

John 20:1-18 “Experiencing the Unimaginable” 3/31/24

Have you ever pondered life’s unanswerable questions? - For example, why is Real Lemon juice made with artificial flavor, and lemon dishwashing liquid made with real lemons?

Why is the man who invests your money called a broker; when going broke something we want to avoid with our money? - Why is the time of day with the slowest traffic called rush hour?

If cats are famous for chasing mice, why isn’t there mouse-flavored cat food? - Why don’t you ever see the headline, "Psychic Wins the Lottery"?

Why are there Braille labels on the drive-up ATM?¹ - And why doesn’t everyone believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Some of these unanswerable questions may be debatable - Or even have answers - But “why doesn’t everyone believe in the resurrection of Jesus?” will remain unanswerable - Because believing in the resurrection is the only logical choice

The resurrection of Jesus is an essential part of the gospel message - It is a key doctrine in the Christian faith - It proves that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that His atoning work on the cross has been completed and was effective - Jesus’ resurrection changed everything!

The empty cross and the empty tomb proclaim loud and clear that the debt that Jesus gave His life to pay, has been paid - Because of that, from the very first day, the enemies of the Faith have attempted to disprove the resurrection

I do not want to devote this whole message on why believing the truth is the easiest thing to do - But I do want to briefly touch on a few of the false claims

¹ Adapted from an illustration by Mike Sares, SermonCentral.com

From the very beginning, the enemies of our Lord tried to deny the historic fact of the resurrection - The Jewish leaders claimed that the Lord's body had been stolen from the tomb

In Matthew 28:11-15, Matthew records that the Jewish leaders bribed the Roman guard to say that the disciples had stolen the body while they slept - This claim is ridiculous on several points

Foremost, a Roman guard sleeping on duty would be immediately executed - And secondly, the disciples were not even capable of stealing Jesus' body from the tomb

They were hiding for fear of their own arrest - The tomb was securely sealed and guarded by the Roman troops - Most importantly, those disciples are another proof of the resurrection - That is because they all ended up sacrificing their own lives because they would not stop telling others about our Lord rising from the dead

If His body really had been stolen from the grave - They certainly would not have gone to their own graves for the sake of some lie

Neither would any of our Lord's enemies have stolen the body - Because if they had, once word of the resurrection spread - They would have produced the body

Another theory says that the disciples had some kind of mass hallucination and just imagined seeing our Risen Lord - This theory is also easily proven false - As you may read in 1 Corinthians 15:6 the resurrected Jesus was at one time seen by 500 people

That is way too many people to have the same mass hallucination - In addition, the hallucination theory is disproved by the fact that if that is what had happened, there would still have been a body in the tomb

The enemies of Jesus would have produced that dead body in a flash - They could not, of course, because Jesus rose from the grave - So there was no dead body to produce

The swoon theory claims that Jesus didn't really die - But He just kind of fainted on the cross - This too is a silly idea - The Romans were good at executing people - And one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with his spear

If Jesus had not already been dead, that spear would certainly have killed Him - And then what happens? - Jesus wakes up in a sealed tomb? - Would that mean that the enemies of our Lord who came up with the swoon theory want us believe that Jesus performed a miracle to escape from that sealed tomb before He ran out of air?

There are a couple of other false theories, but they too are easily proved false - The only logical conclusion is that He kept His promise and arose from the dead

As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,"²

Warren Wiersbe writes that, "the glorious truth of the resurrection was not understood immediately by even His closest followers. It gradually dawned on these grieving people that their Master was not dead, but alive!

And what a difference it made when the full realization of His resurrection took hold of them! For Mary Magdalene, it meant moving from tears to joy, for ten disciples it meant going from fear to courage; and finally for Thomas it meant moving from doubt to full assurance"³

Jesus' resurrection changed everything - It absolutely shook the ancient world - It turned the disciples from men hiding for fear of their lives - Into men who would sacrifice their own lives - Rather than stop telling others about Christ's resurrection

² Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,

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³ Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, © 2003, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO)

Our Lord's resurrection established His Church - And moved the day when we honor God - From the Sabbath on Saturday - To the Lord's Day on Sunday

It was such a fantastic event - That we find it recorded in several historical records other than the Bible, that were written in that day - Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, recorded the resurrection in his encyclopedia size book "The Antiquities of the Jews"

John 20:1-2 "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. 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."

Mary Magdalene had been present at our Lord's crucifixion - And in this passage, we hear of her arriving at Christ's tomb so early that it was not even light out yet

Jesus had freed her of seven demons, and in response, she was a dedicated follower of His - Christ has brought us all salvation - And our reaction should be the same

Not following Him out of some sense of obligation - But out of love, in response to His love for us - In the words of 1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

When Mary found the empty tomb, she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved - This other disciple, whom Jesus loved, is commonly understood to be John the author of this Gospel

John focuses on Mary Magdalene because she was the first to see Jesus alive after He rose from the dead - But when we compare the other Gospels, we discover that she was among a group of women

After they discovered the empty tomb Luke 24:9-10 “and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles”

The eleven are the eleven disciples who remained after Judas’ betrayal - They had heard Jesus many times - Probably even more than the women - You could imagine them receiving the news with amazement and even joy - But that is not what the Scripture says happened

Luke 24:11 “but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” - The women are sharing the biggest news the world had ever heard - And they were talking to Jesus’ inner circle of friends

But their words seemed like nonsense, like idle tales - Fortunately Peter, and John with him, go to check it out

John 20:3-4 records their reaction, “So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first”

Notice verse 8 - It says that John saw and believed - Sometimes that first moment of belief does not come after fully evaluating all the facts - And hearing indisputable evidence

But it comes from seeing and believing - Of seeing the works of the Living Savior - Of noticing how He has touched the lives of so many - And just believing on faith

Next, John 20:10-11 records, “Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb”

She is about to be the first person to see our resurrected Savior - But first she encounters two angels in verses 12 and 13 - And after speaking to them she sees Jesus

My guess is that at that moment, Mary was the one person who needed Jesus the most - Jesus is always right there when we need Him most

A few years ago, Joanne and I were both outside the Heislerville parsonage - She was in the back taking the dog out - We didn't use a leash in Heislerville - And I was dragging recycling and garbage to the curb

I thought I heard the dog's tags jingling - And I was afraid that he was following me to the road, so I went around the corner of the house into the side yard - It was getting dark, and I had a hooded sweatshirt on, so the dog didn't recognize me

The dog decided that he needed to protect Joanne from this hooded stranger - So he charged at me with his meanest bark - I moved closer, figuring that he would recognize me - He did not, and he just got angrier

Then I spoke his name - And when I said, "Jacques" he instantly recognized me - The angry bark immediately stopped - And he was delighted to see me - I hope you will forgive me for comparing Mary Magdalene with my little critter

But notice that Mary does not recognize Jesus by seeing Him - It might not have been her meanest bark, but she sure isn't pleased with the thought that the gardener may have taken Him somewhere

Yet, when Jesus calls her by name - Any irritation that she may have had with the gardener instantly disappeared - Replaced instead with recognition and joy

We too may look forward to the day when Jesus calls our name as well - Listen to Jesus' own words from John chapter 10:14-17

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again”

Like Mary, we will one day come face to face with Jesus - Perhaps we will be called home to heaven, out of these temporary bodies - Or maybe we will still be alive when Jesus returns for His Church

When either of these things happen, if we are one of His sheep - If we know Him as our Savior - And love Him as our Lord - We will know the reality of Christ’s words in John 10:28 “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”

Because Jesus rose from the grave - We can each be assured of our own resurrection - And on that, we have Christ’s promise

This Easter Sunday, go forth and investigate the empty tomb by spending time with God’s Holy Word, the Bible - Because it is there that we will encounter our Risen Lord

In addition, be sure not to leave this event in the past - Sure this happened 2,000 years ago - But the reality is that Jesus is still risen today - Welcoming all who believe into God’s family

Know Jesus as your Savior today - And dedicate your life to being a radical follower of His - Radical because nothing is more important than being His disciple - And keeping Jesus first, every moment of our lives, because His resurrection truly changed everything