

## The Resurrection Of Jesus

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

Scripture Reading: **John 20:1-10**

This is the miracle of all miracles, a miracle of staggering proportions --- *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. It is no surprise that all four Gospels record this event. The 10 verses from **John 20** that I have just read for you is one of the four records. Let us begin by looking at what it said.

**Verse 1.** It was a Sunday morning, very early in the morning, around dawn. [Saturday is the last day of the week, Sunday is the first day of the week.] Mary Magdalene was going to the tomb. Other Gospel records tell us that she was not alone. Mary the mother of Jesus, Salome and Joanna (among others) were with her. Mary's own words in **verse 2**, "*we do not know where they have laid Him*" say just as much --- she was not alone. Why did they come to the tomb? What was the purpose? **Mark 16** and **Luke 24** inform us that they brought spices to anoint the body of Jesus. This tells us immediately that they expected to find the body of Jesus in the tomb, that they were NOT expecting something like the resurrection. As they drew near to the tomb, they were shocked. The stone that functioned as the door to the tomb, it has been moved away. What happened? Who moved the stone?

**Verse 2.** Not only did they saw the stone moved away, but they also found the body in the tomb missing. So we find Mary Magdalene running with all her might, away from the tomb to find Peter and John. Why? Was it to announce to Peter and John the great news, "*Jesus our Lord has risen from the dead*"? No! Seeing the missing body, she thought the worst! Someone has taken the body, someone has stolen it. Oh Peter, oh John, help! What should we do?!? Once again, we must note that the possibility of resurrection --- that Jesus had risen from the dead --- it did not cross her mind, not at all.

**Verses 3-7.** Peter and John rushed to the tomb. Both saw with their own eyes that the body is indeed missing. But they saw more than that. In

**verse 6**, they saw the linen clothes lying there. The linen clothes were used to wrap round the dead body of Jesus. In **verse 7**, the handkerchief that had been around the head of Jesus was folded together in a place by itself. Now, this is very unusual. If someone has taken the body, why did he not take everything? Why remove the linen clothes and the handkerchief, leave them in the tomb and then just carry the naked body away? Why bother to do a thing like this? Isn't it easier, and more natural, to just take everything? There is something even more unusual here! Look at the linen clothes. It is not in a mess but it is very orderly. Let me use an illustration to highlight the picture before us. Imagine an Indian lady, wearing saree and lying down on her bed, face up, to sleep. You leave the room for 5 minutes, you return, and she is no longer on the bed. But the saree is there. Not there in the sense that she has taken it off, folded it nicely and put it there. Instead, it is like the body has just disappeared into thin air. The space that was once occupied by her body is now just air, and as a result, the clothes just collapse together. The form of the body is still there, but the body is missing. Can you imagine such a scene?

Now transfer this scene back to the tomb in **John 20**, and that's exactly what Peter and John saw. The linen clothes just collapsed, still retaining the form of the body, but the body is missing. If someone has decided to take the body away, naked, without the linen clothes, he could not possibly have taken the body away in this way! Unbelievable as it appears, it seems that the body has passed through those linen clothes and left. It is a most unusual sight inside that tomb. The whole place looks so neat and orderly. Nothing messy, which would be, if grave robbers have been here.

The body of Jesus is missing. The tomb is empty. From that day onwards, until today, many have given their theories to explain the missing body and the empty tomb. The Bible's answer is simple and straightforward. The body is missing and the tomb is empty because Jesus has resurrected. He has *physically* risen from the dead. The resurrection is not an allegory. The resurrection is not a symbol. The resurrection is a reality. This is the miracle of miracles, the greatest. How important is the resurrection? Does it matter if we deny the physical resurrection of Jesus?

Take away the resurrection, and there is no forgiveness of sins for you. Jesus died on the Cross, a substitute for sinners, to pay for the penalty sinners must pay. His resurrection is God's reply that He has accepted what Jesus has done. "*If Christ is not risen, then you are still in your sins,*" Paul reasons. And he is right. There is no forgiveness of sins, no gospel without the resurrection of Jesus Christ! What good news is there, if Jesus is still dead and in the tomb?

Take away the resurrection, and there is no Christian Life for you. We struggle with sins. We fight the temptations and the seductions of this world. We try to live as a Christian in this world. We strive to be as holy as we can. This is the Christian Life. But can we do it? Paul tells us in **Ephesians 1** that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that works in us today. This is our hope of victory. How can we ever conquer sins, overcome this world and be as holy as God? The answer is found in the resurrection of Jesus. If He has not risen, physically, really, then there is no Christian Life to talk about. This is why Paul says, "*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*"

Take away the resurrection, and there is no Day of Judgement for you. Paul says in **Acts 17**: "*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.*" The resurrection is tied to the Day of Judgement. On that day, all wrongs will be righted. On that day, we will be publicly vindicated, and declared to be God's beloved, and received into His eternal home. In God's eternal home, all our tears will be wiped away, all our sorrows will be removed. But if Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, then there will be no physical coming of Jesus on the Day of Judgement. In fact, there will be no physical, real Day of Judgement. Then this world will go on as it is --- bad and becoming worse. No hope of evil being stopped, no hope of sinners being dealt with. This is worse than hell! The resurrection of Jesus changes that. His resurrection assures us that the Day of Judgement will be there.

What is at stake, if you deny the physical resurrection of Jesus? No forgiveness of sins, no Christian Life, no Day of Judgment. In other words, the whole Christian Faith and Christian Life collapse into one big mess. If you remove the resurrection of Jesus, you do not have a reduced Christianity. You have no Christianity. My dear friends, make no mistake about it. The resurrection of Jesus is absolutely crucial to our Christian Faith and Christian Life.

It is therefore no surprise that the world has spared no efforts to attack and deny the resurrection of Jesus. They may just give us a smile, when we talk about Jesus turning water into wine, or Jesus feeding the five thousand. They may even not say anything, when we mention about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. But the moment we say that Jesus has risen from the dead, never to die anymore, they fire all their missiles! Because if Jesus is really risen from the dead, then He is really the Saviour and the Lord, and they will have no more reasons not to believe Him. But they will try, try all ways and means, to deny the resurrection of Jesus. How? Let me mention and deal with two of them here this morning.

#### [1] JESUS DID NOT DIE ON THE CROSS.

This is what some people said. The reasoning is clear: *if He did not die on the Cross, then He did not rise from the tomb.* No real death, no real resurrection.

Good try, friends, but if you have bothered to study a bit more about Roman punishments in those days, especially the crucifixion, you will be too embarrassed to repeat this objection anymore. If your Bible is still opened, please look at **John 19:1** --- *So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.* Have you been invited to the Changi Prisons to see how some criminals are being caned? This 'scourging' is 1000 times worse! Normally, this Roman flogging consists of 39 lashes each time, could be more depending on the mood of the Roman soldiers. The whip is made up of leather thongs with metal balls. When the whip strikes the flesh, the metal balls will cause deep bruises, and repeated blows will cause the flesh to break. In addition, the whip has pieces of sharp bones to cut the

flesh. After the 39 lashes, the back of the person would be very badly shredded. The spine could even be exposed by the deep, deep cuts.

Many people actually die from this kind of flogging, before they were even nailed to the Cross. For those who survived, they would go into what the medical world today will call, hypovolemic shock. The effect of losing a large amount of blood is hypovolemic shock. The heart races to pump blood that isn't there. The blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse. The kidney stopped producing urine to maintain what volume is left. The person becomes very thirsty, as the body craves for fluid to replace the lost blood volume. Friends, remember the Romans flogged Jesus.

By this time, He was more than half-dead.

Now, consider the crucifixion itself. The crucifixion is a most cruel way of torture the Romans invented. A spike of 5-7 inches will be driven through the wrists. This goes through the place where the median nerve runs. Remember, both wrists, and then the feet! The pain is unbearable, indescribable! To convey the pain, we actually invented a new word: *excruciating*. This word actually means, *out of the cross!* With his arms stretched out in this way, both of His shoulders would be dislocated. In this position, in order to breath, the person would have to push his body up so that he can breath. But to push his body up, it will mean the spike tearing through his feet, and his badly bruised back rubbing against the vertical bar of the cross! This will repeat itself, until the person is too weak to push, and then he will die of suffocation.

The hypovolemic shock suffered earlier would have cause a sustained rapid heart rate. This will lead to heart failure, resulting in a collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart and the lungs. Now, look at **John 19:33, 34**. That spear apparently went through the right lung to the heart of Jesus. When it was withdrawn, what flows out? Blood and water, exactly what the medical world would have expected. At this point, what is the condition of Jesus? Dead, absolutely dead --- no doubt about it. The Romans soldiers have not the slightest doubt about it. **Verse**

**33** says that they did not break the legs of Jesus, while **verse 32** says they did it to the other two. Why break the legs? Not to prevent them from escape, but to hasten their death. Remember how one breathes on the cross. If your legs are broken, then there is no way you can push up to breathe, and so you will die in no time. The reason why they did not break the legs of Jesus is because they could see that He is no longer breathing anymore --- He is dead. Now, if they make a mistake, they will have to pay for it with their very own lives. These soldiers may not have attended medical school, but don't bank on them making a mistake as big as this! Friends, this is no way Jesus could have survived the Roman flogging and crucifixion combined. By that Friday afternoon, around 3 p.m., He was dead.

## [2] JESUS WAS NOT BURIED IN JOSEPH'S TOMB.

Look now to **John 19:38-42**. We are told that Jesus was buried in a tomb that belongs to Joseph of Arimathea. **Verse 41** says that it was in a garden, and the tomb was new, that is no one has yet been laid there.

Now, there are people today who say, "*This is a myth. People who are crucified don't get a proper burial.*" My reply is, that's true. According to all reliable records, crucified bodies are left on the cross until their flesh was devoured by birds of prey or wild animals. Or, if due to Jewish sensibilities, they will be taken down and buried in a common dirt graveyard reserved for criminals. This is what probably happened for the other two persons crucified that day. But what commonly takes place does not rule out special cases. In the case of Jesus, it was specifically mentioned that He was given a proper burial. The Bible records that a man by the name of Joseph, from Arimathea asked Pilate for the body, and having received the permission, took and buried that body in his new tomb.

"*Ah, there is no such person as Joseph of Arimathea! He is the invention of Christians!*" so goes the attack. Whether there is a

Joseph of Arimathea or not, it is not for you or me to decide, but the people who were alive then! If there is no Joseph of Arimathea, and yet all the four Gospels mentioned him, then all that needs to be done is for the people living then to say, " *There is no such person!! Where is this Joseph? Let him come forward for us to see!*" We find no records, anywhere, of such a retort! Now, if the Christians wanted to create a legendary figure to play the hero's role here, why choose Joseph of Arimathea? Who is he? **Mark 15:43** says that he is a prominent member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the highest religious body of the Jews. Don't forget that this is the council that plotted and voted to put Jesus to death. Logically, you can imagine that this council would be the enemy of the Christians, because they killed the Christian's beloved Lord. Why choose someone from this council and put him in the hero's role? More than that, call him a prominent member of the council. Why, if he does not exist, all the Sanhedrin needs to do is to produce their membership roll and the Christians will be silenced forever!!

Not only that, Joseph of Arimathea is cast as a hero here, while the apostles, the leaders of the Christian church are cast as cowards! He was brave enough to ask for the body, while they were hiding under their beds! Would you create a legend in this way, and cast shame on your own leaders? My dear friends, Joseph of Arimathea is a historical figure, and his tomb is real. The body of Jesus was laid in that tomb. **Mark 15:47** states that Mary Magdalene and some other women who were present then saw and noted where the body was laid.

Jesus did really die on that Friday afternoon. And the body of Jesus was really laid in Joseph's tomb that Friday evening. Not only that, **Matthew 27:62-66** tell us that the enemies of Jesus remembered what the disciples of Jesus have forgotten. They remembered that Jesus did talk about 'His resurrection'. So they asked and got guards to be stationed at the tomb, after sealing up the stone. What can be more secure and protected than that? Yet, as we return to our text in **John 20**, we find that on Sunday morning, the tomb was empty. How can you explain that?

The enemies of Jesus stole His body. If that is true, then why did they not produce the body when the Christians started to preach the resurrection of Jesus? If they did, then they would have silenced the Christians once for all, there and then! The hatred that these people have towards Jesus and His followers is deep. There is no doubt that if they could destroy Him and them, they would! So where is the body, why did they not produce it?

The disciples of Jesus stole His body. If they did, then they knew that they were preaching a lie when they preached the resurrection of Jesus. What is the advantage of perpetuating this lie? Many people are prepared to silence their conscience and perpetuate a falsehood, in order to enrich themselves, to be famous and so on. What did the apostles get? Beatings, abuse, persecutions, sufferings and finally death. Why would anyone perpetuate a lie in such a situation? Why are they willing to even lay down their lives, if they knew it was a falsehood? Why did no one blink? If those 11 eleven, plus the woman hatched this falsehood, why all of them remained convinced of the resurrection until the day they die? Why is it that no one, not even one, flinched and recanted later on, which is normally the case in all hatching of falsehoods? Not only that, remember that they were initially very sceptical, very doubtful. These are not just honest men, but very cautious men as well! Yet they were willing to undergo any sufferings and even die, just to preach to the world that Jesus has risen from the dead. Why? Only one answer: ***Because they really saw and met the resurrected Jesus!***

The Christians created this story. If so, why create a story with the womenfolk as the first people to discover the empty tomb? In the Jewish society then, the testimonies of ladies are useless, not admitted in the courts. If the disciples created this story of Jesus' resurrection, why not cast themselves as the ones who discovered the empty tomb first? Why the ladies? Isn't this to shoot at one's own feet? Unless of course, it is a honest record of what actually happened. No inventions and no playing with data here!

In addition, look at the way the empty tomb event was narrated --- simple, straightforward, with absolutely no flowery language. There is another book called the *Gospel of Peter* which Christians reject. We do



not believe that that is to be part of the Bible. This is what the Gospel of Peter says about the resurrection: *The tomb was surrounded by the Roman soldiers, the Pharisees and elders and many other people. Suddenly, in the night, there was a loud voice from heaven, and 2 men descend from heaven to the tomb. The stone rolls back by itself, and the two men go into the tomb. 3 men came out, 2 of them holding the third. The heads of 2 men reach the clouds, the third reaches beyond the cloud. Then a cross comes out of the tomb. A voice from heaven asks, "Have you preached to them that sleep?" And the cross answers, "Yes."*

This is how legend looks like, colourful and flowery. Contrast this with the 4 Gospel accounts of the empty tomb --- simple and straightforward. The difference is like a newspaper report and a composition written for the school exams, both writing about a car accident. The Christians created this story?

Look, even the Jews did not deny the empty tomb. How can you, if the tomb is empty and staring at your face every day?

Every explanation fails to explain and every theory falls flat on its face. There is only one reasonable and acceptable answer. The body is missing and the tomb is empty, because Jesus is really risen from the dead.

In addition, consider the many eye-witnesses. No one actually saw the resurrection, but many really saw the resurrected Lord. The Bible claims that there were more than 500 people who have seen and met with the resurrected Jesus. These 500 more people are made up of both men and woman, they are very different in background, training and initial attitudes towards Jesus and the resurrection. Some were sceptical, and some were even hostile. But all of them were finally convinced. And when Paul mentioned this in 1 Corinthians 15, he says that many of them were still alive then. In other words, he is saying, if you want to, you can check it up and interview them. If you summon each of them as witnesses in the court, give them 15 minutes maximum to give their testimonies, it would take about 125-130 hours! Assuming that the court session lasts from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, with one hour lunch break, that is, 8 hours a day, this would last us 15 to 16 days!! Can you imagine that!! A long queue of

witnesses that will last us 15 -16 days, and each of them limited to just 15 minutes, to tell us that they saw and met the resurrected Jesus!

I want to come back to **John 20**, and now to **verses 8-10**. They saw the evidence. **Verse 8** says, John saw and believed. Yet **verse 9** says '*as yet, they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*' **Verse 10** then records a strange thing --- *they went home*. What an anti-climax!! No jumping with joy, no shouting of hallelujahs. Just '*went away again to their own homes*'!! Now compare this behaviour with what is said later in **verse 20** --- *then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord*. **Verse 10** is flat. **Verse 20** is glad. What is the difference?

**Verse 10** brings us to the end of the examination of the evidences. Intellectually, we can be silenced, convinced. But it is only when the resurrected Jesus appears, meets us and deals with us, that the heart is moved, bowed and worshipped. That's **verse 20**. This pattern is repeated in the case of Thomas, in **verses 24-29**. Meeting with Jesus is what changes everything for Thomas. This then is our greatest need. The resurrection of Jesus is a fact --- solid, undeniable fact. But what you ultimately need is not intellectual convincing. What you need is to meet Jesus, the resurrected Lord. Jesus must come, and He must begin to deal with you. Then, and only then, will you believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you will have life in His Name. My dear friends, your salvation and hope lie not in evidences and proofs, but in Jesus Christ. And my dear fellow Christians, your answer and hope is similarly in Jesus. We need to see Jesus, to meet Him, to have dealings with Him. Because He is alive, alive today, this is possible. And it is my prayer that this possibility will become a reality for you this day.