

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John

(SB_JN20_Jesus' Crucifixion and Death(s))

At the time that John wrote his Gospel account (circa A.D. 90's), two deceptive (thus Satanic) philosophies had arisen that attempted to discredit the reality of Jesus' Incarnation and His sacrificial death. *Doceticism* takes its name from the Greek word *dokeo* which means to seem or to appear. The central idea in Doceticism was that Jesus only seemed to be human since God could not become man because man is made of matter and all matter is evil according to the Docetics. Doceticism was the exact opposite of another 1st Century heresy known as *Ebionism* which denied the deity of Christ.¹ *Gnosticism*, a movement that obtains its name from the Greek word for knowledge (i.e. *gnosis*), was a movement that glorified individuals who seemed to possess a superior capacity for knowledge. Gnosticism was heavily influenced by pagan philosophy and is a term that encompasses several variations. But, generally speaking, Gnosticism denied the humanity of Jesus, even to the extent of denying the reality of His human body.² Within the Gnostic movement, there were two major branches that follow the same path as the trends of the sin nature of man. Some Gnostics drew the conclusion that since the body was evil, a strict asceticism should be practiced while those of a lascivious trend concluded that whatever is done with the body was spiritually irrelevant.³

These two heresies were becoming very influential towards the end of the 1st Century A.D. and we can see John's attempts to deal with them in his Gospel. For instance, he opens His Gospel account with the words "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). In John's account of Jesus' crucifixion and death, John describes a scene described by none of the other Gospel writers. John mentions the fact that Jesus' legs were not broken and that a spear used to pierce Jesus' side brought forth blood and water thereby confirming Jesus' death. If Jesus had not been truly human and if Jesus was only an apparition as maintained by the Gnostics and Docetics, He would not have had bones and there would have been no blood and water that would have flowed out of His body (see 19.31-36).

John points out that Jesus' treatment in death on the Cross was in fulfillment of prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus as the true Passover sacrificial lamb would not have a bone broken (Ex 12.46; Num 9.12; Psa 34.20). Also, the latter Hebrew prophets indicated that people in the future will look upon the One Whom they pierced (Zech 12.10 cf. Rev 1.7).

In one house it [the Passover sacrifice] shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, *nor shall you break one of its bones.* (Ex 12.46)

They shall leave none of it until morning, *nor break one of its bones.* According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it. (Num 9.12)

He guards all his bones, *not one of them is broken.* (Psa 34.20)

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then *they will look on Me whom they pierced.*

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983, 1984, 1985), 713.

² Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 614.

³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1197.

Yes *they will mourn for Him* as one mourns for his only son, and *grieve for Him* as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech 12.10)

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, *even they who pierced Him*. (Rev 1.7a)

In John 19.38-42, we see examples of two prominent Jewish leaders who were believers, even though they were fearful of the other Jewish religious leaders. Joseph from Arimathea (about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem) was a member of the Sanhedrin, he was rich (Matt 27.57), he was awaiting the kingdom (Mk 15.43) and he was a good and upright man who had not consented to the decision of the Sanhedrin Council (Lk 23.50-51).

Nicodemus had come to Jesus by night to ask Jesus questions as we saw in John 3. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin Council (Jn 3.1) and had even attempted to defend Jesus before them on one occasion (Jn 7.50-51). Both men had been disciples in secret, but now manifested their faith publicly through their actions.

Matthew records that the tomb used to bury Jesus was Joseph's tomb (Matt 27.60). Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be buried in a rich man's grave (Isa 53.9). This act of Joseph and Nicodemus was dangerous, costly and did not provide them personal gain in a worldly sense. Nevertheless, we can only imagine what would have become of Jesus' body had they not taken these actions. Their actions were extremely important since they helped establish the fact that Jesus' body was not stolen, thus validating the resurrection. The confirmation of the validity of the resurrection was and is extremely important to our faith (see Paul's dissertation on the subject in 1 Corinthians 15.12ff).

In John's Gospel, Mary of Magdala is very prominent in the resurrection account. As we have previously noted, Mary of Magdala was extremely devoted out of gratitude to Jesus for having delivered her from demon possession (Lk 8.2). Tradition (primarily Roman Catholic) has associated Mary Magdalene with the sinful (presumably a prostitute) woman of Luke 7.36-50 since Mary Magdalene's ministry to Jesus is recorded shortly thereafter in Luke 8.2. However, there is no evidence the two women are the same.

Each Gospel writer described the events of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection from their respective vantage points. According to Mark's account, several women including Mary Magdalene brought spices to anoint the body of Jesus, but they were in a quandary as to how they might move the stone before they arrived at the tomb (Mk 16.3). As they arrived at the tomb just after sunrise, they saw two man-like figures with clothing that gleamed like lightning, thus these figures were obviously angels (see Mk 16.5 cf. Lk 24.4). The women were terrified and bowed themselves with their faces to the ground before the angels in similar response to the guards who had watched the angels roll the stone away from the tomb (Matt 28.2-4). The angels reminded the women that Jesus had predicted His resurrection on the 3rd day (Lk 24.5-7) and that they should not be looking for Him among the dead since He had risen. One of the angels commanded them to go and announce to the disciples and Peter that Jesus had been resurrected and would meet them in Galilee (Mk 16.7-8).

It is interesting that in spite of the explanation she had heard from the angels (see Matt 28.1-10; Mk 16.1-8; Lu 24.1-12), Mary was not convinced of the fact of the resurrection. When she encountered Peter, she indicated that someone had taken Jesus out of the tomb and placed Him somewhere they did not know (Jn 20.2). Nevertheless, when Peter heard this, he and John immediately made their way to the tomb with John in the lead. John peered into the tomb as he arrived and he saw the strips of linen cloth lying there. The fact that the strips of linen and the burial cloth were still in the tomb were evidence that the body had not been stolen. Thieves would have left the burial cloths in disarray or have carried the cloths with the body. All the teaching of Jesus about His death and resurrection had not convinced these men, but when they saw the empty tomb, then they understood and believed (Jn 20.8).

Principle: Academic understanding of the Truth is not the same as an active faith.

Principle: When Truth is understood academically, then combined with the faith of a humble spirit, the believer is in a position to apply spiritually enlightened Truth to life situations.

Principle: The fact that a believer possesses pertinent spiritual Truth does not mean that he/she will apply that spiritually enlightened Truth to life situations. (All it takes is a little rationalization for that believer to fail to apply what he/she has previously appropriated in faith).

Principle: Faith is required to appropriate spiritual Truth prior to application of spiritual Truth.

Principle: Faith is required to apply pertinent spiritual Truth that has been previously appropriated by faith.

Application: Mary had heard the Truth from an angel and most likely understood the words of the angel since we have this account of the angel's message to her recorded in Scripture. However, the Truth Mary heard was not mixed with the faith of a humble soul at this particular moment. Why? Most likely the emotional excitement of the moment completely blinded her to any logical thought that could be illuminated by the Holy Spirit thereby resulting in Truth that could be applied to the situation. The Truth that Mary heard from the angel was never mixed with faith; therefore that Truth was never made available in her soul to be applied to life.

Principle: Even when Truth is communicated accurately, the recipient's emotional state can blind that person to appropriate the Truth in faith.

Application: Peter and John had heard Jesus' communication of the Truth regarding His future resurrection. Peter and John, as well as most Jews, believed in a future resurrection to judgment. The fact that Jesus distinguished His Own resurrection from that future resurrection with the words "in three days, I will raise it up" (Jn 2.19) had not registered with the disciples until they saw with their own eyes.

Principle: Sometimes when we hear the Truth communicated, it is not until we experience an opportunity to have applied it to a situation that we believe it in faith. Its relevance escapes us initially.

Application: This is why Christians of a young age need the guidance of more experienced believers. Wisdom is the spiritual perspective of the believer who understands the relevance of Truth (doctrine) in a variety of situations in life.

Application: This is why many young believers are so easily bored with the teaching of Truth (doctrine). They need help understanding its relevance to everyday life situations. That help should come from older, wiser and more experienced believers. (Unfortunately, human history has far more examples of the pall of the spiritual darkness of reversionism than it has examples of wise and experienced older believers providing guidance to a younger generation).

Application: Capacity for true spiritual joy in life is only built upon a foundation of spiritual wisdom – a lifetime of application of Truth (doctrine) to all life situations. Consistent application = spiritual momentum.

Evidently, Mary returned to the tomb after the disciples departed. She remained outside the tomb and had apparently not even looked into the tomb and made the same observation that Peter and John had made. Perhaps she just assumed that the body of Jesus had been taken since the stone was rolled back. Finally, she looks into the tomb (20.12) and sees the two angels sitting where Jesus would have lain. Mary is still convinced that someone has stolen the body of Jesus as she has a conversation with the two angels. This fact indicates that Mary was extremely

emotional and distraught for had she been thinking, she would have realized that if two angels were sitting where Jesus had been laid, they were probably very aware of where Jesus' body was located. However, her response did have some logic to it. The authorities believed that the body of a criminal would defile a tomb and prevent its further use. Mary may have supposed that they planned to dispose of the body in the same manner as they would have for any criminal, i.e. take it to the fires of the Valley of Gehenna (a garbage or refuse dump).

There is a very comforting principle that needs to be reiterated and that derives from this scene. Jesus in resurrected form knows us each by name and is concerned about our sorrows and grief. He didn't have to take the time to comfort Mary, but He did. He had just provided the strategic victory of the angel conflict's appeal trial. There were certainly more important things to do than to comfort a grieving, former demon possessed woman of no importance in this world. Yet, in God's system, it is such acts of love as was displayed by our Lord to the "nobodies" of this world that are in fact an important part of the resolution of the angelic conflict.

That very evening, Jesus appeared to the disciples per John's account (Jn 20.19-23). However, the other Gospel accounts also include some other appearances by Jesus. In Matthew 28.9-10, Jesus appears to some other women who were returning to the tomb. Again, Jesus tells them to tell the disciples and in doing so, Jesus referred to them as His "brothers."

The guards of the tomb reported back to the chief priests that they had been overcome by angels who rolled back the stone. They bribed the soldiers to say that the disciples had stolen the body while they slept (Matt 28.11-15). It is interesting that the disciples had not believed the Resurrection, but sought to confirm it, the chief priests immediately believed it and then sought to deny it. Jesus also appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus (Mk 16.12-13; Lk 24.13-32).

In His appearance that evening to the ten disciples (Thomas was absent), Jesus demonstrated that the resurrection body is in fact a material body. Jesus ate some fish (Lk 24.42). Of course, Thomas refused to believe and Jesus had to prove Himself. It is very important to note that in this passage, John comments that the disciples were "assembled, for fear of the Jews" (Jn 20.19). What a contrast with the boldness that they demonstrated about seven weeks later on the day of Pentecost! Having experienced Truth in life by seeing it displayed in Jesus emboldened them to testify of Him.

Principle: When we see believers apply Truth so that their lives are like Jesus, we are emboldened and encouraged to similarly apply Truth.

Application: Would you like to be the believer in whom others see Jesus and are thereby encouraged and emboldened?

In His discourse with the disciples, Jesus makes some interesting statements and does some interesting things in 20.21-23. In verse 21, Jesus says "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Jesus had made similar statements to His apostles on prior occasions – see Matthew 10.1-26 cf. John 17.18. We will resume here in our next study.