

Holy Week in Biblical Perspective

Easter Sunday

“The Gardener?”

John 20:1–18

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We are celebrating His resurrection on this day after this week of celebrating the eight days of glory. We will be looking at John 20:1–18 but in order to approach these verses I want to start by looking at John 20:30–31 says [30] *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Perspective counts for everything – what you know and how you look at it. Had Jesus not said ‘On the third day I’ll rise again’? Here we are on the third day. Hebrews counted evening and morning as the day. So when Jesus died on Friday that was the first day. The Hebrew day didn’t begin in the morning but the evening before. Then the last Old Covenant He rests in the grave and that is day two. Then the rising sun brought Him forth and that’s day three, evening and morning. This third day perspective is everything.

If you were in heaven and in concert with the angels you’re view of that day would be one of victory. Praise the Lord! From the moment Jesus said on Good Friday “It is finished” Jesus has drank to the bottom the cup of God’s judgment, paid the penalty for all the sins of all of His people and has secured their redemption. From heaven’s perspective it is glory. From the Father’s perspective He has seen the travail of His Son’s atoning death and His justice is satisfied. The Spirit of God has gloriously affirmed the glorious truth of our redemption. The Spirit of Christ from the cross has been commended back to the presence of His Father. He has now gone to paradise as He had instructed the thief on the cross when He said ‘This day I will be with you in paradise’ (Luke 23:43). His body is placed in the tomb. From heaven’s perspective this is a triumph. What seems to be a tragic death, is no tragedy. It is the triumph of our redemption.

From earth’s perspective, from the garden on, everything is in shambles. The whole weight of everything that is taking place humanly speaking, is being born on the brunt and weight of women. The women are bearing up and in fulfillment of Jesus’ prophetic warning the men, the Disciples have fled. We don’t know where all they went. Some may have fled from the garden back to Bethany to the haven of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Some may have fled have fled to the Hasmonean palace because some were of Herod’s household. Some may have fled back to the Upper Room which was the home owned by the father of John Mark where they had established the Lord’s Supper and where Jesus had washed their feet. Some may have fled to the home of John and James for they had a home there in Jerusalem. Things were in shambles and they didn’t know what to make of it.

Now the third day arrives. How are they going to respond? We have in our Bibles the life account and ministry of Jesus that is prophetically given to us in the Old Testament and expositionally or by explanation it is given to us in the Epistles of Paul, Peter, James, Jude and others, but the account of it is given to us by four Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and

John. They also have a perspective and they write inspired by the Holy Spirit. Like all the human authors, their humanity is being used by the Holy Spirit. They don't become robots all of a sudden just spitting out the Word of God. This is coming through who they are, their personality, profile and all the ways God has prepared them for this moment.

It is not only given from their perspective of what they had when these things were occurring but also from the perspective of where they are writing when they write these things years later. They are in other places remembering, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these things down from the perspective of where their present day ministries were. They are also writing from their passion about this and they are all writing from a purpose that takes into account their personality, passion and perspective. They have a purpose when they write. In this study I have asked you to look at the account of John. John is giving us his perspective and purpose. He like the other writers have done some editing. They don't write exhaustively everything that Jesus did and said for there are some things they left on the cutting room floor.

The other writers may have included them but each had a very particular purpose. Matthew purpose was clear for he was writing to Jews to affirm to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. He arranged those facts with integrity and veracity inspired by the Holy Spirit inerrantly but he was specifically trying to convince the Jewish people that this Jesus had fulfilled all those prophecies. Luke is writing an historical account. He tells us that he went and interviewed people. He got eye witnesses and then gives us a distillation of the account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Mark also has a burden and that tends to go toward the Gentiles. So then we get a composition of the life and ministry of Jesus as they all fashion it with a specific purpose.

I think about 80 to 100 years ago a new discipline arose in criminology called the composite sketch artist. Nowadays you don't need this person for now you just talk into a computer and the sketch comes out but then they would get an artist as they brought in all the witnesses. The witnesses would tell what they saw, who they saw and answer questions from this police artist and as they would answer he would put together the sketch of what they person may have looked like.

That is very much like what is happening with these four writers of the Gospels with their purposes, passions and profiles as they each are giving us a composition of the life and ministry of Jesus over 33 years. They are all united in their accounts to make sure you understand from their perspective so that as you put it together you get the bigger picture of what happened. Let's look at how John describes this day from John 20. John develops this into three scenes that we will be looking at.

Scene one is called Mary Magdalene's arrival and is takes place in John 20:1-2 which says *[1] Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. [2] So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved (this is the way John referred to himself, humbly), and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

You can immediately see that she is not thinking about a resurrection. She is convinced a body snatch has taken place. This is one of the places John has done some editing in his Gospel. There is a reason why he has focused upon Mary Magdalene who has kind of become the leader of this group called the 'women from Galilee.' There are seven of them. Mary Magdalene had been delivered from seven demonic spirits. Matthew focuses on Mary Magdalene, the other Mary who was the mother of the Disciple known as James the son of Alpheus, and Salome who was the sister of Jesus' mother whose sons were the Disciples, John and James. So John and

James were cousins to Jesus. Mark focuses on Mary Magdalene and the other Mary but not Salome and Luke focuses upon all the women, including Joanna, Susanna and the rest who all had arrived there as well.

John is focused on Mary Magdalene for a reason. Realize that other women have arrived at the tomb and they are prepared. These were the same women who were last at the cross. They are the ones who prepared the body of Jesus with 75 pounds of spices drenching the linen cloths and put Him aside in a secured tomb by Joseph of Arimathea when at the last minute he had made an appeal to Pilot. So instead of Jesus' body getting thrown into the criminals grave which everyone assumed would be done now is put in a borrowed tomb of a rich man fulfilling another prophecy. That tomb is nearby in a garden near the execution spot of Golgotha.

The women were not only the last at the cross but they also followed Him to the grave. We are told they lingered at the grave for two reasons. One was to see where they laid Jesus and two to see how they laid Jesus. Then they left for the Sabbath was coming. So the from the day of preparation they saw the day of His burial and they go now to keep the Sabbath. Now they come on the first day with no reference that He said He would rise on the third day, it's just the first day they could come because they couldn't come on the Sabbath and they have come prepared. The evening of the Sabbath starts the next day which is the first day of the week and now the marketplaces would open up for a couple of hours for the coming of the week.

This is where they would buy spices and they are very particular spices. These would be spices of an aromatic sense, different than those for burying someone. In archeology they would find vials of these spices in tombs. They would have bought these spices and secured them in these vials. So why would they take these if they had already prepared the body with the other spices? It's the third day. Jesus raised Lazarus on the fourth day and the comment made when Jesus told them to go in to get Lazarus was 'He stinketh!' So there would have been odors on the third day and that's their answer to these vials. As they would have brought those vials it would have also been a statement of affection to place upon Jesus and in the tomb of Jesus. So they set out in the dark but the sun is rising and as they get closer one of them says 'We forgot something? Who is going to roll the stone away?' These were all women.

What they don't know is they actually have three concerns and not just the one about the stone. The stone wasn't put there to keep dead people from coming out normally but it was there to keep animals from coming in to do their vulture work or to keep grave robbers and body snatchers out. So now there were two more problems they didn't realize. The Pharisees had this all worked out where they would take Jesus' body and throw it in a criminal's grave with the other two thieves but two of their own Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus got permission from Pilot to put Jesus' body in a tomb in a nearby garden. Even though Jesus repeated on a number of occasions that He would be delivered up, die and be raised on the third day this was not even on the radar of His Disciples but the Sanhedrin remembered it. They weren't necessarily concerned about Him rising from the dead but about someone stealing His body and saying He rose on the third day. So they went to Pilot to ask him for to make sure it was sealed and to put some soldiers in front of it. So the women will have a problem with the seal of the stone and with the soldiers as well as getting the stone moved.

When they get there the problems are solved. Who solved it? God solved it. How? He sent two angels and an earthquake. The stone was so far removed that from some distance Matthew tells us that they see one of the angels sitting on it. O grave where is your victory? Another angel is inside and both eventually end up inside the tomb. The seal was broken and the soldiers were gone by the time the women got there. When the women go inside the tomb they

see where the body of Jesus came up out of those 75 pound spice drenched cloths and then a face cloth is folded up over to the side.

Luke 24:5–8 says [5] *And as they (the women) were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men (angels) said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He (Jesus) is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, [7] that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” [8] And they remembered his words.*

Matthew 28:5–8 says [5] *But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. [6] He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. [7] Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” [8] So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.*

He will not only meet them in Galilee as one of His 13 appearances but He will have a secret appearance to see if they show up for church that night. So they went away in obedience and disobedience. Their disobedience is that they didn't get rid of all their fear but they also went away with joy to tell the Disciples. John zeroes in on one of them because he has a purpose in it. He doesn't follow all of them but just follows Mary Magdalene who has become the leader of those women. When she tells them to take off as quickly as possible, one is John and the other is Peter. Scene two is dealing with Peter and John.

John 20:3–10 says [3] *So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. [4] Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. [5] And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. [6] Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, [7] and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. [8] Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; [9] for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. [10] Then the disciples went back to their homes.*

So everything I've told you up to this point has been from the Bible. Now I'm going to do some speculating. There are two sets of brothers – Andrew and Peter, James and John. Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida which was next to a town called Capernaum which is where James and John were living with their fishing business. Andrew and Peter were also working with James and John and their fishing business. I think this Bethsaida and Capernaum could be compared to Auburn and Alabama with rivalries and even sibling rivalries. The oldest of one set of brothers, Peter, goes to find Jesus and the youngest of the other set of brothers, John, goes with him.

Peter and John both start running and John is humble because he won't even use his name in this John 20 passage for he refers to himself as the 'other' Disciple. Somehow in the midst of all of his humility he lets us know they had an even start when they began to run and they stayed together for a little while but before long John gets there first. He is so humble that he won't even use his name to tell you he got there first and while he looked in the tomb he didn't go in until the older one showed up. In my mind I can see Peter showing up huffing and puffing but John is respectfully waiting to allow him to go in first. Peter goes in and looks in wonder and marvels. He goes away at this point thinking 'what happened?' but when John goes in he is not only humble and respectful but he is the first one to believe (John 20:8). John also becomes the first evangelist as he leaves to tell the others that Jesus has risen.

Then there is a third scene where it seems that Mary Magdalene must have followed back to the tomb behind Peter and John. As they leave she stays. John 20:11–18 says [11] *But Mary*

stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. [12] And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. [13] They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." (Mary is still convinced that somebody has snatched the body of Jesus.) [14] Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. [15] Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." [16] Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). [17] Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" [18] Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene is overcome with passion and I don't know how much she knew about what Peter and John experienced but she was still in the midst of thinking someone must have taken His body. She has a conversation with two angels and then turns and sees Jesus but doesn't recognize Him, thinking Him to be the gardener. One of the things that stands out in this is that she is having no problem thinking she is talking with two angels but is having a problem believing in a risen Savior. You are probably thinking 'How is she thinking that?'

I know many in the Christian walk and life who have elaborate beliefs in angels, extraterrestrial beings but will have nothing to do with the risen Jesus. That doesn't amaze me but what I love here is what turns it around and that's when He says her name, "Mary." Then she comes back with a term of endearment that I'm sure this woman whom He delivered from seven demons had said this many times, "Rabboni!" Now she sees Him, her Savior and all fear is gone. She takes hold of Him. You can almost picture her grasping His feet that at one time she tried to anoint in the home of Simon.

It is there that Jesus says 'Don't cling to Me' and you may think Jesus is being a little rough with her but no, He is being very compassionate. He is telling her not to cling to Him for this external connection for He must ascend to the throne. He is speaking of His ascent in glory to the right hand of the throne from which He will pour forth the Spirit of Christ. It won't just be an external connection with Him that she can have but He is coming for an internal residence with all of His people. Don't cling to Me for something much better is coming. He will be with all His people, not externally connected, but internally resident to seal you in your salvation. Now go tell them the Good News that My God, My Father is their God, their Father because of My redeeming work. Now Mary Magdalene like John becomes an evangelist and she goes and tells.

Here are a couple of takeaways but first I want to make this point about the women. Isn't marvelous how the Bible affirms in the New Covenant the place of equality in redemption between men and women. There are four men writing these four Gospels and men don't come off too good in this story. The whole brunt up to this point is falling on women. The women are the last at the cross, they linger at the tomb and they are the first at the empty tomb. Praise the Lord for it, but notice they don't see it as equality is interchangeability because these very women who are being honored are going to serve the Lord and at the same time none of them say 'we ought to be Apostles' because of this. They don't usurp the Apostles positions. It is amazing thing to see how this is working in the text here.

Here is the first takeaway. The Providence of God goes before His people to dispel their fears in life and address all of their issues both known and unknown. Here are women in a

quandary about the stone at the tomb but they don't realize there are other problems they would have to face with the seal and the soldiers that happened after they had left the first time and God takes care of both what they knew and what they didn't know. We have no idea what God has done for us that was arrayed against us and you never knew it. He not only takes care of the things that we know – cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you – but He addresses the things you don't know that Satan has designed against you. His Providence like His redeeming work on the cross is victorious.

The second takeaway from this text is how the facts answer the foolish. This does not explain the resurrection. All we know is that from Good Friday the Spirit of Jesus goes to paradise and on the third day the Spirit of Jesus has come back from paradise where somewhere in that period of time has re-entered the body of Jesus that was in the tomb. Now that body is transformed with a physical resurrection and a transformed body for all of eternity that is raised from the dead. The stone is not rolled away to let Him out. Just as He came out of those grave clothes He can come out of that stone as He walks right through the door in the Upper Room for that's not issue for Jesus. The stone is rolled away for you. All the prophecies about this have been fulfilled and the stone is rolled away so that they can see the tomb is empty. We are not told the dynamics of how He was resurrected but He does tell us He is risen and that's why we cry back "He is risen indeed!"

Notice how the Gospel writers put this together. This wasn't a theory or a wish list or a hallucination. You don't hold or cling to hallucinations. You don't see and hear hallucinations. The senses were totally engaged. When I was in college I read all these theories and explanations about the resurrection and you don't know how hard I tried to be an atheist. The Bible isn't written to explain the resurrection or to answer these foolish speculations for the facts just simply do it and confront it. Wrong tomb? They were there and watched there and how He was buried. Stolen body? Those who wanted to didn't and were worried that someone else had stolen it and even if they had stolen it why would all His Apostles die horrendous deaths for this known lie? Jesus didn't really die He just went into a coma. So here is a Man who was beat within a whisper of His life, carried a cross up and collapsed and nailed to a cross with an affixation death which I won't describe here. They stick a spear into His side where blood and water have separated and drain out from His side which is also a sign of death. Then they put 75 pounds of spice on His body as they close Him up in a tomb. Three days later He rolls away a stone from the inside that is sealed and guarded. The facts speak to this directly and profoundly and answers and refute the foolish speculations.

So why does John give us the facts the way that He does? This is the last takeaway. John does it so that you will believe. He doesn't go through all the women he just takes us to Mary Magdalene who believed. He didn't take us to all the Disciples but pointed out Peter and John for they believed. A little later on in the text he gives us a focus on Thomas who believed. John is doing what Jesus does – come, see, hear and believe. Then like Mary, John, Peter and Thomas go and tell.

I'm not asking you today if you believe about Jesus. You probably wouldn't be reading this is if you didn't or perhaps you have some interest about Him, but this isn't what He is asking for or what He demands and He doesn't negotiate. He calls you to believe in Him. Just as Thomas will, 'I surrender, my Lord and my God.' Jesus is not a religious rabbit foot to consult a couple of times a year or once a week. He is a Savior of sinners, sinners like you and me. To have that gift that He paid for as John says 'You have to believe *in* Him.' So would you join Mary Magdalene, John Peter and Thomas and come, see and believe? Perhaps you have done

that and if so, then let's join them and tomorrow go and tell others. The Lord is risen and He is your life. Everyone you talk to can have that life.

Isn't it interesting how honest the Bible is? It is wonderfully honest when it says Mary Magdalene actually thought Jesus was a gardener. Why would John include that, just to show us veracity? Maybe that's one reason to show us that honesty but maybe there is another reason. Jesus is who? He is the Second Adam because in the first Adam, in him we die and in the Second Adam we can live. What was the first Adam's vocation? He was a gardener who was called to fill up the garden and extend it to the whole world. I would suggest that this was John's way of showing what Mary Magdalene thought was a mistake was actually true.

Jesus is a Gardener and He is ready to start in your heart and life, pulling out the weeds of sin and giving you a root in the Righteous One, Jesus Christ from where you can bear fruit and joy forever. Jesus is filling up a garden that is going to fill the whole earth for His glory starting with people like you and me and then through us, throughout the whole world. He is the Gardener and He doesn't till the soil for He will till up your soul and bring you to life. [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples* (John 15:8). Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word this Lord's Day. Thank You that our Savior is risen! If you are reading this and you don't yet know Christ hear now the invitation I now share with you to come and see. He lives and because He lives you can live. Say, 'Jesus I'm a sinner. You are my life. Your resurrection shouts the triumph of Your redemption and I know to say 'yes' for Jesus I come.' For those who know Him, the risen Savior is telling us as He did to John and Mary Magdalene, 'Go and tell, He is risen! He is risen indeed!' Holy Spirit, do right now what only You can do. O Gardener of our soul plant deep the seed of the Gospel. Jesus saves! I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

RECORDED OBSERVATIONS BY JOHN

Scene One

Mary Magdalene and ???

Scene Two

Peter and John

Scene Three

Mary Magdalene Returns

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

1. The Providence of God goes before His people to dispel their fears and address all of their issues both known and unknown.

2. Letting the facts answer the foolish.

3. John's unmistakable purpose.