

WEEK 11: JESUS RISES FROM THE DEAD

John 20:1–18



The Place of the Passage

One might assume that the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus are equally symbolic of the coming world, both serving as signs of the new creation. However, a crucial distinction between them highlights the breaking in of the new creation into the old.

Using C. S. Lewis's terminology, we can say that Lazarus' rising was an "unmaking," while Jesus' resurrection was a "remaking." Lazarus was brought back to his former life within the old creation, destined to die again. In stark contrast, Jesus was raised into a new and glorious mode of existence—one that had never before existed. If Lazarus' miracle foreshadowed the new creation, Jesus' resurrection inaugurated it: "Each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 15:23).

While Lazarus returned to a perishable body, Jesus was raised into an imperishable form—he "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). This means that Jesus' resurrection shifts the biblical narrative from the old creation to the new. Understanding this distinction is key to grasping the significance of Jesus' resurrection in John 20. In a garden scene that echoes Eden, Jesus is revealed as the "last Adam," who "became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). This is not merely a return from the dead but

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a miracle of glorification—a sign from the coming world and the first flower of the new creation’s spring. Through this event Jesus unveils the central purpose of his ministry: to establish the new creation through his own resurrected body.

The Big Picture

The resurrection of Jesus is the defeat of sin and death, the return of the gardener to reclaim his garden, and the declaration that the renewal of creation has begun.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, John 20:1–18. Then review the following questions and record your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2068–2070, or visit esv.org.)



The Setting (John 20:1–4)

This miracle account includes a great deal of symbolism from the Genesis creation account, beginning with the remark that the resurrection occurred “on the first day of the week,” that is, Sunday (John 20:1). How might this “new week” symbolize a new era (new creation)? How do you think the occurrence of Jesus’ resurrection on Sunday gave biblical warrant for changing the day of “the Sabbath,”¹ when the people of God gathered for worship and for rest from their worldly labors?

Why do you think Mary did not look into the tomb but ran to get the disciples, and why does the narrator describe the foot race between Peter and the other disciple (20:2–4)?

The Miracle (John 20:5–10)

The resurrection is the only miracle in John in which Jesus is the recipient and not the agent (see Acts 2:24; Gal. 1:1; 1 Pet. 3:18), even if he is involved in his own resurrection (John 2:19, 10:18). Why is this significant? What does it teach us?

Jesus' resurrection is a bodily resurrection! How does the fact that the miracle involves the body of Jesus (not just his spirit or soul) magnify the significance of this miracle? Why does this matter for our own hope of life after death, and also for how we proclaim the gospel (read 1 John 1:1–4)?

John describes in detail the linens and face cloth wrapped initially around Jesus' dead body. What is the significance of these details, especially the remark that the face cloth was folded as though to be used later for another person (John 20:6–7)?

How might it be significant that the other disciple “saw and believed” in the resurrection (20:8), and how would the disciples later understand from Scripture (the Old Testament) that Jesus “must rise from the dead” (20:9)? Where in

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the Old Testament might we find ideas of, images of, or allusions to the resurrection from the dead?

The Conclusion (John 20:11–18)

It is quite possible that John’s detailed description of the angels’ sitting on the bench where Jesus had been laid is intended to signify the angels at the two ends of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (20:12; see Ex. 25:18–19). If so, how does this communicate both that Jesus is the once-for-all sacrifice for God’s people and that this offering was performed not in the temple but in a tomb?

Mary misidentifies Jesus as the gardener (John 20:15), but how is she also correct? How is Jesus like the original gardener, Adam in the garden of Eden (see Rom. 5:12–17)?

What was wrong with Mary’s touching Jesus (20:17), and how does Jesus’ response to her depict the already-but-not-yet reality of the new creation? How does this verse also magnify the importance of the ascension² of Jesus?

In light of the purpose of miracles, what does this miracle teach Christians about the person of Jesus (who he is) or the work of Jesus (what he has done for us)?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

THE ARK OF THE NEW COVENANT. The carefully crafted symbolism of the angels and their intentional placement on the seat where Jesus had been raised seems to borrow from the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament (Ex. 25:18–19). If the ark of the covenant, and the place between the angels, was the mercy seat, how much more so is Jesus' empty tomb! With symbols and images that strain the theological imagination God has made this tomb his new Most Holy Place and this corpse seat his new mercy seat, all in a way that presents this garden tomb as the ark of the new covenant. The resurrection of Jesus declares once and for all that the Lord Jesus Christ is now present with and powerful enough to save his people.

THE FACT OF THE EMPTY TOMB. The narrative goes to great lengths to testify to the fact of the empty tomb. The detail with which John explains the empty and forsaken grave linens makes the resurrection of Jesus emphatically clear. The message of the passage is simple: "Christ is risen!" The church has used this greeting for centuries. It serves as a declaration that the work of Jesus has been accomplished and fulfilled, and it serves as a promise that the restoration of all things has now been guaranteed—and even begun. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. Because the tomb was empty, all those who believe in Jesus shall be resurrected to eternal life.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE. It is right for Christians to utilize evidence from our created world to support the truthfulness and the fact of the

resurrection of Jesus, but we must also acknowledge, as John 20:9 does, the importance of the written Word as an authoritative witness. The narrator's commentary on the formation of the disciples' belief makes clear that the testimony of Scripture (in this case, the Old Testament) is itself essential and irreplaceable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Not only does verse 9 explain that Jesus rose from the dead, but it also says he "must" have done so, that this was all part of God's purposeful plan. In this case Scripture adds not only to the "what" but also to the "why." While there is a place for apologetics that relies on historical and philosophical proofs, Christians must be careful not to avoid or minimize the primacy of Scripture for securing belief and its certainties.

THE GARDENER IN THE GARDEN. The narrator clearly wants the reader to see the resurrection of Jesus in this "garden" in light of the original garden in Genesis. Since it was in a garden that the world betrayed God, a garden is a fitting place for his final betrayal and for its overturning. And, just as Mary was wrong to think that Jesus was the gardener, she was also perfectly correct. This was the gardener in his biblical garden, the second Adam. If the first Adam in the garden brought death out of life, the second Adam in the garden brought life out of death. Finally, in this garden the gardener himself came to tend his (new) creation (Gen. 2:15; Revelation 21–22).

Theological Soundings

CHILDREN OF THE FATHER. This miracle account is the first time that the fatherhood of God is applied to the disciples and that familial language is used between the disciples (John 20:17). The Gospel of John began with the promise that God the Son would unite the children of God to God the Father (1:12). Not until the resurrection of Jesus were this access and right fully manifested. This remarkable status reached its fullest provision when the first human of the new creation, the resurrected Jesus, walked out of the tomb. It is for this reason that God's children gather weekly on the "first day of the week" (20:1) and celebrate together Jesus' resurrection, our rest in him, and our fellowship as the family of God.

THE ASCENSION. The Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 49) suggests three applications we can derive from the ascension of Jesus. First, we have the comfort that the resurrected Lord is also our advocate, interceding on our behalf in heaven before God. Second, the truth that we have our own flesh in heaven is a sure pledge that Christ will take us, his members, up to himself. Third, he will send his Spirit to us on earth as a pledge, a promise, and a guarantee of our inheritance. This explains what can be taken initially as harsh or unsympathetic

words of Jesus to Mary in verse 17. Jesus is not limiting Mary's access to him but wants to give her a share in his life by means of the new creation reality that required not only his resurrection but also his ascension. The presence of Christ is now experienced in a new creation manner: in Christ and through the Spirit. Such a relation to Jesus is more intimate than anything experienced prior to his ascension.

Personal Implications

Take some time to reflect on what you have learned from your study of John 20:1–18 and how it might apply to your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. John 20:1–18

▶ As You Finish This Unit . . .

As the church declares regularly, “Jesus is risen! His is risen indeed!” Take a moment to look back through this study and reflect on the many things the Lord may be teaching you.

Definitions

¹ **Sabbath** – Originally Saturday, the seventh day of the week, the Jewish day of worship and rest (Gen. 2:2–3; Ex. 31:13–17). Now Christians meet for worship on Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 20:7), and regard Sunday, rather than Saturday, as their weekly day of rest as they look forward to an eternal Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:1–13).

² **Ascension** – The departure of the resurrected Jesus to God the Father in heaven (Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:1–12).