

199. The Gospel of John 20:1-8

The King is Risen-Part 1

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(11-13-22)

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John 20:1–3 (NKJV)

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.

As we read the accounts of the resurrection in the 4 Gospels—skeptics have pointed out that the Gospels seem to contradict themselves as to the events that transpired the day Jesus rose from the dead.

First of all, let me set the scene—at the end of Chapter 27 of Matthew’s Gospel (verse 55) we see some of the women that followed Jesus standing afar off watching Him being crucified.

Matthew tells us they included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons (Salome). John adds in his Gospel (19:25) that Mary the mother of Jesus was there also—as was Mary the *wife* of Clopas.

After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked Pilate if they could have His body so they could give it a proper burial.

The problem was the sun was about to go down which meant the Sabbath (a high sabbath) was about to begin. So, Joseph and Nicodemus quickly wrapped Jesus’ body for burial—but didn’t have enough time to do a proper job before laying it in the tomb, rolling the stone over the opening and departing so they could get home before the Sabbath began.

The women saw where they had buried the body of Jesus and purposed that they would come back to the tomb early Sunday morning to properly finish preparing His body for burial. So, we see them coming the ‘*first day of the week*’ (Sunday) bringing the sweet spices they would need to finish the job Joseph and Nicodemus had started.

The Gospels tell us they were coming to the tomb early that morning.

The word ‘**early**’ is a Greek word that means “*the fourth watch of the night*”.

The Romans had divided the night into four watches—the first watch went from 6 to 9 P.M., the second from 9 to 12 A.M., 12 to 3 A.M. was the third watch of the night—followed by the fourth watch which was from 3 to 6 in the morning.

One of the problems skeptics point out is the seeming discrepancies in the Gospels as to what women came to the tomb that morning and when.

Matthew tells us (Matthew 28:1) that Mary Magdalene and ‘*the other Mary*’ (probably the mother of James and Josés—27:56) went to the tomb.

Mark mentions those two but says that Salome, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, was also with them—Luke adds Joanna to the list of women who went to the tomb that Sunday morning.

Whereas, John only mentions Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb—and he says that it was still dark when she got there.

However, Mark tells us that when the women got to the tomb—the sun had already risen.

- *What are we to make of all of this?*
- *How are we to reconcile these apparent contradictions?*

Let me tell you what I think happened that morning.

I believe that these women started out toward the tomb very early that morning—before the sun came up. Mark tells us that the main thing they were worried about was who was going to move the stone from the mouth of the tomb so they could get in.

This stone that the women were worried about was no small problem—it weighed between 3 and 4 thousand pounds and was rolled in a channel down a slight incline over the opening of the tomb.

How in the world were they ever going to move it back up that channel so they could properly finish preparing Jesus body for burial? They were probably worrying about this for the past three days—but especially on their way to the tomb that Sunday morning.

The interesting thing about it was that when they finally got to the tomb—the problem they were so worried about had already been taken care of by God—

Matthew 28:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 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.

This got me to thinking about how much time and energy I have wasted worrying about how I was going to solve a certain problem that I knew was coming down the road—only to get there and find out that God had gone before me and already taken care of it!

The Word of God says, “*Do not fret (worry) it only causes harm.*” (Psalm 37:7)

The English term *worry* comes from an old German word meaning to *strangle*, or *choke*.

That is exactly what worry does—it is a kind of mental and emotional strangulation, which probably causes more mental and physical afflictions than any other single cause.

So, these women started out for the tomb before the sun came up, coming from their respective houses—which meant they started off from different locations.

There was probably 8 or more women that converged on that tomb on this first Resurrection Sunday.

It could be that some of them lived near each other and met up and walked together—probably in separate groups of 2 or 3 coming from various points around the city wherever they lived.

Mary Magdalene could have lived in a different location from the other women and started out for the tomb alone that morning. In any case, it seems that Mary Magdalene, in her eagerness to get there, went ahead of the other women arriving at the tomb first just before the sun had risen.

When she saw that the stone had been removed from the door of the tomb—she concluded that somebody had broken into the tomb and stolen the body of her Lord. What she and the other women didn't know was that **an angel caused an earthquake—and then moved the stone from the opening of the tomb.**

In John's Gospel, he uses the Greek verb, "airo" in reference to the stone being **"taken away from the tomb"**—this verb used in this context means *"to pick up and carry."*

It wasn't that the stone had simply been rolled up the channel back to its starting point. John is describing a situation where the stone had been picked up, carried a short distance and then put down in a place near the tomb but not where you'd expect it to be if someone had wanted to get in and simply rolled it out of the way.

Years ago, an English trial lawyer and critic of Christianity named Frank Morrison started out to write a book disproving the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, after careful study he was compelled by the evidence to become a Christian.

He wound up writing a book in defense of the resurrection entitled, *Who Moved the Stone?*

**Remember the angel didn't move the stone to let Jesus out—
he moved the stone to allow the disciples to get in
and confirm that the tomb was indeed empty!**

Now, let me stop here and say something about the day Jesus was crucified in relation to the day He rose from the dead—which we know was Sunday.

Many hold to a Friday crucifixion—but I believe that Jesus was crucified on Thursday.

➤ *Why do I believe this?*

Because in Matthew 12:40, Jesus told us—*"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."*

As I have said before—there is no way you can get *"three days and three nights"* in the grave with a Friday crucifixion—even if you count 3 in the afternoon to 6 P.M. on Friday as a whole 'day.'

So, once again, when Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been removed from the door of the tomb—she concluded that somebody had broken into the tomb and stolen the body of Jesus.

She immediately runs to tell Peter and John and says to them, **“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” (John 20:2)**

Now while Mary was in the process of going to tell Peter and John what had happened—the sun has come up and the other women now begin to arrive at the tomb (in groups separate from each other but not all arriving at the same time).

As each group of women arrive at the tomb, they all see the same thing—the stone has been moved, an angel (or angels) announces to them not to seek the dead on behalf of the living—Jesus is not here He is risen! Go quickly and tell His disciples—and then each group runs to tell Jesus’ disciples the good news!

Matthew 28:5-8 (NKJV)

⁵ But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." ⁸ So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

As each group of women reaches Jesus’ disciples to tell them the tomb is empty (Mary Magdalene is still there trying to convince these men that she wasn’t crazy—the tomb is indeed empty)—as each group of women arrive and say the same thing to Jesus’ disciples—at one point Peter and John take off for the tomb to see for themselves.

John being the younger of the two gets to the tomb first—

John 20:4-5 (NKJV)

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.

When John arrived at the tomb, he saw that the stone had been taken away from the opening—however, he didn’t enter but rather he cautiously remained outside and looked in.

Don’t forget it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread (a weeklong feast) and also the Feast of First Fruits (which took place on the Sunday of that week).

And so, John’s Jewish upbringing kicked in which said that during the major Jewish feasts of the year you didn’t want to come in contact with anything that would defile you and therefore disqualify you from celebrating the feast—and that would definitely include stepping inside a tomb!

So, John stayed outside the tomb and simply looked inside—*what did he see?* John saw the graveclothes that had held the body of Jesus lying by themselves undisturbed but empty.

The word **“saw”** in verse 5 is the Greek word *blepo* and simply means *“to glance at.”*

So initially John just gave the empty tomb a quick glance.

In fact, it’s the same Greek word used of Mary Magdalene in John 20:1—initially both Mary and John gave the scene a quick glance (*blepo*).

A few minutes later Peter arrived—

John 20:6-7 (NKJV)

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.

When Peter got to the tomb he impulsively charged right in—just as we would expect him to do!

He also ‘**saw**’—but the Greek word used in v.6 is *theoreo*, which means, “*to look carefully, to study and contemplate what you’re looking at*”.

What was Peter looking so intently at—what did he see in that tomb?

He saw the linen clothes lying there empty—but he noticed that they were laying there like an ‘*empty cocoon*’, still retaining the shape of Jesus’ body.

Peter knew this wasn’t the work of grave robbers since they would have taken the body—grave clothes and all!

And yet even though Peter carefully examined the scene—he still didn’t understand that Jesus had risen from the dead.

John now enters the tomb and gives it a closer look—

John 20:8 (NKJV)

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

The Greek word now used of John seeing is *eido*, which means, “*to see and understand, to perceive with intelligent comprehension*.”

In other words, “*John saw, understood and believed.*”

John understood that the only way those linen clothes could be left in that condition would be if Jesus *passed right through them* as He rose from the dead and they fell limp still holding the shape of His body!

➤ *Why am I focusing so much on the words translated “**saw**” in this passage?*

I think the Holy Spirit is using Mary, John and Peter and how each of them looked into the empty tomb and saw what was there (the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection)—as an example of the different ways a lot of people look at the evidence surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. Mary

When Mary Magdalene got to the tomb that morning, she *saw* that the stone had been rolled away—again the Greek word for ‘**saw**’ is *blepo* and means to see something superficially without necessarily comprehending what you’re looking at.

There are a lot of people who are confused about the resurrection because they’ve only taken a quick, superficial look at it—maybe while growing up in Sunday School or going to Awana’s or VBS—but have never given it more than a passing glance.

Now that they've gotten older, they've gotten busier and the focus of their life is work, taking the kids to soccer or baseball; working on the house, being preoccupied with a special hobby, planning vacations—and they just don't have time to really take a hard (serious) look at spiritual things like the resurrection.

If you ask them what happened 2000 years ago that first resurrection Sunday morning, they'll tell you they don't really know—just like Mary who really didn't know what to think—she 'saw' the evidence of the resurrection but didn't know what it all meant.

2. Peter

Now, even though Peter studied the situation carefully he didn't comprehend what had happened—and so while he was *curious*, he was also confused.

There are those who study the Christian doctrine of the resurrection and still don't understand what happened—some of them are liberal scholars and seminary professors.

They know that history records that the body of Jesus was gone from the tomb—but because they refuse to believe the obvious conclusion (that He rose from the dead)—they come up with all kinds of ridiculous explanations as to *why* the tomb was empty.

3. John

Then we have John, who initially saw the evidence of the resurrection superficially and didn't comprehend—but then gave it a closer look and came to understand and believe.

John 20:8 (NKJV)

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

Coming to believe in Jesus Christ is often a *process* of the Holy Spirit opening a person's eyes a little at a time until they 'get it!' In other words, the light goes on, they believe, and receive Jesus as their resurrected Savior—as did Mary and Peter came to do along with John.

You need to ask yourself where along the process are you?

The question I want to leave you with this morning is—why can children believe that Jesus rose from the dead when some of the most brilliant minds in the world can't?

Let me end with a true story along those lines—

"Once upon a time I had a young friend named Philip. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. He was a pleasant child—happy, it seemed—but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children. Philip went to Sunday school at the Methodist church. His teacher, also a friend of mine, taught the third-grade class with Philip and nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.

You know eight-year-olds. And Philip, with his differences, was not readily accepted. But my teacher friend was creative, and he helped the group of eight-year-olds. They learned, they laughed, they played together. And they really cared about one another, even though eight-year-olds don't say they care about one another out loud. My teacher friend could see it. He knew it. He also knew that Philip was not really a part of that group. Philip did not choose nor did he want to be different. He just was. And that was just the way things were.

My friend had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter last year. You know those things that

pantyhose come in—the containers that look like great big eggs—my friend had collected ten of them. The children loved it when he brought them into the room. Each child was to get one. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assignment was for each child to go outside, find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises one by one.

It was glorious. It was confusing. It was wild. They ran all around the church grounds, gathered their symbols, and returned to the classroom. They put all the eggs on a table, and then the teacher began to open them. All the children stood around the table.

He opened one, and there was a flower, and they ooh-ed and aah-ed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. *"Beautiful,"* the girls all said, since it is hard for eight-year-old boys to say "beautiful." He opened another, and there was a rock. And as third graders will, some laughed, and some said, *"That's crazy! How's a rock supposed to be like new life?"* But the smart little boy who'd found it spoke up: *"That's mine. And I knew all of you would get flowers and buds and leaves and butterflies and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I wanted to be different. And for me, that's new life."* They all laughed. My teacher friend said something to himself about the profundity of eight-year-olds and opened the next one. There was nothing there. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, *"That's not fair—that's stupid!—somebody didn't do it right."*

Then my teacher friend felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Philip was standing beside him. *"It's mine,"* Philip said. *"It's mine."* And the children said, *"You don't ever do things right, Philip. There's nothing there!"* *"I did so do it,"* Philip said. *"I did do it right—it's empty—the tomb is empty!"*

There was silence, a very full silence. And for you people who don't believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day last spring. From that time on, it was different— Philip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his different-ness.

Philip died last summer. His family had known since the time he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his little body. And so, late last July, with an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off, Philip died. At the funeral, nine-eight-year-old children marched up to the altar, not with flowers to cover over the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher, marched right up to that altar, and laid on it an empty egg—an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg!"

**At this point the words of Jesus come to mind—
that if a person doesn't have the faith of a child,
they won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven.**

May God give all of us the faith of children—but the strength of soldiers standing against the evil around us—and having done all to stand!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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