

John 20:1-10
The Empty Tomb

NKJ John 20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

2 Then 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."

3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb.

4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first.

5 And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there,

7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself.

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

9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

Jesus had been speedily buried by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea on Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath, and the rock rolled into place. The chief priests and the Pharisees had heard to their horror that the body had been released into the care of these formerly secret disciples and so, even though the next day was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, they had been so anxious they had violated the Sabbath and had gone together to Pilate to request that the tomb be sealed with Caesar's seal and a guard set.

***Matt. 27:62** On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate,*

***63** saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.'*

***64** "Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."*

***65** Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."*

***66** So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.*

Men had done all they could to ensure that the story ended there. Jesus is dead, Jesus is buried. Had Jesus merely been the "good teacher" and not the Son of God, that would have been the end of the story, and the end of Christianity.

The disciples themselves were full of gloom. Clearly they had no plans to "steal the body" as the priests had alleged. They needn't have bothered with the guard, Christ's disciples were totally demoralized and scared and had gone into hiding. Only the women had any plans at all, and that was simply to wash and anoint the hastily buried body of their Lord once the Sabbath was over, and even there we see a lack of planning. Mark tells us in Mark 16:4 that it was only after they set out that they said among themselves, "*Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*"

But that morning, the thing that no man expected happened. Peter and John are together somewhere, probably deep in depression, when all of sudden Mary Magdalene bursts in to tell them that some people had stolen the body of their Lord!

Who the “they” are who did they are who did the stealing isn’t made clear, whether Mary thought it was the enemies of Christ or possibly Nicodemus and Joseph we aren’t told. The only thing we do know is that she is frantic because neither she nor the other women (note the plural in verse 2 “WE do not know where they have laid him” she wasn’t there alone) know where the body of Christ is.

Peter and John don’t spend time discussing it, but immediately run to the garden tomb to find out if what Mary has reported is true. John gives us another detail that only an eyewitness would have included, namely that while both of them started out running together, that he had outrun Peter and reached the tomb first.

John hesitates to go in, but from where he was he could see the tomb was empty and could make out the linen cloths lying there. Peter when he arrives is not so hesitant he immediately stoops and goes in and ascertains that the tomb is empty save for the burial cloths that Jesus had been wrapped in. What this tells them immediately is that the body of Jesus wasn’t taken, because no grave robbers would have taken the time to unwrap it and then fold up the cloths neatly. They would have taken it wrappings and all.

All in all, this puts the final nail in the coffin of the stolen body theory. First the guards would never have let his disciples into the tomb. It was a death penalty offense to open Caesar’s seal, and the guards knew that if they didn’t stop anyone opening the tomb they would have to pay with their own lives. Had all the guards fallen asleep on guard (which was also a death penalty offense) and slept so deeply that they didn’t hear someone arrive and open the heavy stone door, what are the chances those robbers would have unwrapped the body in the pitch dark, and then folded up the grave clothes and slipped away unheard? Had the enemies of Christ stolen the body, they would have immediately produced it the first time Peter and the Apostles preached “**Christ is risen**” on Pentecost and that would have been the end of the Christian faith before it even began.

No, brothers and sisters the ONLY coherent explanation is that it happened just as the bible said, that Jesus was resurrected. That morning on the Third Day just as he had said He would. The formally lifeless body of Christ was filled with life: I love the way Peter Trumper describes what must have happened as Jesus' spirit returned to his body and the formerly broken body came to life:

'The impotent passivity of the once crumpled form, bearing the hallmarks of death - sallow flesh, languid expression, hollow eyes, sagging mouth, twisted arms and legs - gave way to a rapid surge of divine strength. Death's sickly pallor surrendered to the radiance of death defied; the power of darkness (Col. 1: 13) to "the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:16)... Christ opened his eyes! It was a simple act, yet the most profound known to man, signalling that the finality of death could be overcome; the living no longer needed to be sought among the dead (Luke 24:5). Heaven had burst into that confined space. Christ is risen'

And then immediately after that most important moment in history, we read what Matthew records:

Matthew 28:2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.

4 And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

Now please note: the angel did not roll the boulder away from the tomb so that Jesus could get out, he rolled it away so that people could see that it was EMPTY. For Christ had risen. Jesus had already left. The same Jesus who could at will walk on water, and appear suddenly in locked rooms, did not need an angel to open a door for him.

This is not a mass hallucination, a Jesus is raised in my heart, or a wouldn't it have been nice if story, it's the report of eyewitnesses to the event! This was the testimony of multiple eyewitnesses backed up by the irrefutable evidence of AN EMPTY TOMB.

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Now the text tells us that they now saw that Jesus was somehow alive, and that probably wasn't as hard for them to grasp as we might expect – after all they had seen Lazarus come forth, they had seen the widows son and Jairus' daughter too. But while they grasped he was alive they did not yet grasp the importance of that, or how different this raising was from the other temporary restorations to life they had witnessed before. They did not yet grasp that these things *had* to be so and that the scriptures had predicted it would happen.

Why? Well, Their minds were still captive to the theological traditions they had been raised with. They had been willing to accept that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, but they still labored under the impression that the Messiah was still supposed to take up the throne, triumph over their earthly enemies and re-establish the golden Davidic kingdom. [I'm currently being sent emails by a Christian who was raised to view the Sabbath as Saturday and absolute pacificism as a requirement for all Christians – scriptures just bounce off of him.]

But Jesus had said How would rise again:

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

40 "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

And that too was a fulfillment of what scripture had said about the Messiah:

Psalm 16:10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

He had risen to show that He had indeed died to pay for the sins of His people, and to open the way to eternal life and their own resurrection:

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

He had to rise from the dead so that the world would see that Jesus did not suffer his own suffering or die his own death for his own sins. As Ryle put it: "The whole of saving Christianity hinges on the two facts, that Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification."

1 Cor. 15:12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

Applications:

1) Those who have received much from the Lord love him much. Mary Magdalene: If you know anything about her you've probably heard about her "profession" prior to conversion but we are by no means certain of that. We are only told that she was one out of whom the Lord had cast "seven devils" (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2)--one who had been subjected in a peculiar way to Satan's possession--and that her gratitude to our Lord for her deliverance was boundless.

As Lancelot Andrewes put it: "***She was last at His cross, and first at His grave. She stayed longest there, and was soonest here. She could not rest until she was up to seek Him. She sought Him while it was yet dark, even before she had light to seek Him by.***"

Those who feel their gratitude, know their condition prior to salvation tend to be the most grateful

"How is it that many who profess and call themselves Christians, do so little for the Savior whose name they bear? How is it that many, whose faith and grace it would be uncharitable to deny, work so little, give so little, say so little, take so little pains, to promote Christ's cause, and bring glory to Christ in the world? These questions admit of only one answer. It is a low sense of debt and obligation to Christ, which is the account of the whole matter." - Ryle

2) This Event is why we worship on Sunday and not Saturday.

This is the day of new life of new creation

This is the "eighth day of Creation" in which

**On thee, at the creation,
The light first had its birth;
On thee, for our salvation,
Christ rose from depths of earth;
On thee our Lord victorious**

**The Spirit sent from heaven;
And thus on thee most glorious
A triple light was given.**

3) John SAW and believed, Peter SAW and believed, what about you who have not seen?

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Do you believe this happened? Because believing in the Resurrection is not a negotiable of the Christian faith, it is an absolutely fundamental part of true saving faith:

Romans 10:8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."