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John 20



Gospel of John - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, particularly in John 20. He explores the possibility of tampering with the tomb and the significance of the appearances of Jesus both in Jerusalem and in Galilee. Gregg notes that while Mary Magdalene was the first witness to the resurrection, it was John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who believed without seeing. He concludes that Christians are expected to believe without seeing, but doubts and confusion can still arise.

Transcript

We're, of course, almost at the very end. We're in John chapter 20. There remain only two chapters for us to consider.

But, in a real sense, of course, John has saved the best for the last. And that's just the way it had to be because the story's best occurs at the end, and that is when Jesus rises from the dead. And the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is what makes Christianity, Christianity.

It's not the Sermon on the Mount that makes Christianity, Christianity. It's not even so much the life of Jesus, although that is not the least bit unimportant. The life of Jesus is all of one piece with his death and resurrection as well.

It was his sinless life that made his resurrection possible and made his death effective as an atonement for sin. So, we would not diminish that, but the point is that every religion has a founder who lived and many religious founders lived exceptional lives, not as exceptional as Jesus' life, but still noteworthy. And, of course, all religions had founders who died.

But no other religious system in the world has a founder who rose from the dead, nor even claims that, despite the vacuous claims of those who present what's called the Jesus myth theory, the idea that the story of Jesus dying and rising again is simply borrowed from the pagan mystery religions and that all the pagan gods of previous religions were dying and resurrecting gods. The idea that the Egyptian god Horus, or the

god Mithras, or even Krishna, or Bacchus, as some of these deities of the pagans that were worshipped before the time of Christ, we're sometimes told they died and rose again, yet, despite the frequent repetition of these claims, you will search in vain for any evidence that this is so. In the pagan religions, the idea of a god who dies and rises again, in the sense that we're talking about here, is simply not found.

With Horus, for example, the Egyptians claimed that he died and then he became the lord of the underworld. He didn't rise from the dead, he just had a continuing existence somewhere else. The story of Jesus is unique.

Jesus doesn't have any competitors. It's not like there's a smorgasbord of beliefs that are all very similar to each other but with slightly different flavor. There's only one Jesus, there's only one person who has risen from the dead and proven himself to be divine, proven himself to be the son of God.

And the story of his resurrection is obviously carried in all the gospels. There wouldn't be gospels without it. We really wouldn't have a gospel without the resurrection of the dead.

And therefore, in every one of the gospels, Christ's resurrection is the climax and the close. Each gospel presents the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to people afterward. Mark's gospel has alternative endings in different manuscripts.

Not all of the manuscripts of Mark end the same way. And the oldest ones actually end without an appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. All we really have there in the shortest version of Mark is that the tomb was empty and angels at the tomb told the women that Jesus had risen.

And we don't have in that case resurrection appearances. But the longer endings of Mark have a number of appearances and all the other gospels, of course, do. One of the hard things is to harmonize the records of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection with each other.

This can, I believe, be done. It's not the easiest thing in the world, but it can and has been done. And I'm not sure that the way it has been done eliminates every little problem, but there is certainly a sequence of events that is reasonable that can be woven together from the four gospels.

If we were unable to do so, for example, if we didn't have enough information to know how to weave them together, that would not mean that the gospels are presenting fiction. As a matter of fact, we have evidence that the four gospels are very independent witnesses by the very fact that they are hard to harmonize. If they were not independent, they would resemble each other much more.

If one writer depended on other writers, he would have copied the information, at least some of it, or at least harmonized with it. The fact that the gospel writers made no effort

to harmonize their accounts with each other, or even make them sound agreeable with each other, is proof that the gospel writers are four independent witnesses, like independent witnesses in a court of law who testify to something and have not heard what the others have said. Now John knew what the others had said, and John was deliberately supplementing it.

The other gospels may or may not have been familiar with each other. There are claims, of course, that Matthew and Luke used Mark's gospel. I don't know that that's the best explanation of the data that they try to explain by that thesis, but the point is that we have four witnesses that are clearly independent of each other to the same event.

The essential event is that Jesus rose from the dead, that his tomb was empty, that angels were there who announced his resurrection, and that he appeared to a number of people afterwards. If it's hard to know exactly what order those appearances took, that's a much smaller problem than the skeptic has in trying to explain how it is that four witnesses could agree on these matters so much if it had no basis in history. One thing we have to say is that there are four witnesses to the fact that Jesus appeared.

After his death, he appeared alive again. In chapter 20, we read of Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb. One gets the impression that she is coming alone, and yet the other gospels tell us that as the dawn began to break on Sunday, the first day of the week, a group of women were coming to the tomb, and Mary Magdalene among them.

Let me give you what I consider to be a probable order of events harmonizing all four gospels. Then we'll study what Mark John tells us, and we'll see how it fits into this larger picture that we get from all the gospels. The best harmony of the gospels on this, I believe, would have Mary Magdalene along with other women approaching the tomb very early in the morning about sunrise on Sunday morning.

They are discussing among themselves how it is that they'll have the stone removed from the door of the tomb because they're bringing spices, and they hope to honor the body of Jesus with their spices. They want to spice the corpse more, which was just one of the ways that they showed honor. And so they're discussing the problem of how will we get the stone removed.

Perhaps they felt that all of them together could put their backs to it. There were at least four or five of them, it seems, or else maybe they thought they'd meet some man along the way who would help them move it, but they were discussing that. And as they drew within view of the tomb at a distance, they could see that the stone was already moved.

Now, the assumption was made by Mary Magdalene, and maybe the others as well, that someone had tampered with the tomb and that perhaps someone had stolen the body. And Mary Magdalene, seeing that, runs off to tell Peter and John that someone has stolen the body. She does not go all the way to the tomb initially.

She simply sees that it is open, and she leaves the other women and goes and tells the disciples that Jesus' body has been stolen, an assumption that she has made just from the little evidence she's seen. The other women, however, do not run off. They go to the tomb, and arriving at the tomb, they see angels there.

And the angels say, why are you seeking the living among the dead? You're looking for Jesus. He's not here. He's risen.

And he's going to go ahead of you into Galilee. Therefore, go and tell his disciples that he'll meet them in Galilee, as he said. Now, apparently there had been some discussion between Jesus and the disciples previously that he would meet them in Galilee, and apparently at a particular place.

And so, the angels didn't have to say where. I mean, Galilee's a big place. They just said, go tell the disciples that he'll meet them in Galilee, as he said.

There must have been some rendezvous point that he had spoken of with them before, but they had forgotten about it or discredited it when he died. And now he's alive again, the angel says, and you need to meet him there. Now, this is curious, because the women then go off to tell the disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee.

However, we find later on that Jesus actually appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, both on Sunday, the resurrection day, in the evening, and also a week later. They're still in Jerusalem. And so, it's strange that we find them saying he'll meet them in Galilee, but in fact he meets them in Jerusalem that night, long before they'd have a chance to get to Galilee.

My own thought is this, that when the angel said, tell his disciples that he'll meet them in Galilee, the angel doesn't mean the apostles, but all the disciples throughout Galilee. Go and spread the news among those who were his disciples in Galilee that he'll meet them in Galilee. There was perhaps a location, probably a mountain, where all the disciples who lived in Galilee would meet him, or at least as many as these women could find.

They were Galileans themselves, they probably had a network of friends who were followers of Jesus, and they were told to go and gather the disciples, but not necessarily the apostles, because Jesus was going to appear to them much sooner. The apostles would see him that night. But, in the meantime, the women leave on the errand that the angels have sent them on, and Mary has arrived at the home of, or wherever Peter and John are staying, and says, you know, they've stolen the body, they've moved the body, we don't know where it is.

Peter and John just jump up and run out the door to run to the tomb. Mary is a bit tired, having made the round trip once, and she's trailing behind them, she's going to the tomb also. But they get there first, they're running, and John gets there first, he stoops down

and looks in, but he doesn't go in, and Peter comes up behind and runs right in, then John goes in, they see the grave closed, Peter is perplexed, John, at that point, believes that Jesus has risen, and then they leave the tomb not knowing what else to do.

And they go back to their lodging. As they have left, Mary Magdalene, who has been following behind them, arrives at the tomb. And it's at that time that Jesus appears to her, as John's gospel records.

And she becomes the first to see him, after his resurrection. Then the women see him, because they're on their way to tell the disciples of the meeting of Galilee, and he appears to them. And he says, All hail, and they fall down and worship at his feet.

And so, that is what happens immediately in the morning. The disciples, Peter and John, come to the tomb and see what's there. Mary comes there and actually sees Jesus.

The other women have seen an angel, and are dispatched with a message by the angel, but Jesus meets them on the way as they run off to carry that message. Okay, later in the day, but we don't know exactly when, Jesus appeared to Peter alone. We know this because it says so in Luke 24, 34, and also in 1 Corinthians 15, 5. So there was an appearance to Peter that is not really, we don't know the place or time exactly.

Later that day, in the evening, in the afternoon, two men on the road to Emmaus encounter Jesus, but don't know that it's him immediately. And once they recognize that it's him, he disappears. And so they run back to Jerusalem, and they tell the disciples that they've seen Jesus.

And the disciples say, Yeah, we've seen, you know, Peter's seen him too. And while those two men from Emmaus are still there with the disciples in the upper room, apparently, that's when Jesus first appears to them all, all except Thomas. Thomas is not present at that time.

And so Jesus appears to them, and all the apostles except for Thomas now have seen him, touched him, known that he's really risen. And this is all on the same day. Everything that we've talked about so far happened on Sunday.

The next appearance of Jesus apparently didn't happen until the next Sunday. And Thomas has, in the meantime, been told about the resurrection by the apostles, but he's not believing it until he sees it. And so Jesus appears again in the upper room to the disciples, this time with Thomas present.

And Thomas comes to faith also. Probably chronologically, next would be an appearance in Galilee. These appearances that we've talked about so far were all in Jerusalem.

And understandably so, because Jesus was crucified at Passover, and there would be a one-week feast of unleavened bread that the Jews would normally be in Jerusalem for. So

the disciples stayed there for that week. That's why they were there on Sunday night when Jesus rose and the following Sunday night.

They stayed for a week and a few days in Jerusalem before going back to Galilee. But when they did go back to Galilee, we have the story of John chapter 21, where seven of the apostles were fishing. And they saw and met Jesus by the side of the lake, as we shall see in chapter 21.

After that, apparently, was when Jesus met with all the disciples, 500 perhaps or more. Paul mentions that in 1 Corinthians 15. He says that Jesus appeared to 500 at one time.

1 Corinthians 15.6. That was probably the appearance of which we read at the end of Matthew, where he met, it says, with the disciples on a mountain of Galilee. That's what Matthew tells us in Matthew 28. On a mountain in Galilee, he met with the disciples and gave them what we call the Great Commission.

And that is probably when there were 500 or more people who saw him. And after that, there is an unrecorded appearance to James, the brother of Jesus, who was an unbeliever until that time. Now, I say unrecorded, you say, well, how do we know about it then? Well, it's alluded to.

In 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 7, Paul said, then he appeared to James. We have no other information about that, but after this time, with the 500 who saw him, he appeared to his brother James. 1 Corinthians 15.7. And then there's one other recorded appearance, and that is on the Mount of Olives, back in Judea again.

And that was the occasion where Jesus ascended into heaven, but he also gave another commission then. So there are a total of about 14 different appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. And that's the probable order of them.

John concerns himself primarily with the earliest ones and then with one of the later ones in Galilee. He's got, in chapter 20, all the appearances in chapter 20 of John occur in Jerusalem. And the appearance in chapter 21 occurs in Galilee.

So, actually, Luke concentrates on the appearances in Jerusalem. Matthew and Mark concentrate on the ones in Galilee. And John has some of each.

He's got appearances in Jerusalem in John chapter 20 and an appearance in Galilee in chapter 21. So, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early. And we know that she was not alone because the other Gospels say there were other women with her.

But that's not important enough for John to bring out because he wants to focus on Mary's experience. It's interesting how much we feel like we know Mary Magdalene. She has never been mentioned in the Gospel of John previous to the Passion narrative.

She was listed as one of the women who watched Jesus die from a distance. And now she's the one who comes to the tomb. Previous to that, she was not mentioned in the Gospel of John at all.

And in the Synoptics, she's only mentioned one time during the ministry of Jesus. Again, in a list of women. In Luke, I think it's in chapter 8, it says that her name is given along with other women who were wealthy women who financially supported Jesus and the apostles.

Jesus' ministry was primarily supported by a group of wealthy women. And Mary Magdalene was one of them. And we're told in that one place where she's introduced in Luke that Jesus had cast seven devils out of her, seven demons out of her.

We have no record of that occurrence. We only are told that that had happened. So, we know very little about Mary Magdalene other than this story that we're reading now.

And yet, it is told with such graphicness that we almost feel like we know the woman. Like I said, we've only had her name in lists previous to this. Lists of women.

And the only information we've known about her is that she was a financial supporter of Jesus and he had cast seven demons out of her on some earlier occasion. But that's it. Sometimes the tradition is told that she was a sinful woman.

Sometimes she's identified in popular imagination with the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. But that is strictly a Roman Catholic tradition. The idea that she was a prostitute or that she was a great sinner was a mistake that was made by one of the popes.

Giving a sermon, actually. I think it was Pope Gregory, if I'm not mistaken. And he gave a sermon where he referred to Mary Magdalene as that prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her hair.

With her tears and hair. But he was mistaken. The Bible doesn't say any such thing about her.

There's nothing in the Bible that says Mary was a prostitute or that she was a bad person. Perhaps the fact that Jesus cast seven demons out of her might make her seem like a bad person. But we don't know, first of all, how she became demon possessed.

Whether she had done something bad in order to come into that condition. Or whether she was a victim, as some other people are, who have done nothing knowingly to become demon possessed. We also don't know, while she was demon possessed, whether she did bad things or not.

Demon possession seems to be manifest more in erratic behavior, in craziness, not

necessarily in moral behavior. So there's nothing in the Bible that suggests that Mary was a particularly immoral woman. If she was, well then she might have the more reason to love Jesus because those who are forgiven much love much.

But we don't know that that's the case. We know almost nothing about her except what we find in this chapter. And yet the chapter is so graphically and realistically told that you feel like you're there.

You kind of feel like you know this woman. And so we're going to concentrate on her experience here. Ignoring the fact that other women were with her initially as she approached the tomb.

But she apparently separated from them when she saw from a distance that the stone had been rolled away. It says, while it was still dark and she saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, they have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they laid him.

Now notice it says, we do not know, which suggests that she was not alone and she was not. The other gospels tell us there were other women with her. John has not mentioned that just because it's not his intention to give all those details.

But the very fact that she says we don't know means that she was not alone when the tomb was discovered to be open. However, she had not gone close enough to see the angels or hear the announcement made to the other women there. She instead impulsively just ran off to tell Peter and John.

And Peter therefore went out and the other disciple and they were going to the tomb. So they both ran together and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. The fact that John outran Peter probably just is because he was the younger disciple.

Not because he was more enthusiastic than Peter. Peter was probably a big man. Might have been a little slower moving than John because Peter was big.

Because we have him single handedly pulling 153 fish in a net ashore in the next chapter. He did it apparently himself. He pulled the whole net with this many fish in it.

The weight of the catch was too heavy to pull into the boat for all the mariners. And yet Peter was able to drag it ashore once he got his feet on solid ground. He must have been a rather muscular man and probably a large man.

And perhaps not a fleet of foot as John. So John gets to the tomb first and he's stooping down and looking in and saw the linen cloth lying there. Yet he did not go in.

Simon Peter came following him and went into the tomb and he saw the linen cloth lying

there. And the handkerchief which had been around his head not lying with the linen cloth but folded together in a place by itself. In the Greek this word handkerchief specifically means a sweatband.

Something wrapped around the face. And the other disciple who came to the tomb first went in also and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the scripture that he must rise again from the dead.

Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. So Mary is trailing behind them. She doesn't run because she's already been to the tomb and back once that morning.

And she's just walking dejectedly toward the tomb probably crying. And Peter and John have run back to the tomb and left before she gets back. Now what was it they saw? It says that John when he saw these things believed.

It does not say that Peter believed. It says they did not yet know the scripture that he must rise from the dead. It doesn't say scriptures, plural.

It may be that John has one particular Old Testament scripture in mind. We don't know which one. Because there's not a direct statement in the Old Testament scripture about Jesus rising from the dead.

We know that Jesus said as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. So shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. It may be that that was considered to be one of the main Old Testament types.

That were predicting that Jesus would rise from the dead. Or some have thought it's referring to Hosea chapter six in verse two. When it says in three days he will raise us up.

Although in the context it's questionable whether that's referring to the resurrection of Christ. Also Isaiah 53 doesn't mention the third day. But it does say that the Messiah would die.

That he'd be cut off from the land of the living. But then it says that God would prolong his days. Isaiah 53 is very frequently quoted in the New Testament.

It says in Isaiah 53 in verse eight. The middle of Isaiah 53 verse eight says for he was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgressions of my people he was stricken.

So it talks about him dying for the sins of his people. But then in verse ten. It says yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.

He has put him to grief. When you make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed. He shall prolong his days.

Prolonging his days after he's been killed? How's that? Well we would see it as a reference to the resurrection of course. There's not very much in the Old Testament that directly speaks about Jesus rising the third day. Although Paul felt there was in first Corinthians 15.

When he summarizes a portion of the gospel that he had preached to the Corinthians previously. Verse three says for I delivered to you first of all that which I also received. That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

That he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. That is Jesus resurrection on the third day was according to the prophetic scriptures. It's not entirely clear which of the Old Testament scriptures.

The apostles were thinking of when they talked about the scriptures that say that Jesus rise from the dead. But the disciples at this point in time didn't understand the scriptures that Jesus should rise from the dead. So there may be scriptures like this in Isaiah 53 10 or Hosea 6 2 or possibly Jonah.

Which they were not seeing that way yet. But they came to see afterwards. Now what they saw, what Peter and John saw in the tomb was grave clothes.

But that in itself is significant. That was a perplexing thing. Because the body was gone but the grave clothes were still there.

Now remember they didn't just wrap a dead body up in a sheet. What they made was almost like a mummy arrangement with strips of cloth. Which were wrapped around like you'd wrap something in duct tape.

You know I mean there'd be all these individual strips that were kind of glued together with spices and stuff. And so he was kind of wrapped up in a lot of bits of shreds of cloth. It's not a garment you could just take it off and leave it behind.

It'd be very time consuming to unwind it all. So a grave robber wouldn't take the time to unwind it and tear off a naked body. If they wanted to rob the grave they'd just grab it and go and the grave clothes would not be there.

Furthermore it says that the head cloth that had wrapped around his head was rolled together in a place by itself. It almost looked like someone had folded it up and set it down. This was not a hasty grave robbing.

This was a case where it would appear that the grave clothes were still intact in the place where they had been. On the slab where the body had been laid. And the head cloth someone had taken the time to fold it up and put it there.

He didn't leave a mess behind. It's just not the kind of evidence that would provide an

easy explanation. When Lazarus was raised from the dead he came out of the tomb still wrapped up.

The reason is that his physical body was simply brought back to life again. And it was all constrained by these grave clothes. And Jesus said unbind him and let him go.

Jesus however, his resurrection body was not like that of Lazarus. It was not just a resuscitation of his physical natural body. It was rather a glorification of his body into a supernatural form.

So that we find later in some of the appearances of Christ to the disciples after his resurrection that he was able to enter a room with the doors locked. Apparently able to pass through solid objects. Apparently he was able to pass through the grave clothes and leave them lying there.

His body was able to come right through them and leave them. Now what he was wearing then after this when he appeared to them we don't know. Obviously this is a miraculous situation.

God may have given him miraculous clothing. He may have had a robe on or something. We don't have any description of that.

But he didn't have his grave clothes on anymore. In any case they saw the evidence but they didn't know what to make of it. Except John believed it says at that point.

John was the first to believe. He's the only one who believed without seeing Jesus first. But he did see something.

He saw the grave clothes and the evidence he put together convinced him that Jesus must in fact be risen from the dead. The other disciples did not believe until seeing. We sometimes think of Thomas as doubting Thomas because he did not believe until he saw.

But the other disciples didn't believe until they saw either. I mean all of them except John had to see Jesus before they believed he was risen. Thomas just had the misfortune of not being there the first time he appeared.

So it took him longer. Now verse 11. But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping.

And as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb just like John had done. John didn't go in until Peter had run right past him. Always more impetuous.

He doesn't think to stop or anything. He just runs right past John and into the tomb. Once he's in there John follows him in there.

Mary like John is a little more reluctant to go in. But she peeks in there and she saw two angels in white sitting. One at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus

had lain.

Now she apparently didn't know they were angels at the time. And they said to her, woman why are you weeping? And she said to them, because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him. Now they didn't give her any response to that.

They didn't say to her what they said to the other women. Which is, you know, well he's risen. They didn't have to.

Jesus had reserved this revelation to appear to her, to himself. And when she had said this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But didn't know it was Jesus.

Why didn't she know it was Jesus? This is one of the peculiarities about many of the resurrection appearances. In that people often either outright did not recognize him. Or they kind of did.

When I say they kind of did, you'll find in chapter 21. When the seven disciples have caught that load of fish. And they go ashore and they're having breakfast with Jesus.

There's this peculiar statement that says, none of them dare ask him who he was. Because they knew it was the Lord. What a bizarre statement that is.

None of them dared to ask him. Certainly the way that's worded, it sounds like they wanted to, but they didn't dare. But it says, because they knew it was the Lord.

Well if they knew it was the Lord, why did they want to ask him? Why would they want to ask him who are you, if they knew it was the Lord? Obviously there's some ambivalence there. There's some, you know, they kind of feel like, of course it's the Lord. Who else would it be? We can see the holes in his hands and his feet and we recognize his voice and all that.

But there's something different about him. Maybe it just seems surreal. Maybe it just seems like they're wondering if they're really there.

If they're really in the presence of Jesus. After all, they'd seen him die some days earlier. And now they're sitting in his presence and he's talking to them.

It's like, after my wife died, I had a few nights where I actually dreamed that she came back. Not that she rose from the dead, but that she really hadn't been killed after all. There are a few dreams, just in the few weeks after she died, that in the dream, I went someplace and there she was.

It turns out that she hadn't died. It had only been a false report that she had died. Of course, I saw her dead when she died.

But in the dream, things are different. In the dream, it's like, oh, I thought you were dead. And she says, no, I'm just here.

One of those wishful thinking kinds of dreams. But in the dream, it's like, it just seems so surreal. You've adjusted to the idea that this person's dead, you're never going to see them again.

And then there they are, in the dream. It's like, well, how weird is that? And apparently, the disciples, when they saw Jesus, they kind of recognized him, but they kind of were not sure. Or they kind of were, but they just weren't sure what to think.

It just must have been like they were in a dream-like, surreal state of mind. The two men on the road to Emmaus had seen Jesus during his lifetime, but didn't recognize him the whole time they walked with him to Emmaus. And it wasn't until the breaking of bread that they recognized him, and then he disappeared.

So from time to time, after his resurrection, he was not immediately recognized. Now, in this particular case of Mary, though, people sometimes suggest, well, it wasn't really that he looked any different. It was rather that her eyes were filled with tears.

This is a very common suggestion. She was weeping, we're told. Her eyes were filled with tears.

She couldn't see well. She could see kind of blurry through her tears and couldn't quite make out who it was. That's possible.

But there's also possibly something even more simple than that. She stooped down and was looking in the tomb. So she's down low, looking in the opening.

He's standing behind her, and she turns around and sees him there. She might not have seen his face immediately. She's down at this level, and he's up here.

She turns around and sees there's a man there. And she is weeping and so forth, and she doesn't immediately look up to see who it is, and she doesn't know it's him. So it may be just like you wouldn't know immediately who's standing behind you if you turned around and you were down at this level and you just saw some legs behind you.

We don't know if he was unrecognizable or if she just wasn't looking at his face immediately. Jesus said to her, woman, why are you weeping? Which is the same thing that the angels had asked. But Jesus was going to take up where they left off.

Whom are you seeking? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Apparently she felt like maybe someone had found it inconvenient for Jesus to be in this particular tomb. It was a rich tomb.

It was Joseph of Arimathea's own tomb, a wealthy man's tomb. Perhaps she thought, well, Jesus was a peasant. Maybe someone decided they didn't want him in their fancy tomb, and they just took him off somewhere else and dumped him somewhere.

I don't know what she thought, but she certainly wasn't thinking he had risen from the dead, and therefore other suggestions were flooding her mind as much as she could think of them probably. And Jesus then said to her, Mary. And she turned and said to him, Rabboni, which is to say teacher.

Rabboni is essentially the same word as rabbi, perhaps a more affectionate form of the word rabbi. Rabbi means my teacher or my great one. So she recognized his voice.

Some think that he spoke her name in a distinctive way that she was accustomed to hearing him speak it, or maybe not, maybe it just took this long for her to look up and see it was him when he called her name. Jesus said to her, Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my father. But go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God.

His statement to her, don't cling to me, is more properly rendered here than in the King James. In the King James version it says, touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my father. Now the translation touch me not is adequate, but probably not correct in this case.

The verb here is the verb hupto, you would write it H-A-P-T-O, hupto. That word means in the Greek touch, it also means cling to, and it also means in some contexts to light a fire, to touch off a bunch of kindling with a flame and start a fire. But in this case it obviously doesn't refer to starting a fire, so it either means touch or cling to.

The King James chose touch, touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my father. This wording has led many people to what I think is a mistaken interpretation. They've said, oh Jesus could not be physically touched after he came out of the tomb until he would ascend to the father and fulfill the type of the high priest entering the Holy of Holies and sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, Jesus had yet to do that.

And he couldn't be touched because his resurrection body was purified and he couldn't be defiled by human touch until he would go into heaven and sprinkle his blood on the mercy seat, then he could be touched. And they point out that shortly after this, that same morning, the other women who were running to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee met him and they grabbed his feet and he didn't tell them not to touch him. In other words, they did touch him.

And so, on the view that Jesus said to Mary, do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my father, many have suggested that between the time that Mary met him and the time the other women saw him, later, maybe only less than an hour later, that he

ascended to heaven, sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat in heaven, then came back and he was allowed to be touched then. This is how some people have understood it. To my mind, it's very elaborate and unnecessary.

He's not making some kind of mystical statement about being untouchable at this moment, but I'll be untouchable after I've gone up into heaven and back. I think all he's saying is, don't cling to me. I think she actually was clinging to him.

I think she was hanging on to him. We can hardly imagine otherwise. She had great affection for him and thought that she had lost him when she was watching him die.

She watched him get buried. She was adjusted to the idea that she was never going to see him again. And then, to her great joy, she sees him alive again.

And, of course, she would just grab him and say, you know, she wouldn't be saying, but she'd be thinking, I'm never going to let you go again. I thought I lost you once, but you're back. I'm not going to lose you again.

And for him to say, don't cling to me because I have yet to ascend to my father, can simply mean, the most natural thing, would mean that he has yet to go again. And we know he did. He eventually ascended in the presence of his disciples.

And the book of Acts records that, and so does the gospel of Mark. He was going away again, in other words. He's not here forever.

He's not here to stay. He's going back to heaven. And so, don't cling to him.

That is, don't become emotionally dependent on me being physically here with you. You have to release me, because I'm going to be gone again. It may seem like I'm back, but I'm not really back, in the sense that you're hoping.

I'm going away again, and I'll be gone. So, don't be too clingy. Don't depend too emotionally on my physical presence here.

And that would appear to be what he's actually saying to her. And he says, go and tell my brethren, I'm ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God. Now, many people quote this as if to say that Jesus is not God.

They say, well, he spoke about God as his God. Well, that's true. I mean, that's not shocking to Christians who believe in the Trinity.

Jesus, in his incarnation, submitted to his Father as his God and his Father. It actually says that in Psalm 45, which is quoted in Hebrews 1 as a passage addressed to Jesus. You can find it in Hebrews 1, verses 8 and 9, a quotation from Psalm 45, verses 6 and 7. Hebrews 1.8 says, But to the Son he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions.

Now, the writer of Hebrews says this is addressed to Jesus. And the speaker speaking to Jesus says, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness. So, clearly the writer of Hebrews is saying that it's not inappropriate to refer to the Father as Christ's God.

He is your God. But, notice, he is also called God. At the very beginning of the quote in verse 8, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The Messiah is addressed as God, and yet the Father is spoken of as his God. This manner of speaking is obviously confusing to us, because we do not fully understand the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son, the deity of Christ, and the Sonship of Christ. What we are left with is the idea that Jesus, though he existed in the form of God, when he took on the form of a servant, he took on an additional dimension or identity to what he had had before.

He was not only God, but he was now something else too. He was also a man. He was a God-man.

And the God-man looked to God, the Father, as his God. Yet he was that God in human form. How this could be, John never explains, but he makes more references to it than any other gospel writer.

He starts out with that mystery. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He just opens his book with that very paradox.

He was with God, and he was God. And in the upper room in John 14, when they said, show us the Father, and it's enough, Jesus said, well, have I been this long with you, and you don't know who I am? In other words, you want to see the Father, don't you know who you're looking at? If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. He says, don't you know that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? He's obviously saying that his identification with the Father is almost absolute, so that you don't need to see the Father.

Additionally, if you've seen him, you've seen as much of the Father as anyone could ever desire. And yet, in the same chapter, before that chapter ends, he says, the Father is greater than I. And now, although Jesus is God, and that's what Thomas eventually confesses, he says, my Lord and my God, when he sees him. Yet, Jesus speaks of the Father as my Father and your Father, my God and your God.

How we are to synthesize the doctrine of Christ's deity, and the doctrine of Christ's subordination as Son to the Father, it's a perplexing thing for theologians, but only

because they allow themselves to be perplexed. The other option is to not be perplexed and just not understand. You don't have to understand, and you don't have to be perplexed.

You can just acknowledge that there are some mysteries that God understands, and he speaks from the standpoint of him understanding those mysteries without explaining them to us. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. And so, we should accept it.

Jesus said that the Father is my Father and he's my God, and yours too. But Jesus is also him. Now, Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things to her.

That first appearance of Christ, as far as we know, he had appeared to nobody else previous to this. Mary Magdalene had the first opportunity, and she testified to it. So, the first witness of the resurrection was a woman.

The other women had been told about the resurrection by angels, so they had an authoritative message to convey, but they couldn't bear witness. They hadn't seen him. You can only bear witness to something you've actually seen.

If you go to court and they ask you to testify, and you say, Well, I heard someone say this, and they say, That's hearsay evidence. What did you see? What actually happened before your eyes? The courts only want to know what you've seen. You can only testify to what you've seen.

Mary was the first person who had seen that he had risen. John had come to believe it by seeing the grave clothes. The women had come to believe it because of the angels telling them.

But Mary actually could testify, Jesus is alive. I've seen him. And therefore, she was the first evangelist.

The first messenger of the gospel as a true witness. Now, the other women were messengers of the gospel, too. They weren't able to witness what they'd seen, but they knew the information from angels, so they also communicated it.

Thus, the very first people to preach the gospel were women. It's often been pointed out that this could hardly be fiction, because Jews who wrote the gospels would never, if making the story up, would never make the primary witnesses of the resurrection be women, for the simple reason that women's testimony was not considered reliable in Jewish society. A woman would not be allowed to testify in court because it was not thought that a woman could be reliable as a witness.

Women were seen very inferior in Jewish society to men. And the witness of a woman in

court would not count for anything. Women in the Middle East are not highly regarded, and at least not regarded as credible.

And therefore, Middle Eastern story writers, if they were making this up, would never have chosen women to be the first persons to be testifying. It's clear that the reason that these stories are told this way is because that's what happened. The Jewish writers would much rather have had some male witnesses at the beginning, but that's just not the way God worked it out.

And the men were expected by God to believe the testimony of women, although they were not accustomed to crediting the testimony of women. Now, it does say in one of the gospels that when the women testified to the apostles about seeing Jesus, it sounded like idle tales to the disciples. The disciples didn't really believe them.

Apparently they didn't believe Mary Magdalene either. So, Jesus then did appear to the apostles. Of course, you would think they'd be the first, because they are his apostles.

They're the ones he has chosen to be his spokesman permanently in the future. But he appears to them for the first time here in verse 19. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, Now when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So they came to believe at this point. Then Jesus said to them again, And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Now this was all the apostles except for Thomas.

This appearance to these men is sometimes referred to, for example, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 as his appearance to the twelve. However, there weren't twelve. Thomas was not there and Judas was not there.

There were only ten of them. But they were still called the twelve. The twelve came to be a technical term for the apostolic group.

If there were some of them not present, or even when it was down to eleven for a little while and then restored to twelve, the group was still technically called the twelve. And so we have ten of them at this point see Jesus. And significant things happen in the absence of Thomas.

One, Jesus says, And the word send here, although John doesn't use the word apostle very often in his gospel, he uses the verb from the noun apostle, which means I apostolize you, essentially. I send you as apostles is what that verb means. And when he had said that, he breathed on them and said to them, Now this is obviously prior to Pentecost.

Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered 120 in the upper room, was going to be like seven weeks after this. These disciples received the Holy Spirit, it would appear, prior to Pentecost. Now some think they didn't.

Some think that Jesus just breathed on them and said receive the Spirit as sort of a way of saying the time will come when the Holy Spirit will fall upon you and then I'm exhorting you to be receptive at that time. But it doesn't seem necessary for him to say that because in the upper room, receiving the Holy Spirit was a moot point. The Holy Spirit fell upon them all and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they didn't have to, as a special act of the will, seek to receive.

His breathing on them at this time, of course, resembles God breathing into Adam. After he made Adam out of clay, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and Adam became a living soul. He's imparting to his disciples life through the Holy Spirit at this point.

I believe we have to assume that this is the point where they were regenerated, they're born again. They would have been born again sooner if it were possible. It says in 1 Peter 1.3 that we are born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It wasn't until Jesus rose from the dead that regeneration of this kind could happen and Jesus gave it to his disciples at the earliest possible opportunity after his resurrection. The resurrection life of Christ is that which we receive in regeneration. We are partakers in his resurrection.

We pass from death unto life when we're born again and we can only do that because Jesus passed from death unto life. So he had to rise first and then he could impart a new life through the Spirit which is what happens to all of us when we become Christians. Now what happened at Pentecost was separate, a different thing.

That was being filled with the Spirit and that's not automatic. Christians are not all automatically filled with the Spirit. The Bible, in fact, commands us to be filled with the Spirit though it assumes we already have the Spirit.

In Ephesians 1, Paul told the Ephesians that they had received the Spirit after they believed. But in Ephesians 5, he commands them or exhorts them to be filled with the Spirit. Apparently something that is separate from just having the Spirit.

It's in Ephesians 1.13. You have the seal of the Holy Spirit given to you. You have the Holy Spirit and that's like a seal of God upon you. Like a signet of God's ownership upon you.

So the readers have the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1.13 says. But in Ephesians 5, verse 18, he says, Do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. So

he's writing to people who have the Spirit, who are born again people.

And he tells them to be filled with the Spirit which apparently is not automatic. That's something people have to be told to do. Being filled with the Spirit is what happened to the people in the upper room at Pentecost.

But prior to that, apparently the disciples were regenerated by receiving the Spirit from the breath of Jesus. And then he says to them in verse 23, John 20, 23, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

Now the Roman Catholics have understood this to mean that God gave the apostles a special authority to forgive or not forgive sins. They believe also that the Roman Catholic bishops are the successors of the apostles and have that authority. And that the bishops can appoint priests and give them that authority.

So that only Roman Catholic priests can absolve you of sin. That's why they have confession to a priest. And the priest says, okay, you say this many Hail Marys, you say this many Our Fathers, you light this many candles, you do these things and your sins are forgiven you.

And the priest has the right to forgive your sins or not. Because why? Because he is appointed by a bishop and those bishops are the successors of the apostles. And God gave the apostles the right to forgive or not forgive sins.

Well, the Roman Catholic Church certainly doesn't have Scripture in its favor. Even if Jesus was given the apostles special sanction to forgive or not, it does not mean that they would have successors who would have the same authority. There is no reference to the apostles ever having successors.

The twelve apostles remain the twelve apostles for eternity in the city of God. The twelve foundation stones are the foundations of the twelve apostles. Their names are on them.

They are permanently the foundation of the church. And whatever authority they may have had specially that we don't have, they didn't pass it along to someone else. So, Jesus might have been giving such special authority to the apostles, but Protestants usually take this somewhat differently.

And they feel that all Jesus is really saying is, I'm commissioning you to preach the forgiveness of sins to people. If you do, you will be acquiring for them forgiveness. If you don't, their sins will be retained.

You will be, in a sense, forgiving them. You are extending God's forgiveness to them by preaching the gospel. And as you do so, then they will be forgiven, in fact.

If you neglect to do so, then their sins will be retained and they will not be forgiven. So,

typically it's argued that all Jesus is saying here is that you have the task of extending God's forgiveness to the world through the preaching of the gospel, through the proclamation of the atonement. And if you don't do it, then the world's sins will be retained.

There is possibly yet another meaning of this, and this would possibly mean that Christians, not just the apostles, but Christians have the right to forgive people of sins committed against themselves. This may not be what he means here, but it does appear that we as a kingdom of priests have the authority to absolve people of sins that they've committed against us, which is perhaps why we're so often told to forgive each other of the things done against us. If your brother sins against you, forgive him so you can be forgiven.

Stephen, when he was being stoned, said, Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge. He couldn't ask that all their sins be forgiven. That wasn't his province, but the sin against him.

He said, do not lay this sin to their charge. And perhaps God honored that. Stephen apparently thought that that was something he had the right to ask.

Jesus himself, referring specifically to those who crucified him, said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do. Now, this did not automatically confer salvation on all these people, but it may well be that Jesus was absolving them of this particular crime against himself.

It may be that Jesus is saying, because you are extensions of me, at least those sins that are committed against you, you can release people from those. That will at least diminish the burden of their guilt and of their condemnation. I don't know if he means that, but verse 23 has been obscure, and obviously Catholics and Protestants take it differently from each other.

But Thomas called Didymus, one of the twelve. Thomas is the Hebrew, Didymus is the Greek. They both mean twin.

One of the twelve was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, we have seen the Lord. But he said to them, unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days his disciples were again inside and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, peace to you. Then he said to Thomas, reach your finger here and look at my hands, and reach your hand here and put it into my side.

Do not be unbelieving, but believing. And Thomas answered and said to him, my Lord and my God. And Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have

believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed. Now, just briefly here. Jesus speaking to Thomas this way made it very clear to him that Jesus had heard what Thomas said.

Because Jesus essentially echoes Thomas' words that he had made eight days earlier. Thomas said, I won't believe unless I put my finger in the holes in his hands and put my hand into the hole in his side. Jesus was not visibly with them, but he was listening.

And he made it very clear. Remember when you said that? I heard that. Here, put your fingers in my hands.

He echoed to Thomas the very words Thomas had said when Thomas thought Jesus wasn't there. And what Jesus is doing during these 40 days after his resurrection, because there were 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension, according to Acts chapter 1. During those 40 days Jesus was appearing and disappearing. You see, he had been with them consistently before his crucifixion, and he would be away from them consistently after his ascension.

And there was a 40 day interim where he was conditioning them. He was sometimes visible and sometimes invisible, but always with them. And he was illustrating that even when they can't see him, he's listening, he's there.

He's conditioning them for the idea that they will have his presence with them invisibly, as they had known his presence with them continuously, tangibly, invisibly for the three and a half years he was in ministry. He would not be visible with them anymore, but he would still be with them. And this is one of the things he illustrates.

By saying, Thomas, I heard what you said. Okay, I'm giving you the offer. See if these are my hands or not.

Now, Thomas, we have the impression he didn't take him up on the offer, but just seeing and hearing him was enough. And he said, my Lord and my God. Now, those who don't believe that Jesus is God say that this is just an ejaculation of astonishment.

Like, oh my God, that's not really a reference to Jesus as God or whatever. It's just sort of a declaration of surprise. But of course, that's silly.

It wouldn't be recorded if that was the case. I mean, he's referring to Jesus as his Lord and as his God. And Jesus did not find any fault with that.

Certainly, the God of Thomas and of the apostles was Yahweh. And now he's recognizing Jesus as his God. If Jesus was not Yahweh, this would have been blasphemy.

But Jesus didn't find fault with him saying it. But Jesus did say, you believe now because

you've seen. There's going to be a lot of people who will be asked to believe without seeing.

After Jesus ascended, nobody saw him anymore except Paul. Maybe a few others that we don't know about, but John on the island of Patmos. But most people are going to be called upon to believe in him without having the opportunity to see.

And Jesus pronounced a special beatitude on those who would believe without seeing. That's us. There's a blessing on those who saw him and believed.

What a blessing it would be to see the resurrected Christ. That's a great blessing. But Jesus seems to imply there's even a greater blessing on those who don't have that opportunity, and yet they believe without seeing.

And that is what almost all Christians throughout history have been expected to do, and what we're expected to do. Verse 30, So John says there's a lot of other things he could have included, other signs, other miracles Jesus did, but these should be sufficient to cause you to believe that Jesus is who he said he was. And his main concern is not just to get a lot of people to believe something, but so that they can have life.

I want you to be able to have life through believing in his name. So the purpose of the book, John says, is to impart life to you by giving you sufficient evidences that will cause you to believe that Jesus is who he said he is, because by that means you will have life. And with these words it sounds like the book ends.

It certainly is a fit ending of the book. And yet there's another chapter. All scholars agree that chapter 21 seems to be a separate bit to the story, maybe added a little later by John.

But it serves sort of as an epilogue to the whole book, just as the first 18 verses of chapter 1 are a prologue to the book. So chapter 21 seems to be an epilogue. And we'll take that separately, of course, when we come back next time.