

The Resurrection and Post-Resurrection Narratives

Chapter 1: Prelude to Resurrection and a Harmony of the Four Accounts

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The resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental truth of the gospel and a cardinal doctrine of biblical Christianity. All the gospels end their historical narratives with the climactic resurrection and exaltation of Christ (Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24; Jn. 20; 21). In the gospel preaching recorded in the book of Acts, the resurrection and exaltation of the Savior is emphasized. The resurrection and Lordship of the Messiah forms the climax of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:29-36); his preaching on Solomon's porch (Ac. 3:15, 26); his speech to the Sanhedrin (Ac. 4:8-12); and, his and the apostles' answer to the council (Ac. 5:31-32). The evangelist Stephen ends his defense before the Sanhedrin with the exaltation of Jesus (Ac. 7:55-56). In the first sermon preached to the Gentiles, Peter said, "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (Ac. 10:39-41). When Paul preached in Antioch after discussing the condemnation, crucifixion and burial of Christ (Ac. 13:27-29), he focused on the resurrection (Ac. 13:30-37) before his appeal to believe in the Messiah (Ac. 13:38-41). Luke gives a summation of Paul's preaching of the gospel saying, "Then Paul, as was his custom went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Ac. 17:3; see 17:30-32).

In the epistles the resurrection is also presented as a crucial aspect of the gospel. Paul says in Romans 10:9 that we must confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead if we are to be saved. The epistles teach that our regeneration is rooted in the Redeemer's resurrection (Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 2:13; 1 Cor. 15:45); that He "was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:24-25); that our sanctification and the application of redemption to us is dependent on our Lord's resurrection (Phil. 3:10). In 1 Corinthians 15:14 the apostle even says that, if Jesus had not risen, then the preaching of the gospel is empty (i.e. void, vain, false, a waste of time, meaningless). In verse 17 of the same chapter he says, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." "Everywhere in the N.T. the resurrection is proclaimed as the decisive turning point in the life of Jesus and in the history of the world's redemption."¹ Given all these considerations, our Lord's resurrection must not be considered just an interesting epilogue to His suffering on the cross. The resurrection itself is an indispensable aspect of the redemption that Jesus had to complete. It is the exalted Savior that applies salvation to His people, that intercedes on their behalf and that judges the nations. Therefore, it will be of great value for us to study all the gospel narratives on this subject and apply what we learn to our lives.

¹ J. A. Schep, "Resurrection of Jesus Christ" in Gen. Ed. Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 76), 5:75.

Prelude to Resurrection

And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, "After three days I will rise again." Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch (Mt. 27:61-66).

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him (Mk. 15:47; 16:1).

And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment (Lk. 23:55-56).

There are two important things to examine that form a link between the passion narratives and the record of the resurrection.

The first regards Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joses and the other women from Galilee who do two things that set up their role in the resurrection narrative. (1) They were present at or very close to the sepulcher when Jesus was buried. These women are very important because they were present at the crucifixion and burial of Christ and serve as eyewitnesses to these events. Because of their love and devotion to the Savior they insisted upon staying close to Him in life and in death. They knew exactly where the tomb was and how Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had lain the body in the sepulcher. These women had seen the linen in which the Mediator was wrapped and would be able to testify after the resurrection that the very same linen was found wrapped together in the empty tomb. To understand the importance of their role as discoverers of the empty sepulcher we must keep in mind that none of the apostles except John witnessed the crucifixion and there is no textual evidence that John stayed to watch the burial. (2) Consequently, not only was the discovery of the empty tomb dependent on their knowledge of the burial site, but it was their desire to render devotion to the body of our Lord by completing the anointing of the Redeemer's body with prepared spices and perfumes, that led directly to the discovery of the empty tomb. Mark 16:1 informs us that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joses, and Salome purchased spices as soon as the Sabbath was over (around 6:00 pm Saturday) in order to anoint Jesus' body. This preparation on Saturday evening made their departure right before sunrise on Sunday morning possible.

Although the preparation of spices demonstrates these women's great love for the Savior, it also demonstrates their ignorance of or lack of faith in Christ's coming resurrection. If they knew or believed that the Lord was going to rise from the dead early on the first day of the week, they could have saved their money and not wasted their time preparing the aromatic ointment.

The women's obedience to the Sabbath is noted by Mark and Luke and is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the true followers of our Lord are godly. These women went about their preparations only after the Sabbath was over. Even in a task as important as anointing the Son of God these women would do no unnecessary labor on the Sabbath day. Luke

says they “rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment” (23:56). Second, their obedience to the Sabbath led to the discovery of the empty tomb instead of the sealed and guarded tomb. If they had visited the tomb on Saturday they would have been ordered to leave by the soldiers and may not have again attempted their task. But, by waiting until the Jewish Sabbath was over, they found that the guards had fled and the tomb was opened. They came to anoint the dead but instead found the author of life. Their weeping would be turned into joy.

The second thing which prepares us for the resurrection narrative is the setting of the Roman guards at the tomb. This pericope is only found in Matthew’s gospel. Apparently, Matthew believed it was significant because it so clearly exhibited the providence of God in proving the resurrection of Jesus.

Matthew’s account says that on the next day, the day after the day of preparation (which is the Jewish Sabbath), the chief priests and Pharisees came to see Pilate. Matthew makes the unusual coupling of “the chief priests and the Pharisees” (see 21:45) possibly to emphasize that although these two groups had very different views of the bodily resurrection (the chief priests were Sadduces and denied the resurrection, cf. Mt. 22:23; Mk. 12:18; Lk. 20:27; Ac. 23:8) they were united in their hatred and opposition to Christ. They likely approached Pilate early Saturday morning. Although it is possible that certain high priests and Pharisees acted on their own initiative, they probably were a delegation from the Sanhedrin. In either case, Pilate would have regarded this as an official delegation.

Interestingly, these religious leaders who had refused to enter the Praetorium on Friday when a Jewish crowd was present had no qualms about entering the Governor’s residence when the multitudes were not present. “We see how they played fast and loose with their own religious regulations. Men who had stooped to murder would certainly be capable of lesser transgressions.”² “It seems that the Pharisees, who were always insisting on strict Sabbath observance, had found an excuse for what they were doing this Saturday morning.”³

The men put on an air of humility before Pilate and addressed him as “lord” or “sir” (*kurie*). They told Pilate of our Lord’s prophecy regarding the resurrection. “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will arise’” (Mt. 27:63). This statement raises a few important questions. How did the chief priests and Pharisees know about Jesus’ prediction? And why did the Jewish leaders understand and remember Christ’s promise when all the disciples failed to understand or regard anything our Lord said about this matter? All of this is somewhat remarkable. The unbelievers understand, while all the believers do not.

Regarding the disciples, the answer is simple. God hid the proper comprehension and understanding of the resurrection from them. The synoptic gospels record that on at least three separate occasions Jesus spoke privately to the disciples about His coming death and resurrection. The Savior explained what was going to happen in very clear, non-figurative language. Right after the pericope where Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, Matthew says, “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (16:21; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22; see Mt. 17:22-23; Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:45; Mt. 20:18-19; Mk. 10:33-34; Lk. 18:22-33). The first time the Savior discussed His coming death and resurrection, Peter rebuked Him and rejected what He said. The second time Christ spoke of His death and resurrection Luke says, “But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying” (9:45; cf. Mk.

² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1943] 1961), 1142.

³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 981.

9:32). The third time the Redeemer told the apostles of His resurrection the evangelist writes, “But they understood none of these things: this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken” (Lk 18:24).

These passages tell us that it was not only the apostle’s own bad theology, presuppositions regarding the kingdom and worldly political/military expectations of the Messiah that prevented them from understanding our Lord’s teaching on His suffering, death and resurrection; but, also, God Himself did not want the disciples to understand these things until after they had already taken place. In fact after Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19), John adds the following comment: “Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the words which Jesus had said” (2:22). From this we should learn two things. First, the influence of early and repeated bad training in theology is exceedingly great. People who have held to false doctrines for a long period of time often act particularly deaf and blind when confronted with clear passages that contradict their theological system. Second, we are completely dependent upon God for spiritual illumination if we are to comprehend the Scriptures. The apostles were like undiscerning infants until God opened their eyes to the truth.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, who had only heard about the resurrection of Christ in obscure, veiled phraseology (e.g., Jn. 2:19; Mt. 12:40; 16:4) understood what Jesus was teaching. They even asked Pilate to post guards until the third day, just in case. We must remember that throughout our Lord’s ministry the scribes and Pharisees had sent men to watch the Savior very carefully and take note of anything that was unusual or could be used against Him. They had challenged Jesus to show them a sign and repeatedly had been told about the sign of Jonah. Unlike the disciples who were unwilling to contemplate the unpleasant implications of Christ’s statements, the scribes and Pharisees either came to proper conclusions or were aided by Judas Iscariot. Their request of Pilate indicates that they knew that the witnesses who came forward at Jesus’ trial who claimed that Christ was going to literally destroy the temple in Jerusalem were lying.

The understanding that the chief priests and Pharisees came to regarding the Savior’s teaching, of course, does not mean that they believed it. They most certainly did not. In fact their wickedness and spiritual blindness regarding the person and work of Christ is exhibited by their continuing accusation that Jesus is a deceiver or imposter. “This is the only place in the gospels where Jesus is called *planos*, ‘deceiver’ (cf. the cognate verb used in reference to Jesus in John 7:12, 47; cf. the same point but different language in Luke 23:14).”⁴ Only men who are bewitched by Satan could make such an accusation after all the miracles, the raising of Lazarus, the three hours of darkness and the great earthquake that opened the tombs. God had already testified to the truth of the Savior’s person and work, but these men obstinately rejected the truth. What they did “was not to defy the clouds, but to spit in the face of God, so to speak, by ridiculing the brightness of the sun. Such examples show us that we ought, with pious and modest thoughtfulness, to direct our attention early to the glory of God when presented to our view, that our hardness of heart may not lead us to brutal and dreadful blindness.”⁵

The Jewish leadership’s fear was not that the Nazarene would actually rise, but that the disciples would steal the body and then claim that He arose. Note their request, “Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and

⁴ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 862.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 3:336.

steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first" (Mt. 27:64). If the disciples were false teachers and were dishonest, as the Jewish leaders supposed, then their request made perfect sense. A Roman seal upon the tomb and a contingent of Roman soldiers would not have been overcome by our Lord's small band of disciples. The request does, however, reveal a bit of paranoia on the part of the Jews, for Jesus' disciples had fled for their lives and had exhibited only cowardice, fear and unbelief since Gethsemane (John excepted). However, it "is exactly because these leaders are themselves dishonest people (see 28:11-15) that they mistrust Christ's disciples."⁶ Their irrational paranoia is further revealed by the fact that the disciples would have absolutely nothing to gain by perpetrating a myth upon the people that Jesus arose from the dead. If the Savior did not rise, then their faith was in vain. Why would these men live lives of great sacrifice, hardship and persecution for something they knew was a gigantic fraud? If Christ did not rise then "we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19). While many people suffer and die for a delusion, for something that is false but is thought to be true; no one is willing to die for something that they *know* isn't true. Perhaps, the Jewish leadership became unhinged a bit from the amazing miracles that attended the crucifixion and death of Christ. Perhaps, deep down that "which *really* they were afraid of, was, his *resurrection*; that which is most Christ's honour and his people's joy, is most the terror of his enemies."⁷

What is ironic and providential regarding their request is that God used it to render a much greater historical proof of the resurrection than otherwise would have been. If the Roman guards had not been at the tomb, then the Jewish authorities' lie about what happened to our Lord's body (Mt. 28:11-15) would have been more plausible. But, how is anyone supposed to believe that a few cowardly disciples with only two small swords (see Lk. 22:38) could overpower trained, well-equipped Roman soldiers? As Calvin notes, "We see then how the Lord not only *disappointeth the crafty*, (Job v. 12), but employs even their own schemes as snares for holding them fast...let us observe that God, as if he had hired them for the purpose, employed their services for rendering the glory of Christ more illustrious; because no plausible ground for lying, in order to deny it, was left to them when they found the grave empty; not that they desisted from their wicked rage, but with all persons of correct and sober judgment it was a sufficient testimony that Christ was risen, since his body, which had been placed in a grave, and protected by guards who surrounded it on all sides, was not to be found."⁸

Pilate granted the Jews their request in a rather curt, direct manner. "Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how'" (Mt. 27:65). The governor's sense is "take a guard." That is, "Here, you can have a detachment of my (Roman) auxiliary troops." We know that Jewish police were not used because Matthew 28:12 uses the word *stratiotai* which usually refers to Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:65 uses a Latin loanword *koustodian*) and Matthew 28:14 says explicitly that the guards were answerable directly to Pilate. Further, it is unlikely that the Jewish authorities would have needed Pilate's permission to deploy their own guards. The Jewish leaders were not taking any chances. They wanted the maximum security possible.

Under the supervision of the Jews, the Roman guards secured the tomb by "sealing the tomb and setting the guard" (Mt. 27:66). The sealing of the tomb did not involve closing the tomb with stone for Joseph and Nicodemus had already done that. Rather, it involved placing

⁶ Ibid, 982.

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Pub., no date), 5:436.

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 3:336.

clay or wax on the door and side of the tomb connected by a rope. The wax or clay would be impressed with an official seal so that any tampering with the door could be easily detected. The seal stood as a warning to anyone that moving the stone and breaking the seal would involve grave consequences from the Roman authorities. The Jewish leaders had worked in league with the Roman authorities to put Jesus to death. They now worked in league with the same authorities to attempt to prevent the resurrection. Apostate religion and the heathen state combined their efforts to keep Jesus locked in a tomb; held fast in humiliation. But, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision" (Ps. 2:4). "Here was all the power of earth and hell combined to keep Christ a prisoner, but all in vain, when his hour was come; death, and all those sons and heirs of death, could no longer hold him, no longer have dominion over him. To guard the sepulchre against the poor weak disciples, was folly because *needless*; but to think to guard it against the power of God was folly, because *fruitless* and to no purpose; and yet they thought they had *dealt wisely*."⁹

Christ's Resurrection

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you." And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "All hail." And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Mt. 28:1-10).

And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not (Mk. 16:2-11).

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not

⁹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:437.

the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass (Lk. 24:1-12).

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, "They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She saith unto them, "Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him." And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus saith unto her, "Mary." She turned herself, and saith unto him, "Rabboni;" which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, 'I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things unto her (Jn. 20:1-18).

All four gospel writers spend a good deal of time describing the discovery of Christ's resurrection early on the first day of the week. This detail is to be expected since the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus forms the climax of the gospels. Interestingly, all four accounts are quite different. John's record (as usual) is unique to himself throughout. "The differences between the gospels amount to no more than a demonstration that here we have the spontaneous evidence of witnesses, not the stereotyped repetition of an official story."¹⁰ The perceived "difficulties" are "owing to the great compression in the various narratives, due partly to the incomplete information possessed by the narrators—of whom only one was strictly an eyewitness, but chiefly to this, that to the different narrators the central point of interest lay in one of the other aspects of the circumstances connected with the Resurrection."¹¹

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 828.

¹¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 2: 621.

Modernists seize on the different way the stories are told as proof of the fallible nature of Scripture. The reality, however, is that the Spirit of God made good use of the evangelists to shed light on all the different aspects of these events to give us a more complete picture of the resurrection. Therefore, the best way to study the resurrection is to carefully combine all four narratives in order to reconstruct the whole story. Although it is not easy to harmonize all the accounts it can and has been done. Being inspired, infallible and inerrant, the accounts can be reconciled without any artificial twisting to the narratives of each gospel.

Before we examine these events, there are some general observations about these records that are noteworthy. First, there are no actual witnesses to the resurrection itself. The narratives describe and prove the resurrection in two different ways. There is the fact of the empty tomb. This fact is not left without interpretation, but is explained by an angel of God (Mt. 28:5-6; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:4-7). Also, there are the appearances of the risen Savior to His disciples. These appearances progress from Mary Magdalene, to the other women, to Peter, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and to all the disciples. While Jesus' followers were given the privilege of seeing the resurrected Messiah, unbelievers in that generation and all subsequent history are dependant on the eyewitness testimony of that first generation. This testimony has been infallibly recorded in Scripture for our benefit. Second, the emphasis of these narratives is not simply to prove the resurrection to an unbelieving world (although they do, indeed, do that); but, they also focus our attention on the impact of the resurrection on Christ's "bewildered and exhilarated followers, on their fear and joy, doubt and assurance."¹²

A Harmony of the Gospel Resurrection Narratives

In order to prove that the four records of the resurrected Savior are not contradictory in any way, we will begin our study with a chronological synthesis of all four accounts. This will not only clear up any confusion regarding what occurred, but will also give us a coherent and more complete picture of these amazing events.

The story begins with a group of women leaving to go to the tomb on the first day of the week while it was still dark (Jn. 20:1). Matthew begins his narrative with "as it began to dawn" (28:1) which means the sun was just starting to arise. Mark and Luke say they came "very early in the morning" (Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1). The women involved were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary—the mother of James and other women (Jn. 20:1; Mt. 28:1; Lk. 24:10). These women came to see the sepulcher (Mt. 28:1) and anoint the body of Jesus (Lk. 24:1). On the way to the tomb the women had a discussion among themselves regarding who would roll away the stone from the sepulcher (Mk. 16:3). If Matthew 28:2-3 follows verse 1 chronologically, then while the women were on their way to the tomb there was a great earthquake that occurred when an angel from heaven came and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulcher. This frightened the guards so they became "as dead men" (Mt. 28:4).

The women arrive at the tomb just as the tip of the sun begins to appear over the horizon (Mk. 16:2). As this group approached the tomb they noticed that the large stone had been rolled away (Mk. 16:4; Lk. 24:2; Jn. 20:1). Upon seeing this, Mary Magdalene concluded that the body of Jesus had been removed and immediately ran back to the city to tell Peter and John what she had seen (Jn. 20:1-2). While Mary Magdalene was gone, the other women that remained saw the angels in the tomb. It was the angels who announced unto them the resurrection of Christ (Mt.

¹² R. T. France, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 405.

28:5-6; Mk. 16:5-6; Lk. 24:3-8). One of these angels instructed the women to tell Peter and the other disciples what they had seen (Mt. 28:7; Mk. 16:7). Since there was more than one disciple to contact, it is likely that the women split up, with some going to one house and the others to another (e.g., John Mark).

While these women had gone back into the city, Mary Magdalene went back (with Peter and John) to investigate the empty tomb (Jn. 20:2). This incident is not recorded in the synoptic gospels, but is important to John who was a participant. Although all three set out for the tomb, Peter and John were so excited they ran to the sepulcher. John, being younger, arrived first and waited for Peter. The beloved disciple looked into the tomb and saw the linen clothes. Peter being the bolder of the two went into the tomb and inspected the wrappings. John went in with Peter; after he saw “he believed” (Jn. 20:7-8). This is the first example of a disciple believing in the resurrection.

Apparently Peter and John were so excited they either left before Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb; or, they left with Mary waiting outside the sepulcher. In either case, they did not take the time to speak with her. As Mary Magdalene is outside the tomb weeping she looks into the tomb and sees two angels dressed in white, one sitting at the head, while the other was sitting at the feet of where Jesus had lain (Jn. 20:12). She does not perceive that these visitors are angels and asks them if they know where they have put the Savior (Jn. 20:13). After she spoke to the angels, she turned and saw Christ, but did not recognize Him (Jn. 20:14). When our Lord speaks with her and calls her Mary, she recognizes the Savior and clings to him (Jn. 20:16-17). Mary is the first person to actually see the resurrected Messiah. Mary then reports what she has seen to the disciples (Jn. 20:18). Later on the same day Jesus will appear to some of the women (Mt. 28:9), then to the apostle Peter (Lk. 24:34) then to the two Emmaus disciples (Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13ff.), then finally to all the disciples except Thomas (Mk. 16; Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-20).

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