

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**John 20:1-10 | The Empty Tomb That's Not So Empty**  
Sunday March 31, 2024

**WELCOME:**

- Happy Easter / Resurrection Sunday!
- Please turn your Bibles to John 20.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Notes are in the foyer, so take them home with you.

**REVIEW:**

Last week, we celebrated *Palm Sunday*.

Palm Sunday is the day we celebrate when Jesus of Nazareth—both the Son of God and the Son of Man—rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with one hundred thousand people shouting... *Estimated*

***Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mark 11:9)***

What took place last week is paradoxical.

I mentioned how Palm Sunday is both comforting and tragic, beautiful and awful, holy and profane—all at once.

We learned about two prophecies.

We discovered through our studies the tragic vision from Ezekiel.

He saw *God's glory* leaving the temple.

In other words, God's presence left the Jews to fend for themselves.

However, Ezekiel also prophesied that the Lord would return.

In addition, Zechariah prophesied 520 years earlier that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a colt.

We then tied everything together by recognizing how it was the Lord Jesus Christ who fulfilled both prophecies.

Not only were those prophecies fulfilled but they were fulfilled down to the exact minute detail—

Because Jesus entered Jerusalem at the same eastern gate God's glory left over 500 years prior.

Details matter in Scripture.

Lastly, we also learned that God cares about the details in your life—and that's why we too can shout...

*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mark 11:9)*

And we can pray that prayer regardless of our current circumstances.

## INTRODUCTION:

I mentioned last Sunday that half of both Mark and John's Gospels—are dedicated to what happened between Palm Sunday and Resurrection Sunday.

Nearly 1/3 of both Matthew and Luke write about this past week.

So, a lot has happened during this “Holy/Passion” week in the Gospels.

In fact, Scripture lists 51 separate events from when Jesus entered the temple on that Monday evening to when He was resurrected on Sunday morning.

Let me cover the highlights of the past week so we're all on the same page.

We left off on Monday evening (even though we celebrate Palm Sunday on Sunday).

**Mark 11:11**—He went into Jerusalem and into the temple. After looking around at everything, since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

So, after Jesus left the temple that Monday evening, Jesus and His disciples walked two miles to Bethany and probably spent the night with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

#### Tuesday...

- Jesus returns to the temple and clears it out for the second time—removing all the pop-up stores and con artists. */money changers/ tables*
- Jesus spent the rest of Tuesday teaching in the temple.

#### Wednesday...

- Jesus teaches in the temple through parables and teaches on God and Ceasar.
- Jesus pronounces the "woe" judgments to the Pharisees.
- Jesus teaches the disciples about the End Times—called the Olivet Discourse.

#### Thursday...

- Disciples prep for Passover meal.

#### Thursday evening...

- Jesus celebrates the final Passover with the disciples—also called the First Lord's Supper.
- Jesus washes the disciple's feet.
- Jesus prays the High Priestly prayer.

Early Friday Morning...

- Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Judas betrays Jesus
- Jesus is arrested.
- Jesus goes through a mock trial.
- Peter denies that he knows Jesus.
- Jesus is sentenced to death by the Jewish Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate.
- Jesus is mocked, beaten, and scourged by Roman Soldiers.
- Jesus carries His cross to Golgotha.
- Jesus spends six hours suffering on a Roman cross—experiencing the wrath of God for crimes He didn't commit.
- Jesus dies, his body is taken down, cleaned, and given a proper Jewish burial—wrapped in burial clothes and spices. *- then laid in a hewn tomb*

Saturday...is the Sabbath day—no work is done. Everyone rests.

And with that flyby of Holy/Passion Week, we find ourselves on Sunday morning.

And this is where we pick up <sup>*A tiny fact*</sup> the greatest story ever told.

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.\**

SCRIPTURE:

**John 20:1**—On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

**John 20:2**— So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!"

**John 20:3**— At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb.

**John 20:4**— The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first.

**John 20:5**— Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

**John 20:6**— Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there.

**John 20:7**— The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself.

**John 20:8**— The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed.

**John 20:9**— For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.

**John 20:10**— Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

*These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.*

**PRAY:**

*But I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the end he will stand on the dust.  
Even after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet I will see God in my flesh.  
I will see him myself;  
my eyes will look at him, and not as a stranger.  
My heart longs within me. ( Job 19:25)*

**EXEGESIS:**

**John 20:1**—On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

All four Gospels say the same thing—"the first day of the week."

John would go on and write in Revelation that this day is "The Lord's Day." (Rev. 1:10)

It's the Lord's Day because it's the day of Jesus' resurrection—that's why we gather and worship on Sunday.

Every Sunday we celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

**John 20:1b**—On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early,

Mary Magdalene appears in all four Gospels as a follower of Jesus (Luke 8:2).

Mary's last name, "Magdalene," implies that she was from Magdala, a town near the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had cast seven demons out from her (Mark 16:9 and Luke 8:2).

She may have been wealthy because Mark's Gospel includes her among the women who provided for Jesus. (Mark 15:40–41)

The apostle John focuses on Mary in his narrative.

However, the other Gospels also tell us that Jesus' mother, Joanna, and Salome were present with Mary at the tomb.

Two rumors about Mary Magdalene.

1. She was married to Jesus (DaVinci Code)
2. She was a prostitute. (Scripture doesn't affirm).

**John 20:1c**—*On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark.*

Darkness is a good illustration of Mary's understanding of what she's about to witness.

However, Mark's Gospel states that the other women arrived after sunrise (Mark 16:2).

Is that a contradiction? No, not at all!

When we read all four Gospels together, we learn that the women evidently started walking together.

Still, Mary somehow got ahead of the other women—maybe she walked faster or even ran.

Regardless, Mary arrives at the tomb first, and that's what John focuses on.

**John 20:1d**—*She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.*

Put yourself in Mary's shoes.

Before she met Jesus, Mary had lived with not one, not two, not three—seven demons.

We don't know how long she lived this way—we can only guess the torture that she endured.

What we do know is that Mary didn't leave Jesus' side after her deliverance.

Mary witnessed the most crucial events surrounding the crucifixion—while the other disciples scattered.

She was at the mock trial of Jesus.

She saw the abuse of the Jewish and Roman leaders with her own eyes.

She heard Pontius Pilate pronounce Jesus' death sentence with her own ears.

She saw Jesus beaten and humiliated by the crowd.

She was one of the women at the crucifixion itself.

She also saw Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea take down Jesus' body, prepare it with spices and place it in the tomb.

After experiencing all that—living nightmare— over the past week, how much sleep do you think Mary has gotten ~~any sleep~~ over the past few days?

And now, the Jewish Sabbath day is over—and where is Mary?

At Jesus' graveyard! She is still with Jesus.

Now, Mary is already in a fragile and vulnerable state of mind.

And she sees something that she wasn't expecting.

**John 20:1d**—*She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.*

Can you imagine her emotions the moment she laid eyes on that tomb and saw its entrance wide open?

I'm guessing a shot of pure fear overwhelmed her body—fear of what?



Fear of the unknown.

What was running through her head?

- *Who moved the stone?*
- *Where's Jesus' body?*
- *Did Joseph of Arimathaea move it?*
- *What am I to do?*

She doesn't know what to do, so her instincts kick in, and fear prevents her from entering the tomb.

Fight or flight mode kicks in, and...

**John 20:2**— So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!"

The other disciple is John, our Gospel writer.

**Question:** Who's the "they?" (They've taken the Lord...)

Who's Mary talking about?

We don't know—but we can take an educated guess.

It could be the Romans, the Scribes/Pharisees, or even grave robbers.

As sick as it sounds, people robbing graves was a thing in the first century.

It became so common that Emperor Claudius (ad 41–54) eventually ordered capital punishment for those convicted of destroying tombs or removing bodies.

**John 20:3**— At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb.

So the moment Peter and John hear Mary's news, they bolt to the tomb to see for themselves.

**John 20:4**— *The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first.*

What's going through Pete and John's minds as they sprint towards the tomb?

Anger. Fear. Betrayal. Who knows?!

John gets there first because he's younger (most likely) and looks in the tomb.

Think about how creepy this is.

**John 20:5**— *Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.*

The first thing John sees are grave clothes.

The sight of Jesus' grave clothes—without Jesus—must have left an unforgettable impression on John because he mentions it four times in two verses.

It struck so much fear into <sup>John</sup> ~~him~~ that he immediately stopped.

When John saw the grave clothes, he looked at them in this impulsive and hasty manner.

It's like John saw the clothes and immediately is scanning the tomb for Jesus' body or for somebody hiding.

The Greek verb is *blepō*; it means nothing more than "sight."

John "saw" the grave clothes standing outside the entrance of the tomb.

Just as Mary was fearful when she saw the stone rolled away—John is also fearful by seeing Jesus' grave clothes.

**QUESTION:** Why on earth are Jesus' grave clothes still there?

Mary said that someone had moved the body.

**PAUSE**—Why would someone move the body and leave the grave clothes? ?!

As John tries to make sense of all this—Pete shows up and doesn't hesitate to go in the tomb.

**John 20:6**— Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb.

Can you picture Peter arriving, out of breath and in a hurry—and pushing John aside, plunging into the tomb?

**KEYPOINT 1:**

*The stone was not rolled away so Jesus could get out. Rather, it was so the disciples could get in!*

**John 20:6**— He (Peter) entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there.

Both Disciples see the grave clothes—it's the first thing Scripture points out.

However, Peter sees them differently than John at first.

Pete doesn't just casually look at them—Peter scrutinizes the grave clothes carefully.

Scripture uses a particular word for what Peter did— The Greek verb is not *blepō* but *theoreō*.

We get our English words "theory" from it.

Peter observes and sees those clothes with careful attention and perception.

Verse seven tells us precisely what Peter saw—

**John 20:7**— *The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself.*

Now, this verse is unintentionally communicating something that is not correct.

Let me back up...

Every society has different methods of burying their dead.

For example, in Egypt, bodies were embalmed.

In Rome and Greece, they were often cremated.

In Israel, they were neither embalmed nor cremated—bodies were wrapped in linen strips packed spices.

The bodies were wrapped in such a manner to where they would leave the face, neck, and upper part of the shoulders bare.

The upper part of the head then was covered by a separate piece of cloth that had been twirled like a turban.

After the body was wrapped in this fashion, the body was then placed face up in tombs.

These tombs were cut from the rock within a hill.

Many of these tombs still exist today.

That said, we have every reason to believe that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus buried Jesus in a similar manner.

John's Gospel tells us that Joe and Nick inserted seventy-five pounds of myrrh, aloes, and spices into the folds of linen. (John 19:29).

Those details are important—

Aloe was made into a fine sawdust material.

Myrrh was a gummy sticky liquid that would be mixed with the aloes.

So, all that to say—Jesus' body was encased in these spices.

Here's the irony—the Empty Tomb is not so empty—is it?!

Jesus' body is not there— but his grave clothes are!

Along with seventy-five pounds of burial spices.

Mary said that "they" moved Jesus' body.

*Question* If Jesus' body were stolen by grave robbers or moved by the Romans or the Pharisees—

- Why would they strip Jesus' body out of His grave clothes?
- And how long would that take?

By that time, the spices would have acted like glue.

If someone or a group of people moved Jesus' body—why isn't there any mention of the tomb itself being a mess with the spices scattered everywhere?

And if thieves did steal Jesus' body, why would they leave such valuable spices behind?

**John 20:8**—The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed.

At this point, John enters the tomb and sees more than Peter does.

This time, the Greek verb *eidon* (e-don) is used, meaning "to see with understanding."

John's understanding of what had just happened led to his belief.

BTW, this is the first time one of the twelve believed in the resurrection.

**Pause:** We still haven't answered the question—

- Where is Jesus' body?
- And why are his grave clothes still in the grave?!

Consider two things before we answer those questions

First, when Jesus resurrected Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus needed help getting out of his grave clothes.

**John 11:44**—The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth (turban). Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go."

Second, Jesus repeatedly told the disciples that He would rise from the dead.

If you had been inside Jesus' tomb, what do you think you would have seen at the moment of His resurrection?

Would you have seen Jesus wake up, open his eyes, sit up, and struggle out of the grave clothes? (Like the movies).

No. That would have been a resuscitation, not a resurrection.

### **KEYPOINT 2:**

*Jesus was resurrected not resuscitated.*

If something like a resuscitation happened, Jesus would have been raised in a human body, similar to Lazarus.

And we all know that's not what happened—because Scripture tells us.

Let's hit the fast-forward button for a moment. *(After Resurrection...)*

**John 20:19**—When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

**John 20:26**—A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

**Question:** How did Jesus get into the room with the doors locked?

**Answer:** With His new resurrected body.

If you had been in the tomb at the moment of the resurrection, you would have seen one of two things happen:

1. You would have witnessed the earthly body of Jesus disappear.
2. You would have seen His earthly body supernaturally change into a resurrection body and disappear.

Either way, Jesus' new resurrection body would have passed through His grave clothes — just as it passed through those closed doors.

Jesus' grave clothes would have receded and fallen once the body disappeared— but they also would have held the overall form of Jesus' dead earthly body because of the burial spices. 75 pounds / 6 lbs

Therefore, the grave clothes lay undisturbed until John and Pete show up.

Back to...

**John 20:7**— The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself.

If we're not careful, this verse makes it sound like Jesus resuscitated and took the cloth off his head and laid it down—

Which gives credibility to the Swoon theory, which states that Jesus never died—that He simply passed out.

But that's not what happened.

Remember, this head cloth was a separate piece of material from Jesus' body, wrapped like a turban around His head.

And it was this piece that was lying in a place by itself—probably several inches apart from the body—which is the distance from his bare shoulders to his face.

What's even more fascinating is that this head cloth had kept its circular shape.

How do we know?

The Greek verb is *entylissō*, meaning "neatly composed so that one part covers the other."



- The ESV and LSB translate *entylissō* —*folded up*.
- NASB—*rolled up*.
- NKJV—*folded together*.
- AMP—but was [still] rolled up (wrapped round and round) in a place by itself.

It wasn't that Jesus folded the headpiece up after He was resurrected.

Rather, the headpiece was still wrapped together/folded up and neatly composed from when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared Jesus' body on Friday!

Why? Because Jesus' new resurrection body disappeared through the grave clothes.

Do you see how its impossible for someone to move or steal Jesus' body?

It's impossible because there was no human body in the tomb.

As the angels told the women...

**Matthew 28:6**— *He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*

Jesus now lives in His new resurrected body.

**John 20:9**— *For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.*

Jesus repeatedly told the disciples that He must rise from the dead...but they couldn't hear it.

**John 20:10**— *Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.*

Wouldn't you like to be a fly on a wall listening to that conversation?!



 **PREACH:**

Jesus' resurrection is the hinge that proves everything Jesus said is true.

Jesus' resurrection is the key that unlocks the door to true truth.

The resurrection caused the disciples to write the Gospels.

The existence of the church is evidence of the resurrection.

Jesus fulfills the Davidic Covenant through the resurrection.

And our lives have been forever changed because of the resurrection.

Yet, the resurrection also guarantees judgment for those who refuse to believe in the Gospel.

*What's the resurrection mean for you today?*

It depends on where you are.

If you're a Believer, the resurrection proves that your sins have been forgiven and by God's grace, you too will have a new resurrection body.

If you're a Believer, you have the hope of eternal life with Jesus— along with the peace that He gives while you endure the trials of this life.

If you're a Believer—this is not your best life now. Not even close!

However, if you're an unbeliever—please know that this is your best life now.

If you're an unbeliever—this is as good as it gets—why? Because your sins have not been paid for.

Jesus came from Heaven, was born of a virgin to bypass human sin—

Lived a perfect life, dies a substitutionary death and was resurrected from the dead to satisfy God the Father's righteous wrath for sin.

And if you don't believe in the Gospel—that Jesus is God and died for sinners—then you will have to pay for your sins yourself—in a very real place called hell for eternity.

**John 3:16**—For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

**John 3:17**—For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

**John 3:18**—Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

**John 3:19**—This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

**John 3:20**—For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.

But, your destiny can change today.

**Romans 10:9**—If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

**Romans 10:10**—One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

Dear friends, The Empty Tomb— is Not So Empty for a reason.

Those grave clothes were left there as one of the many signs for you to believe in the Gospel.



## **PRAYER**

### **Music**

## **BENEDICTION**

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! ...To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! (Rev. 5:12)*

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