

“THE SAVIOR IS ALIVE—PHYSICAL EVIDENCE”

John 20:1-10

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INTRODUCTION

Faith in our Resurrected Lord can be manifested in various ways and motivated by different scenarios; note the **progression** of faith in this chapter—a progression in apparently the opposite direction: 1) John believes without seeing the risen Lord (v. 8); 2) Mary believes when He appears and when she hears His tender voice; 3) the disciples believe when they see His wounds (vv. 19-23); 4) Thomas believes when Jesus again appears and shows his wounds (24-29). Jesus comments that those are especially blessed who believe without seeing (v. 29).

John shows the readers that his purpose in writing this Gospel is that the readers “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing” they “might have life in His name” (20:31). **If Jesus were not alive, no one would be able to have faith in Him, and He would not be able to save anyone.**

HOWEVER, JESUS IS ALIVE AND THE TESTIMONY OF THAT FACT IS SOLID AND TRUE. **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved—and live in Him a life of Joy!**

In this passage we see the *physical evidence* for Jesus’ resurrection.

There are **five** sections of chapter 20: 1) the physical evidences of the resurrection (vv. 1-10); 2) the appearance of Jesus to Mary M. {11-18}, 3) the appearance to the ten apostles and others (vv. 19-23; 4) the appearance to Thomas and others (24-29); and 5) the conclusion and purpose of this gospel (vv. 30-31).

The outline of chapter 20:1-10 is built around the **three signs**:

1) Mary sees the open tomb. 2) Peter and John see the empty tomb; 3) Peter and John note the carefully ordered grave-clothes.

I. MARY SEES THE OPEN TOMB (1-2)

A. The time of Mary’s visit to the tomb

1. The first day of the week—“the *one* of the Sabbaths”

2. While it was still dark

No real contradiction with the other gospels—Mark states that when they had arrived it was beginning to be light. **No woman would dare go to the grave by herself at dark—especially at this time when so many strangers were in Jerusalem from elsewhere.** They had left when it was dark; took care of gathering the spices and organizing them, then arrived when light.

B. The companions of Mary’s visit

The other gospels mention several women-- *Matthew: Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” (28:1); Mark: Same two plus Salome (16:1); Luke: Same two plus Joanna (24:10).* John focuses only on Mary.

C. The Purpose of Mary's visit—finish the preparation of Jesus' body with the spices they had obtained. The women came with spices to anoint His body. Why, when Nicodemus had brought such a large quantity? (19:39) Did they not know about that—unlikely in light of Mk. 15:47—Mary and the other Mary looked to see where Joseph laid Jesus. **More likely is the scenario that Nicodemus had been unable to complete the process—not using all of the spices he had brought due to the lateness of the hour and the proximity of the Sabbath. These women had come to complete the unfinished business.**

D. The observation of Mary's visit—the moved stone

1. No mention of the earthquake or of the angel who sat on the stone
2. The stone was not only rolled away, it was "*lifted up and taken away*"!
3. The idea seems to be that it took a supernatural feat in order to get that stone out of that groove and flat onto the ground.
4. Mary seemed to miss this point; it as of yet led to no faith in the Lord.
Why the mention of the moved stone?
 - 1) TO show that the grave had been conquered; 2) That Peter and John might be able to enter and observe, and bear witness.

E. The Response of Mary's visit

1. She ran to Simon Peter
 - Note the excitement and confusion that kept her from a more careful observation of the grave like the other women.
 - She also missed seeing the angels.
 - Nor did she hear the message of the angel(s) to the other women.
 - Peter was still considered a leader despite his failure a short time before.
2. She also spoke with John.
 - The implication was that John lived in a separate dwelling.
 - Yet, the only evidence we have is the preposition used twice.
 - However, we do have the later statement that they both went to their own homes "again" (v. 10) and the statement in 19:27 that John took Mary to his own house.
3. She concluded that someone had taken away Jesus' body.
4. She and her companions (implied here in the "we") did not know what had become of Jesus' body.

Mary's observation of the open tomb had not yet resulted in genuine faith in our Lord.

II. PETER AND JOHN SEE THE EMPTY TOMB (3-4)

A. Immediate Response—Peter led the way, John followed (3)

B. Hurried Response (v.4-5)

- They were running—together for a while.
- John ran ahead because he ran faster than Peter—maybe because he was younger.
- John arrived at the tomb first.
- John stooped and peered into the tomb—a casual glance.
- He noticed the linen cloths with which Jesus had been bound.

- He did not enter the tomb—out of reverence, awe, and respect for Peter’s leadership.

III. PETER AND JOHN NOTE THE CAREFULLY ARRANGED GRAVE-CLOTHES (6-8)

Once Peter did arrive, true to his character, he went right inside.

A. Peter made more careful observations: “carefully observed”.

1. The Linen wrappings were lying there.
2. The face-cloth or handkerchief to cover the head was lying in a separate place by itself.
3. John then entered and observed the same things.

What significant conclusions may be derived from these facts?

- The text does not prove that Jesus’ body rose through the grave-clothes and that they lay undisturbed right where the body had been. The text does not mean that the bandages were “being held in position mysteriously and in violation of the laws of gravity; but simply indicates that they were lying there *without the body*.” The text does not say that the bands looked as though the body were still in them!
- The words of the text could mean that, but do not necessarily do so.
- The head-cloth in that case should have been there also—just above the cloths around the body—not in a place by itself and the text says.
- It appears that Jesus has neatly folded it (“rolled up”) the face-cloth.
- The point is, grave robbers had not done this, or they would have: 1) taken the body cloths and all, or 2) torn off the cloths and scattered them, not neatly stored and folded them!
- This is an “orderly scene, not one of wild confusion.” (p. 833)
- No disciple had been there to remove the body! No had any enemy—they had guarded the tomb to prevent such! The likely scenario is that the Lord Himself had removed the bandages and the head band and had put everything in the proper place and then had provided for himself an appropriate garment for the living. The bandages were lying “there” and the headband “here.”
- Chrysostom remarks that Jesus’ body was buried with “much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead . . .” (LXXXV. 4; pp. 320f) [p. 833 n.]. These grave-clothes had been carefully and meticulously removed—such involved time and a degree of difficulty.

B. John, once he saw all of the evidence—**the open tomb, the empty tomb, and the neatly-arranged grave-clothes—BELIEVED**

What was the nature of John’s belief?

- That Jesus rose is the natural answer. Hendrickson adds that John believes “that Jesus . . . was the real Messiah, the Lord of Glory, the Son of God in the most exalted sense. This is nothing less than living faith in the act of embracing the truth of the resurrection.” No one else would have so carefully arranged the grave-clothes!
- But the text goes on to say that they did not yet know the Scripture that He would rise from the dead.
- **One view** is that of Culver—that John believed that a resurrection had occurred on the basis of the evidence before his eyes—despite his current ignorance

relating to the Scripture bearing on the issue. This view is supported by the meaning of the word “believe” in vv. 25, 27, and 29. John’s faith here is the climax of the narrative. **“The empty tomb illuminated the sense of scripture” (Hoskyns, p. 834).**

- Some critique this view by saying that John would thus evidence pride—but in view of v. 29—not seeing and yet believing—humility is more likely.
- A **second** view is that John came to some sort of faith—though not a knowledge of the resurrection! This seems to be Westcott’s initial suggestion, but he does later allow (correctly) for the fuller meaning.
- A **third** (and weaker) view is that John had come to believe Mary’s story. Luke 24:24 may seem to support this view—they saw things to be exactly as the women reported. *But this could well be a reflection of Peter’s condition currently—not necessarily John’s*, for John does not say that Peter had yet come to believe.
- Note that John puts emphasis upon the **EMPTY TOMB**—Seen by Mary, also seen by Peter, Seen by John.
- This text is not stressing the weakness of John’s faith in that he had to “see” in order to believe. Rather, he (and later—how much, we don’t know—Peter also) now saw and believed.

C. Neither Peter nor John yet understood the meaning of prophetic Scripture. (v. 9)

1. **Scripture** in the singular is John’s regular way of referring to a specific passage—not merely Scripture’s general teaching. So then, *What passage?* Paul also says that Jesus was raised on the “third day according to the scriptures” (I Cor. 15:4). Many point to Hos. 6:2 or to Jon. 1:17 for the “third day”. But neither is totally convincing to us today—but could have been to these men.

But the general idea of His resurrection could well have reference to such passages as Is. 53:10-12 (The Servant lives and is active after His death.) and Ps. 16:10. (Possibly even Ps. 118:22-24; Ps. 110:1, 4) Westcott favors Ps. 16:10 as the “Scripture” here, and refers to the use of this passage in connection with Christ’s lack of decay both in Acts 2:24ff and in 13:35.

Early Christians saw the resurrection as foretold in the OT. **But, this verse plainly shows that the belief in the resurrection came first—before they made the connection with specific passages.**

“BELIEVERS DID NOT MANUFACTURE A RESURRECTION TO AGREE WITH THEIR INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY. THEY WERE FIRST CONVINCED THAT CHRIST WAS RISEN. THEN THEY CAME TO SEE A FULLER MEANING IN CERTAIN OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES.”

Then the disciples went away to their own homes (v. 10).

CONCLUSION: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved—and live in Him a life of Joy!