



John 20:1-16...The Empty Tomb – Witnesses to the Fact

Lesson #54, Gerald Cumby, Teacher

John 20:1-4, Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then 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.” Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So, they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first.

The Judge to Mankind...“Just the Facts, My Friend, Just the Facts!”

- After His burial, the tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:62-66).
- The tomb was sealed and guarded at the request of the Jewish Council. However, when Mary arrived at the tomb (on the first day of the week), the stone had been rolled away, and the tomb was empty.

Question: Was Jesus placed in the tomb on Friday or Thursday?

- According to other gospels, she was not the only woman to come to the tomb that morning (at least three other women accompanied her).
- John mentions Mary was the one who ran back and told the disciples about the empty tomb. Remember, John was not with Mary when she discovered the empty tomb.
- The women probably came to complete the work begun by Joseph and Nicodemus.
- **“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb”...** When Mary saw the empty tomb, her first reaction was to think the body of Jesus was stolen.

Question: Why didn’t she know what had happened to Jesus?

Note the “**We do not know where**”...The plural confirms Mark’s account that she was not alone.

- Peter and John heard the news from Mary and immediately started for the tomb. In keeping with the author’s humility, John did not refer to himself directly, but only as **the other disciple**.

- Peter was older than John. We might picture a man in his late forties or early fifties; therefore, we see Peter running to the tomb with great labor, and a man in his mid-twenties easily outrunning him. The excitement left them breathless.

John 20:5-10, And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

- Whatever kept John from going in (fear of the unknown, not wanting to touch where a body had been, etc.), it didn't stop Peter.
- When Peter finally arrived, he immediately **went into the tomb**.
John wanted to stop and think about it... but Peter went right in.
- Peter **saw** that the cloths were still orderly and neat...as if the body evaporated out of its coverings.
- **The other disciple (John) saw and believed.**
 - ✓ Generally, the very first Christians did not believe in the resurrection only because the tomb was empty, but because *they saw and met the resurrected Jesus.*
 - ✓ John was something of an exception; he believed simply by seeing the empty tomb, before meeting the resurrected Jesus.
- **Some of the best books on the Resurrection have been written by lawyers, some of whom originally set out to disprove it...but came away convinced that Jesus was indeed the Christ (Lawyers like Frank Morrison, Gilbert West, J.N.D. Anderson, and Sir Edward Clark).**

Knowing the fact of the resurrection is an important start, but not enough. We need to let the Bible tell us the meaning and the importance of Jesus' resurrection.

- **The resurrection means that** “Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

- **The resurrection means that** we have assurance of our own resurrection: “*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).
- **The resurrection means** that Jesus has a continuing ministry: “*He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25).
- **The resurrection means** that Christianity and its God are unique; completely different and distinct among world religions.
- **The resurrection proves** that though it looked like Jesus died on the cross as a common criminal, He actually died as a sinless man, out of love and self-sacrifice to bear the guilt of our sin.

The death of Jesus on the cross was the payment, but the resurrection was the receipt, showing that the payment was perfect in the sight of God the Father.

John 20:11-16, **But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then 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.” Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).**

- Mary wanted to see what Peter and John saw, so she wanted to LOOK for herself. In the moment between Peter and John’s examination and Mary’s, something was different in the tomb...**She saw two angels in white sitting** where Jesus’ body had been.
- Mary didn’t seem to react with shock or fear; she probably did not immediately perceive that they were angels (Hebrews 13:2).

The Word of God is perfect:

- **One angel at the head and the other at the feet:** “So were the cherubim placed at each end of the mercy-seat (Exodus 25:18, 19).”

- **Mary wasn't thinking or dreaming that Jesus was alive.** She believed He was still dead, and only wanted to know where He was so she could do the final work of preparing His body for burial.
- **Mary wondered and worried about where Jesus was, but He wasn't far away.**
 - ✓ Mary certainly knew who Jesus was, and it was strange that she did not immediately recognize Him.
 - ✓ Some think it was because she was emotionally distressed and had tears in her eyes. Others speculate it was because Jesus looked somewhat different, retaining at least some of the marks of His suffering.
- ***Jesus did not immediately reveal Himself to Mary. It wasn't to play some trick on her; it was to break through her unbelief and forgetfulness of Jesus' promise of resurrection.***

Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

- **Jesus had only to say one word, and all was explained.** She heard in the name and the tone the voice of her beloved Messiah and instantly called Him **Rabboni**.
- Her eyes failed her, but her ears could not mistake that voice saying her name. Never was a one-word utterance more charged with emotion than this word spoken by Jesus.
- **Charles Spurgeon stated, “Jesus can preach a perfect sermon in one word.”**

At the name of Jesus, every living thing will bow. Creation's author and editor-in-chief has spoken... “The final painting is on display. An example of perfection. Jesus paid the debt for our salvation.”

Jesus is going to call your name out one of these days!

Does he know you? We don't need to worry whether he remembers us...HE WILL!

If you know Him...Say, “AMEN AND AMEN.”

Scriptures used for further reading and References on next page.

SCRIPTURES TO REMEMBER:

Matthew 27:62-66, The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, **‘After three days I will rise again.’** ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”⁶⁵ **“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”** ⁶⁶ **So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.**

Mark 16:1-3, When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

Hebrews 13:2, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

Exodus 25:18-19, “And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. ¹⁹ Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends.”

John 2:19, Jesus answered and said unto them, “Destroy this temple, and **in three days** I will raise it up.”

Mark 8:31 Jesus says, “**The Son of Man will rise again after three days.**” He mentions the same event in John 2:19 as “**in three days**,” and on various occasions the Gospel writers tell us Jesus used the phrase “**on the third day**” (see, e.g., Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 24:46). On the face of it, this might seem to involve a flat contradiction. While both predictions could be wrong, is it really possible both could be right?

It is Biblically sound to understand that Jesus died and was buried on Friday (Jewish Time) and his body resurrected on Sunday (Jewish Time). Basically, the term “On the 3rd day” would be easier to understand. The most frequent reference to Jesus’ resurrection reveals that He rose from the grave on the third day of His entombment. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus as prophesying that He would arise from the grave on this day (Matthew 17:23; Mark 9:31; Luke 9:22).

While preaching to Cornelius and his household, Peter taught that God raised Jesus up “on the third day” (Acts 10:40). The fact is, however, Jesus also taught (and Mark recorded) “that the Son of Man” would “be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31, emp. added). Furthermore, Jesus elsewhere prophesied that He would be in the heart of the Earth for “three days and three nights” (Matthew 12:40). So which is it? Did Jesus rise from the dead on the third day or after three days?

In the first century, any part of a day could be computed for the whole day and the night following it (cf. Lightfoot, 1979, pp. 210-211). As awkward as it may sound to an American living in the 21st century, a person in ancient times could legitimately speak of something occurring “on the third day,” “after three days,” or after “three days and three nights,” yet still be referring to the same exact day.

The Scriptures contain several examples which clearly show that in Bible times a part of a day was often equivalent to the whole day.

- According to Genesis 7:12, the rain of the Noahic Flood was upon the Earth “forty days and forty nights.” Verse 17 of that same chapter says it was on the Earth for just “forty days.” Who would argue that it had to rain precisely 960 hours (40 days x 24 hours) for both of these statements to be true?
- In Genesis 42:17 Joseph incarcerated his brothers for three days. Then, according to verse 18, he spoke to them on the third day and released them (all but one, that is).
- In 1 Samuel 30:12,13, the phrases “three days and three nights” and “three days” are used interchangeably.
- When Queen Esther was about to risk her life by going before the king uninvited, she instructed her fellow Jews to follow her example by not eating “for three days, night or day” (Esther 4:16). The text goes on to tell us that Esther went in unto the king “on the third day” (5:1, emp. added).
- Perhaps the most compelling Old Testament passage which clearly testifies that the ancients (at least occasionally) considered a portion of a twenty-four hour period “as the whole of it” is found in 2 Chronicles 10. When Israel asked King Rehoboam to lighten their burdens, he wanted time to contemplate their request, so he instructed Jeroboam and the people of Israel to return “after three

days” (2 Chronicles 10:5, emp. added). Verse 12, however, indicates that Jeroboam and the people of Israel came to Rehoboam “on the third day, as the king had directed, saying, ‘Come back to me the third day’”. Fascinating, is it not, that even though Rehoboam instructed his people to return “after three days,” they understood this to mean “on the third day.”

Even though in modern times some may find this reasoning somewhat confusing, similar idiomatic expressions frequently are used today. For example, we consider a baseball game that ends after only completing 8½ innings a “9-inning game.” And even though the losing pitcher on the visiting team only pitched 8 innings (and not 9 innings like the winning pitcher from the home team), he is said to have pitched a complete game.

Consider also the guest at a hotel who checks in at 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, and checks out at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday—less than 24 hours later. Did the man stay one day or two days at the hotel? Technically, the guest was there for less than one full day (24-hour period), yet the hotel legally can charge him for two days since he did not leave before the mandatory 11:00 a.m. checkout time.

We could argue to be arguing...or, realize that Jesus was right on time, right on schedule, and right where He said He would be.

I love the Scripture found in John 11:25-26 quoting Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Do we understand it? Do we have any idea how Jesus states it so emphatically and asks us to believe it? Do we understand the idea of being born-again? No...our finite minds cannot understand it! But, the Holy Spirit reveals to us that we can believe it to be true and take the truth of the Scripture “to the bank” and know that our salvation has been bought with a price and has been paid for by the King of all Kings, Jesus.

Elon Musk and the elites of the world can’t explain it; however, we who have believed the truth in Christ Jesus can know we will be with the King of all Kings for eternity.

References and Materials Used:

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- **Lightfoot, John (1979 reprint), *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).**