



The Book of John – Chapter 20

April 15th, 2018

The Resurrection

The Empty Tomb

John chapter 20 opens on Sunday, April 9th A.D. 30, approximately three years and three months since the baptism and beginning of Christ's ministry on earth. There remains only forty days that Christ will walk on the earth, his time away from the Father now is drawing to a close.

Top Tens List of Greatest Event in Human History

1. World War II
2. Landing on the Moon
3. World War I
4. Industrial Revolution
5. Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
6. 9/11
7. Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius
8. The Black Death
9. The Fall of the Roman Empire
10. The American Revolution



John 20:1-10 (ESV) ¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying

there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

The Circumstances of Christ's Empty Tomb Reflect Authenticity

A. The Empty Tomb Was Discovered By Women

If Jesus' empty tomb was a lie and simply an example of legendary development, it's highly unlikely that the story would have been manufactured with women discovering the empty tomb. In order to understand why this is true, we need to understand two things about the place of women in Jewish society.

- **Women were not regarded as credible witnesses.** This attitude toward the testimony of women is evident in the Jewish historian Josephus's description of the rules for admissible testimony: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (Antiquities IV. 8.15). No such regulation is to be found in the Bible. It is rather a reflection of the patriarchal society of first-century Judaism.
- **Women occupied a low rung on the Jewish social ladder.** Compared to men, women were second-class citizens. Rabbinical texts state: "Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women!" (Sotah 19a) and also: "Happy is he whose children are male, but unhappy is he whose children are female!" (Kiddushin 82b). The daily prayer of every Jewish man included the blessing, "Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has not created me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman" (Berachos 60b).

If the empty tomb story were legend, then male disciples would have been made to be the ones who discovered the empty tomb. The fact that women whose testimony was deemed worthless, were the chief witnesses of the empty tomb, can only be plausibly explained if they actually were the discoverers of the empty tomb. The gospels just faithfully recorded what was for them, an embarrassing fact.

B. The State of the Empty Tomb Supports the Narrative of Christ's Resurrection

John says that the linen cloths used to wrap Christ remained in the tomb despite the absence of Christ's body.

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Why would anyone have bothered to unwrap the body? Why not take it, grave clothes and all? The body was gone; of that there was no doubt at all. There was no evidence of haste or vandalism. Everything was orderly and in place, the grave clothes, the napkin just a little apart from the rest. It was as though the form of a dead man was preserved, but the body itself was gone. Who could make sense of that? Who would go to all that trouble?

Grave robbers would not have unwrapped the body, left the valuable spices behind, or taken the time to neatly arrange the wrappings before they left. Nor would they have attempted to break into a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers.

On so many levels, this resurrection story possesses characteristics of truth and authenticity. Many more proofs followed, but scripture tells us that already there was enough proof to convince John.

. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

Although it's difficult to say for certain what level of belief John had at this moment,

⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

scripture certainly points to John as a symbol of those who believe without sight, previewing a message from Christ in verse 29... ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Whether Peter also believed at this time is not clear, though Luke 24:12 suggests that he did not...

¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

The phrase “marveling at what had happened” can also be translated, “wondering what had happened”. Whether in belief or bewilderment, the disciples went away again to their own homes.

The stage is now set for the appearances of the resurrected Lord, which will eliminate all confusion regarding the absence of his body. It is to the first of these appearances, to Mary Magdalene, that John’s narrative now turns.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene



John 20:11-18 (ESV) *¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.*

At this point it’s interesting to construct a possible sequence of events that occurred on this morning by looking at a totality of scripture from all of the Gospels...

About 5:00 a.m. Mary Magdalene, along with Mary the mother of James and Salome (and perhaps some others), set out for the sepulcher. It was still dark, but dawn was near. Mary Magdalene hurried on ahead of the others, found the tomb open, and ran to tell Peter and John.

About 5:30 a.m. the other women arrived. By this time the sun was up (**Mark 16:2f.**). They saw an angel who sent a message to the disciples (**Matthew 28:5f.; Mark 16:5f.**).

About 6:00 a.m. another group (among whom was Joanna) arrived at the tomb (**Luke 24:1f.; Mark 16:1f.**). They saw what they took to be “two young men” who gave them words of comfort and instruction (**Luke 24:4f.**).

About 6:30 a.m. Peter and John come to the tomb. Mary Magdalene evidently followed them, but did not go home when they did. She saw two angels. About the same time the other women delivered their marvelous news to the other disciples (**Luke 24:10f.**).

About 7:00 a.m. the Lord revealed himself to Mary Magdalene (**John 20:14-18; Mark 16:9**). Not long afterward he revealed himself, it would seem, to the company of women who by this time were returning to the tomb. They were charged by the Lord with a message to his disciples to meet him in Galilee (**Matthew 28:9f.**).

Later on, in the evening of this glorious day, there were other appearances of the Lord. (op. cit. Westcott, p. 288).

The Gospel of John's accounting of Christ's resurrection focuses on Mary Magdalene, who is mentioned only in this chapter and at the cross in chapter **19:25**. The synoptic Gospel's mentioned other individuals that played a role on this morning. But, in Johannine fashion Mary Madgalene serves as a model or representative of a type of person, here the women.

The Lord's appearance to Mary reflects His special love and faithfulness to all believers, no matter how seemingly insignificant they might be. Mary was not a prominent figure in the gospel accounts; before the crucifixion she appeared only as a name in the list of women who traveled with Jesus and the apostles (**Luke 8:2**). Yet the Lord chose to appear first to her, a woman, as He had first declared His messiahship to the woman at the well (**John 4:28-29**).

The word John uses for Mary's "weeping" in verse 11 is "*klairo*". This is the same word used of Mary of Bethany when she went out to meet Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus (**John 11:31**). It literally means "to wail." The term is used for the anguished crying or wailing associated with mourning as at funerals and in times of bereavement. It would hardly be viewed as a quiet, restrained shedding of tears, but the noisy lamentation typical of Easterners of that day. Mary Magdalene wasn't just distressed, she was heartbroken.

Mary does not at first recognize Jesus, but instead believes him to be a gardener. The scripture is not clear as to why this is the case. The nonrecognition theme concerning the risen Lord appears to be a significant feature in the Gospel of John, because nonrecognition reports are included not only here, but also in the story of the miraculous catch of fish in **John 21:4**. The Gospel of Luke also reports similar nonrecognition phenomenon in the Emmaus story (**Luke 24:16**). We cannot be certain as to the reason for this. But, it has been suggested that this nonrecognition may have been related to the apostle Paul's thoughts on the earthly body and the nature of the resurrected body described in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:35-40 (ESV) ³⁵ *But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"* ³⁶ *You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.* ³⁷ *And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.* ³⁸ *But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.* ³⁹ *For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.* ⁴⁰ *There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.*

Once Mary does recognize the risen Lord, her response is immediate. She uses only one word to acknowledge his presence..."Rabboni!". The word Rabboni is a more intimate and personal form of the word Rabbi and is similar to saying "my dear Rabbi" or "my dear Teacher".

Once Mary recognizes the risen Lord, scripture indicates she must have emphatically embraced Him. Jesus' response to her show of affection invites potential confusion and speculation...

¹⁷ *Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father;*

Jesus' initial statement, "me mou haptou" (Do not cling to me), does not seem to be a rejection of touching Him in order to avoid contamination or violation prior to his ascension to heaven, because this would stand in contrast to his invitation to touch or handle him in **Luke 24:39**

³⁹ *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."*

and the invitation to Thomas to touch his hands and his side found in **John 20:27**

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

Also the women touching his feet in worship at **Matt 28:9**

⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

The purpose of this ascent statement must have been to indicate to Mary that the way of relating to the resurrected Lord would no longer be through the physical senses because the ascent would terminate such encounters. Clinging to the physical nature of her relationship with the pre-resurrected Lord would no longer be possible. Even her efforts at revering a body in a tomb were gone because that body was no more.

Most likely, John is asserting that the physical touching and seeing of Jesus had at this time now ceased on earth. And, that confession of Jesus in the future must be made without seeing or touching him, as Mary, the disciples, and Thomas had been able to do (**John 20:29**).

The story of Mary's encounter with the risen Lord concludes in the typical biblical fashion of a theophany (a visible manifestation to humankind of God) in which the one who receives an experience of God or the angel of the Lord is usually also given some form of commission.

Christ's commission to Mary, was to report to his followers that he was about to ascend back to the Father.

¹⁷... but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Previously, Christ had referred to his disciples as slaves or friends... **John 15:15**

¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.)

Now, for the first time the disciples are called brothers. It was only through Christ's work on the cross just days earlier, that this new relationship with Him was made possible. Christ having paid the due penalty for mankind's sins, has now cleared the way for God to adopt believers in Christ as his sons and daughters. What a remarkable gift!

Romans 8:14-15 (ESV) ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

Ephesians 1:5 (ESV) ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Galatians 3:26 (ESV) ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples



John 20:19-23 (ESV) ¹⁹ *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."* ²⁰ *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* ²² *And when he had said this, he breathed on*

them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

It's obvious at this point that the disciples are still gripped by tremendous fear. They were terrified that security forces would find them. After all, their enemies found Jesus at night and came after him with torches and weapons (**John 18:3**). Now they are found locked in a room, undoubtedly reviewing their precarious situation.

Reading the account of John, it is understandable to be tempted to wonder what kind of body Jesus could have that could pass through walls or doors and yet was physically present so that he could be touched (cf. not only **John 20:27** but also **Matt 28:9**; **Luke 24:39**) and even eat physical food (cf. **Luke 24:41-43**). John does not make an attempt to explain this mystery, and undoubtedly could not explain it anyway. The nature of this body is acknowledged by New Testament writers as a mystery...

1 Corinthians 15:51-53 (ESV) ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*

Regardless, the nature of this new body is really inconsequential to the heart of the message. Christ has conquered death and as a result, established an avenue for mankind to be reconciled with the Creator and obtain eternal life through belief in Him.

Christ's words of "Peace be with you", contrast sharply with the mood of the disciples. Like a beacon of light in the darkest dungeon, it provides immediate hope. Changing forever the path the disciples will walk for the remainder of their time on earth.

The change in the lives of the apostles as a result of Christ's appearance here is one of the most compelling facts validating the truth of Christianity. From this point on, the apostles will never again live in fear. From various sources, including the New Testament itself, apocryphal texts, early Christian historians, legends and lore, we find that all but one of the apostles (John) would give their lives due to their unshakeable faith in Christ after the resurrection appearance.

In verse 22 it states the Christ breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. The word for "breathed" is **emphusao**, the same word used in the Septuagint in **Genesis 2:7**. The Lord as Jehovah Elohim breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life so that he became a living soul. The word means "to breathe with force."

The task before them was a humanly impossible task: to evangelize a God hating, Christ rejecting world of unregenerate people, dead in trespasses and sins, and organized into a satanically energized system and society. How could they do it? By the Holy Spirit now indwelling their mortal bodies. The Son had received the Holy Spirit for his mission (**John 1:32-34**; **3:34**) and now he gave them the Holy Spirit for their mission.

Jesus and Thomas



John 20:24-31 (ESV) ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 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.

Christ Confronts the "Realist"

Thomas has often been vilified by Christians because of his early doubts expressed in these verses. But throughout this Gospel he has been presented as a realist, a person who evaluated situations on the basis of what he could perceive.

Thomas was a thinker, analytical in nature and in chapter 14, John shows that he wanted more than words in order to follow Jesus to his place of preparation...

John 14:5 ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

But if reasonable facts existed, he would be obedient...

John 11:16 ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

The impact of the moment on Thomas was transformational! His response is complete and made with no reluctance... "My Lord and my God!"

Early Christian historians record that Thomas went on to preach the gospel in Greece and India, where he angered local religious authorities, who martyred him by running him through with a spear.

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The disciples who had experienced the surprising appearance of Jesus and his empowering commissioning were apparently enthusiastically ready to share the details of their post resurrection experience. But like many who have experienced transforming grace and want to share it, these disciples were met with a cold, skeptical face.

Thomas had not been at the meeting, and he had no sense of the significance of the miracle that had occurred, an event that had begun to change the course of history and would soon change his life as well.

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Thomas was a thinker, analytical in nature and he wanted more than words in order to follow Jesus to his place of preparation (**John 14:5**). But if reasonable facts existed, he was willing to take risks for Jesus (**John 11:16**), even though it might have resulted in his own death. Thomas is not merely a pathetic doubter. He is symbolic of many Christians who are capable of great possibilities as well as hesitations in faith.

Jesus' response to Thomas's reluctance to believe, is to give Thomas what he in his humanness required "point for point." The story is particularly captivating. Imagine for a moment Thomas the realist coming to the community meeting on Sunday after having made his firm demands.

Into that meeting Jesus materializes. Then, having proclaimed "Peace," Jesus looks around and his eyes fasten on Thomas. Then He says something like: "Hello, Thomas! Fancy meeting you here." After Thomas takes a big gulp, Jesus continued, "Oh, Thomas, I think I heard you say something this past week about needing to touch my hands and my side."

After a brief but heavy pause, Jesus continues. "Well, come here Thomas and bring your finger!" By this time Thomas had to be almost completely undone. But Jesus continues on... "No, Thomas, put your finger right **here!**" "And now your hand, Thomas, put it right **here** in my side." Can you imagine the churning that must have gone on in the whole psyche of Thomas?

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