

CHURCH.

LESSON 44

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> <i>REVELATION 4 - 7</i>
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Revelation 4 - 7).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN JOHN]</i> <i>(17) JOHN 16:13</i>
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Review two by two.

(17) John 16:13. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <i>[THE GOSPEL OF JOHN]</i> <i>JOHN 20:1-31</i>
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Introduce. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study John 20:1-31 together. John 20 to 21 deals with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his appearances to Mary Magdalene and the other disciples. The resurrection is the second part of the greatest event in human history. In John 20:30-31 the write describes the purpose of his Gospel.

Although at first sight it seems that the recorded testimonies of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) contain contradictions, these alleged contradictions can be satisfactorily explained so that no unsolved contradiction remains. When we read all four Gospels together, there is *no event that does not fit into the whole story*. All four evangelists have heard the testimonies of the women and of the disciples of Jesus several times and finally each recorded in his Gospel what he regarded as important.

<u>STEP 1. READ.</u>	GOD'S WORD
Read. LET US READ John 20:1-31 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

<u>STEP 2. DISCOVER.</u>	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

Discovery 1. The resurrected body of Jesus.

The Gospels describe that Jesus in his resurrected body could not be hindered by the strips of linen bound around him many times, or by a closed rock tomb. He passed through closed gates and doors to meet his disciples. And he appeared and disappeared at will.

But this does not mean that his human nature was now in possession of the qualities of his 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 confused or blended in 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 remain at his resurrection unchanged, unchangeable, distinct, not confused or melted together and at the same time indivisible and inseparable! This is how the ancient Christian Church has always confessed the two natures of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, it was not the human spirit of Jesus Christ that had arisen from the grave, (as liberals teach), because that was not dead, but with God the Father (Luke 23:46)! It was the human body of Jesus that was resurrected from the dead! The body of Jesus was not *a phantom or shadowy appearance* (as the followers of Docetism teach), but a real body! Jesus proved that he had a real body by urging his disciples to touch him (Luke 24:39; 1 John 1:1) and by eating some food in their presence (Luke 24:40-43; John 21:12-13).

The resurrected body of Jesus was not *a completely different body*, but it was his own lowly body which he possessed before his death that had been totally transformed to his glorified body at his resurrection (Philippians 3:21). 1 Corinthians 15:42-44,53-54 teach the following about the resurrection body of Jesus Christ and that of Christians in the future: The resurrection body is then:

- imperishable (incorruptible), that is, it will never grow old, sick or weak and it will never again die. It is clothed with immortality. It will continue to exist forever in perfect life, in eternal blessing and in the presence of God.
- glorious, that is, it shares in the divine characteristics like love, holiness, righteousness, power and wisdom of God.
- powerful, that is, it has supernatural abilities and is a powerful personality!
- spiritual, that is, it is renewed and governed by the Holy Spirit.

Christians worldwide are looking forward to the resurrection of the body! Then their human bodies will be as the glorious resurrected body of Jesus Christ!

20:30-31

Discovery 2. 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 the readers of his Gospel would believe that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God, and receive eternal life through their faith. But also that believers in Jesus Christ would continue to believe and continue to experience eternal life.

These signs were: the changing of water into wine (John 2:1-12), the healing of the centurion's son (John 4:43-54), the healing of the withered man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15), the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15), the opening of the eyes of the man born blind (John 9:1-14) and the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46). But the greatest sign was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (John 20:1-10)!

The miracles in the Gospel of John are called "signs", because they introduce the teaching of specific truths with reference to Jesus Christ. Therefore, even the cleansing of the temple (John 2:13-17) and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-19) may be called "signs".

The Gospel of John is *a book of signs*. It records the wonderful deeds of Jesus Christ together with the meaning of the signs! 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 to point to the reality, truth and presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not want people to focus on the miracles themselves, but on Jesus Christ himself! All miracles point to Jesus Christ and teach specific truths about Jesus Christ! For example, the feeding of the five thousand teaches that Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is the Bread of Life also for me!

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 20:1-31 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

20:1-2

Question 1. How do we know that Mary Magdalene was not the only woman at the tomb at that time?

Notes. If we would only read the Gospel of John, we would get the impression that there were contradictions with respect to what we know from the other Gospels. For example, John speaks of one woman, Matthew of two, Mark of three and Luke of more than three women at the tomb.

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 (Luke 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 (*plural*) don’t know where they have put him (John 20:2)!”

20:3-9

Question 2. Why did Peter and John suddenly believe?

Notes. 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 sudden realisation of the fact that the body of Jesus had been resurrected caused Peter and John to believe: that Jesus was indeed what he had prophesied to be, that he was resurrected from the dead and that he was now alive!

Therefore the Bible began to take on new meaning for Peter and John. John 20:9 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 and Isaiah 53. Psalm 16:10 says, “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” And Isaiah 53:10-11 says, “Yet it pleased the LORD to crush him; He made him sick; when he (the Messiah) has made his soul (to be) a guilt offering, he will see seed/offspring (Hebrew: zer>a); he will lengthen days” After the suffering of his soul, he will see it (according to one of the Dead Sea scrolls: he will see the light of life). (See manual 5, supplement 1).

Now Peter and John suddenly realised that these passages in the Old Testament prophesy the resurrection of Jesus Christ! They realised that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a part of God’s eternal plan and therefore a divine “must” – it had to happen. The resurrected Lord confirmed this later, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). In the New Testament Jesus Christ himself predicted several times that he would be crucified and be resurrected from the dead on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33)¹!

20:14-17

Question 3. Why does Jesus say to Mary Magdalene that she should not hold on to him?

Notes. When Jesus Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, she first thought that he was the gardener. Due to her unbelief, she did not expect to see Jesus alive, but was looking for his dead body! However, when Jesus called her by her Aramaic name, Miriam (Mary), and spoke to her in her native language (Aramaic), she recognised Jesus and desired to hold on to (cling to) him and hold him back as if she would never let him go.

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 him. She now assumed that this former mode of fellowship was going to be resumed. Therefore Jesus says to her that she should not hold him back, because he has not yet returned to the Father. Jesus does not object to a woman touching him, but is telling her that from now on the relationship between him and his disciples has changed. The period of his day-to-day visible association with his disciples is over. He appears, now to this one, then to that one. That is why he says to her that she must not think that by holding him back 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 will she and the other disciples again be able to have uninterrupted fellowship with him! And this fellowship would be far richer and more blessed than the fellowship they had up to now! It would be the fellowship of the risen Lord in heaven with his Church on earth!

20:30-31

Question 4. 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?

Notes.

(1) The resurrection and the appearances.

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

¹ Greek: té trité hemera, “on the third day”. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34 in Greek says “after three days” (meta treis hémeras). Mark 15:42-43 clearly teaches that Jesus was crucified on Friday (Greek: paraskeuế) and Mark 16:2 teaches very clearly that he was resurrected on Sunday (the first day of the week) (Greek: mia tón sabbatón)! In the light of these facts, we understand that the Jews used the expression “a day and a night” in Matthew 12:40, not as a period of 24 hours, but rather as “a part of that day” (whether part of the day or part of the night). Therefore, the body of Jesus was in the grave from Friday late in the afternoon till Sunday early in the morning! Compare the expressions: “not long after these days” (ou meta pollas tautas hémeras (Luke 15:13; Acts 1:5).

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 to his disciples 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!

(2) The ascension and the new relationship.

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 information* to Mary Magdalene than to the other women. They had to tell about his resurrection and his appearance to his disciples. She had to tell about his ascension and his new relationship to them. Because he would ascend to his heavenly Father, his relationship to his disciples would change!

On the one hand, Jesus emphasised *what is the same* between him and his disciples in relationship to God. He now called them “my brothers” (John 20:17), which is an even more intimate term than “my friends” (John 15:13-15). This means that their relationship would be a relationship in the Spirit, that they would belong to the same family and that they would inherit the same eternal inheritance. In a spiritual sense, God is only “the Father” of those people that have received God the Son by a living faith (cf. John 8:41-44).

On the other hand, Jesus emphasised *what is different* between him and his disciples in relationship to God. Jesus Christ is *by nature* (that is, in his Being) “the Son of God”, while his disciples are *only by adoption* “sons of God” (Ephesians 1:5). Nevertheless, the closeness of their fellowship is also stressed. In a spiritual sense the God who by nature is the Father of Jesus Christ, is also by adoption the Father of his disciples! It is to this God and Father that Jesus is ascending.

20:21-23

Question 5. With what authority does Jesus Christ send his disciples into the world?

Notes.

(1) The great commission was above all given to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

On the evening of the day Jesus was resurrected, he appeared to ten of his disciples and others who were gathered there (Luke 24:33). After he had shown them the marks in his hands and side, they believed that he was the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Then he gave them the great commission. In John 17:18 Jesus said to God the Father, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world”. Now in John 20:21 Jesus says to his own disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”. The word “send” means “to send as an apostle”. These words were first of all directed to the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. They *had been with him from the beginning* and had witnessed his life (words and deeds), his death and his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22).

The apostles of Jesus Christ had to be his official witnesses to the Jews, to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles (Acts 1:8). They had to go into the whole world and preach the good news to all the creation (Mark 16:15). They had to go and make people in all the nations “disciples of Jesus Christ” (Matthew 28:18-20). It is upon them and their testimony that Jesus built his Church (Matthew 16:18). It is to them that he gave the keys or authority to include or exclude people from the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18-19). But the apostles of Jesus Christ have no successors (as bishops), because no one would qualify (Acts 1:21-22).

Once the Christian Church had been established by the apostles of Jesus Christ, the great commission belongs to the Christian Church as a whole. Now all local congregations with their elders and members work together in the Great Commission! Disciples make new disciples and congregations establish new congregations.

(2) The special reception of the Holy Spirit was to empower the apostles of Jesus Christ for their task (the apostolic office).

The Greek text says: “Jesus blew (or breathed with the purpose of transmitting something) (Greek: emfusaó) (aorist) and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them (Greek: afíemi) (perfect tense, passive); if you retain (those) of any, they are retained (Greek: krateó) (perfect tense, passive) (the sins remain forgiven or not forgiven)!”

This “blowing” (cf. John 3:8) had symbolic significance. The same verb is used in Genesis 2:7 when God had formed the man from the dust (elements) of the earth and “breathed” into the face of man the breath of life, and man became a living soul. But in John 20:22-23 it is not *the bestowal of physical life* that is in view, *but the empowerment of his apostles for their spiritual ministry*. The “blowing” or “breathing” is symbolically giving the authority that belongs to the office of an apostle of Jesus Christ, as is evident from Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 18:1,18. The intension was that this authority was also given to Thomas who was absent, as is evident from the parallel Bible passage in John 17:18 where Jesus sent his apostles out into the world. And the intension was that this authority was also given to Paul, as is evident from his calling in Acts 26:16-18, Romans 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 9:1. The (twelve) apostles of Jesus Christ had the authority to forgive the sins of people (if they repented) or retain their sins (if they hardened themselves against the proclamation of the gospel).

Four times in the Bible the Holy Spirit is received.

- The prophets in the Old Testament received the Holy Spirit for their special task to prophesy the Word of God (Ezekiel 2:1-7; 1 Peter 3:10-12)
- Jesus Christ in the New Testament received the Holy Spirit for his special task to bring salvation or judgement (Isaiah 11:2-5; 61:1-2; John 1:32-34; 3:34)
- The apostles of Jesus Christ received the special office (of “an apostle of Jesus Christ” with the task and the authority that belongs to it) to close the door of the Kingdom of God/the Church (Greek: dedemenon, perfect tense) or to open it (Greek: lelumenon, perfect tense) (and the door then remains opened or closed) and to proclaim forgiveness of sins to people who believe in the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ or to proclaim condemnation to people who harden themselves in unbelief (John 20:21-23; cf. Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18; John 20:23; Acts 13:9-11; 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 2:10; 10:8). The apostles received this authority when they were baptised with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
- All Christians receive the Holy Spirit when they come to faith in Jesus Christ (are being born again, are baptised with the Spirit) (Mark 1:8; John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; 7:37-39; 14:16-18; Acts 1:5; 2:38-39; 11:14-18; 15:7-9; Romans 8:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Titus 3:5-8).

(3) The great commission and authority cannot be exercised independent from God.

The great commission and the authority entrusted to the apostles could not be exercised independent from God. They were indissolubly connected to the presence and reign of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (the Holy Spirit) in them. The apostles had no authority in themselves apart from the Holy Spirit. They were not allowed to act apart from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit always speaks in complete agreement with the Word of God (the Bible) (John 14:26; 16:13-15; cf. 14:6; 17:18; Ephesians 6:17) and acts in complete agreement with love. Arbitrary pronouncements by spiritual leaders (modern church officers as for example: popes, bishops, priests, pastors, etc.) about the forgiveness of sins, arbitrary exclusion out of the Christian Community (excommunication), arbitrary punishments and curses have no legal power with the God of the Bible.

While it is the task of the apostles *to declare* that people’s sins are forgiven (or not), it is only God who *effectively forgives* their sins (or not)! The passive verbs “their sins are forgiven” or “their sins are not forgiven” show that forgiveness is the work of the sovereign God. The apostles are not given a task and authority independent of God. The apostles (and other spiritual leaders as popes) are also not given the assurance of infallibility. Galatians 2:11 clearly shows that the apostle Peter was not infallible! The task of the apostles of Jesus Christ is to proclaim and to teach the Word of God, but the prerogative to effectively forgive the sins of people or to retain the sins of people belongs only to God! Later, the apostle Paul correctly says, “The Lord assigned to each his task. I planted the seed. Apollos watered it, but *God made it grow*” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6)!

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from John 20.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from John 20:1-31.

20:5-8. Study the historical evidence concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ and believe it!

20:11. The Christian faith regards grieving for losses as a genuine and necessary expression of feelings before healing can take place.

20:18. Tell others what you have seen God do in your life.

20:21. Learn as much as you can from how Jesus Christ fulfilled his ministry.

20:22. Believe that Jesus Christ will equip you for the ministry he calls you to do.

20:26-29. Stop doubting and believe the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ. You will be blessed!

20:30-31. The miracles of Jesus Christ are above all ‘signs’ that point to Jesus Christ himself, who he is and what he does.

20:31. Only when you believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah and the Son of God will you receive eternal life.

2. Examples of personal applications from John 20:1-31.

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!

I realise that the great commission has originally been given to the apostles of Jesus Christ. Although the apostles of Jesus Christ have no successors, the great commission belongs to the Christian Church as a whole. Every local

congregation in the world under its elders should be involved in the great commission. The gospel must be proclaimed to the whole creation and disciples of Jesus Christ (mature and functioning Christians) must be made in every nation on earth. As I preach the gospel, God will draw people to Jesus Christ and forgive their sins in a sovereign way. I want to be continually aware that God has not given me a task or 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 Christ and he in me, I will bear much fruit!”

STEP 5. PRAY. **RESPONSE**
 LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in John 20.
 (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<i>[INTERCESSION]</i> PRAY FOR OTHERS
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Continue to pray in groups of two’s or three’s. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	<i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i> FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ’s Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the Bible study of John 20 together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of Revelation 8 – 11 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method or the question method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (18) John 16:14. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
6. Update your notebook on building Christ’s Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.