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## **Faith Dawns as the Son Rises**

**John 20:1-11**

**Intro:** These last few chapters of John's Gospel have been a roller coaster of emotion and apparent disappointment. We have witnessed the most unthinkable things happen to Jesus in the final days of His life on this earth. One of His own disciples treacherously betrays Him to His enemies for a handful of coins. The group of disciples that He had led, taught and ministered with and to for over 3 years, failed Him when He needed their support in the Garden and deserted Him, almost to a man, when the officers came to arrest Him. When He needed His friends, they were gone.

When then saw Jesus trials in both the Jewish legal system and the Roman. Jewish Law was purposefully bent towards making it extremely difficult to secure a guilty verdict in any capitol case because the life of a Jew was considered to be precious. Roman law was pragmatic and straight-forward. Trials were performed to establish guilt or innocence and to ensure justice was swiftly executed on the guilty and mercy was extended to the innocent. The legal proceedings were performed in a specific manner with a specific goal and when the sentence was handed down, it was final. By the traditions and legal precedents of both systems, Jesus should have been found innocent and released but He was condemned instead. So much for human justice! The problem wasn't with the judicial systems of Judaism or Rome. The problem was the wickedness in the hearts of those who manipulated the systems and actually used the just and merciful laws to condemn an innocent man to a gruesome and shameful death.

It was that death that was the most shocking of all. From the initial scourging, to the forced march out of town to the execution site, to the horrendous reality that was crucifixion. It's impossible to imagine a worse form of death: one that intensifies the suffering as the life prolongs. Add to that the humiliation of the bodily exposure and the unending vitriol and ridicule from those who finally saw their evil desires realized against their greatest enemy; the innocent man whose only crime was His constant exposure of their sin. His light revealed the darkness of their hearts and His death brought that darkness out into the open and showed what they were truly interested: their own will!

Think of how His disciples must have felt during this time. John is the only one that we know was at the cross but I'm sure he went back and told the others that he could find how Jesus suffered and died. As you can imagine, this didn't help the guilt and discouragement they had to have been feeling. There was no good news coming into their hearts from any of John's updates from the cross. They ran away when their Master needed them most and He's suffered greatly at the hands of wicked men and they were helpless to stop it. Now their beloved Rabbi, what are they to do?

Of course, we have studied and learned that there were some pretty amazing things that happened on the cross, things that changed the course of human history. You can even say that there was a cosmic shift in the created universe, both physical and spiritual – temporal and eternal, on the day that Jesus died on the cross. We learned that it was there on the cross, by His suffering and death, that the work of atonement for sin, the great catalyst for God's eternal plan of salvation for sinful man had finally been completed. "It is finished" is how Jesus put it and so it was!

By His death, Jesus became the sacrifice for our sin. He died in our place, as our substitute. By His death, He also averted the just wrath of God that is directed against all sin. God's justice against sin was satisfied so God's love could be extended to save sinners. His death also makes it possible for sinful men and women to be reconciled again with a holy God. We can enter into His presence and enjoy intimate fellowship with God only by being washed clean from sin by the blood of Jesus. By His death, Jesus also paid the price to redeem us out of the slave market of sin. His blood was the price required to purchase our freedom from not only the bondage of sin but its penalty too!

All this was great but it was also all unknown to His disciples and followers. The universe was forever changed. Sin, death and hell had been defeated by Jesus Christ but his disciples were completely unaware that any of this had happened, that any of this was even suppose to happen. All they knew was that Jesus was dead, their hopes and dreams were crushed and that they were at least partly to blame for it all. There was no hope in their hearts, no expectation of a brighter day, no thought of a glorious reunion, of any kind of relief from the deep disappointment, discouragement and utter self-loathing that they were currently drowning in. As far as they could tell,

life as they had known it was over. Life would never be the same again; it would never be as they expected it to be, as they had always dreamed it would be in the presence of Jesus. They didn't realize how right they actually were.

The point is that during the disciple's darkest days of their lives, God was working out their greatest blessing. He was working behind the scenes to fulfill His eternal plan of salvation for lost humanity and His work was accomplished as He had declared it would be and in His own timing. Just because the disciples were unaware of it didn't make it any less effective. Their lack of knowledge of God's work didn't hinder His work; in fact, it had no bearing on it at all. Their ignorance only had bearing on their own faith, on their perspective of God and His ability to fulfill His Word. God was accomplishing great things but they didn't know it, they couldn't see it through tear stained eyes, at least not yet.

If John's Gospel were just an ordinary biography, there would be no **ch20**. Every biography I've ever read ends with the death and burial of the lead character. I've never read one where the main character comes back on the scene. The fact that John continues his account of the life and Jesus and shares the excitement of the Resurrection miracle is proof that Jesus Christ is not like any other man. He is, of course, the unique Son of God, as He Himself had said.

The Resurrection is an essential part of the Gospel message and a key doctrine of the Christian faith. It stands as undeniable proof of several indisputable facts: 1) that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (**Rom 1:4**); 2) that His atoning work on the cross has been completed and is effective (**Rom 4:24-25**). The empty cross and the empty tomb are God's "receipts" that tell us the debt has been paid and the payment has been accepted. Of course, one of the great historical evidences of the Resurrection is the empty tomb. But the startling fact is that when Peter and John arrived at the tomb early that Sunday morning, it was not quite empty. The body of Jesus was gone, but something was still there: the graveclothes. Something about them so struck John that he believed in the resurrection by seeing them.

**1-2** – The other Gospel tell us that there were several women who went to the tomb together early on that morning. John only mentions Mary Magdalene. It is assumed that the purpose of the women coming so early to

the tomb was to complete the burial process that was initiated by Joseph and Nicodemus 3 days before. Their intent was to further care for the dead body of their beloved Master. Some skeptics have suggested that Christian faith in the resurrection was the result of rumors spread by Mary Magdalene who merely hallucinated that she met a risen Jesus. The problem with that theory is that Mary couldn't have suffered a hallucination because the last thing in the world she ever expected to happen was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Her immediate thought upon seeing the open tomb was that somebody had gained entrance inside the tomb and had moved the body of Jesus elsewhere. The only thing she could think to do was to go back and find Peter and tell him what she had discovered.

**3-5** – Apparently, John was hanging out with Peter (misery loves company) but Mary's news really got their attention for it prompted a foot race. Well, it didn't start out as a foot race *per se* but it certainly turned into one. John notes that Peter left the house first but that he arrived at the tomb first. Not a big deal, John's athleticism is stated but isn't a big part of the story. It really didn't mean anything because though John seemed to be bent on getting to the tomb first, he wasn't in a hurry to enter the tomb. He stood outside and looked in and "saw" the linen cloths lying inside. The Greek word used here is the common word for seeing and relates to nothing more than sight. John saw them lying there but the sight didn't as yet register in his mind or heart as being of any significance.

**6-7** – When Peter finally arrived huffing and puffing, I suppose, he had no hesitation about entering the tomb. He went right in and also "saw" the graveclothes and the linen cloth but this is a different Greek word. It means not only did Peter see these things but he scrutinized them and began to wonder what had occurred that caused them to be in this pristine condition. The Greek word is *theoreo* from which we derive the English words *theory* or *theorize*. "How could this happen?" was most likely what was going through Peter mind at the time. He clearly understood that something unusual had happened but he hadn't settled on an acceptable explanation.

**8-9** – Not to be out done by Peter's courage, John also enters the tomb and now he gets a closer look at the contents that were left in the tomb. This time, John uses a 3<sup>rd</sup> Greek word for "saw," the word *eido* – it means more than just to see; it means to know – to see with understanding! John declares that he saw "with understanding" and he believed! This tells us that

of all Jesus' disciples and followers, John was the first to believe and he did so before he actually ever saw Jesus. What made him believe? What did he see that convinced him of the resurrection?

Jewish burials were quite different than most others in that part of the world. Egyptians embalmed their dead, the Romans and Greeks generally cremated their dead. The Jews didn't embalm nor cremate. They would wash the body of the deceased and then carefully wrap it up with linen bands that enclosed dry spices in their folds. The spices were meant to inhibit the decomposition process. Jesus' body would have been encased with 75 lbs of these spices. Aloe was a powdered wood sawdust with an aromatic fragrance, myrrh was a fragrant gum that was mixed with the aloe powder. His head, neck, and upper shoulders were left bare and a linen cloth was wrapped about the upper part of His head like a turban. The body of Jesus was then lovingly placed within the sepulcher where it lay until sometime on Saturday night or early Sunday morning.

What would we have seen if we had been there the moment Jesus was raised from the dead? Would we have seen Him stir a bit, open His eyes, sit up and start to struggle out of the bandages? That would've been a resuscitation, not a resurrection. It would've been as if He had recovered from a swoon or had just been raised from death like Lazarus was. It would mean He was raised in a natural body only, not a spiritual body; but that was not the case.

If we had been in the tomb at the time of the resurrection we would have seen either the body of Jesus disappear from inside the graveclothes or be transformed into a glorified body that passed through the graveclothes and out of the sealed tomb just as it was able to pass through closed doors later. His body was changed into something new and different and wonderful.

What happened after that? The linen strips of cloth would have collapsed upon themselves from the weight of the spices contained within them and they would've been lying undisturbed exactly where the body of Jesus had been. The cloth that had been wrapped around His head, without the weight of any spices, would have retained some of its shape and would have lain by itself separated from the body cloths by the space where His neck and shoulders had been.

What did John see? The graveclothes were undisturbed. If Jesus' body had

been carried off by friends, enemies or simple grave robbers; the graveclothes would also have been gone. If Jesus had recovered on His own or if someone had attempted to remove the graveclothes, the inside of the tomb would have been a complete mess. What happens when you accidentally knock over a full container of open Tony Chacherie's? Delicious Cajun spices go everywhere!

Imagine the mess 75 lbs of spices would make if they are violently or even just carelessly disturbed. John saw that everything left in the tomb was still carefully placed in order. He saw that there had been no disturbance in the tomb.

What did John believe? Clearly, no one removed the body or disturbed the graveclothes but yet, the body was gone. It hadn't been stolen, it hadn't been moved. The only logical conclusion to this evidence is that the body passed through these graveclothes, leaving them precisely as they had been placed around the body. Jesus must be risen!

At a glance, these graveclothes prove both the reality of the resurrection and indicate the nature of it. The disciples saw everything was still in order but the body was gone. Jesus had been raised and in a resurrected body.

**10** – Strangely, with this new and wonderful information, Peter and John just go back home! Why? Simply because, as good as evidence is in convincing the mind, it takes more than that to change a life. They saw the evidence and believed something wonderful had happened but as yet, they hadn't associated it with any Scripture. What Jesus really wanted to cultivate in the lives of His disciples was faith in the Word of God. The disciples eventually got this message. Later, Peter, in his first epistle made it clear that the Word of God is the only true basis for our faith, not personal experiences or even physical evidence. This is great because, as far removed as we are from these original events, it's impossible for any one to acquire access to any physical evidence – it no longer exists! But true, saving faith doesn't come from evidence or experience; faith only comes by the hearing of the word of God (**Rom 10:17**). When they eventually made the connection with the OT Scriptures, the resurrection of Jesus will change their lives!

Our text presents a few important lessons. 1) God has provided perfectly adequate evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It consists of the claims of those who saw Jesus between the time of His resurrection and His ascension back into heaven. The empty tomb; the

changed character of the disciples; the authenticity of the records and the evidence of the undisturbed burial garments. The evidence is there, the evidence of the grave-clothes alone was enough to birth faith in John. If men still fail to believe, it's because they will not believe, not because the evidence is lacking.

2) What Peter and John saw at the tomb show that the body of Jesus was glorified. It was sown (buried) a natural body and was raised a spiritual body. Jesus lives in this body today, seated at the right hand of God where He intercedes for us until the day He will return again in judgment. We no longer think of Him as the vulnerable Jesus of history. Jesus died, but He died once for all. He was beaten, spat on and cursed, but that will never be repeated. We pray to a powerful Lord, an exalted Lord today. This Lord will return one day to take His own to be with Him in glory.

3) The transformation of the body of Jesus points to a new mode of life for all believers. He's the first fruit. We, the harvest, shall be like Him in our bodies and our character traits. Our resurrected bodies will be better than our old physical bodies. They'll not just be our old physical bodies resuscitated. Our current bodies hamper us. They tie us to earth, to habits, to character traits inherited from our parents. They slow our thought processes. When we're really tired they carry us away in sleep. Eventually they die. But death is not to be feared by a believer for it is our ultimate gain. The resurrected body will not hamper or inhibit our fellowship or our service to the Lord. The body of the risen Christ is the forerunner of our bodies, and it was and still is absolutely subservient to His wishes. It didn't hamper Him. It freed Him. In that new body He felt no pain, no suffering, no want. For us there will also be freedom. There will be no want. There will be unlimited wakefulness and unlimited opportunities for service.

It's often said of someone whose going through a physical difficulty that they have seen better days, or that their best days are behind them. That may very well be true of a lot of people but it is never true for a believer in Jesus Christ. No matter how good your life was in the past or how tragic and painful it may be in the present – the truth is: your best days are still yet to come! One day you will see your Lord, your Savior, your King in all His resurrected beauty and glory and when that day comes, the Bible promises that you will be like Him! Like Him in His glorified body and like Him in His character traits. As the old hymns so eloquently puts it, "What a day,

glorious day, that will be..." 😊