

## A Response To The Resurrection

### John 20:1-31

Jeanne Pouchain is a 58-year-old French woman who can't convince her government that she's alive. She was mistakenly declared dead by a judge in 2017 and has been trying to prove her viability ever since. The declaration of her death has cancelled her ability to work, get insurance, drive, or use a bank. She's even appeared before numerous judges with a certificate from her doctor stating that she is in fact alive, but to no avail. Pouchain explained she can't do anything because she no longer exists. Her lawyer is trying to get the ruling reversed but noted the challenges: "When an error is so enormous, it's hard to admit." Similarly, the evidence of Jesus being alive is all around us, yet some simply find it hard to admit.

In **John 20:30-31** the Apostle wrote **"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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."**

Imagine that you were one of Jesus's followers. You witnessed His crucifixion, saw His limp and lifeless body taken off the cross, then wrapped for burial. With some of His other followers who also grieved His death, you walked to the tomb where He would be buried, saw Him laid to rest and the large stone rolled into place.

As you might expect, I have been to quite a few funerals. My practice following the service is to stay after all the friends and family have left the room. I watch the funeral director lower the lid and lock it in place. I then walk in front of the casket as it is taken and placed in the hearse. At the gravesite following the short committal, on occasion I have stayed behind after everyone has left and watched them lower the casket into the vault and then put the vault cover in place. It's like rolling the stone over the opening. Once you walk away, you know that this side of heaven you won't be seeing that person alive again. That's what Jesus's followers believed, no matter what He had said to the contrary, that He

would rise again, they thought His burial was final. They somehow missed the message to the Pharisees who asked Jesus to show them a sign and they would believe. He told them none would be given except the sign of Jonah. Just as he was three days in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man would be three days in the ground. They mocked Him when He said that **"this temple would be rebuilt in three days"**. They assumed He spoke of the temple building, when He meant His body.

So we understand and would have done the same thing by either staying in hiding out of fear and grief or going to His tomb on Sunday. They expected nothing different than a dead body.

We're going to take a look at **John 20** and the responses of Mary, the disciples, and Thomas and then conclude with our response. We will end with a visual reminder of Christ's death, burial and resurrection by taking communion. Resurrection Sunday is a most fitting day for us to remember the price paid and the victory won for our salvation. Both the cross and the resurrection are necessary for salvation. In the cross Christ paid the debt for sin and in the resurrection the sacrifice was accepted giving us assurance that salvation was paid for by the shed blood of Christ. Because He conquered death and the grave, we too will conquer them because of Him.

Everyone of us will form a response to the resurrection. Some choose not to believe it, some choose not to accept it, others choose to embrace it. **What is your response to the resurrection? Is it fact or fiction? Do you accept it by faith or reject it as fable?** What you believe about the resurrection will determine your eternal destiny.

Let's consider first the response of Mary.

## I. THE RESPONSE OF MARY

John records a wide range of emotional responses Mary displayed that day. Notice Mary's discovery.

### A. Mary's Discovery – v. 1

The other gospel accounts indicate that Mary wasn't

the only one who went to the tomb on the first day of the week. Without naming them, Luke says the women took spices to put on the body.

Mark notes that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the lesser and Joses, and Salome went to the tomb.

Matthew says it was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, most likely Mary the wife of Clopas. We read in **John 19:25** that this Mary was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. Mary was a common name, so it seems that even within the same family, there could be more than one child named Mary.

[Heavy weight boxer George Foreman named five of his sons George and a daughter named Georgetta.](#)

So while there is no discrepancy or inconsistency between the four gospel accounts as critics would like to argue, here is this small band of women rising early in the morning while it was still dark to go to the tomb to put spices on the body of Jesus. The other accounts indicate that it was dawn. Again, there is no discrepancy. They started out when it was dark and arrived at dawn. [This past week I left for church when it was still dark and arrived about 20 minutes later when the sun was coming up.](#)

While other women also went to the tomb, John's focus is solely on Mary Magdalene. Keep in mind that this is the same Mary from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. We read elsewhere that out of gratitude for all Jesus had done for her, she supported Jesus and the disciples financially. Out of indebtedness, she walked to the tomb early on the first day of the week to anoint His body with spices. Keep in mind that it was at the end of the day on Friday that Jesus had died and in haste for the Sabbath they took the body down and buried it without the proper burial procedure because there was no time. These women wanted to go and do for the body what they couldn't do after His death.

As they were walking to the tomb the topic of how they were going to remove the large stone from the mouth of the grave came up. So we see in **John 20:1** that Mary made a discovery. The stone was already rolled away. That in itself would be startling. **Luke 24:2** records something even more

disconcerting. Mary went in and found the body was gone. That was something they didn't expect. This discovery led to Mary's distress.

## B. Mary's Distress – v. 2

They all saw the stone moved away from the entrance of the tomb. Mark and Luke both tell us they went inside and saw the tomb was empty. Mark says the angels invited them to see the place where Jesus had been placed. The angels asked why they sought the living among the dead. Matthew records that Jesus had risen from the dead.

We also learn from his account that two angels appeared frightening the women. Their response was to bow down. What happened to the women afterwards is unknown. None of the other accounts indicate what happened to the women who were with Mary that morning after the encounter with the angels. We can only speculate. Did they stay behind at the tomb while Mary ran back to tell the disciples? Maybe she was younger and faster. Did they scatter because they were uncertain what might happen to them? If robbers had taken the body, maybe the women thought they might still be nearby and may choose to harm them.

It's unclear if the soldiers were still there but so shaken from the earthquake and the stone being moved that they were unable to do anything. Or maybe they ran away out of fear. If they were gone, maybe the women feared the guards would return and arrest them on the pretense of stealing the body. When it comes to the whereabouts of the women we can only wonder.

Our text tells us that the response of Mary was one of distress as she ran to where the disciples were staying and told them that **“they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him!”** Was she so beside herself with grief that she hadn't heard the message of the angels that Jesus had risen from the dead? Were their words just too incredible to believe? Rising from the dead seemed out of the realm of possibility. We only know that at least Mary went into the tomb and saw it empty? Did she somehow

miss the folded up grave wrappings? If she did notice them, what did she think? Sometimes in our grief we can miss the most obvious things. In her distress at the missing body of Jesus that's all she could tell the disciples. She assumed someone had moved Him in the night. She assumed it was foul play. She assumed He was still dead. The stone was moved, and the body was gone. Someone took Him.

A time lapse occurs and we are back at the tomb. She has joined Peter and John who were doing their own inspection of the scene to get some clues as to what might have happened. They leave and she is left alone. It is at this time we see Mary's despair.

### C. Mary's Despair – v. 11

Already grief stricken by His death, the missing body now only adds to her despair. She wanted to honor the Lord by preparing His body with burial spices. **J. Vernon McGee suggests two reasons why she wept. He writes "She is weeping because she loves Him, but also because she does not believe."**

On several occasions prior to His death, Jesus stated that He would rise again, but it's apparent by their actions that none of His followers believed Him or understood what that meant.

#### John 11:21-27

Grief can keep us from seeing what is in plain sight. It can keep us from remembering.

It can keep us from believing.

In her despair she couldn't believe anything other than what she had concluded – that someone had taken and moved the body.

Maybe it was a glimmer of hope that she decided to take one last look, desperately wanting the body to be there.

Maybe it was a final glance into the empty tomb to picture in her mind's eye the place where He had been laid to rest. **I do that and probably so do you. I think about something my Mom used to say or picture that ever present smile. Sometimes it's hearing her hum a hymn like she used to do in the kitchen.** Maybe Mary wanted one more reminder before she turned away and walked home. But something else caught her attention, something that

revealed Mary's disbelief.

### D. Mary's Disbelief – vs. 11-15

The disciples had already left. For all we know, the other women were also gone, so it was probably somewhat surprising for her to see someone else in the tomb which she thought was empty. We're not told that she was startled by their presence or that she even understood that they were angels. Hebrews tells us that we might not even know when we are entertaining angels. She gives no indication that she believed these two angels were anything but men.

They ask why she has been crying to which, again, her response implies her unbelief that Jesus could be anything else other than dead and moved. I want you to notice, though, the personal affection Mary had for Jesus – **"they have taken MY Lord away."** The greater the love, the greater the grief.

Now she either heard a sound behind her or the two angels made a gesture that made Mary turn toward the opening of the tomb and look behind her. Someone else was standing there. Our text tells us that Mary assumed it was the gardener, who just happened to be walking by and heard voices inside and poked his head in to see who was in the tomb. He too, asked why Mary was crying and who she was looking for.

Scholars give two reasons given as to why Mary may not have recognized Jesus. One is that her tears may have obscured her vision, the other is that like the two men on the road to Emmaus, Jesus may have temporarily blinded her vision from recognizing Him. I highly doubt that His resurrection body had changed much in terms of appearance. Whatever the case, Mary thought it was the gardener and assumed he may have moved the body. In a sense she was right, the person she is now talking to had moved the body because He walked out of the sealed tomb. But in her disbelief, Mary thought this gardener had moved the body and she wanted to go and get it and return it to the tomb.

When it comes to the resurrection, the problem is not a lack of evidence, the problem is a disbelieving

heart. She couldn't recognize Jesus because she wouldn't believe anything else.

**How often do I see and believe only what I want to when it comes to Jesus?** Maybe you see yourself in her response as well. There was her discovery that led to her distress and then to her growing despair that really stemmed from her disbelief.

The Psalmist pens some words that should be of encouragement to each of us. It reminds us that grief is okay, but that we don't need to linger in it. It gives us hope. It's where we find Mary.

**Psalm 30:5, 11-12 "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning... You turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give You thanks forever."**

Mary's grief is turned to gladness, her pain to praise, her tears to thanksgiving, her despair to delight.

#### **E. Mary's Delight – v. 16-17a**

Jesus had to speak only one word for her to recognize who it was that was standing there. He only had to say her name – **"Mary"** and she instantly knew it was the Lord.

**John 10:3-4 "the watchman opens the gate for Him, and the sheep listens to His voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice."**

**Do you hear the voice of Jesus calling you by name? Do you hear His voice because you belong to Him?**

If you do not hear the resurrected Christ, perhaps it is because you do not know His voice.

Mary heard and knew it was the Lord. We can only infer by what Jesus says in **verse 17** that she must have instinctively reached out to embrace Him so overjoyed that Jesus was alive. Her weeping had turned rejoicing. He had removed the sackcloth of her grief and replaced them the joy. The heaviness

of her grieving heart had been replaced with a spirit of dancing.

One thing now remained for Mary. The Lord gave her a task. In **verse 17** we see Mary's duty.

#### **F. Mary's Duty – v. 17b**

She was told to go to the disciples and tell them the news of Jesus's resurrection. How heavy her heart and steps must have been earlier when she went to tell them of the missing body. Now how joyful her heart and pace must have been on this errand.

**I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today;  
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.  
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,  
And just the time I need Him, He's always near.**

**Is it with gladness of heart that we share with others about the resurrected Christ? Is it with joy that we proclaim to them the good news of a risen Savior?**

But be warned. While we have a duty like Mary to make the news known, there will be those who won't believe, who choose to ignore the testimony. In this passage we not only see Mary's response, we also see the response of the disciples.

## **II. THE RESPONSE OF THE DISCIPLES**

We return to **verse 3** where their first response is one of deliberation.

### **A. The Disciples Deliberation – vs. 3-9**

They had witnessed the same events as Mary. The crucifixion and the burial. It wasn't a case of a mistaken tomb as some critics surmise. If it was a case of a wrong tomb, that could have been corrected. I'm sure they were just as bewildered by the news as Mary was that somehow the tomb was empty. So they ran off to investigate. In my own curiosity I would have done the same thing. I don't think it's a matter of trying to prove Mary wrong.

I don't think it's a matter of unbelief, otherwise why would they have dashed over to the tomb? If they didn't believe her, they would have stayed home. I think they were bewildered by the news and

wanted to check it out for themselves. Maybe they didn't believe and wanted to see for themselves. Whatever the case, they hurried to the tomb and yes, it was the right tomb, because they went to the same one Mary had just come from. John, the faster of the two, arrived first and bent in for a look and saw the linen strips lying on the stone where the body had once been laid. It's not like there was any police tape blocking his entrance or a guard standing there keeping him from entering and disturbing the evidence or the forensic investigation. He stooped down for a look.

Peter, on the other hand, was a bit bolder and darted on into the vault to see for himself if what Mary had said was true. Ever the one to throw caution to the wind, he rushed on in. He saw the same undisturbed evidence. We can only guess to the expressions both men had about the puzzling turn of events. Puzzled, bewildered, surprised, curious, troubled, wondering, calculating, deliberating.

Perhaps in a moment of retrospection about his own experience in that moment of what he thought, John writes that he eventually joined his fellow disciple. I can imagine John putting his quill down for a moment as he stares off into space reflecting on what he must have felt in that moment and he captures it for us. **“He saw and believed.”** I don't think it was just believing that Mary was right after all about the missing body based on the evidence. It's my opinion that he saw the evidence and came to the conclusion that Jesus was alive, but he didn't quite know how because in the very next verse He says that **“they still didn't understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”**

Puzzled or satisfied with what they saw, **verse 10** says they returned to their home. It is then that we see their dread.

### **B. The Disciples Dread – v. 19**

They were afraid and in hiding. They feared that arrest warrants had been issued for them as well. It's conceivable to think that they could have also been arrested at the same time as Jesus. He asked the guards to let them go. Now uncertain about their

future, they were inside with the door locked.

In a ballad, Christian musician Don Francisco echoes the sentiment of what it must have been like for the disciples hovering in fear.

The gates and doors were barred  
All the windows fastened down  
I spent the night in sleeplessness  
Rose at every sound  
Half in hopeless sorrow  
Half in fear of the day  
Would find the soldiers breakin' through  
To drag us all away.

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Uncertainty only adds to the fear as nervous chatter and whispered conversations try to stifle what they all must have been thinking and feeling throughout the day. Peter and John had gone early in the morning and now we find that the day has past and it's evening. All of a sudden the silence was broken by the appearance of the Lord uttering words of peace to their otherwise anxious hearts and minds and we are privileged to read about their delight.

### **C. The Disciples Delight – v. 20**

Words of peace and the presence of the risen Lord relieved their once fearful hearts. To affirm that it was really Him, He showed them the nail scars on His hands and the place in His side where He was pierced. There was no denying that it was the Lord and Scripture tells us that they were overjoyed. It wasn't just joy, it was joy upon joy. Wave after wave of joy. Uncontained joy. Unabashed joy. It was great joy, exceeding joy.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice and sing  
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ, the King!

I hope today you are overjoyed at the reality of the risen Savior. If Christ is not risen, then there is no resurrection for us, our faith is worthless, there is no hope, no joy, no reason to celebrate and of all people, we are to be most pitied for faith in nothing.

Hallelujah He has risen. Rise up and be overjoyed. Such delight though, comes with a duty.

## D. The Disciples Duty – vs. 21-23

Jesus commissioned them to go out and be His representatives, to share the gospel. This new commission required spiritual power, so He breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost they would receive this spiritual endowment of the indwelling Spirit to empower them to be witnesses.

**Verse 23** does not mean that they had the ability to forgive sins. It literally says “whosoever sins you forgive shall have already been forgiven and whosoever sins you do not forgive shall have already not been forgiven.” In essence, they proclaimed forgiveness, they did not pronounce forgiveness. To put it another way, if they shared the gospel and sinners would repent and believe, their sins would be forgiven. When they repent and believe we can with authority declare they are forgiven not by any power in us, but only through what Christ has done. When a person believes in Christ, the Christian has the right to announce his forgiveness. When a person rejects Christ, the Christian has the right to announce that person is not forgiven. Our duty is to share the Gospel, God’s duty is to forgive and transform the heart.

But not all the disciples were present at this joyful occasion. Thomas was absent, why is unclear. When they caught up with him we see his response.

## III. THE RESPONSE OF THOMAS – vs. 24-29

These verses speak of his disbelief, then his disclosure and finally his declaration.

### A. Thomas’s Disbelief – vs. 24-25

We can only imagine the excitement the disciples must have had in talking over one another telling Thomas that they had seen Christ alive, but try as they may he could not bring himself to believe. He remained unconvinced and wanted proof. This isn’t doubt. It’s unbelief – **“unless I see, I will not believe.”** In the Greek text it’s a double negative “I positively will not believe.”

A week passed and they were all together again when Jesus once more appeared before them with

the doors locked. He singled out Thomas and we notice Thomas’s disclosure.

### B. Thomas’s Disclosure – vs.26-27

Jesus knew Thomas’s request for validation that He was alive and extended an invitation to him. Thomas you want proof that I’m alive? Take a finger and put it in the scar on My hand. Take your whole hand and put it into my side where the spear pierced Me. **“Stop doubting and believe.”** It literally reads “stop becoming faithless but become a believer.” Jesus added that Thomas believed because he saw, but those who would never see the risen Christ and still believed would be blessed. That’s you and me – if you believe in the resurrected Christ and trust Him for salvation.

We have all the evidence we need for a resurrected Savior. He may be saying to some of you as He did to Thomas **“Stop doubting and believe.”** Faith is being certain of what you don’t see and believing it just as if you had seen it.

When Thomas saw the resurrected Christ standing there, he didn’t need to touch the scars. We see his declaration. He was convinced.

### C. Thomas’s Declaration – v. 28

When the eyes of faith see Jesus as the risen Savior, like Thomas, we declare **“My Lord and my God.”** With the proof of who Jesus is there are only two options to us. Either we will reject the proof that He is the Christ, the Savior or we will receive Him, we will declare Him to be our Lord and God. What, then will be our response?

## IV. OUR RESPONSE – vs. 30-31

### A. Our Faith

### B. Our Future

John wrote what he did in his gospel so that you might be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the one who saves and that by believing you might have eternal life. He died and rose again. Your response determines if you will have everlasting life.