

TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 20: 1-10: Mary Magdalene Discovers the Empty Tomb

"Now 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. ² 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."³ Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. ⁴ So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. ⁵ And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples went away again to their own homes."

Background Notes

Verse 1 tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb *"while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."* We know from the other Gospels that other women came to the tomb with Mary Magdalene. Mary ran and told Peter and John, *"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."* Peter and John then ran to the tomb. John outraced Peter, probably because he was younger, but John didn't go into the tomb immediately. John looked into the tomb, but he didn't enter it until Peter arrived.

John refers to himself here as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." He referred himself in this way in John 13 and John 19 as well. When Peter arrived, he went directly into the tomb to check things out (v6). Peter, you remember, was always the more impulsive disciple! Then John also entered the tomb(v8).

What does it mean, that the disciples "entered into" the tomb? The tombs of the first century were not like the graves of today. They were like hand-hewn caves; rooms or chambers cut out of solid rock, with long shelves or "niches" cut into the rock walls where bodies would be laid. A rich man's tomb, such as the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea where our Lord was buried, would have had two chambers. There would have been an inner chamber with the shelves or niches in the wall, but there would also have been an outer chamber called the "weeping chamber," where mourners could gather. A large circular stone would seal the entrance to this outer chamber. It seems that Peter and John bent down and entered the outer weeping chamber, because the stone was already rolled back (v1).

"And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there..."(v5). In verse 5-7 we read of the linen wrappings, or linen grave-clothes. It is significant that the plural is used in the Gospel of John to describe the linen wrappings, because the question always

comes up, "What about the Shroud of Turin?" The Shroud of Turin is a relic of the Catholic Church that is kept in a shrine in Turin, Italy. This linen cloth purports to be the burial wrapping, or burial shroud, of Jesus Christ. Is the Shroud of Turin the authentic burial shroud of Jesus Christ? We don't know, but it doesn't seem to easily fit into the data given in John 20. The linen clothes or wrappings (plural) seemed to indicate strips of cloth, not a burial shroud. Now it could always be argued that a burial shroud is included here as part of the grave clothes, particularly because the other gospels do mention a linen cloth (singular). However, even if the plural grave wrappings include a burial shroud, it doesn't mean that the famous Shroud of Turin is the authentic burial Shroud of Christ. In fact, a recent radioactive-carbon test of that shroud pretty conclusively proved that it is not first century cloth, but rather cloth from the Middle Ages. Thus the Shroud of Turin is probably an artist's rendering.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. The resurrection of Christ is the best explanation of the evidence.

If you disprove the resurrection of Christ, you've taken away the basis of the Christian faith. Unbelievers will try to do just that! They will try to explain away the resurrection of Christ. But that is not easy to do. A skeptic can't just "write off" the resurrection of Christ as a legend, because there is too much evidence. So the skeptic has to either say, "The evidence was made up," or he has to explain evidence away by another means.

Some skeptics try to say that early Christians made up this evidence. If so, the skeptic has to logically explain why those same early Christians made it up the way they did, and how could they get so many people to believe it, and why they would actually die for their faith when they knew that the resurrection story was fabricated!

For example, in the resurrection accounts we see that Mary Magdalene and the other women bravely went to the tomb very early in the morning. After they saw that the tomb was empty, they told the men, who wouldn't believe until they saw for themselves. In addition, it is recorded that the Lord appeared first to a woman! Now if the early church had actually fabricated the accounts of the resurrection, most likely they would not have made it up that way. They would never have made the **women** out to be the brave "heroes" of the story, or nor would they decide to make up that the Lord appeared first to a **woman!** Remember, the early Christians were Jews who were coming out of Judaism, and their views of the status of women were anything but praiseworthy -- they would never have made **women** out to be the heroes of the tale! And if the early Christians had made up the account, we would think that they would surely have made the men appear to have at least a little more faith and courage!

If the unbelieving skeptic admits that the early Christians didn't make up the evidence, they have to explain the evidence away differently. Well, they have a tough job doing that as well, because there are so many details associated with this evidence. This evidence is not just one point -- there are a lot of details associated with it. How did these details get to be a part of the biblical record if indeed they're not part of the actual evidence? For example, if the skeptic tries to explain away the evidence of the empty tomb by saying that the disciples stole the body of Jesus, then he has to explain all of the details that are given in association with the historical record.

Here are just a few of the details that we see in John 20. Clearly this account of Mary and the disciples shows that the empty tomb was a surprise to them (v2). We see that Mary thought the body has been removed -- not by the disciples, but by the authorities, or more likely Joseph of Arimathea. Peter and John were obviously taken by surprise; they ran to the tomb to check it out. John didn't enter at first because he looked in and saw the grave

clothes lying undisturbed in the inner chamber -- he probably thought that the body was still there. Then when he and Peter went into the tomb to check out those grave clothes, it was obvious that the body wasn't stolen -- after all, you don't leave the grave clothes behind if you're going to steal a body! And by the way, another piece of evidence is the head cloth, that covered the head -- it was folded neatly to one side. So here's the point - if indeed the explanation of the empty tomb is that the disciples stole the body, this skeptic has to explain away all these associated details. After all, these details are part of the record; they became accepted by everyone as true.

In addition, you would think that the skeptic, who's trying to explain away all this evidence, would certainly come up with some explanation of how the disciples were able to steal the body. Remember the tomb was sealed with an official Roman seal, and there were the guards on watch, and so forth.

Don't you see, the resurrection of Christ is best explained by the **evidence**?

2. The resurrection of Christ is predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures.

In verse 9 we read, *"For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."*

Where in the Old Testament was the resurrection of Christ predicted? Turn to Acts 13:32, which is part of Paul's sermon to the people of Galatia: *"And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us, their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second psalm, "You are My Son. Today I have begotten You."* So you see, quoted right there in Act 13:32-33 is a Scripture, Psalm 2:7, showing a prediction of the resurrection of Christ in the Old Testament.

Read on further in Acts 13:35: *"Therefore He also says in another psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'* That quote is from Psalm 16:10: *"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."*

And there are others. In Isaiah 53:10 we read, *"When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand."* The fulfillment of that prophecy necessitates the bodily resurrection of the Suffering Servant. It's a prediction of the resurrection of Jesus Christ! In Psalm 22 (a Messianic psalm), after the death of the Messiah, we hear Him speaking: *"I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You"* (v22). This means that the Messiah would have to come back to life.

And there are more Old Testament Scriptures -- in fact, all of the Old Testament Scriptures predicting the glorious reign of the Messiah on earth can only be fulfilled if the Messiah is bodily raised from the dead after His death!

Practical Application

When in doubt, check it out!

When Peter and John were told that the tomb was empty, they ran to the tomb to check it out. When John saw the evidence, he believed (v8). He believed **on the basis of the evidence!** This was no leap into the darkness!

When in doubt, check it out. Whenever you have doubts about the Christian faith, don't run away! Don't sweep your doubts under the rug, or don't pretend they don't exist. Don't throw in the towel and toss away your faith -- check it out! The Lord will give you the answers you need. Maybe right now you have some doubts. When in doubt, check it out! If you have doubts about the resurrection, check out the evidence.

There are many stories of people who have come to faith when they began to check out the evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the basis of the Christian faith. Just one example. Years ago, a man named Lew Wallace tried to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, on the basis of the overwhelming amount of **evidence** for the resurrection, he became a believer! He wrote the book *Ben Hur*, a novel from the time of Christ, which became an Academy Award-winning film.

Recently I was talking to a man who became a Christian as a teenager. His father is still not a Christian, and he doubts everything about the Christian faith. The Christian man keeps challenging his father -- check out the evidence! But his father will not check it out. Here's the irony -- for 25 years his father worked for the FBI, and was constantly checking out evidence! Sadly, he will not take time to check out the evidence for the Christian faith.

When in doubt, check it out!