

Psalm 118: 14-24

John 20 1-18

### **A promise fulfilled!**

There's something about death that seems permanent and tragic.

Sigmund Freud wrote: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably will ever be!"

Jesus had said He would arise from the grave on the 3rd day, but they didn't really believe it. Death was somehow permanent. But, having heard the words of the Mary Magdalene and the other women, John and Peter ran to the grave to check it out for themselves.

John was a little faster, he arrived at the tomb just before Peter did, and when he looked inside, he saw that it was empty. Empty, except for the strips of linen laying there, and the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head.

John tells us that something about the scene convinced him that the women had been right. Jesus HAD risen from the grave.

I suppose it could have been simply the fact that the tomb was empty. It had been guarded by Roman soldiers and sealed with the Roman seal. The soldiers should have still been there, and the stone should have been sealing the opening. And above all else, the tomb should not have been empty. But it was.

Maybe that was what had convinced John.

But I suspect something else caught John's attention.

When Lazarus had risen from dead, he came out of tomb and what was he wearing? Why, he was still wrapped in his grave clothes. But on the floor of THIS tomb the linen clothes are on the ground and the cloth that had covered Jesus' face, was folded up neatly in the corner.

Some have suggested that the face cloth appeared as if Jesus had simply slipped out and the cloth had collapsed. I don't know, but one thing is for certain: When Jesus left the tomb, His grave clothes didn't go with Him. And that's all it took for John to believe.

**Main Talk**

John tells us (regarding both he and Peter) "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." John 20:9

John may have known those prophecies from the Old Testament and remembered that Jesus had repeatedly said this would happen. But he may well have not put two and two together at this point.

Matthew 16 tells us that at the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James and JOHN were there as Jesus told them "he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Then in Matthew 17, it says that when they returned to Galilee, Jesus repeated: "They (would) kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life."

And when the disciples returned to Jerusalem for the last time Jesus again told them "They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

It seems that everybody knew Jesus had declared he would rise from the grave on the 3rd day. So, John didn't need Old Testament prophecies to convince him that Jesus was alive. He'd heard the words from Jesus' own lips... and now the grave was empty.

Now, Peter shows up at the tomb just a few moments after John did, but he's the first one to look inside. Oddly, the text doesn't tell us much about whether Peter believed or not.

It simply says he went home.

So we know John believed... and Peter may have wanted to

But the really odd story here in John 20 is the one about Mary Magdalene.

According to the other 3 gospels, there had actually been several women who had gone to the tomb that morning. There was Mary the mother of James, Joanna, Salome and maybe a few others. But John doesn't mention the other women. He only tells us the story of Mary Magdalene. Why focus only on her?

Well, I suspect John focused on Mary Magdalene because - while she saw the empty tomb and heard the angel say Jesus had risen; she saw all of this... and heard the words of the

angel - but she REFUSED to believe.

When she went to see the disciples, she didn't give the message of the angel: "He is risen!"

What she did say was: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" John 20:2

It's little wonder the disciples did not believe the other women...." Luke 24:9-11

Mary Magdalene's testimony was different than theirs. She didn't agree with them!

But why didn't she agree with them?

She'd seen what they'd seen and heard what they heard. How could she possibly have experienced all that they had, but still refused to believe? Well, perhaps the whole thing seemed fantastic to her.

In her mind she perhaps said to herself, "when a person died - they were dead.

It was kind of permanent that way.

People didn't rise from the dead - so Jesus couldn't have risen from the grave. " you can't fault her logic. But she forgot that this was the Lord.

So, Mary returns to the tomb. And when she went there, she went looking for a dead Jesus, not for a living one.

And it's there that Jesus appears to her.

Oddly enough, the first-person Jesus appeared to was Mary Magdalene.

In fact Mark 16:9 tells us that very thing; "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene..."

But why appear to her first?

There were all kinds of people Jesus could have appeared to. He could have appeared to his mother Mary, the woman who'd given birth to Him.

Or He could have appeared to the OTHER women who'd gotten the message right!

Or He could simply have gone first to His Apostles.

BUT He doesn't do that. - He appears to Mary Magdalene.

The woman who couldn't even believe an angel.

Why? - Well, I suspect it was because she needed Him!

John 20:11 "Mary stood outside the tomb crying...." Then a man she thinks is a gardener asks her: "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

John 20:15:- Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

You see, Mary Magdalene didn't oppose the idea of Jesus rising from the dead she just didn't think it would ever happen! She stood there and in her mind was the thought: "When people die, they don't come back!"

And so, the grave was an empty hole in the ground.

It was a place of hopelessness and futility.

Death was the end of all existence.

And the people she loved – who'd died – weren't coming back.

Jesus could have appeared to anyone He wanted to. But all those others believed He'd risen from the grave.

He chose Mary Magdalene because she didn't.

And He chose her because she needed His message right then.

She needed to be refilled with the hope of Christ's victory over the grave.

I Thessalonians 4:13-14 tells us

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."

That's the promise Mary needed to hear that day at the tomb.

That's the promise that our hope is built on.

Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed!**

Amen.