
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 20.1-11. The Sabbath was from dusk on Friday to dusk on Saturday. So early morning on the first day of the week would be Sunday morning. John emphasized the darkness as symbolic of Mary's lack of spiritual understanding at this point: she was devoted to Jesus, but she was not expecting his resurrection. Thus she assumed someone had taken the body out of the tomb. This, combined with the grief she was feeling about the crucifixion, led her to weep in despair.

Reflect: Mary of Magdala had experienced a miracle, when Jesus drove seven demons out of her, and she had believed enough in him to support his ministry financially and to appear at the cross. Why then would she not expect the resurrection? With all we have experienced of God and with all we learn in scripture, why is it sometimes difficult for us to expect a miracle in our times of need? Why are we surprised when God delivers in an unusual way? Can you think of times when people might have misinterpreted events because they did not understand God and his ways very well?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 20.1-9. Most such tombs which were carved from the rock had entrances that were less than three feet high, so an adult would have to bend down and practically crawl inside. When John reached the tomb, the sun must have been up enough to see in. Most such tombs had a low shelf or bench around the three other walls or a niche carved out of the wall, on which the body could lie while it decomposed. Recall that Joseph and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus in these linen cloths, packed with aromatic Myrrh mixed with aloes. John now saw the cloths lying there where the body had been. Then Peter rushed up and into the tomb and saw these linen cloths from Jesus' body, as well as the face cloth folded up separately. Grave robbing was a widespread problem in the empire, but no grave robber – nor anyone else who might have come to remove the body – would take the time to unwrap the body; and even if they had, they would not then leave the valuable linen cloths, even taking time to fold them up. Also, the Jewish religious leaders had persuaded Pilate to put a guard of soldiers on the tomb and to seal up the entrance [Matthew 27.62-66], so nobody could have taken the body.

Though the disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead to fulfill scripture [even after all that Jesus had said to that effect!], when John entered the tomb and saw the head cloth folded up, he believed in the resurrection. There is something special about 20.8, in that John is telling us his own impressions in the tomb: he saw the grave cloths without the body, and he believed in the resurrection. Historically, the teaching of the early church [and its widespread success and rapid growth] depended on the empty tomb. Like John, others came to see that the empty tomb was evidence of the resurrection and the resurrection was evidence that Jesus was who he said he was – the Messiah [Christ], the Savior, the King, the Son of God – and that Jesus could keep his promise to resurrect us one day to new life on the renewed earth.

Reflect: Read 1 Corinthians 15.14. Why is this true? What would strengthen your confidence in the historical event of Christ's resurrection? One of the key aspects of Christianity is that it is based on historical events, of God actually intervening in world history. Do you have any questions or doubts about the crucifixion or resurrection of Jesus?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 20.1-10. Read Luke 24.12. Apparently, Peter felt confusion where John found faith.

Reflect: Why might it have been harder for Peter to believe in the resurrection than for John? [Hint, what was going on in Peter's head these last few days, and how would that affect him?] How can our own struggles damage our perception of God's presence and work around us? How can we prepare ourselves so that in a crisis we are not as vulnerable to such misperceptions or confusion? Though Peter struggled to believe in the resurrection at first,

and though he had failed to stand beside Jesus the night of his trial, Jesus would empower Peter to be one of the most effective ministers in the early church; pray to believe that no matter what your failings or weaknesses, God loves you and can make great use of you to glorify his name!

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 20.11-18. We could think of Jesus' first question as a mild rebuke: she would not be crying if she had expected Jesus to keep his word about the resurrection. We might see his second question as an invitation to reflect upon what kind of Messiah [Christ] they all thought Jesus was. Though thinking highly of Jesus, showing great devotion to him, and expressing confidence until the end that he could deliver for them, none of them thought he could come back from the dead, and that suggests that they did not really understand his identity as the Son of God, nor many of the prophecies about the Messiah. Mary had wealth and standing [Luke 8.2-3], and she assumed Jesus was the gardener, so she ignored his questions and continued trying to care for the body.

Once Jesus spoke her name, Mary recognized him. This brings to mind Jesus' teaching in John 10.2-4. Imagine the transition for Mary from despair to delight! It is uncertain what Jesus meant in 20.17. Perhaps, he considered that she was clinging to him because of her delight that he was there, so he said she should stop, for certainly he had not yet ascended; in other words, "don't be so surprised! I am still here, as I said I would be!" Or maybe he meant she should stop, for since he had not yet ascended there still were things to do, so she should go to the apostles and report to them.

In Isaiah 53, the prophet said that the Suffering Servant of Yahweh would die for the nation. But the prophecy continues that this Messiah would see the good results of his sacrificial death in the justification of believers [in other words, when God declared believers to be righteous in his sight because of that sacrifice]. And this Savior would be rewarded by God, including receiving blessing in the spoils of victory over the nation's oppressors. We know now that Jesus was that Suffering Servant who died for the nation, but would see the justification of believers as a result, and would be rewarded by God the Father, specifically as the Davidic King who will return to be victorious over the unbelieving nations.

Reflect: As you have done these devotions, you have learned about Jesus being the Messiah/Christ/Savior, the New Adam, the Greater Moses Prophet, God's Greatest Prophet, the Ultimate Davidic King, the High Priest like Melchizedek, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Son of Man of Daniel, and the divine Son of God. Why is it important to understand the many aspects of Jesus' identity? Mary did not understand who Jesus really was or what he could and was planning to do in the crucifixion, so even though she was devoted and trusting, at 20.15 she still did not have saving faith. Is it possible for people today to go through life thinking they are Christians, even living like Christians, and not have accepted the gospel and received salvation? How can you be sure about your faith and your destiny?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 20.11-18. The resurrection accounts show Jesus has a body which could be touched, bore the marks of his pre-death wounds, and could consume food; but also rose from the dead, could appear in a locked room, and sometimes was not initially recognized! As 1 Corinthians 15.40-44 NIV says, "There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another... The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable... it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." This is still highly mysterious to us!

Reflect: In what ways do you think Jesus' resurrected body might be like the bodies we will have in the resurrection? Can you think of any reasons why our resurrected bodies might differ from his? What differences might there be? Prayerfully read Romans 6.1-14. What does this passage say about victory for you and your life? Rejoice that you are made spiritually alive and free in Christ!