

Both the death and the resurrection of Jesus are essential elements in God's work of redemption and in the gospel message. John reports on select resurrection events to support his purpose in writing, that the readers might be believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

I. *Peter and John are met with an empty tomb.*

John focuses initially on Mary Magdalene although she was probably accompanied by some of the other women. She was key in bringing Peter and John to the empty tomb. Their experience forms John's first evidence of the resurrection and contains the first report of faith in the resurrected Christ.

1. *The physical evidence and its significance:*

- a. The stone was rolled away, making possible entrance into the tomb and exit from it. The latter was not needed for Jesus. The former was important to witness the empty tomb.
- b. The witnesses, Peter and John, attested to the fact that there was no body present in the tomb. Jesus, having been the only one laid in the new tomb, was no longer present.
- c. The grave clothes were still present.

This argues against theft since the linen cloths and the 75 pounds of ointment were the most valuable content. To merely move the body would not have required stripping it. Keeping a three day old corpse wrapped would have been an advantage. Neither thieves nor body snatchers would have taken the time at the grave to strip the body.

This argues possibly for divine intervention. It is possible that either the wrappings around the body or the cloth covering the head had been left undisturbed, but collapsed, where the body had lain. The wording implies this and the response of John shows that He perceived that this was no ordinary body snatching but a supernatural removal of Jesus.

2. *The various responses to the evidence of the empty tomb:*

- a. Mary initially came to the wrong conclusion that the body had been taken.
- b. Though we are not told how Peter responded, the other disciple, probably John, believed. The empty grave, and especially the grave clothes, changed John's thinking. Until that point they had not understood Scripture, that Jesus had to rise again. John now believed what Jesus had said about Himself and that He must die and rise again.
- c. For others, who would later follow Jesus, this report of the empty tomb and the discarded grave clothes rules out any mystical re-interpretation of the resurrection. It was a physical, bodily resurrection. It also showed a link between the old body and the resurrected body. This is the basis for the future hope of all believers, that like Jesus we will be resurrected to live eternally with Him in glorified bodies.

The empty tomb was a testimony to Jesus, that what He said was true. He is the Christ, the Son of God, as was taught by His words and works. And He lives!

II. *Mary is met by the resurrected Jesus.*

John, in reporting on this encounter of Mary with the risen Jesus, gives important information concerning the resurrection both in the physical details and in the conversation.

1. *The physical appearance of Jesus to Mary affirms a bodily resurrection.*

His body was indistinguishable from normal human appearance. He could be recognized and touched.

2. *The resurrection and Jesus's post-resurrection appearances were a prelude to His ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God the Father.*

Though Jesus had promised that after He had gone away He would return to take His disciples to be with Him forever, this was not yet that time. He had first to ascend to the Father, be seated at His right hand, and receive and pour out the gift of the Spirit. Now was not the time to be holding on to Him. Yet great things were coming.

3. *The resurrection of Jesus heralded a new relation to His disciples.*

He now addresses them as brothers and relates them to the Father as He does, "my Father and your Father, my God and your God." These men who had forsaken Him and even denied Him are now called brothers. The death and resurrection of Jesus made this possible.

The theology which we find later in the New Testament is grounded in these historical events of the resurrection. The earliest followers of Jesus did not have the New Testament. The disciples, though, had experienced Jesus. They had seen God revealed in Him. They had even confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of God.

But when they witnessed His death, they did not understand. They lost hope ... until John saw an empty tomb and discarded grave clothes, until Mary heard her name called and could clasp the feet of her Lord. Then they truly believed.

Readers of the Gospel are asked to do the same, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The empty tomb points to that. The appearances of Jesus establishes the resurrection which declares with power Jesus to be the Son of God.

He is able to do all that He has promised. He will do all that He has promised for His brothers. The resurrection is a call for all of us to trust Him daily with all the details of our lives.