

John #54: Out of the Tomb (John 20:1-18)

PRAY

This world is a scary and sad place to live—and you don't need me to tell you that
We try to cope by not thinking about it, but not thinking about it doesn't make it less real
And this world's brokenness will continue to rudely interfere in our lives
Today, we've got lots of distress and fears over wars breaking out all over the world
Closer to home, we've got Canadian schools getting shot up and Canadian planes crashing
People of faith have great alarm over assisted dying and religious freedom
And that's just the news headlines... We've got *plenty* of anxieties and sorrows in our own lives
For those with kids: What is this world we're raising our kids in? It's crazy!

Believe it or not, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the solution to all of this
It may not completely remove all our griefs and fears, but it should transform them
And I want to show you this today from the way Jesus' resurrection transformed his friends
Their firsthand accounts have been passed down to us
Because they wanted us to know the truth, and to be changed like they were
Even in a world that would continue to be scary and sad
So please **TURN** in a Bible with me to John chapter 20... John 20 [page #906]
Here, John will give us 3 eyewitness accounts, from himself, Peter, and Mary Magdalene

This of course follows right after Jesus' trial, crucifixion, death, and burial in John 19
So the Word became flesh and then lowered himself to the point of death on a cross
And he couldn't go any lower than he'd just gone: into the grave
But now we reach the turning point that tops all turning points
Things had screeched to a complete halt for Jesus—he really died
But now the action picks back up, with exciting passages full of wonder and delight

Let's begin reading, with what happened dark and early Sunday morning: **READ v.1¹**
We only met Mary Magdalene, a long-time follower and friend of Jesus, once in John:
As she stood with other women at the cross of Christ
Now she came to the tomb, after the Sabbath, to add burial ointments to his body
They'd been rushed Friday; so they wanted to make sure he was buried properly

But once Mary sees the heavy stone sealing the entrance rolled away, it sends her into a panic
Jesus was gone! ...But Mary's understanding was as dark as the new day still was
Her alarm was understandable: Imagine burying one of your loved ones in a cemetery,
and then coming to visit the grave a few days later,
only to see a big hole dug where the casket was buried!
We don't know whether Mary looked in the tomb or not, or just made a quick assumption
But she took off to report the scene to some of the men: **READ v.2²**
Picture her bursting into the house where the disciples were staying,
Likely waking them up, gasping for breath, crying, maybe shaking,
And blubbing out that it looked like Jesus' body had been moved
It would've been great if Mary saw the empty tomb, and immediately recalled:

‘Oh yeah, Jesus *said* that he’d be crucified and then raised from the dead!’... But alas, no
Instead, she’s freaked out and anxious and frustrated and maybe even angry
I recently had a pair of sunglasses go missing, and didn’t know where to look for them
Even losing something trivial frustrates us... How much more a body!
And not knowing where to even begin looking

For now, we’ll put a hold on Mary’s point of view, and consider Peter and John’s
As Mary barges in and relays her story, they’re quickly alarmed: [rub eyes] ‘What?!’,
So they bolt out the door, and go careening through town toward the tomb, to investigate:
READ v.3-4³... John was likely younger, and thus faster, than Peter...
As funny as it might sound, John’s not bragging here, ‘Never forget: I got there first!’
Since this entire account is meant to show how they came to believe in the resurrection
Even minor details from the eyewitnesses are important

Can you put yourself in their shoes though, at these moments? How must’ve they felt?
They were panicked, confused, shocked... ‘Oh no.... No no no no no!’

How could someone defile his tomb or desecrate his body even more?!

READ v.5-6a⁴... So John leans over the entrance, panting, and tries to make sense of the scene
Meanwhile, Peter catches up and doesn’t stop at the doorway, but barges right past John,
rushing (true to his nature) impulsively into the tomb, and *saw*: **READ v.6b-7⁵**

We might wonder: What’s with the detailed description of laundry?

If I were recording an account of the most glorious, significant event of all history,
I’d definitely say the tomb was empty... Mention the earthquake, absolutely...
Talk about the tough guards being knocked out, uh yeah... Fiery angels—check...
But neatly-folded strips of linen... Doesn’t seem to fit a dramatic narrative

But there were several key reasons for why John would talk about the empty grave clothes
One: this was evidence that no one simply moved the body... Who’d strip him to do that?
It was also evidence that no one had robbed the grave,
As thieves would never have left the expensive linens and costly spices behind
Further, two men witnessing the same vivid details meant this was a valid legal testimony
And finally, remember that Jesus wasn’t the first person to rise from the dead in John
Back in chapter 11, Jesus had called Lazarus out of his tomb
And Lazarus came out, wearing all his grave clothes
He was coming out to the world of bandages, so to speak
And one day, he would require them again
In contrast to that scene, Jesus’ resurrection body appears to have passed through
his grave clothes altogether, setting them aside, and leaving everything behind
Jesus no longer had any use for grave clothes, and wouldn’t ever again

[tr] When you look closely at this passage, I think the focus is on *where* Jesus is—or isn’t
And over this first paragraph, v.1-10, where is Jesus? The point is: He’s *not* in the tomb!
They go to the tomb, and they go into the tomb, but Jesus is no longer among the dead
And what does that do for his people? As exemplified by John, it starts giving them faith... So:

The absence of the buried Lord can transform fear to faith (v.1-10)

[r] The fact that Jesus was no longer there, in the tomb, transformed their fear to faith
[r] The absence of the buried Lord can (and should) transform fear to faith

So Peter was looking around the empty tomb, probably very puzzled by what he saw
John then follows Peter into the tomb to see things better for himself

And suddenly, there's a life-altering shift that takes place in his heart: **READ v.8⁶**
What did he believe? He can't be referring to anything else but Jesus being alive again
He recognized that Jesus, who'd been dead and buried, was no longer buried nor dead
Many of Jesus' disciples would only have faith in the risen Lord after seeing him alive
But John arrived at that place as well sooner than most

However, John still isn't boasting in his impressive faith here... He doesn't even name himself!

And the next verse will tell us how they still didn't really understand much yet
No, John—and Peter and Mary—are side shows to the One of real significance
Why are we given all the details about running and who arrives first?

It's Easter... Who cares who's faster? ...I like what **Simon Manchester** says:

"It seems to me that what John is telling us is that they really did get to the tomb—in fact, he was even slightly quicker—but they were slow. Slow to understand... [So] Mary's not that impressive, John's not that impressive, Peter's not that impressive—but Jesus had promised, and the evidence was absolutely clear. Does Jesus promise he will rise? Yes. Does he rise? Yes. Does everyone immediately understand? No. The greatness is his!"

The facts didn't lie: The tomb was empty... There was no other explanation

If you think the disciples could've been lying about this, well, sure...

If they were willing to be proven wrong when someone simply produced the body

And if these cowards were willing to risk their own lives for what they knew to be a lie

No, the bold preaching of the apostles and the explosive growth of the early church
are unexplainable apart from an empty tomb⁷

And the empty tomb proves that Jesus' body, though glorified, was physically risen

It wasn't just some spirit showing up later on

Therefore, there's eternal hope for our bodies as well

In order to truly and totally save us, body and soul, Jesus *had to* actually rise from the dead

Though the disciples hadn't connected those dots yet: **READ v.8-9⁸**

John may've been referring to Psalm 16 or Hosea 6 here

But yet again, everything that was happening to Jesus was foreseen by Scripture

It was all prophesied... And it was all part of God's plan, all along

But how does this make sense, that John believed without understanding it all?

Well, that's actually the point: John's fledgling faith was founded on the fact of resurrection

What mattered most was what they had seen—or, in this case, not seen

But it took time for everything else to click in their minds

This was a heart faith, not a head faith... Though the head would inevitably follow

Besides, is this not our usual experience as well? For those here who believe,

When you came to faith, did you understand everything then? Of course not

There were a few key things you had to have understood:

Your sin and need for a Saviour, Jesus saving us by his death and rising

But it takes time to learn and understand how it all fits and works together

You don't need to know everything in order to have simple, saving faith in Jesus

But what about you? As you peer through the eyes of Peter and John today,
And you see that Jesus was absent from the tomb, do you believe?
We know how crazy it may sound to believe that a man really rose again from the dead
Nonetheless, the historical evidence is compelling
And millions—if not billions—have believed this really happened—with good reason
If you take a look around the empty tomb and decide that no, it just couldn't happen,
Or that there must be some other explanation... So be it; you can go on your way
But you owe it to yourself to seriously consider the facts, and be sure of it
Because if Jesus truly did rise from the dead, the implications are massive
It validates everything Christ claimed
And he claimed to be the Giver of Life and the rightful Lord and King of all

Piers Morgan recently had the Christian historian (and Canadian) Wes Huff on his show
Wes claimed confidently that: *“If you could have had a camera running on the tomb in
and around AD 33, then an actual Jesus would have walked out on the third day after his
crucifixion and burial.”*

And Piers, despite his clear skepticism, gets it... He said: *“You see, that is the crux of it,
isn't it? Whether Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected really goes to the absolute essence
and heart of Christianity, because obviously if he was, then that is a miracle, and
everyone who believes in Christianity—what it stands for, and in Jesus himself—would
feel validated by that fact. How else do you explain it? So it's at the very center of it...”*

He then grills Wes on any actual hard evidence, and Wes gives him a great rundown of it
Establishing who Jesus is and what he did, from the earliest historical sources

The question is: What do we do with this? John clearly wants us to follow in his footsteps:
To run to the garden with him, to pace around the empty tomb, to gaze on the linens...
And to conclude: There is no other explanation... Jesus Christ is risen indeed!

We invite you to take this step today, and we're here to help you do it... Please let us know
I hope you believe... I pray you believe... I know your life can be transformed for the better

Faith in Christ can take away fear over current events—if he's alive and reigning over it all
Fear about tomorrow can be transformed into anticipation for what's to come
Fear of the unknown can become faith in the unseen

Faith in the risen Lord can even eliminate that most fundamental, primitive, and
inescapable fear: the fear of death... Transforming it into the joy of life

I want this for you today... It doesn't mean we never get afraid again... We do
But our fears are different now, as we rest our hearts and minds in our risen Saviour's hands

READ v.10... As Peter and John go out of the tomb and head back to where they were staying,
One heart was already changed... And the other would be soon

[tr] So Mary went, 'We don't know where Jesus is'... At first, they are scared and horrified
But as John saw, it was actually good news that they didn't know where he was
He wasn't in the tomb! Death could not hold him; the grave could not keep him
So where was he? Oh, it's about to get really good!

Right in the middle of deep, deep sorrow: **READ v.11**¹⁰

Mary must've followed the guys back after they ran off, but she doesn't go home
She lingers, distraught... Her weeping is mentioned 4 times in this passage

But she didn't need to weep that Jesus wasn't there... Because he *was there*

If the first paragraph stresses Jesus' absence, the second tells us of Jesus' presence... That:

The presence of the risen Lord can transform sorrow to sight (v.11-18)

[r] Or, for us, at least a form of sight... I'll explain

[r] The presence of the risen Lord can transform sorrow to sight

This happened very literally for Mary Magdalene...

v.11 says she stooped to *look* into the tomb

And what did she *see*? God showed her something different than the men saw: **READ v.12¹¹**

That severely understates how incredible this must've appeared

Angels were spectacular heavenly warriors and messengers of extraordinary news

Basically every time angels show up, people get scared to death

But given Mary's non-reaction, maybe they just appeared like men right then

Or maybe she was blind with grief... Or her eyes were spiritually veiled

Whatever the case, heavenly power had invaded the tomb

A neat detail: Why were the angels sitting the way they were, positioned at the head and foot?

Well, where else do you have two angels at both ends of something in the Bible?

On the ark of the covenant! Hovering over each side of the mercy seat

Which was known as the earthly location of God's holy presence

This seems to symbolize Jesus being the fulfillment of God's presence and atonement

And the empty tomb now marked the truest place where God's mercy is revealed

READ v.13a¹²... That should have been rhetorical... She didn't need to answer them

They were trying to tell her that she didn't need to be weeping anymore

Mary blurts out the same concern she's had all day: **READ v.13b¹³** ... 'I don't know where he is'

And it's right then that she either heard or sensed someone behind her, so she turns around...

READ v.14¹⁴... Were her eyes blurry with tears? Was she not looking up at his face?

Did Jesus' glorified body perhaps look a bit different than it had before? Don't know

The effect we're left with again is that Jesus' friends were slow to comprehend

But hear the tender mercy and compassion dripping from Jesus' words: **READ v.15a¹⁵**

But she's still not picking up what he was putting down: **READ v.15b¹⁶**

Presumably so she could take care of his body and re-bury it someplace better

'Why are you weeping?'—'You don't need to be weeping...'

There would never be a need to weep quite as deeply, ever again, in fact

'Who are you looking for?'—That was, as one scholar described it, "*an invitation to reflect on the kind of Messiah she was expecting, and thus to widen her horizons, and to recognize that, grand as her devotion to him was, her estimate of him was still far too small.*"¹⁷

Brothers and sisters, are your estimations of Jesus too small today?

In reality, many of our fears and tears are unnecessary, in light of the resurrection

Don't get me wrong: This world is still incredibly broken, and things can be super sad

There is a time to weep and a time to mourn... Lament is very appropriate

Some of you are carrying a lot of real grief these days

But... everything would be exponentially sadder if Christ were not risen
And everything sad will truly come untrue one day because Christ is risen
So we grieve, but we grieve with unshakeable hope
May we grow in patience, knowing that God is at work in our lives for our good
In a sense, Christ *is* a gardener... Slowly transforming all of us
And may we likewise grow in trust, knowing that Christ will have the final word
As D.A. Carson brilliantly said: *"I'm not suffering from anything a good resurrection can't fix."*

Our world tries so many ways to try to beat death... Health, wellness, fitness, drugs, medical care
We dream of using technology to prolong life or even achieve immortality
Because we know that if death can be overcome, it solves basically everything
But all our efforts will inevitably fall short... But Jesus didn't... He triumphed over death
So we don't need to fear... And we don't need to weep

Mary's eyes are finally opened to truly see in v.16, as Jesus speaks her name: **READ v.16a**¹⁸
Can you hear her gasp with astonishment and delight? [gasp] **READ v.16b**¹⁹
Jesus ended her confusion, frustration, and sorrow with one word
And so: In a passage all about *seeing* Jesus, she recognizes him not by sight, but by his *voice*
Truly: The Good Shepherd *"calls his own sheep by name"*
And his *"sheep follow him, for they know his voice."*²⁰

Mary must've rushed forward to either hug him or bow down at his feet, grasping on to his feet
She'd thought she lost him for good... She wasn't about to lose him again
But, perhaps strangely to us, Jesus resists this, and encourages otherwise in v.17: **READ v.17**²¹
Biblical experts are unsure about exactly what Jesus was getting at here
But here's a guess: Jesus was like, 'Stop hanging on me. I'm still here. I haven't left for heaven quite yet. It's OK; we have a bit more time... You don't need to hold me captive.'
He was implying: 'This is a time for joy, and my other friends need to hear too
So stop holding on to me and go tell them!'

Jesus hadn't left earth yet—he hadn't ascended back to the glories of heaven just yet
That would come soon enough... It was imminent: **READ v.17b**²²
Not that very moment... We totally miss the point if we go, 'Right away?'
He was basically in the process of ascending—of returning to his Father
Over the next 40 days, he appeared to his disciples repeatedly
But he wasn't constantly with them like he was before his death
Why not? Because his home was no longer in this world
He was glorified, and on his way home
He eventually had to go... He had to take his throne... And he had to send the Spirit back down

By the way, v.17 is the first time Jesus calls his disciples 'brothers'—
Right after re-forming his family bonds on the cross... They were now family members
And we can see this again in his words: **READ v.17c**²³... Do you get what that means?
It means that because Jesus is risen, we now share in his sonship to the Father
Which means that through Jesus, we have the same access to God that he has
This should stun you: God is now just as much our Father and God as he was Jesus'!

So don't be afraid... Approach God with confidence... Pray to him
The Father loves you and sent his Son for you
And Jesus rose again so that love never needs to end for all eternity

Having received her marching orders, Mary spread the word: **READ v.18²⁴**

How wonderful: 'He's not in the tomb, for he's alive... And I saw him—out of the tomb!'
We have no idea if Peter or John had said anything... But Mary, at least, bore witness
The Lord's absence in her life had caused her immense grief
But what's changed over the course of this story?

Jesus' presence has returned... She has now seen the Lord
And she is transformed from a bearer of bad news into a gospel evangelist
Do you hear Jesus speaking to you today,
urging you to go and tell others what you have found in him?
The more he transforms our hearts, the more we want others to experience the same

Now, Mary's sorrow was transformed to sight for her...

However, you may think: 'But we're not in the same situation as Mary!
We weren't there! We don't see Jesus... It's not the same.' ...And you're right!
In these last couple verses, we aren't really in the equivalent situation as Mary
But we *are* in the same essential situation as the rest of the disciples, hearing the report
We get the privilege of hearing from those who did see Christ risen
Even now, they are speaking to us through the Scriptures
John saw the empty grave... Mary saw the risen Saviour
We know Jesus' resurrection led to sight, because it did for them

But it doesn't for us... At least not yet

We can see it—behold it, with the eyes of faith, that Jesus is alive
But we aren't called to truly see it right now... We're called to hear it
And we're called to hear with faith, even when we can't see
Our ***"faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*** (Romans 10:17)
So have you heard his word—his message? And have you believed?
Is your life totally different today because you've heard that Jesus is risen?

All that said, I was comfortable phrasing the second major point that way, though
That 'the presence of the risen Lord transforms sorrow to sight'
Not only because it was real in the past... But also because it is coming in the future
Because he lives and reigns now, one day *"every eye will see him"*²⁵
And that will leave those who have faith in him utterly transformed: ***"... We know that when he
appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."*** (1 John 3:2)

CONCLUSION

Do you find yourself wandering through this sad and scary world, fearful and sorrowful?
What—or who—are you seeking? Do you know where Jesus is now?
If not, let me tell you: He is risen and reigning from heaven's throne
And most comforting: By his Spirit, the risen Christ's presence is with us even now
We can tell our souls to rise and take courage, for he is risen—and he is here

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

⁴ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.

⁵ He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

⁶ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed

⁷ HT Carson

⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

⁹ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹⁰ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.

¹¹ And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

¹² They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

¹³ She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ Carson

¹⁸ Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

¹⁹ She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

²⁰ John 10:3-4

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

²² ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

²³ I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

²⁴ ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

²⁵ Revelation 1:7