

January 17, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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CAN YOU BELIEVE IT
John 20:1-10

One of the great statements in the Bible is that Abraham believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). Simply put, that means that Abraham had faith in God's promises and, because of his faith, God gave the man salvation. This is a very important observation because God uses this fact to affirm that we too are born again through the same means. We believe what God promises and He saves us from sin.

Yes, but what did Abraham believe? We know that we have faith in God's promise that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins through His sacrifice on the cross. As we trust that payment, God forgives our sins. Did Abraham believe that?

God's promise to Abraham was that God would make a great nation from his loins and would give his people the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21). That is true. But God promised something else in that original agreement. He promised that He would bless all the people of the world through Abraham. How was that going to happen? Surely the whole world is not blessed because Jews have been such great people.

Maybe Abraham understood more than the average person in his day understood. When sin entered the world, God announced that the antidote to sin would be the Seed of the woman. This person born of a woman would crush Satan and thereby destroy sin. Who would that be? How would He do this great feat of destroying sin's power and Satan's power?

When Abraham took Isaac the son of God's promise to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him in obedience to God's will, he made an important promise to the young man. When Isaac asked where the

sacrifice was that they would slay and burn upon the altar, *Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."* So they went both of them together (Genesis 22:8). The simplest interpretation of that statement is that Abraham told Isaac that somehow a lamb would be waiting for them at the place of sacrifice. However, it seems likely that Abraham was also stating how God would provide for the world's redemption from sin. The Hebrew text reads that Abraham said that *God would see to Himself for the provision from the flock of the sacrifice.*

Did Abraham pull all of God's promises together when he believed God? Did he believe that God would provide the final sacrifice of a special Lamb, the Seed of the woman, as the means for atoning for sin, through whom all the world is blessed? I think that is the case. The prophet Isaiah saw this and declared that Messiah would be despised, rejected, smitten, wounded for our transgressions, carry our sorrows and griefs, and crushed for our iniquities. He said that we have peace because He was chastised and we are healed by His stripes, because God laid on Him all our iniquities. Did Isaiah know what he was saying? Did Daniel understand what he wrote when he declared that "the Anointed One shall be cut off and shall have nothing"?

Peter indicated that the Old Testament saints trusted God to provide salvation through the sacrifice of the promised Lamb. He wrote, *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories (1 Peter 1:10-11).* The Old Testament saints looked ahead to God keeping His promise to provide salvation through the Seed of the Woman. We look back to the same promise.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus unpacked these truths. Many people were waiting and looking for this Messiah who the Old Testament prophets promised would come. Many of them were convinced that Jesus was that Anointed One. However, almost everyone, including the disciples, got pretty lopsided in their view of Messiah. It is true that the Old Testament promised that Messiah will be the King who establishes David's Kingdom and rules in perfect justice. That is still to come at the final advent.

The more important part of the old prophets' messages was that this King is also the Lamb who will take away the sins of the world. That is how John the Baptist introduced Jesus (John 1:29). Jesus continually taught that He was the Promised One who came to pour out His soul in death (Isaiah 53:12), who came to give His back to those who strike (Isaiah 50:6). He told all who would listen that He, being the Good Shepherd, would lay down His life for the sheep (John 10). He promised that because He would lay down His life, He would also take it up again. That is resurrection. That is the final payment for the price of atonement.

Somehow the closest followers of the Anointed One missed the most important truths about His ministry. They were so focused on the restoration of the kingdom that reconciliation of their sin-sick souls to their Creator didn't register. That is why the resurrection of their beloved Friend Jesus shook them to the core. Christ's resurrection forced His followers to reassess everything they believed about Him. It forced them to turn their focus to the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world.

This miracle demands that all people do the same thing. We do not question if Christ rose from the grave. We ask "Why did Christ rise again?" The answer is that He rose in victory over sin and death so that we can fully believe that He has won our salvation.

Where Is He (vv.1-2)?

According to John, Mary wondered where Jesus' body was. Mary who? *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 (v.1)*. She wasn't the only woman to show up at the tomb. By comparing all the Gospel accounts, we learn that early in the morning women went to the tomb. When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb it was so early it was dark. But Matthew wrote that it was *toward the dawn of the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1)*. Mark wrote that it was *very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen (Mark 16:2)*. Luke wrote that it was *on the first day of the week, at early dawn (Luke 24:1)*.

So why did John say it was still dark if Mark said the sun had risen? Let's stop to consider who went and when they went. John

remembered that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb while it was still dark. It seems that maybe a few minutes later some other women joined her. Who? We know that the other Mary arrived (Matthew 28:1). Who was that? Jesus' mother? No. Mark clarified that it was Mary the mother of James (6:1). And he also pointed out that Salome was in the group (Mark 16:1). Luke told us that the group included Mary the mother of James, Joanna and other women (Luke 24:10). All of these women went together in a group planning to anoint Jesus' body with more spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1).

But not Mary Magdalene. She went alone a few minutes earlier. While it was still dark Mary arrived on the scene and was perplexed about the stone being moved. John wrote that she arrived *while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb (v.1b)*. Picture Mary Magdalene standing in the dark, barely able to make out the stone removed. What went through her head? How confused did this scene appear to her?

In a few minutes, the other women showed up and weird stuff happened. Earlier, before any of the women arrived, there had been an earthquake. An angel came from God and knocked the huge stone out of the way and sat on it (Matthew 28:2-4). The guards became like dead men. After they came to their senses, the frightened guards ran away (v.5). Shortly thereafter it seems Mary Magdalene showed up and then the other women. Not knowing that any of this had taken place, the other women wondered who would move the stone for them (Mark 16:3). No sooner had the words left their lips when they looked and behold the stone was moved. Mark wrote, *And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large (Mark 16:4)*.

Probably after some brief hesitation and bewilderment, the Marys-come-lately looked in the tomb. It was lighter now that the sun had risen, and they could see that the tomb was empty. Luke observed that *when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus (Luke 24:3)*. They were dumbfounded and, while trying to make sense of this, a couple of angels popped up in the tomb. Grave robbery was common enough in that day that in A.D. 41 Emperor Claudius ordered capital punishment for anyone caught in the crime.

Probably that thought crossed the women's minds. But they didn't think about it very long. *While they were perplexed about this,*

behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel (Luke 24:4). The angels told the good news that Jesus was alive and they should go tell the disciples that He was risen. They said, "He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise" (Luke 24:6-7).

It appears that Mary Magdalene was not included in the women who looked in the tomb and heard the good news. Therefore, Mary hurried off to tell Peter the bad news. *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" (v.2).* It does seem that Mary Magdalene left before she could hear the good news. She ran to tell Peter and John that someone had moved Jesus' body. If only she had stayed long enough to hear that Jesus was risen. But would she believe it if she did hear it? Would Peter believe it?

The other women who stayed and looked in the tomb learned good news that they could share. The angels had told them to go tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. They ran for the disciples, not stopping to talk to anyone along the way. Mark had learned that *they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (Mark 16:8).* And better than the angel's message, Jesus Himself met those women and encouraged them to be evangelists (tellers of good news). *And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (Matthew 28:9-10).*

Having told some of the disciples, the women couldn't stop talking about it, telling everyone they could (Luke 24:8-9). But Mary Magdalene had already told Peter and John that Jesus' body was gone and they were incredulous. Worse is the fact that it seems that about the time Mary Magdalene moved on, the other women showed up and told the good news that Jesus was risen. *But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them (Luke 24:11).* Why? Wouldn't you and I believe that Jesus had risen from the grave?

They Did Not Understand Scripture (vv.3-10).

These two special followers of Jesus went to the tomb themselves and saw the evidence. The story indicates that John and Peter were quite stirred about the news. John outran Peter. *So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first (vv.3-4).* The term, "other disciple" in this book consistently refers to John, the human writer. He was probably younger than Peter and, therefore, could outrun the older fisherman. Remember that John wrote this account nearly twenty years after Peter's death. Peter was not necessarily old when he died, but John was certainly old when he wrote in AD 85. John didn't win the race to the tomb because he was more zealous or because Peter was afraid.

John was the first of the two to see the evidence of the risen Christ. *And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in (v.5).* He saw the strips of linen with which Joseph and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus' body. If someone had stolen the body, the linen would have been gone. Thieves definitely would not have left the linen behind because it was expensive stuff. All the evidence John saw indicated that the body of Christ rose out of the linen wrappings and left.

Why did John not enter the tomb is anyone's guess. By the way, we also have no idea how big the tomb was or what it looked like. In a few seconds, Peter showed up. He too saw the evidence of the risen Christ. *Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself (vv.6-7).* John remembered that when Peter arrived, he went right into the tomb. This was in keeping with Peter's impetuous nature. No fear with this guy!

Peter also saw the linen wrappings lying there. John noted also the face cloth lying where it would have been around Jesus' head. Maybe it lay at the other end away from the door so that John could not have seen it at first. If doors and walls could not prevent the glorified body of Christ from entering a room, why should linen strips keep Him from rising and exiting the tomb. The angel didn't move

the rock to let Jesus out – but to let the disciples in. It is important for us to realize that in Jesus' culture, two acceptable Jewish men observing and testifying about the same evidence was sufficient for affirming the testimony in a court of law.

We read that both Peter and John looked at the evidence in the tomb. But the text indicates that only John believed. *Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed (v.8)*. John entered, saw all the cloths, and believed. What does that mean? Suddenly it registered with him that Jesus, the beloved Teacher he had enjoyed fellowship with, who had been crucified and buried was risen from the dead. John had no thoughts that someone had stolen His body or that someone had moved it. He was convinced that Jesus had risen.

We do well to remember that seeing and believing is the theme of John's Gospel. Jesus told the official from Capernaum, *"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe"* (John 4:48). The Jews demanded, *"What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?"* (John 6:30). Many who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead believed (John 11:45). Thomas declared that unless he would see for himself he would never believe. *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:29).

That leaves us inevitably with John's argument for the Gospel account. *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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* (John 20:30-31). Again we also need to remember that John wrote this account many years after his experience. We are not surprised that John confidently argued this way some forty-five years after Jesus rose from the dead.

It appears that John was convinced that Jesus had risen, but Peter was not. In fact *he went home marveling at what had happened* (Luke 24:12). He was like so many people for whom the idea of the resurrection is too superhuman to grasp by mere acceptance. To accept this miracle by faith requires the special work of God in the heart. And yet God has left us with plenty of proof that Christ is risen.

The Jews of all people would have loved to be able to produce Jesus' dead body, but they could not. The disciples changed from cowards quaking in the dark to bold proclaimers of salvation by faith in Christ's resurrection. The world was literally turned upside down by the massive number of people who came to believe the resurrection.

We rejoice that John believed, and we are sad that Peter doubted. But what did John believe? Why did Peter doubt? John testified that they did not understand. Scripture clearly taught the promise of Jesus' resurrection. John and Peter were perplexed *for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead (v.9)*.

On one hand, there was John who willingly accepted the fact that Jesus was not dead but had risen from the dead. Why did Jesus do that? That is the question that stumped him and Peter for a time. They were both very familiar with all the Old Testament scriptures. They did not understand that an Old Testament scripture promised that Jesus must rise from the dead. Yes, but to which of those scriptures did John refer? There was Job's confident promise: *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"* (Job 19:25-27). There was David's prophecy of Christ's confidence: *"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption"* (Psalm 16:10). Again David promised Jesus' words, *"As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness"* (Psalm 17:15). And again, *"O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit"* (Psalm 30:3). Even Hosea's promise can be applied to Christ. *"After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him"* (Hosea 6:2). Didn't Peter and John understand that these promises applied to Jesus?

They went home without understanding. The words, *Then the disciples went back to their homes (v.10)*, strike us as somewhat sad. Yes, they went home, but God wasn't finished yet. That very day, two of their friends would meet Jesus on the road, and Jesus would open the Scripture to them. *Moreover, some women of our company*

amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:22-27). That result of that meeting is so encouraging. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

Faith still comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). God's word states repeatedly and emphatically that God the Son paid the price for sin by shedding His blood on the cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb, rose from that tomb with a glorified body, and ascended to heaven where He intercedes with His blood for all who believe Him. No physical proof is necessary. The Scripture states it. The critics and the evil people mocked Jesus by telling Him that if He would come off the cross they would believe Him. He did something great then by rising from the dead and walking out of the tomb. Rather than believe Him, they lied about the miracle and still do. We don't need any proof to affirm truth. God said it and that is sufficient. We need to humbly accept and rejoice in John's argument: *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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 (John 20:30-31).*