

## THE EMPTY TOMB

John 20:1-18

Intro: Bishop Westcott says of John's account of the resurrection,

"It is not simply a history, still less an exhaustive history, but a revelation of spiritual truth through outward facts. Writing in the centre of a Christian Church to those who were familiar with the historic groundwork of the Gospel, the Evangelist recounts from his own experience just those incidents which called out in the disciples the fulness of belief triumphant over personal sorrow, and common fear, and individual doubt . . . It lays open a new Life in Christ, and a new life in men" (p. 287).

Note John 20:9. As far as the effect is concerned, at this point our Lord might just as well have said nothing concerning His death and resurrection. But we are to see how the Lord brought this truth to their understanding, and what of all the circumstances pleased the Lord.

How did it come about? Note, first

I. THE EMPTY TOMB--THE PLACE OF DISCOVERY (vv. 1-10).

It was Mary Magdalene who first discovered

A. The stone rolled away.

There is no evidence here in v. 1 that she looked into the sepulchre. John simply says that she "seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth . . ."

We could take it that this was the realization of her deepest fears (and possibly also those of the apostles)--that the Jews would do away with the body of Christ.

And this is what she knows has happened, and so she runs to tell Peter and John so that there may be no more delay in finding out what had happened.

The reaction of Peter and John seems to confirm this. (See vv. 3, 4.)

But here the evidence advances as Peter and John look

B. Inside the tomb.

Here we have what Bishop Westcott has called "a revelation of spiritual truth through outward facts," AND JOHN PICTURES THIS FOR US BY SPEAKING OF THREE WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE EVIDENCE!

1. John arrived first, "And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying" (v. 5).

The words, "and looking in," are in italics (if your Bible uses them), indicating that they were added by the translators. But Brown (V, 289) says that they need to be there to convey the full meaning of παρακύψας. "The idea which it conveys is that of looking intently with eager desire and effort (literally bending beside) at that which is partially concealed" (Ibid.). Cf. JAS 1:25  
1 PET. 1:12

But this is followed by the word for "simple sight": (Westcott, p. 289): βλέπει. He just saw enough to know that the Lord's body was gone, but then he waited for Peter. His purpose seems to have been that he first of all wanted to confirm what Mary Magdalene had reported, but not with positive proof.

How many people stop with this!

But then Peter came and

2. He looks in a second way. (Read vv. 6<sup>7</sup>).

"Seeth"--the verb θεωρεῖ. It "expresses the earnest intent gaze of the Apostle as his eye passes from point to point" (p. 290 in Westcott).

He saw, but he could not understand!

What did he see?

HE SAW THAT THE GRAVE CLOTHES WERE STILL AS THEY HAD BEEN WOUND AROUND THE LORD'S BODY, BUT THEY HAD FALLEN FLAT--BECAUSE THE BODY WAS GONE.

Keep in mind what John tells us in v. 9.

However, at this point John comes in and we have

3. The third view.

Read v. 8.

At this point John uses a third expression. It is the word, εἶδεν, which is the 2nd aor. indic. act. of ὁράω.

Thayer says that ὁράω "gives prominence to the discerning mind . . . denotes perception in general (as resulting principally from vision" (p. 452).

So it means to see something which you look at and then to perceive its significance with your mind, to understand.

As we would say, "Oh, I see!"

Thayer cites many examples of this (John 1:18; 3:11, 32; 6:46; 8:38; 16:16-19; Acts 8:23; Col. 2:18), but two are especially clear:

- (1) John 14:7, 9, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. . . "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"
- (2) Rom. 15:21, "But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand" (quoted from Isa. 52:15).

John understood--and we have a unique situation here where JOHN SEEMS TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST BY FACTUAL EVIDENCE BEFORE HE REALIZED ITS PLACE IN SCRIPTURE.

This explains why "he saw, and believed"!

Now a very strange thing happens. Read v. 10. AND NOTE THE CONTRAST WITH V. 11. John (and possibly Peter) may have been satisfied to know that He was alive, but this truth had not yet gripped the heart of Mary and SHE REFUSES TO BE SATISFIED UNTIL SHE KNOWS WHERE THE LORD IS! And so we have at

## II. THE EMPTY TOMB--A BROKEN HEART (vv. 11-18).

Note the burden of her heart: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him" (vv. 2, 13; cf. v. 15).

Here is the lesson for us from Mary Magdalene. Peter and John might be satisfied with the evidence; Mary had to know where our Lord (His body) was. What devotion!

In v. 11 she does what John did in v. 5.

In vv. 12 and 14 she does what Peter did in v. 6.

How wonderful it is to see that the Lord Himself answers the heart-cry of Mary!

And when she returns to the disciples, ~~she~~<sup>John</sup> uses the same word in v. 18 for her that he had used for himself in v. 8.

Her broken heart was healed, and her sorrow was turned to joy!

Concl: What confirmation there is here for the believer's faith!

And what a challenge for those who have never yet trusted the Lord!

Do you have trouble with the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? So did Peter and John.

But they were convinced by what they saw in the tomb. Then their faith was strengthened when the Lord Himself appeared to them. AND THEY SPENT THE REST OF THEIR LIVES TELLING MEN EVERYWHERE THAT JESUS CHRIST HAD BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

How wonderful to read in Rev. 1:9,

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Is your heart open to an honest investigation of this truth? If so, then examine the evidence in the Word--and our Lord will satisfy your heart as he did Peter's and John's and Mary's!

NOTES ON JOHN 21:15-17

The Greek verbs which the Lord used His questions, and the verb which Peter used in each answer are:

- 1) V. 15: ἀγαπᾷς φιλῶ
- 2) V. 16: ἀγαπᾷς φιλῶ
- 3) V. 17 φιλεῖς φιλῶ

Ἀγαπάω -- a reasoned attachment, choice, selection, that which due another because of who he is, or because of some beneficent thing he has done.

φιλέω -- while not unreasoned, it does not feel necessary to explain. Is more instinctive, has more feeling, passion.

(Trench, pp. 41, 42)

Each time after Peter's answer, the Lord said:

- 1) V. 15: "Feed my lambs" Βόσκει τὰ ἀρνία μου
- 2) V. 16: "Feed my sheep" Ποίμαινε τὰ προβάτια μου
- 3) V. 17: "Feed my sheep" Βόσκει τὰ προβάτια μου

1) and 3) simply mean, to feed.

2) includes all of the work of a shepherd: feeding, guiding, guarding, seeing that the flock is in the fold.