

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

The Empty Tomb **Pastor Ty Blackburn** **John 20:1-10** **May 1, 2016**

What a blessing. I ask you to turn with me in your Bibles to John 20. We'll be looking this morning at Verses 1-10. The title of the message is simply 'The Empty Tomb'. What I want to do is read back into Chapter 19, Verse 38, to set the context well. We'll read the last five verses of Chapter 19, Verse 38 and following, and then we'll read the first 10 verses of Chapter 20. So starting at 19:38:

John 19:38-42 ~ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. 39 Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

*John 20:1-10 ~ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark, and *saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. 2 So she *ran and *came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and *said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he *saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also *came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he *saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 So the disciples went away again to their own homes.*

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to You this morning, as always, unworthy, sinners in need of grace, blind men in need of sight. And we ask that You would grant us, by the power of Your Spirit, and the power of Your word, to understand the things that You have for us. May Your word lift up Your glory, and the glory of Your Son. And we pray this in His name, Amen.

In a sense, what we are looking at today is the testimony of the empty tomb, the title of the message 'The Empty Tomb', but what we really have here is testimony that our faith rests upon. The tomb was empty and we have John here, as he has laid out for us in his Gospel, we've talked about this a number of times that his Gospel, in a sense, is basically almost like a legal case he is making. He uses a lot of forensic language throughout the book. The term 'witness' is an important term for him. He is trying to prove his case, and his case is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that there is life only in His name. He is going to tell us that purpose later in this chapter, Verse 30.

John 20:30-31 ~ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

The whole reason he has written this Gospel is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, and so he has shown us Jesus' signs earlier in the Gospel—the changing of the water into wine, the healing of the lame man, the healing of the wealthy man's child, the walking on water, the feeding of the 5,000, the healing of a man born blind, and finally the raising of Lazarus from the dead—those seven signs that fill the first 11 chapters. And then he comes, in Chapter 12, to the end of the book, to the final sign, which is really one event. It is the exaltation of the Son of God, that He is lifted up, and John sees this lifting up as being the cross itself, the resurrection, and the ascension kind of all wrapped up in one. So he is making his case that all of us who hear this case should believe because of the evidence that he puts before us.

We noted how early in the book we see that John, as he is making his case, he in a sense, brings witnesses and he lets us hear them in their own words tell us what they thought of Jesus, again, and again, and again. You know Phillip goes and tells Nathanael, "We found the Christ." Nathanael comes and he can't believe that the Christ came from Nazareth. "No good thing comes out of Nazareth." Jesus tells

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

him, “Nathanael, I saw you when Phillip came to you, when you were under the fig tree some distance away, I saw you supernaturally,” and Nathanael immediately says, “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” It was that kind of thing. John wants us to see, when people encounter Jesus, this is the impact it had. He proved Himself again and again, and he comes to the culmination, the capstone of his evidence, the clencher in this chapter, to show us that Jesus is truly the eternal Son of God, and that we each have an obligation to offer Him a life surrendered in worship to Him. He is worthy. So, ‘The Empty Tomb’.

1) The Character of Their Testimony:

Now what we’re going to see is that here again, we have in a sense, witnesses who are testifying, they are offering testimony. We are going to see that the witnesses are Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John himself. We’re going to receive their testimony about what they saw when they went into the tomb where Jesus had been laid. Now the three points this morning, we have three points I want us to gather our thoughts around, each begins with a C. The first point is *The Character of their Testimony*. As we read that, some words should have jumped out as you are reading along, listening, repeated words that jump out. In the New American Standard, the word ‘saw’ occurred six times in the passage that we read, actually five times in the passage we read. When you read on down to Verse 18 there are two more times, the word ‘seen’ or ‘saw’, because what we have in the first ten verses is Mary Magdalene going to Peter and John, and then they go, and they go into the tomb, and they have an experience of seeing what is there. But the word ‘saw’, let me show you how it is repeated again and again. First of all, in Verse 1.

John 20:1 ~ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark, and *saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

Verse 5. This is speaking of John now, the other disciple who runs on ahead.

John 20:5 ~ and stooping and looking in, he *saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in.

Verse 6.

John 20:6 ~ And so Simon Peter also *came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he *saw the linen wrappings lying there,

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Verse 8.

John 20:8 ~ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.

He said the same thing on down in Verse 12. We didn't read this, but we are going to see Mary Magdalene.

John 20:12 ~ and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.

Verse 14.

John 20:14 ~ When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.

Verse 18, her testimony.

John 20:18 ~ Mary Magdalene *came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

Seven times you have the word, the verbs for 'seeing' in that passage. In fact, you can add two to it because two of them, twice we see that someone stooped and looked. Verse 5, John stooped and looked into the tomb, and Verse 11 as well, Mary Magdalene stooped and looked. So altogether, nine different times the focus is on someone seeing, or looking. So what you have is eyewitness testimony. These people saw something and this testimony is valid because we have eyewitness testimony. There is also a vividness about the way John reports this. It doesn't come through as well in the English as it does in the Greek because you have here the use of something we've seen John do a number of times in his Gospel, that is the historical present. That is, the historical present is when you are talking about a past event, but you use present tense verbs to describe it.

Now the translators, because of the awkwardness of it, don't translate them with present tense verbs for us, but in the Greek they are there. Let me give you an example, and if you have a New American Standard, this is one of the reasons I think the New American Standard is the best translation. I mean the ESV is great too, it is a very close thing for me, but this is what I love about the NASB, if you

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

have one, you will have a little star beside a number of words in this passage. A little tiny star, and what that is telling you is that is a historical present verb. The verb there is a present tense verb, though it is translated in this translation in the past tense. Let me tell you where, there are three of them in the first verse, ...***Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb,...*** The verb ‘*came*’ is a historical present. Literally, in the Greek, it says, “Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb while it was still dark.” That is another one, while it *is* still dark. And she *saw*, that is another historical present, is she sees. It really reads like this, “Mary Magdalene is coming early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and she sees the stone rolled away.” So Verse 2:

John 20:2 ~ So she *ran (runs) and *came (comes) to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and *said (says) to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

So then you go back to the past tense for a number of verses. So Peter and the other disciples went forth, they are going to the tomb, all past tense, they were running together. The other disciple ran ahead, past tense, past tense. They come to the tomb first, Verse 4, stooping and looking in, all past tense. And then he *sees*, Verse 5, the other disciple, when he stoops and looks in, he *sees* the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Verse 6, and so Simon Peter also *comes* following him, the present tense again, entered the tomb, and he *sees* the linen wrappings. Now why do you use historical present? We talked about this, but let me remind you.

If we want to tell a story, and we want to help put our listener into the moment so that they get a greater sense of it, we will often use this. If I was telling you I went to the store the other day, and I had a conversation with somebody there I ran into, and we had a really good conversation about the Lord, or something like that. I’m telling you about it, well what I might do is I say, “I went to the store the other day, and I was walking down the aisle,” all past tense, past tense. “And this man comes up to me, and he asks me something,” do you see those present tense, present tense? “So I say to him...” What it does is it puts you, it focuses your spot on what is happening, and it gives a vividness, and an intensity to the narrative. So what you have here, the characters, their testimony, it is eyewitness testimony, but it is also vivid and fervent testimony. John wants us to enter into, he wants us to see what they saw, to experience what they experienced because this is a matter of the greatest important. And so you have, in this account, really you see in the Gospel-

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

writers, the way they present the story of Jesus, they are not telling a tall tale, they are not offering a neat fable, they are telling about historic reality, real events in time and space, with a real man, flesh and blood man, and what He accomplished. That is the character of the New Testament witness.

So when people try to act like the ideas of Jesus are good, or His teachings are good, and they want to limit that. They don't really believe that, but they will say stuff like that because they are trying to keep God at an arm's distance. No, the reality is, what do you believe about the man Christ Jesus? Who was He and what did He do? When He entered into time and space, what did He do? That is Christianity. Anything less than that is not worthy of the name. So what we have here is a detailed account of specific eyewitness testimony. I mean, you see, as we're going to look at this, that when you have someone telling you a story that really happened, and they want you to understand, "Listen to what happened to me," and they are telling you, and their heart is moved by it, they include things that show you it really happened. This is what you have in the character of this passage. You have the when, the where, the who, the what, are all answered. It is not some esoteric idea of a resurrection.

I remember when I was working at the seminary I graduated from. I went to Reformed Theological Seminary for two years, and then I transferred to Beeson Divinity School, and graduated from there, and I was working on staff there way back in 1991-1993. Our dean at that time, Timothy George, was a, he is an inerrantist, he believes in the inerrancy of Scripture. But there was another guy on the faculty of the university, Beeson was a seminary on the university campus of Samford University in Birmingham. They had a religion department professor at Samford, the undergrad religion department dean, and we had the Divinity School dean. Timothy George was the Divinity School dean, the school I went to. The undergrad school was a guy named Bill Leonard. They both had been church history professors at the same seminary in years past. So the *Wall Street Journal* did an article on them at Easter, I believe it was 1992, about these two professors. It was back when the Southern Baptist Convention controversy was still kind of, just coming out of that, and so it was news.

So they did an article on them, and they basically were talking to them both about the story of Christ, the resurrection, the message of Christianity, and Timothy George said, "I believe Jesus literally rose from the dead, that He is a risen Savior." And Bill Leonard, the guy in the religion department said, "I believe Jesus rose from the dead, but not so literally." He didn't believe in literal resurrections,

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

he believed in the idea of a resurrection. He believes, if you really press him, that the body of the man Christ Jesus is still in the tomb, and he was a seminary professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for a number of years. He is an unbeliever. If he is right, our faith is in vain, and we of all men are most to be pitied, and why would you bother teaching at a seminary? But he is not right because Jesus is literally risen, and we see the literalness of it in the details. The details themselves testify, they are making a claim to a literal, physical resurrection. Now with that said, *The Character of Their Testimony*, eyewitness, vivid testimony.

2) The Content of Their Testimony:

Now *The Content of Their Testimony*, the second C. We've covered character, now the content of their testimony. This is where we see the details, and how they are rooted in time and space. This event, the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus is rooted in time and space. I want to consider this content under for W's, for questions, four sub-points for this second main point, *The Content of Their Testimony*, and the W's are going to be *When? Who? Where? and Why?* Now we see as John reports to us, Verse 1, first of all, *When?*

A) When?

John 20:1 ~ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark,...

Do you see all that *When?* there? The first day of the week, Sunday, came early to the tomb, while it was still dark. She comes early in the morning, as early as possible, while it was still dark. It pictures the urgency of the task. The idea is the burial must be completed. In the providence of God, they began to bury Jesus, I mean, they put Him in the tomb, and they began the process of covering Him with the burial linens, and the spices. And they got some way through the process, but they had much more to do, there were other things to be added, to finish the burial. So Mary, and a number of women, when we read the other Gospels we see that there were several different women who came.

In fact, this is one of those things that unbelievers look at and try to argue with. It shows just the folly of unbelief because they'll say, "Well, John says Mary Magdalene came alone to the tomb, and when you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you find that there were other ladies. There was Mary, the mother of James, there

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

was Salome, there was a lady named Joanna. There were at least four ladies that came to the tomb.” Well, anybody with any sense knows that when you get real eyewitnesses to give testimony, they don’t all tell you every detail of the event. They tell you the significant things. Why does John mention Mary Magdalene? Because John is going to put Mary Magdalene on the stand. He wants her, he gives her the biggest place of any Gospel-writer. He wants her to be able to say, “I have just seen Jesus. I have just seen the Lord,” and he is going to let her be his focus.

I think there is another reason, when you put it together. What happened was the four ladies go to the tomb because one lady wouldn’t be out at dark, on her own, walking outside the city. It wouldn’t make sense. The four of them go, or maybe there are even more ladies that we don’t know, that they didn’t name. It would be like me saying, remember I told you I was going to tell you the story about me going to the store the other day, right? And I tell you the story, and you say, “Your story is not true,” because you find out that the day that I went to the store my wife was in the car, and that Maggie accompanied me in the store. Patti stayed in the car, and she said, “Yeah, I was there when Ty came out and he told me about the conversation he had.” “And since you didn’t tell me all the details, you are a liar.” That is absurd, it is ridiculous. I mean, nobody lives like that. “You know, I want to tell you a story. I drove to the store the other day. Oh wait a minute, when I drove to the store, Patti was in the passenger seat, Maggie was in the backseat. We got to the store, I said, ‘Hey, I want to go in and pick up a couple of things,’ and Patti said, ‘If you don’t mind, you go ahead, I’m going to stay in the car, I’ve got a phone call I need to make.’ Maggie said she’ll come in with me. She went in with me. She was standing with me when this guy walked up.” You see how ridiculous that is? That is the kind of logic people use when they look at the Bible. They try to impose ridiculous thought patterns on it.

This is eyewitness testimony. One of the great things about the Gospels, when you really look at them, and you put the pieces together this way, you see that the character of the Gospels themselves confirms their truthfulness because there is clarity in the facts. Like if you were interviewing, say four people who supposedly saw a crime, but didn’t take part in it. They are saying they had nothing to do with this crime, but maybe you find out they really did. Well, what would happen is, you know investigators know that when you see stories line up so much, it is a script. They are all telling the same story. They are lying. But when you see one guy tell about this part, another guy tell about this, and basic content is the same, the main event, but they might tell you different tertiary things, you know that they are telling the truth. This is exactly what, one of my favorite quotes from a book

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

related to this is by Sir Edward Clark. He is not a reverend, he was a lawyer writing to the Reverend E.L. Met McCasey, and he said this, talking about the fact that the resurrection is the best attested fact in ancient history. This lawyer who tried cases before the English Supreme court, he says this:

As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me, the evidence is conclusive, and over, and over again, in the high court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. I've won cases again, and again, and again with much less evidence than you have in the New Testament. Inference follows on evidence, (and listen to this) a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. He tells the story as he saw it, not trying to think how you are going to hear that, and how it is going to play with what somebody else is saying. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer, I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men, to facts they were able to substantiate.

That is the reality, that is the truth of the witness that we have. We have a faith that is rooted in facts, rooted in history.

B) Who?

Now, we started into the *Who?* a little bit. Let's carry that further. *When?* Now, *Who?* Mary Magdalene. It said she went with a group of women. In fact, that's even seen, look at Verse 2, what does she say to, you know John didn't report all the other ladies that went. Look what she says in Verse 2.

John 20:2 ~ ...“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

So Mary is the first witness, but then Peter and John. So she goes to Peter and John, and she tells them, Verse 2:

John 20:2 ~ ...Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved,...

And then he is referred to as '*the other disciple*' a number of times in the passage, Verse 2, Verse 3, Verse 4, and Verse 8, '*the other disciple*'. In Verse 2, ***...the other disciple whom Jesus loved,...*** This is John's characteristic way to refer to himself. The author of the Gospel is referring to himself. He uses names for all the other guys, but when he talks about himself, he refers to himself as '*the disciple*

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

whom Jesus loved'. In this case, *'the other disciple*'. Peter is going, and *'the other disciple*' goes with him. So here we have the author himself telling us that he was one of the first people to see the stone rolled away, and the empty tomb. So the three witnesses that we hear from in Verses 1-10 are Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John.

C) Where?

So we looked at *When?* and *Who?* Now, let's talk about *Where?*

John 20:1 ~ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark, and *saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

See the word *'tomb'* really emphasized a lot in this passage. Just like there, he could have said, "came early to the tomb while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away," and we would have known what she was talking about. But it says, "taken away from the tomb". Actually, nine times in the first 11 verses of Chapter 20, the word *'tomb'*, again, and again, and again. Don't forget where we are, we are at the tomb. In fact, we saw that begin in the previous chapter, Verses 41 and 42 when we are told in Verse 41, 19:41:

John 19:41-42 ~ Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

One of the things we learn about the tomb, in Verse 41 we learn it was in a garden. In Verse 42, it was near the cross. A specific tomb, in a garden, near the cross. Now we know also that Joseph of Arimathea, apparently has the tomb. He has asked for the rights to buy Jesus in Verse 38. It is a new tomb as well. It is a tomb in a garden, near the cross, it says the tomb was nearby, we see that in Verse 42, but it is a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. In fact, in the Greek, the emphasis is brought out by a double negative. Really, the King James has, ***...wherein was never man yet laid.*** That just seems to be a little more emphatic than what we have in the NAS ***...in which no man had yet been laid.*** In the Greek it literally says, "Never yet no one had been laid there." It's a double negative, but the double negative intensifies the meaning. John's emphatic, "This is a tomb in which no other body has been laid."

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Now, it was customary in the 1st century to bury more than one body in a tomb, because tombs were different than what we use. We use little burial vaults or we bury people in the ground in a grave, and one person occupies one grave, one casket. Well, the tombs that they used in 1st century Palestine were carved out of rock. It was an industry. Rock carvers would go in and carve out tombs out of the hillside caves. They would turn a cave into a tomb and then carve a stone to roll over the cave entrance. And normally a tomb would be a family tomb, and so six, eight, ten people could be buried in one tomb, sometimes only three or four, and sometimes more, but never just one. And this tomb, John wants us to know right off the bat, this tomb, there are no bodies there. There's no way to get confused. There aren't these other bodies that we can get mixed up with about Jesus. He's the only one laid in that tomb. Now, as we go on and we read through the narrative then:

John 19:41 ~ Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

They've got to get done before sundown on Friday. They're rushing to get through with the burial as much as they can before the Sabbath begins. And so because the tomb is nearby, that Joseph has secured, they can get Jesus' body there, and they begin the process. It tells us in Verse 40:

John 19:40 ~ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

They got a good portion of the burial done. Now, what they would do in burying someone is they would lay linen wrappings—that's the NAS word that occurs four times in our passage, linen wrappings. Strips of linen cloth they would lay over the body, and then they would layer spices on top of the linen wrappings, and then they would do another layer of linen wrappings, and then another layer of spices, and another layer of linen wrappings, so that the spices would help to keep the smell of the decay at bay. So they had begun this process on Friday afternoon before sundown, and they've laid Jesus in the tomb, they've begun the process of laying the wrappings over Him and putting the spices, laying the wrappings, putting the spices, but not all of it has been done. And so the women are going to

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

come back on—the first opportunity will be after the Sabbath is over. The Sabbath is actually over at sundown the next night, but you can't start a project at sundown, so they come out early on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, to do that. John wants us to know, look at the tomb. Keep our eyes on the tomb. Now, that's the *where*. We looked at *when*, *who*, and *where*. Now let's look at: *What?*

D) What?

The real meat of their testimony comes in under the question *What?* What are they telling? What's the content of their testimony? The first thing that we see, and how we're going to examine this is I mentioned earlier that it's eyewitness testimony. We're going to look at each time the word *saw* is used, and let's see what they saw, okay? So the first time the word *saw* is used is in Verse 1:

John 20:1 ~ Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark, and *saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

So let's see what Mary Magdalene saw. What was her testimony? Her testimony is the stone is rolled away. She gives her testimony verbally in Verse 2:

John 20:2 ~ "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

She sees the stone rolled away and she concludes that Jesus' body has been stolen. She sees the stone rolled away, and apparently the ladies when they approach close enough to see, possibly walking in, we're not told that they did, but they're clear on the fact that Jesus' body is not there. It's not just like some men have opened the tomb for them and they know they can go on in. No, they realize something's happened. They apparently see that His body is not there, because they are distressed. And here again I think that what happened was you've got these four ladies, three of whom are a little older. Mary Magdalene is the youngest, and so when they see what has happened, naturally she starts running to get the disciples. Just like when John outruns Peter, there was a time in my life when I could outrun maybe not a lot of people, but more people than I can now. I want to pick my challenges very carefully on whom I challenge to a race now. No, as you get older, you can't run as fast. So she's a younger lady, she takes off running, and she gets there first. So she's the one that they see. This is why John has it in his mind that Mary Magdalene has come with the news.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

They see that the tomb is empty, that the stone has been rolled away, and they conclude the body has been taken away from the tomb. “He’s not there. We don’t know where they have laid Him.” What they assume is that either robbers or vandals have come to the tomb. Now, grave robbing was something that happened often in the 1st century. In fact, we’re told later in the 1st century that the Roman emperor Claudius, sometime in the 40s, issued a law across the empire that made it a death penalty to vandalize a grave, to rob a grave, to even move the stone away, because what would happen is when someone had been buried like Jesus, when they had all those spices, remember there was 75 pounds, or 65 to 100 pounds. It depends on what the Greek measurement really means. It’s 100 of the Greek measurement, and depending on how you see that ancient measurement, you come up with these different numbers. But at least 65 pounds of spices, probably valued in the tens of thousands of dollars. Nicodemus was giving Him the burial of a King. And so they may have concluded that we didn’t get through a lot of those spices. There’s still a lot of value in there. Somebody might have been watching, and they came in and they stole that, and they also stole the body. Or they believe that someone is just dishonoring Jesus, vandalizing the grave. These are reasonable conclusions given what they see at first. They haven’t looked more carefully. So that’s Mary’s testimony from the first *saw*. Now the second time we see the word *saw* is after we read in Verse 3:

John 20:3 ~ So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first;

Peter’s a little older, too, apparently, or maybe he’s just got a hurt leg or something. But anyway, John gets ahead of him and comes to the tomb first. But here we see John’s timidity possibly.

John 20:5 ~ and stooping and looking in, he *saw...

He saw what? The second element of testimony, John’s testimony initially, he saw:

...the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in.

I mentioned the linen wrappings would be strips of linen laid over the body and then spices laid on, and strips of linen laid over the body. And John sees the linen wrappings not as they should be, lying there. That’s all we’re told about what John

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

sees. In Verse 6 we come to the third sort of sub-point under ‘What is their testimony?’ We heard from Mary Magdalene, and then we heard from John, and now let’s look at what Peter saw, Verses 6 and 7.

John 20:6 ~ And so Simon Peter also *came (comes), following him, and entered the tomb; and he *saw (sees) the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings,...

Do you see all the emphasis on linen wrappings? Three times, Verse 5: ***...linen wrappings lying there...*** Verse 6: ***...linen wrappings lying there...*** Verse 7: ***...not lying with the linen wrappings...*** One of the key things they saw was the linen wrappings lying there. What John is getting at is really seen most clearly when you contrast this with the raising of Lazarus. Turn with me back to John 11:43.

John 11:43 ~ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.”

He’s asked them to roll the stone away, and Jesus says, “Lazarus, come forth.” And what happens?

John 11:44 ~ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus *said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

When Lazarus got up out of the grave, this shows the difference between his raising. It was more of a resuscitation than it was a resurrection. Jesus was resurrected. Lazarus was still a part of this fallen order, and when he was raised from the dead, the linen wrappings clung to him. The grave clothes were still on him. Look back at John 20. ***...the linen wrappings were lying there.*** He had all of those spices, all of this weight of linen wrappings, and the spices on top of Him. What John is describing is that Jesus, in His resurrection, He came through the linen wrappings. He came through the spices. He got up and the linen wrappings were lying right where they had been. There was just no body underneath them. Now, we know that because of the description, the linen wrappings were lying there, lying there, lying there. And then also when we read on later, we’re told in Verse 19 that when the doors were shut and locked, that Jesus suddenly appears with the disciples. The second time, eight days later, the same thing. They’re shut in a room with locked doors, and suddenly Jesus appears there. The resurrection

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

body of Jesus can walk through walls and it can walk through linen wrappings and spices. His body has been transformed. Now it's important to realize it's not a spirit. It's not a ghost, because there is no body in the tomb. The tomb is empty. The body of Jesus has been gloriously transformed from a body like our sinful flesh, into the body of glory that we will one day have. For as John himself says in 1 John 3, we don't know what we shall be, but we know that we will be like Him. We will be like Him, for we'll see Him as He is.

So what he's describing here is the resurrection of Jesus. The linen wrappings are lying there. Now, Peter sees that, and in fact, the word for *see* here, *saw*, "He saw the linen wrappings lying there," actually this particular word is a different Greek word than is used in most of the other times where the word *saw* or *seen* is used. This is the word $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ (*theōreō*), which means not just to see with your eyes, but to see with intent, to look at, sort of to fixate on, to reflect on, to notice, to be putting things together in your mind. When John looked in, when he stooped and looked in, and saw the linen wrappings lying there, it wasn't the kind of sight that Peter has at this moment. When Peter walks into the tomb, he sees the same thing John saw from a distance, but he's seeing it more clearly. He's inside. He's looking. He can see the linen wrappings lying there, and the body has been removed out from under them supernaturally, and he has much more information. Now, we're not told what Peter thinks.

We come to another witness. John comes in. This is the fourth time we have the word *saw*. We have a second, it's like, "Call John back to the stand." He calls himself back to the stand. Remember he was too timid to go in. He waited on Peter the leader to come in and to go first. And now that Peter's inside surveying the situation, John now feels emboldened. He walks into the tomb. He stoops down and now walks into the tomb, Verse 8:

John 20:8 ~ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.

Now he sees more fully. When he sees now, he understands the linen wrappings lying there, there's no explanation. There is no physical explanation for what is before them. And a 1st century reader knowing burial customs would have understood this. This is nothing less than eyewitness testimony to a supernatural resurrection. And what's really cool is John tells us in Verse 9, at first when you read it:

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

John 20:8 ~ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.

Does Verse 9 read a little in a jarring fashion? Verse 9:

John 20:9 ~ For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

At first when I read that, I'm thinking, "Do they still not understand that He had to rise from the dead? They just saw that He's risen. I don't understand this. What's going on here?" It's like he believes but he doesn't understand yet. That's not how it reads at all. What John meant to say was, "It's the first time I understood and believed about the resurrection. I came to a new level of faith. Even though I had believed earlier, now I believed in a transformative way. I now understood that He had to be raised from the dead." He's been told this a number of time by Jesus, hadn't they? And they just didn't understand. Nobody understood that Jesus had to be raised from the dead. They were so in the dark without the Holy Spirit being fully given to them, with all that had happened, the swirl of events that had happened. And so at this moment when he sees those burial linens lying there and the facecloth as Peter saw, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself, it seems that what happened was maybe He sits up. I don't know. He sits up and the grave clothes stay in place. But He's physically there. Remember, later He's going to eat with them. He tells them in another Gospel, "Look at Me. I'm not a ghost." He touches them. Mary Magdalene is going to touch Him later. His physical body, it's a resurrected body. But He sits up possibly through the grave clothes. The grave clothes stay there. They have no place on the living Savior. He takes the face cloth that's lying there and decides, "I'm going to just take it and roll it up." It's kind of like the opposite of vandalism. You have a neat, orderly room. No vandals have been here. Jesus just got up and walked out of the grave.

When you do things as you ought as a man, I'm always being reminded that I need to—not always being reminded. I'm sorry, but I'll often need to be reminded. "If you pick up after yourself it makes it easier. Your socks don't belong there, do they?" Well, when we put things where they're supposed to be, there's a beauty and order about our lives. We use something and we put it away. Even Jesus seems to be doing that. He's resurrected, but He rolls up the head cloth and sets it to the side.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

They see all of this compelling evidence. That's the content of their testimony. The *when*, the *who*, the *where*, the *what*, what they saw. Now the final point is the call of their testimony.

3) The Call of Their Testimony:

What response does this testimony call for? When John saw, he believed. To the skeptic and unbeliever, what is your response to this testimony? The evidence is compelling. As we read earlier, it is of much greater weight than we see in the courtroom of life so many times. It's irrefutable. Christ is risen. All of His claims are validated. You say, "I like the teachings of Buddha, or Confucius, or Mohammad." Only one Man has risen from the dead, so all of His claims are validated. Yield yourself. Trust in Him. Believe this fact about Him and believe into Him.

But it's also a call not just to the skeptic and unbeliever to believe. It's a call to the believer to believe, because John himself says he believed. Now, we know that he already believed, that he was already clean. Remember John 13, a few hours before this, when Jesus washes the disciples feet, and Peter says, "No, don't wash my feet," and then that whole discussion. Peter then says, "Wash my head, my hands, everything. If You have to wash my feet to make me a part of You, then wash everything." Jesus says, "You don't need to be washed. You're already clean. If you're already clean, you only need your feet to be washed, but not all of you are clean." And John says in that verse, that Jesus knew the one who would betray Him. So He's saying that, "Eleven of you are clean, and only need a footbath. Eleven of you are right with Me. Eleven of you believe in Me. Eleven of you have been justified and are saved." They were saved in the Old Testament sense of the word just like Abraham. He believed the Lord and he was declared righteous, credited with righteousness.

So John is saved, but what happens is the believer comes to a deeper level of faith, and this tells us something about the nature of true saving faith. There are two things about saving faith. The first thing is it keeps on believing. True faith keeps on believing. When you become a Christian, especially if you haven't had a spiritual background and taught doctrine, you may become a Christian with a very, very tiny faith. It's not the size of the faith. It's the glory of the Savior that the faith is in. You may not have any idea about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You may not understand the doctrine of the Trinity, and you probably don't understand it very well anyway at the moment you're saved, but what happens when a believer

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

is confronted with those things? Though they may wrestle for a while, they believe. They keep submitting to the word of God. They hear the Shepherd's voice and they follow. So the believer, when he's confronted with more truth, he believes, and this is what happens with John. He sees now more than he had seen before, and he keeps on believing.

But the even more wonderful thing, I said there are two things about the nature of saving faith. First it keep on believing, and secondly, it keeps on receiving. For John, this moment was a moment of intense delight. There was a sense in which it wasn't as dramatic as his conversion, but there was something dramatic about what happened to him when he believes now. Everything falls into place. Suddenly all that Jesus has been teaching, it's like somebody had removed some kind of obstacle that had been in front of him, and now he sees the panorama of all that Christ has done, and it begins to make sense to him in a whole new way. He testifies to this in John 2:22. Way back in John 2 when Jesus was at the temple, He cleansed the temple, and remember they said to Him, "By what authority do You do this? Show us Your authority." I'm paraphrasing, but basically He said, "I'll show you by what authority I do this. What authority do I have over the house of God? Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it." They said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple." Verse 21:

John 2:21 ~ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

"Now we understand. His body has been the temple all along." His body, His earthly body, His earthly life, is the meeting place between God and man. We shared about this a little bit last week how, "It is finished!" suddenly makes more sense now. I think for John, the work of building the temple, Jesus is the temple, and the work was finished when He said, "Tetelestai," on the cross. The long, arduous work of building the meeting place of God and man, the true one, is done. It's finished. Remember I said the same verb was used in Exodus 40:33 when Moses finished the tabernacle? 2 Chronicles 5:1, when Solomon finished the temple, Jesus says, "It is finished." Now John on this side of the resurrection says, "Yes, the work is finished. I see." The meeting place of God is Christ. How it must have moved his heart as he reflected on these things. I mean, he was still in wonder, and things were coming over time, but it was like the key had been put in the lock, and the door was opening, swinging open, to see more of the glory of God.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

I wonder if he began to understand the marvel of how Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection happened at Passover, how he suddenly could understand, "Wait a minute. The reason that Jesus has timed it this way, that God put Christ on the cross at Passover was because Jesus is the fulfillment. He is the true Passover Lamb." He's the one who was slain so that we would not experience the judgment of God that fell upon each in Exodus. It was a picture of the judgment that falls on sinners. He's crucified not on, as some people think, the day when the Passover lambs were slain. I don't have time to explain this. If you want to ask me about it afterwards, I'll explain the timing of it. Jesus was crucified the day after the Passover lambs were slain, because when you compare Mark and Luke, they clearly say the Last Supper happened on the day the Passover lambs were slain, and it was a Passover meal. So they ate the Passover, but Jesus was crucified on the first day of Unleavened Bread, the day after the Passover, part of the Passover week. Why did God do that? The whole Jewish nation went through the rituals of Passover there, and they all come to Jerusalem, probably between 1 and 2 million people thronging in Jerusalem, the city bulging, and they all find lodging there. They gather as families and they go through the rituals, and one of the first things they do is go through the ritual of removing all of the leaven from the house that they're staying in, usually the night before the Passover meal.

Then they slaughter the Passover lamb, they eat the Passover meal, they remember the Exodus and what God has done, and then the Lord lets them see that picture again. He lets them see the sign again, and the very next day He says, "Here is the fulfillment." The true Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, marches to Calvary. Remember that yeast represents sin. Leaven represents sin. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was seven days they could eat no leavened bread. They took all the leaven out of the house. What's God saying? "If you want to be saved, if you want to be in My Kingdom, you must have no sin." Jesus, on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, takes all the leaven away from the people of God forever.

Zechariah 3:8 ~ ...I am going to bring in My servant the Branch.

Zechariah 3:9 ~ ...'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.

That is the day of the crucifixion, and these are the kinds of things that are flooding in upon the apostle John, the glory and beauty of the Savior, the resurrected Savior, a Savior who lives. The more that we believe, the more that we receive the goodness, the lovingkindness, and the beauty of Christ.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Let's pray together...

Father, we thank You that You have made Your glory known in such a clear way. You picked a time when the whole nation was in Jerusalem, to lift up Your Son in all of His glory, to show them that He is the answer. And Father, all of us in this room today have considered that fact. We have seen the testimony that He is the answer, that You have vindicated Him and validated everything that He said and everything that He did, by raising Him from the dead. We pray that You would work in the hearts of those who have not yet believed, in this room. Let them cry out to You. Help them to cry out to You, to surrender to You, to give themselves to You, even in their hearts to ask you for faith, that even if they're saying today, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief," they've come to a Savior who responded to that by granting their request by granting healing and salvation. Father, may all of us be people who truly lay hold of Jesus more, and more, and more, trusting in Him, loving Him, treasuring Him, for He is worthy. We pray in His Name, Amen.

"The Empty Tomb"

Video, audio, description, and transcription are licensed under an [Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Attribution:

Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA

www.ProvidenceDuluth.org

Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.