

Resurrection Day 2022
Witnesses to the Empty Tomb
John 20:1-18

Introduction: While Jesus' burial was the last act of His humiliation, it was in some ways the beginning of His exaltation. It is, as Paul states in 1 Cor. 15:1-4, an essential part of the Gospel.

Three events occur in the hours before Sunday's sunrise. **First**, a great earthquake occurs (Mt. 28:2). **Second**, an angel descends and rolls the stone away (breaking the Roman seal; Mt. 27:66). See illustration of the Roman seal in Fruchtenbaum. **Third**, the angel's appearance frightens the Roman soldiers to the point of fainting (Mt. 28:3-4).

1) At least six women: Mary Magdalene and at least five other women—John 20:1-2

a) ¹ *Now on the first day of the week Mary the Magdalene came early, while it was still darkness, to the tomb and saw the stone removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus was loving, and said to them, "They have removed the Lord from the tomb, and we (her and the other women) do not know where they have placed Him."*

i) She had purchased spices after sundown Saturday evening (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1), intending to apply them to Jesus' corpse Sunday morning. This shows us that they did not anticipate a resurrection, despite the six resurrection predictions in the book of Luke.

b) The other women include: **Mary** the mother of James and Joseph (the other Mary?), **Salome** (wife of Zebedee, the mother of James and John, possible sister to Jesus' mother Mary), **Joanna** (the wife of Herod's household manager), and at least **two other** unnamed women.

c) Before Jesus, Mary had been a broken woman. (Luke 8:1-3; Mk. 16:9)

d) She was among those who were near the cross. (John 19:25)

i) Remember that most of the disciples (except John; Jn. 19:26-27) had fled and were not present at the crucifixion. (Mt. 26:56; Mk. 14:50)

e) Mary does not consider the resurrection to be a reality. She does not expect the tomb to be empty. Her assumption is that some unknown someone has stolen Jesus' body.

i) A few years later, robbing graves would become liable to capital punishment in the Roman empire.

ii) We make similar assumptions when "someone" moves our phone, our car keys, etc.

- f) **The point:** Mary turns from curiosity to despair due to her imagination.

2) Two men: Peter and John—20:3-10

- a) **Peter and John's immediate response—20:3-5** ³ *So Peter went out, and the other disciple (John), and were going toward the tomb. ⁴ And the two were running together, but the other disciples ran ahead more quickly than Peter and came to the tomb first. ⁵ And he, having bent down to look, saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not enter in.*

- i) John wins the footrace but chooses not to enter the tomb. (20:2-5)

(1) Bending over to look in is required because most grave openings were only about 3 feet high. See picture of tomb door.

(2) Perhaps out of respect, timidity, deference to Peter, or maybe fear of becoming unclean.

- b) **Peter and John's different responses—20:6-10** ⁶ *Then Simon Peter came, following him, and entered into the tomb, and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been around his head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but folded in a place by itself. ⁸ So at that time, the other disciple, who had come to the tomb first, entered and saw and trusted. ⁹ (For they did not yet understand the Scripture, that it was necessary for Him to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples departed again to their own homes.*

- i) See picture of tomb interior.

ii) The orderly arrangement of the burial items indicates a resurrection, not robbery as Mary initially assumed. (20:6-7)

(1) It is unlikely a thief would undress the corpse before stealing it or leave 75-100 pounds of expensive spices (John 19:39-40) behind.

(2) BTW, this description proves that the Shroud of Turin is not the shroud of Jesus.

iii) John is apparently the first disciple to believe [aor. act. ind. πιστεύω] in the resurrection. (20:8)

(1) Peter, however, leaves the empty tomb still wondering. (Luke 24:12)

(2) Note how two believers can witness the same event and process the same information at different speeds.

iv) These two witnesses would provide adequate support under Jewish Law. (Dt. 17:6; 19:15)

v) Their understanding of the OT Scriptures was not complete. (20:9)

- c) **The point:** John turns from curiosity to genuine faith.

3) One woman: Mary Magdalene—John 20:11-18

- a) **Mary's interaction with angels—20:11-13** ¹¹ *But Mary stood near the tomb weeping outside, and so, as she was weeping, she bent down to look into the tomb, ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ And 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 put Him."*
- i) The angels now appear as young men. (Mk. 16:5)
 - ii) Mary's distressed response of intense weeping. (20:11-13a)
 - iii) Mary's imaginative response of assuming. (20:13b)
- b) **Mary's interaction with Jesus—20:14-17**
- i) ¹⁴ *And having said these things, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "**Woman (Madam), why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**" She, supposing that He was the gardener, said to him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will take him away."*
 - ii) ¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, "**Mary.**" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni," (which is to say, "(My) Teacher"). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "**Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father. But proceed to My brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your^{pl} Father, and to My God and your^{pl} God.'**"*
 - (1) No gardener would know her name.
 - (2) Jesus' voice is recognized; the recognition of His physical appearance is delayed.
 - (3) It is possible that Jesus' words refer to either:
 - (a) Jesus temporarily ascends to cleanse the heavenly sanctuaries. (cf. Heb. 9:11-28)
 - (b) Jesus doesn't want Mary to cling to Him but permits the other ladies to touch Him later that morning. (cf. Mt. 28:9-10)
 - iii) Her immediate response of ignorance. (20:13)
 - iv) Her subsequent response of imagination. (20:15)
 - v) Her delayed response of submissive faith. (20:16)
- c) **Mary's interaction with The Eleven—20:18** ¹⁸ *Mary the Magdalene came, while announcing to the disciples that she had seen the Lord and He had spoken these things to her.*
- i) Mary is the first disciple to see the risen Lord!
 - ii) Her response is now rooted in obedient faith.
- d) **The point:** What progress for Mary!

4) Things we need to remember:

- a) The Easter faith means more than the conviction that a resuscitation has taken place; it includes understanding that the divine purpose revealed in Scripture has now taken place. (Leon Morris)
- b) Mary, a woman, is a weak witness. Peter and John, surprised and slow to understand, do not come off as great champions of the cause. As eyewitness testimony, however, the narrative carries the ring of truth. (James Hamilton)
- c) As James Hamilton states: The resurrection of Jesus is the fulcrum of history, the moment when a crucified failure is revealed as the triumphant King. The resurrection of Jesus testifies that God has once and for all triumphed over death, and nothing will ever again be as it once was.