

### Mary Magdalene Discovers the Empty Tomb

#### John 20:1-10

John 20:1-10 - *“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. <sup>2</sup> 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.”*

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

#### Background Notes

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb very early: *“while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb”* (v1). Other women accompanied Mary Magdalene, as the other Gospels tell us. When Mary saw that the stone had been rolled away, she 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. He looked into the tomb, but he waited to enter it until Peter arrived. Peter didn't wait – 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). In verse 2 John referred to himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” as he did in John 13 and John 19 as well.

What does the disciples “went into the tomb” mean? 1<sup>st</sup> century tombs were not like the graves of today. They were like hand-hewn caves. Rooms or chambers were 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 Joseph of Arimathea's tomb where our Lord was buried, would have had two chambers - an inner chamber with the shelves or niches in the wall, and an outer chamber that was called the “weeping chamber,” where mourners could gather. A large circular stone would seal the small 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 verses 5-7 linen wrappings, or linen “cloths” are mentioned. It's significant that John used the plural to describe the linen wrappings, because the question always comes up, “What about the Shroud of Turin?” The Shroud of Turin is a relic that belongs to the Catholic Church. It is kept in a shrine in Turin, Italy. This large piece of linen cloth is said 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 cloths or wrappings (plural) indicate strips of cloth (v5-7), not a large burial shroud.

Now it could be argued that a burial shroud was part of the "grave cloths," particularly because the other Gospels do mention a linen cloth (singular). However, even if the plural grave wrappings included a burial shroud, that doesn't mean the famous Shroud of Turin is the actual burial shroud of Christ. A recent radioactive-carbon test of the Shroud pretty conclusively showed that the Shroud is not 1<sup>st</sup> century cloth, but rather dated it to the Middle Ages. Thus the Shroud of Turin is probably not an authentic part of the grave wrappings of Jesus Christ, and the markings on it may actually be 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 Jesus Christ, you've taken away the basis of the Christian faith. And unbelievers will try to do just that. They will try to explain away the resurrection of Christ. But that's 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 say "The evidence was made up," or he has find some way to explain away the evidence.

Some skeptics try to say that early Christians made up the evidence for the resurrection. If so, the skeptic has to logically explain this idea. Why did the early Christians make it up the way they did? How could they have gotten so many people to believe it? (Many people who witnessed the death of Jesus were still alive when the Gospels were written, and they would immediately have discredited a fake resurrection story!) And why were some early Christians willing die for their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord when they knew that His resurrection story was fabricated?!

For example, why did the early Christians make up the story as it's written in the Gospels? In the resurrection accounts, it's recorded that **the Lord appeared first to a woman!** Mary Magdalene and other women bravely went to the tomb very early in the morning. When they saw that the tomb was empty, they ran and told the men, who wouldn't believe until they saw for themselves.

Now if the early Christians had actually fabricated the accounts of the resurrection, most likely they would **never** have decided to say that the Lord appeared **first** to a **woman!** Nor would they have made the **women** the brave "heroes" of the story! Remember, most of the early Christians were Jews - and in the views of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, the status of women was far from praiseworthy. So those early Christians would never have come up with a story that **women** were the heroes of their fabricated tale! And if the early Christians had made up the account, surely they would 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 in a different way. But they have a tough job doing it, 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 the main point. 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.

- The accounts show that the empty tomb was a surprise to Mary and the women.
- Mary thought the body had been removed – but not by the disciples! Perhaps she thought the Lord's body might have been taken by the authorities, or even by Joseph of Arimathea.
- The disciples were obviously taken by surprise. They ran to the tomb to check it out.
- John didn't enter at first because when he looked in he saw the grave clothes lying undisturbed in the inner chamber. He probably thought that the body was still there.
- When John and Peter entered the tomb, it was obvious that the body wasn't stolen. After all, you don't leave the grave wrappings behind if you're going to steal a body!
- The cloth that covered the head was folded neatly and placed to one side.

So here's the point: if the explanation of the empty tomb is that the disciples stole the body, this skeptic has to explain away all these associated details. These details are part of the historical record that was accepted as true by everyone in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition, a skeptic who tries to explain away all this evidence would have to come up with an 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!

Don't you see - the best explanation for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the **evidence**?

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

Verse 9: *"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." Psalm 2:7, quoted right there in Acts 13:32-33, is a prediction of the resurrection of Christ in the Old Testament.*

Read on further. 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 Isaiah 53’s “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). For the Messiah to say this, He must have come back to life.

And there are more Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, all the many Old Testament Scriptures that predict the glorious reign of the Messiah on earth can only be fulfilled if, after His death, the Messiah is bodily resurrected from the dead!

## Practical Application

### When in doubt, check it out!

When Peter and John were told that Jesus’ body was gone, they ran to the tomb to check it out. When John saw the evidence, he believed (v8). His belief was no leap of faith into the dark! **He believed on the basis of the evidence!**

If you ever have doubts about the Christian faith, don’t run away! When in doubt, check it out! Don’t sweep your doubts under the rug, and don’t pretend they don’t exist. Don’t give up and toss away your faith. Check it out! Ask the Lord, and He 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 skeptical people who came 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.

Here’s just one example. Years ago, a man named Lew Wallace tried to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But on the basis of the overwhelming amount of **evidence** for the resurrection, he became a believer! Afterwards he wrote the book Ben Hur, a novel set in the time of Christ, which became an Academy Award-winning film.

Recently I was talking to a man who became a Christian as a teen. His father is not a Christian and he doubts everything about the Christian faith. The Christian son keeps challenging his father, asking him to check out the evidence - but his father refuses to check it out. Here’s the irony: for 25 years his father worked for the FBI. On his job he was constantly checking out evidence! Sadly, he won’t take the time to check out the evidence for the Christian faith.

When in doubt, check it out!