

III. Holy Week in Biblical Perspective

Eight Days of Grace to Glory

“The Crowded Empty Tomb”

John 20:1–18

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We'll start by looking at John 20. This is the Word of God. God's Word is the truth, inspired, inerrant and infallible. We have come to the eighth day in our study of the passion week, the first day of the week. John 20:1–10 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, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." [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 (John) 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.*

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

Holy week, the week of passion, the week that changes everything, I believe is the most astonishing, the greatest week in all of history with no comparison. The closest comparison would be the week of creation. While the week of creation displays the power of God and His attributes, it doesn't display the vividness of all of His attributes, for in that week there is no sin so the display of grace is not shown in that week and we don't see God's patience with sinners there. We also don't see God's mercy, holiness, righteousness and wrath against sin in the week of creation due to no sin. In this week of passion, God saves sinners through His Son Jesus and the display of John 3:16; *[16] For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* There is no problem in defending that this is the most astonishing week in all of history.

This is a week of up and down emotions. I think of the emotions of Jesus' triumphal entry although Jesus was pensive and thoughtful but everyone else is taken up with the moment of it all. Then there is the next day when Jesus cleanses the temple for the second time in His ministry and the emotions there. The next day they are moved from the bewilderment of this cleansing that has taken place as they see the anger of the Lord against what was happening in the temple and then the next day is the cursing of the fig tree as He then begins teaching in parables. Then comes His announcement that in two days they will celebrate the Passover and then the Son of Man will be delivered up, killed and raised on the third day. On Wednesday of that week people seem to be kind of catching their breath and then Thursday is where God mandates (Maundy) the fulfillment of the Passover. That is now fulfilled in Him as the last Passover with the initiation of the first Lord's Supper. Now we have the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world and a meal that points us back to Him going to the cross.

He will give a new commandment to love one another although that part is old but He says we are to now love one another as He has loved us. I can only imagine what they thought a few days earlier at the Mount of Olives when He gives the Olivet Discourse when He told them about the temple being destroyed in that generation and when He explains His coming at the end of the age. Now after the Lord's Supper they go back to the Mount of Olives as Jesus calls Peter, James and John to pray with Him. Then Jesus goes a little further out to pray but they can hear Him and they will fall asleep three different times. This is the same Jesus that His asleep in the boat when these Disciples call out during a rough storm 'Jesus, don't you care about us?' Now He is in angst, intensity, overwhelmed, even crying out in a petition – 'Father, if there be any way let this cup (of the unmixed wrath of God that He will drink to the bottom for us) pass from Me.' This agony causes His capillaries to burst and the blood is mingled with His sweat as He prays. Then He tells those Disciples to awake from their sleep as His betrayer comes and you wonder what they thought when they saw Judas who had now seized the moment to kiss to betray the Savior. We then see their emotions of fear as they run and scatter to various places.

Peter and John hang back and follow what is about to happen to Jesus. Perhaps it is because of John's relationship with the household of Caiaphas, the High Priest. So they watch from a distance and Peter denies knowing Christ three times. What must that have done when that news had gotten out? We know it greatly effected Peter as he goes away weeping and swearing, returning to his fisherman way of language. Jesus goes through six different trials and the report must have come back as these professionals had scourged and beaten Jesus to almost the point of death. He then bears the cross and is put upon it.

Certainly, the seven sayings He said on the cross came back to the others. The first being "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do,*" from Luke 23:34. The second being, "*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise,*" from Luke 22:43 said to the thief on the cross. The third from Him was to His mother and His cousin brother, *Jesus said to his mother: "Woman, this is your son."* Then He said to the disciple: "*This is your mother,*" from John 19:26–27. The fourth being, "*My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*" from Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34. This is where all the sins for all of eternity for all of His people was poured out upon through God's wrath. The One with perfect unity with the Father is now separated under the torments of God's judgment. We see His humanity is His fifth words from the cross which was "*I thirst*" from John 19:28. Then we see His sovereignty because no man takes His life for He gives is up freely which we see in His sixth saying which was *When Jesus had received the wine, He said, "It is finished;" and He bowed His head and handed over the Spirit,* from John 19:30. Payment has been made in full to save His people from their sins. They are ransomed in the satisfaction of the holiness of God. His last words were, *Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit,"* from Luke 23:46.

He is then taken away in fulfillment of Scripture to a borrowed tomb of a rich man. Two men have stepped up at this moment and one of them is Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin along with another man named Nicodemus. They had already manifested resoluteness for they did not consent to the death sentence by the Sanhedrin. Now we see that Joseph and Nicodemus are identified with Christ for they go to Pilate and ask for His body. Joseph will put Christ's body in his unused tomb. Jesus dies at 3 o'clock and His body is taken down from the cross. They do a preliminary encasing of spices and He is laid in the tomb.

There are so many parallels here. When Jesus was born He was laid in a stone trough, wrapped in cloths and around His little body are the spices – frankincense and myrrh. Now as He has saved His people from their sins He is laid in another stone trough wrapped in cloths encased in frankincense and myrrh, the One who after His circumcision would have shed blood and on the cross He shed blood to circumcise (cut away) our sin record to cancel it – paid in full.

Standing somewhat away is a company of women who are called the women of Galilee. We know many of their names but not all of them. They are watching and probably around 4 o'clock they begin to leave. Here I will speculate – after the women see Joseph and Nicodemus hurriedly prepare the body they would say 'Isn't that just like men?' The reason I say that is because my grandmothers, my mother, my wife and two daughters are all strong women and I know what they say after I do something. These women of Galilee probably said 'we'll need to come back and get this thing right' so thankfully they had a Sabbath day of rest as they processed all these roller coaster events. They arise the next morning with a planned and prepared mission.

Four of the women are named who were there at the cross. One is Mary Magdalene, a passionate one who wanted to anoint the feet of Jesus. She was one who had been forgiven much and loved much. She was full of energy and compassion, tempestuous almost. She is there and her tempestuousness will be seen again. There is Mary the mother of Jesus (the second woman there), Mary who is the sister of Martha and Lazarus and then there is Mary who is married to Cleopas (also known as Alpheus), who is also one of the mothers of a Disciple of Jesus, James the son of Alpheus. Another woman who is there is Joanna and she is part of the Herodian palace for she worked for Herod Antipas, along with Susanna who might have been there but we don't know for sure. A fourth woman who was there was Salome who is the sister of Mary, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John, two more of Jesus' Disciples. Then the Bible says and 'other women' are there so we know there are somewhere between four and eight women there. They are ready to enact their mission as they have gathered in the pre-dawn darkness to go to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body for its final resting place.

On the way, one of the women forget something and one of them surfaces the problem. Who was going to roll away the heavy stone that was in front of the tomb for them? But there are five things that have happened before they get there. Number one, a second earthquake in three days has happened. There was one on good Friday and then one that had just happened. Accompanying the most recent one is the descent of at least two angels. One of those angels will carry the stone away and lay it down rather than rolling it back in the trough. We know it gets laid down because then the soldiers are confused and dazed but when they come to their senses, they see the stone away with an angel sitting on it and another one in the tomb. The soldiers then flee. What they had left undone in their plan, God did for their plan and it wasn't so much to let Jesus out but to begin to let the crowd in, thus the crowded empty tomb.

If the women had believed what Jesus had said before He went to the cross, what do you think their mission would have been? It would have been to go check and see that He was raised, because He had said repeatedly that He would be crucified to save them from their sins by the chief priests and scribes and rise on the third day. But they have assumed here that the body was still there and they would prepare it for its ultimate rest in that grave, until a day of resurrection. Yet this was the day of the Savior's resurrection and so their mission is telling us they didn't believe what Jesus had said repeatedly. Another way we know they hadn't believed Jesus was when they did get to the tomb that was empty they assumed someone had stolen the body. Mary Magdalene, the passionate one, leaves before the other women, high tailing it to the Disciples telling them, particularly Peter and John, 'they have taken our Lord and I don't know where they have taken Him' (John 20:2).

The Disciples didn't believe it and while Peter and John didn't believe, they take off to the tomb. Mary is on her way as well for her second trip to the tomb. Back at the tomb as the other women are turning to perhaps follow Mary, a messenger speaks. The angels now appear. 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.

Condemnation for sin is gone and the power of sin is broken. Victory of sin, death, hell and the grave is assured. Fear not! Then the angel goes to an invitation when he says ‘come and see where He lay.’ The angel ends with a takeaway when he says ‘go and tell the disciples.’ Remember there was a Disciple who said he would stay with Jesus to the end but ended up faltering and denying Him three times – Peter. Don’t you love the care of our God through these angels? In Mark 16:7 we see that the angel adds to go and tell the Disciples and Peter, that He is risen.

Before the women get to the Disciples comes five documented appearances of Jesus. In the 40 day ministry of Jesus from His resurrection to His ascension, the Bible documents 13 appearances of Christ but I think there were many more. One of those appearances would be to five hundred at one time. The first of these five is when Jesus meets the women on their way to the Disciples and when they see Him they worship Him. He will even meet with the Disciples back in the Upper Room at the end of this day. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15 that Jesus will personally meet with Peter although there is no record of it in the Gospels. Back to this day, Peter and John are at the tomb with Mary being right behind them. When the group of women get back to the Disciples, they don’t claim a graverobber for they have been instructed to tell them He is risen and they say ‘we have seen Him.’ The Bible tells us that the Disciples are confused at this point. Jesus will straighten all that out in the Upper Room that night. Before we go further here let’s go back to the tomb.

When Peter and John get to the tomb, Peter goes in. Peter sees the cloths Jesus was wrapped in and the neatly folded up face cloth over to the side. Then John goes in and sees it. They believe but didn’t quite understand it yet and then they turned to leave. As they go out there is one standing a distance away emotionally overwhelmed and that is Mary. She now comes up for the second time to go into the tomb and John’s account takes great pains to give us this account.

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.” [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.*

There are 13 documented appearances of Jesus. In two of those times, they don’t recognize Him. One is here in this John passage and the other happens later on in this day on the road to Emmaus. In the account on the road to Emmaus we are told that Jesus prevented them from recognizing Him until He opened their eyes. Everyone else recognized Him yet there are those who say the resurrected body is not recognizable but it is. Jesus intentionally, sovereignly prevents two from recognizing Him for a reason. While in the passage of John doesn’t say He is preventing Mary from recognizing Him I believe He is preventing her. When Paul says in his

epistles to go check with the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, how can they be witnesses if they didn't recognize Him as risen? So, it assumes He is recognizable but in this case, He has not allowed Mary to recognize Him yet until He says her name and once she recognizes Him she clings to Him.

I remember when my mother went to be with the Lord I was with her and I remember grabbing her. Part of it was that I wanted to comfort her as she stepped into glory but the other part of me was trying to keep her. I really wanted to keep her even though I know it's better where she was going. Death is gain for the believer.

Here Mary is holding onto Jesus and Jesus has to remind her what He has already told the Disciples – go tell My brothers I am ascending. Jesus had told them that He must go away and that it would be better for them that He go, because then you won't have Me in front of you but you will have Me in you as the Spirit of God is poured out upon you. Thus He is saying the same thing to Mary – don't hold on. She immediately lets go and I know that because she goes to tell the Disciples what He said. She lets go and gets on mission, on message and in ministry.

Here is the takeaway. John 20 records a mission failure. The women's mission failed. In fact, once they got to the tomb it was aborted. Now they have a new mission – come see and go tell. They also have another mission. Every fact according to the Bible has to be affirmed by two or more witnesses and that's why there is a crowded tomb. The Lord is bringing the witnesses to the tomb on the day of resurrection. There are two angels, four to eight women, Peter, John and Mary for a second time, but while this tomb is crowded with a lot of people, it is empty for there is One who is not in the crowd for He is risen and risen indeed! That is Christ the Lord of glory declaring the victory of His redeeming work. So we have a mission failure because of the mission success.

The success is John 3:16 which says *[16] For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* Jesus has gone to the cross and saved His people from their sins. He died in our place as He took the wrath of God upon Himself that was due to us. It doesn't matter our background, our ethnicity, our socioeconomic situation for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Nothing that you have or nothing that you are can get you by the judgment of God. We are helpless and hopeless and there is none who seek Him, no not one (Romans 3:11). Praise God that while we need Him but don't want or seek Him, He who doesn't need us, wanted us to seek Him.

Two things are clear as we gaze upon that cross. One is that when you see what He did on that cross you see the sinfulness of sin against the backdrop of God's impeccable holiness. He will in no wise leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7). This Jesus who went through six trials as innocent is now on the cross and hears 'guilty' but it's not because He has sinned but because He has become our sin. Now we see the cost of our sin.

We will never be able to gather on the Lord's Day with a heart of joy to sing praise to God. We'll mouth it and check the box, maybe and quit waiting for worship leaders to manipulate you into something. Worship comes out of the heart. When we are engaging in the elements that the Lord has prescribed, the heart and the joy comes as you realize that Jesus who died for me is the One who died because of me. I am forgiven. Sin's penalty has been wiped away. Sin's power has been broken. I'm justified, regenerated, born again and now the practice of sin is not being managed for you don't get Jesus to manage life. Jesus gets you and He is your life. You don't manage your sin, you kill your sin, not to be saved but because you love your Savior, until you go to be with Him.

As the hymn *It is Well With My Soul* says;

*My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought
My sin not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul
It is well with my soul.*

The other thing that Good Friday shouts to us is the love of God and the grace of God in Christ that is greater than our sin. That's how we're saved and it turns us around from checking the box of 'churchianity' to living Christ in Christianity. This is what changes men and women.

All the Gospel accounts are inspired by the Holy Spirit, all complementary, nothing contradicts but they all have distinctives when you read them. In this study I have tried to put together the chronology of them in the account of Holy Week, but when the Gospel writers write about this resurrection, they never try to sell it. They don't try to defend the event. They just report it. When you hear in this world that you can't save yourself, and no one else can save, nor religion, nor what you do, your helpless and hopeless and only One who can save is Jesus then that becomes a scandal. We will suppress that and therefore we will try to deny this event. They report that others had already started doing that even in the Bible. In reporting the event they actually demolish all the concocted fabrications to deny the historicity of the resurrection.

One of the fabrications was they had the wrong tomb. The very eight people standing there at the tomb are now the first at the tomb and they didn't find the tomb they were looking at? You can just see the very reporting of the events demolish the attempts at the fabrications to deny it. Another one was that the Sanhedrin stole the body. Then there was the fabrication of the Disciples stealing the body and bribing the guards. At Pentecost a few days later Peter will say 'this Jesus whom you crucified, God raised from the dead,' now what would he preach that if he was one of them that stole the body? All they would have had to do is roll the body out and Christianity would have been done. Some say it was a wish list. This wasn't a spiritual resurrection of emotion. The linen cloths were laying where the body was. Perhaps this illustration might help. Around Christmas you see these inflated Christmas things in people's yard when you drive by and by the next morning they are deflated. That's the picture they saw. The body that those cloths had surrounded was now gone and it was deflated. So much for a spiritual wish.

The fabrication I particularly love is those who say the Disciples stole the body for the ones you ran when Jesus was arrested somehow got the courage over that night time to come up with a plan to take on the Roman guards, the Romans Empire and the Sanhedrin. Number one I don't think they would smart enough to do it. Two, I know they are too fearful to do it. I don't mean that sarcastically, I just don't think they would have come up with that. If they did why did they all die horrific deaths, giving praise to God. If I had lied about this thing and someone was getting ready to cut my head off or crucify me upside down I'd confess right then and there. No, they willingly died and seized the moment as a platform to tell people the truth – the Savior redeems and the Savior is risen.

Stealing the body? That would be like saying someone had come in and robbed your house but folded up your laundry for you before they left. So much for body snatching. You do have the power of God's Word for every prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus and that includes Him rising on the third day. That is God's exclamation point – the Sacrifice satisfied. I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone say 'if I had Jesus right next to me I'd believe' yet Mary Magdalene had Jesus right next to her and she didn't believe. I believe this is why John records it and why Jesus prevented her from recognizing Him so that he could tell those of us who had not yet seen Him that you believe Him and love Him because just like Mary, you can hear Him.

When His Word comes by His Spirit for faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

Jesus says in John 10:27–28, [27] *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. [28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* Here is your encouragement. The Savior speaks to you and when you come to Him, He lives within you. See the power of God's Word at work.

Mary thinks that Jesus is the gardener. Is she right or wrong? I believe John includes this because she is wrong but unknowingly she is right. This is Jesus the Second Adam. The first Adam was a gardener and he was in a garden. Here is the Second Adam in a garden. He's a Gardener. Please come to Him today and put your trust in Him. Politics, money, man-made religions are not going to save you for there is only One Savior who can save us and will save us from our sins – its penalty, power, practice and one day its presence. That is Jesus. I do what this text repeatedly does to this tomb, I invite you to come and see and when you give your life to Him, then until He comes again we get to go and tell others.

Yes, He's a Gardener. He will take you and clean you. He will take you and grow you up so that you bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit for the glory of God. He will take you by the Spirit through the adversities of life and pull the weeds of sin out of your life to bring you to glory. Then He will take you and send you into His field. He'll not only harvest you but send you for Him into the harvest to bring to Him. Oh yeah He's a Gardener, is He yours? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for Jesus who came, who died, who is raised, who is ascended, who sends the Spirit that we might come to Him as King, Lord and Savior. So Father, with Your Word, by Your Spirit may Your invitation given throughout this day when You were raised, this day in Your Name before You come again may they hear it. I say to you as the Preacher in the garden did, come and see and give your life to Jesus. You don't have to manage your sin's guilt and shame for He'll remove it. You don't have to manage sin's power for He will break it. You don't have to manage sin for you can kill it and you can embrace Him who will never let you go. The resurrection declares that all You have given Me Father, I lose not one – here is our assurance. Come! Those who have come, God give us the power and heart to go and tell, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAY

A Mission Failure – The Mission Success

He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Everything is Changed!