some struggle with faith? How, by our focusing on the Cross and the Resurrection, can our faith be strengthened?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

death. This week, we will consider four instances of the post-Resurrection period.

### I. Mary Magdalene: "I Have Seen the Lord!"

After Jesus cast seven devils out of her (*Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2*), Mary Magdalene became His devout follower and supporter. Her loyalty to Him was so complete that even in His death, she wanted to serve Him. So she was the last to leave the cross and the first to arrive at the tomb on Sunday. But its emptiness plunged her heart in grief. She was looking for the wrong Jesus: the dead one. Neither she nor the disciples paid sufficient heed to the Scriptures (*John 20:9, Ps. 16:10*) or to the Master's teaching that He would rise from the dead (*Matt. 16:21, Mark 8:31, John 2:17*). The neglect of God's Word in study and devotion, in praise and worship, extracts a heavy price in times of emotional need or spiritual despair.

However, when the Person whom she considered a gardener called her "Mary," she recognized Him as Jesus. Had He not said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (*John 10:27*)?

Jesus' treatment of Mary shows His great regard for women. He chose to reveal Himself first to a woman. Then He commissioned her to be the first person to tell the world that He was alive. " 'I have seen the Lord' " (*John 20:18, NIV*), she shouted joyfully to the disciples. No factor is too limiting, no person is too insignificant or too marginalized to be a spokesperson for God!

### II. Jesus: "So Send I You."

Jesus is ever conscious of His saving mission. With His eyes fixed on the Cross, He spent His entire earthly ministry on fulfilling the Father's will. The intimate relationship that existed between Him and the Father prior to the Incarnation motivated Him to press forward. "The Son of God was surrendered to the Father's will, and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 208.

The risen Jesus could no longer continue His earthly ministry, and at His first appearance to the disciples, He breathed on them the Holy Spirit and enlisted them as His coworkers: " 'As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you' " (*John 20:21*). "Whatever our position, we are dependent upon God, who holds all destinies in His hands. He has appointed us our work, and has endowed us with faculties and means for that work. So long as we surrender the will to God, and trust in His strength and wisdom, we shall be guided in safe paths, to fulfill our appointed part in His great plan."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 209.

**TUESDAY** *March 23*

## **The Power of His Resurrection** (*John 2:22, 7:37-39, 12:16*).

**What** are some other things that happened to the disciples as a result of the resurrection of Jesus? *John 2:22, 7:37-39, 12:16*.

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection,” Paul writes to the Philippians (*Phil. 3:10, NIV*). The resurrection of Jesus was the most awesome event of all time. With all our science and technology, we still have no clue how to bring life back from the dead. Anyone who has the power to raise the dead would (one would think) have the power to accomplish anything else the human race might need.

At the heart of Christian faith is the testimony of the New Testament that Jesus rose from the dead. The power of Jesus’ resurrection became the basis for the mighty acts of God in the lives of Christians ever since (*2 Cor. 5:14-17*). The power of the Resurrection is the basis for limitless power in the lives of Christians today. Why, then, are these “limitless powers” so invisible in many churches today?

One of the major themes of the Old Testament has to do with remembering and forgetting. Whenever the Israelites forgot the mighty things God had done for them, they lost the sense of His power and presence. When they remembered what He had done for them in the past, the power of the original action was reactivated in their lives. In fact, the very essence of Old Testament spiritual life was recounting the mighty acts of God in their past history.

**Read Deuteronomy 26:1-12. How do these verses reveal the importance of remembering how God has acted in the past?** *See also Pss. 66:1-6, 78:1-55.*

Indeed, when the Israelites told of the mighty acts of God in their past history, the power of the original act was unleashed again in their experience (*2 Chron. 20:1-30*).

What was true in Old Testament times is also true of the New Testament. The greatest mighty act of God is the action He did at the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus. There is power in the constant retelling of the Christ event. That is why sharing our faith is such an essential part of the Christian experience. Where there is no retelling of the mighty acts of God, there is no power. But telling what God has done brings revival and reformation. The power of the Resurrection turns a formal religion into a living and powerful one!

**How, in your own walk with the Lord, has recounting the Lord’s actions in your past helped strengthen your faith?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

### III. Thomas: “My Lord, My God.”

Missing worship and fellowship with fellow believers commands a high price. Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them, but when they told him about it, he refused to believe. His pessimism demanded visual proof (*John 20:25*). Little did he realize, though, that genuine faith is not a result of scientific investigation but of unquestioning trust. Jesus, however, is the Lord of love, and where love is, patience abounds. So Jesus granted Thomas’s wish. Whether

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *John 1:14; 20:23, 29, 30; 21:12; James 2:22-25*

- ❶ Jesus’ resurrection is indeed far greater than His greatest of acts in the Old Testament, because death is the ultimate obstacle. Yet, even though His resurrection was well attested to, it was less public than His other miracles. How is this significant to the message of John’s Gospel?
- ❷ Were the disciples wrong to demand proof that Jesus had risen from the dead? Was it really a lack of faith on their part to ask for such proof, or was their personal and concrete witness necessary to believers who would follow them? Explain your answers.
- ❸ Christians—and heretics—through the centuries have had different ideas about what the Resurrection was and what it meant. Why is it important that Jesus physically rose from the dead, rather than as a “spirit,” as some have taught?
- ❹ It is easy to believe in the Resurrection and similar miracles and wonders as great events that occurred in the distant past, but it is more difficult to appropriate their power and meaning in our lives today. Why is mere belief in Jesus’ resurrection insufficient? What is necessary for our lives to benefit from it?
- ❺ Why were the encounters of the disciples with Jesus after the Resurrection so anticlimactic? Do you think, even then, that the disciples had failed to grasp the significance of the Resurrection?
- ❻ John 21:15-23 is one of Scripture’s most beloved passages. How many personal applications to the Christian life can your class glean from this passage? Which of these applications mean the most to your class members, and why?

**WEDNESDAY** *March 24*

## **Gone Fishing** (*John 21:1-14*).

**Read John 21:1-11. What makes this event so appropriate, so symbolic, of what Jesus would have them do after He's gone (see particularly vs. 11)? Compare this account to Luke 5:1-10, particularly verse 10.**

John 21 is often described as the epilogue to the Fourth Gospel, because it comes after a passage that reads like the concluding words of the Gospel (*John 20:30, 31*). John 21 tells the story of how the disciples encountered Jesus in Galilee after His resurrection. Jesus provides a huge catch of fish (*vss. 1-6*), fixes breakfast (*vss. 7-14*), and then holds a serious conversation on the beach with Peter (*vss. 15-23*).

The impression one gets, particularly in the Gospel of John, is that Jesus' postresurrection appearances were occasional and rather unexpected. Mary, the ten, Thomas, and now seven disciples are all startled at the suddenness of Jesus' appearances. In a real sense, the ministry of Jesus to His disciples was completed in the upper room (*John 13-17*). He says very little to them after the Resurrection, at least, that is recorded. The purpose of His appearances, perhaps, is not so much to teach as to validate the reality of His resurrection.

**What has Jesus been doing on the shore? *John 21:9-13*. What spiritual meaning can you find in Jesus inviting them to dine with Him?**

It appears that breakfast that morning was pretty silent (see also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 810). The disciples didn't seem to know what to make of Jesus' behavior since they had been with Him in the upper room. On that day they experienced the same uncertainties the second generation Christians would experience over the death of the beloved disciple. The disciples were in the presence of Jesus in the flesh, yet His physical presence seems to have offered no advantage to them. Only the coming of the Spirit would provide solid assurance, and the coming of the Spirit proved to be equally effective for both the first and the second generation.

**Imagine being in the presence of Jesus and it giving you no advantage! That could happen if someone were to allow formal religion alone—creeds, rules, doctrines—without a living experience with the Lord, to dominate his or her religious life. What lesson is here for us?**



## TEACHERS COMMENTS

the Lord's invitation for Thomas to touch and feel His wounds embarrassed Thomas or not, the humbled disciple went beyond simple acceptance to make the greatest Christological confession of all times: "My Lord and my God" (vss. 26-28).

### IV. Jesus: "Feed My Lambs."

The beloved apostle closes his Gospel narrative with a dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Three times the Lord asked Peter: "Do you truly love me more than these?" (*John 21:15-17, NIV*). Peter was no longer boisterous and boastful. The events of the Cross had changed his life, and in the most humble way, he submitted himself to the all-knowing wisdom of Jesus. "Yes, Lord . . . you know that I love you." "The transformation in Peter was evident. The close, testing questions of the Lord had not called out one forward, self-sufficient reply; and because of his humiliation and repentance, Peter was better prepared than ever before to act as shepherd to the flock."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 812.

Such a transformation is always essential before we can fulfill Christ's commission to feed His lambs.

## Witnessing

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America mentions three undeniable rights of all human beings: "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Throughout history, however, death has been the punishment for certain criminal acts. In the Old Testament, a person was subject to die for arbitrarily taking the life of another (*Deut. 19:11, 12*). Today, the death penalty is still used in many countries. When an individual has been given a sentence of death, that person's right to life is taken away.

From a spiritual standpoint, our right to life was taken away when sin entered the world. We were all subject to death, until Christ died on the cross. Because of His resurrection, we no longer have to suffer the death penalty. Once again, we have the right to life. We are free to make choices. We can choose to overcome sin and temptation. We have the right to liberty, liberty that enables us to "rejoice evermore" (*1 Thess. 5:16*). We have the right to pursue happiness.

After His death and resurrection, the Lord returned to the Father in heaven. But He has given us Power of Attorney on earth. When someone has Power of Attorney, he or she has the legal right to act on behalf of another in his or her absence. As His agents, we have the power through the Holy Spirit to win souls. Our job is to go into the world and preach the gospel (*Matt. 28:19*) until the Lord returns.

**THURSDAY** *March 25*

## **Getting Peter Back on Track** *(John 21:15-23).*

**Read** the exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15-17. Compare it with what happened in Luke 22:55-62. What was Jesus doing here with Peter?

Verses 15-17 describe a threefold repetition of question, reply, and response. This approach could seem rude on the part of Jesus. Its effect is to probe Peter to the depths of his being, at the cost of considerable pain. Peter's self-confidence is gradually chipped away, until he is left with nothing but the certainty that Jesus knows his heart and will be fair in His judgments.

There is something about pain, loss, poverty, and emotional anguish that brings people to the place where major gains in spiritual development are possible. And sometimes, as in the case of Peter, the author of that pain is Jesus who, like a loving surgeon, wounds so that He might heal. Jesus does not settle for quick, superficial answers. He insists on getting down to the true feelings and motives of those He loves.

The experience of Peter shows that any relationship with Jesus will tend to have its ups and downs. What would Jesus have us do when we fall? How can we know we are accepted in spite of what we have said, thought, or done?

1. *Know what kind of God you are dealing with.* God loves sinners! This is not to say that sin does not matter but that no matter what we have done in the past, we can start over today. It is at those very times when you feel the worst that you have the greatest claim on His mercy!

2. *Tell the truth about yourself.* The Bible calls this confession. Confession simply is facing reality and being honest with God about it. Confession can be difficult, because our natures will rebel against it, but if we are grounded in the value that we have at the Cross, it will be less painful than the consequences of not confessing!

3. *Ask for forgiveness.* "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV). God does not require a whole list of conditions before He becomes willing to forgive. The conditions were already met in Jesus Christ.

4. *Plan to forsake sin forever.* How can you do this when many sins seem attractive? Total up in advance some of the consequences of continuing in sin. Read the list to yourself every time you are tempted.

**Take a spiritual inventory of yourself, based on those four steps listed above. How have you done? Better with some steps than with others? What changes must you make in your own life?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

### Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “Jesus’s friends could not come to the tomb on the Sabbath, because to make the journey then would have been to break the law. . . . So it was on Sunday morning that Mary came to the tomb. She came very early. The word used for early . . . was the technical word for the last of the four watches into which the night was divided, that which ran from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. It was still grey dark when Mary came, because she could no longer stay away.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 2*, pp. 265, 266.

#### Thought Questions:

❶ Mary, heartbroken and crying at the empty tomb, did not recognize Jesus. Perhaps it was because the tears had blinded her. Perhaps it was because she was facing the wrong direction (maybe she could not take her eyes off the empty tomb). When Jesus comes the second time, many will be blinded or may be found looking in the wrong direction. What are some of the things that may blind us? What other focuses in our life may cause us to look in the wrong direction?

❷ The Latin word for “priest” is *pontifex*—a word that also means “bridge builder.” The purpose of the priest was to build a bridge between God and humanity. Jesus, of course, is our perfect High Priest. In what ways would you be at a disadvantage without Christ as your High Priest? What must you do to make the most of Jesus as your High Priest?

#### Application Questions:

❶ Scattered throughout the story of Mary are expressions of her deep love for Jesus. Gather from the life expressions of your love for Jesus. How would you label the relationship you have with your Lord? Distant? Close-knit? Intimate? Passionate? Where do you see this relationship going three years from now?

❷ Thomas’s positive quality was that he said what he felt. If he did not understand something, he did not rest until he did. And when he believed in something, he did so completely. What lessons can you learn from this trait of Thomas in the area of Bible study? In your personal communication with God?

## FRIDAY *March 26*

**Further Study:** “Jesus had several times attempted to open the future to His disciples, but they had not cared to think about what He said. Because of this His death had come to them as a surprise; and afterward, as they reviewed the past and saw the result of their unbelief, they were filled with sorrow. When Christ was crucified, they did not believe that He would rise. He had stated plainly that He was to rise on the third day, but they were perplexed to know what He meant. This lack of comprehension left them at the time of His death in utter hopelessness. They were bitterly disappointed. Their faith did not penetrate beyond the shadow that Satan had cast athwart their horizon. All seemed vague and mysterious to them. If they had believed the Saviour’s words, how much sorrow they might have been spared!”  
—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 25, 26.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Are there times when it is good to be as skeptical as Thomas was? How do we know when it is appropriate to doubt something?
- 2 How do we know whether the pain in our lives is something God is allowing to happen in order to teach us something? Or do we need to know? Is it not enough simply to ask the Lord, If the pain, whatever its source, does not go, could You at least allow me to learn from it?
- 3 If someone asked you to give evidence of the resurrection of Christ, what would you say?

**Summary:** The power of the Resurrection not only convinces us that the story of Jesus is true; it convicts us of sin and provides the basis for a living and vibrant relationship with Jesus. There is nothing like the peace that comes from being totally committed to His will. There is nothing like the joy that comes when your conscience is clean. Christianity has lasted about two thousand years, because nothing can compare with the kind of life that comes when you have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. It is possible to go through the motions and call it Christianity. But the real thing is the greatest. Why settle for less?