I have always been a big fan of music. My number one hobby may be listening to music. When it comes to music, I like to listen to LPs – you know, those big black vinyl things that you have to flip over every 15 minutes (ask my wife, they’re all over the house). I’m not a big fan of iTunes. I think iTunes has destroyed the concept of an album. You used to buy whole albums and listen to them clear through. Sure you had favorite songs on an album, but generally speaking you got to know the album as a whole, in addition to the individual songs. The albums held together musically and even sometimes thematically. However, on any given album there is generally one song that kind of defines the whole album, or sets the tone. Often that song is the title track having the same title as the album. But alas those days are over for most people. iTunes and Spotify have taken over!

In many ways the books of the Bible are like an album. Sure there are chapters that stand out, but any given book holds together like an album; there are common themes and an overall direction. If you treat a book of the Bible like iTunes treats music, you’ll miss a lot of what’s going on.

That’s how the book of John is too. We’ve been in the book of John as a church for eight months now. We come to chapter 20 this morning and we find ourselves at the title track. Chapter 20 serves as the conclusion to the book (chapter 21 is more of the epilogue).

Now, if you’re a guest this morning and have not been here to listen to the whole book of John, don’t feel left out. While I do hope this title track will inspire you to “listen to” the whole book of John (read it or even listen to the sermons), I don’t think you’ll feel like you are being cheated this morning. Let’s now turn to John 20.

**John 20:1–31 (ESV)**

1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 
2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 
3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 
4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 
5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 
6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, 
7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 
8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 
9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 
10 Then the disciples went back to their homes.

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But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I don’t intend to comment on every verse in this chapter. Instead, I’d like to answer two questions this morning: 1) What is the reason for the resurrection; 2) How should we respond to the resurrection?

**REASON: Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for eternal life. (vv. 9, 31)**

I was told in seminary that if you don’t answer the question “so what” then you will preach to “who cares.” So, the obvious question for me that hangs over this whole chapter is why was it
necessary for Jesus to rise from the dead? Why does it matter? Why should you care? In verse 9, we are told that the Scriptures teach that Jesus must rise from the dead, but why? And where in the Scriptures does it say that Jesus must rise from the dead?

Well, it is not necessarily in any one place. When John says in verse 9 that the Scriptures teach that Jesus must rise from the dead he meant that all of the Scriptures combined point to the fact that the resurrection was necessary.² I would like to walk you through some of these Scriptures. It is my hope that in due course you will see why the resurrection matters.

**Creation:** At the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1-2, we learn that man was created by God. God breathed life into him (2:7). We also learn that God created man in his own image (1:27). Part of what is meant by that is that man was created for a relationship with God. He was meant to live a life of worship before God; a life that brought glory to God as he reflected the image of God in his life. And this life would be a good life for man if he would walk in the way of God’s commandments (1:31; 2:16). John summarizes all of this much more poetically.

**John 1:1-4 (ESV)**

1 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

**Fall:** But not long after this everything changed. Man rebelled against God’s commandments and sought glory for himself. Man failed to believe that God’s ways were good and so Adam sinned against God. This is recorded in Genesis 3.

The result of sin was the curse of death. Man was banished from the presence of the eternal life-giving God – the relationship between God and man was broken. And man was sentenced to eternal death by the holy and just God – both spiritual death and physical death. Where there once was the light of life, man now lives in the shadow of death.

And this curse applies not only to Adam and Eve, but to all humanity after them, including you and me. We are all sinners by nature and choice;³ therefore we are all under the curse of eternal death. John again, says it more poetically.

**John 3:18–20 (ESV)**

₁⁸[We are] condemned already... ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

**Recreation:** But the good news is this. “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (1:5). The Creator came into his creation to save his creation from sin and the curse of death. Jesus came into the world to save sinners; he came to recreate – to give rebirth to

³ EFCA Statement of Faith, Article 3.
his dead creation; to give new life, to restore us to a relationship with the eternal God (cf. Jn. 1:12-13).4

John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible, but don’t let the familiar words keep the hope-filled message from going deep into your heart.

**John 3:16 (ESV)**

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This is really good news. The offer of eternal life is good news because we are sinners who have been given an eternal death sentence. But how is it possible for God to give eternal life through Jesus Christ? How does God specifically deal with the main problem of sin and death?

**God deals with sin at the cross.** Jesus died for our sins and pays the penalty for our sin. He bore the curse of death and the wrath of God that we deserved on the cross. We can stand forgiven at the cross. **And God deals with the problem of death through the resurrection.** Earlier, I posed a “so what” question: What is the reason for the resurrection? Why is it necessary? The answer is this: Jesus’ resurrection makes eternal life possible.

If Jesus remained in the grave, we remain dead in our sins, without God and without hope in the world. But Jesus lived the life that we fail to live. And he died the death that we deserve to die, in our sins. And he also is risen from the grave so that we also can be raised to new life. His resurrection is the basis for spiritual rebirth right now and the basis for our own bodily physical resurrection when he returns. It is through his death that he deals with sin. It is through his resurrection that he provides eternal life. This is a big deal; this is why the resurrection matters. He has dealt with the problem of death.

Pastor Colin Smith illustrates this well.5 Imagine for a moment that you’re in a large city and you don’t know how to find your way to where you need to be. You have a couple of options in this situation.

You could ask for directions. I’ve done this in Chicago a number of times. It usually goes like this. Catch bus 35 going west and get off at the second stop. Then get on the blue line at Logan Square south to the loop. Then get off at the transfer station and take the red line north to Grand. Then walk another two blocks to the west and you’ll be there.

Another way to get where you need to be in a large city is to simply take a taxi. If the cab driver knows where you’re going all you have to do is get in. Let me say, from limited experience, if you have the money take the taxi.

Now suppose, in the first situation, right after you get on bus 35 the man who gave you directions dies on the spot of a heart attack. While unfortunate, this would not keep you from getting where you needed to be. However, suppose, in the second situation, that right after you

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4 N.T. Wright argues that much of John deals with this recreation motif, of which chapter 20 is the climax.
5 Colin Smith, *Unlocking the Bible Story, Vol. 3*, pp. 231-232
get into the cab and begin travelling toward your destination the cab driver has a massive heart attack and dies. Not only is this unfortunate, but you are now going to have a hard time arriving at your destination.

The heart of Christianity lies not in a set of directions, but in a person – the person of Jesus Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6). Without his resurrection there is no way to eternal life. If he remains in the grave, then not only do we remain in our sin, we remain dead in our sin. If our destination is eternal life, we’re going to have a hard time making it to our destination unless Jesus is risen from the dead.

But he’s not dead! No, he is alive! Jesus’ resurrection makes eternal life possible. We can be made alive spiritually now and will one day be resurrected physically when Jesus comes again. We’ve dealt with the “so what” – the reason for the resurrection. Let’s now address the “now what” – our response to the resurrection.

**RESPONSE: We’re required to believe in order to receive eternal life.**

There are four responses to Jesus’ resurrection recorded in chapter 20: 1) Peter and John, 2) Mary, 3) the other disciples, and 4) Thomas. In many ways they are all different. But in another sense, they are all the same. All four see the risen Christ and believe that he is risen; they see and believe.

Now it is important to note that each of them saw Jesus physically in real time and history. Jesus’ death and resurrection are physical and historical realities. Remember, we don’t simply follow a set of directions. The Christian faith is bound up in the historical person of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and is risen indeed. But now that Christ has ascended to the Father, as he said that he would (v. 17), we are not able to see him like those in chapter 20.

We are still called to see and believe, but our sight comes through the written Word of God. In verse 31 we’re told that all of these things were written in order that we as readers might believe. And Jesus tells us in verse 29 that those who believe, although they don’t literally see, are blessed. “Jesus said to [Thomas], ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

So, how should we respond to the resurrection of Christ? As we see Jesus as revealed in God’s Word, we must believe. And those who see and believe are those who have eternal life. Verse 31 is explicit. “These are written so that you may believe and that by believing you may have life [eternal life] in his name.”

That is the appropriate response to the resurrection and the whole purpose of this book. That is why I have called this chapter the title track to this sermon series. The whole point of the book of John is that we would see and believe and thus have eternal life. But what does belief look like?

We’re not given a lot of specifics on how to believe. But I will say there is a trust factor involved. In the book of John, we are told that eternal life begins when someone is born again.
Jeremiah and Ezekiel use different imagery. They talk about a new heart. When we are born again we are given a new heart.

My mother-in-law needs a new heart valve. And the doctor tells her that when she gets this new heart valve she’ll be a new woman. But part of what is involved in all of this is a basic trust in the doctor who will perform the surgery. If my mother-in-law doesn’t trust the doctor’s opinion about her situation or doesn’t trust the doctor’s ability to do the surgery she’s not going to get a new heart valve and therefore she won’t be a new woman.

So, my in-laws have looked into everything. They’ve checked references with other doctors and other patients who have had the same surgery. And in a sense, they have come to see that this doctor is capable and that this surgery needs to be done. And therefore they believe that this surgery, done by this doctor, will make an impact – my mother-in-law will be a new person. If they didn’t see and believe, she wouldn’t be going through with the heart surgery.

In the same way, while only God can give us a new heart, our rebirth must be accompanied by trust. We must believe what we see written in God’s Word about Jesus. We must believe that he is the Christ (the One sent by God to save his people). We must believe that he is the Son of God. We must believe he is the only way to the Father. We must believe that his death is sufficient to deal with our sins. And we must believe that his resurrection paves the way to eternal life. As we see these truths, we must believe. Then, and only then, will we have eternal life. Do you see? There are some who see, but do not believe. So I’ll ask another question. Do you believe?

When we believe we are new people, in a similar way the doctor promises my mother-in-law will be a new person. What the doctor means is that my mother-in-law will have a lot more energy because her heart won’t be working double time. But what does it look like when true believers are given a new heart? What does it look like when we have eternal life?

There are a number of things listed in the book of John and a number in chapter 20. As I close, I simply want to point out one thing that is true of people that have been given a new heart.

Those who believe worship! Notice what happens when Thomas believes in verse 28. He never says he believes (though Jesus tells us that he does in verse 29). Instead he simply says, “My Lord and my God.” This is a confession of belief expressed in the language of praise. This is remarkable!

Thomas’ belief in the resurrection causes him to worship the risen Christ as he is – Lord and God. But notice how personal Thomas’ confession is. Thomas refers to Jesus as his Lord and his God. Eternal life is defined in John 17:3 as knowing God. Those who are given eternal life come into personal relationship with God.

Remember what we said earlier. We were created to live eternally in a relationship with God. And that relationship is intended to be marked by worship. We were created to glorify God as we bear his image and enjoy his goodness forever. When God gives us new hearts, when God
makes us alive together with Christ, we are then, and only then, able to fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

The resurrection is necessary because without it we remain dead in our sin. But through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we can have eternal life if we believe. We can fulfill the purpose for which we were created – to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Now that you see, I invite you to believe.

**Benediction**

*Hebrews 13:20-21* (ESV)

> 20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
References


