

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #75

John 20:1-18

I recently watched an interview that was done with an actor, who is dying of cancer. Some of the interview had to do with this actor's body of work. But a good deal of it had to do with the fact that he is dying and probably only has a short time to live. Actually whenever you watch any interview of anyone, you are in all reality watching an interview of one who has a short time to live.

Any honest biography of any person you will ever hear or read about will end with the person's death. You will not ever read a biography of a person who died and then days after burial came back alive. That is until you come to the Bible and read the biography of Jesus Christ found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The whole issue of who Jesus Christ is comes down to this chapter. The whole issue of Jesus Christ being able to save you from your sins and give you everlasting life comes down to this chapter. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential part of the Gospel, for the thing you must believe in order to be saved from your sins is that Jesus Christ died for your sins, was buried and was raised from the dead (I Corinthians 15:3-4). In fact, H. A. Ironside said, "I do not see how anyone desiring to know the truth, can meditate on this passage without being brought to saving faith in the risen Savior" (*John*, p. 857).

Even though Jesus had told these eyewitnesses on many occasions that He would rise from the dead, when those eyewitnesses actually went to the tomb, they were not expecting to find His body gone nor were they expecting Him to be raised from the dead.

Actually when you come to the cemetery where Christ had been buried, most refer to it as the "empty tomb." But when you actually look into the tomb, it wasn't quite empty. The body was gone, but there were some things in the tomb that ultimately led the witnesses to conclude Jesus had risen from the dead.

The point you will see from every person who was connected to that tomb is this:

EVERY PERSON WHO WAS ACTUALLY AT THE TOMB OF JESUS CHRIST SAW AND BELIEVED THAT HE HAD BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS PROVED HE WAS GOD AND THAT HE WAS THEIR LIVING SAVIOR.

Now the Gospel of John is being written by the Apostle John in order to produce faith in Jesus Christ (20:31). It is the last gospel written and it most likely is the last book John wrote before he died. He certainly was being led by God's Spirit to pen things that he was actually there to see. John is actually the only disciple who was there. So this is his account.

There are actually three main key evidences that John presents that clearly prove Jesus Christ did rise from the dead:

EVIDENCE #1 – The evidence of Christ’s body gone from the tomb. **20:1-10**

There are two main eyewitnesses to this:

Eyewitness #1 - The eyewitness testimony of Mary Magdalene . **20:1-2**

On the first day of the week, Sunday morning, which would be the new day of worship for the dispensation of Grace , Mary Magdalene and some other ladies started walking to the tomb. We learn from the other gospels that Mary originally was accompanied by **Mary** the mother of James, **Salome**, **Joanna** and some other women (Mark 16:1; Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:10). They were going to the tomb together to anoint Jesus’ body with more spices. The walk to the tomb was about a two mile walk from Bethany, which could take, for slower walkers, about an hour. As they were walking they discussed how they would get the stone removed so they could anoint the body.

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus Christ: He had set her free from demons and a life of shame. Mary was obviously a fast walker and got to the tomb first. When she got to the tomb she was amazed that the stone was already taken away from the tomb and apparently did not look inside the tomb, but ran to Simon Peter and John and told them that someone had moved the stone and taken the body.

So the first thing Mary initially believes is not the resurrection, but that the body had been taken and moved by someone and she didn’t know where. Mary at this point is not thinking that Jesus has been raised from the dead; she thinks His dead body has been moved.

Eyewitness #2 - The eyewitness testimony of John and Peter . **20:3-10**

It is clear that Peter and John were together as they were heading to the tomb. When, where and how they hooked up is not known, but what is known is, as soon as Mary Magdalene told them the body was gone, both of them took off running to the tomb.

John wants us to know the specific facts about this, that he out ran Peter and got to the tomb first (**20:4**). Peter was undoubtedly physically stronger than John, but John was a faster runner.

I have always said that if churches wanted to do something Biblical on Easter Sunday morning, instead of having some sunrise pancake breakfast, they ought to have a one mile run with no breakfast.

Now what they are actually running full out to see is an empty grave. I doubt there has ever been another episode in the history of the world where people take off running to see an empty grave in some cemetery. But that is exactly what you have here.

According to **verse 5**, John got to the tomb first and looked in, but didn’t go in and the thing he saw was the linen wrappings. According to **verse 6**, when Peter got to the tomb, he did go in and he saw the same thing. These were the linen wrappings that had been mixed with about 100 pounds of spices.

Both disciples noticed that the face-cloth had been rolled up nicely and was lying separate from the linen wrappings (**verse 7**).

When the disciples saw this, they knew the body had not been stolen, because if you were going to steal a body, you would not take the time to nicely roll up the face-cloth and take off the strips of linen.

Now **verse 8** is critical for John says this was the thing that caused Him to believe in the resurrection. At this point in time, neither disciple understood the Scriptures that taught that Jesus would rise again (**verse 9**). Scriptures like Psalm 16:11 or Isaiah 53:11.

Now please don't miss this point. These disciples are not basing their faith in the resurrection on their knowledge of Scripture; they are basing their faith by what they saw. In fact, John uses three different Greek words for what he saw with his eyes: **verse 5**, "looking" (βλεπω), which means to look at and see with perception; **verse 6**, "beheld" (θεωρω), which means to carefully look at something as a spectator and **verse 8**, "saw" (οραω), which means to see something and have a mental perception of what you see.

If you are honest with what is written here by an actual eyewitness, these inspired Greek words tell us that John did not just glance into this tomb and get a brief look. He is recording what his eyes and mind, clearly, factually and intelligently, saw and understood. This is not some emotional delusional vision; this is real.

You are getting an eyewitness account here. Faith in the resurrected Savior is not a blind *leap in the dark* faith, it is a sight *we have been there and seen it* faith. **Verse 10** makes it clear that these disciples went to their own respective homes and they knew Jesus had been raised from the dead.

What every person needs to realize about Biblical faith is that it is based on evidence. Belief in God, belief in Jesus Christ is factually and logically provable. All other systems of religious belief are not. But Biblical Christianity is.

EVIDENCE #2 – The evidence of angelic manifestations to Mary. **20:11-13**

Mary Magdalene had obviously turned around after seeing Peter and John take off running toward the tomb and started back toward the tomb too. She couldn't keep up with the boys, but she eventually got there.

Mary was a tenderhearted woman and when she stood outside the tomb, she just started crying. As she was weeping, she stooped and looked (θεωρω) very carefully into the tomb and she saw what looked to be two men in white who were angels; one sitting where Jesus' head had been and the other sitting where Jesus' feet had been. Notice the angels look like men, not with halos or wings.

Dr. Wiersbe said that these two reminded him of the two cherubim on the mercy seat in Exodus 25:17-19. He said what Mary is looking at now is the new mercy seat (*Be Transformed*, p. 125).

Now the angels asked Mary why she was crying, which is the typical emotional thing to see at a cemetery. Mary said, “Because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have taken Him” (20:13).

I want to bring out this point about Mary. She is the only one just hanging around the tomb at this point simply because she loves Jesus Christ and this was the last place she knew Him to be. She does not think He is raised from the dead; in fact, by her own statement right here, she thinks someone has taken the body. She is simply there because she cares.

EVIDENCE #3 – The evidence of Jesus’ manifestation to Mary. **20:14-18**

As soon as Mary said this, she turned and beheld (θεωρεω) Jesus standing there and didn’t know that it was Jesus. The Greek word “beheld” would indicate she actually saw a person and carefully looked at Him, but didn’t know it was Jesus (20:14). In fact, she thought she was talking to the gardener. Now there is only one solid reason as to why she didn’t know it was Jesus and that was because at this point, Jesus did not let her see Him for who He was.

Don’t ever forget this point. When you comes to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, it is only due to the fact that Jesus Christ has Personally let you see Him as your Savior. He has the power and the ability to blind people and He has the power and the ability to let people see Him and see truth.

Jesus asked Mary why she was weeping and Mary’s response was if you have taken the body of Jesus, please tell me where you put it and I will take Him away. Think of this. Mary so loves Jesus that she is willing to try to move His body herself.

Actually, this should have been a moment when Mary was praising God because of the resurrection. This should have been a great moment of emotional elation, but instead it was Mary’s lowest moment of emotional depression.

In **verse 16**, Jesus said to her, “Mary” (μαριαμ), and when Jesus said that, she turned and at this point she knew that she was seeing Jesus.

Mary responded by saying, “Rabboni” which means master/teacher. **This is the first person Jesus appears to after His resurrection.** No matter how dark your past, Jesus Christ loves to be close to those who love Him.

Here is the only time that you will ever hear Jesus say to anyone “stop clinging to Me.” Mary couldn’t believe her eyes and she apparently grabbed hold of Jesus Christ. And Jesus told her to stop clinging to Him because He had not yet ascended to His Father, now the One who is your Father and My Father.

The real question is what did Jesus mean by this statement to Mary? We do not believe that touching Christ is forbidden, for Jesus asked Thomas to actually touch Him (John 20:27).

Four possibilities are:

- 1) Mary, you do not need to keep clinging to Me for I have not ascended to My Father yet and we will have many more opportunities to visit.
- 2) Mary, stop clinging to Me because you still have some witnessing work to do; go and tell the others that you have seen Me.
- 3) Mary, stop clinging to Me for I need to make a quick ascension to My Father, but when I do I'll be back and we will again fellowship together. It is believed that Jesus ascended to His Father multiple times in the next 40 days before He made His final ascent from the Mount of Olives in Acts 1.
- 4) Mary, stop clinging to Me for the close relationship that you want to resume will not occur until I have ascended to My Father and sanctioned My Spirit.

Notice carefully Jesus calls the Father “My” Father and “your” Father and “My” God and “your” God. The reason for this is because Jesus was in a very special and peculiar relationship with God the Father as God the Son. His relationship with the Father and ours are different.

Mary came and said to the disciples, “I have seen (οραω) the Lord.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best eyewitness news you can ever hear. Do you have any idea what this news does?

- 1) It proves Jesus Christ is God. Romans 1:4
- 2) It proves that when you believe on Him you are declared righteous from all your sin. Romans 4:25
- 3) It proves that you and I have the potential of victory over all of our sin. Romans 6:4

If you will place your faith in the living Savior Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead, you are guaranteed eternal salvation based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and this resurrection is a believable and provable reality based on eye witness accounts.