

The Resurrection of Christ (John 20:1–18)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/20/2022)

Introduction

1. The focus of today's message is the resurrection of Christ. The crucified Christ was buried and three days later rose from the grave (Acts 2:32, 33). Peter explained that although the purpose of God allowed the Jews to put Jesus to death at the hands of the Roman executioners, the sinless nature of the Son of God forbade His remaining in death's grip (Acts 2:24). Scripture cannot be broken (vv. 26, 27, citing Psalm 16:9, 10).
2. Jesus' cross work was the only way back to the Father because only by it could God remit the sins of His people. However, the resurrection is of vital necessity to salvation (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20). Christ could not remain in the grave because He successfully conquered death, the wages of sin (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23). (1) The resurrection was the Father's vindication of Christ and proof that His work of obedience was fully accepted. (2) The resurrection is the path to glorification for all who are transformed in Christ. (3) The resurrection is implied in Genesis 3:15. Bruising the heel of the Son of woman was accomplished in His death on the cross, but the crushing of the serpent's head in victory required that the Son be raised again (1 Corinthians 15:54, 55, citing Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14). (4) When the scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign as proof of Jesus' claim to be their anticipated Messiah, the sign given them was the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38–40). (5) The resurrection was also prefigured in the OT by the deliverance of Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:19; Hebrews 11:19). (6) The NT makes the resurrection its central theme and essential element of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1–4; Romans 4:24, 25).

I. The Urgent Burial of the Savior (19:38–42)

1. Last week, the message closed with Jesus' death on the cross. His life was *not* taken from Him. Although He was put into the hands of lawless men to be crucified, He was fully in charge of His suffering and death (Isaiah 53: 6, 10; John 10:17, 18). Isaiah also had prophesied: "*And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death*" (53:9). John explains how this prophecy is fulfilled.
 - a. Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple out of fear of the Jews, went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (19:38). Normally, bodies of executed criminals were released to their families for proper burial. However, Jesus was crucified as an *insurrectionist*. In the plan of God, to the contrary, Pilate released Jesus' body to Joseph.
 - b. He was also joined by another member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus (introduced in John 3), who brought burial spices. This man had sought to speak to Jesus at night. Later, though, he defended Jesus openly when the officials were upset by the failure of the temple officers who returned to the council without Jesus (7:46–52). The Pharisees sneered, "*Have you also been deceived?*" (v.). At this point Nicodemus interjected, "*Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?*" (v. 51). No, the gracious God moved these men to step out of the darkness of fear and emerge into the light of faith and obedience. Has Christ moved you to faithful obedience to His will?
2. John also provides details about Christ's burial unique to his gospel. Isaiah has the servant of Yahweh interred in a rich man's grave. Near the site of the crucifixion was a garden and, in that garden, a new tomb, most likely an artificial cave. John notes that Joseph was a rich man but does not say the garden and tomb were his, but the apocryphal Gospel of Peter says it was Joseph's. Since it was nearing sundown, the nearness of the tomb was important, as was the fact that no one had ever been laid there, an

issue to Jews who would never have buried a crucified man in an occupied grave. More importantly, when resurrection morning came, the tomb was empty.

II. Resurrection Morning, the First Day of the Week (20:1–18)

1. That the resurrection is vital to gospel truth is proved by the alleged discrepancies unbelievers try to inject into John's account. In the final analysis, one must trust the overwhelming evidence substantiating the Scriptures' claim to be the very Word of God. a. John's account begins with Mary Magdalene's coming to the tomb alone and while it is still dark (20:1). b. Another supposed discrepancy is the claim that John believed Jesus was risen when he saw the grave clothes (20:8). c. John's purpose is to describe the *effect* of the resurrection on the individual followers of Christ and what transformation His appearance wrought on them. How has the resurrection of Jesus changed your life?
2. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Lord. There was *no human eyewitness* of the actual resurrection of Christ. All the Gospels deal only with post-resurrection events. John opens his account with the time reference, "*first day of the week*" (v.1). Mary's prominence appears in all four Gospel accounts. Interestingly, A woman's witness to evidence was not admissible in Jewish courts.

She came early, while it was yet dark, which is in keeping with John's "light/darkness" symbolism. But did Mary come alone? John implies other women were present: "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him*" (v. 2). The revelation of the empty tomb prompted her to turn around and seek out the disciples; thus, she missed seeing the angels that the other women witnessed. She also returned to the tomb after the other women left. Upon hearing Mary's news, Peter and John ran to the tomb (vv. 3-10). Upon entering the tomb, they saw the grave clothes where Christ had lain but the face cloth folded and lying in another place. Nothing is mentioned about communicating with Mary; they just went home (v. 10), leaving Mary to grieve.

As Mary grieved outside the tomb, she stooped and looked into it. She saw two angels sitting at the head and foot of the place where the Lord's body had lain. At that point, she turned and saw but did not recognize Jesus. She mistook Him for the gardener. Jesus asked, "*Whom are you seeking?*" (v. 25). She asked where He had taken the body so that she might recover it. This request affirms the fact that she was a woman of both wealth and influence.

Whatever the cause of her blindness, it was taken away when Jesus called her by name, "*Mary*" (v. 16). The Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name and His "*sheep follow him, for they know his voice*" (John 10:3, 4). Her ecstasy in seeing her Lord is evident. She is now enthralled that the relationship with Him is restored, her joy overflowing. At that point, she falls at His feet and, no doubt, clutches them tightly. The Lord responds, "*Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'*" (v. 17). Jesus had not yet presented Himself before the mercy seat in Heaven to seal His sacrificial work. In addition, He had a mission for her to go and announce to the disciples that she had seen her Lord alive.

Lessons

1. The core of NT hope is the resurrection of Christ (1 Peter 1:3; Philippians 3:10, 11; Romans 1:4).
2. An encounter with the living Christ has a dramatic effect that radically changes one's life.
3. Faith is not self-generated but God-wrought through understanding of Scripture.
4. Real faith is not static but emotional. However—Beware of emotion that is not faith-generated. Beware of "faith" that is not expressed in joy-filled love for Christ.