

The Day has Come - Life

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[0 : 0 0] first of all say a word of appreciation for your welcome it's a real joy to be here it's great to see the completion of the building project and a real privilege to share your Sunday morning worship together I've been asked to preach on John chapter 20 which is a real joy and delight so if you would like to take the Bible and turn again to page 882 as we open the Bible so that we can follow the text we'll ask God to guide and direct us and to teach us by the work of his spirit let's pray heavenly father we take your word into our hands and pray that as we open it you will also take our lives into your hands and open them and we ask that you will meet us in the pages of scripture that by the work of your holy spirit our teacher we may understand more about the risen Lord Jesus we may find our hearts assured of its certainty and we pray that our lives may be shaped by this good news as we seek to live and work for your praise and glory during this coming week in Jesus name amen well that is a great assurance isn't it Christ is risen and certainty is a wonderful quality to have but it is a strange and elusive quality and many people lack it many Christians lack certainty I'm reminded of a young man who went for an interview for a job and in the course of the interview he was asked by the interviewer tell me are you a decisive person to which he replied well I'm not sure really and sometimes people who are certain are not necessarily right there's a story from the early days of radio in the UK about the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw whose great play Pygmalion of course became my fair lady Shaw was an expert on the English language and he used to give talks about

English vocabulary and grammar on the radio and on one occasion apparently he said that there were only two words in the English language that start with the sound sh but do not begin with the letters sh well he received a letter after the talk because he didn't mention what the words were and a lady wrote to him and said I'm I'm afraid you're wrong there is only one word and that is the word sugar to which the playwright sent her a one-sentence card in response which simply said madam are you sure now certainty when it is grounded in reality can turn the world upside down and that is precisely what happened to the disciples of the Lord Jesus they became a hundred percent convinced Christ is risen death has been conquered the impossible had happened and they were so convinced of that reality that they spread the good news everywhere literally they turned the world upside down but the question I want to ask this morning is how did they become so certain and how can we and it was really to provide the answer to that question that the Apostle John wrote this gospel from which we've been reading in front of you you'll see that chapter 20 divides into four events which brought the disciples to faith and through faith to assurance in the risen Christ this morning we're going to look at two of them the empty tomb in verses 1 to 10 and then the appearance to Mary Magdalene in verses 11 to 18 and next Sunday morning you'll be looking at the other two the appearance to the disciples and to Thomas but before we look at the detail let's go to the end of the chapter and see that in verses 30 and 31 John gives to us not only the purpose of writing this chapter but the purpose of writing the whole of his gospel just look with me if you will at verse 30 now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book but these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Christ the Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name that is really the key that unlocks the whole of John's gospel you'll see there are three elements in it there are signs or evidences which prove that Jesus is the Christ who he claimed to be the signs the evidence are designed to bring us to faith verse 31 these are written so that you may come to believe and when we put our faith in

Jesus not just faith in anything but in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God through believing you have life in his name everlasting life as we were reminded in the children's talk so the evidence leads us to faith and the faith brings us to experience everlasting life these disciples saw and testified that

Jesus is alive we believe on the basis of their testimony and therefore when we believe we enter into eternal life but unlike these disciples we do not have the opportunity to see and touch the risen Lord Jesus and so we tend to say to ourselves how can we be believers if we are not seeers now of course if we could meet the risen Lord Jesus we could see what they saw we would see his hands and feet that were wounded and the mark of the spear in his side and we would see that he was in a real physical body truly raised from the dead some years ago I was ministering in a church in the city centre in Southampton on the south coast of England and my colleague and I were standing at the door one evening saying good night to folk as they left church and a man came up the steps to the vestibule and he said to me I am the Lord Jesus Christ and I have come to my church well my colleague overheard what he said and he was quicker than I was he said to him may I see your hands please so the man held out his hands and he said if you are the Lord Jesus Christ where is the print of the nails in your hand because you see if you really met Jesus it would be that Jesus that you met the Jesus who hung on the cross the Jesus who physically rose from the dead sadly that man was mentally disturbed he went off and we never saw him again but it was a great question to ask wasn't it where is the print of the nails in your hand you would see before you would believe now we live in a society that says just that seeing is believing but John's point is this no it isn't seeing is not believing but believing is seeing that's what Jesus says in verse 29 of our chapter have you believed he says to Thomas because you've seen me blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe now that will include us this morning if we're believers in the risen Christ people who have not seen and yet have come to believe so that's the agenda for this chapter and as we take that key and unlock the chapter together let's look at just the first two incidents as we see what John wants to teach us now of course the whole gospel discloses who Jesus is there are the I am sayings and there are many miraculous signs that John records one is a sign of resurrection the raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11 and in that same chapter the I am saying is

I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die so resurrection is a big sign in John of the reality of Jesus being truly God as well as truly man turn back a few pages and you'll see this right in the beginning of the gospel let's go back to chapter 2 and pick it up at verse 18 chapter 2 verse 18 Jesus has entered the temple at the beginning of his ministry he's turned out the money changers and those who've turned it into a marketplace and the Jews are challenging him in John 2 18 they said to him what sign can you show us for doing this where's the evidence that you have the authority to behave like this Jesus answered them verse 19 destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up the Jews then said this temple has been under construction for 46 years and you will raise it up in three days but he was speaking of the temple of his body after he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken now just keep that in your mind what is it that would bring them to faith it is the scripture supported by the word that Jesus had spoken so John's interest is not so much in how it happened for them rather he takes us through a series of evidences to show us how men and women throughout history come to faith in this Jesus as God they needed to come to faith because they weren't expecting him to rise from the dead they were not expecting the event if they had been they would probably have had a vigil at the tomb waiting for it none of them actually saw the event nobody saw Jesus coming out of the tomb but the way they came to believe is the way that every 21st century Christian must also come to believe that Jesus is alive and through this chapter while there is great emphasis on seeing and believing it is actually by believing the word of God that they come to see and to understand the reality of the resurrection it's as though John is saying put your faith in the risen Lord and you will prove him to be all that he claimed to be and that's not an invitation to gullibility it's not that we're saying that faith is believing what you suspect isn't true and if you can only believe it hard enough and squeeze yourself enough

I really believe I really believe then it will work that is not what he's saying at all that's wishful thinking now Christian faith is based on solid evidence and the only way that we can live as Christians in the world is to assess that evidence to put our faith in the Christ who is testified to by the evidence and then we begin to prove that it's true that it really does work in our lives so let's look at the two stories just briefly and put the evidence together firstly there is the empty tomb in verses 1 to 9 when Mary came before dawn on that Sunday morning all she could determine was that the tomb was open and the tomb was empty you see that in the first two verses and she goes to the disciples and she says we because she was one of a number of women as the other gospels tell us

we do not know where they have laid him now look at that little phrase we do not know they didn't know what had happened but they did have some evidence the tomb was empty the tomb was open so they began to act on the evidence the body must have been moved they had no real hope of a resurrection that wasn't in their thinking at all so what's happened we do not know responding to that

[12:00] Peter and the other disciple who is John himself the author of the account runs to the tomb John gets there first he's probably the younger man he arrives and we learn in verse 5 that he looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there but he didn't go in Peter comes puffing up behind him and typical Peter goes straight into the tomb he saw the linen wrappings lying there verse 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head lying with the linen wrappings and so he goes in and sees for himself now it's interesting that different characters but they both have the same evidence the body is gone but the wrappings are exactly as they had been when the body was there even John tells us the head covering it obviously made an impression on him was in its position rolled around as it had been separate from the body wrappings twirled into its sort of turban shape in which it had originally been wrapping the head of Jesus when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had put him in the tomb so this is not the work of grave robbers they're not after the precious spices they would have taken the wrappings now it's as though the body has passed through the grave clothes and the tomb is open not to let Jesus out because we learn later in the chapter that he could appear in a locked room and disappear it was open not to let Jesus out but to let the disciples in to demonstrate the reality of its emptiness look with me at verse 8 then the other disciple

John who reached the tomb first also went in and he saw and believed so here is the author treading the very path he wants us his readers to follow John now goes into the tomb and the seeing is deeper it involves the understanding it's almost as though in a flash it comes to John later he will see it in all the Old Testament scriptures that point to the resurrection that Jesus had to rise because he is the eternal son of God and the Lord of glory but for the moment it's the sheer factual evidence that leads him to faith and on what he saw and recorded for us on that basis we too believe for one of the great strands through history has always been the evidence of the empty tomb if Christ did not rise why was the body never produced if the Romans had moved it and why would they want to they could certainly have produced it when people started to say that very week in Jerusalem that Christ had risen if the Jews had removed it then they could have produced it and there was no reason for the disciples to remove it they were so glad it had been properly buried so what happened to the body

Jesus had risen from the dead and the empty tomb is the proof of a very physical resurrection but there's one other thing I'd like you to notice before we leave this first story verse 9 of the chapter verse 9 for at yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead see that's how we understand we understand through the scripture we don't actually see the print of the nails in his hand but they did they have been told to expect it in the Old Testament scriptures and by the very words of Jesus three days and I will raise this temple speaking of his body we receive the evidence through the scriptures the Old Testament and the record of the New Testament evangelists and apostles and here is the evidence for us on which we believe they were prepared to give their lives in martyrdom rather than to deny what they knew had happened and so their solid faith and their testimony down the centuries comes to us as dependable manuscript evidence from the very first century of the Christian era that the empty tomb is the first strand of solid historical evidence that Jesus is alive but all the way through the records not only do you have that strand but the other strand which is the second one the personal encounter with the risen Lord people actually saw him talk to him he ate with them over a period of 40 days and here is one of the first of those encounters probably the first with Mary Magdalene from verses 11 to 18 another personality another incident while the men return she stays at the tomb weeping but Jesus is already preparing the way for the meeting so Mary looks into the tomb and she sees the angels who ask her the reason for her tears verse 13 woman why are you weeping why it's as though they're saying don't you realise it's Easter morning don't you realise it's the dawn of a new creation that life has come why are you weeping and she replies verse 13 they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him now that's all wrong of course they haven't taken away my Lord but it's certainly true that she doesn't know do you see the phrase again we don't know we don't know actually at that very moment the risen Lord is closer to her than she could ever have imagined but her problem is identifying him see that in verse 14 when she said this she turned around and saw

Jesus standing there but she didn't know that it was Jesus so for her seeing is not believing is it she sees Jesus but she doesn't understand who he is she doesn't recognise him it's not her sight that is the primary means by which she comes to faith now she doesn't know and even when she sees him she doesn't know there's the phrase again in verse 14 she didn't know that it was Jesus but her failure to recognise him doesn't affect the reality of his presence and so the risen Lord begins this dialogue as he comes to her at the very point of her need in all her grief and begins to show himself to her what Mary suggests in answer to his gentle question is actually quite impossible she was clearly very distraught and very anxious so when he asks her who are you weeping why are you weeping and she thinks he's the gardener she replies if you carried him away tell me where you've laid him and I will take him away now of course she couldn't possibly do that but it was an expression of her love

and her devotion she was willing to do anything for the Lord Jesus whom she had loved so much after all he delivered her from seven demons and then the risen Lord calls her by name Mary and instantly in that name and in that voice and in that personal relationship with her recognition dawned Rabboni my teacher my master so here is a representation then of the other great strand of historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus personal encounter with the risen Lord Mary has it Peter and John will have it the disciples will have it Thomas will have it Paul tells us that over 500 people in one place had that encounter with the risen Christ and their testimony is an unbroken chain of witness from the first century through to the year 2005 my master my teacher in that submission and worship as she believed lay eternal life for Mary and for everyone else who kneels at his feet and calls him Lord but notice that new relationship that lies at the heart of the meeting where in verse 17

Jesus said to her don't hold on to me because I've not yet ascended to the father but go to my brothers and say to them I'm ascending to my father and your father to my God and your God see things are not the same as they were before the cross she would like to hold on to him and keep him there but he is en route back to the heavenly kingdom back to the throne at the father's right hand he is returning through his ascension to the father then he will send his spirit to live within every one of his people and the spirit will be much nearer than a physical body touching another physical body ever could be but already you see the cross and the resurrection have secured a new quality of life interesting isn't it that the disciples are now described by Jesus as brothers go to my brothers and say to them that is we possess the same life the same family life of God is within us and that of course itself is a fulfillment of what John led us to right at the start of the gospel when in the prologue he told us that everyone who received the Lord Jesus who believed in his name to them he gave power to become children of God who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man but born of God so they are his brothers and we too are brothers and sisters of the firstborn son now he is the only begotten son by nature we are adopted children he is one with the father in a way that we never shall or could be but the father is nevertheless our God and faith in the risen Lord Jesus brings us into this deep personal relationship with the living God through the risen Lord and so in verse 18 leading the way for multitudes of disciples in the centuries that follow when Mary has met the risen Lord she goes and tells people about it she goes in obedience to announce the fact of his victory over all the hostile powers and to herald his coming ascension to glory she has met the risen Lord and in obedience she goes to the disciples and told them that he had said these things to her now do you see there's a pattern here the revelation of the risen Christ depends upon the event and the explanation of the event you need both don't you if there was no resurrection then Christianity would simply be a myth as we were reminded in the children's talk it would be an empty box there would be nothing there there has to be an event the event of the empty tomb the event of the risen Lord but we also need the explanation of the event we need to see that this is God's purpose from the very beginning through the scriptures that he had always predicted that the Christ would suffer and die and on the third day rise again and Jesus in his own word because it is the word of God he is God in human form made the same predictions so we believe because of what they saw and experienced the event but we also believe because of their divinely given explanation of the event which teaches us the significance of the resurrection and we meet the risen Lord just as surely as they did through the scriptures whether in the

[23 : 43] Old Testament prophecies or in their New Testament fulfillment that witness is now written down it is the New Testament gospel it's recorded in all its 27 books and it proclaims to us the grounds on which the apostles believed and on which we can believe that Jesus is the Christ and through believing have life in his name so I want to ask you as I conclude this morning whether

that is something that is true in your experience is that what you are believing do you have certainty about the fact that Jesus really is alive that death could not hold him it is conquered and that in the risen Christ God has proved in time and for all eternity that Jesus is his son and that we may come to have life as we turn to him and trust him accept him as our saviour and follow him as our Lord for if that is true then there are going to be repercussions as we go out to live and work for him this week let me just remind you of what they are as I conclude it means you see that the cross was the greatest victory that the world has ever seen a victory over sin and death and the devil himself the cross of Jesus Christ is an amazing proclamation of his total triumph over all the hostile powers that are ranged against humanity it's a great thing to know that isn't it as we go out to live this week that nothing can separate us from his love sealed at the cross and that no power has any authority over the Lord Jesus we read in Ephesians that he is exalted beyond and above all authorities and dominions and powers that is what the resurrection proves it means that his sacrificial offering has been accepted by the Father and that Jesus is declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead so as one of the children said it means that our sins can all be forgiven they are many they are innumerable many more than we know about but God has covered them all by the blood of the cross and that once for all sacrifice vindicated by him raising his Son to everlasting life means that you can know your sins have been forgiven the event of the cross and its explanation confirmed through the resurrection brings the certainty of peace with God it means that like Mary we can enter into a deep personal relationship of love and faith with the God who made us that we can know his presence with us in our lives this week we can know his spirit within us day by day not just as it were we have to have some mental image of him and wish that we could be beside him that's not what the Christian faith is all about he lives within us he enters his people he gives to us the new life by uniting us to him by faith and regeneration the new birth is the life of God planted in the souls of men and women like us through the Holy Spirit bringing the risen Christ to us day by day and it means that we look for his coming again in glory as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords it means that we do not have to fear the grave that death is a defeated enemy it means as the hymn says that henceforth death is but the gate to life immortal and that God will bring every one of his trusting children home into his eternal presence blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed and if you've never come to this risen Christ and put your faith in him and said thank you Lord Jesus

that you died on that cross for me thank you that you're risen in power to transform my life my Lord my God my teacher my master well today would be a great day to do that wouldn't it for the very first time and to enter into the blessing of believing that brings eternal life even though you haven't seen because you've trusted the word of promise you've trusted what John recorded the writings that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Christ and if you're a Christian here this morning let me ask you is that certainty driving your life the certainty that Jesus is alive because as we live in the light of that reality like Mary we should want to say well we won't be able to say I've seen the Lord will we but we should want to say I know the Lord and I know that that risen Christ is with me every day so pass it on this week ask God to give you an opportunity to talk to somebody this week about the risen Lord

Jesus and when that opportunity comes trust him to use your testimony that others may believe as they read the scriptures and meet the risen Christ let's pray so we ask you gracious God to write your word in our minds and on our hearts to energise us by your spirit so that our wills live according to our obedience to you the risen king and please may our lives this week be living witnesses testimonies to the reality of what it means to know and love and serve a risen saviour for your great namesake we ask it Amen