

The Resurrection: It's In the Details

John 20:1-9

Our author is the Brother of James, son of Zebedee and one of Jesus' closest companions. John was called to be a disciple of Christ early on and so his presence is seen and felt throughout all the Gospels. And so when John began to pen his gospel he did so with the sole focus being to proclaim the authenticity and truth of Christ to believers and unbelievers in the region of Ephesus. And wants others to know and see what he saw, knows, and experienced.

READ TEXT: John 20:1-9 (1000)

John begins by saying that it's early in the morning and Mary comes to the tomb – and as she approaches John starts to lay out these beautiful images that set the stage.

It's early – I mean it's early. And while John doesn't tell us the exact time - he doesn't have to. Mary is simply there not only before everyone else, not only before the rooster crows, but before any other person would even imagine going out. It's simply dark. And for whatever reason Mary feels that *now* is the right time to go to the grave of Jesus. Now is the time to walk that treacherous path in the dark...alone. Now is the time, when all others are sound asleep or just beginning to wake from their slumber...it is now her time to stare at the tomb. To picture the lifeless body that was covered in spices and then wrapped in linens and laid to final rest in a fresh cut tomb that, she believes, is going to be just beyond her sight, her touch. But not far enough to weep.

Can you imagine all that is going through her head at this time? Her beloved Savior has died. 3 days ago she witnessed it all. She witnessed his bloody, broken body hang lifelessly on a wooden cross. She witnessed a soldier come up and pierce his side because the weather was getting weird and the next day was a holiday so they wanted the bodies removed – and she watched Jesus take his last breath. 3 days ago her world fell apart. 3 days ago all the hope, all the joy, all the life that was in her and that moved through her veins...simply collapsed. And she is so grieved and broken that she heads off, in the dark, alone... something that no good Jewish woman in first-century Jerusalem WOULD EVER DO.

But she does anyway. She doesn't care.

And as she approaches the tomb she notices that the heavy stone that had just been cut and rolled over the entrance 3 days ago...has been removed. And then...it's all this fast non-stop action of Mary running back, declaring to the disciples what she's seen...the other two disciples take off running as fast as they could to validate what Mary proclaims – Peter obviously the slower of the two – but both of them most likely feeling anger, frustration, sorrow – and a whole host of other

emotions. Not getting to the grave yet, not seeing with their own eyes...the natural conclusion is going to be a stolen body. Mary's the first to proclaim that...

Grave robbers were a *thing* back then. We know from other texts outside of scripture that Emperor Claudius ordered it a capital punishment for those who defiled and destroyed tombs as well as removed bodies from their graves. And there is no mention in the gospel of John or any other text that the disciples would have taken the body...so the natural conclusion with the hastiness of the disciples and the reaction of Mary when she first got there...grave robbery was suspected.

But all of this simply changes when they look inside. Once there, Peter immediately rushes in (nothing unlike Peter who is always the first to do most things) and then John, after staring at the opened tomb, looks in as well. And John describes the scene in straight simple words. Lying there are strips of linen as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. And while the strips of linen appear to have been moved the cloth that was wrapped around Christ's head...was still where it had originally been placed.

That really struck me this week...the placement of the cloth that was around Christ's head. John is so intentional about the words he uses, the things he says and how differently they are from the other gospel writers – that upon first look, which seemed weird because I've read this text numerous times – but upon first reading this week...I was simply struck by that head cloth description. And this isn't just something John does. Mark gives a detail of the feeding of the 5000 that the grass was "green" (**Mark 6:39**). This doesn't mean that Mark took a special meaning to the grass or that he was a grass naturalist or a turf tender. It simply means that this is something Mark took notice of and thus mentions it. It simply tells us something that the others didn't. There is nothing hidden there that we should read into.

But what can happen is that sometimes we can get caught up in the text and make something out of something that isn't something at all. When I first took notice of the head cloth and the short description, which I hadn't particularly noticed before, I was like... *"What!? What is John saying? What does this mean!? There is a hidden meaning here! It's a sign, it's a proclamation...it's a pointing of something for sure!"* Anyone familiar with the "Da Vinci Code"? The books and movies about hidden meanings in scripture and monuments. John is NOT having a "Da Vinci Code" moment – nor is he Dan Brown (the author of those books). John...is John.

Understand John...understand the text. It's that simple.

But I really want to include things that aren't included...because they sound good, make me feel good or affirm what I believe. I want to feel that that is a sign from God that really means

something – as opposed to maybe Christ just being neat. Maybe Mary, as he was raised, simply taught Jesus to fold his clothes when he was done wearing them and they aren't yet dirty (*something I'm still waiting for my own kids to learn*) or maybe he saw how hard it was to wash clothes back then and how hard his mom worked to keep his clothes clean that he treats his clothing better. I want these grandiose small things that may get over looked but really mean so much to MEAN SO MUCH... when in truth...I simply think this is John's way of saying, "Hey...grave robbers would have taken the body AND the cloth...so this was no grave robbery." And we read that when that other disciple finally went in and saw...he believed (vs 8). And not believed that the body had been stolen, not that he believed that it was all a sham or the other disciples stole the body while they were sleeping so that they could scheme up this grandiose hoax of a plan...but that this...was special. This is what all of scripture and prophecy have pointed to.

That's ... what John is getting at. That this is the fulfillment of God's plan, prophet's words, Jewish hope – and not some body stealing scam.

Isaiah 25:7-8 *“And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, that sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth.”* Then again in **65:20**, *“No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime...”*

The details of what he saw, the details of what he says...are the details given long ago.

John wants us to realize the importance of this moment...and not in a grand way but in a tangible way – the way that he saw it, experienced it and felt it. John doesn't deny the importance of Christ's resurrection from the dead – his whole gospel message is LITERALLY ABOUT JESUS, but John is taking a personal approach to all of it. We read at the end of chapter 20 (**John 20:30-31**) that many other things were done by Jesus that weren't necessarily written down in his book...but the ones that ARE written were done so so that by believing you may have life in his name. By believing in Jesus Christ and understanding the miracles he did, the actions he took, the WORDS HE USED...YOU may have life in his name...

That you may come to faith or be strengthened in your faith. That you would realize that in this moment, in this confusion of the Easter moment something magnificent happened. Something victorious has happened. And the proof...is right there. That inside the tomb, where Christ was put to final rest...where he was covered in spices for preservation, where he was then wrapped in cloth and linen strips as was custom, where a tomb was cut and a large stone was rolled to cover the entrance (and exit)...all those things still remain...well, all but one thing: Jesus.

If you recall in **John 11:44** we have Christ calling to Lazarus to “come out” of the tomb. And as Lazarus steps out John mentions that his hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth was around his face. And Jesus says, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” John’s contrast here, with what he saw remaining in the tomb of Jesus, shows us that the resurrected body of Christ simply didn’t need those things...that cloth – so they were left behind. The dead was not walking with Christ.

And John also gives us other small details that help his point in other ways too. And as one author points out...this is not simply something that John saw himself but it was seen by Peter and Mary as well – and as custom...this is evidence that would be held up in any and all circumstances of a court of law (**Dt 19:15**). One simply doesn’t make this stuff up. Multiple people witnessed...which means corroboration.

John wants us to know that this is validated.

To John...this is all important stuff. And as John was taking inventory of all that was in the tomb look at what remained – he noticed that one thing, that was most the most important of all...was gone. It’s the most important detail of all things that he speaks of, tells about, informs, and encourages. That Jesus Christ was not there not because of grave robbers, they would have messed up the linens in their haste or simply taken them with them, but the tomb was empty because Jesus had been raised from the dead. That this moment had been prophetically spoken of, anticipated, and finally come to fruition.

We are a people who come to “seeing is believing” – and John gets that. For him it wasn’t seeing the risen Christ – for him it was seeing the empty grave clothes. It was in that moment that he got it. That he remembered his history, his religious teaching and upbringing. He understood that this is the messiah that was foretold that would come to redeem, restore, and save. That this...was done by the power of God (**Matt 22:29**). And readers of John’s gospel are encouraged to come to the same conclusion...and yet we’re encouraged to see something else too. To remember something equally amazing. That our faith is built up in not only Christ’s overcoming death, by Christ’s not needing the grave clothes any longer...but our faith is built up and encouraged by the very words of Christ – the very words we find throughout scripture that speak of his work and promises and this very act of resurrection and what it truly means for you and I.

That Christ has come to give *you* life (**John 10:10**).

That forgiveness is offered to *you* (**Matt 6:9-15**)

That we are wholeheartedly forgiven, cleansed, and purified of all our unrighteousness because of Christ (**1 John 1:9**)

That the blood Christ shed upon the cross was done for the forgiveness of sins (**Matt 26:28**)

And above all other things, if those weren't already more than enough, Jesus proclaims in **John 11:25** that he is the resurrection and the life – and that whoever believes in him will live...even *though* they die. These are the realities that hit John as he stood there, stooping down to look into an empty tomb. That all the details he ever heard and knew before Christ, and all that he heard and knew and saw and experienced BY Christ and IN Christ...meant that Jesus had risen from the grave.

Know...and believe. Hear...and understand. See the details through the eyes of those who witnessed that this *had* to happen. That Christ's death had to take place because it was ordained and set in stone by God. But that moment would then be overcome by the very power of God to overcome death. Death does not have the last say. And if we believe the words of Christ of what he did and his invitation to you and I...for life...then we too know that linens and spices and oils will not have their final resting place on either Christ...or us. There is no need for the clothing of the dead when the living are in Christ.

Let's pray.