

He Must Rise from the Dead

John 20:1-10

John's account of the resurrection of Jesus, like that of the other Gospel accounts is a statement in the form of historical narrative. That is, there is absolutely nothing about the account that resembles fanciful myths. In every way this account reads as reportage: Jesus, who was crucified on Friday, was alive again – as he had said he would be – on Sunday morning. Like the other evangelists, John records the events from his own perspective which accounts for the variety among the Gospel records. Different emphases demanded that different parts of the story be told or be given special attention. John offers an account of the resurrection in which much of the emphasis falls on several individuals and how they came to know and to believe that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead.

John's account is designed to demonstrate the nature and the basis of faith in the risen Lord Jesus. His special purpose in his narrative is to explain how men and women came to believe that Jesus **had** risen from the dead. At the end of his account (vv. 30-31) he makes this theme explicit. John tells us that he is interested in his readers coming to believe as these disciples had come to believe. He has offered four of them – Mary, Peter and John, and, finally, Thomas – as examples of men and women obtaining certainty about the risen Christ in order that others who read his gospel might know what it means to come to such faith, be encouraged to believe themselves, and understand how that faith is born in the heart and mind.



Main Idea: Jesus rose from the dead proving that he is the Son of God and Savior.

Vs. 1 – It is remarkable that all four of the Gospels begin their account of the resurrection by identifying the day as “the first day of the week,” and not, as might well have been supposed, “on the third day,” that is, the third day after the crucifixion, which is what the Lord had so often promised: that he would be crucified and then rise on the third day. There is surely some significance to this and, certainly, it is most plausible to find here an emphasis on the new Lord’s Day that replaced the Jewish Saturday Sabbath. The new day was a memorial of Christ’s resurrection and witness is born to that fact in the striking way in which the resurrection narratives begin.

Vs. 2 – Mary Magdalene is featured by all four Gospels in their resurrection account. John records only Mary’s experience. No explanation is given as to why he does not mention the other women. Some have postulated that this could be the record of a second visit to the tomb which Mary made alone. It may also be that John simply does not mention the other women. Mary’s initial assumption was that grave robbers had stolen the body of Jesus. Grave robbing was not unheard of in those days.

Vs. 3 – In all likelihood, John’s greater speed is due to the fact that he was younger than Peter.

Vs. 6 – Peter’s characteristic impetuosity is on display. He does not hesitate to enter the tomb.

Vs. 7 – The empty tomb was not the work of grave robbers. They would not have left behind the expensive linen, no doubt still holding the expensive spices. The impression that is left by this description is that the body had simply passed through the grave clothes – spices and all – (as Jesus would later pass through the walls of the Upper Room), but that the burial cloth that had covered Jesus head had been neatly folded by the one who had no use for it any longer. It is the sort of vivid description that is characteristic of eye-witness testimony. And there being two men who saw it means that their testimony would have been admissible in a Jewish court. [Carson, 638]

Vs. 9 – John knew that Jesus had risen. But, as yet, he did not understand the resurrection in its biblical meaning and significance. That would come later.

1. The Fact of Jesus' Resurrection

Like the other Gospels, John's account of Jesus' resurrection and the varied responses to the empty tomb reads like a report of an historical event. In other words, none of the hallmarks of metaphor, poetry, or myth characterize the resurrection accounts. It is straightforward reportage (see note on verse 7).

a) The role of the evidence.

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is powerful and convincing. For generations unbelievers, after carefully considering the evidence for the resurrection, have turned to faith in Jesus. And yet there are many others who have seen the same evidence and yet remained stubborn in their disbelief? What has made the decisive difference?

b) The role of the Holy Spirit.

John's Gospel is perhaps the richest source of teaching regarding the person and role of the Holy Spirit. So it is not surprising that Jesus credits the faith of every believer to the work of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit can turn a stubborn unbeliever into a faithful believer.

- "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:6-8).
- "John answered, 'A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven'" (John 3:27).

2. The Meaning of Jesus' Resurrection

a) It vindicated Jesus as God's Son.

- "[He] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).
- "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24).

b) It assures God's people of their right standing with God.

- "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:7).
- "[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).
- The resurrection was the vindication of Christ's work on the cross which cancelled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands (Col. 2:14).

c) It assures God's people of Jesus' ongoing ministry on their behalf.

- "The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:23-25).
- "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died — more than that, who was raised — who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom 8:34).

d) It is the ultimate source of Christian hope.

- "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 15:20-23).
- "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:39-40).