

## **JOHN 20:19-31 ENCOUNTERING JESUS**

“I will never believe.” Maybe you’ve heard those words, or words like them. People tell you that they don’t believe in Christianity, or that they have no intention of believing that kind of stuff. Maybe you’ve said words like that in the past, stating that you had no desire to go to a church, but something changed, and now you’re here. Now those who said “never” to you in the past are more open to hearing and talking about Jesus. Something changed.

We’ll look at some of those changes in the lives of some people in the Bible, and the change that changed them, and you can reflect on what changes have happened in your life since you encountered Jesus.

Early on in Jesus’ ministry John the Baptist “saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me.' I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34).

John didn’t know Jesus as the Son of God, but then the Holy Spirit revealed Him to John, and John declared Him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As we look at these various people and their encounters with Jesus, just think of how your life would change if you truly believed what they believed.

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:47-51).

How do you know me Jesus? I’ve never met You before. Jesus knows your sitting down and your rising up. When you think of Jesus knowing your every thought and move, do you declare Him to be the Son of God? How does that affect your life? There are even greater things for you to know about Jesus. He died for you. He rose for you. You have life in His name.

Nicodemus “came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him."” (John 3:2). Does what you hear and read about Jesus tell you that there’s something special about Him? Does it make you also want to come to Jesus, or wish Jesus would come to you, because for some reason you don’t feel worthy or able to come to Jesus? Just imagine what you could learn and receive from Jesus. Jesus told Nicodemus that “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14). Do you believe in Jesus, or are you doubting? Can you imagine eternal life?

There was a man who didn’t feel worthy or able to come to Jesus. His name was Zacchaeus. “He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."” (Luke 19:2-5). That day salvation was brought to Zacchaeus’ house.

Today we look at a day, and the weeks after, when salvation was brought to mankind, to you and to me. We begin today’s reading on the evening of the resurrection of Jesus. Reports about the resurrection had been circulating from Mary and other women. Yet, after all that the disciples had seen from Jesus, for fear of the Jews they and ten apostles were hiding in a locked room.

Jesus knew where they were hiding, just as He knows where you’re hiding, and what you’re trying to hide from Him. They were hiding because of fear. You might hide because of sin, or trials in your life, or a feeling of shame or unworthiness. Still Jesus came to them to show them that He is alive, to show them that He forgives them, to show them that He loves them. Jesus does the same thing for you so that you know that you’re forgiven, loved and saved.

Jesus takes them from this state of fear and uncertainty to being glad. I don’t know about you but ‘glad’ feels like a blah word to me. There’s not much excitement in the word glad, but that’s the translation we have before us. However, this same word could be translated as joy. The disciples were joyful. The disciples rejoiced. To see that we can look at our first reading where we’re told that the disciples rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of the Lord.

It’s the same word that could be translated as glad or rejoice. Personally, I’d feel more joy over seeing Jesus than being beaten for teaching about Jesus. Yet, still however you look at it, Jesus takes people from a state of fear, and a

state of painful dishonour, and brings them joy. He transforms their lives. Jesus told His disciples as much before He died and rose again.

He said to them “You heard Me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28). So “you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).

Yes, it can be hard to believe in Jesus at first. Yet, Jesus tells the disciples that He will help them, as He helps us, as He helped Thomas. Thomas wanted to see Jesus too. He wanted to touch Jesus. Jesus knew this and before Thomas told Him He offered to let Thomas touch Him. We don't hear that Thomas actually put his fingers and hand into Jesus' wounds. He may or may not have done that, but when he saw Jesus, and Jesus made the offer of what he had asked for, showing him that He truly knew Thomas, Thomas declared Jesus to be, “My Lord and my God!”

Again, translations don't fully capture the Greek that this is written in. It's less likely that Jesus told Thomas to not disbelieve, but rather that He told him to not become unbelieving. The first implies that Thomas was already disbelieving, which is often how we talk about Thomas because he said that he would never believe. Yet, Jesus' words imply that Thomas still had faith, but he was losing that faith, and Jesus was encouraging Him to believe, and to hold onto that faith.

We can look at our lives in the same way. Let's think about the last verse: “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” (v. 31). This verse can be taken in two different ways depending upon who is reading it. It's written to unbelievers and believers. If you're an unbeliever in Jesus you would read this to say: “these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” If you're a believer in Jesus you can hear this to say: “these are written so that you may go on believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

Come to believe in Jesus, or go on believing in Jesus. Thomas was being encouraged by Jesus to go on believing in Jesus. For you today may you come to believe if you haven't yet believed in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, and go on believing that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the Son of God who was lifted up on a cross to die for your sins. May salvation come to your house today. May you find peace with Jesus' forgiveness, and joy in your eternal life. Amen.