

# John 20.1-18—The Empty Tomb AND The Resurrected Jesus

- I. Introduction
  - a. Can you recall how you came to believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be true? Have you ever been challenged by someone on your belief in the resurrection of the dead? If so, how did you handle that?
    - i. They might ask, have you ever seen anyone come back to life (not to mention this one you claim to have risen was stored away in a tomb for three days wrapped in burial cloths with no medical attention and Roman guards posted at the entrance)?
    - ii. Or, how can you know? Even if it were possible, how would you determine it to be true?
    - iii. I wonder if our lack of evangelism is due to the probability that we are afraid of these questions and therefore we avoid getting ourselves in such conversations.
      - 1. If that's so, I hope to encourage and equip you for those challenges.
  - b. The resurrection is the basis of our faith. You can believe everything else and without the resurrection of Christ we have nothing.
    - i. This sums up how weighty this matter is when Paul says this in (1 Cor. 15:17) <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
- II. Main Point
  - a. Following the death of Jesus, it was necessary that he must rise from the dead and conquer the grave!
- III. Outline
  - a. What does resurrection mean?
  - b. The Eyewitness account of the Empty Tomb
  - c. The Eyewitness account of the risen Lord Jesus
  - d. If Jesus has been raised, how should I respond?
- IV. Exposition
  - a. What does resurrection mean?
    - i. I ask this question because it's more than coming back from the dead. Lazarus was raised from the dead and yet was subject to death again. How is this resurrection different?
      - 1. "When Jesus was raised he was the "first fruits" (1 Cor. 15:20, 23) of a new kind of human life, a life in which his body was made perfect, no longer subject to weakness, aging, or death, but able to live eternally" (Grudem 608-609).
      - 2. Additionally it means that "the resurrection of Jesus, and his eternal possession of a physical resurrection body, give clear affirmation of the goodness of the material creation that God originally made: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). We as resurrected men and women will live forever in 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet. 3:13). We will live in a renewed earth that 'will be set free from its bondage to decay' (Rom. 8:21) and become like a new Garden of Eden" (Grudem 613).
        - a. I want to leave you with a great desire to live for God's glory now and long for Jesus' coming too. Because of the resurrection, we have purpose for living and great hope in dying. All that is wrong with us and the world will be fixed! And that could not have happened apart from the resurrection of Christ.
  - b. Well, let's see if there is an answer to man's natural dilemma in our text today—in fact, in an empty tomb.
    - i. I don't for one second believe we should be gullible or naïve. I certainly do not think anyone mentioned in the resurrection accounts was gullible. In fact, their disbelief is obvious. I, for one, am glad. Their disbelief is normal. Some were given evidence and others seemed to demand evidence. I'm grateful they were eyewitnesses to an empty tomb AND the resurrected Jesus.

- ii. We break into our story after the death and burial of Jesus. In haste, Joseph and Nicodemus had buried Jesus' body on Friday before the Sabbath began. So, the body lay in the grave from Friday, through Saturday and here we are in John 20:1 on the first day of the week which is Sunday.
- iii. The details of the story are amazing. John tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark.
  1. She was the first to arrive. And most obvious, she was a woman. We probably do not know the amount of pressure the writers of the NT had in their day not to record this. However, the fact that they did gives lots of credibility to the story. If it were not true, they would not have said so.
  2. Though it is still dark, she discovers that the stone had been taken away. This was no easy task and would certainly been understood that it was a "team lift" kind of thing.
  3. Her immediate response was to run and tell Peter and the beloved disciple.
  4. When she arrives, we hear what she believes has happened there in verse 2. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."
    - a. The "we" in the last part of her statement gives us some trouble since John doesn't name anyone else with Mary.
    - b. The other Gospels include others and certainly they were there at some point. Knowing exactly when each group arrived is not given.
    - c. Let it suffice to say this from (Lk. 24:24) <sup>24</sup> Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."
  5. We must conclude that Mary did not believe Jesus had been resurrected but rather that he had been taken from the tomb. Mary is still in the dark, we might say. An empty tomb is a necessary part of this story but it cannot be all of the story or we could have a stolen body on our hands.
    - a. An empty tomb with no sightings does not lead people to believe the resurrection.
    - b. And that's just it. No one believed in resurrection like this. Some people claim the disciples were hallucinating when they claim to have seen these things. But that assumes they were actually looking for it.
    - c. They were no different than anyone in our day, really. This empty tomb could easily end up being a fabrication of sorts.
    - d. And if they had sightings of Jesus and no empty tomb, there is no way anyone concluded that this was a resurrection either.
- iv. The disciples respond to this news from Mary by running back to the tomb.
  1. Again, the details of this account are fascinating. Peter and the Beloved disciple which we know to be John, the writer of this Gospel, gives us the specifics. He's faster than Peter!
  2. While that might seem to be a boastful comment, it cannot be because if he had wanted to keep up that image, he would not have told us that he would not go into the tomb. He looks in but remains outside not to mention he wrote it because that's how it happened.
  3. These kinds of facts speak to the volumes for John, "I should know because I was there."
  4. Peter soon joins him at the tomb and he does not hesitate to enter. There they find the grave cloths lying there.

- a. This is an important piece of evidence. Robbing bodies from graves was not uncommon. There are Roman laws against it that would result in capital punishment.
  - b. No one attempting a robbery of Jesus' body would take the time to remove the linen cloths when punishment for such a crime was death.
    - i. The linen cloths and the abundance of burial spices folded into the linen were worth a lot of money...especially the amount used on Jesus.
  - c. Although this isn't a sighting, it is evidence. It was as though Jesus conquered death and left death's clothes behind. It is distinctly different than when Lazarus was raised.
5. In a day where no one had a smart phone to post pictures of the empty tomb on social media, their burden of proof came by way of eyewitness accounts.
- a. John gives the names of those who saw what he saw. In other words, people in his day could have gone and asked Peter and Mary. You don't name names when you are trying to hide or fabricate something.
6. We still have one more clue of evidence in this first section to consider.
- a. John finally goes in himself after Peter entered the tomb and when he saw he believed.
  - b. In other words, he didn't believe what Jesus had previously told them would happen after three days. He didn't believe Mary when she explained what she saw.
  - c. "So, often the objection is raised that the disciples fabricated the account of the resurrection based on their preconceived notions. But you have to ask, "Why fake something like the resurrection, if they didn't believe it was going to happen in the first place?" John's point isn't that he believes something, and then fabricates the resurrection. He tells us straight up: "I didn't believe it until I saw it with my own eyes." His belief follows his sight, and he's humble enough to admit it. And that gives his testimony further credibility." (Bret Rogers, Sermon)
7. Why had he...they not believed? (Jn. 20:9) <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.
- a. It's a similar sound from many. The two guys on the road to Emmaus said this to Jesus: (Lk. 24:21) <sup>21</sup> But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
  - b. No one expected it. If they had, they would have been ready to run for the hills in hiding or fabricate a story of grave theft. The Roman Soldiers that were assigned to guard the tomb just in case that happened made this eyewitness account even more credible.
- c. Eyewitnesses to an empty tomb cannot be denied. The historical evidence is weighty. And not only from John but many writers. Paul was probably one of the first to write about this: (1 Cor. 15:3-4) <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. Now we need either to see a body or we need to see Jesus to confirm the resurrection.
- i. In verse 10, the disciples return but Mary stays. The disciples' actions are typical of what we have seen out of them.
  - ii. However, Mary's actions are displayed in her staying and weeping. But her actions are not much different than Peter and John's. She doesn't believe. She too looks into the tomb. There, she sees two angels sitting where the body had lain. And Jesus is working on her behalf that she might believe. Without the work of Christ, she would not have believed.

1. We assume that Jesus had to make himself known in order to be raised. That is not true. He could have left the tomb empty and ascended to the Father. But no, he pursues those he came to save.
  2. For the angels, weeping was the wrong response to what she was seeing.
  3. Though she is still outside the tomb, something happens to get her attention behind her. Most angel sightings cause fear and I'm sure a fixation on them. I can't help but wonder if the angel did not point her attention elsewhere when she stated that Jesus' had been taken and she didn't know where he had been laid.
- iii. She turns to see someone, who we already know to be Jesus, but she doesn't know yet.
1. Jesus also doesn't think weeping is the right response to what she is seeing. He asks whom are you seeking? A rebuke with patient pursuit.
  2. She repeats the same message to who she thinks to be the gardener.
- iv. Jesus replies by calling her by name: Mary.
1. It's none other than this playing out in real time: (Jn. 10:3) <sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
  2. Mary's weeping is over because she knows who he is! TEACHER! In her joy, she takes hold of him. Again, an obvious example that this resurrected body is a physical body that can be touched and held.
- v. She is sent and announces, "I have SEEN the Lord!" Now the right conclusions can be made! An empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus—standing and talking and sending.
1. Mary's eyewitness account is only the first among many. But the fact that it is a woman and it was documented makes this account all the more credible. Take note of this NT scholar's comments:
    - a. In the first century, women were not even eligible to testify in a Jewish court of law. Josephus said that even the witness of multiple women was not acceptable "because of the levity and boldness of their sex." Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity, mocked the idea of Mary Magdalene as an alleged resurrection witness, referring to her as a "hysterical female...deluded by...sorcery." This background matters because it points to two crucial truths. First, it is a theological reminder that the kingdom of the Messiah turns the system of the world on its head. Into this culture, Jesus radically affirmed the full dignity of women and the vital value of their witness. Second, it is a powerful apologetic reminder of the historical accuracy of the resurrection accounts. If these were "cleverly devised myths"... women would never have been presented as the first eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (Köstenberger and Taylor, *Five Errors to Drop From Your Easter Sermon* in Christianity Today, April 14, 2014).
    - b. Dear sisters in Christ, your witness matters greatly for the Kingdom!
- V. Responding to the Resurrection of Christ
- a. Mary, who was still in the dark, responds with joy to Jesus when he shines light into her darkness. (Jn. 1:4-5) <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
    - i. Jesus has conquered the darkness! Keep praying for your loved ones.
  - b. Next, when the Good Shepherd calls Mary by name, she knows his voice and follows!
    - i. Take much assurance in sharing the gospel that God is the One who saves. We are just messengers.

- c. Not only did the Light of the World conquer the darkness, he also conquered death! I mentioned in the introduction that if the resurrection of Jesus didn't happen then our faith is futile and we are still in our sins.
  - i. But those of us who do believe, we can boldly respond like this:
  - ii. (1 Cor. 15:55-58) "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.
  - iii. Death is no longer a threat to Christians. If we are in Christ, we shall be raised with him.
- d. And finally, Jesus has overcome the fact that we were enemies of God. Through the cross and resurrection of Christ, we are, by faith in Jesus, no longer enemies but family.
  - i. Did you notice the message Jesus sent with Mary? And this really hit me! He said, "Go to my brethren and say to them..."
  - ii. At least in John, Jesus had not referred to his disciples in this way. Not only are they his disciples, but they have a share with him in the family of God. The resurrection has changed everything!
  - iii. My Father and your Father!
- e. This can be yours if you will repent and believe in Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection have accomplished all that is necessary to be reconciled to God. In him you may be forgiven and justified by faith. Come!