

John 20 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

I. THE SIGNS Chs. 1-11

II. THE END Chs. 12-21

Last week I mentioned that there was a question about what day Jesus died.

Traditionally, Good Friday is the day we commemorate as the crucifixion.

But Jesus said He would be **3 days & nights** in the tomb.

Since we know He rose Sunday morning, counting backward, that would be Sat., Fri., & Thurs. nights.

So the cross was probably on Thursday, not Friday.

John 19:31 confirms this.

The day Jesus was crucified was called a Preparation day for a High Sabbath.

The Sabbath wasn't just Saturday; it was any special holy day they were to refrain from work to commemorate their unique covenant with God.

In the same way – for us, the weekend is usually Saturday & Sunday.

But when Monday is a holiday, we call it a 'long weekend,' & Monday, usually a **workday**, is considered **part of the weekend**.

Immediately following Passover is the week long Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Exodus 12:16 says that both the first & last days of the Feast are considered special High Sabbaths.

Passover, which was held on Thursday the year Jesus died, was therefore the Preparation day for the High Sabbath that marked the 1st day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

This is why the women couldn't return to the tomb to properly bury the body until Sunday.

Friday was a Special Sabbath & Saturday was the normal Sabbath in which they wouldn't have been allowed to travel that far or do the work of burial.

All of this points to the likelihood that Jesus was crucified on Thursday.

K. The Empty Tomb 20:1-10

1 Now 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.

Remember that John is only filling in the details the other Gospel writers had left out.

They tell us there were several women who went to the tomb.

John only mentions Mary Magdalene because of the story he wants to tell us about her in a few verses.

When the women arrived at the tomb, much to their surprise they found the stone door rolled aside.

That had been a concern of theirs as they talked on their way there – how they would move the stone so they could attend to Jesus' body.

But arriving at the scene, they found it rolled aside.

As it was still dark, Mary was not able to see inside the tomb very well & only

stayed long enough to verify Jesus' body was missing.

While the other women lingered, Mary went running to where the disciples were hiding.

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."

Take careful note of the word, "we." While John only mentions Mary, her words indicated she was part of a larger group of women who'd gone to the tomb.

Now – the other Gospels tell us that as the rest of the women lingered at the tomb, two angels appeared to them and informed them of the Resurrection, telling them to go and tell the disciples.

They hurried back into Jerusalem to the place where the disciples were.

But Mary Magdalene had gotten them well ahead of them & told Peter & John.

3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 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. 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.

Peter & John weren't with the rest of the disciples when the other women came with their report; they'd gone to the tomb themselves.

As soon as Mary gave her report, Peter took off.

John followed and quickly outran him.

But when he got to the tomb, he stopped at the door, while Peter ran in.

The scene inside the tomb was not what they would have expected.

Because they didn't really believe in the resurrection yet, the absence of the body could mean only one thing – someone had stolen it.

But grave robbers would have lifted the body whole, with the grave clothes still around it.

Jesus had been the victim of scourging & crucifixion; He was a bloody mess and no one would have wanted to get all that on them, so they would have left the linen scraps on him.

If their goal had been simply to burglarize the tomb, they would have torn the cloths from the corpse and left them in disarray.

What greeted the eyes of Peter & John caused confusion.

The grave clothes were such that they were in the same shape as when they were wrapped round the body.

It was as if the body had simply dissolved out of them.

But the face cloth, which was a separate piece, was neatly folded & sitting away from the rest of the cloth.

Rather than the grave clothes bearing the evidence of a hurried departure, they exhibited a calm & measured treatment that didn't look at all like a crime of body snatching.

What we find here & in Ch. 19 can help us determine if the famous Shroud of Turin is a legitimate relic.

The Shroud is considered by many to be the burial cloth of Jesus.

Many tests have been performed on it over the years, using the latest of scientific methods, to determine if it's the real deal.

The scientific community has varied in its view from time to time; sometimes saying it looks like it could be real, & other times calling it a hoax.

I'm not going to go into all the factors that both sides use to support their case because we need go no further than to look at what the Bible tells us about the grave clothes of Jesus.

In 19:40, John tells us that Joseph & Nicodemus first wrapped the body of Jesus in *strips* of linen cloth.

He furthermore tells us what they did was *customary* – that is, they followed the general practice of the day.

Which was to wrap the body in several long sheets of linen.

The word that M., M, & L use to describe the grave clothes refers only to the *material*, not its shape.

John fills in the details – they were strips of linen, not one long sheet folded over, such as the Shroud of Turin is.

Furthermore, John makes it clear the cloth covering the face was separate.

Yet on the image that's found on the Shroud is of an entire person, from feet to head.

While there is some amazing evidence pointing to the Shroud's authenticity in terms of dating & other forensic details, it simply doesn't match the Bible's description of the grave clothes of Jesus.

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

John outran Peter on the way to the tomb, but when he got there, he hesitated to go in.

Once Peter arrived & walked boldly in, John followed & saw what Peter had; the grave clothes lying as they were.

The arrangement of the wrappings and face cloth told a very different story than a case of grave-robbing.

And suddenly, the many times Jesus had foretold His resurrection began to stir in John's heart.

John uses 3 different words for vision in vs. 1-8.

In vs. 1 & 5, in speaking of Mary's & John's first looks at the tomb he uses a word which can be translated as 'glance.'

In v. 6, the word he uses for Peter's look at the inside of the tomb means to 'notice.'

In v. 8, the word "saw" means to 'perceive.'

At first, both Mary Magdalene & John simply saw an empty tomb.

Peter took a closer look and realized the evidence did NOT point to a crime of body-snatching, but that's all he saw.

When John encountered the evidence, he looked past what the evidence **DIDN'T** point to, to what it **DID** suggest – Jesus had risen.

But this was no certainty for John; just a possibility.

9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

In the NKJV, we get the literal translation of the end of v. 10.

What such a rendering does is miss the *idiom* of the phrase, “went again to their own homes.”

The meaning is – they “returned home,” they went to their place.

The NKJ makes it sound like they went to different places.

But when Mary Magdalene went to see Peter & John they were in the same place.

It was that place they returned to here.

In v. 9, John says that as they returned from the tomb, they didn’t realize the resurrection was something the Scriptures had foretold.

Even after they encountered the risen Christ, they didn’t understand that all that had happened to Him had been a fulfillment of many passages in their Bible.

Jesus Himself walked them through the prophecies of His life, death, & resurrection in one of the times He appeared to them.

John returns now to Mary Magdalene who’d followed after Peter & John as they ran to the tomb.

L. Mary Magdalene Sees Jesus 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

Just as had happened to the other women after Mary had left earlier, angels now appear to her.

Mary saw one sitting at the head of where Jesus body had lain, & the other at the other end of the bench.

There are 3 main locations in Jerusalem that vie for the burial place of Christ.

2 are inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

1 is just north of the city walls.

Inside the Church of the Holy Spirit is the traditional site of the tomb which today is covered by a small chapel.

The problem is, there’s no tomb there. Until they built the chapel & church around it, it was open air.

Next to the chapel is a much smaller Jacobite chapel that is ancient & decrepit.

One wall of the chapel is solid limestone bedrock, into which are cut 2 small loci – holes into which bodies were slid after they were wrapped in the linen cloths.

We do know that this is the way the poor were buried during the first century – and for that reason, many scholars consider one of those two holes to be the one Jesus’ body was placed in.

But if this is the tomb, then we have a problem with what we read here in v. 12.
John says Mary saw 2 angels sitting at the ends of where Jesus' body lay.
That means they were itty bitty angels!

It's far better to consider the 3rd site as the real tomb of Jesus; the one located north, outside the city walls.

The setting is perfect for what we know about the crucifixion & burial of Christ.

It's right alongside the ancient main road that led out of the city.

That road passes right at the foot of an ancient quarry & cliff that looks like a skull.

And just a short distance away, as John says it was, was a cultivated spot in which is located the tomb of a wealthy person.

We can say that because it's built on the older style which was much larger with benches to lay bodies as opposed to holes cut into the rock.

What's interesting about this particular tomb is that it's unfinished.

One of the benches is complete, but the other is only partially chiseled out, meaning the tomb wasn't completed.

The Gospels tell us Joseph's tomb was new and had not been used.

Indeed – after the resurrection, he never used it again, but left it as an abiding memorial to the risen Christ.

13 Then 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.”

Though Mary is seeing & talking to angels, she's sobbing.

This gives us an idea of just how heart-broken she was.

If we were crying about something and suddenly an angel appeared, we'd likely stop our bawling & sober up.

Mary's grief at the loss of Christ was so intense, even angels couldn't stem the tide of tears.

That's John's point and helps us understand what comes next.

14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.

Why didn't she know it was Him? Couple reasons. . .

1) She's thought He was dead & His body missing.

2) Her eyes were filled with tears.

Mary's emotional agony is due to something more than her great love for & devotion to Jesus.

The Jews of that time considered the proper treatment of a dead body an important moral value.

Family members & friends of the deceased treasured the corpse of a loved one & treated it with great regard.

The whole reason the women had been so diligent to return at the first opportunity to the tomb was to show the body of Jesus the respect He was due.

Mary is hanging out at the tomb precisely because it was the last place she knew His body had been and hoped somehow to pick up the trail to where

it had been taken.

She is extremely distraught over what she concludes has happened to Jesus; someone is mistreating Him – and this kills her!

15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

Because the resurrection was no where in Mary’s realm of possibilities, she assumed this one who challenged her frantic presence in that place at that early hour must be the servant charged with the task of tending it.

And if he’s the gardener, then there’s a good chance he knows what’s happened to Jesus’ body. Indeed He does!

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

A gardener would not have known her name.

And there was something distinctive in the way He said it that opened her eyes to Who He was.

She then calls Him “Master Rabbi;” rabbi means ‘teacher.’

In John 10, Jesus had said that the shepherd knows His sheep by name & the sheep know their shepherd’s voice.

If a fraud tries to call them they will not come, but when their master calls, they will.

Jesus had called Mary by her name many times, & when she heard the distinctive sound of His voice in the old familiar way – she knew it was Him.

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ”

When Mary realized it was Jesus, she threw herself on Him, and clung with such a tight desperation Jesus had to tell her to get a grip and back off.

Mary was probably thinking, “You’re never gonna’ get away again! I’m never going to let go.”

So Jesus had to tell her to let go because He couldn’t stay.

He hadn’t risen to return & hang out with her & the others.

He was on His way back to heaven from whence He’d originally come.

In the meantime, He gave her a very important mission – to go & tell the disciples that He’d risen & would soon ascend to Heaven.

Why this? Why was the ascension important?

Because it would validate His death as being sufficient payment for our sins.

As the Psalms make clear, no one can ascend to heaven unless He’s approved by God.

The resurrection had a destination.

It wasn’t simply a rising from the tomb *to the Earth* – it was a rising all the way into the presence of the glory of God’s throne.

The ascension would prove Jesus’ work at the cross fully paid for our sin and broke the dominion of the curse.

18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.

Mary was the first apostle!

She was the one who was first charged with carrying the good news to others.

In *The DaVinci Code*, Dan Brown says that the Emperor Constantine commissioned & paid for the first accepted set of books we call the Bible at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

He contends that he selected the 4 gospels of the NT precisely because he wanted to suppress the role of women and exalt the supremacy of men in the Church.

He says that there were some 80 gospels considered for inclusion in the NT but 76 were rejected because they emphasized the role of women while M,M,L,&J exalt men at the expense of women.

This is an utterly absurd, idiotic charge that has not a single shred of historical truth in it.

1) The Council of Nicaea rendered 20 rulings about the Faith and NOT A SINGLE ONE had anything to do with what books would be considered sacred Scripture.

2) M,M,L,&J contain numerous references to the important role of women in the life & ministry of Christ.

Here is one of them – Jesus appeared FIRST to Mary Magdalene!

If there was a conspiracy to erase MM from the Jesus story as Dan Brown contends, John's gospel never would have made it.

3) As for there being 80 gospels the Church Fathers had to chose from; HARDLY!

Again showing his complete ignorance of history, Brown says the Dead Sea scrolls contained gospels. Not one!

The Nag Hammadi documents discovered in Egypt a few years before the DSS do contain some other gospels – 5 to be exact.

But they are all well known Gnostic texts written in the late 2nd, early 3rd Century.

M,M,L,&J were the only gospels to make it into the Canon precisely because they were the only ones that passed the very rigorous test the Church Fathers used in deciding which to include.

They dated to very early and were known to have been authored either by an apostle or a close associate of one of the Apostles.

Dan Brown simply misrepresents & lies about the history of the Early church all so he can promote his own version of the truth.

Mary Magdalene was the first person Jesus appeared to.

We would expect Him to appear to the disciples first.

Or maybe Caiaphus or Pilate.

But it was MM -& the reason why is probably because she was THE most devastated by His death & disappearance.

Her tears & frantic statements to the angels & who she thought was the gardener indicate she was on the verge of a breakdown.

The grief was crushing her – so Jesus appeared to calm & comfort her. God is not interested in the dramatic & doesn't follow the script we so often set for Him.

He's filled with compassion. He moves to heal the hurting heart.

M. He Appears to the Disciples 20:19-29

19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Since they were terrorized by His sudden appearance, this would be the right thing to say.

As we saw Sunday, word had reached the disciples the Jewish authorities were looking for them.

Their success in getting Jesus executed emboldened them to stamp out the movement He's started so they were trying to round up His followers.

When Jesus suddenly materialized among them, they were spooked, the other gospels tell us, thinking He was a ghost.

So he used a greeting *friends* used when they met each other.

"Shalom – Peace."

20 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Ghosts don't have material bodies – Jesus did.

He wanted them to realize it was really Him, the One who'd been to the cross, so He showed them the wounds.

This gives us the clue that after the resurrection, Jesus' appearance was *different* than before.

Mary didn't recognize Him earlier.

The 2 on the Road to Emmaus didn't recognize him until they saw the nail print in His hands.

A few weeks later when Jesus met with all of them just prior to His ascension, we read that some of them still doubted.

They did so because He looked *different*.

What that difference was *due to* we can't be certain – but it may point to the fact that in our resurrection bodies, we'll attain just the perfect age & condition that will be the epitome of what God created us for.

In other words, the effects of living in this fallen world will not be resident in our new bodies.

We'll be the height and weight we were created to be.

We'll have perfect eyesight & hearing.

Smooth skin, good hair, perfect posture, bodies that are perfectly proportioned to our right shape.

Not a blemish will remain – no scars – perfect health.

The only one who'll carry His scars to glory is Jesus – so that we might all remember eternally how we got to be there!

Jesus showed them the wounds so that they would realize it really was Him – the

one who'd been crucified a few days before.

21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

It's almost as if the last 3 days haven't happened.

He repeats one of the last things He'd said to them during the last Supper – that

He was leaving and was turning the work over to them.

And they were to carry it on just as He had – by the Power of the Holy Spirit.

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

This is an *aorist-active-imperative*; Meaning it was a *specific act* He's *commanding* them to do right then at that moment.

It was at this point they were born again – as is evidenced by the other gospels which tell us right after this Jesus took them on a long Bible study which they finally understood all He was telling them; the evidence they were now saved.

The He said . . .

23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Read through the filter of 2000 years of religious tradition this sounds like an affirmation of the priesthood's role confession, where people enter a confessional, disclose their spiritual failure, & are absolved by a priest who gives them some penance to perform.

It's that's the way we interpret what Jesus says here, then it's an example of interpreting a passage through the *wrong cultural lens*.

Remember, when studying the Word, we have to ask, "What did this interesting phrase *mean the disciples* in that room that evening?"

The answer lies in our understanding of the relationship between rabbis & disciples.

You see, the rabbis were *THE authoritative teachers* of Galilee.

Because they knew the Law so well & were recognized as having special authority from God, they could tell people whether or not they'd sinned based on how they had behaved in a given situation.

Jesus is telling the disciples they're graduating from being disciples to full-on rabbis.

Because of their abiding relationship with Him *through the Holy Spirit* He just imparted to them, He's giving them the *authority* to define the boundaries & borders of the Christian Faith.

Because the Cross & Resurrection are now accomplished facts, the Gospel carries in it the power to set men & women free from sin.

And because of their previous 3 years with Jesus, they are the ones that Gospel has been handed to.

As they go forth proclaiming it, those who respond in faith will know God's forgiveness. Those who reject it will remain lost.

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them

when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” ²⁶ And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” ²⁸ And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

[Covered Sunday]

N. Why John Wrote 20:30-31

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Contextually, we probably ought to understand the “many other signs” here in v. 30 as referring to the *post-resurrection appearances* Jesus made to them.

If this had come at the very end of the book, it would refer to the entire Gospel.

But John goes on to tell *another* story about a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in the next verses.

So is best to understand what he’s saying here as referring to how Jesus revealed Himself between the resurrection and His ascension.

Everything John’s recorded about the appearances of the Risen Christ is aimed at producing faith in Him as the Messiah & God.

While this is a tad technical – I want to point out something in v. 31 that will help us understand the Christian life.

John writes, “**These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**”

The first “believe” is in the *aorist* tense, which means simple completed action.

It looks to a moment in time when a thing happens, & it’s done.

It’s John’s goal to see his readers come to an instant in time when they turn from unbelief to faith in Christ.

Really, it’s fitting that John would say such a thing in a passage which has just shown when HE & the other disciples crossed over to saving faith in Jesus.

The Christian life *begins* with an *instantaneous conversion*, a moment in time when a person’s will surrenders to God.

It might take months or years for them to come to that point, but eventually it arrives and they step from death to life.

This is why we do altar calls. They afford someone the opportunity to give public testimony to the event of their salvation.

Raising a hand, going forward to pray with someone, repeating a prayer with

an evangelist or counselor doesn't save anyone.

These are merely vehicles by which those who've *had* a crisis of decision can declare their reception of God's grace.

But that crisis of decision, that moment in time when one crosses over from death to life, leads to an *abiding place of faith*.

That's why the 2nd use of the word 'believe' in v. 31 is in the *present* tense:

“ . . . and that [continually] believing you may have life in His name.”

The initial event of being born again is meant to usher us into *a life of on-going faith*.

Just as we step from death into life the moment we surrender our will to God, we can *grow* in our *experience* of that life by constant, continuing surrender.