

How many of you like to write?

Now, to those who raised your hand, how would even you feel if I asked you to write a 40-page paper for me?

John, the Apostle, was a fisherman. Writing was not what he had done much.

And yet here he has written for us an account longer than any paper you have ever written. Why?

Because writing is fun? No. It probably wasn't for him.

He actually tells us in verse 31. **John 20:31**

John wrote this gospel because God wanted him to write it so that people would believe in Jesus.

He has an agenda because of what he has seen and heard and come to believe.

It is an agenda for those he knew who read these words in the first century.

And it is an agenda for you as you read, even though he might not yet have known who you would be.

Believe that Jesus Christ is your risen Lord.

Believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing have life forever in His name.

Our passage for this morning begins on the evening after the morning when Jesus rose from the dead.

He is the Word of God, the Son of God, God Himself, made a real man and come into this world.

He came into the world that He created so that we could see who God really is.

He came to die for us, to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

John tells us of His authoritative teaching, His miracles, His identification as His Father's own Son.

He spends hours instructing His disciples before He suffers and dies for us on the Cross.

In His death He fulfills prophesy and becomes the sacrifice that we need to pay for our sins.

Then He defeats death itself by rising on the third day.

He then appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden outside the tomb. It is an intimate moment.

After this Mary announces to the other disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

Did they believe her? We don't know. We do know from other gospels that they were wondering. It is evening of that day when Jesus meets with them.

I. The disciples saw Jesus and believed. John 20:19-23

John 20:19 They are together, the doors shut, for they are scared that the Jewish leaders are looking for them.

You and I would probably be doing the same. They killed Jesus.

The Jews had set up a guard at the tomb to keep them from stealing the body and lying about it.

Now the grave is empty. What will the Jews do? What would you think? What would you do?

Then Jesus appears among them. Apparently locked doors are now no barrier to Him, if they ever were.

He says to them, "Peace to you" = Shalom Alechem"

It is a Hebrew greeting expressing both a wish and a blessing.

Why? Because they are fearful when they ought to be at peace.

A great victory has been won. Death has been defeated. The prophecies have been fulfilled.

Payment for sin has been accomplished. A way to God for sinners has been made.

The Jewish leaders who killed Jesus were never the big problem. They are not why Jesus came.

It was our sin that caused Jesus to come and die.

Our sin and rebellion had made us enemies with God.

We needed peace with God. Jesus made a way for that peace.

Then Jesus shows His wounds so that they could believe and rejoice. **John 20:20**

Now they can see clearly, with 20/20 vision, Jesus is the risen Lord.

The reason that they are so joyful is really quite simple.

They are beginning to understand what His death is all about.

These disciples are beginning to understand that Jesus has given them peace with God. **John 14:27**

How does the world give peace? Temporarily, based upon circumstance.

How does God give peace? Permanently, based on the sacrifice of Jesus in which He takes away sin.

And so, what does it mean when you believe in the risen Savior? Jesus the Messiah is alive from the dead.

It means that life is altogether different, in purpose and power.

He then commissions them in three ways. **John 20:21-23**

1. He sends them out, as the father has sent Him, to reconcile people to God, to be peacemakers. (vs. 21)
This world is filled with people who are not only without peace, but without purpose.
They have nothing bigger than themselves to live for. Sometimes you see them searching for causes.
How will people find a purpose for our lives that is bigger than ourselves?
Worth living for? Worth dying for?
A purpose that will not let us down, that will not lie to us (as politicians are wont to do)?
Well, this group of men would live and die for this man Jesus.
Why? Because He is altogether faithful and no cause is greater than this one. **Matthew 28:18-20**
Notice the promise, "I am with you always." How can this be? Because He is alive forever.
2. He gives them His Holy Spirit... just as He told them He would before He died. (vs. 22)
Now we know that the Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost.
Jesus actually commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for that moment.
However, here Jesus gives them an early infusion and indicates a few things about the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit comes from Jesus. "breath" **John 14:16-17, 25-28, 15:26-27, 16:5-15**
The Holy Spirit is necessary for the completion of the task Jesus has given us, this commission,
He is now present with them, though He has not yet "filled them" as at Pentecost.
3. He gives them the power to forgive sins. (vs. 23)
Now, I grew up in a church in which this text was wrongly applied every Sunday.
This is not about the pastor announcing to you on Sunday the forgiveness of your sin.
It is not as if there is some absolution to be found in the words of a paid minister.
This is NOT speaking of the power of the Pope, or a pastor, or someone with a gift of praying.
You don't get forgiven by some ceremony apart from where your heart is at with God.
First of all, the "you" in vs. 23 is plural. This is about the power of the church, together.
Matthew 16:19, 18:15-20 This is about the power of the church, filled with the Spirit of God.
And "church" is a word that means "gathering of people."
This is speaking of the power of the local church, a body of believers, when she gathers together.
Back to John 20:23. See, we who are joyfully following Jesus are in this thing called life together.
We (together) are called to be holy, set apart for God and His mission.
We are to help one another deal with sin, not ignore it.
And we are to help one another experience the joy and blessing of true forgiveness.
When someone repents and experiences God's forgiveness, it is our job to help them feel forgiven.

II. Believing is not natural. **John 20:24-25**

But Thomas wasn't there. You can understand His struggle.

There are some people who feel very much this way when others tell them about Jesus.

I had an uncle who told me that he doesn't believe in anything that he cannot see.

I entirely understand. Believing, trusting in Jesus whom we cannot see, is strange. Let us admit it.

One of my daughters asked me last year, "Dad, are there times when you doubt?"

Absolutely. I wish I could say, "No. I never doubt. I have no problem trusting in Jesus."

But I am like Thomas.

Every now and then I stop myself and ask, "John, do you really believe all this stuff?"

After all, it is incredible. The invisible God becoming a baby, then suffering and dying...

Jesus rising from the dead and living forever until He comes back in the clouds.

Think about it. There are things far less weird that I don't believe: aliens, crystals, politicians.

"Maybe," I say to myself, "I only believe it because of how I was raised or where I live."

But my brother who was raised as I was doesn't believe.

And there are people who live here who don't believe.

I don't let the doubts linger. I confront them with facts and with all that the Lord has done in my life.

There are no better explanations for the historical realities than that Jesus rose from the dead.

There is no better explanation for my life, peace, joy, everything than that Jesus is alive.

III. Thomas saw Jesus and believed. John 20:26-29

You have heard the expression, "Seeing is believing." Here is an example.

Eight days later, Jesus comes to help Thomas believe as the other disciples believe.

I find it amazing that Jesus did this, and just for Thomas. What love our Savior has for each one of us. And Thomas believed.

He did not understand everything, but he believed that Jesus, his Lord and God, was no longer dead.

Why did he believe? Because he saw Jesus.

And Thomas worships Jesus, calling Him "my Lord and my God."

This is precisely who Jesus is, so Jesus accepts the worship and does not rebuke him.

Now there are people who claim that if they could just see Jesus, then they would believe.

I don't think so. Thomas believed in Jesus because he saw Jesus and wanted to believe in Him.

Most people who say, "Show me Jesus and I'll believe" are lying. It is but an excuse.

In fact, at the end, when Jesus comes back, people who don't believe will be terrified, not trusting.

I find it odd that People believe what history tells us about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln...

But they don't believe what history tells us about Jesus.

Why? Well, to believe in Abraham Lincoln costs you nothing. He does not demand that you follow Him.

To believe in Jesus costs you everything. You must repent. This is the reason people don't believe.

Is seeing believing? Jesus next pronounces a blessing in verse 29 on those who believe without seeing.

This is where we come in. This is why John wrote His gospel story, for you and for me.

IV. We must believe without seeing. John 20:29-31

You might say that Jesus is turning that familiar phrase on its head, as Jesus does with so many of our thoughts.

It is only when you really believe that you can see the most important things. Now it is "Believing is seeing."

This is what faith means. **Hebrews 11:1-2**

You and I do not get to see Jesus in the flesh... not yet.

Jesus was born and died and rose at a particular time and place in history. You and I were not there.

This is the nature of historical fact.

It makes sense that if God would actually visit His creation, He would pick a time and a place to do it.

This is not some myth or fantasy that everyone can just imagine that they are in. These are real events.

However, the fact that you did not see Jesus then does not mean that you cannot believe now.

John wants you to read his honest account and hear in it the words of Mary and Thomas and Jesus.

By their witness he wants you to believe.

He wants you to feel with him the inescapable fact of that empty tomb and the grave clothes.

He wants you to realize that there is no better explanation than the fact that He arose and is alive.

If this is all true, what does it mean for you?

If all this is true about Jesus, it means that He is the Messiah predicted by all those OT prophets.

It means, "That by believing you may have life [everlasting] in his name." (vs. 31)

If you believe in Jesus, that He rose from the dead, it changes your life forever.

In John 3 Jesus calls this being "born again." He calls it that because it doesn't really come from you.

It is God's work from beginning to end. You begin a new life, alive to God and at peace with Him.

You begin to want to confess your sin and be forgiven and be right with God and other people.

You begin to love His words and understand them, and you want to obey His commands.

You begin to want to worship God and serve Him with your life.

You begin to have a desire to tell others about Jesus, like John does, so that they can believe.

And you begin a life that lasts forever.

For when you die, you will go to be with Jesus and wait for a new resurrection body like His.

And you'll need a new body that won't get sick or get old.

Because He is making a home for you in the New Heavens and New Earth that will last forever.

And you'll need a forever body to live in your forever home. (1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 50-57)

All this, if you believe.