

Beyond the Tomb: Devotions for the Week Following Easter

*Provided by Explore the Bible
Written by Jesse Campbell*

Monday: John 20:19-23

¹⁹ When it was evening of that first day of the week,[‡] the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”[‡]

²⁰ Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side.[‡] So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you. As the Father has sent me,[‡] I also send you.”[‡] ²² After saying this, he breathed on them[‡] and said,[‡] “Receive the Holy Spirit.[‡] ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. (CSB)”[‡]

Note the first words Jesus spoke to them. Consider their purpose and remember their background. Jesus knew (of course) that they had betrayed and abandoned Him. He knew even about Peter’s three denials of Him the night of His trial, but He did not bring up any of it. It was fully within His rights to show up and immediately rebuke them, but His first words were “Peace to you” and He said it twice (vv.19, 21)!

Do you believe that, despite your sin and the numerous times you have let Him down, Jesus’ heart toward you is full of mercy and grace and affection? Really and truly press the question to your soul. In essence, the question is, “Do you believe the Bible?”

Journal your response and be sensitive to what the Spirit may be shifting in your heart if there is a difference between how you think Jesus views you versus how this Scripture describes Jesus.

Then, look to verse 21 and see Jesus lovingly put His disciples to work. He is now sending them out just as He was sent. The Holy Spirit will pour out upon them in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. Likewise, Jesus has put modern Christians to work and has poured out that same Holy Spirit upon us today.

Verse 22 says that He breathed upon them. When God breathes this way, the dead are brought to life. It is by the breath of God that the universe was spoken into existence out of nothingness. This same holy breath brought the vision of the valley of dry bones to its feed in Ezekiel 37. Ask God for this same breath upon your life this week.

Tuesday: John 20:24-31

²⁴ But Thomas[‡] (called “Twin”[‡]), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were telling him, “We’ve seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “If I don’t see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails,[‡] and put my hand into his side,[‡] I will never believe.”[‡]

²⁶ A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though 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 look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don’t be faithless, but believe.”[‡]

²⁸ Thomas responded to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed.[‡] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”[‡]

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs[‡] in the presence of his disciples that are not written[‡] in this book.[‡] ³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah,[‡] the Son[‡] of God,[‡] and that by believing you may have life in his name. (CSB)[‡]

Before joining the tradition of bashing Thomas for his doubt, know that Thomas was likely the missionary who first brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to India. Imagine the surprise of Christian missionaries who thought they were pioneering new territory in this subcontinent only to find that believers were already waiting for them. Today, Thomas’ body is buried in India.

Note the first words of verse 26 because they are crucial to grasping the purpose of this text. Why would Jesus wait a week before proving His resurrection to Thomas? Certainly, Jesus could have appeared to Thomas at any point over the course of those days, but He chose instead to give Thomas the chance to believe his friends.

Picture the moment the other disciples told Thomas that they had encountered the resurrected Jesus, only for Thomas to shoot them down. This was arguably the first instance of evangelism in the New Testament and it was initially a failure!

The purpose for Jesus’ delay is made clear in verse 29. Every day that past without Thomas seeing proof was another opportunity for Thomas to believe in faith. Every time Thomas chose not to believe in the resurrection of Jesus was a missed blessing.

Today, we have the opportunity to experience the very blessing Jesus described in verse 29. We who believe without having physically seen Jesus are blessed. This, according to verse 31, is the whole purpose to the Gospel of John in the first place! Read, believe, and come alive in His name.

Wednesday: John 21:1-8

After this, Jesus revealed[‡] himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.[‡] He revealed himself in this way:

² Simon Peter,[‡] Thomas[‡] (called “Twin”[‡]), Nathanael[‡] from Cana of Galilee,[‡] Zebedee’s[‡] sons, and two others of his disciples were together.

³ “I’m going fishing,” Simon Peter said to them.

“We’re coming with you,” they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.[‡]

⁴ When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus.[‡] “Friends,”[‡] Jesus called to them, “you don’t have any fish, do you?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” he told them, “and you’ll find some.” So they did,[‡] and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish. ⁷ The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, “It is the Lord!”[‡]

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his outer clothing around him (for he had taken it off) and plunged into the sea. ⁸ Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards[‡] away), the other disciples came in the boat,[‡] dragging the net full of fish (CSB).

The whole scene had to be familiar to Peter, the sons of Zebedee, and the other disciples. It was profoundly similar to the moment at least three of them were first called to be Jesus’ disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. They were fishing when Jesus said to them “follow me.”

It was no small thing for these former fishermen to drop their cast nets. In my family, cast net fishing is a huge deal. My father taught us how to throw cast nets, took us cast net fishing on Sundays if could throw perfect circles with our nets after church, and used the whole experience to teach us life lessons. He always told my cousin and I to marry a woman who would carry the mullet bag for us. I did exactly as he advised.

For fishermen, to drop their nets was to drop their means of making a living and take a huge step of faith to follow Jesus. In John 21, though, they pick their nets back up and go back to the things they were doing before they met Jesus. It were almost as though Jesus’ ministry had never happened. Does that sound like your life right now? Have you picked back up the things you first put down to follow Jesus?

Like Peter, drop it all once more. Like Peter, swim the length of a football field (vv. 7-8) just to be with Jesus again. He loves you. He has plans to restore you. He is the Lord!

Thursday: John 21:9-17

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.[‡] ¹⁰ “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus told them. ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish — 153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.[‡]

¹² “Come and have breakfast,” Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to

them. He did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time[‡] Jesus appeared^{‡‡} to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John,[‡] do you love me more than these? ”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”

“Feed[‡] my lambs,”[‡] he told him. ¹⁶ A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love[‡] me? ”[‡]

“Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”

“Shepherd[‡] my sheep,”[‡] he told him.

¹⁷ He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love[‡] me? ”

Peter was grieved[‡] that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me? ” He said, “Lord, you know everything;[‡] you know that I love you.”

“Feed[‡] my sheep,” Jesus said (CSB).

Charcoal fires take time. The beachside barbecue described in verse 9 could be one of the most overlooked miracles of Jesus’ ministry. I wonder how Jesus seasoned the fish. I’ll bet it was Cajun.

Look at the intimacy in this text. The resurrected Jesus knew it was a priority to eat a meal with his disciples. He blessed them with overwhelming abundance that was hauled in despite the fact that it was beyond their nets’ capacity to handle (v.11). He lovingly and systematically confronted Peter and then restored Peter. It was painful for Peter to be reminded of the three times he denied Jesus and failed utterly to come through on his bold promise, made that very same night, to die before he would forsake Jesus. According to Luke 22:61, Jesus looked directly at Peter the moment Peter denied him for the third time the night before the crucifixion. It broke Peter. At this beachside breakfast, however, Peter is restored.

Accompanying each confrontation and confirmation was a commission. Peter was put to work in ministry. This is deliberate on God’s part. We are not to sulk forever in our failures. Rather, we are to arise healed and go about the work God has prepared for us. So, arise, Christian. Get to work!

Friday: John 21:18-23

¹⁸ “Truly I tell you,[‡] when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” ¹⁹ He said this to indicate by what kind of death[‡] Peter would glorify God.[‡] After saying this, he told him, “Follow me.”[‡]

²⁰ So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved[‡] following them, the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, “Lord, who is the one that’s going to betray you? ”[‡] ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him? ”

²² “If I want him to remain until I come,”[‡] Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you, follow me.”

²³ So this rumor[‡] spread to the brothers and sisters[‡] that this disciple would not die.[‡] Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? ”

Historical tradition maintains that Peter was crucified upside down. This is likely what Jesus was describing in verses 18 and 19. How profound that the purpose behind this gruesome death was to

glorify God (v. 19). Take that truth and compare it to your understanding of your personal affliction. Have you ever been mad at God over the pain in your life and wondered why He would allow you to face it? Have you ever considered that this affliction may be part of God's will for you?

My brother and I have both lost children. My son Aiden passed away and his daughter Elle died last year. As I sat near Elle's little casket, I saw my parents sob. My heart was wrecked for my brother and for our whole family, but I knew God was using it to bring people to Himself. I kept praying, "God, since this is the cup you have for us, we will drink it deeply."

We leaned into the pain God had for us and watched in amazement as God used it to bring about revival in our churches and life-saving progress is modern medicine!

Do not, as Peter did in verse 21, start comparing your life situation to another believer's. Do not complain to God that you are suffering more than some other Christian whose life does not appear to be as godly as yours. You simply cannot and do not know exactly what is going on in their lives.

Focus.

Christian, you walk the path that God has laid out for you and you specifically. When I hear Jesus voice in verse 22 as He rebukes Peter, it sounds harsh in my imagination. What is it to you, Peter, if Jesus wants John to live his whole life out on a cruise ship? Note Jesus words "as for you" in verse 22 as they focus completely on Peter.

Then, in verse 23 comes the second echo of the weighty call upon disciples. "Follow me." No matter the cost. No matter how easy the lives of those around you may seem by comparison, follow Jesus. Drink deeply from the cup He has for you because He is Lord.

Saturday: John 21:24-25

²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books[‡] that would be written.[‡]

These are the final words of John's Gospel. He wrote everything just as the Holy Spirit inspired him to write it and he wrote everything with a clear conscience – knowing every word to be true (v. 24). It is evident throughout the text that John was writing to two audiences simultaneously. He knew his writings would be first distributed and read to the Gentiles (non Jewish people) of his day. However, he also knew that he was writing something for the ages.

At multiple points in the Gospel of John, we see the purpose for the Gospel of John stated outright. He tells us plainly that he recorded these things so that we would believe and, by believing, have life in Jesus' name. The very first verse of John describes Jesus as the very Word of God. So, to read these words is to encounter Jesus. Here at the very final verse (v.25), we see the results.

The events of the Gospels were so cataclysmic that they effectively broke history in half. The Gregorian calendar looked back on time itself and labeled the year of Jesus' birth "Year 1" with no year zero. Today, we now place events along a spectrum of history according to their proximity to Jesus' life and this no-name John who lacked formal education was among the unlikely group of revolutionaries who spread the word of Jesus' resurrection across the globe. The fact that you are reading the Gospel of John at all is quite amazing. The odds were so massively stacked against him.

Jesus sent His disciples out and put his disciples to work doing things like, well, writing the Gospels. He even prayed first for His disciples and then for everyone who would believe because of their testimony (Jhn. 17)! That means Jesus was praying for you, reader of John's Gospel, in that moment!

Upon sending this writing out into the world, the disciple became a rabbi in his own right and put his readers to work just as Jesus had put him to work. So, the mission and purpose of John's Gospel is cyclical.

Jesus put John to work. John puts us to work. People believe John 3:16 and the cycle continues through the millennia to today until it now collides with you. So, what now? Does this cycle end with you?

You have inherited a costly and precious truth. People risked and lost their lives so that you could know it. Do not let it be in vain. Rather, spread the word of Jesus' resurrection yourself. The reason the books of the world could not contain all the miracles of Jesus' ministry (v. 25) is that He is still alive and still miraculously changing lives today!

You, my friend, are one of the miracles described in verse 25. Now, share the news with someone right away. God bless you and happy belated Easter!

- Jesse Campbell