

## Celebrating the Risen Christ!

John 20:1-10, Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

*Please read John 20:1-10 before going further in this transcript.*

Today's Scripture reading from John 20 talks about the Empty Tomb. On Friday afternoon, Jesus' body had been placed in this tomb, and a stone was rolled over the entrance; but by Sunday morning, His body was no longer there. This was an absolute surprise to Jesus' earliest followers; it caused a variety of reactions among them: panic, confusion, weeping, doubt, ...as well as belief. Now there's a lot of additional information that can be found in the following verses of John chapters 20-21. But rather than jumping ahead to that information, let's travel back in time to the events in John 20:1-10.

John 20:1 begins, "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance." "The first day of the week" refers to Sunday, which also happens to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> day since Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>1</sup> The fact that it was still dark out, highlights Mary Magdalene's eagerness to get there as early as she could.<sup>2</sup> She came to the tomb that morning to grieve her loss; she was feeling deeply distraught by the death of Jesus, and all of the recent events surrounding His arrest and mistreatment.<sup>3</sup> *(By the way, the other gospel accounts clarify that Mary Magdalene wasn't the only woman*

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<sup>1</sup> "It is remarkable that all four Gospels (cf. Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1) introduce their respective resurrection accounts by specifying the first day of the week, rather than 'the third day' after the crucifixion (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3, 4), despite Jesus' passion predictions (Mk. 8:31 par.). The reason is disputed, but it may have to do with the desire to present the resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of something new." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 635.

<sup>2</sup> Even though it was still dark out, Mary Magdalene knew right where the tomb was, because she'd been there when Jesus' body was placed inside. Mark 15:47 records, "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid." Matthew 27:59-61 records, "59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb." John 19:38-42 clarifies that Nicodemus assisted Joseph with this task.

<sup>3</sup> Later on that same day, in verse 11, we find Mary back outside the tomb weeping. The original Greek indicates wailing, with an emphasis on the noise that accompanied her weeping. κλαίω: "to weep or wail, with emphasis upon the noise accompanying the weeping—'to weep, to wail, to lament, weeping, crying.'" Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 303.

to go to the tomb that morning, but, for whatever reason, at this point, John focuses in on Mary Magdalene.<sup>4</sup>)<sup>5</sup>

Mary Magdalene had been a deeply devoted follower of Jesus for some time now: Luke 8:2 mentions, "...some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out." She and several other women had been traveling from place to place with Jesus and His 12 Apostles. These women were devoted followers of Jesus, who were helping to financially support His ministry.<sup>6</sup> Now, we aren't given any more details about these seven demons, but we can only imagine how terrible it must have been for Mary, before she was delivered from this state of demonic possession. And we don't know how long she was in this terrible situation. What we do know, is that she was delivered from all seven of these demons, and the context indicates that Jesus Himself was the one who cast them out. Mary Magdalene's life had been forever changed by Jesus. She followed Jesus from that day forward, right on up to the cross. John 19:23 says, "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." Mary Magdalene stayed near Jesus right on up to the bitter end. She was there that day. With her very own eyes, she'd watched Jesus hang on the cross.

So Mary Magdalene had been following the events of Jesus' final days very closely, which is why she went to the tomb bright and early that Sunday morning. John 20:1 mentions that "...the stone had been removed from the entrance." At this time in history, the stones that were rolled over the entrance to a tomb were typically quite heavy, often requiring 2-3 strong men to move them. Since the stone was round, the tomb was designed with a curved slot or space in the ground in which it would rest, making it even more difficult to roll open. All of this was designed to discourage grave robbers and animals from getting in.<sup>7</sup> So, when Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance, she immediately assumed

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<sup>4</sup> There could be any number of reasons for this, including the possibility that she first went there alone, and then the other women joined her a little later. A number of very plausible possibilities exist, and we needn't worry that John got it wrong. Each Gospel author decided, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which details to include and which to leave out.

<sup>5</sup> "Mary Magdalene appears in the crucifixion and resurrection story in all four Gospels, but apart from that we read of her only in Luke 8:2-3." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2011, p. 1806 footnote on John 19:25.

<sup>6</sup> See Luke 8:1-3.

<sup>7</sup> "The robbing of graves was a crime sufficiently common that the Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54) eventually ordered capital punishment to be meted out to those convicted of destroying tombs, removing bodies or even displacing the sealing stones." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 636.

that a group of people must have come and rolled the stone away, and moved Jesus' body somewhere else.

Matthew 28:2 gives us some helpful information about who rolled back the stone, "...an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone...." To be clear though, Jesus didn't need the stone to be rolled back in order for Him to get out of the grave. Jesus rose from the dead with unimaginable power and authority, so mere stone walls wouldn't have been any problem for Him. There are also indications later on in chapter 20 that Jesus' risen and glorified body wasn't subject to the limits of the natural laws of this earth, so He could pass right through walls and doorways.<sup>8</sup> Be that as it may, the angel didn't remove the stone for Jesus' benefit, but rather for the benefit of those coming to visit His grave. The open tomb prompted them to look inside, which then revealed... that the empty tomb was *empty*; otherwise they would have had no way of knowing. But the grave couldn't hold Jesus any longer, whether there was a stone in the way or not!<sup>9 10</sup>

John 20:2 goes on, "So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" The other disciple mentioned here, who's described as "the one Jesus loved," is a reference to the Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John.<sup>11</sup> This seems to be John's creative way of referring to himself throughout his own Gospel. And to be clear, John isn't suggesting by this description, that Jesus didn't love the other disciples, but rather that he himself felt especially close to Jesus, and personally loved by Him. The fact is, the more that any one of us draws near to Jesus, the more deeply loved and privileged we'll feel, because Jesus is fully God, and God is love. So we can be confident that Jesus loves ALL of His disciples; He has a personal fondness and affection for each and every one of His followers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This is suggested by John 20:19, which records, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

<sup>9</sup> So the explanation for the empty tomb really had little to do with the angel rolling the stone away, it had everything to do with God the Father raising Christ from the dead in power!

<sup>10</sup> Consider one case made by <https://dwrightlongenecker.com/c-s-lewis-science-fiction-and-why-jesus-walked-through-walls/> but also the case made by <https://www.knowableword.com/2019/06/28/did-jesus-walk-through-a-wall/>

<sup>11</sup> See John 13:23-24.

<sup>12</sup> In William Young's book, *The Shack*, there's a line, "I am especially fond of him," referring to multiple different people, thus revealing God's heart for each individual. Jeremiah 31:3 reveals Yahweh's heart for His people, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

Mary Magdalene's initial assumption is that someone had carried Jesus' body out of the tomb, meaning that she assumed Jesus was still dead. So at this point, she hadn't yet realized that Jesus had risen.<sup>13 14</sup> Well this is when the footrace begins between Peter and John. John gets there first but he doesn't go into the tomb. John 20:5-7 says, "5 He [John] bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen." The strips of linen lying there were a pretty good indicator that no one had simply moved Jesus' body. The *ESV* captures an important nuance here: "6 ...He [Peter] saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself."<sup>15</sup> If someone had removed Jesus' body from the tomb, verse 7 causes us to wonder why they would have taken the time to remove the face cloth and linens? This probably wouldn't have been all that easy to do, especially given the condition of the body, and the amount of embalming spices that had been used.<sup>16 17</sup> And even if they did decide to remove them for some reason, why take the time to fold up the headcloth and place it by itself?<sup>18</sup>

John 20:8 goes on, "Finally the other disciple [*John*], who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed." Unlike Peter, John was a little hesitant to just barge into the tomb. And that's understandable; after all, it may have felt a bit creepy entering into the resting place of the dead. Nonetheless, John finally goes in. Now, all that John had seen up to this

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<sup>13</sup> Note that Mary Magdalene says "WE," "we don't know where they have put him." So even though the writer of this Gospel doesn't mention their names, there may very well have been other people with Mary Magdalene at this time. See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2011, p. 1807 footnote on John 20:2.

<sup>14</sup> However, Carson notes: "Many argue that the plural 'we' (v. 2) hints that Mary Magdalene was not alone on her first trip to the tomb (though other explanations for the 'we' are possible: e.g. Bultmann [p. 684 n. 1], rightly cites both Aramaic and Greek parallels where the plural is merely a mode of speech, without plural referent)." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 635.

<sup>15</sup> A number of scholars have suggested that when God the Father raised His son from the dead, He gave Him a new, glorified body that could pass through the burial wrappings. "What seems clearest is the contrast with the resurrection of Lazarus (11:44). Lazarus came from the tomb wearing his grave-clothes, the additional burial cloth still wrapped around his head. Jesus' resurrection body apparently passed through his grave-clothes, spices and all, in much the same way that he later appeared in a locked room (verses 19, 26)." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 637.

<sup>16</sup> John 19:39 mentions that Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes for Jesus' body.

<sup>17</sup> "He saw the strips of linen...lying there, evidence enough that no-one had simply moved the body. Nor would thieves have been likely to leave behind expensive linen and even more expensive spices." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 637.

<sup>18</sup> "Evidence that no one simply moved the body. It is unlikely that thieves would have taken the time to remove the cloth, leave behind the expensive linen and even more expensive spices, or leave the cloth in an orderly arrangement." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2195 footnote on John 20:6-7.

point was the empty tomb, with the strips of linen and the head cloth. He hadn't yet seen the risen Christ, and yet... the evidence of the empty tomb was apparently enough for him. Verse 8 says, "He saw and believed."

John had been with Jesus since the very beginning of His earthly ministry. Way back to when he'd been one of Simon Peter's fishing partners and Jesus had invited them to follow Him. John was there that day when they caught the miraculous catch of fish and just about sank both boats. That was the moment in his life when he pulled his fishing boat up on shore and left everything to follow Jesus.<sup>19</sup> John had also been there at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified. Jesus looked down from His cross and saw John standing near His mother, and He asked him to look after her. So John was at the cross that day, and he knew, without a doubt, that Jesus had died.<sup>20</sup> And now in verse 8, when John saw the empty tomb, he believed. Later on, in verse 29, the risen Christ tells Thomas, "...Because you [*Thomas*] have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." So John was one of Jesus' followers who was blessed to believe *before* he saw the risen Christ!<sup>21</sup> After years of following Jesus, after sitting under His teaching, and watching Him heal and do miracles, the empty grave was enough to seal the deal for him. For John, this was the moment when everything clicked: Jesus had risen from the dead!<sup>22</sup> It was all true, everything that Jesus had claimed about Himself, all that He had taught His disciples, and all that He had promised.<sup>23</sup> And just like Peter and the other Apostles, John would now go on to testify about Jesus' resurrection for years to come.

John 20:9 goes on to make an interesting textual commentary, "(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)" So even though they were firsthand, eyewitnesses of the evidence for

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<sup>19</sup> See Luke 5:1-11.

<sup>20</sup> See John 19:25-27.

<sup>21</sup> Here's a glorious thought: one day every believer will get to see the Risen Christ! See 1 John 3:2.

<sup>22</sup> By the way, Luke 24:12 gives us a bit more insight into Peter's initial reaction to the empty tomb, "Peter...saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."

<sup>23</sup> "Most of the early witnesses came to faith in Jesus as the resurrected Lord not because they could not find his corpse but because they found Christ alive; but John testifies that he came to such faith before he saw Jesus in resurrected form. And he took this step, not simply because the tomb was empty, but because the grave-clothes were still there." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 638.

Jesus' resurrection, they were still putting the puzzle pieces together.<sup>24 25 26</sup> You see, much of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, was a mystery to those living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, even though they'd read and studied the Old Testament their entire lives. And one of the key ways that God unlocked the mystery of Christ, was by raising Jesus from the dead, which opened up a whole new level of understanding of God's master redemptive plan.<sup>27</sup> Some 50 days later, at Pentecost, Peter's sermon illustrates that Jesus' followers were starting to catch on to how the Old Testament had predicted the Risen Christ. Acts 2:31-32 says, "31 Seeing what was to come, he (King David in the Old Testament) spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it." Acts is referring back to Psalm 16:9-11, where David is confident that God would not abandon him to the realm of the dead, because He would not abandon their Messiah to the realm of the dead. Jesus' body would not see decay but rather would be raised in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. David's own hope rested secure in the future resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is why John 20:9 says, "Jesus *had to* rise from the dead." He had to: the future life and eternity of all of God's people depended on it.

Well this leads us to a few closing applications: there are wonderful reasons to celebrate Jesus rising from the dead.

### **Reasons to celebrate Jesus' resurrection!**

**First of all,**

#### **1) It proves that Jesus was telling the truth.**

Jesus was telling the truth about Himself. All that He said and did, everything He taught, was true. And His resurrection provides demonstrable, verifiable evidence.<sup>28</sup> The testimony of the Apostle John which we talked about today illustrates this well: "He saw and believed." John, along with the rest of the Apostles, and many other believers as well, went on to live bold lives of courageous faith. Acts 4:33 records that... "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." They went on to testify about Jesus' resurrection for the rest of

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<sup>24</sup> "The disciples did not perceive from OT prophecy 'that Jesus had to rise from the dead,' so they certainly did not make up a resurrection story to fit a preconceived understanding of OT prophecy." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2196 footnote on John 20:9.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus further explains the Old Testament Scriptures to two of His disciples in Luke 24:27, on the road to Emmaus, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Also consider Luke 24:44-47.

<sup>26</sup> Consider John 1:45 and 1 Peter 1:11, and see Genesis 3:15; Numbers 21:9; and Deuteronomy 18:15. Also consider Psalm 2; Isaiah 7:14, 52:13-53:12; and Malachi 3:1.

<sup>27</sup> See 1 Peter 1:10-11. "the resurrection of Jesus opened a door of understanding." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 632.

<sup>28</sup> "the resurrection proved that he was vindicated by God, and therefore none less than the Messiah, the Son of God he claimed to be." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 632.

their lives; many of them becoming Christian martyrs, who were put to death because they would not renounce their faith.

Jesus' resurrection is important not only as an apologetic though.

**2) It also assures us that God the Father accepted Jesus' payment for our sin.**

To be clear, Jesus didn't raise Himself from the dead; He was raised from the dead by His Heavenly Father.<sup>29</sup> Acts 2:24 says, "But *God* raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." We could think of it this way: On Good Friday, Jesus declared that His redemptive work was done: "It is finished!" And then on Easter morning, God the Father declared: "Paid in full!"

So God the Father is the One who accepted Jesus' payment, and then He raised Him: "Come on out of that grave Son!" Romans 4:25 says that... "[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." "Justification" means "made right." Jesus' payment for our sins made us right with God; His death was entirely effective in our justification. Jesus' once and for all, perfect sacrifice for our sin got the job done. God vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead, providing us with indisputable evidence that Jesus' payment for sin was sufficient and acceptable to Him. His holy wrath against sin has been satisfied because it was poured out on Jesus at the cross. The penalty for sin is now officially paid in full for anyone who places their trust in Christ.

This leads right into a third and final reason to celebrate Jesus' resurrection:

**3) It offers us new life in the present, and eternal life in the future.**

Romans 6:4 says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." 2 Corinthians 5:17 says it this way: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" In other words, Jesus' resurrection offers us new life in the here and now. We are no longer trapped in our sin, because He defeated it at the cross. We are no longer trapped in our old life, in our old way of living, because Jesus' resurrection offers a whole new life to those who put their faith in Him.

In addition to being offered new life in the present, Jesus' resurrection also offers us eternal life in the future. 1 Corinthians 6:14 says, "By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also."<sup>30</sup> You see,

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<sup>29</sup> See Acts 2:24,32 and

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20 agrees, "...Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Jesus' resurrection is just the first of many other resurrections still to come in the future. Romans 6:5 agrees, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his."<sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> The way for us to be united with Jesus in His death and resurrection is through faith. So for those of us who've put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, there awaits a future resurrection. It's an amazing opportunity to live forever in the new heaven and earth, enjoying God's presence for all eternity.<sup>33</sup> Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 10:9 adds, "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

None of the celebration that we're talking about here this morning is personally applicable, until we've done this: declared Jesus as Lord and believed in our heart that He was raised from the dead. In order for us to enjoy the blessings that flow from Jesus' resurrection, we need to turn from our sin, and believe that Jesus' sacrifice can save us. We need to admit that we have a sin problem; that we've done and said things that are not according to God's plan. The reason Jesus came to this earth was to seek and save spiritually lost people. Jesus died and was raised again in order to provide the one and only way for us to be made right with God. So each of us is left with a personal choice: will we turn away from Him, and reject His offer, or will we turn from our sin and turn to Christ, and join in the joy-filled celebration of the Risen Christ.

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<sup>31</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 15:23.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26 says it well, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Also consider 1 Corinthians 15:54-57.

<sup>33</sup> 2 Timothy 1:10 says, "Christ Jesus... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."