

Twenty-One Days With John

Day 20 – John 20

Prayer:

Lord, Jesus. Your salvation was finished on the cross. As I read John 20, help me see that the Your greater work occurred that first Easter morning. Even as You have risen from the dead, enable me by Baptism, to rise to new life in You. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Meditation:

“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God,
for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead.”

I Corinthians 15:14-15 (NIV)

In I Corinthians 15, the “Resurrection Chapter” of the Bible, Paul poignantly described the importance of the resurrection. How important is it? One can believe Jesus’ incarnation...and not be saved. One can believe He did miracles and changed lives...and not be saved. One can even believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive sins...and not be saved.

The importance of Jesus’ resurrection is such that if the resurrection had not occurred, Paul taught, even the most vividly accurate eye-witness accounts of these workings of Jesus—and the strongest faith the world has ever seen—would be *vain, worthless and useless*. (cf. I Cor. 15:14,17).

That is why John’s eye-witness testimony of Jesus’ ministry cannot end with John’s testimony of a crucified Messiah in John 19. The only way to *fully* validate the testimony is have an eyewitness testimony to testify to a *risen* Messiah.

John 20-21 is not the only place in Scripture where John described the Resurrection. In I John 1 John’s detailed a classic testimony of his up-front-and-personal experience of the resurrected Jesus. John’s Apocalypse, an account of twenty-two chapters in which John gave eyewitness testimony of the risen and glorified Messiah, is another major record of the resurrected Jesus. His works taken together, John has the distinction of being the one who has written more about the resurrected Christ than *any* other Biblical prophet or apostle...*combined!*

In chapter 20, John’s account begins where the other Gospels begin: early on the Easter morning. Note John’s record of the discovery of the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene was first to arrive. Seeing the stone rolled away, she was startled. Frantically, she ran back to Peter and the “other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved,” that is, John (20:2).

It is interesting that Peter and John were together. How was it that Peter and John were together? We know John was at the cross when Jesus died. Peter, having denied Jesus, was apparently AWOL...or was he? Sometime after Jesus’ death and the events of John 20, Peter and John came together. What occurred in their interaction is unknown. Nor do we know what, if any, conversations or exchanges that Peter, the denying disciple, and John, the loyal disciple, had.

The fact that Peter and John *were* together in John 20:1ff. is rather remarkable. Obviously *something* bound these two disciples together. Perhaps it was a spirit of forgiveness which John shared with Peter. Perhaps it was the camaraderie of two life-long fishermen developed over a three-year trek with Jesus. Perhaps what brought them together was a deeply-shared longing and their best Friend, Jesus. Or, perhaps, John needed the testimony of two witnesses to validate the Truth of the events at Jesus’ empty tomb.

Peter, true to his nature, ran to the tomb. His impulsively jumping ahead full-throttle doesn’t surprise us. That’s just Peter. But this time Peter’s not alone. John is running too. In fact, John ran faster and reached the tomb first and was the first to look in. Coming from behind, Peter

Twenty-One Days With John

Day 20 – John 20

apparently, without any hesitation, ran right inside of the tomb. After some apparent hesitation John “finally” entered the tomb (20:8).

In light of this, a natural question to ask is this: Were Peter and John running to the tomb because they anticipated Jesus’ resurrection? Did they know that Jesus, as He said, would rise of the “third day?” John, ever an honest truth-bearer, admitted his own and Peter’s weakness. “They still did not understand,” he wrote (John 20:9 [NIV]). The simple truth of Easter is this: The resurrection surprised Peter and John...*totally!*

Jesus’ first resurrection appearance recorded in John was to Mary Magdalene. Of all those whom Jesus could have appeared to first, Mary was certainly a high candidate for this honor for many reasons.

First, she was there at the empty tomb, profusely weeping for her esteemed *Rabboni*.

Second, she had cared so much for Jesus that she witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion from afar (Matthew 27:55).

Third, she no doubt felt a *lifelong* bond of thanks to Jesus after He exorcised the seven demons from her (Luke 8:2).

Fourth, Luke, in chapter 8:3, described how Mary and a couple of other women financially supported Jesus and the disciples. In essence she, alone with several other women, underwrote Jesus’ ministry...of her very own pocket.

According to John, Mary Magdalene enjoys the distinction of being the *very first one* to see *and* believe Jesus had risen. Later that evening, John recorded Jesus’ appearance to the other disciples. Now they, too, believed and according to 20:20, they were “glad” (KJV) and “overjoyed” (NIV).

All except for Thomas. When the other unbelieving disciples saw the resurrected Jesus, their new first-hand experience of the risen Christ shattered their prior doubt and skepticism. Detailing Thomas’ stubborn unbelief, John used Thomas’ experience to silence any skeptic or doubter. Did Jesus rise from the dead? Just ask “Doubting”—now “Confident and Unshakeable”—Thomas and with Thomas exclaim, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28 NIV).

John used Thomas’ witness and all those mentioned prior in John for *one main purpose*: “That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31 NIV). Underline this verse. Fold over the corner of the page. Mark it as distinctively as you can! It’s the *whole* reason for this Gospel. It’s the purpose for which John, led by the Holy Spirit, took the time to painstakingly lay out His argument, and give the testimonies of so many, many witnesses.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. Do you, too, believe?

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, You are the Son of God. Born, crucified, dead and resurrected, You alone are the Lord of glory. Help me to celebrate Your resurrection each day. Each time I consider Your cross, lead me also to Your empty, glorified tomb. There, let me know anew the joy of believing in You, the Resurrection and the Life. Amen.

Thomas F. Fischer