

2,000 years ago, Jesus, the Son of God, the long-awaited Messianic King, rose from the dead. You and I might be used to hearing about this, but imagine the news when it took place. Jesus died and was buried. But now the tomb is empty.

Do you understand the empty tomb?

What is truly remarkable is that this should have been no surprise. It had to happen!

Matthew 12:40

Matthew 16:21

Matthew 17:22-23

Mark 9:9

Mark 10:32-34

John 2:18-22 Jesus told them He would rise from the dead.

John 10:17-18 This is the Father’s commandment to Jesus.

John 16:16-22 Jesus is speaking cryptically, but now we can understand what He is saying.

I. Jesus died and was buried.

John 19:38-42

This is important.

The resurrection of Jesus is essentially meaningless if He did not actually die.

As I explained earlier this morning, ten facts point to the certainty of His death:

1. The Romans were good at killing people. People never survived crucifixion.
2. The Romans found Him dead; therefore they did not break His legs.
3. They stabbed Him in the side to make sure He was dead and blood and water came out.
4. Many of Jesus’ friends, including His mother, watched Him die.
5. The centurion in charge of the crucifixion told Pilate that Jesus was dead.
6. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus received permission to bury Him from Pilate.
7. They wrapped Him in 100lbs. of linens and spices. No one could breathe with that.
8. When He was buried, the Roman authorities put a seal on the tomb.
9. The tomb was guarded by soldiers because the Jewish authorities knew He was dead.
10. The disciples of Jesus went into hiding because they knew He was dead.

Here, in John 19, we learn that two men get permission from Pilate to bury Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea was a Pharisee who was part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish priestly ruling council.

In Mark and Luke, we learn that this man was “waiting for the Kingdom of God.”

Here we read that He is a “disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews.”

He was an important man and a rich man.

Nicodemus was also a Pharisee.

You might remember him from chapter 3 when he met with Jesus at night.

Jesus spoke to him about the new birth and told him, “You must be born again.”

In John 7:51 he sort of tried to get the Jewish leaders to listen to Jesus.

These two take the body of Jesus and carry out a traditional Jewish burial.

It included some 100lbs. of spices to preserve the body and mitigate the smell of death.

And it included wrapping the body in cloths, like a mummy.

And, finally, the body would have been placed in Joseph’s garden tomb and a stone rolled over the entrance.

This was important as the stone would have kept out grave robbers or anyone who might mutilate the body.

We know from the other gospels that, due to Jewish warnings, Pilate put a Roman seal on the tomb.

The Jews and Pilate also provided for a Roman guard to be placed outside the tomb.

This meant that at least four soldiers would have been present constantly at the tomb, rotating.

And there lay the body of Jesus.

II. Mary Magdalene, “We do not know where they have laid Him.” John 20:1-2

It is interesting that in each of the gospels we are told that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb that morning.

Others came with her, but she is named in each of the four accounts.

In John, she is the only one named, though others are clearly with her. (“we” at the end of verse 2)

In fact, in John’s gospel Mary Magdalene is featured.

She seems to be the main witness of the resurrection on the first Easter morning. Why?

Mary Magdalene is an unlikely person to be featured as the principal witness of the resurrection.

1. Mary Magdalene was a woman. This is obvious, but women were often not considered reliable witnesses by Jews in that time.
2. Mary Magdalene had been healed by Jesus when He cast out from her seven demons. (Luke 8:2)
3. It may be that Mary Magdalene was the woman disparaged by the Pharisee and then forgiven by Jesus for being a great sinner in Luke 7:36-50.
4. Mary Magdalene was a witness to the Crucifixion, “from a distance.” (Mark 15:40, John 19:25)
5. Mary Magdalene watched the burial “to see where He was laid.” (Mark 15:47)

What is the purpose of highlighting Mary Magdalene as the witness to the resurrection?

Well, it is typical of God to choose unlikely people to have a special place in His Kingdom.

Objectively, Mary is the least likely person to be part of any conspiracy to lie about Jesus.

Mary was obviously there, because she cared about Jesus. This adds to the authenticity of the account.

If you were making this up, you would not choose Mary as your witness.

Clearly, at first, she did not think that Jesus rose. She thought someone had taken the body.

For John, there is an added important purpose.

I think he is saying to us all implicitly, “If Mary believed in the resurrection, you can as well.”

III. Peter and John run to the tomb. John 20:3-10

Peter and John’s experience actually begins in verse 2,

when Mary Magdalene come and tells them that the body of Jesus had been stolen.

Jesus had been arrested and tried on Thursday night into Friday morning.

He was crucified on Friday, died in the middle of the afternoon.

Then the skies grew dark and there came an earthquake. It would have been terrifying.

His body was placed in the tomb on Friday evening.

On Saturday, the Sabbath, the disciples and the women were hiding in their homes, in fear.

Now we read about what happened on Sunday morning.

John 20:1-2 You can imagine the shock.

Grave robberies were common then. Jesus had become dear to them. How would you feel?

Understandably, John (the disciple whom Jesus loved) and Peter his friend run to the tomb.

John 20:3-7

Now, can you imagine them both there, looking at those empty grave clothes... thinking.

Who steals a body like that?

There are people who might break in and steal the body, wrapped and all.

There are even more people who might unwrap the body and steal stuff off of it.

But, who in the world unwraps a corpse and steals the body, all gross and decomposing?

So, there they are, looking. Then John tells us what he did. **John 20:8-10**

“He saw and believed” = What did he believe?

Well, he probably believed that Jesus rose from the dead.

Later in this chapter we will discover that this is what they are all learning to believe.

In other gospels we are told that at this point the disciples begin to remember what Jesus had told them.

He told them that He would die and rise from the dead, though they did not want to hear it then.

We know from vs. 9 that the belief did not come from an understanding of the Scriptures.

John did not realize that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

It was simply the best explanation for what he saw.

IV. Mary Magdalene, "I have seen the Lord."

John 20:11-18

The disciples went home. What would you do? I wouldn't know what to do.

When I don't know what to do, I usually go home.

In fact, sometimes I find myself at home when I meant to go somewhere else.

But, not Mary, she probably had come back to the tomb following Peter and John.

Now she stays there crying. **John 20:11-13**

I don't know what she thought about those two angels. Does she not wonder why they are sitting in the tomb?

In any case we see that she is still consumed by grief and still believes her original conclusion.

She thinks someone has stolen her Lord.

Next, she actually meets Jesus, but does not recognize Him.

probably because she thinks He is dead. **John 20:14-16**

He asks her the same question that the angels did, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

So, now we notice this question. Is it important? I think so.

The implication is that she ought not be weeping, but joyful.

She still believes Jesus dead and stolen, until He speaks her name.

It is then that she recognizes her Lord, her teacher.

It is then that she is overwhelmed with joy. **John 20:17-18**

It seems that once she realized who He is, she responded with a hug. She loves Jesus.

Jesus must go to the father. Mary needs to go and tell the other disciples.

But Mary now believes the truth about what happened, even though it seemed unbelievable.

She believes the unbelievable because she saw Jesus and heard his voice.

She tells all the others, "I have seen the Lord."

Luke tells us that they don't believe her. And... would you??? You can imagine the quiet conversation.

"She so much wants Him to be alive. She loved Him so!"

"She did once have seven demons. People like that might relapse. Maybe she's seeing things."

But, no... they would all discover that Mary's joy was real.

Her faith in Jesus her risen Lord, a belief grounded in solid facts.

A direct result of her Lord's victory over death.

This is the sort of joy that real Christians have because they are loved by Jesus and they love Jesus.

And He is no longer dead. He is alive.