

**20:1 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.**

**20:2 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."**

**20:3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb.**

**20:4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first;**

**20:5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in.**

**20:6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there,**

**20:7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.**

**20:8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.**

**20:9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.**

**20:10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes.**

The first person to the tomb was Mary, followed by the apostle John (the beloved disciple) and then Peter. Matthew also mentions Mary, the mother of James and Salome (Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1). Luke (Lk. 24:10) tells us that Joanna and others also accompanied Mary Magdalene. This is why Mary says to the disciples in 20:2, "...we do not know where they have laid Him."

The mention of darkness may be a subtle message by John reflecting his theme of light and darkness that has appeared throughout the gospel; the darkness of the hour corresponds to the darkness of Mary's understanding (Carson, 635).

By Jewish reckoning, each day began at dusk and ended at dusk. Thus, the week ended on the Sabbath which began Friday at dusk and continued until dusk on Saturday. The first day of the week began on Saturday evening after sunset.

Before Jesus was buried his body was prepared according to the custom of the time. John 19:39-40 says that Nicodemus brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight . . . [and] took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews." However, because Jesus was crucified on Friday and the Jews were not allowed to "work" on the Sabbath, the preparation of His body was rushed, for it had to be completed before dusk on that day. Evidently, it was incomplete or others were unaware that any preparation had been done, so women went to the tomb early Sunday morning to finish the preparation.

The cave tomb was hewn out of the rock and was like a small room instead of a vertical grave as we commonly have. The body was often laid upon a shelf carved in the cave's wall. The entrances of such tombs were often no higher than a yard, so the person would have to stoop to enter it (20:5). It was

sealed with a large cut stone that was rolled down an incline to keep vandals and animals out. The women's initial concern was how they were going to get into the tomb (Mk. 16:1-3) since they were not strong enough to roll the stone away, but when they arrived at the tomb, the stone had been removed and the body of Jesus was not there.

Immediately, John and Peter were informed about what had transpired. Mary's announcement, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him" suggests that there was no thought of resurrection. "They" could be grave robbers, for grave robbing was fairly common (Carson, 636).

John and Peter then ran to the tomb and when John arrived he stooped down, looked inside, and saw only the linen wrappings filled with the spices used by Nicodemus. Next, Peter went inside and noticed that the face cloth that was presumably used to keep Jesus' jaw in place, was rolled up and lying in a separate location. This is specifically mentioned as historical evidence for the resurrection. It demonstrates that Jesus' resurrection was bodily, not a spiritual continuance of His life in the lives of His disciples, as some have claimed. This is a literal, historical, physical return of the body of Christ from death that is being described. It also made clear that Jesus' body had not been stolen, for no grave robber would have taken the time to unwrap the body and leave behind the expensive spices. This also rules out the theory that the disciples stole the body for they too would have acted in haste. And of course, none of this even addresses the fact that soldiers stood guard over the tomb, for the Jews were concerned that "His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first" (Matt. 27:64).

It has been commonly believed that Jesus passed through the grave clothes (Carson, 637). Later in the chapter, Jesus also appears to pass through doors (Jn. 20:19, 26). Although there is nothing in the text that disproves this, it must be remembered that it does not specifically say this is what happened. The picture is that of an orderly scene, not one of wild confusion (see Morris, 833). Theologically, the empty tomb stresses the continuity between Jesus' pre and post-resurrection body.

John then entered the tomb and he tells us that when he *saw* the wrappings, he *believed*. However, as verse 9 explains, at that time none of them understand that Jesus *must* rise from the dead (v. 9); that is, they didn't understand the divine necessity of the resurrection. In other words, John concluded from the grave clothes alone that a resurrection had indeed taken place, but he was unaware that it was both predicted and necessary. Jesus had to rise from the dead for at least three reasons. First, His resurrection confirmed the sufficiency of His sacrifice by proving that His death was not just the death of another criminal. God had vindicated Him through resurrection (Ro. 4:25). Secondly, resurrection was necessary to complete the salvation of His people. The same resurrection power that brought Him from death to life now operates in the lives of His people (Eph. 1:18-20) and produces in us newness of life. Lastly, His resurrection provides the evidence that our final resurrection will be a reality; He is the first fruits of what is to come (I Cor. 15:20 ff.)

This paragraph introduces the theme of “seeing and believing” which culminates in verse 29. John places himself in the same category as Thomas who did not believe until after he saw.

***20:11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;***

***20:12 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.***

***20:13 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."***

***20:14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.***

***20:15 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."***

***20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).***

***20:17 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.'"***

***20:18 Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.***

The disciples and the other women went back to their homes. Mary remained at the tomb weeping. Although John doesn't mention how Mary got there, it is not difficult to imagine that she returned – perhaps even following the disciples. She once again stooped to look in the tomb, but when she did she saw that two angels had appeared. They simply asked her why she was crying. She wasn't weeping because Jesus had died, but that the body was gone, which made His death even worse. She then sensed someone standing outside of the tomb. Assuming that it was the gardener, she asked if he knew where the body was or if he had taken it somewhere himself.

Many have commented about why Mary did not recognize Jesus. Some point out that His resurrected body was not often immediately recognized (see Lk. 24:16, 31; Jn. 21:4; Kostenberger, 567). This is very possible, but it is also conceivable that Mary was tremendously distraught over the whole event and had no conception that Jesus would rise from the dead. Her mind simply refused to see Him as Jesus. It was also dark, her eyes were blinded by tears, and Jesus could have had His head covered.

Jesus asked Mary the same question that the angels did, but also directed her attention to Himself; He said, “*Whom* (not “*what*”) are you seeking?” “She was looking for a corpse whereas she should have been seeking a person” (Morris, 838). The answer to Mary’s search is self-evident; the one whom she is seeking is asked “for a solution to the mystery of the empty tomb” (Kostenberger quoting Moloney, 568). Then Jesus spoke her name and she immediately recognized Him. Many have pointed out that John 10: 3 and 4 states, “He calls his own sheep by name . . . [and they] follow him because they know his voice. ”

John 20:17 belongs to a handful of one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament; it is not immediately clear what Mary's clinging to Jesus had to do with His ascension. It appears that Jesus' comment, "Stop clinging to Me" marks the turning point in Jesus' relationship to His followers; they can no longer relate to Him in the same manner that they had done before. Perhaps Mary was assuming that Jesus was back to stay, but He wants to make it clear that He was not; He was not going to return to life in the same way that Lazarus had, but was going to ascend to the Father and send the Spirit in His stead. This was not a time for sentimentalities, but Mary was to go and tell the disciples (affectionately called His "brothers") that He had risen.

This also sheds light on the manner of His ascension; Acts 1:9 says, "He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." After Jesus' resurrection He did not associate with the disciples to the extent that He had prior to the crucifixion but rather appeared to them sporadically over a period of time. If Jesus had not ascended as He did, the disciples may have thought that Jesus could appear at any time. His ascension was somewhat of a dramatic farewell to make the finality of what was taking place clear (Carson, 645).

Jesus' words, "My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" are understood in two opposite ways. Some think this shows that Jesus places His relationship to the Father *in a different sphere* than that of the disciples. His sonship is by nature and right, theirs is by adoption and grace; therefore He speaks of "your Father" not "our Father" (Lightfoot, see note 42 in Morris, 842). Others think that Jesus is stressing the privileges that the disciples *share with Him*; because of His death and resurrection, Jesus' Father is their Father and His God is theirs.

Mary did what she was asked to do and reported back to the disciples.

***20:19 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."***

***20:20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.***

The disciples were in hiding; even though Mary's news had reached them, they still did not know what to think. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst (cf. Jn. 15:11; 16:20-24; 17:13). The text does not explain how Jesus entered the room, but the mention of the doors being shut (locked) suggests that the entry was not normal.

Jesus addressed them with a typical Jewish greeting – "Shalom" (Peace) – however, to disciples who were hiding in fear of the Jews, such words must have meant much more to them.

According to Luke 24:37-39, the disciples "were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit." In response Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your

hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." John simply records that He showed them His healed wounds. The disciples rejoiced for they had seen the Lord.

***20:21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."***

***20:22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."***

***20:23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."***

Jesus commissions the disciples as He was commissioned by the Father (see Jn. 17:18).

John 20:22 must be seen as a symbolic act of a soon-to-be reality, for it is clear that the Holy Spirit did not come until after Jesus had ascended. Acts 1:4-5 says, "Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" John himself had also written many times that the Spirit would not come until after Jesus' glorification which included His return to the Father (Jn. 7:39; 14:16-18, 25-26; 16: 12-15; cf. 20:17). The impartation of the Spirit guarantees that the disciples would be empowered to fulfill their commission.

Evidence for the above interpretation can be found in the gospel of John itself. In John 12:20, with the inquiry of the Greeks, Jesus concluded that His hour had come (12:27), and from that time on spoke of His hour as having arrived (12:23, 31; 13:31; 17:1, 5). In John 13:31 Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." In John 17:11 He said, "I am no longer in the world." Yet it is clear in all of these examples that what was being said were things that would shortly happen, not realities that existed as He spoke. Furthermore, there is no hint that Jesus' bestowal of the Spirit in John 20 made any difference in the disciples' behavior. As Carson says, "If John 20:22 is understood to be a Johannine Pentecost, it must be frankly admitted that the results are desperately disappointing, and the promises of John 14-16 vastly inflated" (Carson, 653). It was not until after the event at Pentecost (Acts 2) that visible transformation was apparent.

Verse 23 is difficult to understand. The reception of the Spirit is linked with retention and forgiveness of sins. It says, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." First, it should be pointed out that this is addressing the church, not specific individuals who have authority to absolve sin; "you" is plural. It appears that this is focusing on the fact that Jesus' disciples' mission, when empowered by the Spirit, can be described in the same terminology that Jesus used of His own work. "The Christian ministry is a continuation of Jesus' ministry: through the gift of the Spirit the authority that Jesus exercises in, say, John 9, is repeated in their lives. Jesus there gave both sight and faith to the one who knew he was blind; to those who claimed to see He declared 'Your guilt remains' (9:41). . . And the Paraclete who is given as a gift to Jesus' followers (v. 22)

continues the same two-edged work through them" (Carson, 656). It is through the preaching of the gospel that some will be forgiven and others not.

***20:24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.***

***20:25 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."***

***20:26 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."***

***20:27 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."***

***20:28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"***

***20:29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."***

Thomas (called Didymus, meaning "the twin") had not been present when Jesus had appeared to the others and refused to believe their testimony that they had seen the risen Lord. Thomas' doubt was the skepticism of one who had gone through massive religious disappointment such that he didn't want to be blindsided again. It is possible that he thought that the disciples had seen a ghost, not Christ resurrected in the flesh or he may have been so overcome by the shock of the crucifixion that he guarded his emotions against false hopes. The only way that he would believe was if he had the hard evidence in front of him; only if he saw Jesus himself and could touch His wounds would he believe. This portion of the resurrection account disproves the notion of some that Jesus simply returned as a spirit.

Eight days later Jesus appeared again. If this is calculated in Jewish terms where any part of a day is counted as a day, then this would be the Sunday following Easter (Carson, 657; Morris). The disciples were again gathered and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus (as is so common in this gospel) displays supernatural knowledge and tells Thomas to do the very thing that Thomas said he required if he was to believe (compare 20:25 and 20:27). Literally, Jesus tells Thomas to stop being faithless (unbelieving) but to believe. Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God!" In the Bible "Lord" and "God" are often placed side by side (Ps. 35:23-24). Thomas is not addressing Jesus and God as two separate beings, for the text clearly says that Thomas was speaking to *Him* (i.e. Jesus, 20:28). Rather, this verse forms the concluding statement to the claim that Jesus was God in human flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14, 18). It exemplifies what it means to honor the Son as one honors the Father (Jn. 5:23). At the same time, John 20 shows that Jesus' deity is not limited to Him; Jesus still can address the Father as "My God" (v. 17).

***20:30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;***

***20:31 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.***

Although Jesus performed many miraculous signs, when John wrote his gospel he specifically selected what he wanted so that people might understand who Jesus is and come to have faith in Him. These were signs that all the disciples had seen. The final and greatest sign that pointed to His identity was His resurrection (cf. Jn. 2:18-22).

Even the events in John 20 are handpicked by John for a purpose. They are put together in such a way that through the experiences of the disciples, the pathway to eternal life is seen. The narrative begins with doubt and misunderstanding when they are confronted with the facts of Jesus' resurrection. It then moves to eyes being opened and understanding of what had happened. Mary, John and Thomas come to believe and finally Mary and Thomas make a profession of faith. It is the author's desire that his readers respond as Mary and Thomas did in full profession of faith in Jesus as their Lord and God, and with confident belief that He rose from the dead.