

The Resurrection and Post-Resurrection Narratives

Chapter 3: Peter and John's Encounter with the Empty Tomb

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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 (Jn. 20:1-10).

Although John's record begins essentially the same time as the synoptic gospels—very early on the first day of the week—the apostle ignores the other women's encounter with the empty tomb and the angelic message and instead follows the actions of Mary Magdalene. (“John, of course, assumes that his readers know the account of the synoptists. What he himself adds is almost throughout new material, hence of supreme value on that account. He writes with exceptional detail and great vividness...”¹). In the process we learn the important event of Peter and the beloved disciple's examination of the empty tomb. As we study this section of Scripture we want to examine: (1) Who is Mary Magdalene and what does she do? (2) What is the significance of the apostle's observations in the tomb? (3) What does the faith of the apostle John tell us about the evidence for the resurrection?

Mary of Magdala

Since Mary Magdalene figures so prominently in the resurrection narratives we need to look at who she was. She is first mentioned in the gospels by Luke (8:2). She is identified as Mary, called Magdalene, out of who had come seven demons. She had been particularly afflicted by demonic oppression and her gratitude to Jesus for her deliverance was exceptionally strong. “In short, of all our Lord's followers on earth, none seem to have loved Him so much as Mary Magdalene. None felt that they owed so much to Christ.”² Thus, with the other women she stayed at the cross even after the Savior had died and witnessed His burial. She was probably not married because she was named after her home town Magdala (from the Hebrew *migdol* meaning “watch tower”), a small town on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. When women were married it was common for Jews to identify them either in relation to their husband or their

¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1943), 1332.

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John* (Cambridge, England: James Clark, 1976), 3:390.

children (e.g., Salome “the mother of the sons of Zebedee” [Mt. 27:56]; “Mary of Clopas” [Jn. 19:25]). Given the fact she was able to support our Lord’s ministry, she may have been a widow of means who did not have any children. She is very prominent toward the close of the gospels because of her presence at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:25; Mk. 15:40; Mt. 27:56; cf. Lk. 23:49); her observation of the burial of the Savior (Mk. 15:47; Mt. 27:61; cf. Lk. 23:55); and, the events we are about to examine. She is the first person to see the resurrected Christ (Mk. 16:9-10). The human tradition that has arisen regarding Mary—that she was a young, beautiful prostitute or a woman of very loose moral character before her conversion—has no basis in the Scriptures at all.³

Note that it was Mary’s great love of the Savior that led to such brave and repeated acts of devotion toward Jesus. It was her great love and the love of the other women that led to their great discovery. This great love has something to tell us. As Pink notes,

How this devotion of hers puts to shame many of us, who perhaps have greater intelligence in spiritual things, but who manifest far less love for Christ! Few were as deeply attached to the Redeemer as was this woman. Few had received as much at His gracious hands, and her gratitude knew no bounds. How this explains the listlessness and half-heartedness among us! Where there is little sense of our indebtedness to Christ, there will be little affection for Him. Where light views of our sinfulness, our depravity, our utter unworthiness, are entertained, there will be little expression of gratitude and praise. It is those who have had the clearest sight of their deservingness of hell, whose hearts are most moved at the amazing grace which snatched them as brands from the burning, that are the most devoted among Christ’s people. Let us pray daily, then, that it may please God to grant us a deeper realization of our sinfulness and a deeper apprehension of the surpassing worthiness of His Son, so that we may serve and glorify Him with increasing zeal and faithfulness.⁴

When the women arrived at the tomb they were surprised to see the very large stone which covered the sepulcher already rolled away. After seeing this Mary quickly concluded that either some men had stolen the body, or perhaps that the owner of the tomb had his servants move the body to another sepulcher. With this conviction, she immediately left her friends at the tomb and started off to notify Peter and the beloved disciple of this shocking news. Poor Mary had come to minister to the body of the One she believed had been defeated; she was not yet aware that He was the great victor over Satan, sin and death. “She thought that she had come to put a final touch, such as only a woman can, to a life of sad and irremediable failure; but had no conception that on that morning a career had been inaugurated which was not only endless and indissoluble in itself, but was destined to vitalize uncounted myriads.”⁵

The urgency of the situation and Mary’s excitement can be seen in the fact that she did not stay with the other women to examine the tomb, but she ran (present indicative) back to Jerusalem to tell Peter and John. Simon Peter was recognized by the other disciples as a leader of the group. Like the other women, the thought of a bodily resurrection of Jesus does not even

³ “For no reason at all, church tradition identified her with the unnamed sinner of Luke 7, who anointed the feet of Jesus in the house of a wealthy Pharisee—probably because Mary of Bethany later did the same thing in the house of Lazarus, and there is a confusion of these two accounts and the two Marys. After this she was assumed to have been a prostitute before Christ saved her, and by the seventeenth century ‘Magdalene’ was being used as a word to describe a reformed prostitute” (James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, 1999], 5:1571).

⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan [1945] 1975), 3:256-257.

⁵ F. B. Meyer, *The Life of Love* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Ravell, 1987), 386.

enter her mind at this point. When she arrives at what is probably John's residence where Peter may have been staying she says, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him" (20:2).⁶ Mary's "they" is left undefined because she has no idea who was involved. Her plural "we" as in "we do not know" indicates that she came to the tomb with a group of women and proves that John was aware of the accounts in the synoptics.

The Empty Tomb

After receiving this information, Peter and John go immediately to the tomb. "Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first" (20:4). It is indeed possible that all the apostles were at this residence and that John only focuses our attention upon Peter and himself because they were the only ones who went out to examine the tomb. Their running to the tomb may indicate that although their faith was very weak at this time, hope was not completely extinguished. As Calvin comments,

Some sense of faith, therefore, remained in their hearts, but quenched for a time, so that they were not aware of having what they had. Thus the Spirit of God often works in the elect in a secret manner. In short, we must believe that there was some concealed root, from which we see fruit produced. Though this feeling of piety, which they possessed, was confused, and was accompanied by much superstition, still I give to it—though inaccurately—the name of *faith*, because it was only by the doctrine of the Gospel that it was produced, and it had no tendency but towards Christ. From this seed there at length sprang a true and sincere *faith*, which leaving the sepulcher, ascended to the heavenly glory of Christ.⁷

John being younger and faster than Peter outruns him and arrives at the tomb first, but does not go in. He does, however, stoop down to take a look. The word used (*blepo*) indicates a mere glance on John's part. From his position he could see the linen clothes lying in place. Because of timidity or perhaps because he is simply waiting for Peter to arrive, he does not go into the tomb. When Peter arrived, he went right into the tomb and closely examined (*theorei*, to behold or take careful notice of) the linen clothes lying there (20:6). At this time John went into the tomb and also saw the linen clothes lying there. "It is noteworthy that John himself is the writer who records that 'he went not in.' Be the motive what it may, he generously gives his brother Peter the whole honour and credit of being the first to go inside the grave, and thoroughly investigate the condition of it in every particular."⁸ Roman Catholic writers use this passage as a proof text for the primacy of the pope. They argue that John's refusal to enter the tomb first indicates that he was bowing to the supremacy of Peter. Aside from the fact that the supremacy of Peter is rejected by the broader context of Scripture (e.g., see Gal. 2:7, 8, 11; 1 Cor. 1:12-13; 3:22; 12:28; 2 Cor. 12:11-12; Eph. 4:11), there is nothing in this passage at all that indicates John was deferring to a superior church officer.

There are a number of things that merit our attention regarding their discovery. First, there are two witnesses to the empty tomb, both of whom were chief among the apostles. Two

⁶ Some commentators believe the grammar indicates two separate residences. Frederic Louis Godet writes, "The repetition of the preposition *pros, to*, in ver. 2, leads us to think that the two disciples had different homes, which is natural if John lived with his mother and with Mary, the mother of Jesus" (*Commentary on John's Gospel*, 974).

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3:250.

⁸ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3:404-405.

witnesses are better than one and God's law requires two witnesses in legal proceedings (Dt. 19:15). The group of women and Mary Magdalene were also independent witnesses of the empty tomb and wrappings. In the days of our Lord, however, the testimony of women was not accepted. This may account to some degree for the disciples' unwillingness to believe the women's report (Mk. 16:11; Lk. 24:11).

Second, the description of the grave clothes indicates very clearly that the body of Jesus had not been removed by men or stolen. This is seen by the following observations: a) The only thing of value in the tomb would have been the linen wrappings and the expensive spices used to freshen the corpse, yet both of these remained. A naked corpse would have been absolutely useless to thieves. b) Violent thieves who would be willing to roll back a grave stone and desecrate a tomb would not have taken the time or trouble to very carefully lay out the linen wrappings to make it appear that the body just disappeared or passed through the wrappings. If they were after the expensive spices, there would have been a corpse tossed aside with pieces of linen cloth all over the floor. c) If Joseph of Arimathea had decided to move the body of Jesus to a different tomb so that his garden tomb could have been reserved solely for his family members, then obviously the body would have been moved *with the grave clothes*. They would not have been left behind. d) Chrysostom has also pointed out that "John tells us by anticipation that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead...(LXXXV.4; pp. 320f.)"⁹ Thus, the disciples would know that the remaining linen clothes and their position were remarkable and were intended to lead to belief in Christ's resurrection. e) We must not forget that the tomb was guarded by professional, well-armed Roman soldiers. If someone wanted to steal the body of Jesus or simply remove the expensive spices they would have to either kill the soldiers or bribe them with a large sum of money. This fact alone renders all theories that the body was stolen as untenable and virtually impossible. Given the abundance of evidence one could argue that a *lack* of belief in the real bodily resurrection of Christ is unscientific and irrational.

Third, there is also significance in the fact that this was the only resurrection in history where the grave clothes are left behind. The Savior arose naked and was clothed with new heavenly garments. Hutcheson writes,

It may serve to teach us, not only what he hath purchased to us by his death and resurrection, even a restitution to that blessed estate through him wherein Adam was in innocency, (when he needed no garments), though the complete enjoyment thereof be suspended till eternity, wherein we shall be perfected, and shall not only need nothing to cover our outward nakedness, but shall leave that infirmity and corruption which accompanieth us to the grave behind us, as he left his grave clothes; but further, it teacheth that Christ rose again, not to live any more in this world, not to die any more, but to live and reign for ever, and therefore he left his grave clothes...¹⁰

The theanthropic Mediator earned His white, lustrous heavenly garments by a life of moral perfection. We, however, will receive white robes because of the merits of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the fact that the linen wrappings were laying neatly in one place and the napkin that covered the head was rolled up apart from the body wrappings not only proves the reality of the resurrection, but also indicates *the nature of the resurrection*. If we know that in Jewish burials there were separate wrappings for the head and the body (e.g., Jn. 11:44) and understand

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 883, footnote 16.

¹⁰ George Hutcheson, *The Gospel of John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1657] 1972), 415.

the strong adhesive character of the spices used, then we must conclude that Christ's new resurrected body passed supernaturally right through the wrappings, leaving them in place. This view is supported by other appearances in the post-resurrection narratives and other portions of the New Testament. The resurrected Savior on occasion would appear suddenly and could vanish in a supernatural manner (Lk. 24:31, 36). He could appear suddenly in a room with closed doors (Jn. 20:19). Although Jesus has a glorified, real human body and soul (i.e. in His human nature He is not omnipresent), He is not impeded by solid objects like walls, doors or burial clothes. His resurrected body could also appear as very glorious. In Acts he appeared surrounded by a blinding bright light (9:3) and the aged John, when on Patmos, described His countenance as "the sun shining in its strength" (Rev. 1:16). "All these mysterious and miraculous elements, together with the miraculous ascension show that Jesus' body, though consisting of flesh and bones, was now in a glorified condition and capable of acting independently of the laws of time and space. This does not imply that He Himself was beyond time and space for this again would mean the annihilation of His true humanity."¹¹

Given the state and place of the wrappings and the other resurrection narratives, one can only conclude that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body in which He died. He was not a mere spirit, ghost, apparition, vision, or hallucination. Although our Lord arose from the dead in the same body in which He was crucified (which even maintained the scars in the hands and side [Jn. 20:27]), His body had undergone a change. Christ's resurrection was unique. The Bible contains a number of examples of people who have been raised from the dead (e.g., 1 Ki. 17:17 ff.; 2 Ki. 4:32 ff.; 13:21; Mt. 27:53; Mk. 5:41-42; Ac. 9:40-41). But all these people went on to live normal lives and then died again, were buried and suffered corruption. Jesus, however, did not rise to the normal earthly sphere of life but came alive immortal and incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42, 50, 53). We learn of the nature of the transformation that occurred in the Savior from Paul's discussion of what the Mediator's resurrection will lead to in the resurrection of believers (1 Cor. 15). Paul speaks of celestial bodies (v. 40) which are incorruptible (v. 42), raised in power (v. 43), a spiritual body (v. 44), the heavenly Man (vs. 47-49), immortal (v. 53) and victorious (v. 54). Through the resurrection, Christ "became a life-giving spirit" (v. 45); "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20); and, "the firstborn of the dead" (Col. 1:18).

Although Christ rose with the same body in which He was buried, it was now remarkably different. It was glorified, imperishable, powerful and perfect. As a reward for His redemptive obedience, Jesus "was endowed with new qualities perfectly adjusted to His future heavenly environment."¹² When the Bible describes our Lord as having a "spiritual body," it does not mean that He is somehow immaterial like an angel, but that He has a body perfectly suited to an eternal heavenly environment. Although with a real glorified human body the Savior is not omnipresent; nevertheless, he can still do amazing things. The theanthropic Messiah is able to rule the whole creation from the right hand of God. As a "life-giving spirit" He is able to redeem His own throughout history.

John Sees and Believes

¹¹ J. A. Schep, "Resurrection of Jesus Christ's Body," 5:82.

¹² L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 346.

After Peter and John examined the empty tomb and the linen cloths something happened in the beloved disciple's mind. The account says that "he saw and believed." John understood the significance of what he was observing. In the gospel of John, the word "believe" (*pisteuo*), when used of true Christians as here, refers to genuine faith (e.g., 5:44; 6:47; 19:25; 20:29). The beloved disciple, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that the evidence of the empty tomb and the grave clothes is sufficient for faith in the crucified and risen Redeemer. John, obviously, is not saying that he became a true believer in Christ for the first time at the tomb. It means that the beloved disciple believed or trusted in this new crucial information about the Messiah. As he learned new things about the Savior these things became the objects of his faith. He had faith before, but it was not as mature or complete as it could be. It is one of the characteristics of the gospel of John that, when Jesus performs an amazing sign, the account will tell us that the people or the disciples believed (cf. Jn. 1:50; 2:11, 22, 23; 8:30, 31; 10:42; 11:45; 16:45; 16:30, 31). The Savior will even speak of the disciples believing in the future (Jn. 14:29). While a believer is justified the moment he believes (Jn. 5:24), his faith continues throughout his life. It can be nurtured and can grow.

The emphasis in the text about John believing shows us the importance of personal faith in the person and work of Christ. Two men came to the empty tomb and examined the very same evidence. One "saw and believed," while the other at this point did not. When God presents the glorious truths of the gospel before our minds, either in the preached or written word, we have a duty to accept and trust in all the truths set before us. We do not have the option of accepting only what we like or what seems reasonable to us. Further, we are to trust in the gospel for ourselves. Although the church is a corporate body consisting of many parts, we all become Christians by a personal faith. Our parents, siblings and friends cannot believe for us. We cannot rest upon our baptism, heritage, church membership or church attendance, but must personally embrace the death and resurrection of Christ by faith.

John was the first apostle to believe in the resurrection. He also was the only disciple to believe in the resurrection without first having to see the resurrected Savior in person. Since the passage says nothing about Peter's faith, at this time he still did not comprehend what was right before his eyes.

It is interesting that, even though John believed in the resurrection at this point, he along with Peter still did not understand how the resurrection fits into the teaching of Scripture. The beloved disciple writes, "For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (20:9). "The lack of understanding of the Scriptures concerning the Messiah's redemptive work is beautifully illustrated in the Emmaus story (Luke 24:25-27, 32) and extended to the whole disciple group in Luke 24:44-47. The plural *edeisan* shows that the ignorance applied to both disciples..."¹³ This and other passages demonstrate that the apostles believed in the resurrection *before* they understood how it was foretold in the Old Testament. This proves that the disciples did not manipulate the evidence or make up the resurrection to agree with their interpretation of prophecy. "They were first convinced that Christ was risen. Then they came to see a fuller meaning in certain Old Testament passages."¹⁴ Some of the passages that would soon be used as proof for the resurrection of Christ are Psalm 16:10 (see Acts 2:24, 13:35), Psalm 2:7 (see Acts 13:33) and Psalm 110:1, 4 (see Heb. 6:20). Interestingly, the proper Messianic understanding of these passages came directly from the resurrected Savior Himself. From Luke

¹³ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 373.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 835.

24:44-47, we see that Jesus used the whole Old Testament to explain His suffering and resurrection from the dead on the third day.

The fact that the disciples did not understand the Scriptures on such a fundamental point of the faith teaches us two things. First, it condemns our own carelessness in not making the necessary effort in reading and studying the Bible to learn everything we can about Jesus and His holy doctrine. At present, in the United States there is a woeful lack of knowledge of the English Bible and basic doctrines among professing Christians. Many evangelicals don't know the ten commandments or the Lord's prayer. They cannot even define doctrines such as justification by faith alone, the atonement or the two natures of Christ in one person. It is for this reason that in the last generation churches have been plagued with heresies, immorality, and perversions of worship. Therefore, we need to be faithful and force ourselves to study the sacred Scriptures and good Christian books *everyday* so we will grow in the knowledge of the excellence of our Savior and excel in personal holiness. For those of us who come home from work and are very tired and find it very difficult to study, the holy Sabbath is the perfect opportunity to catch up on our Christian reading and prepare ourselves spiritually for the battles of life.

Second, we need to be on guard that our presuppositions regarding prophecy are derived from the Bible itself and not some popular man-made system such as dispensationalism. The apostles did not understand the prophecies regarding the Savior's suffering, death and resurrection because these events did not fit into their Messianic paradigm. Their prophetic concept of Jesus' kingship did not take into account that humiliation must precede exaltation. While many of the Old Testament predictions regarding the Messiah to come were difficult and obscure, there were others that were much more explicit and clear. Once these amazing redemptive events occurred, the apostles no doubt understood their own blindness and stupidity in these matters.

Unbelieving Views of the Resurrection Refuted

At this point in the resurrection narratives (even before the many personal encounters with the resurrected Christ [e.g., Lk. 24:39-43; Jn. 20:27; 1 Cor. 15:1 ff.; etc]), we have already seen that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is overwhelming and irrefutable. We have noted that the evidence was sufficient for the beloved disciple to believe even before he saw the Savior. This proof, however, does not mean that everyone is willing to embrace the truth of the resurrection as it is presented in Scripture. Therefore, in order to sharpen our own presentation of the resurrection to others, we need to understand some of the unbelieving presuppositions behind the rejection of the resurrection and examine some of the ways people seek to avoid this fundamental truth of the faith. There are a number of presuppositions that undergirds lack of belief in the resurrection.

First, there is the rejection of the resurrection based on the presuppositions of modern "science." This assumes that if an event cannot be observed empirically (i.e. it cannot be examined by the senses in the here and now) and cannot be reproduced by man or "nature," then it belongs forever in the realm of mystery and mythology. People who consider themselves very enlightened will embrace such arguments because: a) we have not and cannot see it; and b) it cannot be reproduced under controlled conditions.

This view must be rejected for a number of reasons. a) To deny the resurrection on the basis of the fact that we ourselves cannot observe it (if consistent) would be a *denial of all meaning and scholarship* related to history, literature, logic, and even science itself. History is a

description of events from the past that obviously cannot be observed in the present. No one living has seen the battle of Waterloo or the carnage of Gettysburg. These events are known through the testimony of eyewitnesses who are now deceased and on rare occasions the findings of archeology. Yet, no modern unbelieving scientist argues that these events never happened. Likewise, no one has observed Shakespeare, Milton or Bunyan write their plays or books. In the realm of science, no one has actually seen a black hole or a quasar. Yet these things are accepted by everyone in the scientific community. No philosopher has been able to observe a law of logic. The fact that the empty tomb was examined by several people; that Jesus' enemies acknowledged the tomb was empty (Mt. 28:11-15); and that our Lord was seen by over five hundred people (1 Cor. 15:1 ff.) and was even touched and handled (Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27) is more than sufficient to prove the historical reliability of the resurrection. It is inappropriate, absurd and inconsistent to regard a fact of history in the same manner as a lab rat that can be observed, handled and experimented upon in the *present*.

Second, most modern minds reject the resurrection because they think it is unnatural or against nature. That is it must be rejected because it is not a part of our everyday experience and is not comprehensible within the laws of nature or the physical universe as we know it. The problem with this kind of thinking is twofold. a) It assumes that finite sinful man, a puny fallen creature, is the final, authoritative definer of reality. It starts with the presupposition that truth and facts are only what man says they are. It also arrogantly assumes that man has an infinite knowledge of the unknown and all possible contingencies. It presupposes a closed universe where man is god, defining what can and cannot be possible. Therefore, modern man *a priori* (i.e. before the facts), simply by *fiat* definition, rules the acts of God in creation and history out of bounds. This is true of the doctrine of creation and all miracles as well as the greatest of miracles—the resurrection. b) It presupposes that either God does not exist or, if He exists, He cannot reveal Himself in propositional form to mankind. In other words, even if God exists He must forever remain an unknown God, totally irrelevant to meaning, ethics, salvation and life. Modern, so-called ‘scientific’ man does not like God, so His existence is denied or God is defined away as meaningless and totally irrelevant to our lives. This is the essence of modern humanism. It is a house of cards all built upon presuppositions that are not proven; that cannot be proven; that in fact, are contrary to all evidences and common sense.

God has revealed Himself in propositional form, the Bible, the Word of God, and this self-revelation is infallible, inerrant, trustworthy and absolutely true (Ps. 12:6; 19:7, 8; 119:140, 160; Pr. 30:5; Jn. 10:35; 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; etc). To not embrace what God has spoken regarding His own Son, which has been attested by miracles and hundreds of eyewitnesses is to embrace meaninglessness and nihilism. It is the death of rational thought and ethics.¹⁵

¹⁵ Christianity is a religion based on historical facts such as the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The secularist or naturalist strikes at the heart of Christianity by its attack on the miraculous or the supernatural. This, in turn, is really an attack upon the Christian concept of God and the doctrines of creation and providence. Thus, we see that even in a discussion of something as simple as the resurrection of Christ, the believer is arguing from the foundation of Christian theism and the biblical worldview. Likewise, when the unbeliever challenges the reality of the resurrection of Christ, he does so from a platform of unbelieving starting points or axioms. The unbeliever must be shown that, given his own presuppositions regarding reality, knowledge and ethics, he cannot consistently deny or affirm any truths. Contrariwise, the Christian teaching regarding who God is, which lies behind the doctrine of Scripture and a believing epistemology, guarantees the truth claims of the Bible and the logical process where facts are properly interpreted. For both believers and unbelievers, any discussion of “facts” involves a philosophy of fact and a whole worldview.

Third, there are the stepchildren of secular humanism, who are called modernists or Christian liberals and Barthians. Because of their humanistic presuppositions these schools of thought eliminate the Christian doctrine of the resurrection by redefinition. This is done in two different ways.

The older style of modernism argues that the resurrection as a literal bodily event is an embellishment of the early church. In other words, the post-apostolic church (likely following an earlier delusion or a false oral tradition) perpetuated unknowingly or perhaps even knowingly a blatant lie. If one adheres to modernism or neo-orthodoxy, then the Christian church has nothing to say in the realm of history. The church becomes a kind of club or fraternal organization which prefers certain myths or legends over others. It is all a bunch of absurd nonsense. “The insuperable problem with all such ‘theories’ that [ignore] or downplay the physical facticity of the Resurrection is that apart from the New Testament materials, no one can say *anything* significant about the Resurrection, and these documents insist on a physical resurrection. The resurrected Jesus is expressly distinguished from a ghost and eats fish with his disciples (Luke 24); Thomas is shown the nail prints in Jesus’ hands and the wound in his side (John 20).”¹⁶ We either must accept what the Scriptures explicitly and repeatedly say about Christ’s resurrection or we must stop claiming to be a Christian. If we do not believe that the Redeemer died and rose from the dead *according to the Scriptures* (1 Cor. 15:3-4), then we cannot be saved. A redefinition of the resurrection in humanistic or modernistic terms is nothing but a clever tactic of Satan to destroy the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Both views approach Scripture from an unbelieving, secular humanistic standpoint. Because they *a priori* accept higher critical theories of scholarship which *assume* that the Bible is not inspired, but rather is a thoroughly human document full of mistakes, errors, myths, outmoded thoughts, practices and worldviews, they feel the need to justify their continued place in the church. This unbelieving axiom is the starting point for all their speculative, arbitrary theories. They would do better to abandon their unbelieving presuppositions and listen to Peter: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables [Greek-*mythoi*] when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16).

Both views completely destroy the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone which is one of the pillars of Christianity. Paul says that Jesus was “raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). How, we ask, can a resurrection that is outside the realm of history or is a metaphor rooted in a myth going to justify anyone? Some people may find such views of the resurrection to be interesting or intellectually stimulating. But if Christ is not risen from the dead, literally, bodily, then you are still in your sins (1 Cor. 15:17). You are without hope and without God in this world and the world to come.

Fourth, there is what called the swoon theory which says that Jesus did not really die but had only passed out. Then, when He was placed in the cool tomb, he revived and showed Himself to His disciples. The swoon theory is disproved by the following facts.

(1) The gospel narratives make it perfectly clear that Christ really did die on the cross. There was the severe blood loss from the scourging (Mt. 27:26, Mk. 15:15; Jn. 19:1) and the piercing of the hands and feet with large spikes (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:18). In fact, our Lord bled out for a period of around six full hours from nine in the morning to around 3 pm (Mk. 15:25; 33-37). It was at least another hour or two before He was removed from the

¹⁶ John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 76.

cross (Mk. 15:43-46). All the gospel accounts record the fact that Jesus gave up His spirit (Mk. 15:37; Mt. 27:50; Lk. 22:46; Jn. 19:30). In order to make sure the Savior was dead, a Roman soldier thrust a spear deep into the Redeemer's side out of which came water and blood (Jn. 19:24). This shows that the separation of the red blood cells from the serum had already begun under gravity, a process which happens after the blood stops circulating. The soldiers examined Jesus' body to make sure He was dead (Jn. 19:33). Further, Pilate inquired from the centurion in charge of the execution to make sure Christ was dead before he handed the body over to Joseph of Arimathea.

(2) Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took possession of the dead body, washed it and wrapped it in spices and linen (Mk. 15:46). Not only would these men have noticed if the Savior was still breathing, but once the spices began to harden it would have been impossible for Jesus to free Himself of the wrappings let alone remove the giant stone and overpower the armed guards. Thus, the fact that the tomb was empty and Christ was alive can only be explained as a miracle, a supernatural act of God.

Unbelievers and enemies of the Savior can exert themselves and grasp at straws forever, but the veracity of the bodily resurrection and the biblical accounts stand. "The only reasonable explanation for the missing body, the many appearances, the transformed disciples, and the amazing origin and spread of Christianity is the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from Joseph's tomb."¹⁷ All unbelieving explanations of the empty tomb are foolish. They tell us more about the depravity of man and the nature of unbelieving thought than they do about redemptive history.

Having seen the empty tomb, the disciples return to their own house; or, literally in Greek "to themselves" (20:10). This indicates that at least some of the apostles were sharing a place to stay in Jerusalem. We know from John 19:26-27 that the mother of Christ was now the beloved disciple's responsibility. John was probably eager to tell her the news of the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb after the disciples had entered and remained outside weeping. When the disciples left the sepulcher Mary stayed behind to mourn for Jesus. Apparently, the disciples left in haste and did not interact with Mary when they left. We leave this marvelous scene with John believing, Peter wandering and Mary mourning.

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¹⁷ Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 348.