

Sermon – 18/03/2007 am

No Body

Study Text: John 20:1-10

It was the first day of the week. It was very early in the morning. Mary Magdalene hurried to the place where Jesus had been buried. She wanted to pay homage to her dead Master and Lord.

Many Christians hurry off to church each Sunday morning to do the same thing. They believe that Jesus died on the Cross. They hope that somehow in doing so he took away their sins. Maybe it is their baptism they are trusting in, or the bread and the wine they take at the Lord's Supper. One man I know asked the pastor to have the Lord's Supper at the beginning of the service because he did not want to stay for the message. We all know churches where the sermon is being squeezed as the rituals and singing time increase.

I suppose we cannot blame such people when the message gives no confidence in the authority and power of the Bible. Liberal and modernist teaching discount the supernatural. The miracles are explained away or at least avoided. The resurrection is also a subject to be avoided since modern man who understands science cannot accept such a phenomena.

On the other hand apostolic preaching focused on this very fact, this very truth, of the resurrection. The gospel they preached was that Jesus died on the Cross and that he rose again on the third day. *He was delivered up for our offences and was raised for our justification* (Romans 4:25). Is the resurrection essential to the gospel?

People

Mary hurried to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus we are told in the other gospels. There we also read that other women went with her. John does not dispute this – Mary reported *we do not know where they have laid him*. We find this event recorded in all four gospels – no account is the same so there was no collusion, yet no account contradicts the other. Such is the wonder of the Spirit of God in inspiring the Scriptures.

The light was dim as Mary approached the tomb, although the sun was up (Mark 16:2) – this may have been the sign that the Sabbath was over. Remember it was obedience to the Sabbath command that kept her from coming earlier. What did Mary notice as she approached the tomb?

She saw that the stone had been taken away. This heavy stone was not designed to be moved away. It had in fact been sealed in place by the Jews during the Sabbath (Matthew 27:66). Had Mary gone to the wrong tomb as some suggest? She was one of a few who had actually seen where Jesus was buried; and women do not easily forget the place where loved ones are buried.

Mary hurried off to tell the apostles of this remarkable sight. She knew her own role and responsibilities. Though Mary and other women had followed Jesus and served him with unparalleled devotion, Jesus chose only men to be apostles and leaders in the church. He was

obeying the creation mandate and Mary understood this. She hurried off to tell Peter and John. They were from the inner circle – maybe they were staying nearby.

Finding Peter and John, Mary told what she saw – or rather jumped to the conclusion that ‘they’ had taken away the body of her Lord out of the tomb (19:2). Who was Mary referring to by ‘they’? She does not say. She just wanted to know where the body was so she could anoint it. Peter was not ready to believe this over excited woman (Luke 24:11). She was not making a lot of sense. ‘Let us go and check out what she is saying’ he probably said to John, with some doubt in his voice.

Peter was not there when Jesus was buried of course – he had denied Jesus – but John was there caring for Jesus’ mother (19:27). They raced off to the tomb together to see for themselves, with John reaching the tomb first. He was looking in when Peter came and boldly entered the tomb.

Proof

As we have already seen there are four independent accounts of what was found, or not found, at the tomb of Jesus that Sunday morning. It was on the Friday evening that the bruised and broken body of Jesus was laid in that tomb. He had been lashed with a Roman scourge before being nailed to the Cross where he was then pierced with a spear. Jesus was not just unconscious as some claim in their ignorance.

What was found in that tomb on the third day – after 36 hours? The dead body of Jesus had been wrapped in linen for burial according to Jewish custom and was placed in this *new tomb in which no one had yet been laid* (19:41). What did John see as he looked into this tomb? He saw linen cloths but no body. What did Peter see as he rushed passed John into the tomb? He saw linen cloths – but no body. They saw the same thing – two eyewitnesses. John actually saw something else. He saw the head cloth neatly folded in a place to the side.

‘They have taken the Lord away’ Mary said. What Peter and John saw was not at all consistent with a dead body being moved or stolen. A thief would hardly take the grave clothes off a corpse he was stealing – much less neatly fold them and leave them behind. No! This body had not been stolen. What then had happened?

John struggled to believe the impossible. He finally went into the tomb. He saw and believed (20:8). He had to believe. There was no other way to explain what he saw. He was expecting to find the dead body of Jesus just like Mary. But there was no body in the tomb. How do you explain what Peter and John saw that morning?

Prophecy

As John wrote this gospel some time later, he reminds us that such a phenomena was actually written about in Scripture. He did not understand this at the time – *as yet they did not know the Scripture* he admitted (20:9). What Scripture? Scripture that said Jesus must rise again from the dead. Just what Scripture John was thinking of he does not say, but we can easily find passages which apply. Peter referred to Psalm 16 in his first sermon – *nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption*. He was proclaiming the resurrection – *this Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses* (Acts 2:32).

Jesus himself gave a couple of signs pointing to his resurrection –the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39f) and sign of the temple (John 2:20). We all love the story of Jonah. How many see it as a sign of the resurrection? Jesus also told his disciples directly that he must *be killed and be raised on the third day* (Matthew 16:21). John did not understand these prophecies when he saw the empty tomb. Can we read such prophecies today and still not understand? Can we read the eyewitness accounts and still not believe? Incredible as it is, some claim to be Christians but still do not believe in the resurrection.

It is interesting that though the apostles did not understand these prophecies, the Pharisees did. They recalled what Jesus had said and that is why they were prepared to break the Sabbath and put a seal on the tomb (Matthew 26:63). The devil is not ignorant of Scripture. You have to be up early to trap him. You must know the word of God, you must believe it as the inspired and inerrant word, and you must know the power of the Holy Spirit, if you are to stand against the devil. The witness of many individuals and of the church in general, has been seriously eroded by failure to believe in the resurrection, and to proclaim the resurrection.

Remember what Paul says I Corinthians 15? *If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; and you are still in your sins! Furthermore, if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.* Paul was himself confronted by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. From Jerusalem all the way to Rome Paul proclaimed the Cross **and** the resurrection (Acts 13:30f, 17:31, 26:23). The resurrection was essential to the gospel he preached. Is it so today?

The resurrection of course speaks of hope beyond this world. Some evangelism and teaching today is so focused on this world, so focused on health, wealth and happiness in the here and now, that the message of the resurrection is ignored or forgotten.

Power

Do you love to hear this word? Power evangelism, power healing, power this and power that is what we hear today. Hear what the apostle Paul prayed while chained in prison. *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection* (Philippians 3:10). Paul wanted to know more of the mighty power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to his right hand in heaven (Ephesians 1:20). In the resurrection of Jesus, God displayed his great power, and also his acceptance of the sacrifice made by his Son. *Jesus was delivered to death for our sins and raised for our justification* (Romans 4:25).

Moreover, Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. Paul had no doubts that he would one day follow Christ in the resurrection of the body. He looked beyond life in this world to the glory of heaven. He looked forward to seeing the risen Lord Jesus again, to being changed into his likeness and remaining in his presence for ever. Do you share Paul's desire?

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