

John – An In-Depth Study

[Part 20]

John 19:38-42 [NIV] *“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no-one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.”*

John’s account of the burial of Jesus is important mainly for its mention of the part played by Nicodemus.

Both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were members of the Sanhedrin.

Although Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus, he became bold enough to pay his last devoted service to Jesus.

Pilate’s granting of permission for burial was in accordance with general Roman procedure.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were changed more by Jesus’ death than by His life.

They realised who Jesus was, and that confrontation with Jesus and His death brought out their belief, proclamation and action.

This is just how we should react, our life changed, our belief strengthened into proclaiming the gospel message.

Nicodemus’ offer of very costly myrrh and aloes was evidence of his devotion.

The tomb in which Jesus was placed was situated in a garden, and had not been used. [**Luke 23:53**]

The significance of this is that Jesus’ body was **not** brought into contact with corruption.

Jesus had **not** been dead on the cross for an hour when His own prophecy came true.

John 12:32 [NIV] *“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”*

Already the power of the cross had begun to operate, drawing human beings to Jesus Christ, turning the coward into the hero, and the waverer into people who take an irrevocable decision to follow and serve their Saviour Jesus Christ.

John 20:1-10 [NIV] *“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes,”*

It seems that Mary Magdalene pre-empted the other women with her visit to the tomb. The fact that the stone at the entrance had been moved was **not** so Jesus could get out but for the women to get in to anoint the body of Jesus.

For a list of all the women who visited the tomb read **Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1.**

The precise positioning of the different grave clothes suggests that Jesus left without disturbing them as a resurrected physical body being changed to a spirit body would. [1 Corinthians 15:50-54]

When John saw the position of the grave clothes, he believed his faith was **not** yet with understanding.

People who hear about the resurrection of Jesus for the first time may need time to comprehend the full impact to be committed to Jesus as their Saviour.

At first people may think the story is impossible to believe.

Like Peter, people may check out the facts and still be puzzled about what happened. [**John 20:6-7**]

Only when people encounter personally the resurrected Jesus Christ, through prayer, study of the Christian Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit are they able to accept the resurrection. [**John 20:16**]

Only then will people commit themselves to the risen Lord and devote their lives to serving Him, and understand the reality of His presence in them. [**John 20:28; John 14:17**]

It is deeply ingrained in gospel records that understanding did **not** come even to the disciples until after the resurrection and then **not** fully until the coming of the Holy Spirit some weeks later.

Jesus' resurrection is the key that unlocks Christian faith.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that He has the power to accomplish all He has promised.

Jesus' bodily resurrection shows us that the living Jesus Christ, is not a false prophet or impostor but is ruler of the eternal Kingdom of God.

We can be certain of our own resurrection because Jesus was resurrected. [**1 Corinthians 15:12-23, 42; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Peter 4:21-22**]

The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is now available to us to bring our spiritual dead lives back to life.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God, is the basis of the Church's witness to all humanity.

John 20:11-18 [NIV] *“but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don't know where they have put him.’ At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus. ‘Woman,’ he said, ‘why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”” Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.”*

Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside the empty tomb which to her was evidence of theft of the body of Jesus. The function of the angels here was to challenge Mary over her weeping, they have **no** words of comfort or of encouragement to offer.

In Mary's mind there could be only one person who might have removed the body, the gardener.

When Jesus posed the same question as the angels, she blurted out her worst fears, thinking that she was addressing the gardener.

But the voice of Jesus Mary recognised at once, an emphasis on personal relationships with Jesus Christ we all can have.

There is **no** contradiction between this refusal to touch Jesus and the invitation to Thomas to touch Him.

Between this incident and that of Thomas, Jesus must have ascended to His Father's throne to offer the sacrifice of His atoning blood. [**Hebrews 9:11-14**]

This introduction of the ascension here is to mark the approaching change of relationship between Jesus and His disciples.

John 20:19-23 [NIV] *“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”*

Most likely the disciples were fearful that they would be arrested like Jesus and also crucified. Every step on the stairs or knock on the door brought a cold sweat of fear.

Then suddenly Jesus was standing there among them, what relief those four words must have brought to their fear-filled minds. The Master was back among them.

Having calmed their fears, Jesus gave them their commission to follow on doing the work the Father had given Him.

Jesus then gave them a foretaste of the power that they and all disciples of Jesus would need to fulfil the commission given to us. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came in full power at Pentecost. [**Acts 2:1-4**]

There is life in the breath of God. Humans were created but did **not** come alive until God breathed into them the breath of life. [**Genesis 2:7**]

It is the breath or spirit from God that separates humans from every other creature. [**Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11**]

Now through the breath of Jesus, God implanted eternal spiritual life, the power to do God's Will on earth.

Jesus was giving the disciples a spirit-powered and spirit-guided mission to preach the Good News of what God had done through the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

The disciples were **not** given power to forgive sins, only God can do that, but the authority to tell new believers that their sins had been forgiven because they had accepted Jesus as their Saviour.

Every true Christian minister will tell the new believer about this freedom from the penalty of sins as they rise up from the waters of baptism.

Next a minister will lay hands on them and ask God to fill them with the Holy Spirit, followed by welcoming them into the Church, the human body of Christ on earth. [**Acts 8:15-17**]

Those who refuse to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour inevitably retain their sins and will then in the end receive the reward of eternal death. [**Romans 6:23**]

John 20:24-29 [NIV] *“Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.’ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”*

Thomas’ doubt and subsequent leap to faith are no doubt included by John in his account of events to illuminate the main purpose of his writing this gospel, to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the **only** Saviour of humanity from the penalty of their sins.

Jesus’ return after seven days is marked by a repeat of the reassuring words *“peace be with you”* indicating the continual state of fear the disciples were still experiencing.

The personal challenge to Thomas by the repeating of the words that He had previously spoken must have had a deep impression on Thomas and the rest of the disciples.

They suddenly realised the constant presence of Jesus even when they could not see Him.

This adds power to the words that Jesus gave to His disciples down through the generations since.

Thomas’ response to his personal contact with the risen Jesus is the response we all should make as Jesus reveals to us who He is.

Ultimately true faith must always be independent of sight.

Although we cannot see Jesus at this time we can have a personal relationship with Him.

We can talk with Jesus and God the Father at any time through prayer and meditation on His words as they are recorded in the Christian Bible.

Some people need to doubt like Thomas if that doubt leads to questions that can be answered by other Christians who have established their faith in Jesus Christ. [**1 Peter 3:15**]

John 20:30-31 [NIV] *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

In these two verses John makes clear the purpose of all he has written.

Even the miracles of Jesus had been selected to fulfil this purpose, to lead us to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and our Saviour.

The gospels were **not** intended to be a historical record of the life of Jesus Christ but each was written with a specific purpose and group of people in mind.

The gospels include all we need to know about the life and words of Jesus Christ to have total faith in Him.

John 21:1-14 [NIV] *“Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered. He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, ‘It is the Lord,’ he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’ Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.”*

The fishing event suggests an action of despair and a return to their former occupation.

In the fruitless toil in the night John is expressing a spiritual principle for he proceeds to show the dramatic difference when Jesus is on the scene.

Responding to Jesus’ command resulted in a bountiful catch of fish must have reminded the disciples of Jesus’ words to Peter that he would be made a fisher of men [Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17] and similar event recorded by Luke. [Luke 5:1-11]

The main reason for this additional epilogue to John’s account is to demonstrate once and for all the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrected Jesus Christ was not a vision but a real person with a real body that still bore the marks of the crucifixion and the spear thrust in His side.

John 21:15-19 [NIV] *“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’ Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’”*

The “more than these” may well mean all the nets and equipment that had been used to catch the fish. Peter was asked if he was willing to give up all hope of a successful career, a steady secure job and a reasonably comfortable life.

Give up all this in order to follow me and do my work?

Peter’s answer was an expression of his love for Jesus.

Three times Jesus asked Peter to affirm this love because three times Peter had denied knowing Jesus.

Jesus was showing His gracious forgiveness, and gave Peter a chance to wipe out the memory of his past failure. [Isaiah 43:25; Psalms 103:12; 1 Peter 4:8]

Throughout this conversation Jesus was adding another future responsibility to Peter's life to become a sub-shepherd of God's flock, as well as a fisher of human beings.

Every disciple and minister of Jesus Christ has this dual commission, if they are truly following Jesus Christ.

John 21:20-24 [NIV] *“Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is going to betray you?’) When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?’ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.”*

This passage assigns John his place in Jesus' plan. John's function was to be pre-eminently the witness to who Jesus Christ is, and we see fulfilment of this in the way he wrote this gospel message.

We tend to compare our lives with others, whether to rationalise our own level of devotion to Jesus or to question God's judgement as to whom He uses for certain tasks within His work of redemption.

Jesus' response to us is the same as to Peter, just get on with the work I've given you as you follow Me.

John 21:25 [NIV] *“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”*

John had given all the personal witness that was necessary for any human to accept or reject who Jesus is and what He has done for all humanity.

Each human being has to decide if the witness that John has given does fully prove who Jesus Christ is.

You the jury are now out to decide your verdict!

Your decision is a matter of life and death for you!