

Four Witnesses to Jesus

John 20

MPS: Jesus gives new life to all who believe in Him.

OBJ: Every person should believe in Jesus for salvation because of four witnesses.

INTRO Easter is such a potent holiday; the day in history that illumines reality and eternity. Not everyone who claims to be a Christian agrees with this. A recent article states, “A quarter of people who describe themselves as Christians in Great Britain do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.”¹ But a further reading of the article reveals the real problem. The survey, commissioned by the BBC, suggests 17% of all people believe the Bible version word-for-word. And, 31% of Christians believe word-for-word the Bible version, rising to 57% among “active” Christians (those who go to a religious service at least once a month). The real problem is not the suggested doctrine of those who claim to be Christian. The real problem is their definition of Christian. The fact that so many think they are actually Christian, yet do not believe God’s Word or actively engage in church more than once a month.

Some argue that the resurrection cannot be believed. Ian Hutchison, Professor of Nuclear Science at MIT, disagrees when he states, “Still, the fact that the resurrection was impossible in the normal course of events was as obvious in the first century as it is for us. Indeed that is why it was seen as a great demonstration of God’s power. Science offers natural explanations of natural events. It has no power or need to assert that only natural events happen.”²

Maybe you are asking, “**Why does the resurrection matter?**” We celebrate the most unnatural, supernatural event that has ever occurred in history, and will ever occur in eternity. **Jesus Christ rose on the third day; He is the power of life over death.**

TRANS So, the question becomes: **What kind of person does Jesus save?** Today **I want to look at four witnesses from John 20, and consider their personal testimonies to see what kind of people Jesus saves.**

READ John 20:1-10

*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. ²So 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.” ³So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to their homes. **John 20:1-10***

Mary Magdalene is the first to be at the tomb on resurrection morning. When she sees the stone rolled away from the entrance, she runs to get Peter and the others. Peter and John, here noted as “the other disciple” due to a writing tradition for how an author would reference himself, ran to the tomb to see for themselves.

John points out that though they ran together, he outran Peter. I love this. He’s not bragging, but recording what was going on in his heart. He is the “Beloved”, the disciple whom Jesus had the closest personal relationship with, and that provided a ‘turbo boost’ of motivation to get to the tomb. Love has a way of giving superhuman enablement at times in life. Once he arrived, he looked in to take in the full measure of what he found. But Peter, in true fashion, never flinched. He launched right past John and immediately into the tomb. Together they found the tomb empty, and the linen cloth folded up in a place by itself.

¹ http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-39153121?ocid=socialflow_twitter&ns_mchannel=social&ns_campaign=bbcnews&ns_source=twitter. Last viewed on April 13, 2017.

² <http://www.veritas.org/can-scientist-believe-resurrection-three-hypotheses/> Last viewed on April 13, 2-17.

Verses 8 and 9 provide a raw and authentic insight into the lives of Peter and John. When they saw the empty tomb John records, “*he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*” The empty tomb completed the promise of God’s revelation in Scripture and “sealed the deal” for Peter and John. [The resurrection is the historical event that substantiates and illuminates everything else with one truth, Jesus is Lord.](#)

[The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the power of God over death, hell and the grave, the crushing blow of victory over Satan and sin, the distinctive proof of Christianity over all other religions, the crowning victory of Jesus that substantiates His coronation as Lord, and the source of the eternal inheritance and hope of the Christian life.](#)

[Jesus gives new life to all who believe in Him.](#)

TRANS THIS is what the resurrection means to all who believe in Jesus. And what we see in John 20 are four lives who bear testimony to the life-giving power of the resurrection of Jesus. I want you to hear from these four witnesses and understand “what kind of people Jesus saves when one believes.

First, let’s look at Peter. (I feel like he would be disappointed if we didn’t begin with him. And John would expect this.) Originally called Simeon or Simon, Peter was a Jew. His Father’s name was Jonah, and he was married. He was part of John the Baptist’s movement, and came to follow Jesus by his brother Andrew’s influence. He came to be known as Peter while following Jesus, and that name would signify the “stone” upon which the Christian faith would be established, the testimony that Jesus is Lord. ^{Matt 16:18}

Peter was one of the first disciples called by Jesus, and his name stands first in the lists of disciples. He was one of the inner three closest to Jesus, and served as the disciple’s leader and spokesman for the disciples. He was impulsive and spoke quick, and usually before thinking at least early on. Evidently, this is normal for a Galilean, who held “a marked character of their own, a reputation for an independence and energy which often ran into turbulence”, as one commentator writes.³ Galileans spoke with a distinctive dialect, and their pronunciation was reckoned harsh in Judea. This gives insight when scripture later records that they were recognized as “uneducated, untrained men” when they spoke. Even while following Jesus he is known by his wrong boasts and the one who denied Jesus three times, he is chosen by God to preach at Pentecost when the church was established. Peter’s life is a powerful testimony of God’s mercy and grace. He gave God every opportunity to dismiss him, but God redeemed Him.

When many other disciples walked away from following Jesus because it became too hard, Peter is the one that said, “Lord, we’ve left everything to follow you. Where else can we go and who else can we follow.” Peter left a successful fishing business to follow Jesus. His testimony is one of absolute surrender, absolving any other interests or investments that interfered with following Jesus. We know His life of following Jesus was not easy. Even before he died as a martyr, historical tradition records that Peter was present at his wife’s martyrdom.⁴ [Peter watched His Lord be crucified, his wife die for and His life taken for the same Lord, but his testimony remains today as a faithful witness of Jesus today.](#)

Peter tell us that Jesus IS worth giving up everything to believe and follow Him. Jesus saves people from the deception of their own pride, self-trust, and personal success, and the crushing disappointment that it brings when we put all our hope in personal accomplishment. [Peter was a self-made man who tells us that Jesus is a better re-maker of men when we surrender all to Him. Jesus saves the self-made from their success to bring real life, meaning and satisfaction, when we believe in Him, repent and follow Him as Lord.](#)

John is our second witness. As the author, his response at the empty tomb is characterized by the whole message of this gospel account. His detailed knowledge moves beyond known tradition of the day and that of other authors. John enjoyed a deep, rich, personal experience of walking with Jesus. He stayed closer to Jesus than any other, reclining against Jesus at

³ M. G. Easton, [Easton’s Bible Dictionary](#) (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

⁴ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, [Tyndale Bible Dictionary](#), Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 1022. Elwell and Comfort record, “Later tradition speaks of his children (Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* 2.6.52) and says that Peter was present at the martyrdom of his wife (Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* 3.30.2).”

their meals(13:23), following Jesus farther into his trial and crucifixion than any other, even being silently present when Peter denied Jesus, and while being crucified Jesus charged Him to look after his mother. (19:26, 27) He witnessed the soldier thrust the spear into Jesus' side, from which flowed blood and water. (19:34-35) [John was known as the "Beloved", likely Jesus' most intimate friends on earth.](#)

TRANS But John's life was not a privileged, sugar-coated existence.

John was a "Son of Thunder" along with his brother James, a son of Zebedee. His family was likely affluent, but John was not beloved because he earned Jesus' love or proved worthy of it. He would be labeled with "anger issues" today. He had an uncontrolled temper that often showed itself. His reputation was so severe that some critics claim He didn't write this book because the strong theme of love could not have come from one who was believed to have been so wrathful and emotional.⁵ John was a pre-eminent bully, ruled by pride and raging against those he viewed as weaker, less valuable or just unknown.

John's testimony tells us that Jesus radically changes the one who believes to receive His love. Jesus saves those imprisoned by their inner self, held captive by emotions, insecurities and fears, and ruled by pride, anger and living by intimidation. [Jesus sets us free from all the brokenness that life buries us under.](#) He wanted everyone to know Jesus and experience that same love. John tells us: Jesus doesn't "write off" strong personalities from flawed people. Jesus doesn't measure us by our flaws, but loves us just as we are with them. We are not condemned to be imprisoned forever when our weaknesses and sin overrun and outweigh our strengths and goodness. [Jesus loves the hardest heart to become the Beloved.](#)

READ John 20:11-18

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³They 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." ¹⁴Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus 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." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). **John 20:11-16***

Mary Magdalene is our third witness. When Mary looked into the tomb two angels greeted her, but probably not the way we might think. When they ask why she's crying, she tells them that they have taken away her Lord, and she did not know where. Jesus appears to her, though not recognized by her yet, and begins a conversation with her. When she realizes who it is, she is overjoyed.

Mary was a woman who knew what it meant to be "ruled" in her life. She had been healed by having seven demons cast out from her. Though we don't know much about her life, she is thought to be from a city of a very poor reputation. And, ancient historians have attributed the fall of that city to its licentiousness.⁶ Considering her hometown and her afflictions, it is believed that her life was likely bound up deeply in sexual immorality of any imaginable form. Mary Magdalene was a woman who lived in search for herself, thinking that her actions might bring love that she most desired, only to find it destroyed and enslaved her from within as one after another used and abused her.

Mary's testimony tells us that Jesus saves people who are enslaved to the deepest lifestyles of sin. She is present at every major gospel point in the Bible. Mary stayed at the cross when Jesus died, prepared his body when they buried Him in the tomb, and was the first to arrive to find the empty tomb. She knows what it feels like and means to be so hopelessly far from God, yet to receive a true identity full of love and joy that did not disappoint from her new Lord, in Jesus.

⁵ Craig Blomberg. *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), p32.

⁶ Raymond F. Collins, ["Mary \(Person\)."](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 579. Collins writes, "Among the Jews the city enjoyed a poor reputation; later rabbis attributed the fall of the city to its licentiousness (*Midr. Lam. 2:2*)."

There is no one too far for the reach of God's love, to come and save. And, when Jesus is Lord, He is worthy of our deepest devotion because He gives the greatest joy. **Jesus loves people hopelessly trapped and enslaved in sin's deepest and darkest deception, to set them free to live in His light and new life.**

READ John 20:19-29

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...

*²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **John 20:19, 24-28***

Thomas is the last witness. His skepticism would not allow him to believe such a story just because people closest to him told him it was true. He was not present when Jesus first appeared to the disciples, but this is no surprise. Thomas had likely separated himself from the group in order to think the situation through on his own. Thomas didn't readily accept things just because others accepted it or said it. ^{John 14:5} Thomas was his own man and wanted to work through things in his own way. Thomas was a man ruled by his own thoughts. He wasn't interested in what everyone else thought or said. He demanded his own doubts, fears, concerns, and unbelief be fully satisfied before he would believe. All those doubts and his most convincing rationale immediately disappeared when Jesus appeared before Him. Thomas' testimony tells us that Jesus saves the harshest critic and hardest skeptic. **Jesus loves people who are convinced He's not real, never was and couldn't be true, to bring into a personal relationship.**

TRANS Four witnesses bear testimony of Jesus' saving power, but they're only representative of the kind of people Jesus saves. They demonstrate how people far from God are brought close by Jesus. They tell us...

Jesus gives new life to all who believe in Him.

TRANS And, HOW does Jesus save all kinds of people from all kinds of situations? L-O-V-E.

READ John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but 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.

John 20:30-31

John wrote these things for one reason, that you may believe that He is the Christ and have eternal life in Him.

Have you believed in Jesus? I don't mean accepting factual information or an emotional high experience. **Have you placed your trust in Jesus, in the sacrifice that He has made to pay for your sins and give you life and peace with God?**

If not, why not? Do you have another plan or strategy to replace what Jesus offers? It won't work. There is no replacement for Jesus. Other faiths, religions, ideologies and philosophies will offer you other alternatives, but none address what Jesus deals with. **Jesus saves from the ultimate problem of life, power over death.** Easter brings a special celebration to the resurrection power of Jesus that Christians live in every day of the year. You can too!

The resurrection invites each person to believe in Jesus and receive new life with God.

Why NOT believe and receive Jesus today!