

The Gospel of John

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Chapter Twenty

Good Thursday: The Resurrection

This concept is essential to Christianity (bolded for emphasis):

*1Cor 15:13-19 NASB But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; (14) and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. (15) Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. (16) For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; (17) and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (19) **If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.***

If you have read to this point but do not believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ actually happened as revealed by Scripture then you are most to be pitied. It is not enough to say that one believes for the demons believe (James 2:19). It is not enough to call Him Lord, cast out demons, do miracles in His name, or any other acts or thoughts unless the resurrection is accepted as fact:

*Matt 7:21-23 NASB "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (22) "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' (23) "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; **DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.**'*

So approach the study of this chapter with great caution. Your life for an infinite amount of time depends upon your reaction to this chapter. There are two cycles of resurrection appearances of Jesus in the NT. A Galilaean cycle was presupposed by Mark, recorded by Matthew, and presented by John in chapter 20. A Judaeian cycle was recorded by Luke and presented by John in chapter 21.

John 20:1-2 NASB

*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."*

The first day of the week would have been Sunday. If the crucifixion was on Thursday then three days and three nights have passed since that horrible event. The original tense of John is present tense that conveys the vividness of the events and the excitement by Mary. John does not give us much information about Mary of Magdalene but he gives us a vivid impression of her vital personality. Luke does give us some information about the casting out of seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). Mark records that she traveled with the disciples during the Galilean ministry and provided financial assistance to the group. Mark (15:40) and Matthew (27:56) agree with John that she was present at the crucifixion and all four evangelists state that she was one of the witnesses of the empty tomb (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:10). Mary was not alone for she uses the third person when she told Peter and John (supposedly) that “we do not know where they have laid Him. Mary ran to make the report but she only told what she observed and that was that the tomb was empty. She supposed that someone had stolen the body and they did not know what had been done with it.

John 20:3-5 NASB

*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.*

The immediate reaction of these disciples shows that they had not been involved in any secret moving of the body. John arrived at the tomb before Peter and he did not go in but stooped to look into the tomb. He may have not entered out of respect for the dead or because he feared ceremonial contamination from touching a corpse. He saw the line wrappings lying there that indicted the body had not simply been stolen. If the body had been stolen the wrappings would have remained as they had three days and nights to be soaked by the spices and simply removing them from the body would have been difficult.

John 20:6-7 NASB

*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.*

Peter then arrived and he entered the tomb. He also saw the linen wrappings lying there. However the face-cloth was rolled up in a separate place indicating that it had no further purpose. Lazarus also had a similar face-cloth over his head that remained over his head when he emerged from his tomb so all the wrappings had to be removed (John 11:44). If the body of Jesus had simply been stolen then one would not expect any of the wrappings to remain at the tomb.

John 20:8-10 NASB

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.

John then entered the tomb and saw what Peter had seen but his faith allowed him to see more. It seems that Peter was only puzzled by what he saw and did not see any meaning to the event.

However John must have remembered all that Jesus had been telling them about His dying and then being resurrected (John 2:22; 11:25; 16:22). John believed without seeing the resurrected body, which is exactly what all Christians after the ascension of Jesus have to do by faith. All the disciples did not yet understand that He must rise from the dead. They then went away to their homes with an implied dejection and loneliness. The location is not stated but it could have been the "upper room" or the place John had earlier taken Mary, the mother of Jesus. John recorded earlier that they did not understand the total mission of Jesus until after the resurrection:

John 2:19-22 NASB Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" (21) But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (22) So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

The Scripture to which John referred is probably referring to all Scripture relating to His death and resurrection and not one particular Scripture. This is similar to the comment by John in 2:22 above when he looks back from the resurrection to the events at that time in his discussion.

John 20:11-13 NASB

*But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; (12) and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. (13) And they *said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She *said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."*

However Mary did not go immediately to her home. She stood outside the tomb weeping over the loss of the body of her Lord and she stooped and looked into the tomb. She was rewarded for this extra effort as she probably just wanted to get a better view of the entire area in case they had just not seen the body. The tombs usually were carved out of the soft limestone of the area with a low opening into a chamber where there could have been several places carved for the placing of bodies. There is some difference in the reports of the evangelists over this event but they are minor and do not adversely affect our understanding of what happened. Mark reports that three women went to the tomb and were greeted by one young man:

Mark 16:1 NASB When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.

*Mar 16:6 NASB And he *said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.*

Luke reports that three women went to the tomb and saw two men in white:

Luke 24:10 NASB Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.

Luke 24:4-8 NASB While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; (5) and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? (6) "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, (7) saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of

sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (8) And they remembered His words,

Matthew also reports that two women went to the tomb and were greeted by an angel:

Matt 28:1-7 NASB Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. (2) And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. (3) And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. (4) The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. (5) The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. (6) "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. (7) "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

There is enough difference in the reports of the evangelists to cause someone with no faith to doubt the veracity of the reports. However it is not unusual to have four people report events in very different ways. As in dealing with any eyewitness accounts one must try to look through the reporting to the defining truth present in all accounts. This truth is that Jesus arose from the dead with the aid of angels and the remaining burial clothes all testify to a body having gone through the wrappings to emerge as an intact body.

John 20:14-16 NASB

*When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. (15) Jesus *said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she *said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." (16) Jesus *said to her, "Mary!" She turned and *said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).*

John then reports that Mary saw Jesus standing there but she did not initially know that the man was Jesus. The resurrection appearance of Jesus are not always immediately recognizable as Him as with the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16). Apparently the voice of Jesus must have been calming to her so she asked Him if He was the person who took away Jesus. But when He said to her "Mary", she immediately knew that He was Jesus. A common gardener would not have known her name and nobody else would pronounce it as did Jesus. We do not know why she did not tell Joseph of Arimathea of the missing body. He may not have been available because we do not hear more of him since he took the body. She addressed Him by the title Rabboni (the Aramaic word for Teacher), which must have been her usual way of addressing Him. She probably then prostrated herself before Him and clasped His feet as the other women did (Matt 28:9).

John 20:17-18 NASB

*Jesus *said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" (18) Mary Magdalene *came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.*

It is rather difficult to determine the meaning of His reply to her. At her excitement on seeing that Jesus was indeed alive she must have hugged Him tightly as she did not want to lose Him again. His ascension would not occur until forty days had passed (Acts 1:9) and He had much to do before that event would remove Him from their physical presence. It is not likely that Jesus is refusing to be touched but that He needed to be free to finish His appearances to others. He told Mary to tell the disciples that He was going to ascend to the Father and God of Him and them. He called them “brothers” to indicate His new relationship to them. He used the double addresses of God to emphasize the difference between His relationship to God and their relationship to Him. Nowhere does Jesus address God as our God or our Father. The disciple’s prayer may seem to indicate that He said “our Father” but that prayer is not His prayer but the example prayer for His disciples. The beloved disciple had already believed but He had not yet seen Jesus. Mary Magdalene did as Jesus told her to do and she reported that she had seen Him and she told them what He had told her.

John 20:19-22 NASB

*So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and *said to them, "Peace be with you." (20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21) So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and *said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.*

John omits the appearances of Jesus to Simon and the travelers to Emmaus that are reported by Luke (24:13-35). The disciples had hidden themselves from the Jews for they were afraid that they would send a group to arrest them as they had done for Jesus. John makes it clear that no ordinary person could have come into the room as he refers to the doors as being shut. A resurrected body is not like a normal body and is so not kept from entering a room with locked doors. His first statement to them was that they should be at peace and that was certainly needed as His appearance would have been frightening. The early church repeated some of this occasion by meeting on Sunday nights and starting each meeting with the words Maranatha, or “Our Lord, come”. Jesus had previously told them that this event would occur: “*Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.*” (John 16:22)

He then showed them His hands and His side so that they would know that He was the person who had been crucified. He then repeated His command for them to have peace and He told them that He was sending them in the same way that the Father had sent Him. He expected them to deliver His message (15:27) and to do greater works than He had done (14:12). John reported the prayer of Jesus in which He said that He would send His disciples into the world (John 17:18). We have discussed the meaning of doing greater works in the notes on chapter 14. They cannot do any greater miracles but they will be involved in spreading His message to far greater areas of the world than He had visited and they would have the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide them and teach them. His breathing on them and telling them to receive the Holy Spirit is a foretelling of what would happen at Pentecost. Just as He had received the Spirit for His own mission, they

would also have the Spirit in the discharge of their missions (John 1:32-34; 3:34). John had earlier reported that Jesus had to be glorified before the Spirit would indwell them (John 7 : 39) and now the time had come for that fulfillment.

John 20:23-25 NASB

"If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. (25) So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Verse 23 has been used improperly by many people who want to give some person other than Jesus the ability to forgive sins or to declare that their sins are not forgiven. This verse is similar to that of: *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."* (Matt 16:19) The tenses of John 20:23 and Matt 16:19 are done correctly in this NASB translation. They both state that their sins have been forgiven, stating that the "you" in both verses has no impromptu ability to forgive or retain sins but that the "you" is only stating what God has already declared. The first verbs are aorist in tense so declaring the action of an instant, and the second verbs are perfects, meaning an abiding state that began before the action of the first verbs. People can only announce an event but not cause it. If the person repents of his sins and knows that Jesus is his Lord then the declarer can base his assessment on those stated actions even though only God can know the heart of man.

Thomas was not present with the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them and so he was dubious about what has been said about the resurrection of Jesus. He was the perfect pragmatist! He needed proof, or so he thought. His protestations are actually indicative of the incredulous resurrection event! He needed proof or he would not believe, or so he said.

John 20:26-29 NASB

*After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." (27) Then He *said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." (28) Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (29) Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."*

After a week, during which time the disciples remained in Jerusalem but Thomas was probably not with them, Jesus appeared to the group in exactly the same manner as He did the first time. Thus Thomas could not complain that they group had just made up the event. Jesus gave His standard greeting of peace and then told Thomas to see and touch His hands and side so that Thomas could know for certainty that this was Jesus before whom he was now standing. It is important to note that John does not report that Thomas actually touched any part of Jesus. Thomas knew that Jesus knew what he had said to the disciples after the first meeting. He then saw Jesus and knew that He was indeed the risen Lord and his God. The proclamation of

Thomas, a Jew, was incredible. Jews are strictly monotheistic and for Thomas to entitle Jesus as *Kyrios* (Lord) and *Theos* (God) was blasphemy to the Jew (10:33) since both are titles of deity. Jesus told Thomas what He could tell me and many others over the almost 2000 years since His resurrection. People who do not actually see Him will also believe and be blessed.

John 20:30-31 NASB

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; (31) but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

John presented some of the signs of Jesus that he deemed appropriate for his purpose; that is, so that people may believe in Him and thus have eternal life in His name. Not every person who witnessed signs of Jesus believed in Him such as he stated earlier: *“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.”* (John 12:37) One has to have spiritual insight to believe: *“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”* (1 Cor 2:14) The word “Christ” has the same meaning as “Messiah” and this is a word not used by Jesus of Himself for He was not ready to make that proclamation since people were expecting the Messiah to be the political leader of the Jewish nation. Jesus was the Messiah who takes away the sin as promised in the OT as a fulfillment of the patriarchs and David. John asserts that this Messiah did indeed come. John also refers to Jesus as the Son of God, which indeed He was. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as such (1:34) as did Nathanael (1:49). The term Messiah would have special meaning to the Jews and the title Son of God would have special meaning to the Gentiles so John is expressing the fact that Jesus came for people of all types.

John certainly presented an orderly account of the life of Jesus that has been used by God over the millennia to bring into His Kingdom many saints so we should praise God for choosing John and the Holy Spirit for guiding him in the presentation. I certainly thank God for John for it was in reading his account of Jesus sending the Holy Spirit that brought about my salvation.