

John 20 – The Empty Tomb by Marcus

Setting: As we begin chapter 20, it is needful for us to set our minds on what has just taken place. Jesus had just given the ultimate sacrifice. His life for ours. Everything that happened to him while he was here on earth was leading up to this point; this bloody cross was always in the background of Jesus' earthly ministry and time he spent with his disciples that we have been studying for so long now. He told his disciples that this was going to happen, but as we know they were often confused at his teaching. Both the Jews and the Romans were guilty in the death of this innocent man. The Jews had way more knowledge that SHOULD have caused their hearts to be directed in a way that they bow before him and give him glory, but we know that is not what happened.

His most "gung-ho" disciple, Peter, had just denied him after declaring he would follow him to death. He was betrayed by one of the 12 (Judas). Yet he still marched on to do the will of the Father that had sent him. He still voluntarily hung on the cross while the wrath of God was poured out on him. Wow. Not only did he die the death that we all deserve, but he also in his last minutes on the cross declares to one of the guilty criminal's that he will be with him that day in paradise Luke's gospel tells us. Ultimately, He cries out it is finished and gives up his spirit. His side is pierced, and he is taken to Joseph's tomb and buried there.

John 20:1-10 - Read

Intro:

Totally putting the cart before this horse here but I want us to keep in scope the purpose of all these events that we are studying tonight, and we have been studying in John's gospel. It is all summed up in V31 of this chapter **"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."** Isn't this a true statement of John's gospel as well as the other 65 books we have in our bibles?

Resurrection is not a new idea that is just being introduced in the scripture. Job asks the question in **Job 14:14 "If a man dies, will he live again?"** Job's question is one that many still ponder on today. Is there more to life than the present? What happens after we die? As he said, **"man who is born of a woman is a few of days and full of trouble"** Is the grave the end of it all? Job didn't quite understand resurrection but in a sense he did. He says, **"All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come."** Resurrection is presented in so many ways in the scripture. The resurrection of our

Savior Jesus, the resurrection of our dead hearts being brought back to life, the literal resurrection of Jesus' friend Lazarus, Resurrection the person (as Jesus referred to himself as in John 11), and also the future resurrection of the **just and unjust** as Paul said in Acts 24:15 in which the saints of God will be with the Lord forever and his enemies will be cast into the lake of fire. The main point being, resurrection is only possible because of one man, this man who had just died on a bloody roman cross. Jesus Christ.

1) The Stone

What we begin to see John do is give some very specific details in relations to Christ's resurrection. We notice in reading the 4 gospels that all the writers lay out details to give clear evidence that Jesus did indeed raise from the dead. I do need to mention that some will argue about contradictions in the gospel writers accounts. I don't want to spend much time on this, but do want to say that, we can easily make sense of the so called "contradictions" if we take a better look at the scriptures surrounding Christ's resurrection. Had all 4 of the gospel writers given the same exact story word for word, there would be some major red flags there and we would believe they had gotten together to collaborate their stories before they pinned them down. What we see is 4 different men telling the exact same story of the exact same instance in their own perspective. Much like 4 people that are reporting a crime or reporting on major breaking news would tell the same story in their own way.

The reason all the writers take the time to give specific details is because the resurrection of Christ is what all of Christianity is hinged on. It was imperative that they got this right.

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 14-19**: "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and **your faith is in vain**. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, **your faith is futile and you are still in your sins**. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.**"

"Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."

❖ What was the significance of a stone covering the tomb door?

- Mark's gospel tells us that Mary and the other women were taking spices to anoint the body of Christ one last time. The dilemma is, how could they get a stone away from the entrance of the tomb to actually get to him?

When they arrived at the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away, the reaction was not one of "Awesome, I was worried about that, that'll make things easier for us to get to him to anoint him", but more so panic. We see the panic as the scripture tells us she ran back to Peter and the other disciple and says "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him."

Peter and John are both freaking out at this point too. As soon as they heard that the stone was no longer there and that Jesus' body was gone too, they literally took off running to the tomb. I've got to take a pause for a second here and just recognize something that really makes me laugh when I read about these men running to the tomb. John was the younger man, but we really have got to see the humor in the fact that John, who is the writer of this book, makes it a point to say "Let it be known for the record, I outran Peter to the tomb".

I really believe this is nothing more than further eyewitness account from John, but it is not a sin to see the humor in that. Okay, anyways, let's move on to my second point

2) Inside the Tomb

- Mary and John both looked into the tomb, enough to see the Jesus was not there, but we read when Peter arrived, he went into the tomb. We see more of the boldness we are accustomed to seeing from Peter. Matthew Henry in his commentary made a great point about the disciples that is worth repeating considering our studies on the gifts. He said, "*some disciples are quick, and they are useful to quicken those that are slow; others are bold, and they are useful to embolden those that are timid; diversity of gifts, but one Spirit.*" Peter may have been the last person to get there, but he was the first to go all the way in the tomb. It is a beautiful picture of redemption to see Peter inside the tomb of the savior who he had just denied. Peter's repentance was one that was real and is evident by the zeal he still had to be around Jesus and the fact that he still was with, and cared for God's people.

❖ What are some observations we can make from inside the tomb?

A. Jesus is not there

B. His linen cloths were lying there

-What was the fear from the chief priests and Pharisees?

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guardj of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. (Matt 27)

- The fear was that Jesus’ disciples would rob the grave and take Jesus’ body. Grave robbery was actually prevalent during this time. Robbers would enter tombs the tombs of the dead and try to find valuables to steal to sale for profit. So, putting a stone in front of the tomb was, for lack of a better phrase “putting the nail in the coffin”. This was the chief priests, Pharisees and Pilate’s way of saying “make sure no one can get in there to take his body or do anything. This is where it ends. (Spoiler alert – very wrong)

C. The face cloth from Jesus’ head was not lying with the cloths but *folded* up in a place by itself.

- Here is where the theory of “grave robbery” falls apart from a practical perspective. If a thief or Jesus’ disciples were to rob the tomb for his body, who would take the time to unwrap his body, and actually fold the face cloth? Why would anyone take the grave clothes off of the dead and carry a naked body? That in itself makes zero sense.

3) They still didn’t understand

- John now enters the tomb with Peter and sees the grave clothes and face cloth of Jesus. Peter quickly entered the tomb to see for himself, John went no further than Mary had went. After John see’s Peter’s reaction John enters. It is worth

saying that Peter who is often classified by many as the “one who denied Christ” often stirs up other believers’ faith. What an awesome picture of the Church. Some believers may be more timid as John seemed to be, and some more bold as Peter was but God uses both and uses believers to stir one another up and build up each other’s faith. I don’t want to over emphasize that in this particular scripture but did find it to be an encouragement us all. Community, with the same foundation (Christ), builds up our faith.

- Okay here is where I’ve wrestled a bit with verse 8. We read that as John entered the tomb that “he saw and believed.” What does it mean that John believed? I was glad to see that I was in good company because pretty much all of the commentary I read on this, there is a split in interpretation. Some believe that John believed – as in believe that Christ had risen from the dead, and others believe that John believe the report of Mary Magdalene that “they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they laid him”.

Thankfully the Greek word used here for believe πιστεύω means “to believe something to be true and, hence worthy of being trusted. -That pretty much left me where I started on this....But I think the context after this gives us a further look into their thoughts on the matter. V9-10 says “for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes”

Let’s looks at the scripture that these men have heard but didn’t understand. Here are scriptures where Jesus talked specifically about what had happened here.

John 2:19: “Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Matthew 12:40: “For just 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.”

Jesus in **Mark 9** was with Peter, James and John and coming down from the mountain of transfiguration he told them to “tell no one what they had seen until

the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Scripture tells us that the disciples kept it to themselves but were questioning what he meant by rising from the dead.

Then you have the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 when Jesus declared “I am the resurrection and the life”.

It’s crazy to think that the chief priests and Pharisees remembered what Jesus had said better than those that had been the closest with him.

Why is it important to think on this part of the text where it says that John saw and believed?

The summary of the whole book of John is what I read earlier from John in V31. So that you might believe! And have life in his name! We see the disciples went back to their homes? What frame of mind were they in when they went back to their homes? Based on the context I’m of the mind that they went back home with their heads hung low. We know that they were likely distraught because it goes on to tell us Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

We know that all this heaviness would soon be removed for these disciples shortly after this instance of finding the empty tomb. We often see circumstances and situations in the scripture that, from the world’s perspective, the outcome does not seem to be very good. Naturally when people get bad news, it warrants some kind of emotional response from us all.

The beautiful thing about Christianity is that there is a whole other layer to life that that of the world that we see every day. When John the Baptist was in prison he doubted too. I thought of that scripture when thinking on how often the disciples “just didn’t get it”. Jesus sent word to John to go and tell him what they “heard and saw”. He said “**the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them, And blessed is the one who is not offended by me**”.

We were not at the tomb with these disciples, we didn’t run in like Peter did to see the grave clothes and face cloth of our Savior, but we do know and believe, as those who have been born again, that Christ has risen from the dead. We also have seen miraculous things happen in the lives of his people.

We visited a church in downtown JC on the Sunday the power was out at Heritage, and the Pastor there was preaching from 1 John. He talked about thinking on the things “We Know”. I’ve thought about that and used that several times since hearing it. When I read about the disciples in this story I want to talk to them, and say “Come on guys, think about what you know! You remember what Jesus said when you were with him.” Luke’s gospel tells us about 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus and how the resurrected Christ met with them and walked and talked with them. They tell Jesus in **Luke 24:21** “we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel...”. He reminds them that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer all of these things (talking about his death and burial and resurrection) and then enter into his glory.

In Closing

After the darkest day in the history of humanity (Christ’s death at Calvary) we were finally able to get to the best part....His resurrection from the dead. Everything we believe is hinged on Jesus rose from the dead as he said he would. If he had stayed dead and in the tomb, Jesus wouldn’t be any different than any of the other little “g” gods of other religions. Someone asked R.C. Sproul this question once “What is the difference between the Christian God, and the gods of the other religions”. He answered, “The main difference is this: The God of Christianity exists”. That may come of a little punch but what do we know? We know that it is true! If Christ had not risen from the dead our faith is in vain and we would have no hope. This wonderful passage of scripture is here for our benefit and so “we might believe and have life in his name”.