

John 20

Written by K B Napier

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Until this chapter, we saw Jesus leading the disciples, and the disciples accepting His words and miracles, because He was with them. Once Jesus was put to death, they were obviously at a loss as to what to do next. They struggled to come to terms with the events of the past several hours, and felt that their world had ended. Jesus was gone! NOW what were they to do? They felt like frightened rabbits.

What then happened was a sign of a brand new era in their lives, a time of delegated power and authority that would literally turn the world upside down. Jesus began to teach them in His Heavenly form, and gave them each salvation (and thus the Holy Spirit). This new era would transform them from fearful followers into fearless Gospel preachers, used in the salvation of many thousands of Jews. From this came the salvation of Paul, who began the same work amongst the Gentiles.

Verses 1&2

1.

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

2.

Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre before dawn on Sunday (or, 'the first day after the sabbath/the day after the sabbath, Saturday, making it the 'third day' (see A-482). To her astonishment the stone 'door' had been rolled away. We are not told how big the entrance to the cave was, but it must have been fairly small and low (see below). Large or small, the fact was that four guards stood outside the tomb all night. They were now all on the floor unconscious. The narrative implies that though Mary *started out* in the dark, it was light by the time she reached the tomb, it being a spring morning. (She came in the fourth watch, between 3 am and 6 am, day-break or dawn). As a Jew she would not have come to the tomb on the sabbath.

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We are not told if Mary quickly looked inside the tomb, only that she ran to Peter and told him someone must have stolen Jesus' body, for the stone was rolled away. Note that 'the other disciple' (who I think must have been John, humbly speaking of himself in the third person) was also present. We are not told where they were at this time, whether inside the city or outside. In this way another phase in the remarkable events surrounding Jesus was brought into play. It was the start of an entirely different but powerful era for the apostles and other disciples.

Verses 3-10

1.

Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

2.

So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

3.

And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

4.

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

5.

And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

6.

Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

7.

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

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8.

Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

Peter and John immediately ran to the tomb, and John reached it first. John stooped down, which indicates that the doorway was indeed small, but large enough to carry a body into the space. He did not enter but could see the grave clothes were lying flat on the ground or shelf that Jesus was laid on.

Peter was soon with John; he entered the tomb and saw the grave linen, empty. The napkin or cloth that covered Jesus' face was placed separately, folded up. Peter must have told John, for John also entered the tomb to see for himself. Neither of the men knew that Jesus would rise from the dead. No doubt, after much speculation, the two apostles went back to their own homes, puzzled.

That the face napkin was folded and placed separately, proves that someone had done so. The grave clothes, or strips of linen, were wrapped around the body, and yet just lay as if Jesus was 'spirited away' without ruffling the strips of cloth. We know from the rest of scripture that Jesus had in fact raised His own body by releasing Himself from death, and He did so in an amazing way, leaving the linen where it was.

Verses 11-14

1.

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

2.

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

3.

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And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

4.

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

Mary did not follow the apostles; she stood crying outside the tomb, and stooped down to peek into the tomb. I suggest that when the two apostles looked in, as did Mary, it must have been light, otherwise they could not have seen anything in an otherwise dark cave. But, unlike the apostles, Mary was astonished to see two angels, who sat at either end of the spot where Jesus had lain.

The angels were obviously recognisable as angelic beings, otherwise John would not have written the description. They asked Mary why she was crying. She replied that she cried because she did not know where Jesus' body was, having been taken. She then 'turned herself back' and saw Jesus there, but did not perceive it was Him. The wording implies that she had half-turned towards the entrance. Therefore, it is possible that all she saw was a male figure, dark because of the light coming from behind. In such back-lit darkness details of a person's face would not be easy to discern. It is also possible that because Mary did not expect to see Jesus alive, she did not recognise Him. In my own life I have walked past friends who I did not expect to see!

Verses 15-17

1.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

2.

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

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3.

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Jesus asked why she was crying, and who she came to find. Thinking he might be the gardener, she asked Him if he had moved the body, and, if so, where had He put it. She could then remove the body to another place. Then, when Jesus said her name, 'Mary', she 'turned herself'. This suggests that she was only looking sideways at Him, and then, when she heard Him speak her name, turned fully towards the entrance. She immediately said 'Rabboni' or 'Master' (Aramaic, same as saying 'Lord'), thus indicating that she at last knew who the figure really was. Her heart must have pounded at this realisation!

It is likely she walked forward to clasp Him, hence His command 'Touch me not' because He had 'not yet ascended to (His) Father'. This tells us that during the brief stay of His physical earthly body in the tomb, Jesus had not yet gone back to Heaven. He told the newly-saved thief that he would be with Him 'this day' in Paradise. By implication, this seems to suggest that Paradise and Heaven are two different but allied places. Jesus then emphasised that He was referring to her Father as well as His, Who is also her God and His.

Verses 18-20

1.

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

2.

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

3.

And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

Mary went back to tell the disciples what had happened, and what Jesus told her. It is possible that most of the apostles were in one place, discussing the awful events of Jesus' arrest and death. For some reason their response is not recorded, but we can guess they were perplexed in the extreme. Peter and John might even have doubted, perhaps because they saw Mary as a distraught and vulnerable woman. We cannot tell from the narrative.

Later, in the evening, on 'the first day of the week' (Sunday), most of the apostles (and maybe some other disciples; Thomas was not present) were inside a house with the doors bolted, because they were afraid of Temple guards bursting in to arrest them. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst. The word 'came' can indicate either walking in or simply 'appearing'. The text tells us that the door was bolted. Therefore Jesus just appeared 'out of thin air'. He said 'Peace be unto you'. He said this because the disciples must have been petrified; He wanted them to be calm and to feel safe.

The assembled disciples must have experienced great fear, for they had not expected to see Jesus again. They might even have thought He was a ghost (as they did on a previous occasion at night on Lake Galilee). For this reason Jesus showed them His hands and His side. They could see the holes left by the nails, and the gash caused by the spear. Only then did the people in that room praise God and become animated with joy. (Gladness is just one meaning of 'joy', in this case the verb *chairō*). This was a huge turnaround in their dispositions! It is this same knowledge of Jesus' presence, through the Spirit, that finally turns us from mere believers into staunch spiritual brethren with Christ. Without this presence, we are only head-believers without power or commitment.

Verses 21-23

1.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

2.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

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3.

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Jesus did not waste time and told them that they would know peace because they were now being made ready to go out into all the world to preach, just as Jesus was sent by the Father. Then came a remarkable act – Jesus breathed over them and they received the Holy Spirit. This tells us that the incident on the Day of Pentecost was a secondary presence of the Spirit, for a particular purpose (enabling them to act). See Acts 2. It also tells us that they were saved at that precise time and not on the day of Pentecost. Jesus told them that if they remitted sins, it would be done.

However, we must read this properly, for interpreted it means that the disciples would perform only what Heaven had already decided. So, if they assured someone their sins were removed, it would be a sign that God had *already* performed the act of forgiveness. The Roman Catholic notion of this is woefully wrong, because it puts the onus on the priest and not directly on God. Jesus also said that if they were to avoid telling someone their sins were forgiven, it would be because they discerned that God had not saved them.

Verses 24-31

1.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

2.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

3.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

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Jesus then disappeared as suddenly as He had appeared, Later, Thomas, one of the apostles, was given entrance to the room. He was not present when Jesus came so when the others told him they had seen Jesus, he doubted. He would not believe them until he had seen the wounds himself and even put his fingers into the wounds! Would we say something similar? Probably.

Eight days later, the disciples again met in a house. This time Thomas was with them. Again, Jesus appeared miraculously. We know this from the text, which revealed that the door was shut and bolted. Once more, Jesus said 'Peace be unto you', this time as a sign of quiet.

Verses 27-31

1.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

2.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

3.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

4.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:

5.

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

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Knowing the doubts of Thomas, Jesus told him to examine His hands by putting a finger into the nail holes, and putting a hand into the wound in His side. He chided Thomas not to be without faith, but to believe. How many readers have this element of unbelief? How many lives thus lack the power of a faithful Christian?

Thomas was profoundly affected, and said 'My Lord and my God'. In this way Thomas confirmed himself to be a believer, and Jesus as God incarnate. Jesus accepted the words of Thomas, but as a form of mild rebuke – he had believed, but only when he saw physical proof. How much more blessed are those who believe without seeing any such proof! Of course, after the death of the last apostle and disciples who actually met Jesus, this was always to be the case, up to this day and beyond into the future.

Jesus performed many miraculous things when with the disciples, but they were too many to document. Jesus also taught them everything they needed to know before they swept the known world with the Gospel.

John tells us that whatever *was* written is for our edification, that we will believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, the Messiah, Son of God. It is clear from the text that acknowledgement of Jesus as the Son of God leads to salvation. Belief is essential, not just head-knowledge, but acceptance of Jesus as divine and working in our own hearts and minds.

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