

Behold The Open Tomb!
John 20:1-10

Well, we have gone through the last two chapters and it has taken us almost a year, and we have seen the arrest, trial, and the brutal death upon the cross. And we have seen that the death of Christ is so well attested that none can say that he survived all that was done. It was witnessed by his enemies who wanted his dead, his followers who were at a distance, the soldiers who were responsible for his death, and two of his secret but now public followers — Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who wrapped him in the grave cloths and laid him in the tomb. And there is no way that we can dwell long enough on the death of our Lord and the significance of his death. We see throughout the narrative that Jesus chose this path. He chose to drink the cup of the Father's wrath for you and me. He expunged the penalty of sin and then cried in victory, "It is finished!" And none of us can understand or fully grasp the horrors of the cross, and the immensity of the suffering Servant of the Lord. Isaiah 53:5 says, "**But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.**" We all do well to dwell on the love that drew Christ to the cross.

We can never dwell on the death of our Lord enough. But we mustn't stay there only, but we cannot also dwell enough on the resurrection of Christ. Like the death of Jesus the resurrection of Jesus is so well attested that you have to stick your head in the sand to deny that he is risen. He is alive and alive forevermore. It is one of the most attested events in all human history. And it is something that no one saw coming and none of his closest followers and intimate companions expected. But it certainly was alluded to or pointed to the Old Testament. The earliest prophecy of the coming of Christ is in Genesis 3:15, "**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.**" The bruising of his heel is Jesus suffering and dying on the cross. But in order for him to crush the head of the serpent he has to rise from the death. We also have Abraham's son Isaac ready to be offered up, and the ram caught in the thicket and the son is given life. We have Jonah three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. We have the prophecy in Isaiah 53:10, "**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.**"

And we realize as believers the necessity and importance of the resurrection of Jesus. It is not just the end of a bitter story with a happy ending but indispensable to our faith and our hope. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:14, "**And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.**" And I do find it amazing that right from the earliest preaching on the Day of Pentecost that part and parcel of the preaching of the gospel was not only the death of Christ but that God raised him from the dead because it was impossible for death to hold him. The resurrection of Jesus screams out that the penalty has been paid in full. Death could not hold him. We go from what looked like hopelessness and despair, to jubilation and celebration of this chapter here. And just like the death of Jesus there is so much detail

and information that is given to us by John that well attests that our Saviour and Lord is alive forevermore.

And we do well to take our time and really drink in the hope we have in Christ. We realize that these passage speak of not only Christ's defeat of sin and the grave, but also our great hope because we are forevermore in Christ. And I wonder with all the trials and complexities and difficulties of life how often we dwell on the events and the surety of the resurrection of Jesus? These truths not only look to our future resurrection but also give us so much hope in the here and now. We will only get started in verses 1-10, but I really want to see the dawning of a new hope, a new dimension of trust and faith in those who are followers of Jesus Christ. I want us to see a couple of things.

1. First, in hope we need to perceive the truths of Scripture. V.1.

It is incredible that there is such a wealth that happens to be in the Scriptures, but so often we are just not taking advantage about what we already know or have access to it. So often we are not taking what we have heard and really living in light of it. We know the Scriptures are sufficient for all of life. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**" It through the word of God and the promises of the Word that we are complete and equipped for every good work, whether in our marriages or in raising children, or the difficulties of a body breaking down, or any trial or temptation that we go through. Do you believe in the sufficiency of Scripture and what it teaches us about God and his presence with us is all that we need?

Because think of your struggles right now. Think of your battles and we all have them. And what have you been saying to yourself that you need? Do you need your spouse to change or a new one? How about the battles with your children or whatever? Here is where the rubber meets the road, how often are we really thinking about and remembering what God has said and spoken or promised? We've heard it but do we remember God and his word? So often we hear God's Word and say we believe it, and we do, but in the normal course of life it is as if we never heard the life altering and stunning truth of what God has said.

And think of it in light of what we have here in this verse. We see verse 1 begins by emphasizing the time frame, "**Now on the first day of the week.**" And we realize the importance of this is that Jesus had to be in the grave part of three days. He prophesied that after three days he would rise. It is quite a prophecy and quite a bold statement, but it is made by our Lord. But it is an odd way of saying it, and all the gospels have this construction because you would expect that they would record after three days, but it is always the first day of the week. And the emphasis here is that this is a new day. This is a new era. This is something new beginning. And it is incredible because believers began, not gathering on the Sabbath, but gathering on the first day of the week. God has started something new. Even Pentecost and the beginning of the church started on the first day of the week. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is something new, just like we have been given new life in Christ, and are joined to Christ and every other believer. It is such a glorious truth.

Now look how the verse continues, **“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.”** Now there are various different accounts of what took place. And the other accounts say that a group of women came, and Mary Magdalene happens to be one of these women. She is mentioned in all the gospels in relation to her coming because of her love and devotion to Christ. She is only mentioned in relation to his resurrection, other than in Luke 8:2, **“and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.”** Christ had come into her life and wonderfully given her freedom from this suffering of these evil spirits.

Now why does John just emphasize Mary Magdalene and not the other women with her? And John seems to really concentrate not on groups of people but emphasizes through his gospel the response on individuals and their struggle to believe and their devotion also to Christ. So you have Nicodemus coming to Christ at night, or you have the woman at the well, or you have the blind beggar who was healed in John 9, or you have the two sisters of Lazarus who are struggling to believe in Jesus that he truly is the resurrection after the death of their brother. And John concentrates on individuals. You see this in the next paragraph with Mary beginning in verse 11 of our text. But these woman came right at day break or just before the sun arose, and they brought further spices to anoint the body of Christ.

And let me say this that the often we make a big deal that the women were the first to witness the empty tomb, and in legal circles this would not hold up because women were not looked upon as reliable witnesses in court. But here is the thing, and it should encourage women of faith, that the reason why this is recorded is God honours these women. While everyone else is either hiding and sleeping, they seek to honour Christ with these spices. And here is the thing, you might be a home with your children or even be single all by yourself, and might not think that you add much the kingdom. But your God notices all that you do. He sees and delights in your faith. And these resurrection accounts should be such an encouragement to you.

Now the women arrive at the tomb, and the stone has been rolled away. Mary and the other women think the worst, and that is the body of the Lord has been taken. We will see in the next verse that Mary leaves to find Peter and John, while the other women stay and they are greeted by an angel that announces the resurrection.

But here is the point that is stunning — she leaves fearing the worst. Grave robbers have stolen the body of the Lord. But here is why it is so stunning — Jesus told them over and over that not only would he be killed but three days later he would rise. And think of it, this was none other than the one who walked on water, fed the five thousand in the wilderness and raised Lazarus from the dead. Listen to what he says in Mark 8:31, **“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”** Listen to Mark 9:31, **“for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.’** Listen to Mark 10:33-34, **“saying, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they**

will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” Do you get the idea that since Jesus repeated this over and over that it is something important that they needed to remember? Do you think that the resurrection should have been front and centre when she saw the stone rolled away?

And yet how often do we hear the Word of God but don't hear the word of God? We hear about trials in our life and how God has put them in their for our good, sanctification, and they are his grace. But how often do we see nothing good in the trials that we go through? We read that the Lord is our constant helper, but how often do we forget and think we are all alone in this world? We look at our suffering and trials and think they will never end and we forget the promise of the resurrection. So often we are so slow to hear. So often we just do not stop and realize that the glory that God truly has spoken through his finished word in all the events of our lives. We just have to slow down and think — what has God said, what has he promised in this situation. Mary is a faithful follower of Christ. She is there early in the morning, but she is also like us, we are so forgetful. We can hear a sermon and think about how applicable it is then walk out, and do and think the opposite. We need to constantly think and truly apply this glorious word to all of life. God truly has given his Word to change us. The real question is will remember his word and let it change us?

2. In hope we need the glorious ministry of others. V. 2.

One of the things that we so discount today is the need of others in our lives. In a digital age where many are addicted to their phones, and constantly need to be looking. They cannot even get through a stop light without looking. And there is the perception that you are connected to others. But they are not connect to people but just their device. It is incredible how difficult it is for many to learn how to express themselves and their struggle, or to even offer help to others. Many have never learned how to interact with others, and the glory of those relationships that help us mature. You can see it many times in thirty year men olds who love playing video games or interacting online. They have never grown up. You can see it thirty year old women who act like they are teenagers the way they engage with others. We need the ministry of others. Do you realize why God has given us the body and the importance of others?

Now think of what is going on in verse 2, lets read it again, **“So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’**” So the other women remain, but they would be gone by the time Peter and John and even Mary arrive on the scene. But I find it extraordinary that no one expects the resurrection. They had concluded grave robbers had come. And it is not so much the body that they would want but the grave cloths filled with the expensive spices. And grave robbery was a very common thing in the ancient world, and it came with a severe penalty. And Mary hadn't even looked in but after seeing the stone rolled away she presumed the worst. The body is gone! And the distress is that she loves the Lord and really wants to do him service in death.

But here is the question that I want to grapple with, why does she come to Peter and John. We realize John is the “other disciple.” But why these two and not the

others? Certainly she would have realized that these two have a special connection and love for Christ. They would have been in that inner circle of three. It was they who were told to go a little further in the Garden to pray with the Lord. It was they who were present at the transfiguration of Christ. And it would have been observed that they truly had a special connection to Jesus Christ. Not only that, where all the others had scattered, they scattered also, but they did make their approach to Jesus in the court of the High Priest. And John himself was present at the cross, even though he was at a distance from Jesus. These seem to be the natural two to go to, and somehow she knew these men couldn't sleep. The Lord would be on their mind and heart.

But here is the thing I find interesting, we realize that both Peter and John both had brothers. Peter and Andrew, and James and John. And they are often seen together with their brothers through the gospel. But here at the end of the gospel we see it is Peter and John. Even in the early chapters of Acts — in Acts three they are going to the Temple to pray when you have the healing of the beggar, you have them together. So why the switch from brothers to one another?

And here is where you see the heart of John. He is often known as the apostle of love and Christ had truly changed his heart. He would have heard the prophecy of Jesus that the very night in which Jesus was betrayed that he would deny him three times. He would have witnessed in the courtyard the moral failure of Peter, the rooster crowing and the fleeing of Peter. He witnessed the bitter weeping of Peter. You can imagine from Friday evening to early Sunday morning John tenderly and faithfully sought to bind the wounds of his friend and brother in the faith Peter. A.W. Pink quotes the Anglican minister J.C. Ryle, **"The love and tender nature of John's character come out most blessedly in his affection for Peter, even after his denial of Christ... John clings to him, and has him under his own roof, wherever that was. When Judas fell, he had no friend to raise and cheer him. When Peter fell, there was 'a brother born for adversity' who did not despise him!"**

And there are times where we fail so miserably in our lives where we might think that all of life is over. God is done with me and certainly others do not want anything to do with you either. Have you been there? Have you been at the end of the rope, or been in the storms of life where it is wave after wave hurling over you and you are sure you are going to drown. And what does God use to rescue us? He often uses a faithful friend who comes alongside and ministers the grace of Christ. We look back on our lives and there have been people, believers that have been there at the right time to lift us out of that drowning storm. And it was really God who was doing the lifting through them. Maybe you are there right now. Here is the glory of the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ. You really are not alone. There are those who truly understand the battle and struggles with sin and trials and temptation of this life. We think others will not understand but oh they know the struggles of their own heart. There is help. God has put other brothers and sisters in your life to truly help you see Christ.

I can see John sharing some of the truths and promises Jesus made during his earthly life, and even some of the statements that Jesus made on the cross. They certainly didn't have the full knowledge of Jesus until after the resurrection but there is still so much that could bring comfort to the heart of Peter. God is so good at giving us believers who truly care and truly love us, and can truly understand us, and give the

balm of none other than the great gospel of Christ. Here is my plea with whatever you are suffering with — don't suffer alone. There really is help. Reach out. There are more people that care about you than you think. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are a loving resource that our great God has given us — run to your resources.

And lastly, the reasons why John and Peter are together is because they have shared life together. The last three years, and now the affliction of the one that they loved being put to death had bound their hearts together. I find it a real shame that we cannot help struggling believers or we cannot be helped by others is because we have just not gotten to know people. We spend lives so disconnected and isolated. We might come out to church but we really do not engage with others. Seek to build redemptive relationships. God will use them in your life and God will cause you to be an instrument of his grace in others. God is so good. And all this leads to not just the tomb being open but the greatest comfort — the tomb is empty — He is risen!