

Three Resurrection Signs of the Savior

A Study in the Gospel of John

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Introduction

While this study does critique the teachings of Zane Hodges as set forth in his articles “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of our Message”¹ and “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation to Respond”², it should not be viewed so narrowly. The tenor of this treatise is actually broader in scope, and involves a subject that is immensely important but often overlooked. More than simply a response to Zane Hodges, this exposition is a study in the Gospel of John with a focus on the signs of Jesus “in the presence of His disciples” (Jn. 20:30, NKJV).³ It will be argued that these signs constitute a separate group of signs specifically highlighting the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that these so called “resurrection signs” provide the basis for belief that this Johannine, resurrected Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (cf. Jn. 20:30-31).

The Greatest Sign

And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Thy house will consume Me.” The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews therefore said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22)

How important is the sign of Christ’s death and resurrection? Jesus indicated this sign to be His greatest. When the Jews questioned His authority to cleanse the temple by demanding of Him one incontestable sign to justify His actions, Jesus did nothing but prophesy of His own

¹ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000).

² Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation to Respond,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001).

³ All Scriptures taken from the New American Standard Version (NASB) unless otherwise noted.

death and resurrection on the third day (Jn. 2:18-22)! “‘Christ Himself,’ as B. B. Warfield puts it, ‘deliberately staked His whole claim to the credit of men upon His resurrection. When asked for a sign He pointed to this sign as His single and sufficient credential.’”⁴

There seems to be agreement among many scholars that Christ’s death and resurrection was the greatest sign of all in the book of John.⁵ Thomas Arnold, former Professor of History at Rugby and Oxford, and one of the world’s greatest historians, made the following statement: “I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better, fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair enquirer, than *the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died, and rose again from the dead*” (italics added).⁶ Wilbur M. Smith affirms this statement.⁷ Similarly, Merrill C. Tenney says, “These seven signs culminating in the resurrection of Jesus, the eighth and greatest of all.”⁸ And John Niemelä declares, “That sign was the cross and resurrection. It was the greatest of all the signs in a number of ways.”⁹

Why are the two momentous events of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection on the third day considered to be one sign (and not two)? In John 2:18 the Jews specifically asked Jesus, “What sign [*singular*] do You show us”? In Jesus’ answer to this specific question, He links his death and resurrection together by saying, “Destroy this temple, *and* in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19, italics added). Furthermore, the disciples understood the cross and resurrection to be one sign: “When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said *this [singular]*” (Jn. 2:22a, italics added). Even John Niemelä argues that Christ’s death and resurrection is one sign.¹⁰

In reading through John’s narrative, it becomes clear that no other sign approaches the prominence given to the great climactic Passover sign of the Lamb’s crucifixion and resurrection on the third day! While the death and resurrection of Jesus is the greatest sign in John’s Gospel, there are three unique signs that cannot be separated from it. They are the three resurrection signs of the Savior.

Three Resurrection Signs of the Savior

A number of Scriptures verify that Jesus Christ manifested Himself specifically to His disciples after He rose from the dead:

⁴ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1979), 182.

⁵ It is therefore especially odd when other scholars *never even mention* this sign when listing the signs in John’s Gospel! For example, see Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2004), 269; Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *Nelson’s New Testament Survey* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 155-156; Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 134; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, New American Standard Translation (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1678.

⁶ Thomas Arnold, *Sermons on Christian Life* (London: 1854), 324.

⁷ Wilbur M. Smith, “The Need for a Vigorous Apologetic in the Present Battle for the Christian Faith: Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100 (October 1943): 541.

⁸ Merrill C. Tenney, “Literary Keys to the Fourth Gospel, Part 1: The Symphonic Structure of John,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (April 1963): 121.

⁹ John Niemelä, “The Cross in John’s Gospel,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16 (Spring 03): 22-23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-23.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you [the post crucifixion and resurrection church-age reader] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you [the post crucifixion and resurrection church-age reader] may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31, italics added)

until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders *to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:2-3, italics added)*

The word which He sent to the sons of Israel [in context], preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all). . . You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day, *and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.* And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One [i.e. the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, the Son of God] who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins. (Acts 10:36, 38-43, italics added)

And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. *But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. (Acts 13:28-31, italics added)*

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, *and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5, italics added)*

In the Gospel of John, chapters 20-21, the beloved disciple recounts three post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to gatherings of His followers. These appearances of Jesus are described as “signs . . . in the presence of His disciples” (Jn. 20:30, NKJV). In his narrative, John describes only three resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples:

Resurrection Sign #1

When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. . . . But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus [i.e. the Twin], was not with them when Jesus came.¹¹ (John 20:19-20, 24 italics added)

¹¹ Bob Definbaugh, “That You Might Believe: A Study of the Gospel of John,” *bible.org*, affirms what the Biblical text indicates: “It would appear that this was our Lord’s first appearance to the disciples after His resurrection.” Also

Day: Resurrection Sunday (the very same day Jesus rose from the dead), evening (Jn. 20:1, 19)

Location: Locked room (Jn. 20:19)

Audience: Only the disciples (Jn. 20:19), excluding Thomas (Jn. 20:24)

Key Sign Miracle: Jesus miraculously appears to His disciples after his resurrection from the dead and shows them His hands and side (Jn. 20:19-20)

Resurrection Sign #2

And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:26-29, italics added)

Day: Eight days after first resurrection appearance (Jn. 20:26)

Location: "again" in locked room (Jn. 20:26)

Audience: "again" only the disciples (Jn. 20:26), this time including Thomas (Jn. 20:26)

Key sign miracle: Once again, Jesus miraculously appears to His disciples after his resurrection from the dead and this time specifically invites Thomas to touch His scarred hands and side (Jn. 20:26-29)

(In the context of John's narrative, John 20:30-31 occurs here, between the second and third resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples. These verses read as follows: "*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you [the post crucifixion and resurrection church-age reader] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you [the post crucifixion and resurrection church-age reader] may have life in His name.*")

Resurrection Sign #3

After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself. . . This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to the disciples after He was raised from the dead. (Jn. 21:1, 14, NKJV)

Day: Unknown (Jn. 21:1)

Location: Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 21:1)

see Matthew Henry, *Henry's Exposition*, 6 Vols. (Philadelphia: Towar & Hogan, 1828), 5:942, "In these verses, we have an account of his first appearance to the college of *the disciples*, on *the day* on which he rose."

Audience: Only certain disciples: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee (James and John)¹², and two others - possibly Phillip and Andrew¹³ (Jn. 21:1-2)

Key Sign Miracle: Jesus “again” appears to His disciples a “third time” after his resurrection from the dead, displays omniscience and eats food (Jn. 21:1-14)¹⁴

The Resurrection Signs and John 20:30-31

Do the “signs” cited in John 20:30 refer to the three resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples or do they refer to all the signs recorded in the book of John? Context, chronology, Christ Himself, cross references, church-age audience, and certain scholars will demonstrate that the “signs” cited in John 20:30 refer specifically to the three resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples.

First, the context surrounding John 20:30-31 clearly indicates that in these two verses the apostle John speaks of Jesus’ three resurrection signs in the presence of His disciples. The skilled exegete of Scripture will recognize that John 20:30-31 is not an island of two verses by itself. Instead, these two verses are directly connected to and associated with the surrounding context of John chapters 20-21 (which describes the three resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples). John 20:30 begins with the connective word “and” (NKJV), tying verse 30 into the surrounding context. Also, notice that in John 20:30-31a the apostle states that “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written*” (italics added). This language clearly implies that the appearances which are written in the context are to be considered “signs”. Furthermore, John 21:1 continues the thought of the previous chapter (chapter 20) by describing yet another resurrection appearance of Jesus to His disciples: “After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias” (Jn. 21:1a). This is further proof that John 20:30-31 cannot be divorced from its surrounding context which involves the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples.

Second, an important chronological fact is stated in John 21:14 which helps to confirm that the “signs” of John 20:30 refer to the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the presence of His disciples. What the apostle writes in John 21:14 is very significant: “This is now *the third time* that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead” (italics added). This is a key phrase because it unlocks an important truth: *Jesus’ three signs in the presence of His disciples after His resurrection are numbered separately from the previous signs in the book of John!* The apostle John obviously started counting a new group of signs *after* the resurrection of Jesus! To further verify this truth simply compare John 2:11 and John 4:54 with John 21:14:

¹² Cf. Mk. 10:35; Lk. 5:10.

¹³ Matthew Henry, *Henry’s Exposition*, 5:950., seems to indicate that this was the prevailing opinion of his day. He writes, “The two not named, are supposed to be Philip of Bethsaida, and Andrew of Capernaum.”

¹⁴ Jesus did not *need* to eat food because He possessed a glorified body (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13, Rev. 7:16). Yet in John 21 Jesus ate food to demonstrate to the disciples that His resurrected body was real “flesh and bones” (cf. Lk. 24:36-43).

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. (John 2:11, italics added)

This is again a second sign that Jesus performed, when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (John 4:54, italics added)

This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. (John 21:14)

John 2:11 and John 4:54 are said to record the first and second signs of Jesus in John's Gospel. In his narrative the apostle John goes on to describe many more signs that Jesus performed: healing an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (Jn. 5:1-18), feeding the 5,000 near the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 6:5-14), walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 6:16-21), healing a blind man in Jerusalem (Jn. 9:1-7), raising Lazarus in Bethany (Jn. 11:1-45), and Jesus' own crucifixion and resurrection on the third day (Jn. 2:18-22, chapters 18-21). If these signs are counted by addition, their total is *more than three in number! Clearly, the three signs that Jesus performed in the presence of His disciples after His resurrection are grouped separately from the other signs in John's narrative!*

It is not accidental that in his narrative the apostle John includes *three* resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples. This numbering is by divine design and has significance. Concerning the symbolism of the number three, Birch notes: "As the number most distinctly marked with a beginning, middle, and end it seems to have been regarded as symbolic of a complete and ordered whole."¹⁵ Birch goes on to say: "A threefold repetition of something not only has symbolic meaning but also is a method of expressing the superlative (e.g., Isa. 6:3)."¹⁶ John's unique triad of resurrection signs are truly of inestimable value not only because they confirm Jesus' greatest sign, but also because their message must be believed for eternal life: "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:30-31). These truths underscore the fact that in John's narrative the three resurrection appearances of Jesus in the presence of His disciples form a complete and superlative group of signs!

Third, Christ's statement in John 2:19 further demonstrates that the "signs" of John 20:30 refer to Jesus' resurrection appearances in the presence of His disciples. The great "sign" of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection emphasized in John 2 is linked to Jesus' resurrection "signs" evidenced in John 20-21! In John 2:18 the Jewish leaders ask Jesus a specific question: "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?" Jesus, of course, refers to the sign of His death and resurrection on the third day when He declares: "Destroy this temple, and in three

¹⁵ B. C. Birch, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 Vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 3:558.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19b).¹⁷ Regarding this, the apostle John notes: “When therefore [Jesus] was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken” (Jn. 2:22). John clearly presents Jesus’ great statement *in the light of the resurrection!*¹⁸ How do the three resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples relate to the one great sign of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection on the third day? The answer to this important question may “connect the dots” for many readers. In John 2:18-22 the sign of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection is *prophesied*. In John chapters 18-19 Christ’s crucifixion is *performed* and then *proved* (by His burial). In John chapters 20-21 Christ’s resurrection is *performed* and then *proved* (by His appearances, or resurrection signs). The three resurrection signs (as opposed to all the signs recorded in John’s Gospel) are the final proof of Christ’s original prophecy!¹⁹

Fourth, two key cross-references similarly highlight the fact that the “signs” of John 20:30 refer to the three resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples; they do not refer to all the signs recorded in the book of John. The book of Acts commences where the Gospels conclude. In Acts 1:1-3 Luke speaks of the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the presence of His disciples and calls these appearances “convincing proofs”:

The first account I composed [i.e. the Gospel of Luke], Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, *after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*” (italics added)

By simply comparing Scripture with Scripture, and on the authority of the Word of God, one can safely identify the “signs . . . in the presence of the disciples” (Jn. 20:30-31) with the “convincing proofs . . . to the apostles” (Acts 1:1-3)! Similarly, the apostle Paul writes that Jesus Christ “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4a). Definbaugh affirms: “the resurrection of Jesus is the final and compelling proof that He is the Son of God and Savior of the world”.²⁰ These verses simply verify that in John’s mind, he considered the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the presence of

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that in John 2:19a Jesus *doesn’t* say, “If you destroy this temple”. Instead, He prophesied that the Jews *actually would* destroy the temple of His body. Similarly, in John 2:19b, Jesus *doesn’t* say, “in three days I will rebuild it.” Instead, He says, “in three days I will raise it up.” This is a reference to His bodily resurrection.

¹⁸ See Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 12 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 9:45.; Gerald L. Borchert, “The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons,” *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 1988): 503.

¹⁹ These key truths are consistent with the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

²⁰ Bob Definbaugh, “That You Might Believe: A Study of the Gospel of John,” *bible.org*.

His disciples to be powerful and climactic “signs” proving that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 20:30-31)!

Fifth, John’s particular audience of church-age readers is another reason to believe that the “signs” of John 20:30 refer to the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples. There is virtually no question that John’s readers comprise a church-age audience. Concerning the date of John’s Gospel, Scofield declares: “The date of John’s Gospel falls between A.D. 85 and 90. Probably the latter.”²¹ Similarly, Blum writes that “a date between 85 and 95 is best.”²² McGee suggests even latter: “It was the last one written, probably close to A.D. 100.”²³ Charles Ryrie and Earl Radmacher suggest similar dates around A.D. 90.²⁴ Even Zane Hodges affirms, “In my view, [John’s Gospel] was written before 70 AD . . . At the time of writing, the cross was years ago”.²⁵

The apostle John directly addresses his church-age audience in John 19:35 and again in John 20:31 with the words “*that you may believe*” (NKJV, italics added):

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so *that you may believe*. (John 19:34-35, NKJV, italics added)

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31, NKJV, italics added)

This directness of approach bestows great importance on the facts involved!²⁶ What are the specific facts that John is emphasizing his audience believe in these two passages? Consider the following reasoning. If John wants his church-age readers to believe his testimony regarding Jesus’ blood death (Jn. 19:34-35), it follows that the apostle would be *at least* equally desirous (if not more so) that these same readers believe his threefold testimony regarding Jesus’ resulting bodily resurrection from the dead (Jn. 20:30-31)!²⁷ In this scenario, John would be specifically drawing attention to Jesus’ blood death and resulting bodily resurrection from the dead. Concerning this, Matthew Henry writes that in John 19:34 the apostle “give[s] an evidence of *the truth of his death*, in order to *the proof of his resurrection*. If he was only in a trance or swoon,

²¹ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1114.

²² Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John*, 268.

²³ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, 6 Vols. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 4:362.

²⁴ See Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, New American Standard Translation, 1675.; Earl D. Radmacher, Gen. Ed., *The Nelson Study Bible*, New King James Translation (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1754.

²⁵ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 6.

²⁶ See Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 9:185.; Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, The Gospel According to John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1118.; Leon Morris, *The NIV Study Bible, John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1669.

²⁷ While John 19:34-35 involves the death of Jesus, John 20:30-31 goes further and involves not only the death of Jesus, but also His resurrection from the dead by way of the three resurrection signs of the Savior!

his resurrection was a sham".²⁸ John knows that if his readers are not assured of Jesus' death, neither will they be assured of His resurrection! If they do not believe in Jesus' death, neither will they believe in His resurrection from the dead! Based on this reasoning and evidence alone, it becomes clear that since John 19:35 involves Jesus' death, John 20:31 most likely involves the resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples (as opposed to all the signs recorded in John's Gospel). John has drawn special attention to the two great events of Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead in order that his church-age readers "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing . . . may have life in His name." A logical flow chart of these specific Johannine truths might look something like this: Believe that Jesus died (Jn. 19:35) → Believe that Jesus not only died, but also rose from the dead (Jn. 20:31a) → Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 20:31b) → Eternal Life (Jn. 20:31c)! (The apostle John obviously elaborates more on these truths in his Gospel narrative. The previous diagram simply displays the logical sequence of certain important facts.) The main point is this: The apostle's direct references to his church-age audience ("you") in the contexts of John 19:35 and John 20:31 highlight the importance and coherence of Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead as necessary elements of belief for eternal life. This double coherence (of John's church-age audience and Jesus' crucifixion-resurrection action) would be greatly reduced and even lost if the "signs" cited in John 20:31 referred to all the signs recorded in the book of John, and not specifically to the three resurrection signs of the Savior!

Sixth, certain scholars have correctly taught that the "signs" cited in John 20:30-31 refer to the three resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of His disciples. Alva J. McClain states:

1. Christ's Post-Resurrection Ministry and the Kingdom

The first eleven verses of Acts describe this ministry of our Lord. The parallel passages appear in chapter 28 of Matthew, chapter 16 of Mark, chapter 24 of Luke, and chapters 20-21 of John. Luke only, in the first-named passage, states the length of this ministry as "forty days" (Acts 1:3). . . . During this period of time Christ demonstrated to them the reality of His resurrection from the dead. In the words of Acts 1:3, "he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days." Some of these "proofs" are described in detail by Luke in his "former treatise" (Luke 24:30-43). This testimony is confirmed by the other three gospel writers, and John adds that "many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:30-31). And, as we shall see, these visual demonstrations were supported by appeals to the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures (Luke 24:44). Thus by sensible signs and Biblical testimony were the disciples convinced of the resurrection of Jesus, and so prepared for further instruction about the Kingdom.²⁹

Matthew Henry aptly writes:

The remark which the evangelist makes upon his narrative, like an historian drawing towards a conclusion, v. 30, 31. And here . . . He assures us that many other things occurred, which were all worthy to be

²⁸ Matthew Henry, *Henry's Exposition*, 5:933.

²⁹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1983), 390-391.

recorded, but are *not written in the book: many signs*. Some refer this to all the signs that Jesus did during his whole life, all the wondrous words he spake, and all the wondrous works he did. But it seems rather to be confined to the signs he did after his resurrection, for these were in *the presence of the disciples* only, which are here spoken of, Acts 10:41.³⁰

Thomas Scott makes a similar comment regarding the signs spoken of in John 20:30-31:

“The signs” here spoken of, seem to refer to the evidences of our Lord’s resurrection, of which there were far more than it was necessary to record: (*Note, Acts 1:1-3.*) but these were committed to writing, in order that all those who should ever read them, might believe that Jesus was indeed the promised “Messiah” . . . the Savior of sinners, and “the Son of God;” that by this faith they might obtain eternal life, through his name, for his sake, and by his mercy, truth, and power.³¹

A Resurrection Dimension

Zane Hodges makes the following statement regarding the content of faith in John’s gospel:

Let me put it to you this way. The Gospel of John is the only book in our New Testament canon that explicitly declares its purpose to be evangelistic. Of course, I am thinking of the famous theme statement found in John 20:30-31, where we read: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

This statement does not affirm the necessity of believing in our Lord’s substitutionary atonement. If by the time of the writing of John’s Gospel, it was actually necessary to believe this, then it would have been not only simple, but essential to say so.

Inasmuch as the key figures in John’s narrative *did* believe in Jesus before they understood His atoning death and resurrection, it would have been even more essential for John to state that the content of faith had changed. But of course he does not do this. The simple fact is that the whole Fourth Gospel is designed to show that its readers can get saved in the same way as the people who got saved in John’s narrative. To say anything other than this is to accept a fallacy. It is to mistakenly suppose that the Fourth Gospel presents the terms of salvation incompletely and inadequately. I sincerely hope no grace person would want to be stuck with a position like that.³²

Christ’s resurrection signs in the presence of His disciples will demonstrate that Jesus Himself modified the content of belief for eternal life as a natural result of His crucifixion and resurrection.³³ Furthermore, an overview of related Scriptures will also evidence important changes resulting from Christ’s death and resurrection. John chapter 20 will be the key text because “the hinge point of the Gospel of John is the resurrection. That fact should not take us

³⁰ Matthew Henry, *Henry’s Exposition*, 5:948.

³¹ Thomas Scott, *Scott’s Bible*, 6 Vols. (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, and Crocker and Brewster, 1830), 5:596.

³² Zane Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 7-8.

³³ This relates to the doctrine of progressive revelation.

by surprise because the resurrection is in reality the hinge point of Christianity.”³⁴ Furthermore, in the outline of the apostle’s narrative, chapter 20 speaks of “The culmination of faith”.³⁵

A Resurrection Order

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. . . . Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; *but go to My brethren, and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’* Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, ‘I have seen the [resurrected] Lord,’ and that He had said these things to her.” (John 20:1, 15-18, italics added)

Before the risen Savior appeared to the ten disciples, He appeared to Mary Magdalene. It was early resurrection Sunday morning. During this brief encounter, Jesus clearly described *significant changes* resulting from His resurrection from the dead. Ryrie notes that the words of Jesus in John 20:17 describe “His new relationship as resurrected Lord.”³⁶ F. W. Grant writes, “[Mary] learns, not only that He is risen, but of a relationship that His resurrection has brought His people into.”³⁷ Borchert adds, “A new resurrection relationship between Jesus and his followers was being established because Jesus was returning to the presence of God.”³⁸ William MacDonald comments that Christ “told [Mary] to go to His brethren and tell them of the new order that had been ushered in.”³⁹ Harrison echoes this idea of “the new order”.⁴⁰ Similarly, Edwin A. Blum notes:

These words spoke of a new relationship, new relatives, and a new responsibility. . . . Jesus said, in effect, “This (the physical contact) is not My real presence for the church. A *new relationship* will begin with My Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.” Jesus then explained the fact of the *new relatives*. He called His disciples His brothers. Earlier He had said they were friends: “I no longer call you servants . . . instead, I have called you friends” (15:15). Believers in Jesus become a part of Jesus’ family with God as their Father (cf. Heb. 2:11-12; Rom. 8:15-17, 29; Gal. 3:26). Mary’s *new responsibility* was to testify to His risen presence. She was the recipient of four special graces. . . . Christians today are also the recipients of special grace; they too are given this new responsibility to witness to the world (cf. Matt. 28:16-20[; Jn. 20:19-23]).”⁴¹ (bold added)

³⁴ Gerald L. Borchert, “The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons,” *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 1988): 502.

³⁵ W. H. Griffith Thomas, “The Plan of the Fourth Gospel, Part II,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (October 1968): 318.

³⁶ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, New American Standard Translation, 1721.

³⁷ F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible, The Gospels* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1904), 615.

³⁸ Gerald L. Borchert, “The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons,” *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 1988): 509.

³⁹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 1567.

⁴⁰ Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, The Gospel According To John*, 1119.

⁴¹ Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John*, 342-343.

Chafer asserts: “When Christ arose from the dead, Christianity was born, and the new creation was brought into existence. There is nothing in the old order for the believer. He stands on resurrection ground.”⁴² The death and resurrection of Christ was not simply another sign, but was instead “the ONE MOST IMPORTANT”⁴³ “epoch-making event”⁴⁴ that ushered in significant changes and a new order.

A Resurrection Message

After His pre-dawn encounter with Mary, the resurrected Savior appeared to ten of His disciples (Judas Iscariot having committed suicide and Thomas being absent) that same day toward evening (Jn. 20:1, 19). Jesus emphasized their need to believe in His resurrection by showing them His nail scarred hands and pierced side (Jn. 20:19-20). He commissioned them with a message of forgiveness that now involved His substitutionary death and resurrection (Jn. 20:20-23).⁴⁵ The text reads as follows:

And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus therefore said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” (John 20:20-23)

This is truly an amazing statement that Jesus declared to His disciples! Tenney expounds the Scriptural text from the original language with the following words:

The commission to forgive sins is phrased in an unusual construction. Literally, it is: “Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven.” The first verbs in the two clauses are aorists, which imply the action of an instant; the second verbs are perfects, which imply an abiding state that began before the action of the first verbs. God does not forgive men’s sins because we decide to do so nor withhold forgiveness because we will not grant it. We announce it; we do not create it. This is the essence of salvation. And all who proclaim the gospel are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearer accepts or rejects the Lord Jesus as the Sin-Bearer.⁴⁶

Similarly, Harrison strongly describes Jesus’ emphasis when he writes:

“It follows, then, that what our Lord here commits to His disciples, to His Church, is the right authoritatively to declare, in His name, that there is forgiveness for man’s sin, and on what conditions the sin will be forgiven” (Milligan and Moulton, *Commentary on John*) This scene involves the death of Christ (his wounds presented), his resurrection (declared by his living presence), the resultant commission to go

⁴² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995), 202.

⁴³ Henry H. Halley, *Halley’s Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 556.

⁴⁴ Gerald L. Borchert, “The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons,” *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 88): 503.

⁴⁵ The apostle John clearly indicates that the death of Jesus was a substitutionary death. Besides John 20:19-23, see John 1:29, 1:35-36, 3:10-17, 6:47-54, 10:7-18, 11:47-53, and 18:14.

⁴⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 9:193.

and bear witness to him [which the apostle John is doing through his Gospel narrative], the equipment for this task, and the message itself, centering in forgiveness of sins.⁴⁷

As a result of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and set forth the good news of complete forgiveness involving not only His substitutionary blood death for the sins of the world and but also His subsequent bodily resurrection on the third day. John 20:19-23 narrates the saving message of Jesus' substitutionary death (Jn. 20:20, cf. 20:23) for the forgiveness of anyone's sins (Jn. 20:23) and resurrection on the third day (Jn. 20:1, 19-20), which the disciples were now commissioned to preach (Jn. 20:21, cf. Lk. 24:46-49).⁴⁸ It is significant that Jesus emphasized this saving message of forgiveness centered on His death and resurrection in His very first resurrection appearance to His ten disciples! Chafer affirms: "On the first day of the week [Jesus] commanded the disciples to preach the new message to all the world."⁴⁹

A Resurrection Belief

Eight days later, Jesus miraculously appeared a second time to His disciples; this time Thomas was present (Jn. 20:26). But this doubting disciple still didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Jn. 20:24-25). Jesus graciously encouraged Thomas to believe in the reality of His resurrection by saying, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing" (Jn. 20:27). Keep in mind that Thomas already believed in the Jesus who turned water into wine and did many wonderful works, *but Thomas didn't believe in the "Lamb standing, as if slain"* (cf. Rev. 5:6)! He didn't believe in Jesus risen from the dead! But after being confronted with such irrefutable evidence, Thomas needed no further urging. John 20:28 states: "Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" Thomas' response of belief is the climax of John's narrative. Concerning this, Ryrie says: "This marks the climax of John's gospel."⁵⁰

The doubting disciples' encounter with Jesus in John 20:26-29 conveys an elementary yet essential truth: As a result of Jesus' resurrection, believing in Him now involves believing that He did, in fact, rise from the dead! According to Jesus, one must believe in the Man described in John 20:26-29! For those already possessing eternal life prior to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, such belief was an essential part of sanctification, as in the case of Thomas (cf. Jn. 13:10-11, 20:24-28). For those coming to eternal life after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, such belief is an essential part of justification (cf. Jn. 20:23, 30-31).

In His encounter with Thomas, Jesus gave a special blessing to those who believe in Him apart from the physical reality of His resurrected presence. Notice the beatitude Jesus declared

⁴⁷ Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, The Gospel According To John*, 1120.

⁴⁸ Also notice the many references to the deity of Jesus in the context: His miraculous appearance (Jn. 20:19), His resurrection from the dead (Jn. 20:20, cf. Rom. 1:4), His calling God His Father (Jn. 20:21, cf. Jn. 5:17-18), His equality with God ("[A]s the Father has sent Me, I also send you."), His giving of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22, cf. Jn. 16:5-15), and His forgiving of sins (Jn. 20:23, cf. Lk. 5:20-21). In his narrative, the apostle John makes it clear that belief in the deity of Jesus is essential for eternal salvation (cf. Jn. 20:30-31). Matthew Henry, *Henry's Exposition*, 5:948., affirms: "We must believe his deity – that he is God; not a man made God, but God made man, as this evangelist had laid down his thesis at first, *ch. 1. 1.*"

⁴⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), 4:118; Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace*, 203.

⁵⁰ *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, 1722.

to Thomas in the Scripture text immediately preceding John 20:30-31: “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? *Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed*” (Jn. 20:29, italics added). Commenting on John 20:29, Definbaugh writes, “It is not too hard to see what John is leading up to. John is writing this Gospel for those who have never seen the risen Lord.”⁵¹ Similarly, Edwin A. Blum, writes:

“**Jesus** then pronounced a blessing on all who would come to faith without the help of a visible, bodily manifestation to them (John 20:29; cf. 1 Peter 1:8). This blessing comes to all who believe on the basis of the proclaimed gospel and the evidences for its validity. Believers living today are not deprived by not seeing Him physically; instead, they are the recipients of His special blessing: **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”⁵² (bold his)

In John 20:30-31, John declares to his readers that the resurrection belief he has been describing is required for eternal life. In other words, in these two key verses the apostle explains that the resurrection signs of Jesus in the presence of the disciples have been written in order that his church-age readers “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing . . . may have life in His name.”

In John 21:1-14, John goes on to describe a third and final resurrection sign of Jesus in the presence of His disciples. By including this third resurrection sign in his narrative, John encourages belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus by highlighting His divine attributes and portraying Him involved in a very human activity, that of eating breakfast.

At this point it needs to be emphasized that believing in Jesus’ resurrection is different than believing Jesus will resurrect all believers! This distinction is important because some draw a connection between John 11:25-27 and John 20:30-31 based on the common phrase “the Christ, the Son of God” and argue that the contents of “saving faith” haven’t changed from the time Christ walked the earth before the cross in John 11:25-27 to the present day after the cross in John 20:30-31.⁵³ While it is true that there are similarities between John 11:25-27 and John 20:30-31 (both passages contain the phrase “the Christ, the Son of God”, deal with the subject of resurrection, and evidence Christ’s power over death), one must realize that the two passages deal with different resurrections! John 11:25-27 occurs in a context that involves *the resurrection of Lazarus*, while John 20:30-31 occurs in a context that involves *the resurrection of the Lamb*. John 11:25-27 speaks *generally of the resurrection of the saved*, John 20:30-31 speaks *specifically of the resurrection of the Savior*. Interestingly, John Niemelä admits this. Concerning John 11:25-27, he writes: “[Jesus] will resurrect all who believe in Him, even though they may die physically. . . . Martha knows that now deceased saints will be in the Messiah’s kingdom, so obviously the Messiah will resurrect them and give them eternal life”.⁵⁴ However, it must be stressed that the resurrection of “*saints*” described in John chapter 11 is different from the resurrection of *the Savior* described in John chapters 20-21! While John chapter 11 does not affirm Jesus’ *own* death and resurrection, John chapters 20-21 not only affirms these, but emphasizes them as well!

⁵¹ Bob Definbaugh, “That You Might Believe: A Study of the Gospel of John,” *bible.org*.

⁵² Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John*, 344.

⁵³ See John Niemelä, “The Cross in John’s Gospel,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16 (Spring 2003): 23-25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are of central importance to the One who makes “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). These key events clearly add a new dimension to the belief John encourages in his narrative. Tenney aptly comments, “*Jesus’ postresurrection presence brought a new dimension to belief*” (italics added).⁵⁵ In speaking of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples as the basis of Christian faith, Halley avows: “What a Halo of Glory this simple belief sheds on human life. Our hope of resurrection and life everlasting is based, not on a philosophical guess about immortality, but an historic fact.”⁵⁶

A Resurrection Perspective

If the death and resurrection of Jesus naturally ushered in an original order of things, a modified message of eternal salvation yet still by grace through faith, and a different dimension of belief, why does John write so much of Jesus’ pre-resurrection miracles and ministry? Doesn’t this confuse the issue if John’s readers are ultimately to believe the *resurrection* signs and the *resurrected* Jesus? In answer to these questions it is helpful to understand the central theme and perspective of John’s narrative. The central theme, of course, is belief. Tenney notes:

the central theme [is] “belief”. The varied episodes and teachings of the Gospel are all subordinate to the definition and development of this concept. . . . The word “believe” (*pisteuo*) appears ninety-eight times in the Gospel, more often than any other key word, and is obviously the major theme. All the signs, teachings, and events in the Gospel are used to stimulate faith in Christ.⁵⁷

The apostle John included the initial, pre-resurrection works and wonders of Jesus in his narrative because they support his overall theme of belief. “Clearly, to promote authentic believing in the living Lord is the reason why John wrote this gospel.”⁵⁸

Furthermore, John’s narrative is written with a resurrection perspective. His Gospel is correctly understood in light of the resurrection of Jesus. Borchert writes:

While there are certainly many obvious themes in this gospel that could be studied profitably, such as: seeing, believing, knowing, signs, light, darkness, life, etc.; let me turn your attention to what may be for you a less obvious theme: the resurrection perspective in John. . . . in the Gospel of John the resurrection is an organizing theme . . . the entire Gospel is built upon the foundation of the resurrection hope. It is the resurrection perspective that gives the focus to the evolving story of the rejection of Jesus. . . . Throughout the Gospel this resurrection theme is woven into the very core of the Johannine symphony.⁵⁹

Similarly, the comments of Merrill C. Tenney are appropriate in highlighting the resurrection perspective of John’s narrative. Tenney writes:

⁵⁵ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 9:14.

⁵⁶ Henry H. Halley, *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, 557.

⁵⁷ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 9:12.; Also see Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John*, 270.

⁵⁸ Gerald L. Borchert, “The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons,” *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 1988): 510.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 501-503.

[John's] comment [in John 2:22] indicates that from the first of his ministry Jesus had the end of it in view. One can hardly escape the conviction that the fourth Gospel depicts the career of Jesus as a voluntary progress toward a predetermined goal. The allusions to the destruction of the temple of his body (2:22), to the elevation on a cross (3:14; 12:32-33), to the giving of his flesh for the life of the world (6:51), to his burial (12:7), and the announcement of his betrayal and death to his disciples (13:19, 21) attest to his consciousness of the fate that awaited him in Jerusalem. Though the disciples did not comprehend the situation of Jesus' career, the Resurrection placed the memory of his saying in a new perspective. The author's note [in John 2:22] illustrates the principle that the Gospel presents the life of Jesus in the light of the Resurrection and of the apostolic experience based on the results of that event.⁶⁰

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Edwin A. Blum says: "The focus of the Gospels is the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Gospels have been called 'Passion narratives with extended introductions.'"⁶¹ Instead of "blur[ring] the necessary focus on the Person of Christ as the object of faith"⁶², the death and resurrection of Jesus *bring Him into focus!*

The reader must understand that the Gospel of John is an unfolding narrative or "evolving story"⁶³ that "depicts the career of Jesus as a voluntary progress toward a predetermined goal"⁶⁴ and "presents the life of Jesus in the light of the Resurrection and of the apostolic experience based on the results of that event."⁶⁵ In this context, the pre-resurrection works and wonders of Jesus are seen to support John's central theme of belief and the resurrection perspective of his narrative.

Conclusion

Toward the close of his Gospel narrative, the apostle John specifically describes three resurrection appearances of Jesus to various groups of His disciples. These three unique sign appearances furnish the final and compelling proof of Jesus' greatest sign, His death and resurrection. The three resurrection signs of the Savior are seen to involve not only Jesus' substitutionary blood death for the sins of the world, but also His subsequent bodily resurrection on the third day. These key facts are inherent in the three resurrection signs of the Savior! In John 20:30-31 the beloved disciple cites these three resurrection signs of the Savior as *the rationale and reason* his church-age readers should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing they may have life in His name. If John's readers indeed believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God *as a result of* the three resurrection signs of the Savior, they obviously believe the three resurrection signs of the Savior! Thus, in John's mind, there is no dichotomy or bifurcation between the person of Jesus and His crucifixion-resurrection work! In this regard, Gregory Sapaugh says that "[Hodges] has artificially bifurcated the person and work of Christ. For sure, I believe that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. But my faith is

⁶⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 9:45.

⁶¹ Edwin A. Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John*, 269.

⁶² Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation To Respond," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 12.

⁶³ Gerald L. Borchert, "The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons," *Review and Expositor* 85 (Summer 88): 502.

⁶⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, The Gospel of John*, 9:45.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

in the Christ who died in my place, paying the penalty for my sin.”⁶⁶ The fact is, if someone disbelieves the three resurrection signs of the Savior, they will disbelieve the substitutionary death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus, and they will disbelieve that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God!⁶⁷ Josh McDowell writes:

John Locke, the famous British philosopher, said concerning Christ’s resurrection: “Our Saviour’s resurrection. . . is truly of great importance in Christianity; so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it: so that these two important articles are inseparable and in effect make one. For since that time, believe one and you believe both; deny one of them, and you can believe neither.”⁶⁸

Tenney seems to convey this idea when he writes, “the *signs* are the basis of belief; the *person of Christ* is the object of faith, and eternal life is the result of belief.”⁶⁹ By making this connection between the resurrection signs and the Savior, John makes it clear that his church age readers need to believe in the now resurrected Jesus who declared He will forgive anyone’s sins because of His death and resurrection (Jn. 20:19-23)! They need to believe in the now resurrected Jesus who stood before Thomas with nail scarred hands and pierced side and said, “Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing” (Jn. 20:27)! They need to believe in the now resurrected Jesus who appeared to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias and once again demonstrated the reality of His resurrection from the dead (Jn. 21:1, 14)! McDowell writes: “*Michael Green* makes the point well: “Christianity does not hold the resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. Without faith in the resurrection *there would be no Christianity at all.*”⁷⁰

Wilbur Smith asserts:

Christ Himself frequently predicted He would rise – even telling them on what day such a supernatural event would occur. When it did occur, He showed Himself to His disciples, bidding them to touch His hands and His side, to see that it was really and truly the crucified Lord, raised again from the dead. . . . Do not let any man tell you that this is a ‘myth’ which attaches itself to the rest of the doctrine of the Christian Church, **or do not even let one say, ‘Well you may believe it if you can.’** No one says that about Waterloo. As the great Calvinist, Dr. Warfield, once said: ‘The resurrection of Christ is a fact, an external occurrence within the cognizance of man to be established by its testimony and yet, it is the cardinal doctrine of our system, on it all other doctrines hang’” (bold added).⁷¹

Charlie Bing declares:

⁶⁶ Gregory P. Sapaugh, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (August 2001): 29.

⁶⁷ My sincere thanks to Liam Moran for helping to clarify these issues.

⁶⁸ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, 183.

⁶⁹ Merrill C. Tenney, “Literary Keys to the Fourth Gospel, Part 1: The Symphonic Structure of John,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (April 1963): 125.

⁷⁰ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, 182.

⁷¹ Wilbur M. Smith, “The Need for a Vigorous Apologetic in the Present Battle for the Christian Faith: Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100 (October 1943): 539-540.

[W]e must *give people something to believe*. Since it is the *object* of faith that saves, **there must be meaningful content about that object**, which is Jesus Christ Himself. We should present Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins (1:29) and rose again. Content-less emotional appeals are not enough. **It will do no good to call people to believe in something empty or erroneous** (bold added).⁷²

In this regard, *even John Niemelä affirms*,

The present author categorically rejects the idea that John minimizes the cross. **A paraphrase of John's salvific message indicates this: I am to believe that** – through His cross and resurrection – Jesus Christ, God's Son, gives me eternal life and resurrection, removing the death sentence that I deserve as a sinner” (bold added).⁷³

According to the three resurrection signs of the Savior cited in John 20:30-31, there must be a knowledge of the Johannine concepts of Jesus' substitutionary blood death and subsequent bodily resurrection and a belief in them. Otherwise, John's church-age readers might believe that someone is the Christ, the Son of God, but it wouldn't be the Biblical, Johannine, resurrected Jesus that the apostle John climactically sets forth in his Gospel narrative!

Soli Deo Gloria!
(Psalm 115:1)

⁷² Charlie Bing, “The Condition For Salvation In John's Gospel,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 9 (Spring 1996): 34.

⁷³ John Niemelä, “The Cross in John's Gospel,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16 (Spring 2003): 18-19. Also see *Ibid.*, 28, where Niemelä writes, “**My paraphrase of John's message to the unbeliever follows: I am to believe that** – through His cross and resurrection – Jesus Christ, God's Son, gives me eternal life and resurrection, removing the death sentence that I deserve as a sinner” (bold added). The aforementioned quotes appear to evidence an inconsistency in Niemelä's position because on another occasion he writes, “How Does the Cross Relate to the Message for the Unbeliever? The bottom line is to believe that Jesus grants eternal life to everyone who simply believes Him for that gift” (*Ibid.*, 27). By his own admission, John Niemelä's “bottom line” is *noticeably different* than John the apostle's bottom line!