

# The Empty Tomb and Another Garden Scene – *John 20:1-18*

**Introduction** – One of the wonderful things about John’s recollection of the resurrection of Jesus was how the disciples never thought to concoct a crazy story about a bodily resurrection. Rather, they had to be convinced of the resurrection. Years later, Paul wrote an argument for our future bodily resurrection, and he did so based on the fact that Jesus was resurrected. He doesn’t argue for the resurrection; he argues from the resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-8, 12ff). They were eyewitnesses or could speak to eyewitnesses. We have the account of His resurrection from the inspired Word of God and, like Mary Magdalene, we come to faith when we hear Jesus speak to us through that Word (Rom 10:8, 14-15). He is that Word become flesh, that Word that was spoken and all things were created, and that Word which brings the New Creation.

**An Empty Tomb, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John** (vv1-10) – In these last two chapters, John focuses on these three in particular (along with Thomas later). All four gospels note that it was the “*first day of the week*” (Sunday). The Jewish sabbath was Saturday. Jesus rose on Sunday, and we have worshipped as God’s people ever since on the Lord’s Day, commemorating each week the New Sabbath, the New Week, the New Creation, the resurrection of our Lord.

**Outline** – Early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away (v1). She hurried to Peter and John and told them that someone must have stolen the body (vv2-3). There were accounts of grave-robbers in those days and they might have worried that His body was stolen to be used to make magic potions or simply to desecrate His body even more. Peter and John rush to the grave and John runs faster, getting there first, but does not go in (vv4-5). Peter then gets there and goes straight into the tomb seeing the linen cloths lying there and the head cloth folded up and laid aside, none of which would fit the narrative of a grave robbing (vv6-7). John then comes in, sees the same, and believed, for they had not yet understood that the Scripture foretold this (vv8-9, i.e. Psalm 16:10). John then writes that they left the scene (v10).

**A Resurrection, not a Resuscitation** – There is a stark contrast with the “resurrection” of Lazarus (11:44). Lazarus came out of his tomb still covered in grave clothes and Jesus had to command others to remove those for him. Jesus’ body passed through his grave clothes along with the hundred pounds of spices. Lazarus was dead and was resuscitated. Jesus passed through death and came forth with a resurrected body. Later, Jesus appeared to the disciples in a room that was locked (v19).

**Seeing and Believing** – There is an interesting progression and use of words that mean “to see” in John’s narrative. Mary Magdalene “saw” (Gr. *blepo* – to look and see) the stone rolled away (v1). John looked in and “saw” (*blepo*) the linen clothes lying there (v5). Peter then ran past and into the tomb and “saw” (Gr. *theoreo* – to see and wonder/theorize) the linen clothes (v6). Then John went in also and “saw” (Gr. *oida* – to see, to understand) and believed (v8), “for as yet they did not know (*oida*) the Scripture...” (v9).

Jesus would later show the disciples how they had not “seen” what the Scripture foretold (Luke 24:25-27, 44-48).

**Mary Magdalene and Biblical Typology** (vv11-16) – Mary “of Magdala” (a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee) shows up in only one other place besides her appearance at the cross and the empty tomb. We find out in Luke 8:2-3 that she had been possessed by seven demons and that she was one of the women who provided financial support to Jesus. Because of that placement in Luke, it has been popularly thought that she was the fallen sinner who washed the feet of Christ with her tears (Luke 7:36ff). And so, in English, “*magdalene*” has become a word meaning “*reformed prostitute*.”

Mary returns to the tomb and was weeping outside the tomb (v11). She stooped down, looked in and saw (*theoreo*) two angels on either side of where Jesus had lain (v12). This is a picture of the Mercy Seat found in the center of the temple (Ex 25:19). And you might recall that the Hebrew word for mercy seat is “*the place of propitiation*” and that Heb 2:17 tells us that Jesus made propitiation for His people. The heart of the temple was a prophecy of Easter. Mary was seeing the real Mercy Seat. But she hadn’t yet seen. The angels ask why she is still weeping and she repeats that someone has stolen the Lord’s body (v13).

She turned around and saw (*theoreo*) Jesus but she did not know (*oida*) it was Jesus (v14). John reminds us that we are in a garden noting that Mary thought Jesus was the gardener (v15). And then Jesus spoke her name and everything changed (v16). This was not the gardener, but the Good Shepherd calling His sheep (John 10:26f).

**We Are Magdalene** – In the first garden, Adam and Eve were brought together and every marriage since is a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31f). In the new garden where the new temple rose and the new creation began, Jesus calls for His bride (typologically). The story of fallen man, and especially of fallen Israel, is the story of harlotry, spiritual adultery, idolatry, demon possession and bondage to sin, all the result of rebellion against the Lord of all. And the story of the gospel is the story of the Father preparing a bride for His Son by means of His Son's loving sacrifice for her.

**Go and Tell** (vv17-18) – But Jesus is not marrying Mary Magdalene and so she should not “cling to” Him in that way. He still must ascend and then, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, His bride, the church, will be united to Him. That union means His disciples will now be his brethren and His Father will be their Father. And so, the metaphor changes to that of sweet adoption (Eph 1:5, John 1:12).

And so, Magdalene, the church, goes and tells, as she has done ever since (Matt 28:18-20). She has been forgiven, cleansed, made new, and betrothed. She speaks the very Word of Christ and by that Word the nations are being discipled. By that Word, every disreputable sin for any sinner can be cleansed, every body can be healed, every mind can be restored, every spirit reunited with the Spirit of God.

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