

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 22ND-23RD, 2023 // GOSPEL OF JOHN

THE EMPTY TOMB (JOHN 20:1-10)

Mary Magdalene was a disciple of Jesus from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2).

- On the first day of the week (Sunday), John tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was still dark (vs. 1).
- We know from the other gospel writers that other women also came to the tomb to "anoint the body of Jesus."

It seems that Mary (and the other women) apparently had no expectations that Jesus would rise from the dead, even though He repeatedly said that He would.

- So when Mary sees the heavy stone rolled away, she assumes that someone has come and taken the body (vs. 2).
- She ran back to Simon Peter and John to tell them the tragic news.

Peter and John heard the news from Mary and immediately went running for the tomb (vs. 3).

- In first-century Jewish culture, grown adults didn't run—but this was a very urgent situation.
- Church history tells us that John was the youngest disciple and Peter was the oldest; nevertheless, John wants us to know that he outran Peter and got to the empty tomb first (vs. 4).

Even though John got to the tomb first, he was hesitant to go inside (perhaps because it would make him unclean or due to the trauma of seeing Jesus crucified, vs. 5).

- True to his character, Simon Peter goes straight inside the tomb and sees the linen grave clothes that had been buried in (vs. 6).
- The linen sheets were still in place, with the cloth that covered the face folded to the side.

The language John uses to describe the state of the linen clothes is remarkable.

- The cloth that covered the face had been folded (vs. 7), but the linen clothes were "lying in their folds": as if the body had evaporated through them, leaving the appearance of a cocoon after a butterfly has escaped.
- No one would steal a body and then rewrap the grave clothes to form the shape of a body—especially if they were pressed for time!

When John entered the tomb after Peter and found it empty, with only the grave clothes left behind, he saw it and believed (vs. 8).

- John didn't quite understand what he saw, yet he still believed (vs. 9).
- Saving faith often occurs before our greatest questions get answered.
- Perfect understanding is not a requirement for knowing God; however, faith is (Heb. 11:6).

MARY (JOHN 20:11-18)

Peter and John went back to the place where they were staying, but Mary stayed behind outside the tomb crying (vs. 11).

- Having been traumatized by seeing Jesus brutally crucified, despite what Peter and John saw, she now believes someone has stolen His body.
- Broken-hearted and hopeless, she weeps. As she weeps, she stoops to look into the tomb (vs. 12).

When she looks inside the tomb, she sees two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had been lying (vs. 12).

- Angels are "ministering spirits" who appear at crucial times in the gospel narratives to announce God's plan to individuals and groups.
- The angels have a very important question for Mary: "Woman, why are you crying?" (vs. 13).

Mary is crying because she believes her Lord, teacher, and friend is completely gone—as well as her hopes and dreams of all that He'd promised.

- Mary sees the two angels, but still apparently has no idea what has just occurred.
- The angels inhabit a different reality—they know what has really occurred, and their question to Mary is a reasonable one.

Mary wondered and worried about where Jesus was, but He wasn't far away (vs. 14-15).

- When she turned and saw Jesus, she didn't immediately recognize Him until He spoke her name (vs. 16).
- Just one word from the risen Jesus changed the entire scene from heartbreak and despair to joy and hope.

When Jesus speaks her name, Mary falls at His feet, saying, "my teacher!" (Rabboni).

- Hopelessness and despair stem from the belief that there is no possible way for a situation or set of circumstances to improve or get better.
- The presence of Jesus amidst despair changes everything—when He speaks our name, we know that we are His and nothing can separate us from His love.

"DON'T CLING TO ME..." (VS. 17)

Jesus was still there, and He wasn't leaving yet.

- Mary didn't need to hang on to Jesus as if to keep Him from leaving.
- Jesus had come back from the dead, and He wasn't yet going to ascend to the Father.
- Mary needed to go back to the disciples and tell them that Jesus was ascending to God the Father, who was now their Father.

Because of His atoning work, Jesus made it possible for His Father to be our Father.

- Jesus has ascended to the Father (Acts 1:9), and so now the people who love Jesus on this earth must learn by faith to love and follow Him without His physical presence with us (this is why we need the Holy Spirit).
- Mary goes back to the disciples and announces that she's "seen the Lord" (vs. 18).

APPEARING (JOHN 20:19-23)

That evening, the disciples were gathered with the doors locked because of their fear (vs. 19).

- They thought locking the doors would offer them some measure of protection from the Jewish authorities, but the locked doors only served as a reminder that nothing can stop the resurrection body of Jesus.
- Jesus appeared among them with a very ordinary, playful greeting, "peace be with you" (Hil).

The disciples began to rejoice when they saw Jesus (vs. 20).

- Jesus then begins to show these disciples His hands and side—even though He has a

perfected, resurrected body, He still is known by His scars (Rev. 5:6).

- The marks on Jesus' hands and side are a reminder of His furious, passionate, atoning love that made our redemption possible.

"...AS THE FATHER SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU" (VS. 21)

Just as Jesus had been sent by the Father to earth for a very important mission, so now Jesus sends His disciples on the same mission.

- They will be His "sent ones" (apostles/representatives) that go into all the world proclaiming the good news of Jesus.
- This is a commissioning that will require of them their very lives.

"RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT..." (VS. 22)

In Genesis 2:7, "...the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

- The Hebrew word for wind, breath, or spirit is Ruach; it's used to describe the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God (Ruach HaKodesh & Ruach Elohim).
- Just as God breathed His breath into Adam and made him alive, so now Jesus breathes on His disciples and gives them a new kind of life: life in the Holy Spirit.
- We cannot live the Christian life without this!
- This reception of the Holy Spirit was temporary; it was an illumination of their hearts for the next fifty days before Pentecost (Acts 2).

Jesus' death and resurrection made the forgiveness of sins possible, and now His sent ones must go out and proclaim and offer that forgiveness (vs. 23).

- God is the one who forgives sins, but the Church is His representative body.
- As we proclaim the gospel clearly, boldly, and accurately, we can speak from authority on what constitutes a faith-filled response that receives forgiveness and what does not.

DOUBTING THOMAS (JOHN 20:24-29)

Thomas was one of the last disciples to see the risen Lord, but he was quite skeptical when he heard the report.

- Thomas refused to believe the testimony of many who had seen Jesus and made an extreme demand for evidence (vs. 24-25).
- Unless these conditions were met, Thomas refused to accept this wild and bizarre nonsense about a resurrection.

Amazingly, Jesus, in His mercy and kindness, granted Thomas the evidence he demanded.

- Jesus invited Thomas to conduct a real, empirical investigation (vs. 26-27).
- Sincere, authentic Christianity always invites sincere, authentic research.
- When Thomas sees the truth of Jesus for himself, his heart explodes with faith—"...my Lord and my God!" (vs. 28).

If Jesus never made the claim to be God...why didn't He stop Thomas when Thomas called Him God?

- Thomas saw and believed Jesus was God, and Jesus was gracious enough to provide Thomas with the evidence He needed.
- But blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet believe (vs. 29).

Some people demand answers to difficult questions, undisputed historical facts, and scientific reason before they'll believe.

- Others demand visions, miracles, healings, audible voices, words of prophecy, and/or ecstatic experiences before they'll believe.
- Still others demand special circumstances to come about or specific answers to certain prayers before they'll believe.

A hardened, cynical, unbelieving heart that demands evidence from God before belief occurs most often won't be satisfied by the evidence when it's provided.

- But those who believe despite what they haven't yet seen will be blessed and rewarded with spiritual sight of the reality of Jesus.
- Jesus triumphs over our unbelief with His presence, even in the midst of our doubts.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK (JOHN 20:30-31)

The four gospel accounts record approximately thirty-five miracles of Jesus (John records only around ten).

- The signs of Jesus that John recorded were given to us as proof that Jesus is Messiah and the Son of God so that we would believe in Him, receive Him, and have life in His name (vs. 31).
- The greatest of those signs is the resurrection of Jesus.

If none of these signs (including the resurrection) actually happened, then Christianity is of no importance at all.

- If it did actually happen, Jesus' offer of eternal life is profound, life-changing, transformative, and the most important message ever.
- But the only thing it cannot be is "somewhat" important.
- This "sign" requires from us a response.

"TO BELIEVE...AND HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME..."

In the greatest question of life, there are only two possible answers—"yes" or "no"—there's no middle ground.

- To stay unmoved is, by default, to say "no" to life in His name.
- To "have life" is to be made right with God, experience spiritual life now, and to live with the hope of eternity in the life to come.

DO I BELIEVE?

- True saving faith in Christ is not intellectual ascent or a disengaged, private admiration.
- It is to trust Jesus so much that you grab ahold of all that He is and you unite yourself to Him in Faith.

DO I HAVE SPIRITUAL LIFE?

- God wants to make you into a new kind of creation through His very breath. Have you been changed?
- Are you living the spiritual life God's called you to?