

## Witness to the Resurrection

### John 20:1-10

From the very beginning, Christianity was an “Easter faith.” That is, the Christian faith exists because the tomb of Jesus has been empty since the third day following his crucifixion. If Jesus had remained dead and buried it is almost certain that we would not know his name today. His followers would have dispersed dejected like the followers of the many mystics, revolutionaries, and pretend Messiah’s of that day. Indeed, though Jesus assured his followers that he would rise from the grave, none of them believed him until after he appeared to them for several weeks following his execution. The only explanation for the radical change in Jesus’ followers and the unheard of advance of Christianity around the world for 2,000 years is the resurrection. The tomb is empty. Jesus is risen.



**Main Idea:** The resurrection of Jesus is an historically verified event upon which God’s people may rest their hope for redemption from sin and death.

**Vs. 1** – It is significant 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 following the crucifixion. It is plausible to find here an emphasis on the new Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath that replaced the Jewish Saturday Sabbath. The new day was precisely 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. Only here in John, however, does she appear alone. This could be because the other women with her are simply not mentioned, what I think is the more likely explanation, or this could be another visit to the tomb on her part, a visit she made alone. Mary’s initial assumption was that grave robbers had been at work. We know it was not an uncommon crime in those days.

**Vv. 3-4** – Peter and John run to the tomb. The detail about John outrunning Peter is probably due to the fact that Peter was an older man.

**Vv. 5-6** – Peter’s boldness is on display as he does not hesitate to enter the tomb as John looks on.

**Vs. 7** – The empty tomb was most certainly 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). We know from other accounts that Jesus’ tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers because the Jewish religious leaders feared that Jesus’ disciples may want to steal his body.

**Vv. 8-9** – 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.

**Vs. 10** – Peter and John returned to their homes to tell the others what they had seen.

### 1. The death and resurrection of Jesus were actual events witnessed by many.

- The gospel accounts have all the hallmarks of witness testimony. They are not written in the style of myth or legend. John’s account of Jesus’ resurrection, like the other apostolic accounts is meant to be understood as a record of an historical event. The writers of the New Testament remind us that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were public happenings.

Jesus' death and resurrection did not occur in secret. The Apostle Paul points out that following his resurrection Jesus appeared to many witnesses:

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:3-6).*

- Jesus' disciples did not initially believe that Jesus had risen though he had promised them he would. Each of them – not merely Thomas – did not believe until they personally encountered the risen Jesus. What this tells us, among other things, is that the disciples had no interest in following a dead Messiah. This tells us also that Christianity could have been demolished once and for all if only the enemies of Christ had been able to produce his corpse which they most certainly would have had there been one.
- What the disciples would *not* do if they had wanted to fabricate a new religion:
  - a) They would not have represented themselves as ignorant or unbelieving.
  - b) They would not have invented a story in which the first witnesses were women.
  - c) They would not have insisted on a physical resurrection for Jesus since it would have been easily refuted.
  - d) They would not have been willing to suffer and die for what they knew was a lie.

## **2. The death and resurrection of Jesus have a present significance for every believer.**

### a) Assurance

- The certainty of Jesus' resurrection gives us assurance that our sins are forgiven. The resurrection was the vindication of the cross. That is, it is in the resurrection that our redemption purchased by Christ at the cross is sealed.

### b) Hope

- Our present corrupted and decaying selves will be raised incorruptible on the day which God has appointed. Jesus' resurrection body is the model for what we too will possess in the age to come.
- 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 – There is a need for the redemption of our bodies which are dust and will return to dust.
- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 – God will raise up all of his people and give them bodies like that of the resurrected Lord Jesus. This is the redemption of our bodies for which we wait with eager anticipation (Romans 8:18-25).

### c) Comfort

- John 20:11-13 – Mary weeps tears of grief. She assumes that the body of her Lord has been stolen. However, her grief is far deeper than the possibility of a stolen body. Mary's tears are shed first and foremost because she is standing by the tomb of her Lord. She grieved because all she had hoped was now lost. Or so she thought.
- Her tears of grief would be dried by the comfort she would receive from the risen Jesus.
- It is the same comfort we will all receive one day:

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)*