

# God's Love as Victory Over Death

Bible Background • [JOHN 19:38–42, 20:1–10](#); [1 PETER 1:3–9](#)

Printed Text • [JOHN 20:1–10](#)

Devotional Reading • [LUKE 24:1–12](#)

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: REMEMBER in the events of the Resurrection the power of God's love to overcome death; CELEBRATE the saving power of new life offered in the Resurrection; and SHARE with others the power of God's love found in the Good News of the Resurrection.



Albert looked at the suit his wife, Kayla, laid out on the bed for him and heard the click of her white, patent heels coming down the hall. He knew what was coming: “These shoes, or red ones? Or maybe a different dress...” Albert eyed his wife from head to toe, but his thoughts were a thousand miles away.

After almost 10 years of marriage, Kayla also knew what was coming. “Kayla, this is my umpteenth Easter Sunday morning. But I just can’t stomach another Easter parade, the auditorium filled with people who only come once a year.”

Kayla had had enough arguments in the past with her husband on this issue, and this time she decided to take a quiet moment and ask God for wisdom as to what to say.

“Albert, you’re right; Easter has become something I don’t think God intended. And if you decide you don’t want to go, I’m not going to say another word. But, if you don’t mind, I’m going on. I know the resurrection power is still working and active in all this craziness. I’m going to pray for people as they come in and believe God will touch someone’s heart with the truth of what Jesus’ resurrection is really all about.”

Albert sat without a comment, so Kayla got up and continued to put on her makeup in the bathroom. She could hear her husband starting to put on his suit. “Thank You, Jesus,” she uttered quietly and then did a little holy dance on the bathroom rug.

*The Lord cares for His people and provides for all their needs. He comforts and protects. We are dependent on Him like sheep are dependent on their shepherd. In what ways has God been a shepherd to you?*

## Keep in Mind

“Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed” ([John 20:8](#)).

### KJV

**John 20:1** The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

**2** Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

**3** Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

**4** So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

**5** And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

**6** Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

**7** And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

**8** Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

**9** For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

**10** Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

### NLT

**John 20:1** Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.

**2** She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

**3** Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.

**4** They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

**5** He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in.

**6** Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there,

**7** while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings.

**8** Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—

**9** for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead.

**10** Then they went home.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Mary Magdalene.** Also called Mary of Mandala, she traveled with Jesus as one of His followers. She witnessed both Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection ([Matthew 27:56, 28:1](#); [Mark 15:20, 16:1](#); [John 19:25, 20:1](#)). Jesus cast seven demons out of her ([Luke 8:2](#); [Mark 16:9](#)).

**Peter.** Peter was one of the disciples in Jesus' inner circle. He is perhaps the most outspoken of the Twelve. He often boldly asserts his devotion to Christ with an abundance of zeal, Jesus will then correct him, and Peter will then just as boldly accept his Master's correction. For example, when Jesus washes His disciples' feet before the Last Supper, Peter objects to Christ taking so lowly a role. But when Jesus explains the meaning of the gesture, Peter offers to let Jesus wash all of him. In today's passage, we see Peter running to Jesus' tomb and boldly entering it, in hopes of fully understanding this unique event.

## Background

Secular scholars attempt to point to John's account of the Resurrection as the place of contradictions between the Gospels. For example, only Mary is mentioned in John's account, while several women visit the tomb in the other Gospels. But when she speaks to the disciples, she says "We," indicating others were with her. If one reads all four accounts carefully, there is solid evidence of the facts surrounding the empty tomb and Christ's appearances after His crucifixion.

## In Depth

### 1. The Declaration ([John 20:1–4](#))

On the Sunday morning after Jesus' crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, along with other women, went to Jesus' tomb, bringing aromatics to anoint His body ([Matthew 28:1](#); [Mark 16:1](#)). They were confused when they saw the empty tomb, assuming someone had stolen the body. Angels informed the women, "Jesus is not here—He's arisen" ([Luke 24:4](#)). Mary ran back to the disciples and reported these events. This is significant because as a woman, Mary would have been disqualified as a credible witness according to the Jewish culture at the time. God chose her

and the others to be the first witnesses to the Resurrection, even though society had automatically disqualified them because of their gender.

After Mary's report to the disciples, John (the author of the book, humbly referring to himself as the other disciple) and Peter went to observe the empty tomb for themselves. They immediately "went forth" (v. 3). They had to see it with their own eyes. John outran Peter and made it to the tomb first. Their love and honor for their Rabbi caused them to run to discover the empty tomb. Soon they would discover that He was more than just a Rabbi, but; He was the resurrected Son of God.

## **2. The Confirmation (vv. 5–10)**

The men witnessed that the napkin that was around Christ's head laid in a place by itself and the other wrappings were in another place. A body could not have gotten out of wrappings from head to toe without being cut or unwound. But the wrappings were not cut or in disarray; they were neatly folded. God made sure to highlight these details to offset any lies about a stolen body. If a thief stole a dead body, it's highly unlikely robbers would take the time to unwrap it and fold the wrapping clothes in different places.

Peter and John had heard Jesus talk about His resurrection, but they still did not understand the connection between His teaching, the Old Testament prophecies, and this phenomenal event (e.g., [Psalm 16:10](#)). The confused men returned to either their meeting place or their homes. They didn't have all the answers, but they definitely understood something unique and wonderful had taken place.

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. What does Mary report about what has happened to Jesus' body ([John 20:2](#))?
2. What is John's reaction to seeing the empty tomb (v. 8)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

God's power demonstrated by Christ being raised from the dead should give all believers the hope and assurance that this will also occur at the time of their death. Jesus' resurrection is a showcase of what lies in store for those who have faith in Christ. How does knowing we will partake both in Christ's death and His resurrection ([Philippians 3:10–11](#)) affect our daily lives as believers?

## **Lesson in Our Society**

A pastor once said his greatest joy is preaching a funeral of a true believer, a person in which there is no question that his or her heart belonged to Jesus. He or she loved Christ and lived his or her entire life helping others grow in their faith and come to know Him. This same pastor says the saddest time for him in ministry is to preach a funeral when he has no idea whether this person is in heaven. No one knows a person's heart or what might have happened during those last moments before death, but it is a horrible feeling knowing this person blatantly refused to accept any truth about Christ.

Society attempts to paint a pretty picture, saying that a person's good deeds will outweigh the bad ones, or that God would never send anyone to hell. Unfortunately, the Scriptures have never agreed with such ideas.

## **Make It Happen**

It's early; Resurrection Sunday has just begun. Put aside some time and pray about the true meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Ask God to bring to mind anyone—your family, church, group of friends or co-workers—who does not understand salvation in connection to Jesus and the empty tomb. Ask God to give you an opportunity to speak with them about this lesson.

## **More Light on the Text**

### **John 20:1–10**

**1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.**

Mary Magdalene's association with Jesus most likely began when He cured her and other women of demon possession ([Luke 8:2](#)) early in His ministry. She is not mentioned before then. Her name indicates that she either came from or was a resident of the town of Magdala, situated on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She is often identified as a prostitute, especially by American Catholics and in many western European countries where homes for unwed mothers are routinely named "Magdalene" homes. This notion is, however, unfounded and bears no scriptural evidence to support it.

However, plenty of evidence shows that from the time of her deliverance by Jesus, all of the Gospel writers acknowledge her as a constant presence in His life and ministry. Her miraculous cure by Jesus earned Him her untiring faith and devotion. Mary Magdalene appears to have been a woman of substantial means, as it seems she ministered to the needs of Jesus and the other disciples with her own money ([Luke 8:1–3](#)).

Interestingly, the account of the sepulcher visitation differs between the Gospel writers. Matthew reports that Mary Magdalene was accompanied by the "other Mary" ([Matthew 28:1](#)). Mark records the presence of three women: Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; and Salome ([Mark 16:1](#)). Luke records the greatest number of women, writing, "It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them" (from [Luke 24:10](#)). John only mentions Mary Magdalene visiting the tomb.

The fact that her name is always mentioned first when listed with a group of women indicates that she was obviously a leader in the female circle of disciples ([Matthew 27:56](#); [Mark 16:1](#); [Luke 24:10](#)). The only exception is at the foot of the Cross, when Jesus' female family member's names are listed first ([John 19:25](#)).

Faithful to Jesus, even after His death, John presents Mary Magdalene rising early and going to Jesus' tomb to anoint His body with precious ointments and spices, as was the custom of the day. Both Mark (15:47) and Luke (23:55) record that Mary and the other women had watched Jesus' burial and the sealing of the tomb. So, while we are not surprised that Mary could locate the tomb in the dark of the early morning hours, it is not clear how Mary expected to remove the huge stone placed at the entrance of the tomb. Perhaps she expected the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb to roll the stone for her. In any case, when Mary Magdalene arrives at the burial site, the giant stone has already been removed.

**2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. 3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.**

At this point in John's narrative, Mary Magdalene runs to tell Peter and the other disciples that Jesus' body is missing. John does not tell us that Mary has yet to even enter the tomb. In John's account, Mary does not enter the tomb until after the men leave (20:11–12). Matthew's account tells of a "great earthquake" and has the angel rolling back the stone, making the announcement to the women, and inviting them inside the tomb to see for themselves (28:2–6). The narratives of both Mark and Luke indicate that the women enter the tomb and encounter an angel who announces that Jesus has risen. John's difference does not imply any disharmony in the Gospels, but it suggests a differing view of the more significant points to the account. We must also remember that of the four Gospel writers, only John was actually an eyewitness to this event (Matthew was among the Twelve, but he is not mentioned as going to the tomb). He possibly prioritized the notification of Peter and himself and simply chose to leave out details that occurred before his arrival at the grave site. This is logical in light of the fact that his Gospel is written after the other three; he knows they have already included those details.

Interesting, too, is the fact that John does not name the other disciple, the one "whom Jesus loved." It is undoubtedly the writer of the Gospel, John, the brother of James. John never identifies himself in his own Gospel, choosing instead to refer to himself only as the son of Zebedee or, as he does in this account, the one Jesus loved.

**4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.**

Only John's Gospel records that the other disciple outran Peter to the sepulcher. Again, this does not indicate disharmony, but rather the privileging of certain details by the writer, who also happens to be a central character. John is relating the sense of excitement he surely must have felt at that time. He was speculated to be younger than Peter, and certainly would have been able to outdistance the older man as they raced to the tomb.

**5 And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.**

Although John outruns Peter and arrives at the sepulcher first, he does not go in. Some have argued that perhaps John was afraid to enter the tomb alone. A more likely reason is that he

simply defers to the older apostle. Some say it was probably out of respect for Peter's position as leader of the apostles that John allows him to enter the tomb first.

**6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, 7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.**

John seems to emphasize the supernatural implications concerning the burial linens. Also, since Jesus was no longer dead and had conquered death by His resurrection, He no longer had need of burial clothing. The linen grave clothes were for the dead; those who had not risen could not conquer it. Only the Son of the One and Only God could win and seal the victory over sin and death, therefore, securing our own salvation.

**8 Then went in also the other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.**

John's Gospel alone records that upon seeing the empty grave and the discarded grave clothes, John "believed." This is understandable since the writer, better than anyone else, would know this to be a fact. It is interesting to note that in Luke's account, Peter, upon seeing the discarded burial clothing, "wonder[ed] in himself at that which was come to pass" ([Luke 24:12](#)).

While Peter, the elder statesman, puzzles over the occurrence, the younger disciple believes. John uses the Greek word *pisteuo* (**peas-TEW-oh**), which means to have faith or conviction.

**9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.**

Verse 9 offers a fuller explanation for Peter's puzzlement and John's subsequent belief by emphasizing how unexpected these events were to both of them. Although they were closer to Jesus than any of the other apostles, these events still take these men by surprise. It had only been days earlier when Jesus had spoken to His disciples, telling them "a little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while and ye shall see me" ([John 16:19](#)). The apostles were unsure of what Jesus meant. That He would defy the laws of nature and be physically raised from the dead had not occurred to them. Therefore, in verse 10, they simply went to their homes again, pondering all that they had seen and heard.

## **Say It Correctly**

Seeth. **SEE**-ith.

Sepulchre. **SE**-pul-ker.

# Daily Bible Readings

## MONDAY

Jesus' Side is Pierced  
([John 19:31-37](#))

## TUESDAY

The Spirit, Water, and Blood Agree  
([1 John 5:6-12](#))

## WEDNESDAY

The Lord Breaks No Bones  
([Psalm 34:15-20](#))

## THURSDAY

Soldiers Cast Lots for Jesus' Clothing  
([John 19:23-25a](#))

## FRIDAY

Jesus' Final Words to His Mother  
([John 19:26-27](#))

## SATURDAY

The Women and Peter Were Amazed  
([Luke 24:1-12](#))

## SUNDAY

Victory Over Death  
([John 20:1-10](#))