



## John 20:4-8

### What John "Saw" in the Empty Tomb

The apostle John's belief in the resurrection was not a "blind leap of faith" when he saw the empty tomb. Jesus had been teaching the disciples that he must be rejected by the religious leaders, be crucified and buried for three days, and then rise from the dead. John was led into a fuller light of understanding and deeper experience with his Master as he listened and obeyed the teaching of Jesus. However, in spite of the teachings, the resurrection of Jesus caught him and all of the disciples by surprise. Psychologically they were not prepared for it.

John's spiritual growth is an example and encouragement to us. With each new experience we see John growing in faith and conviction about who Christ is. Every response to light brought enlarged capacity for further revelation. Whenever John received a new vision of the Lord in his glory, he was called upon to trust his Master and grow spiritually and personally.

John's comprehension of spiritual things grew along with his faith in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. The miracles in Cana of Galilee, the raising of Jarius' daughter and Lazarus from the dead, the Transfiguration of Jesus and the mysteries surrounding His death were part of the spiritual influences that led up to the events in the empty tomb and Thomas' climatic declaration, "My Lord and my God!"

What did John "see" in the empty tomb that caused him to believe that Jesus was alive?

One of the witnesses who saw Jesus alive for 40 days after his death by crucifixion tells us that he and Peter ran to the tomb after Mary Magdalene reported very early in the morning that the two thousand pound stone door to the tomb of Jesus had been rolled back leaving the tomb open. "So she went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, 'They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!' (John 20:2 NET). Peter and John headed to the tomb.

John, one of the two eyewitnesses, tells us what happened. He describes himself as "the other disciple whom Jesus loved." I am convinced that "the other disciple" and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is the one and same person we know as the apostle John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

John wrote: "The two were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down and saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who had been following him, arrived and went right into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, and the face cloth, which had been around Jesus' head, not lying with the strips of linen cloth but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, came in, and he saw and believed" (John 20:4-8 NET).

The body of Jesus was gone, but the grave cloths remained in the tomb in the exact location as they had been wrapped around the dead body of Jesus when he was buried on Friday afternoon.

## The Burial of Jesus

The events leading up to the words we have just read in John chapter twenty occurred three days earlier at the crucifixion. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea got permission from Pilate, after he had certified that Jesus was dead, to take the body down from the cross and give it a proper Jewish burial (John 19:31-42). They followed the traditional Jewish custom of wrapping the body in strips of linen cloths filled with spices. They wound the linen bandages around his body, sprinkling the powdered spices and gooey-gummed fragrances into the folds as they continued to wrap his body. They used a separate cloth for his head and rolled it up around His head filling the wrappings with the same spices. The word for face cloth is used for a large *handkerchief*, a cloth used to wipe off perspiration, probably the size of a small towel or large face cloth. The head of Jesus was covered by a cloth that had been twirled about his head in a crisscross like turban. Then they laid the body on the stone slab that had been hewn out of the side of the cave-tomb. Lazarus was buried in a similar manner (John 11:44).

What is the evidence John saw in the empty tomb that caused him to "believe" that Jesus was alive?

John especially calls our attention to the head "face cloth," or turban that had been rolled up around the head of Christ. Why is it singled out for our attention? It is the convincing proof that launches John's faith in Christ's resurrection, even before he has had a chance to see that Jesus was alive with his own eyes.

I think the face cloth or turban was rolled up around the head of Jesus like the bandages wrapped around a person who has sustained a severe crushing head injury. His whole head was rolled up with linen as well as the rest of his body. The reference to "a place by itself" simply means separate from the rest of the linen cloths which were used for the body wrapping. The head was rolled up with its own separate wrappings. What Peter and John saw as they continued to gaze were the linen cloths in the actual shape of the body of Jesus. The wrappings around the head of Jesus naturally were where the head had lain. The other cloths were still remaining in the exact place and shape of the body of Jesus.

It is obvious that Jesus unmistakably had been raised from the dead by the power of God during the night, and had left the linen cloths exactly as Joseph and Nicodemus had placed the body in the new tomb.

## The Convincing Evidence for John

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John saw the position and condition of the burial wrappings in the form of the body in the grave where Jesus had been laid. The grave wrappings were in the actual shape in which they had been about his body. The head cloth was not unwrapped and folded up nicely and laid aside. It was exactly in the place where it had been about his head. Every fold of his grave clothes was unmoved, as it had been around his body. John saw the grave clothes wrapped as they had been about the body, still there in place, but *the body was gone*. The grave cloths had collapsed once the body was gone because of the weight of the spices. Otherwise the cloths were undisturbed. The only thing that had changed was there was no body in them. That was all the evidence John saw of the resurrection as he gazed into the tomb, but it led him to be the first disciple to believe that our Lord had been raised from the dead. The tomb was empty. There was no dead body there. His quick mind processed that Jesus was alive.

John saw the burial wrappings and his sharp intuitive mind drew an inference that no one had stolen the body of Jesus. It was impossible because the wrappings were still intact just as they were before the body left it. A grave robber would have had to unwind all those strips of sticky spice filled bandages. It was obvious no one had done that. The undisturbed grave clothes demonstrated that Jesus had risen through and out of them. The face cloth was just as it had been around the head of Jesus. It was also clear to John that enemies had not stolen the body of Jesus. Even the space between the head wrappings and the body wrappings was unaffected. The body just disappeared out of the wrappings.

John "saw" the mummy like windings *without* a body. The wrappings were in the shape of a head, but *there was no head inside them*. The wrappings from the shoulders down to the feet were intact, but there was no body inside.

## Jesus is Risen from the Dead

Peter and John had never seen anything like that before. It was fully beyond human comprehension. God moved in enormous power and raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39-40; 13:28-34, 37; 17:30-31, ect). There were no trumpets, no fanfares, and no angels singing. It was unwitnessed, unheralded, except by God the Father and the angels. Jesus was instantaneously alive in a radiant new dimension of supernatural life. Jesus did not need a man to unwrap those thick, heavy sticky spice filled bandages from His body. No one removed the bindings from around his face, or loosened it and let him go as with Lazarus (John 11:43-33). Jesus was not resuscitated, as was the case of Lazarus. Jesus rose from the dead. God did it! Life returned to Jesus. It is true no human being was in the tomb to see it. But it is still true. Later in the day eyewitnesses saw him alive and continued to do for another 40 days (1 Cor. 15:3-8). He passed through the grave cloth wrappings and through the stone cave. He was alive!

No one even had to roll the round stone door back to let Him out. Angels later rolled the door back to let men and women look in and see that the grave was empty.

"He bent down and saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in" (John 20:5 NET). The linen wrappings for the face were just as they had been around the head of Jesus in the proper place right where the head would have been. Jesus passed right through them.

John looked in, saw it, and all of a sudden it all clicked. Everything Jesus had taught John about his death and resurrection came together in a flash of a moment. If you are an intuitive thinker like John, you understand how that happened.

Later that night John would see with his very own eyes the resurrected body of Jesus (vv. 19-21). In the weeks ahead the disciples never knew when they might see him next (vv. 26-28). Imagine his appearing in their midst, no door opened, no bolt shot, and no preparation made, but he was there with them. They were

their midst, no door opened, no bolt shot, and no preparation made, but he was there with them. They were made aware of his presence and nearness. With equal suddenness, he disappeared. Jesus was still training John to "see" his constant presence. At any moment Jesus might appear. Lord Jesus, will I see you today?

Jesus took his body out of the tomb, leaving the grave clothes absolutely undisturbed, and the two thousand-pound stone door to the tomb in its proper place. His resurrection body was no longer subject to the laws of this material physical nature. Jesus conquered death even on the physical plane with his own resurrection.

Jesus did not recover from a swoon. He died, and rose again. His was a corporal, bodily resurrection. I believe Jesus passed miraculously through death into an altogether new sphere of life.

John saw that the body of Jesus had disappeared. It changed into something new different and wonderful. This resurrection body would have passed through grave clothes, as it was later to pass through closed doors, leaving them untouched. I think what John saw was that once the body was removed these body wrappings under the weight of a hundred pounds of spices would have caved in from the pressure of the weight. John would have seen the gap between the body clothes and the head cloth, where His face and neck had been. And the head cloth itself would probably retain its shape because of the way it had been wrapped in all directions around the head. It too had been filled with the spices.

From the testimony of the witnesses in the gospels and Paul in Acts and First Corinthians the resurrection body has its whole molecular structure (1 Cor. 15:35-50; 1 John 3:2). It is the literal physical body that Jesus had, but it had changed. It could be recognized as the body of Jesus, but it was somehow different. The body of the resurrected Jesus passed through space and matter without friction and without disability or difficulty. For forty days after His resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus made himself visible in his resurrection body and just as quickly made himself invisible (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:10-14, 19, 26-28). We would never have known the grave was empty except that the angel rolled back the stone door and announced an empty tomb.

We can only conclude the wrappings were intact, still in mummy like outward appearance, but *there was no body inside*. There was the head wrapping as it was still around the head, but no head inside. The face cloth was still wrapped together, twirled, round the shape of his head. The grave clothes had not been touched, or folded, or manipulated in anyway by anyone. There was simply nothing in it. It was empty. *There was no body in the tomb*.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but he has risen! Were the angel's words to the women.

### **Some Abiding Principles and Practical Applications**

1. When you read the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive and examine the historical evidence you can only conclude Jesus is alive. He has risen from the dead.
2. Because Jesus has risen from the dead you can now with confidence believe in the great promises he has given to every believer that he is coming back for us (John 14:1-3).
3. Because Jesus has risen from the dead, we too, shall rise from the dead and be like him (1 John 3:1-3; John 14:19).
4. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, he is God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves his deity. It is God's seal on Jesus' claim to divinity (Rom. 1:4).

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5. Since Jesus rose from the dead we can put our trust in him and believe we are justified from all sin, sanctified to live the Christian life, and will be glorified when Christ returns (Rom. 4:24-28; Eph. 1:19-20; 1 Thess. 4:14). The resurrection of Jesus is God's certification that he has accepted the atoning death of Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:19b NET). The evidence is clear Jesus is alive and the gospel was recorded so that you may believe that Jesus Christ is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (v. 31).

To believe on Jesus Christ as your savior is to believe in his death for your sins and his resurrection. You cannot be saved without believing in the resurrection of Jesus. "Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation" (Romans 10:9-10 NET).

Have you confessed, "Jesus is Lord"? The Lord here is to be taken as Yahweh, the LORD God of the Old Testament. The resurrection of Jesus proves that he is whom he claimed to be. He is the Lord, the Son of God, the Anointed of God and our savior.

Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame (v. 11). For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (v. 13).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that Jesus will return to judge all men. He has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31 NET).

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