

# John 20:1-18

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     John 21 to 18. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him. So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, dead, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in. And he saw, and believed. For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. And as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping?

whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener, she 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 in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said to her, Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that he had said these things to her. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

[ 2 : 2 7 ]     Well, good morning, and just a couple of words of gratitude in my own heart this morning, just for the fact that we're able to gather together in greater numbers. I just praise God for the chance to see so many of you face to face, and I'm asking him that your hearts will be encouraged as you see Christ Church Chicago assembled, and we pray that the Lord would bless that.

I also want to say today's bittersweet for me. We are saying goodbye to Kevin and Alyssa Walker and their children, Manny and Zaira, here with us this morning. These two work with me in the work of the Charles Simeon Trust and gratefully are going to continue in that work. But after years in our midst and great contribution to our congregation, both through Alyssa's teaching of our high school and junior high girls on Sunday morning so faithfully, Kevin's work in the midst of our university ministry at the table, we're grateful to know that God's hand is guiding you to Klein Avenue Fellowship Church and that the leadership there is moving with you, Kevin, in pastoral ways. We're thrilled because their increase is an increase of the gospel, and we know that your whole family, Manny and Zaira, the Lord goes before you. And he's going to have people there that will not only attend to you, but also others that you will minister to. So as you go, just know the gratitude of my own heart, but also I just want to, in a sense, from this distance, just place God's blessing on you all.

We'll miss you. Masks and handkerchiefs, I suppose.

Well, I want to take from this text today in John 20, something that would so deeply impress itself upon your heart as to alter your life. Namely, the wonders and the warnings that are attended by the resurrection of Jesus. You know, it is a centuries-old affirmation that the church, universal, Christ Church Chicago in particular, ascends to the resurrection of Jesus, the Nazarene, from the dead, in body and in substance, not merely in some spiritualized projected force through the time.

You think of it, one of the ancient creeds, which it feels to me rises out of even gospels like John. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was, two weeks ago, crucified in our text, last week, dead and buried.

[ 6 : 08 ] He descended into hell, and now, on the third day, he rose from the dead. And this is the affirmation of the centuries, that there is a wonder in play, the bodily resurrection of our Lord.

And so, it's probably worth 25 minutes of our time, isn't it, to consider in an introductory way, why do we believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

Why does the church, through the centuries, and why do members of this church, affirm together that he rose from the dead?

Certainly, it's not due to wishful thinking. The 20th century Protestant movement that kind of placed it within that notion is behind us.

It's not due to some personal insight. It's not as though you were there, or I was there, and can bring some testimony to bear. It's not within some kind of collective expectation.

[ 7 : 16 ] I don't think the church was ready for the affirmation of the creed on the resurrection until the resurrection itself was in the rearview mirror.

No, it's not wishful thinking. It's not personal insight. It's not collective expectation. John, in the verses that were read for you today, would indicate to us that the church's belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead rests upon not only eyewitness testimony, but inseparably that testimony as it is supported in inscripturated texts.

Let me farm that out a little bit. If it was just eyewitness testimony, we all need to realize that you can be fooled by that which you see or don't see.

There are limitations to sight for belief. In fact, there were contradictory conclusions put forward based on sight alone in verses 1 to 10.

Take a look. The first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was dark, and she saw something. What did she see?

[ 8 : 36 ] The stone had been taken away. This is interesting. We've been looking at this little phrase, the body of Jesus, that which is taken away, and now the narrative moves to not the body of Christ taken away, but a stone taken away.

You'll remember back in verse 31, they wanted his legs broken that he might be taken away. You'll remember that Joseph of Arimathea came in verse 38 of the previous chapter that he might take away the body of Christ.

You'll remember that Pilate acquiesced to the request, and that Joseph of Arimathea did indeed take away the body of Christ. And now on the third day, Mary Magdalene approaches, the body of Christ has been taken away, dead and buried.

And she saw a stone taken away. And her first inclination was not resurrection. What she saw with her eyes led to the conclusion in verse 2, namely that the corpse of Jesus had been removed.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they laid him.

[ 10 : 01 ] Her distress of soul has now led to the anguish of heart, which begins to think that the dead corpse of Jesus is not only resting, not any longer resting in peace behind in the grave, but the grave itself has been desecrated, and somebody, for some unknown reason, has moved him.

When you and I will see one another on Easter morning, we're fond of greetings, aren't we? And we're fond of early on Easter morning, meeting one another, my dad and I still racing with our text to see who can begin it first.

Christ is risen. And the response, He is risen indeed. Well, here it is. We've read the narrative. The claim is going to be that Christ is risen.

But the affirmation is not that He is risen indeed. No, from all that she saw with her eyes, the stone moved away. It indicated to her that the dead corpse of Jesus had been taken to another place.

Not a resurrection, but further woe. That view, though, contrasts with Peter, and who is most likely in the text, this unnamed one, John, who gives us this gospel.

[ 11 : 28 ] For let's see what they see and what they make of it, beginning at verse 3. So Peter went out with the other disciple and they were going towards the tomb, both of them running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

And stooping to look in, he saw, not a stone taken away, but linens, cloths, lying there.

But he did not go in. You can imagine, he's now peering from an enlightened sun-rising context in through the darkness of the shadow and he sees the pilings of all the cloths that had actually been wrapping appendage by appendage just strewn on the floor like a heap of laundry.

But he stays his distance. But then Peter, charging in on the back side, a slower runner of sorts, came following him and he went into the tomb, right in through the door.

He must have passed Mary, passed John, and it says, he saw. Now notice, there's an addition here in the text. It isn't merely that Mary Magdalene saw the stone taken away and came to a wrong conclusion or that John saw the linens lying there, but here it says that he saw the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself.

[ 13 : 15 ] Then the other disciple went in and he saw it likewise. So, this is the scene. Mary has seen a stone taken away.

The implication of her mind is not resurrection. John has seen linens lying like a heap of laundry. The implication is not immediately a sense of resurrection. Peter comes and sees a stone rolled away.

The linens lying there and a face cloth folded, neatly placed on a slab set aside. If the body had been taken away, per Mary Magdalene's sentiment, what were all the linen cloths doing there?

And if the body had not been raised from the dead and walked from the tomb, what would explain the nuance of a face cloth being folded and set aside?

And when all of those things are swirling in the witness of those who saw it with their own eyes, we read verse 8.

[ 14 : 34 ] The other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in and he saw and believed. He believed. In wonder, this is the wonder of the resurrection, there was a seed in his heart that was rooted in his mind.

Probably through the remembrance of Christ that he not only had the power to lay it down, but to take it up. Or the early writing in the Gospel of John on the zeal for his house and that he would destroy this temple and in three days rise up.

But even early in John in chapter 2, it says that it was only after the resurrection that they actually remembered those words in fulfillment. And there he is, our unnamed disciple, Peter, standing in the midst of an open tomb and there is belief.

Now, it is the seed of belief. It is not confirmed, is it? We will watch even as they wrestle this out. And indeed, that is only confirming that it might have been true.

for they will come back again and again and again to the solidified understanding that he rose from the dead. My point in this first movement is simply to say to you that eyewitness testimony is the means by which the church today holds that Jesus rose from the dead.

[ 16 : 14 ] We read texts where men and women and others who reported on it beyond this narrative tell us this occurred.

But you might feel a bit cheated. You might wish you had been there yourself or feel the need for your own eyes to bear testimony.

And perhaps that's why the narrator inserts his own voice here. It's almost as though subtitles appear on this movie. And there's an indication that we're to take note of something that the original characters in the story were not wrestling with at that time.

There it is, verse 9, for as of yet or up to this point, up to this point, they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead.

That's not an initial response to a stone taken, to linen cloths lying, to a face cloth folded. That's the, that's not an initial response to resurrection.

[ 17 : 25 ] That is an interpretation based on retrospect. They began to now read the Hebrew scriptures through a different lens, namely that even those scriptures required, necessitated, that God's savior leader would rise from the dead.

It's interesting, isn't it? If you've been following along, you'll notice that at three moments now, John, the writer, wants the reader to attach truths on both crucifixion and death and resurrection to a relationship to Hebrew scriptures.

just look what we looked at a couple of weeks ago over in verse 24 of chapter 19. This, that is this not tearing of the cloth at the crucifixion, was to fulfill the scripture which says, they divided my garment among them for my clothing, they cast lots.

Crucifixion grounded in inscripturated prophetic discourse. Or verse 36 of the same chapter. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, namely that his bones were not broken and that he actually died.

Crucifixion backed by scriptures. Death backed by scriptures. And now he says, resurrection backed by scripture. Scripture which they did not know or understand.

[ 18 : 56 ] I wonder how many of you today are wrestling with, should I believe in the resurrection? Is there a wonder to it?

Is substitution for sin through crucifixion and death mine? Is a savior leader who rules through resurrection actually here, both in the person of Jesus to whom witnesses gave testimony and to which the scriptures pointed?

If that is true, then it does change everything for you. It would mean that not only can your sin be forgiven, but it would mean that you have a savior, a ruler, a king who must be obeyed.

one to whom all humanity will one day give their obedience. this is the stakes on the wonder of Christmas.

It's interesting here, don't you kind of wish he had quoted, well, what scripture are you referring to? They did not understand the scripture. Come on, writer, you gave me scripture text on crucifixion, you gave me scripture text on death, why don't you give me scripture texts on resurrection?

[ 20 : 21 ] Well, they do, it just takes a little longer in the scriptures to read. About 50 days from this very moment, Peter's going to get up and preach a sermon, and he's going to riff on some teaching that he got from Jesus between the resurrection and the day of Pentecost.

Because Jesus, it says, explained to them from the scriptures all these things about his death and resurrection. So here's Peter, doing his first sermon in his new church setting, and he walks into the pulpit with incredible confidence and just rips off one of Jesus' messages from Psalm 16, which talked about the Holy One and his body not undergoing corruption.

So the first sermon within the, quote, Christian church was a prophetic psalm text read that supported resurrection prophetic discourse.

So we've seen it now entirely because the crucifixion text on his garments in 18 was rooted in Psalm 22. The death text on the bones not being broken is rooted in Psalm 34.

The resurrection text as the apostles begin to proclaim it was rooted in Psalm 16. 16 and more than that, you begin to see clearly even in Peter's message, he will also refer to Psalm 110.

[ 21 : 47 ] Or when Paul first starts preaching in Acts 13, he will refer to Psalm 2 and Psalm 16. And what they are doing in the early church is re-reading the Psalms to indicate that even here we see God's Savior leader was one who would need to be raised from the dead.

And all of those Davidic like Psalms are rooted in a promise made to David in 1 Samuel 7 that God's salvation would come through a forever king.

Indeed, if you want to know where to go in the Old Testament for resurrection material, given that Jesus himself said you can destroy this temple but I'll raise it up again in three days, you could refer to Ezekiel 40 to 48 with this renewed temple imagery and this second temple building all as legitimate resurrection materials.

The promise of the scriptures is that God's people in God's place under God's rule would have life and in him have it ever more.

So let me just sit on that wonder for a moment. What does it mean for you and me? We believe in the resurrection because of eyewitness testimony that is confirmed through inscripturated text in the Old Testament.

[ 23 : 20 ] You and I need to understand that the Christian faith understands things like the contemporary world does not that there are limitations to what you can see and you can misread empirical data and you can make conclusions that are incorrect but the scriptures the scriptures support the resurrection from the dead.

Let me give the takeaway for you then on the wonder of the resurrection. You are not at a disadvantage for having lived now as opposed to having lived then.

They had no collective expectation of this. They had to sort it out after the fact and run and chase and read and reread. You and I have the scriptures in our hand and on our cellular devices and anywhere you would want.

You have the leisure of a lifetime to read inscripturated texts that verify and support the resurrection from the dead. You are greatly to be advantaged in coming to believe.

So you may sit there this morning and say I don't think I could believe unless he actually came to me or I saw it. Really? Well that will move you from warning or from wonder to warning.

[ 24 : 45 ] As we'll see in just a moment. Stay with me. The text moves on. While the disciples have the seeds of belief already planted in them and with by retrospect they attach the scriptures to them, Mary is still standing at the tomb weeping long after they've gone home.

Verse 11. She's weeping outside the tomb. Now she finally looks in and what does she see? It doesn't mention linen cloths on the floor.

It doesn't mention a face cloth folded. She sees two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. And they said to her, woman, why are you weeping?

Now this is a supernatural event if ever there was one. And angels in the scripture are always used as messengers from God to provide interpretation to those who don't understand concerning events that are actually important.

And notice where they're sitting, these angels, one at the head and one at the foot of a slab which is the mercy seat of Christ. Do you know what image the Old Testament used in order to represent where satisfaction for sin was won?

[ 26 : 00 ] It was a mercy seat and above it with two cherubim facing toward one another, one at one end and one on the other. And that which they carried around in the wilderness and put blood on as the atonement for sin, Mary now stands and sees angel upon angel, mercy seat in the middle.

And they're asking, why are you weeping? To which you can see she's still caught in her own conclusion, which was a mistake on what the stone taken away meant.

She says, they have taken away my Lord, I don't know where they've laid him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus. This is fascinating now. Now she turns from in the tomb with all of its darkness and two angels speaking to her and she turns still wondering where has Jesus been taken and she sees Jesus, although she doesn't know it's Jesus, and he says to her woman, why are you weeping?

Whom are you seeking? And supposing him to be the gardener, the one who attended the cemetery, the one who opened it up at the beginning of the day, she just sees a man dressed in normal clothing, who this must be his vocation in his workplace, and she says to him, sir, if you've taken him away, tell me and I will take him.

She still wants the corpse of Jesus respected. him. And then those climactic words, Jesus said to her, Mary.

[ 27 : 45 ] What a wonder. The climactic moment, a stone taken, is overturned her mind by her name spoken.

Speech did for Mary what sight could not. A spoken word was better than a wonder seen. Sound was her preference over sight. Voice over a vision. Hearing. Overseeing.

And so notice how she concludes. After the clinging and the admonishing, Mary Magdalene, last verse, went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord.

You see the book ends of the text? Mary saw a stone taken. I have seen the Lord.

[ 29 : 06 ] I witnessed testimony in her sense rooted in words spoken. Not things seen.

And here's the warning then for you and for me. You will not be given any more than God has already put forth to make up your mind on the resurrection.

He is not going to appear levitating over your bed at three in the morning. there's not going to be a spiritual apparition strong enough to hold your faith.

There's not going to be some experience as though God, think of the audacity of this, as though we would require God to appear in every generation in the flesh so that all of those of us who would believe had the opportunity of seeing him face to face.

I mean, the contemporary arrogance of a heart that requires that God will do for you and everyone would mean that Jesus would be appearing in the flesh innumerable times throughout all of centuries in the place of every person when instead he can be trusted on eyewitness testimony that is supported by inscripturated truth.

[ 30 : 47 ] Do you know that Jesus told a parable once, and I'll say this and find my seat, of a real rich guy who wasn't really well lived, who died and found his way toward a place of punishment and a great chasm emerged and he saw one that he had ill treated during the day of living Lazarus there in great distance.

and the rich man says, God, send somebody back to tell my brothers that there is such a place, that they need to be warned about living now as though there's no eternal rule then.

And the parable closes with Jesus saying quite clearly, they've got Moses, they've got all the prophets. prophets. If they don't believe Moses and the prophets, what makes you think they're going to believe it if I send somebody back from the dead?

The warning, the warning of the resurrection, Jesus is alive. He rose from the dead.

I know it, not because I saw it, but I can trust everything I read about it. Not only has he risen from the dead, he's seated at the right hand of the father.

[ 32 : 20 ] Not only that, he rules and is even now dispensing God's will and wrath upon an ungodly world. Not only that, he will come again.

Not only that, every eye will see him then. For the dead will be raised and then those who are alive and there will be a double resurrection into all eternity.

Men, women, brothers, sisters, Christ Church Chicago, never relinquish your grasp on Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We do so at our own peril.

we forfeit the life he won and the rule he deserves. What a wonder. What a warning.

He is risen. Our Heavenly Father, as we explore this most extraordinary subject, resurrection of your son from the dead.

[ 33 : 32 ] I pray that we would grab hold of all that it signifies, namely, that you love us so much as to send your son to die for us, that in his death you offer a substitution for us, that in his resurrection you've given a ruler that we're to follow with all of our lives, and an eternal world into which we share a relationship with you.

May anyone, may anyone, may everyone under the hearing of my voice believe the word which was written down, that they might have life, and have that abundantly, in Christ's name.