

## John 20:1-18 • The Truth of the Resurrection

### Introduction

Every other written biography would end with John 19 with the death of Christ, but without what happens next—the Resurrection of Christ, **nothing** in the biography would matter; it **all** depends on the truth and historicity of the Resurrection. It is the fundamental message of the Gospel and the key doctrine in the Christian faith (1 Co. 15:1-8); it is the proof that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and the Son of God (Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 1:4); it is the proof that what He did on the cross was completed and effective as an atonement for our sin. (Rom. 4:24-25) As it has been rightfully noted by many, the empty cross and the empty tomb are God's "receipts" telling us that the debt has been paid. This proof of His work as Savior is the basis for our knowing that He is also the Sanctifier (Rom. 6:4-10), the Intercessor (Rom. 8:34), and will one day return as Judge. (Acts. 17:30-31) In other words, that He is finishing what He started.

If the New Testament were a human fabrication rather than a divine revelation of historical fact, it certainly would not end by showing that all those closest to Him neither understood the Resurrection to come nor even expected it. It is most ironic that Scripture records it was not His friends who knew that He had promised to rise from the dead, but His enemies. (Mt. 27:62-66) We are here provided with the record of how the full realization of Christ's Resurrection finally took hold of them, where in Thomas the emphasis is on faith, on the Ten the emphasis is on hope, but on the first to experience the truth—Mary, the emphasis is on love.

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

### [Read v.1-2]

**Q: Is this a completely different event than what is recorded in the other Gospels about the group of women who first came to the tomb?**

A: No, this is a perspective on what happened to that group of women but strictly from Mary Magdalene's personal experience and perspective. It is like a soldier who writes about what it was like for him personally, although when he participated in D-Day he was actually among thousands of others who were also there.

**Q: How do we know for sure that she was part of a group and not entirely alone?**

A: In her report to Peter and John she uses the pronoun "we"—"**we do not know where they have laid Him**". (v.2)

**Q: What was their purpose in coming to the tomb?**

A: They knew that circumstances forced the hasty preparation of Christ's body for burial and wanted to finish the task. They had been concerned about how to get into the tomb. It appears that Mary Magdalene arrived slightly ahead of the rest of the group, found the stone already rolled away, and quickly ran back to give a report assuming that someone broke into the tomb and removed the body.

**Q: What does this reveal about Mary Magdalene personally at this point?**

A: She clearly did not believe that Jesus would return from the dead.

**Q: What is the spiritual condition of their faith where Christ is concerned?**

A: We might describe it as "eclipsed"—covered in the shadows of doubt. They were not yet capable of discerning the true meaning of what they were witnessing; they were still seeing things from a purely earthly perspective.

**Application:** Faith can be rendered ineffectual when we no longer cling to the literal truth of His Word and instead begin to allow an earthly perspective to eclipse the truth. Have you ever discovered that something you initially thought was an earthly tragedy later turned out to be the beginning of a greater work of the Lord in your life spiritually? Have you ever allowed the earthly to color or even override the spiritual?

<sup>3</sup>So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; <sup>5</sup>and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. <sup>9</sup>For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. <sup>10</sup>So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

### [Read v.3-10]

#### **Q: What does John appear to do which Mary Magdalene did not?**

A: Mary seems to have only noticed that the body was missing; John observes that something even stranger has happened in that he saw “*the linen wrappings lying there*”. It is the earliest indication that the body was “*taken away*” as Mary first reported, but probably not by the most obvious suspects or in the way first assumed.

#### **Q: What happens with John which as yet does not appear to happen to Mary and Peter?**

A: “...*he saw and believed*”. (v.8) John was not merely puzzled or concerned as to the whereabouts of the body, but began to see that something greater spiritually had occurred.

#### **Q: What might be significant about the word translated “saw” in v.5, 6 & 8?**

1. In v.5 the Greek word for “saw” is “*blepo*”, which is used in to convey the sense of “becoming aware of” or “to glance at”. Upon first arriving, he was looking around casually.
2. In v.6 the Greek word for “saw” is “*theoreo*”, which means “to observe something with continuity and attention”, often with the implication that what is being observed is something unusual. When they enter the tomb they now “saw” the linen wrappings inexplicably left and the body missing.
3. In v.8 the Greek word for “saw” is “*eido*”, which means “to perceive with intelligent comprehension”, as in finally “seeing” the reality and truth about something. Finally John began to understand what he was really looking at “*and believed*”.

#### **Q: What kind of faith would you characterize them as having at this point?**

A: It was faith based on evidence.

#### **Q: How do we know that this faith may have changed their mind, but not their heart?**

A: Their response was that “*they went away again to their own homes*”. (v.10) They were beginning to **think** differently about Jesus’ death but they were as yet not **acting** differently.

#### **Q: Why should the disciples, of all people, have realized before anyone else what happened?**

A: Jesus had told them many times He would be raised from the dead, even from the earliest days of His ministry. (Jn. 2:19) Jesus compared Himself to Jonah (Mt. 12:40), on two occasions plainly announced His resurrection after three days (Mt. 16:21; 20:19), and during the last week prior to the crucifixion promised to be raised up and meet them afterward in Galilee. (Mt. 26:32; Lk. 24:6-7) Even Jesus’ enemies understood this plainly and literally. (Mt. 27:40, 63-64)

#### **Q: Is the basic problem that they don’t believe what they see?**

A: No, the greater problem is that they have not believed what they **heard**. The issue of faith always comes down to what we do with God’s Word. Every sign performed by God requires faith in the greater message behind it more than in the sign itself.

#### **Q: How is this made plainly clear in v.9?**

A: “...*they did not understand the Scripture*”. This is particularly interesting since the only Scripture available to them at this time was the

Old Testament, the clear meaning being that the Old Testament taught this about the Messiah and should have been comprehended by those possessing true faith in God's Word. It was not just Jesus' Word during His earthly ministry which they were not fully believing, but the whole of God's Word already given in the Old Testament.

**Q: Is biblical faith therefore defined as belonging to someone who is able to examine the evidence firsthand for themselves?**

A: At His appearance to Thomas at the end of this chapter Jesus will declare, "*Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed*". (v.29) Peter will later write in detail that the Word of God, not personal experiences, is the basis of biblical faith. (1 Pe. 1:12-21)

**Q: How do we know that the Apostles would come to see these things as fulfilled according to the Old Testament?**

A: In the Epistles they will refer to specific Old Testament references when discussing Christ's death and resurrection.

1. Paul saw the Resurrection in Ps. 16:8-11. (Acts 13:33)
2. Peter saw it in Ps. 110:1. (Acts 2:34-35)
3. Is. 53:10 is often interpreted as a prediction of the Resurrection.
4. Jesus used the illustration of Jonah to illustrate His own death, burial, and resurrection (Mt. 12:38-40) which included the "*three days*" part of the message.
5. Paul saw in the Feast of Firstfruits a picture of the Resurrection. (Lev. 23:9-14; 1 Co. 15:20-23) which also included "*the third day*".
6. Many see the Resurrection and "*third day*" in Hosea 6:2.

**Application:** *Their faith, which had been eclipsed by the earthly circumstances of Christ's death, was now beginning to dawn a little brighter in view of the evidence, but was still not fully embracing the Word of God.*

<sup>11</sup>But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. <sup>13</sup>And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

<sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>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."

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

<sup>17</sup>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

**[Read v.11-18]**

**Q: How would we compare Mary to Peter and John at this point?**

A: She was still mourning Christ's death and not yet understanding that something greater has happened. She does not even appear to recognize those in the tomb as angels. She is still fixated on Christ's death.

**Q: What might the two angels in the tomb be a greater representation of where Christ is concerned?**

A: The Gospel of John begins by identifying Christ as "*the Word*" which was physically represented in the Old Testament as the Ark of the Covenant. A significant part of the Ark were the two cherubim on the mercy seat. (Ex. 25:17-19)

**Q: What is telling about the fact that both the angels and Christ Himself ask Mary the same question, "Why are you weeping?"**

A: It is actually a rhetorical question pointing to the fact that if she had heard and believed Christ's Word and the Scriptures to begin with, this would not be an occasion for weeping but rejoicing. It gets to the issue of faith in God's Word rather than circumstances.

**Q: How did Jesus deal with Mary? Did He openly rebuke her for her lack of faith?**

A: Knowing Mary's heart and her desire to find Him, instead of rebuking Mary He reveals Himself to her. (Prov. 8:17)

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Father, and My God and your God.”

<sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and that He had said these things to her.

**Q: What did Jesus have to do get Mary to recognize Him?**

A: Speak her name.

*“To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

— John 10:3

**Q: What is the proof that Mary did not merely recognize Jesus but worshiped Him as the Messiah?**

A: The most common reaction recorded throughout Scripture of someone who genuinely worships and acknowledges the Lord is found in their falling at His feet in spiritual recognition of Him much as Mary did. (v.17)

**Q: In Jesus’ instruction to Mary to convey a message for Him, what is particularly telling about the effects of the Resurrection?**

A: Christ had previously called His followers “servants” (Jn. 13:16) and even “friends” (Jn. 15:15), but now He calls them “brethren” (v.17) as an indication that they shared His resurrection power and glory.

*Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

— James 2:5

**Q: What might this teach us about the way we are supposed to approach Christ now that He has been resurrected and ascended to the Father?**

A: The resurrection changed Christ from human form to a glorified body. He is not a human historical figure but the exalted Son of God in glory and is to be honored and worshiped as such.

**Point:** *At the Last Supper John leaned against Christ’s bosom (Jn. 13:23), but when John saw Christ on the Isle of Patmos he “fell at His feet like a dead man”. (Rev. 1:17)*

*Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.*

— 2 Corinthians 5:16

**Q: How is Mary’s example everybody’s example in the right response where our personal encounter with Christ is concerned?**

A: She arose and went to tell others the good news of both the fact that Jesus is alive (“I have seen the Lord”) and to share His Word. (v.18)

**Application:** *It may be good to have faith that is based on solid evidence, but the evidence should lead us to the Word which should lead us to the Savior. The key to biblical faith is the Word of God.*

## Overall Application

*What is being highlighted in this account is not merely that Christ lives, but that He lives personally within those who through faith come into a personal relationship with Him. Historical faith says, “Christ lives!”; saving faith says, “Christ lives **in me!**” Do you have saving faith?*