

EASTER

The title of our study today is "The Four Encounters of Easter." We will focus on John's account of the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John. In the sermon, we were reminded that John's account of Jesus' life only goes so far. John writes these words in verse 25 of chapter 21, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." This is a man who has seen Jesus do the miraculous again and again. Today, our text, John 20, records a collection of encounters after Jesus has been crucified, buried in a borrowed tomb, and has risen from the grave. The theme that ties these accounts together is how people responded to the risen Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: John 20

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most? How would you summarize the theme or big idea of the sermon?
2. There are a lot of misconceptions about the real Jesus. Why are people tempted to settle for their idea of who He is rather than consider what the Bible says about Him?

People passively collect information from various sources and always create their own ideas of reality. We see this happen on social media platforms regularly. It's lazy to make assumptions based on random "facts" or "assumptions." Most non-believers are intellectually dishonest (intentionally or otherwise) regarding Jesus. Intellectual dishonesty occurs when someone settles on an idea based on opinion or heresy without doing any rational evaluation on their own. They decide what's "true" without genuinely attempting to understand the facts for themselves. People also avoid the reality of Jesus because they think they don't have to submit to Him or come to grips with the reality of judgment for their sins if they ignore Him. In short, people attempt to ignore or change the identity of Jesus into something more palatable.

3. Considering each encounter in John 20, how should we respond to those who have not yet put their faith in Christ? How should we pray for them, specifically? How can our lives help lead people to Jesus?

Pay close attention to how Jesus spoke with Thomas about his doubts. Jesus met him in his doubts and guided him kindly to see the truth. It's easy for Christians to forget what it's like to be a non-believer. Once you become an "insider," it's easy to forget what it was like to be an "outsider." We need to remember that people are all over the place spiritually. Jesus could be right in front of them, and they

wouldn't recognize Him. They can see all the facts and still have doubts. Christians need to remain patient and tenderhearted toward those who are skeptics, doubters, or obstinate rejectors of Christ. Christians need to be prayer warriors and pray for those far from Christ. Our prayers should be specific too. Pray that God would help our friends and family to connect the dots, see the truth, take the step of faith, overcome their doubts, etc.

4. Can you point to a situation or circumstance in your life where God moved powerfully, and as a result, you surrendered your life to Christ?
5. What does the resurrection of Jesus accomplish for those who repent and put their faith in Him? What differences do we see the resurrection make in the lives of Jesus' disciples?

It's hard to understand why the resurrection is such a big deal if you don't understand why the cross is such a big deal. The Bible tells us that every person who has ever lived has been born into sin. We naturally do the wrong thing; because of that, we are at odds with God and will go to hell when we die. Sin had to be dealt with, and God loved you in such a way that He did not withhold His Son but offered him on the cross as a substitute, in your place, to die for your sin. Without the cross, there is no hope. Without His death, there is no atonement for sin. Because of the cross and His death, the resurrection of Jesus is enormous, beyond comprehension big deal.

The resurrection made all the difference in the world to the disciples. Consider the state they were in during Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial compared to what we see play out in the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament. The resurrection changed everything about how they lived their lives. When Christ was buried, the disciples returned to their former lives – everything seemed over. But when they encountered the resurrected Jesus, everything changed. There is now boldness and courage where there was once uncertainty, fear, and doubt. The mission and aim of the lives changed too. After encountering the resurrected Christ, these men didn't return to fishing – they went to the ends of the earth carrying the gospel with them and enduring the suffering that went along with it – courageously and to their deaths.

Acts 4:13, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

Acts 5:27-29, "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

6. Would your day-to-day life look any different than it does now if the resurrection had not occurred? What impact should Jesus' resurrection have on our everyday lives as Christians? How can we keep the reality of Christ's resurrection fresh in our lives to avoid becoming indifferent toward it?

Christians need to pay close attention to the condition of their hearts. It's easy to become spiritually indifferent toward the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. You were probably wowed the first time you saw the ocean or an impressive mountain range, but the more frequently you see it, the more likely you are to become indifferent to its beauty. Familiarity can quickly reduce the grandeur of things. When did you last stop long enough to consider what Jesus' death and resurrection mean? What He did for you? Stop for a moment and allow your heart to meditate on the truth that Jesus Christ walked out of the grave after dying on the cross – for your sins. Sure, these facts took place 2,000 years ago, but they're no less true now than they were then.

John Piper writes, "God intends that the joy that was set before Jesus and that gave him the power to endure the greatest suffering in the greatest act of love for the least deserving — God intends that joy to be your joy. This is what it means to be a Christian — to embrace the whole Christ: the suffering Christ, the risen Christ, the reigning Christ, the coming Christ, who says at every point, 'I have come, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' The reason the resurrection has explosive power in our lives *now* is the same reason it had explosive power in the life of Jesus on Good Friday. In his case, the hope of resurrection was the joy that held him to the cross. And so it is with us: for the joy that is set before us in the resurrection, we endure the cost of love, no matter how high, for the least deserving."

Additional Resource:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-the-resurrection-changes-everything/>

7. Read Hebrews 5:8-9 and James 2:14. What does it mean that repentance for salvation is more than an intellectual step? What should surrender to the authority of Jesus look like in our lives each day?

Repentance is far more than an intellectual acceptance. It's more than just saying, "I believe that intellectually." Repentance is a posture towards God where you turn away from the life you've always lived. It is a wholesale surrender to the authority of Jesus Christ in your life. It is a complete change of mind and direction.

Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him..."

James 2:14, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"

8. What's one personal takeaway from this study you can focus on applying in your life this week?