

# THE GREAT DISCOVERY: THE EMPTY TOMB JOHN 20:01–10

## *Introduction: Evidence of Resurrection*

In studying John's account, it must be remembered that John was writing a historical account. He was not interested in giving insurmountable evidence for the resurrection. His interest was twofold: (1) to give the evidence that led him to immediately understand and believe, and (2) to give enough evidence to lead anyone to immediate belief — if a person is willing to believe. He was interested in giving enough evidence to make anyone's faith viable and respectable. Now having said this, John's record of Jesus' resurrection is a strong historical account of the event. To an honest, objective, and good heart, the evidence is convincing (Lk. 8:15).

1. The fact that morality is the point of John's gospel eliminates any possibility of his fabricating a lie, especially a lie of such immoral proportions.
2. The description of so many little details, details that are so human, says that the phenomenal event is an event that actually took place. Such human-like details could never be built around an event whose main point was a fable. For instance, Peter and John's running and John's outrunning Peter; Mary's human response of frantic bewilderment; the young author's fearing and hesitating to enter a tomb; the author's believing without physical fact and admitting that his belief was not based upon an understanding of Scripture. There are, of course, many other examples that point to the event actually taking place.
3. The head wrapping is strong evidence for the resurrection. Only the head piece is actually said to be still folded up by itself. The other pieces are assumed to be still folded up because of the phrase "separate from the linen." Although the phrase substantially supports the assumption, it is only an assumption.

The point is this: if John or any other author were fabricating a case for such a phenomenal event as the resurrection, he would state explicitly that the body wrappings along with the head wrappings were still folded up — building evidence upon evidence.

4. The changed lives of the Lord's disciples are indisputable evidence. It is psychological evidence. From seemingly *irreversible despondency* and from *being hunted down* like insurrectionist dogs, they became new creatures of enthusiasm and motivation. They were propelled by a dynamic power and bold courage. Within thirty days they were seen proclaiming a risen Christ from the very spot where their lives were being threatened. They were preaching to the very people who were seeking to arrest and execute them. Only one thing could cause them to adopt this strategy: the Lord had indeed risen, and He had implanted within them a dynamic new power never before experienced by man.
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In discussing evidences, we must remember that God *through inspiration* has not formulated the Scripture to prove anything. God proclaims in Scripture that He is (exists), that He is love, and that He has shown His love supremely by sending His own Son to save a lost and dying world. What God wants from us is love and belief, love for the Lord Jesus and belief in the supreme power of a loving God. This is just the point of the resurrection account. We are to believe because we love even as Mary and John loved. (See Mt. 28:1; Jn. 20:7-10; Heb. 11:6; 1 Jn. 3:23.)

- I. Mary's unquestioning discovery: the unsealed tomb (vv. 1-2)
- II. Peter and John's shocking discovery: the wrappings were lying undisturbed (vv. 3-6).
- III. John's thoughtful discovery: the undisturbed strips of linen (vv. 7-10).

### **I. *John 20:01–02 Mary Magdalene***

Mary's unquestioning discovery, the unsealed tomb. Note four facts.

1. Mary visited the tomb early when it was still dark. Mathew actually says it was "after the Sabbath," meaning between 3.00 - 6.00 a.m. (Mt. 28:1). This reveals three significant facts.
  - a. Jesus arose before dawn, before the sun arose on Sunday morning. This was significant to the early Christian believers, so significant that they broke away from the common division of the week which began with the Sabbath or Saturday. They began to count their days beginning with Sunday, the day of the resurrection of their Lord (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).
  - b. Jesus arose on the first day of the week, on Sunday morning. This means that He had been in the grave for three days just as He had said (Mt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mk. 9:31; 10:34; Lk. 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46). His rising from the dead was a triumph, a conquest over death. Death reigns no more. Its rule has been broken (1 Cor. 15:55-56; 2 Cor. 1:9-10; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:9, 14-15).
  - c. Again, Jesus arose on the first day of the week, Sunday morning. He was in the grave on the Sabbath, unable to observe the laws governing the great season of the Passover and the Sabbath. He was dead to the law and its observances. This is symbolic of the *identification* believers gain in Christ. *In Christ's death* believers become dead to the law (See *Redemption, the Law and Jesus*, Rom. 7:4; Mt. 5:17-18).
2. Mary saw the stone rolled back from the tomb (See *Tomb*, Jn. 20:1)

**Thought 1.** This is strong evidence for the resurrection. The stone was not rolled back for the benefit of Christ, but for the witnesses to the resurrection. When Christ arose, He was in His resurrection body, the spiritual body of the spiritual dimension which has no physical bounds. He did not need the stone rolled back to leave the tomb, for material substance has no bearing on spiritual substance. However, the witnesses needed to enter the tomb to see the truth.

3. Mary ran to Peter. This is important, for it shows that Peter was still the accepted leader. What a man of courageous stature and moral strength! Surely his cowardice had been broadcast and well-rumoured, yet he repented and picked himself up to resume his task.
4. Mary revealed an unquestioning love: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb!” Mary is a supreme example of one who loves and believes, although she did not understand. She was one of the last to leave Jesus at the cross (see Mk.15:40, 47); one of the first to attend the tomb; and one who still called Him “Lord.” Her belief was a belief of love — not a belief based upon intellect or understanding. She knew what Jesus had done for her, and she loved Him for it. Jesus was her Lord, dead or alive (Jn. 20: 1 3f).

**John 15:9** *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”*

**John 20:29** *Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

**Eph 6:24** *Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.*

**1 Pet 1:8** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

**Jude 1:21** *Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

**Deu 6:5** *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

**ROMANS 07: 04**  
**REDEMPTION: THE LAW AND JESUS CHRIST**

*So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. **Romans 07:04***

The first position of the law is a glorious truth — the law is dead to “brothers” (believers). Note: Scripture says that believers have “died to the law.”

=> Believers have “died to the law;” therefore the law is bound to be dead and inactive to believers.

The law has no jurisdiction, power, rule, authority, or dominion over the true believer. The law is a dead issue to the believer; it has nothing to do with the believer. The believer is dead to the law and the law is dead to the believer. The law simply does not exist for the believer. This is a shock to most people, but it is exactly what Scripture is declaring. The believer is no longer under the law and its accusing finger, no longer under its...

- guilt and shame
- condemnation and punishment
- discouragement and frustration
- tension and pressure
- sense of failure and unworthiness
- sense of disappointment

1. Note how the glorious truth becomes a reality in the life of a person. The believer is dead to the law by the (crucified) body of Christ. The believer is slain or put to death *in Christ*. The law has nothing to say to a dead man. The believer's death in Christ is a *vicarious death*: he does not literally die himself, but he participates in the death of Christ — *spiritually*. When a man believes in Christ's death, God takes that man's belief and counts him as having died in Christ. That is, God counts the death of Christ *for* the death of the believer; God considers the believer to have been in Christ when Christ died. Why does God do this? Because Christ died on man's behalf, in man's stead, taking the penalty and punishment of the law upon Himself. Therefore, the believer — being dead in Christ — is freed from the law, from its demands and guilt and punishment.

The believer is freed “through the body of Christ,” that is, by His slain body or by His death. Christ redeemed the believer from the law...

- by being a curse.

*Gal 3:10, 13 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”*

- by His blood.

*Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

*Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*

- by His flesh.

*Eph 2:15 By abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.*

- by the cross.

*Eph 2:16 And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

- by His physical body.

**Col 1:22** *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*

These are equivalent expressions. They teach the same truth: Christ bore our sins in His own body upon the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). His sufferings satisfied justice. His death makes us acceptable to God and delivers us from the penalty of the law; therefore the believer is free from the law.

**1 Pet 2:24** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

**1 Pet 3:18** *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

2. Note the glorious purpose for the believer's death to the law.
  - a. The believer dies to the law so that he can be united to Christ, the risen and living Lord. Note the picture of marriage is used again. Before coming to Christ, the believer was married and united to the law; he was under its rule and authority. But now, since coming to Christ, he is married and united to Christ: he is under His rule and authority. The believer no longer lives as the law says, but as Christ lived and commanded. (Note: Christ came to fulfil the law; therefore He and His commandments include not only the law, but much more. Note that believers are married to Christ, the risen and living Lord. The marriage is not a dead or an inactive marriage, but a living, active marriage.

**Rom 7:4** *So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.*

**1 Cor 6:15** *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!*

**2 Cor 11:2** *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*

**1 John 2:24** *See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.*

**Eph 5:30** *For we are members of his body.*

- b. The believer dies to the law so that he can bring forth fruit unto God. Bearing fruit would mean...
  - To bear righteousness (Rom. 6:21-23; Phil. 1:11).
  - To bear converts (Rom. 1:13; Jn. 15:16).
  - To bear Christian character, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 1:10). □

## JOHN 20:01 TOMB

In Jesus' day tombs were closed by rolling a huge cartwheel-like stone in front of the entrance. They were almost impossible to remove. A deep slanting groove was hewn out of the rock at the base of the entrance for the circular stone to rest in. The stone usually weighed several tons. Such precautions were essential because there were so many tombs ransacked in those days of poverty.

The tomb was further secured by being sealed. When it was necessary to seal a tomb, the huge stone was cemented to the entrance walls or else some type of rope or binding was wrapped around the entrance stone and fastened to both sides of the tomb. Then the binding was cemented with a hardening clay or wax-like substance. In the case of some burials, usually political figures, the seal of the Emperor was also attached to the walls of the entrance. This was to strike fear of Roman retaliation against any intruder. (See Mt. 27:66.)

In the case of Jesus' tomb, further precautions were taken by placing a patrol to guard against any foul play. This guard consisted of a *large number* of men (Mt. 28:4, 11f). □

## II. *John 20:03–06 The Shocking Discovery of Peter and John*

Peter's and John's shocking discovery. They discovered the empty tomb *and the strips of linen*. They "ran" to the tomb. John outran Peter. When John arrived at the tomb, he just glanced in and noticed the strips of linen. Peter actually entered the tomb. He, too, noticed the strips of linen. They both knew the significance. If the body had been removed by the authorities or stolen by someone, the snips of linen would have been taken with the body or left in a disheveled mess, thrown someplace on the floor. From the description and the impact of the event upon the two disciples, neither one discussed his thoughts with the other, not while standing there at that time.

**Thought 1.** Note a critical point. If a man wishes to discover the empty tomb, he must get up and *go forth* to look at it. He must investigate, and then he will see. Getting up and *going forth* is the only way a man can ever discover the risen Lord. Resting in the comforts and lethargy of this world will never help a man find Jesus.

**John 5:39** "*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.*"

**Acts 17:11** *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

**Acts 18:28** *For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*

**Rom 1:2-4** *The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Rom 13:11-12** *And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber; because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.*

**1 Cor 15:3-4** *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

**Heb 6:11-12** *We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

**2 Pet 3:17** *Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.*

**Eccl 9:10** *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.*

### **III. John 20:07–10 The Thoughtful Discovery of John**

John's thoughtful discovery. He discovered the undisturbed strips of linen. Note two significant points.

1. Note the strips of linen. Standing outside while Peter was inside the tomb, John's mind was apparently whirling, pondering, wondering and thinking. Then suddenly it dawned upon him: the snips of linen were lying undisturbed. The Greek word *folded up* (entetulig-menon) is the verb which is actually used for the winding of linens around a body for burial. The Greek word is saying that the linens were still folded up, wrapped just like they would be wrapped around a body — as if the body had just evaporated. They were not disheveled or disarranged. This says at least four things.
  - a. It would be impossible to extract a body from its wrappings and leave them in such good order.
  - b. The wrappings would have been taken with the body if the body had been removed.
  - c. The wrappings would have been disheveled and disarranged and scattered if thieves had ransacked the tomb.

- d. The wrappings (under any circumstances that might be conceived in removing the body) could never be placed in the exact spot on the rock slab where the body lay. Yet, this is just how they were lying according to the Greek text. It was this that led John to an immediate belief.
2. Note John's immediate belief. John did not believe because of insurmountable evidence but because he loved Jesus. Seeing the strips of linen penetrated John's mind, and he remembered Jesus' prophecy that He would arise. John realized what had happened and he believed.

This is the point of this account of the strips of linen and of the way the account is recorded. This is also the point of the resurrection account. A loving God wants love in return — a heart full of love. He wants a person to simply believe that God is (exists) and that God is a rewarder of them that love Him (Heb. 11:6).

**Heb 11:6** *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

**John 3:16-17** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

**1 John 3:16** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

**1 John 4:16** *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*

**1 John 4:19** *We love because he first loved us. ■*