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JOHN 19:38-20:31

Verses 38-42...

Let me read to you **Isaiah 53:9**:

“Men appointed His grave with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death.”

Wicked men had prepared three graves that day...but one would not be used!

Just as God would not allow His bones to be broken, He also would not allow Jesus to be buried in a tomb prepared for a criminal. Jesus would be buried in a tomb prepared by those who loved Him and believed in Him!

Both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were wealthy. Both were high-ranking members of their religious community. And both were secret believers!

But, now they were willing to openly claim the body of Jesus!

What made the difference? **CALVARY!**

Before Calvary, they cared more about what their peers thought than they did about following Jesus openly!

You know, as I studied this this week, I remembered that there was a time when I knew Jesus Christ...but I certainly didn't live my faith out for all the world to see.

You've heard the old question...

“If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

Well, I'm ashamed to say that I would have gone free. Because there would not have been enough evidence to convict me!

Just like these men, however, when I really saw Calvary one day as I was studying my Bible, I really saw the agony, the suffering of my Lord Jesus, and I wanted from that day to make my life count for Jesus!

I'm so grateful He didn't give up on me along the way. Remember, in His prayer in **chapter 17**, He said He didn't lose any that the Father had given Him. I'm so glad He didn't lose Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus when they were playing at being Christians and He didn't lose me, either!

Tombs back then were used over and over, but **this one was new!**

It was clean, untainted by any previous body. There our Savior was laid to rest after being anointed and prepared for burial with costly spices.

The sin debt had been paid! God's will had been accomplished! And the world went about its business.

- Pilate went home and discussed the dramatic events with his wife.
- Annas and Caiaphas went to preside over their respective Passover feasts.

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- John sought to comfort Mary.
- Peter wept over his failure.
- The body of Judas lay forgotten.
- The other disciples secluded themselves.
- A Roman soldier tried on his new robe.
- And another soldier washed the blood of Jesus from his spear.

Yes, things here on earth returned to normal...**but not for long!!!**

Angels in heaven watched as some of their friends prepared for duty down at the grave of Jesus Christ!

Calvary was not the end! If all we see is Calvary, it would be precious that Jesus loved us enough to die for us, but there is so much more! The gospel, remember is the **death of the Lord Jesus for our sins**, but it is also the **burial** and the **resurrection!!!**

Man did all they could...they killed Jesus, but they could not keep Him dead!

John 20:2-10...

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that other women came to the tomb that morning as well, but Mary Magdalene must have arrived there first.

Don't miss the point that she did not come expecting Jesus to have been raised up from the dead...she came fully expecting to anoint His dead body...she brought with her spices for that purpose!

When she saw the stone had been rolled away, she ran. Can you imagine how frightened she must have been?

It was pretty brave of her to go to the cemetery while it was still dark and then to see the stone was rolled away must have really been frightening!

Matthew tells us that an angel of the Lord had descended from heaven and rolled away the stone.

Do you think the angel moved the stone away so that Jesus could get out of the grave? NO! Jesus just came out of the grave in His resurrected body...He just passed through the stone!

The angel moved the stone so the folks who came to the grave could get in!

Mary Magdalene ran and got Peter and John.

Apparently they were together. Maybe John had sought out Peter to comfort him. John knew how dejected and sorry Peter was feeling.

And Mary Magdalene still didn't believe Jesus had been raised even after seeing the stone rolled away, did she?

Verse 2... "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid Him."

Remember that as John wrote this gospel, he was well into his 80's or 90's. **Can't you just see this old man sitting at an old table with his stylus in his hand remembering back over the years to the greatest moment of his life...the day He saw the empty tomb of Jesus?**

Oh, how exciting it must have been...

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Can't you just see this scene?

John was younger than Peter. John outran Peter. John got there before Peter, but was reluctant to enter...and here comes Peter and **when he got there he went right on in!**

And what did they see?

Did they see a confused pile of grave clothes?

Did they see the mess a grave robber would have made in his haste to remove the body of Jesus?

No! They saw the grave clothes arranged exactly as they had been arranged on the body of Jesus! The body of Jesus simply passed through the grave clothes...

Verse 6... the linen wrappings were lying there.

Verse 7... the face-cloth was rolled up in a place by itself.

The face-cloth would have been wrapped around and around the head of Jesus.
But Jesus didn't need all this anymore!

Jesus was out of the grave!

Jesus was out of the grave clothes!

Jesus was in His resurrected body!

It's interesting to note that there are three Greek words used in these verses...

When John saw the grave clothes in **verse 5**, the word for "saw" means "**a glance.**"

And when Peter arrived and "*beheld*" or "**scrutinized**" the grave clothes carefully. But this doesn't indicate to us that Peter believed what he saw.

But then, finally, when John **entered** into the tomb he saw and believed. This word for "saw" means "**to see with understanding.**"

John finally understood that all that Jesus had said about dying and being raised must be true!!!!

I believe it's possible for folks today to simply **glance** at the Word of God...to simply **glance** at Jesus.

And I believe it's also possible for folks today to **scrutinize** the Word of God, really know the Word of God, but not quite believe what they're seeing to the point that it makes a difference in their lives.

But, God wants us to **see and understand** the Word, and what the Word teaches us about the Lord Jesus Christ! Only then will we not only see, but also believe and live it out!

We need to remember that all the times that Jesus had talked about His death and resurrection had not been fully and completely understood by any of His followers!

It's easy for us to criticize these men who had walked with Jesus for over three years...but we would have reacted the very same way!

- We have the benefit of the entire Word of God...the only Scriptures these men had was the Old Testament.
- We also have the Holy Spirit who lives within us and teaches and enlightens us.

We need to understand that when Jesus spoke to these men of His death they didn't really **want** to believe He would die.

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Verse 10... “so the disciples went away to their own homes...”

These men must have been in shock...they didn't know what to do ...so they just went home.

They knew that Jesus wasn't in the tomb...but, they didn't know as yet where He was and they didn't realize as yet the full impact of His resurrection, did they?

Verses 11-14...

Mary Magdalene was left alone. She got up enough courage to look inside the tomb and she saw two angels...one at the head of the tomb and one at the foot.

In the **Old Testament**, Moses was told by God to build a mercy seat of pure gold, with two cherubim...one each end. God told Moses, “And I will meet with you there.”

What fulfillment this was of that mercy seat. After Jesus died, the veil of the Temple was torn in two...from top to bottom...and God's people were truly granted access into His presence to meet with Him there!

Mary Magdalene was still confused and still didn't understand what had happened to the body of the Lord Jesus...but she was about to find out!

Verses 15-18...

What a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus coming to one who was so faithful to bring spices to anoint His body, and then to find out where He was...

This woman loved Jesus so much that

- she had come to the tomb while it was still dark
- she had come, carrying spices to anoint His body
- she had come, not knowing how she would get in...

and even though she thought someone had taken Him away, love kept her there at the tomb because she didn't know where else to go...

Mary Magdalene had never forgotten what Jesus had done for her and neither should we! Let's think a moment before going on with this scene of what **could** and **should** have been taking place.

Think about it...**this was the single most important event in history...**

God had become man...

God had died for man's sin...

God had been resurrected!

The **world** should have been there to witness the empty tomb.

Caesar should have come from Rome!

Caiphias and the entire Sanhedrin should have been present.

Every Jew from everywhere should have crowded into that cemetery to see what Mary saw that morning. Their Messiah had come. He had died for their sin. He had been raised and they weren't even there to see Him!

The roads to Jerusalem should have been packed with pilgrims...Jew and Gentile alike, coming from all parts of the world.

Instead, the world stayed away and who came?

Two angels from glory.

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Some grieving women.
Two grieving disciples.

But, this was all part of the sovereign and perfect plan of the Father! Jesus didn't have to have the approval and applause of the world in order to triumph over death, sin and hell.

Jesus only needed the approval of His Father. That's all that was ever important!

All God wants from us is for us to seek **His** will and **His** approval and **His** applause!

But, let's see what Jesus said to Mary...

Verse 15...

Jesus repeated the same question the angels had asked her. **She thought He was the gardener, until He said her name.**

Can you imagine how sweet her name must have sounded to her when Jesus spoke it? And how happy and excited she must have been?

"Rabboni"... "Master"

She recognized Him instantly because not only does the Shepherd know the sheep by name, but the sheep recognizes the voice of the Shepherd!

Mary must have thrown her arms around Jesus and held Him tightly. Jesus very gently said to her **"Stop clinging to Me."**

I don't believe for a minute that this was a harsh rebuke!

Now, there are several ways theologians have interpreted this Scripture. One is that the Lord Jesus meant that He had not yet ascended to the Father and that He was going to ascend soon for the purpose of applying His blood on the mercy seat which is in heaven.

The theologians who hold this view say that it was necessary for Jesus to go to heaven and sprinkle His blood on the heavenly mercy seat just as the high priests sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the earthly one.

We know that this is what the high priest did once a year on Yom Kippur...the Day of Atonement. We're told in Scripture that the tabernacle and temple on earth were mere copies of what was already in heaven.

We don't have time to go there, but you might want to read **Hebrews 8 and 9** this afternoon...

Another view is that Jesus was telling her that her earthly relationship with Him was about to end...that His ascension would bring a new situation.

His followers would no longer be able to **see** and **hear** and **touch** Him as before. A new and more permanent spiritual relationship was about to be instituted. They must accept His **resurrection...**and they must accept His **ascension!**

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At any rate, I don't believe Jesus was being harsh with Mary. Mary would not be able to hold onto Jesus. She and the others would soon have to learn to live **for** Him, but they would not have Him **with** them!

Also in **verse 17** Jesus tells Mary to go to "My brethren..." Isn't it wonderful to know that just as Jesus called His disciples brethren, we are as well. We are joint-heirs with Jesus. His Father is our Father. His God is our God!

Verses 19-23...

By the way, when did Jesus see Mary? Early in the morning.

When did Jesus come to the disciples? In the evening.

Could it be that it was during the time between when He saw Mary **in the morning** and the time He came to the disciples **in the evening** that He went to heaven and delivered His blood? Just a thought...

Don't you wonder how the conversation of these men must have gone?

Peter and John must have been explaining what they had seen.

Thomas wasn't even there.

The others didn't know what to think!

What a sense of wonder they must have felt when the resurrected Lord stood in their midst! He had just passed through the doors or the walls and He stood there!

Here were men who loved Him, but had never fully believed His teaching about His death and resurrection until now. Here were men who had forsaken Him and fled because of fear for their own lives and had gathered in some out of the way place...

And shut the doors because of this fear!

They were afraid the same thing that happened to Jesus would happen to them!

But, Jesus came to them!

Jesus came and reassured them!

Jesus came and commissioned them!

Jesus came and enabled them...by and through the Holy Spirit!

Verse 21...

Two different Greek words are used in this verse.

1) when a king sends His messenger

2) when a king accompanies the messenger

Jesus is saying, "**I send you and I'm going with you.**"

Verse 22...

"breathe" – the word is the same word found in **Genesis 2:7** where God breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life...

Verse 23...

This verse has given people problems...and is actually the basis for the tradition in Roman Catholicism of the priests hearing confession and doling out penances and forgiving his people.

But, this is not what this means...there is not a single instance of the disciples forgiving or pardoning anyone.

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On the contrary...

They taught that forgiveness of sins came only one way!

Peter told Cornelius in **Acts 10:13...**

“Of Jesus all the prophets bear witness that through His name every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.”

Paul says in **Acts 13:38...**

“...through Jesus forgiveness is proclaimed to you.”

Forgiveness is through the name and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ!

But, our responsibility, our duty, our privilege is to proclaim this for-giveness...to proclaim **the Source** of this forgiveness!

God has chosen to use us as His instruments and we have the obligation to proclaim to others the forgiveness they can find in no one else but Jesus Christ!

We could talk about this at length, but let me just read to you a statement by John Calvin:

“When Christ enjoins (instructs) the apostles to forgive sins, He does not convey to them what is peculiar to Himself. It Belongs to Him to forgive sins. He only enjoins (instructs) them in His name proclaim the forgiveness of sins.”

The story is told of a dying woman who had been reared Catholic, but who, by searching the Scriptures for herself had found Christ as her personal Savior.

When she was on her deathbed, some well-meaning relatives sent for the parish priest. He came to her and offered to hear her confession and to give her absolution...forgiveness of her sins.

She asked him to show her his hands. When she looked at his hands, she said, “**You are an imposter, sir. The One who forgives my sins has the prints of the nails in His hands.**”

Verses 24-29...

Here we see the familiar story of Thomas.

Some commentators are really hard on Thomas. But, you know...I've come to believe that there's nothing wrong with a person who has honest questions and wants a little more proof.

I believe Thomas loved Jesus with all his heart. I don't believe his was a half-hearted devotion. He had walked with the Lord Jesus for three years...and He was not that different from the other disciples.

Thomas by nature was a skeptic. **But, when he believed, he believed with all his heart and when he was disappointed, he put up a shield of defense.** Have you ever done that?

Have you ever been disappointed by something or someone and to protect yourself you say, “**I'll not trust in that again...I'll keep myself from being hurt again.**”

Do you want to know what is so encouraging about this story?

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**Jesus didn't strongly rebuke Thomas.
Jesus understands us.**

He knows our frame...He knows we are but dust. He doesn't deal with us according to our sins.

Jesus knows some folks believe easily and others must have more to go on. Jesus knew the Thomas needed to see the imprint of the nails. But, that doesn't mean that Jesus tossed Thomas aside.

In fact, He went out of His way to provide Thomas with this proof he asked for, didn't He?

And the bottom line is that Thomas proclaimed Jesus as **"my Lord and my God!"**

Thomas wasn't perfect. Peter wasn't perfect. None of the disciples were perfect. Their lives would not be without **difficulty, without challenges, without trials, without accusations, and misunderstandings, without failures and without setbacks!**

Yet, God used them to turn the world upside down for the cause of Christ!

Is He using you?

Are you allowing Him to work through your failures...your weaknesses, to help you be all He wants you to be?

By the way...Did you know that when early missionaries arrived in India to spread the gospel of the Lord Jesus that they found a community of Christians already there? And did you know who began that Christian community? Thomas!

Thomas somehow traveled to India and folks were saved under his teaching and preaching and some believe Thomas was martyred in India.

Verses 30-31...

Verse 31 is the key verse of the Gospel of John. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only way we can have life. Because of what we have seen today in Scripture we, too, will be resurrected!

Many times folks are told to read the *Gospel of John* when they are searching for a belief. Many times folks are told to read it when they are new Christians.

I believe if a person really reads the *Gospel of John* with an open mind and a hungry heart, he will know how to be saved!

John wrote this so that we might believe and that believing we might have life in His name!!

We cannot put too much emphasis on the resurrection...

Paul told the Corinthian church that if Christ is not raised from the dead...

- our preaching is worthless...
- our faith is vain...
- we are false witnesses of God...

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- we aren't saved...
- there's no hope for believers who have already died...
- we are of all people most to be pitied...

But, praise God the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and we will be too!

The Cross takes the weak and makes them strong...

The Cross takes our sin and gives us Christ's righteousness...

The Cross takes our bondage and gives us freedom...

The Cross overcomes darkness with Light...

The Cross turns our loss into gain...

The Cross turns our hell into heaven!

My prayer is that there is not a one of you who hasn't realized that you were a sinner and you needed a Savior and you couldn't save yourself and you called on the Lord Jesus Christ to save you by His precious blood! If you've never done that, there's no better day than today!!!