



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

On a Need-to-Know Basis

The Gospel Of John

John 20:11–31

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There are situations in life when information is given on a need-to-know basis. This can happen for various reasons, often because it would not actually be helpful for you to know everything. Sometimes too much information can be distracting. It's better if you just know what you need to know in order to complete the task at hand or achieve a specific goal.

For example, let's say you're a passenger on a commercial airplane flight. During the flight, one of the flight attendants might come over to you and discreetly say, "Could you come up front for a minute? We need your help with something." So you go up to the cockpit, only to discover that the pilot has died of a heart attack. For whatever reason, they've determined that you are the best candidate to take over. They're on autopilot right now, but somebody's got to grab these controls and actually land this thing pretty soon and they've asked you to do it. But you're not a pilot.

Fortunately, this doesn't happen very often in real life. It has never happened to me, but I've seen it in movies. The person who doesn't know how to fly a plane sits down behind the control panel that's covered with knobs, levers, gauges, and blinking lights everywhere. It's totally overwhelming. They're freaked out. They don't know how to do it.

What do you do in that situation? Well, obviously you put the headphones on because they connect you to someone in the control tower who does know how to fly this plane. They're going to talk you through it, step by step. But they're not going to take the time to explain to you how every one of those knobs or buttons or gauges works. There's no time for that. This is an emergency situation; lives are at stake and they're only going to tell you what you need to know in order to land the plane safely. That's the task at hand. Everything they tell you will be intended to achieve that specific goal.

That's the principle we see at work here in the final few verses of John 20, when the apostle John lets us know that he's just giving us the need-to-know information about Jesus in order to achieve a specific goal. It says:

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but 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.

John is saying, "I could tell you a lot of things. I could fill up 10,000 pages with stories of everything Jesus said and did that would all be amazing and fascinating. But I'm not going to do that, because I have a very specific goal in mind. You need to believe that Jesus is the Christ so you can have life in His name. So I'm just going to tell you what you need to know in order to get you there." He doesn't specify that he's only talking to unbelievers to try to get them to believe in the first place and receive life, or if he's writing to Christians, hoping to strengthen their faith and keep believing, holding on to life. He doesn't target a certain subgroup or demographic like that. He says, "...[T]hese are written so that you may believe..."

You are the target audience, whoever you are. If you are reading these words or hearing them preached—everyone within the sound of my voice, whether you're a follower of Christ or not—the goal is the same: that you would believe in Jesus Christ. In a very real sense, your life depends on what you believe about Jesus.



Just like in the airplane, this is an emergency situation. Lives are at stake. He's not going to tell you how every button works and tell you every word Jesus ever said, nor all the wonderful miracles He ever did. He's going to tell you what you need to know about Jesus. That has been his goal throughout the entire Gospel of John. So this morning, as we look at just this section of chapter 20, we're going to see three things we need to know about Jesus.

We need to know Jesus conquered the grave.

This is really the overarching theme of all the stories presented here. Jesus was dead, but now He is alive. Last week the passage focused on the death of Jesus and Pastor Tim did a wonderful job explaining why it's so important that we know Jesus really died and that His death wasn't a hoax, a conspiracy or anything like that. It was a very physical human death.

Now in this chapter, we see stories of people who had seen Jesus die. They were eyewitnesses to the brutal death of Jesus Christ. They've encountered the resurrected and very alive Jesus Christ, so now they're beginning to tell other people, who in turn have their own encounter with Him and then tell other people. We see this cycle repeated a couple times here.

Mary encountered Jesus at the tomb, then she told the disciples about it. Then they had their own encounter with Jesus, but Thomas wasn't there. So the next time they were with Thomas, they told him about it, then he ended up having his own encounter with Jesus. All these stories are presented as testimonies of personal encounters with people who can attest to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The apostle John presents these because we need to know that Jesus Christ is alive and that He conquered the grave. This is important because if we know that Jesus conquered the grave, we can know we can trust His word. He gives authority to the things He had been saying, because He had repeatedly said and made clear that He would die, then rise again from the grave. For example, Matthew 16:21 says:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Peter didn't get it. He had a hard time accepting it and didn't want to believe it. In fact, the disciples generally reacted this way when Jesus said these things. They had a hard time getting their minds around it.

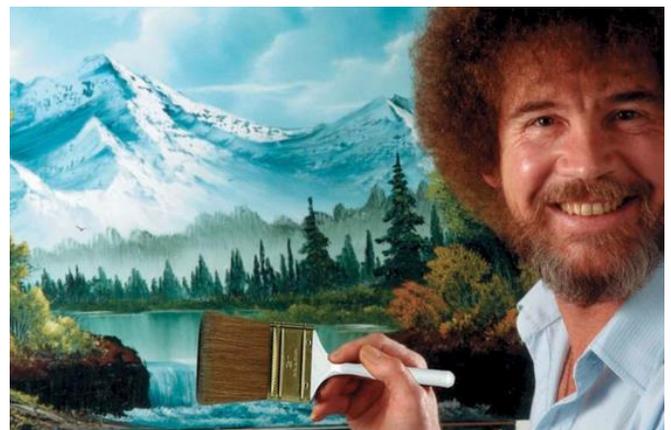
I like John 2:19-22 where it says:

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."...But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

So they didn't really believe it at the time. When He said it they were thinking, "Okay, Buddy, what are You even talking about?" Then when Jesus rose from the dead, they were thinking, "Ah, we get it now. We see it now. This is actually awesome!"

This reminds me of watching one of those old Bob Ross shows. Do we have any Bob Ross fans in here? A few of you. The big poofy hair, the constant whispering, always whispering things like, "Let's put some happy clouds up there." Check him out if you haven't seen his program. It's a great show. He's a great painter and tells you he's going to paint something amazing, like a mountain range. "I'm in. Let's do this."

He starts to paint the mountain range and for most of the show, it's just kind of a blob generally in the shape of a mountain, but it's not particularly impressive. You're thinking, "What is this guy doing? He's whispering the whole time. He seems weird. He might be out of his mind." But we keep watching the show, then at some point he does something to make you think he's ruined the painting. If you've ever seen the show, you know what I mean. Like in the middle of it says,



"Hey, let's try this color." And you're like, "No! That looks terrible. What are you doing? It was looking okay, but you ruined it. There's no coming back from this."

Then he keeps going and right at the very end, he says, "Oh, let's put a little snow on those mountaintops." Then all of a sudden, it looks perfect! You're thinking, "Whoa, he was building that the whole time. He knew what he was doing."

If you watch a few of his programs, you come to expect this. You see him create beautiful paintings, then you start to have confidence that if he says he's going to paint a beautiful mountain range, you know for sure by the end of the show that a beautiful mountain range is going to be on that canvas, even if along the way he seems like a maniac, and it looks like it's ruined.

I think the disciples must have felt like that about Jesus a lot of the time they were following Him. They were pretty confused about what was going on. Some of the things He said didn't seem to make a lot of sense, even seemed a little crazy. Then when Jesus rose from the dead, it's like they saw the picture fall into place, and it was beautiful. They realized that He was the fulfillment of prophecies in God's Word from centuries before and that He was the One foretold in the Scriptures—the Christ, the Son of God. They understood that all along there was divine authority to the things He was saying about life, death, salvation and the Kingdom of God. Because He rose from the dead, we know we can trust His Word. We also know that we personally can have hope in the face of our own mortality.

Jesus didn't just go around making predictions about what was going to happen to Him in His death and resurrection; He said a lot of things that have very much to do with us. He made promises from God that apply to us. For example, here's one in John 6:40: *"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* That's a crazy thing to say, unless you can prove it, right? When He rose from the grave, He proved that He was able to make good on that promise He had made to everyone who, for the rest of human history, would look on the Son and believe in Him. We know that we will be raised up on the last day. He made good on that by rising Himself to prove He has the very power of life. This becomes our hope in the face of our own mortality.

If I remember right, I was about eight years old when I started thinking about death. It's when I became aware that I was going to die someday. The thought of death terrified me because I didn't grow up in a Christian home. I didn't have any hope that there was anything beyond death. I just thought that when you die, that's it. It hung over me like a cloud as I was growing up that someday my life would come to an end, and everything would just go black. I wouldn't exist anymore and it would be like I had never existed because, from my point of view, there's no memory of anything. So what's the point of life even? I was kind of a morbid child; I'll give you that. I wasn't the most fun eight-year-old, going around and thinking about that stuff.

That cloud hung over me until I was in my mid-20s. When I was 26 years old, Jesus came into my life and showed me that death is not the end, that there is hope beyond the grave, that eternal life was real and that He proved it by rising from the dead. That cloud that had hung over me finally dispersed and the light of His truth showed through. I began to experience a radiant joy, like I had never known before.

So for me, this particular point is very personal and very meaningful. My entry point into the faith was the fact that through Jesus, we have victory over death because He has conquered the grave. Amen? That's the first thing we need to know about Jesus.

We need to know Jesus forgives our sin.

In John 20:19–23, we read the story of when Jesus appeared to the disciples who were locked away in a hidden room. He appeared to them and said, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* Then He breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit. So He was basically commissioning them, sending them out to do a work that was the continuation of the work He had been sent by the Father to do.

Then what did He tell them that work was? We read about it in verse 23: *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."* He didn't say, "I'm sending you out to do miracles and teach primarily." Those are things they did, but He really wanted them to know the work God the Father had sent Him into the world to do had to do primarily with the forgiveness of sin, therefore the work they would be doing had to do primarily with forgiveness of sin as well. This is the very heart of the gospel message.

Our fellowship with God was severed because of our sin. Jesus came and led a sinless life so He could offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of others. He suffered and died on our behalf to pay for our sin, then when He rose from the grave it was proof that God had accepted His sacrifice and that the curse of sin and death had finally been broken. That meant our fellowship with God was restored.

I love the way John Piper puts it: “Forgiveness is essentially God’s way of removing the great obstacle to our fellowship with Him. By cancelling our sin and paying for it with the death of His own Son, God opens the way for us to see Him, know Him and enjoy Him forever.” That’s what it looks like to have life in Jesus’ name, seeing Him, knowing Him and enjoying Him forever. Forgiveness of sin is an essential part of getting there.

This means that I take what Jesus has done and apply it to myself, not only believing He died and rose again as simply things that happened. I don’t just believe them with my mind as historical facts. I take that belief down into my heart and respond to it. I believe He died for me. I believe that His death on the cross was necessary to purchase my forgiveness. I’m a sinner and in order to have fellowship with Him and be in His presence, my sin has to be forgiven and cleansed. So I believe it applies to me and by believing He rose from the dead, I gain access to His resurrection power because He has promised it to me. That’s the kind of belief the apostle John is talking about when he says, “I wrote these things that you may believe and have life in His name” (20:31).

It’s a belief that isn’t just some idea that floats around in your brain. It’s a belief that demands a response and that response is, “Lord, forgive me.” It’s accompanied by the knowledge that Jesus Himself is that forgiveness. He forgives our sins. We need to know that which is why he included it in this Gospel story.

We need to know Jesus can handle our doubt.

Jesus conquered the grave and Jesus forgives our sin. Then the third thing we need to know is that Jesus can handle our doubt. When I say doubt, it reminds us of the story of Thomas. Good old Thomas. The disciples tell him that Jesus is alive, but he’s like, “Yeah, I’ll believe it when I see it.” Because he responded that way, he was stuck with the nickname Doubting Thomas for the rest of human history. Everybody calls him that.

I personally think he gets a bad rap with that nickname, because it creates the impression that this was his leading characteristic. We tend to think this guy just went around doubting everything all the time. When I meet this guy, I might say, “Hey, Thomas, good to meet you. My name is Josh.” Then he might reply, “Oh, is it? Likely story.” I’d wonder why he’s being that way so I ask someone and he says, “Don’t worry; that’s just Doubting Thomas. He doubts everything. He’s just like that.”

Now the Bible gives us no evidence that he was generally like that. It’s not like he showed up in all these other Bible stories, just doubting everything. He helped feed 5,000 people. He helped serve the water that was turned into wine. The Bible says he doubted one time. He expressed that doubt and got slapped with that nickname.

If you give somebody a nickname like that, it can marginalize and dismiss them. I don’t think we should dismiss Thomas. I want to suggest something here about Thomas that might be a little controversial. Is it controversial to have sympathy for Doubting Thomas? Even if it is, I’m going to go there anyway because I believe it was not unreasonable for Thomas to doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is a fundamentally unbelievable piece of information.

Thomas didn’t doubt that because he had a doubt problem. He doubted because it is very hard to believe that it actually happened. It’s fantastic. It’s supernatural. It’s miraculous. Yes, the disciples had seen Him perform miracles, but coming back to life? Maybe you’d say, “Well, Thomas should have believed Jesus could do a miracle; He did all those other miracles while He was still alive. How can He reasonably be expected to perform another miracle after He was dead? How can anybody do anything after they’re dead? Nobody can do that. It’s impossible.”

Only God can do that and Thomas knew that only God could do that. This is why when he saw the resurrected Christ with his own eyes, his response was beautiful. Thomas said, “*My Lord and my God!*” In that moment, all doubt was stripped away and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was exactly Who He had been claiming to be—the Christ, the Son of God. Thomas declared Him to be his own personal Lord.

I want you to notice the interaction between Jesus and Thomas. Jesus was aware of the doubt Thomas had expressed and He wasn't angry about it. When Jesus showed up and saw Thomas, He didn't scold him for having doubts. He didn't have contempt for Thomas. He didn't make him feel stupid about it. He didn't seem annoyed by it or in any way threatened by the doubt Thomas had expressed. On the contrary, He was willing to meet with Thomas and address his doubts specifically and personally.

It's very important for you to know that Jesus will do that for you as well. To know that Jesus can handle our doubt has tremendous implications, both for believers and unbelievers. As believers, we can feel that if we are struggling with doubt about some aspect of the faith, some theological point we don't understand, or are perplexed by how God works, we can feel as though it's not okay to express those things. We might think it's going to seem as though we're not good Christians because Christians are supposed to have this iron-clad, unquestioning belief. We'd better keep quiet about it, just go with the program and stuff those thoughts deep down. But in this story, Thomas serves as a model for how we as Christians can and should express our doubts and ask our questions within the context of community. The Lord Himself will help us resolve our doubts, like He did with Thomas. I'm not saying He's going to show up bodily in your room and talk to you. I've never had that happen. I've never known any Christians who have had that happen. But I have had the experience of wrestling with doubts and questions, taking them to the Lord and asking Him specifically, "Lord, what am I supposed to do with this? Please help me." This happened a lot when I was new to the faith and was discovering the truths of Christianity. I was reading the Bible, but this stuff was new to me and a lot of it struck me like, "What am I supposed to do with this?" I was a believer like Thomas was.

Thomas didn't jump ship. When these guys were hiding out, locked in that upper room for fear of persecution, Thomas was still among them. He was a believer. Even though he doubted something that was an important part of the faith, he didn't stuff that doubt inside to go with the flow. He expressed it openly and honestly.

In my experience, the times I did that, I would go to the Lord and tell Him, "Lord, I'm having a hard time believing this or that." Then the Spirit of the Lord would meet me where I was and guide me toward the resolution of those doubts. Part of that was by expressing those doubts to believers and having them help me work through these things.

If you've been walking with the Lord for a while, I'm sure many of you have gone through some seasons of doubt. That experience is part of your testimony as well, being honest with the Lord about what you're struggling with and receiving His help. We don't have to pretend to be doubt free. Jesus can handle our doubts.

It's important for unbelievers to know this as well. I've encountered a lot of non-Christian people over the years who will say something to me like, "Yeah, it's great that you're a Christian. I actually envy your faith. I wish I could believe." I've had people say to me, "I wish I could believe, but I just can't because I have too many doubts." It's like they look at Christians and think the reason why we are Christians is because we're inherently doubt-free people. We never ask the same questions that they do. But that's not true, is it? They think because they have doubts and questions about the faith, they are disqualified from even starting to try to have a relationship with God. They're just not that kind of people. But this story of Thomas shows us that we don't have to be doubt-free in order to have a relationship with God. You can bring your doubts and questions to Him, working through them in the context of Christian community. He will help you find answers to those things that are very personal and specific, meeting you right where you need it because that's Who Jesus is.

That's part of what we need to know. These are the things the apostle John, from the control tower, told us through the headphones of his Gospel, that we need to know about Jesus. He conquered the grave, He forgives our sin and He can handle our doubt when we bring it to Him. It is my prayer that everyone listening today—whether you're already a believer or not—may know and embrace these things and fully lay hold of the glorious gift of life in Jesus' name that He wants us to have.