

The One Who Conquered Death

John 20:1-10

Part 3

Christ told His disciples in **John 14:19**, “**After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; and because I live, you will live also.**” Will we as Christ’s disciples live again in the blessedness of His presence even if we die? Absolutely! This is Christ’s promise to us and to all those who have come to Him and have embraced Him by faith as their Lord and Savior.

And it is because of this promise that we can live each day filled with hope knowing that when our work, as the disciples of Christ, is done and we exit this world, through death, we will immediately enter into the presence of Christ and into all its blessedness.

Can we count on this? Absolutely! This is what Christ promised us. And why should we believe Him? We can believe Him because He has so convincingly demonstrated His power over death.

And it is this thought that once again brings us back to our study of the Gospel of John and more specifically to **John 19:30** to **John 20:31** where Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in three different ways (John 19:30–20:31).

First of all, Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His dying (John 19:30-37). We saw this in **John 19:30-37**.

Secondly, Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His burial (John 19:38-42). We saw this last week in **John 19:38-42**. And this morning we will see Christ’s power over death manifested in the third and final way. And what is the third way?

Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His resurrection (John 20:1-37). In fact, though the dying of Jesus manifested His mastery, and though His burial manifested His power, neither of those manifested His power over death more than His resurrection.

I believe that Christ Himself inferred this very thought when He was asked by the Pharisees in **Matthew 12:38** to provide a sign to validate all that He had claimed and all that He had promised. And what sign did Christ point to as His single and sufficient credential? His resurrection!

Hopefully now having been reminded by Christ of the importance of the resurrection in validating all that He claimed and promised we are now ready to consider the evidence for it as presented to us by the Apostle John in **John 20:1-31**.

My hope for this message is that as we consider John's account of the resurrection, this third and final manifestation of Christ's mastery over death and the evidence for it, that as we consider the evidence we will once again by the grace of God be reminded of the certainty of Christ promise to us that even if we may physically die we will live again in the blessedness of His presence. So, what is the evidence that John presents to us to support the resurrection in **John 20:1-31**?

The Apostle John in John 20:1-31 presents two different exhibits to support the fact of the resurrection. This morning we will consider only the first exhibit. So, what is the first exhibit?

The first exhibit that John presented to his readers to support the resurrection was the empty tomb (John 20:1-10). Let me read this passage for you.

“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. (2) 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.’ (3) So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. (4) The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; (5) and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. (6) And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, (7) and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. (8) So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. (9) For as yet they did

not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. (10) So the disciples went away again to their own homes.”

Clearly in these verses we see the Apostle John making it very clear to us that on the first day of the week that Christ's tomb was found empty. If we are to believe in the resurrection this historical account must be accepted. And I believe that this is exactly why the Apostle John in presenting his evidence started with the empty tomb, or in other words, exhibit A.

So let us take a closer look at his passage beginning with **John 20:1**. **“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.”**

The Jewish people did not have names for the days of the week, but rather counted their days in relationship to the Sabbath. Therefore this would mean that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb very early on Sunday Morning, or in other words, the first day after the Sabbath.

And who exactly is Mary Magdalene? Mary Magdalene had once been demon possessed until Christ, according to Luke 8:2, cast them out. And why was she going to tomb? Mary Magdalene was going to the tomb in order to anoint Christ's body according to Luke 23:55-56.

But why would she do such a thing? Hadn't the body of Jesus already been prepared for burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus based on **John 19:38-42**? Yes, they had prepared Christ's body for burial, but did Mary Magdalene know this? Absolutely!

Apparently, based on **Luke 23:54-56**, she and other women had observed all that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had done on the day of preparation to secure and to prepare Christ's body for burial. In fact, they had not only observed what these two men had done to prepare Christ's body for burial but they had even followed Joseph and Nicodemus in order to see what they would do with Christ's body. And why did they do this based on **Luke's** account? They did this in order to make it possible for them to return back to the gravesite after the Sabbath was over in order to add more spices and perfumes to what Joseph and Nicodemus had already supplied.

Now in light of what we just learned about the number of women involved in the plan to return to anoint Christ's body, isn't it a little bit surprising that only Mary Magdalene is mentioned here in **John 20:1**? But just because she is the only woman that John mentioned in this particular account does not mean that she was alone. Based on Matthew 28:1 we learn that Mary Magdalene was also accompanied by "the other Mary" most likely Mary the wife of Clopas. And where were the other women mentioned in **Luke 23:54-56** who had most likely also planned to go to the tomb in order to anoint the body of Jesus with additional spices? They were probably also on their way to the tomb, but had not yet arrived.

So, what did these two women observe when they got to the tomb according to **John**? Let us continue to read **John 20:1**. **"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene [and the other Mary] came early to the tomb, while it was still dark and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb."**

So how had the stone been taken away from the tomb? The stone had been taken away from the entrance of the tomb by an angel according to Matthew 28:2. Did the angel do this in order to let Jesus out? No! He did this in order to let people in. Was this event unobserved? No, the soldiers who had been stationed at the tomb to secure it had witnessed all of this according to Matthew's account. And once the shock of what they had witnessed wore off they then ran off leaving the tomb entrance not only unguarded, but open.

And this is exactly what Mary Magdalene and the other Mary found when they arrived at the tomb. They found the soldiers gone and the stone moved.

So, what is their response? John does not tell us how the other Mary responded but he does tell us how Mary Magdalene responded. Let us now read **John 20:2**. **"So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved [Who we know to be the Apostle John], and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we [she and other Mary] do not know where they have laid Him.'"** So how did Mary Magdalene respond to finding the guard gone and the stone moved?

Mary Magdalene, after finding the guard gone and the stone moved, and having concluded that the soldiers had taken the body, ran to Peter and John to report it (John 20:2).

Was Mary Magdalene upset? I would imagine that she was beyond upset. She must have been thinking what more could they do to Christ. They had crucified Him and now they have taken His body.

And where was “**the other Mary**” while all this was happening? It would appear that she, from other Gospel accounts, had remained at the tomb and waited for the other women to arrive who also planned help to anoint Christ’s body.

And did they arrive? Yes, they did. And why would I say this? I would say this because **Mark 16:1-5** makes it clear that at some point in time multiple women entered into the tomb and was told by an angel that Christ had risen and instructed them to go and tell His disciples.

Did this group of women include Mary Magdalene? No! It could not have included Mary Magdalene because she had already left the tomb in order to find Peter and John according to **John 20:2**.

So, what happened after Mary Magdalene told Peter and John that the soldiers had taken away the body of Jesus? Peter and John responded just like we would have responded. They went to verify what they had been told (John 20:3-7).

Let me now read for you **John 20:3-7** and see if this is not so. **“So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. (4) The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; (5) and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. (6) And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, (7) and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.”**

So, what do we want to take away from these verses? Do we want to take away from these verses that John being younger was able to outrun Peter? No! It is interesting but not particularly significant. Perhaps what we need to

take away from these verses is that John, though arriving first at the tomb, chose not to immediately enter but stooped and simply looked in contrast to Peter who flew right past him and into the tomb to see if in fact Christ's body had been removed. Again this is interesting but it is not particularly significant.

But what is significant is what John tells us about the grave clothes. And what was so significant about the grave clothes?

The significance that John places on the grave clothes, or in other words, on the linen and on the face-cloth is highlighted by his repeated reference to them in John 20:5-6. What did John see when he stopped at the entrance of the tomb and peered in? He saw the grave clothes lying there! And what did Peter see when he rushed by John and entered into the tomb? He saw the grave clothes. What? Lying there! Not strewn about the tomb but, most likely, simply resting on the slab where they would have naturally fallen after Christ's glorified body had past through them. And where was His face cloth? It has been neatly folded and in a different place than the linen wrappings.

So why are the grave clothes significant? The grave clothes are significant because their presence in the tomb and their positioning was far more consistent with a resurrection than a body snatching.

In other words, if someone had taken the body of Jesus whether it would have been one of Christ's disciples, or the roman soldiers, or even the Jews how likely would they have taken the time to unwrap the body of Jesus and neatly place the linen wrappings in the place where Jesus had been resting and then take the time to fold the face cloth and place it separate from the linen wrappings? I believe the answer would have to be not very likely at all!!

So how did they respond to what they saw? Based on Luke 24:12, Peter was filled with wonderment marveling at what had happened. But what about John, how had he responded? Let me now read for you **John 20:8**. **“So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.”** So the question that we must ask is this.

What did John come to believe? When John 20:8 says that John “believed” it simply meant that John believed that the tomb was empty, as Mary Magdalene had told them. And I believe that this is made clear to us in the very next verse. **“For as yet they did not understand the Scripture.”** Or in other words, the reason why they hadn’t concluded, when they confirmed that the tomb was empty, that Christ had risen was because they, based on their lack of understanding of the Scriptures, did not expect Christ to rise. Therefore they were simply left with wonderment. In other words, how could the body of Christ have been taken and by whom? And why would they have taken the time to unwrap the grave clothes and fold the face cloth? And where was the body of Christ now?

And then what do we read? We read these words, **“So the disciples went away again to their homes.”** And this brings us to the end of John’s account of how Christ’s tomb was discovered to be empty.

Was the fact of the empty tomb important? Absolutely! In Jerusalem, the place of Jesus’ execution and burial, the church would shortly be proclaiming Christ’s resurrection. This necessitated the emptiness of the tomb as being verified. In other words, the message of the resurrection could not have been proclaimed in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been a fact. John is telling us based on his own personal eyewitness account that it was a fact. And not only that it was a fact but that all that the Apostle John had observed on the day that he found the tomb to be empty was consistent with a resurrection rather than a body snatching.

Where is Christ today? He is not in the grave. He is not in the grave because He has risen. And because He has risen and is now alive we can know, based on His promise to us in **John 14:19**, that even if we were to die we will live again in the blessedness of His presence.

This is the promise He has given us. Is this promise something you are presently trusting in? Is this promise something that is helping you to get through the ups and downs of this life? Is this promise sustaining you as you in obedience to Christ are seeking to continue His work of disciple making? Or are you focused more on the stuff of this world, the cares of this world, and the trials of this world?

May God give us the grace to understand, based on the promise of Christ and His complete mastery over death, that even if we die we will live again.