

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John chapter 20. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John chapter 20 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John chapter 20 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John chapter 20. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is about the resurrected body of Jesus.

First. The body of Jesus Christ was resurrected.

It was not just the spirit of Jesus that had arisen from the grave, as some liberals teach, but it was the body of Jesus that was resurrected! The body of Jesus was not a phantom (as the docetics teach), but a real body! Jesus proved that he had a real body by urging his disciples to touch him (Lk 24:39; 1 Jn 1:1) and by eating food in their presence (Lk 24:40-43). The resurrected body of Jesus was not a completely different body, but it was his own lowly body that was completely transformed (Phil 3:21).

Second. The resurrected body of Jesus Christ was now glorious.

The four Gospels in the Bible describe that Jesus in his resurrected body could not be hindered by the strips of linen bound around him as with a mummy or by a closed rock tomb. He passed through closed gates and doors. And he appeared and disappeared at will. This does not mean that his human nature was now in possession of the qualities of the divine nature and that his human nature had become omnipresent. Jesus has two natures: a divine nature and a human nature. His two natures are never mixed or blended in either his state of humiliation on earth or in his state of exaltation in heaven so that one nature partakes of the qualities of the other nature. His two natures always remain distinct, never mixed and always unchangeable, but at the same time indivisible and inseparable! This is how the ancient Christian Church has always confessed the two natures of Jesus Christ.

Third. The resurrected body of Jesus Christ is the guarantee that the bodies of Christians will also be resurrected and become glorious.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44,53-54 teach that the bodies of Christians in the future would be *imperishable* (incorruptible), that is, they will never grow old, sick or weak. The resurrected bodies of Christians will be *glorious*, that is, they will share in the divine characteristics like love, holiness, righteousness, power and wisdom of God. The resurrected bodies of Christians will be *immortal*, that is, they will exist forever in a perfect life, in everlasting blessedness and in the presence of God in heaven! Finally the resurrected bodies of Christians will be *spiritual*, that is, they will be renewed and completely governed by the Holy Spirit. I am looking forward to the resurrection of my body! Then my lowly body will also be transformed and become like the body of Jesus Christ!

(T) An important truth for me is from John 20:30-31 about the miraculous signs, which John recorded in his Gospel.

The apostle John says that he had recorded a selection of miraculous signs in his Gospel so that his readers may *continue* to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in order that believing they may *continue* to have life in his name. These ‘signs’ in the Gospel of John were the changing of water into wine, the healing of the centurion’s son, the healing of the withered man at the Pool of Bethzatha, the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the opening of the eyes of the man born blind, and the resuscitation of Lazarus from the dead. But the greatest sign was the resurrection of Jesus Christ! The miracles in the Gospel of John are called ‘signs’, because they introduce the teaching of specific truths with reference to Jesus Christ. Even the cleansing of the temple and the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem may be called ‘signs’. The Gospel of John is *a book of signs*. It records the wonderful deeds of Jesus Christ *and their meaning*! The purpose of these signs is only one: to cause people to continue to believe in Jesus Christ! The purpose of miracles in the Bible is not to create faith, but to strengthen faith! Miracles point to the reality, truth and presence of

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ calls me not to focus on the miracles themselves, but on Jesus Christ, to whom all these miracles point and about whom all these miracles teach. For example, the feeding of the five thousand teaches that Jesus is *the Bread of Life*. He has become the Bread of Life for me!

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 1:1-18 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (20:1-2). How do we know that Mary Magdalene was not the only woman at the tomb at that time?

(T) If we read each Gospel by itself, it seems as if there are contradictions between the accounts of the Gospels. For example, John speaks of 1 woman, Matthew of 2, Mark of 3 and Luke of more than 3 women at the tomb of Jesus. However, if we read all four Gospels together, then there is *no contradiction with regard to any event that took place*. Luke clearly indicates that there were more than three women in the group of women who went to the tomb (Lk 24:10). Matthew and Mark abbreviate. For example, Matthew only mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. The apostle John probably assumes that his readers are acquainted with the other Three Gospels. Therefore he confines his story to Mary Magdalene. But this does not mean that John states that she was the only person present at that time at the tomb. In verse 2, Mary Magdalene herself says to the apostle Peter, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have put him!” Mary Magdalene does not say, “I don’t know”, but “*We* don’t know” (plural). She herself therefore clearly implies that other women had been with her at the tomb, exactly as the other Gospels record!

2nd Question. (20:3-9). Why did Peter and John suddenly believe?

(S) After Mary Magdalene had told them about the empty tomb, Peter and John ran to the tomb. They went into the tomb and saw the strips of linen lying there without the body and also the burial head-cloth was folded by itself and separate from the linen bandages. The idea that the strips of linen still formed an empty cocoon as if the body of Jesus had gone through the strips of linen, cannot be determined from the text. However, what was very clear was that the strips of linen were still lying there, but the body of Jesus was not there. The sealed tomb and guards had made sure that no disciple had been there to remove the body and no robber had visited the tomb in order to pillage it. Otherwise, the strips of linen would also not have been there! The realisation of the fact that the body of Jesus had been resurrected from the dead caused Peter and John to believe that Jesus was indeed resurrected from the dead and alive!

The Bible began to take on new meaning for Peter and John. Verse 9 says that “previously they had not understood the Scripture”. Although they had read the Old Testament many times, they did not understand passages such as Psalm 16:10-11 and Isaiah 53:11-12 (Ps 110:1; 118:22-24). Psalm 16 says, “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” And Isaiah 53 says, “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life.” Now Peter and John suddenly realised that these passages in the Old Testament speak about the resurrection of Jesus! They realised that the resurrection of Jesus was part of God’s eternal plan and therefore a divine “must” (Lk 24:44). Besides the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus himself had predicted several times that he would be crucified and after three days be resurrected from the dead (Mk chapters 8,9,10).

3rd Question. (20:14-17). Why does Jesus say to Mary Magdalene that she should not hold on to him?

(T) When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, she first thought that he was the gardener. Due to her unbelief, she did not expect to see Jesus alive. She was looking for his dead body to prepare it with spices! However, when Jesus called her by her Aramaic name, “Miriam” (Mary), and spoke to her in her native language, she recognised Jesus and clung to him as if she would never let him go again. Before the death of Jesus, Mary Magdalene had experienced for a long time the daily visible association of Jesus with his disciples and the sweet fellowship with them and had helped to support them (Lk 8:1-3). She now assumed that this former situation would again continue. But Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.” Jesus does not object to her touching him, but is telling her that from now on the relationship between him and his disciples had changed. The period of his day-to-day visible association with his disciples was over. He appeared, now to this one, then to that one. That is why he said to her, that she must not think that by grasping hold of him she could keep him always with her. He was soon going to ascend to the Father in heaven. Only after the outpouring of his Holy Spirit would she and the other disciples again be able to have uninterrupted fellowship with him! But that spiritual fellowship would be far richer and more blessed than this physical association! That fellowship would be the fellowship of the risen Lord Jesus Christ in heaven with his Church on earth!

4th Question. (20:17) Why does Jesus say to some women that he is going to Galilee and to Mary Magdalene that he is going to return to his heavenly Father?

(S) In Matthew 28:7, the angel said to the women that they should go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.” And in Matthew 28:16-20 we read how Jesus indeed appeared to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Although the angel said that Jesus was going ahead of his disciples into Galilee, we know that the first appearances of Jesus were not in Galilee, but were all in Jerusalem and its vicinity. This is not a contradiction, because Jesus did later meet his disciples in Galilee and there is no evidence that Jesus did not reach Galilee before his disciples. Jesus simply *did much more* than he had revealed to them through his angel! He met them in Jerusalem *and* in Galilee!

In John 20:17, Jesus himself says to Mary Magdalene, “Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’.” Jesus *revealed more* to Mary Magdalene than to the other women. He asked her to tell the disciples not only that he was risen from the dead, but that he was going to ascend to heaven, to his Father and their Father. The relationship between Jesus and his disciples would change. He now called them “my brothers”. This means that their relationship would be more intimate, a fellowship in the Holy Spirit. The Christians would belong to the same family in heaven and inherit the same inheritance. But Jesus also emphasised the distinction between himself and his disciples: Jesus Christ God’s Son *by nature*, while they are God’s sons *by adoption*.

5th Question. (20:21-23). With what authority does Jesus send his disciples into the world?

(T) **One. The great commission of Jesus was above all given to the Eleven Apostles.**

On the evening of the day Jesus was resurrected, he appeared to ten of his disciples and others who were gathered there (Lk 24:33). After he had shown them the marks in his hands and side, they believed that it was Jesus. Then he gave them the great commission. Jesus said to them: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” The word *send* means to send as an apostle. Therefore, although these words were spoken to the whole Christian Church, they were first of all directed to the Eleven disciples of Jesus, whom he called *apostles*. The task of being witnesses of Jesus and particularly of his resurrection (Act 1:8,21-22), the task of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth and making disciples of all the nations (Mt 28:19) and the task of using the keys of the kingdom (Mt 16:18-19; 18:18-19) was given to the Eleven Apostles. Under the leadership of the apostles of Christ and those they appointed to be elders in the local churches, the Church and all believers worked together in these tasks!

Two. The reception of the Holy Spirit was to empower them for their task.

Then Jesus blew on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Just as Jesus Christ had received the Holy Spirit *in unrestricted fullness* for the discharge of his own mission (Jn 1:32-34; 3:34), so the disciples of Jesus now received *a special measure* of the Holy Spirit for the discharge of their mission. John was not anticipating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which was more public and resulted in the birth of the Spirit-indwelt community, the Christian Church of the New Testament period. John was speaking of a real impartation of the Holy Spirit in order to give the apostles *the power and authority* they needed to fulfil their task as apostles of Jesus Christ. Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to them by breathing on them. This is the same verb that is used when God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils. But now Jesus was *not imparting life* to them, but he was *empowering* them for their special ministry as apostles. The apostles needed this power and authority to witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to plant the first historic churches in the nations of the world and to write the New Testament books.

Three. The commission and authority cannot be exercised independent from God.

The authority of the apostles to forgive or not to forgive sins was connected to their task of preaching the gospel and making disciples in the whole world. However the passive verbs “the sins are or are not forgiven” show that forgiveness of sins is the responsibility of the sovereign God and is not the responsibility of certain spiritual leaders. The apostles were not given a task and authority independent of God. Neither were they given the assurance of infallibility (Gal 2:11). Their task was to proclaim and teach, but it always remains God’s prerogative to effectively forgive or retain the sins of people! The apostle Paul later correctly says, “The Lord assigned to each his task. I planted the seed. Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Cor 3:5-6).

(S) **STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY**

Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of *possible applications* from John chapter 20 and then choose one possible application and make it our *personal application*. Close the Bible study by taking turns to pray about one truth that God has taught you in John chapter 20.

(T) I realise that although Jesus Christ originally commissioned the eleven apostles. He has commissioned the elders of each church to lead their church in this same task: to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and to make disciples of all the nations. As I preach the gospel, God will sovereignly draw people to Jesus Christ and forgive their sins. I want to be continually aware that God has not given me a task and authority independent of Jesus Christ! It is as Jesus said in John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing!” The opposite is also true: “By remaining in Jesus and he in me, I will bear much fruit!”

(S) I want to stop being afraid of death. The Christian hope is that at the resurrection of the body, my lowly body will be transformed to become like the glorious body of Jesus Christ! Because I already now know that death has been conquered and that I will be resurrected, I can look to my future with joyful hope and confidence! I want to continually confess my faith in the resurrection of the dead! Amen!

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Make a commitment to do Bible study every week. Prepare next week's Bible study. Use "the five steps" method to prepare John chapter 21.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".