

John Lesson 23 Articles

It is significant that John along with the rest of the Gospel writers designated the day of the resurrection as the “first day of the week” rather than the third day after the crucifixion. Although the death of Jesus was absolutely crucial for salvation and the forgiveness of sins, as I have indicated above, “the hinge point of Christianity” is the resurrection. Indeed, on the basis of the resurrection Christians have established their day of worship and praise to God (John 20:19, 26; cf. Rev 1:10). Brown is probably correct in suggesting that the shock of the resurrection seared itself into the memory of the early Christians before they went back to reflect on the fact it was the third day after the crucifixion and formulated the implications of that fact for their theologies.¹

“The first day” (20:1). From the very beginning the church has set aside Sunday, the first day of the week, and commemorated the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Acts 20:7).²

What did the men see in the tomb? They saw the burial wrappings lying in the shape of the body, but the body was gone! The graveclothes lay like an empty cocoon. The napkin (for the face) was carefully folded, lying by itself. It was not the scene of a grave robbery, for no robbers could have gotten the body out of the graveclothes without tearing the cloth and disarranging things. Jesus had returned to life in power and glory and had passed through the graveclothes and the tomb itself! Verse 8 tells us that the men believed in His resurrection because of the evidence that they saw. Later they met Christ personally and also came to believe on the testimony of Scripture. There are, then, three types of proof that you can rest upon when it comes to spiritual matters: (1) the evidence God gives in His world, (2) the Word of God, and (3) personal experience. How can a man know that Christ is real? He can see the evidence in the lives of others; he can read the Word; and if he trusts Christ, he will experience it personally. Note that in v. 10 they go back home without proclaiming the message of the risen Christ. Mere intellectual evidence alone will not change people. We must meet Christ personally.³

The story is told with such relish and haste that we should be careful not to overlook the significance of the detail. Firstly, there is a lot about linen. Why, one might ask? Is this another example of John’s verisimilitude, detail that makes the narrative come alive? Possibly, but I believe there is more to this than mere local colour. The grave linen is given prominence to emphasize that this is a resurrection not a resuscitation. Lazarus was revived. He came out bound from head to foot in grave clothes and had to be released (11:44). Jesus is raised by the power of God alone and needs no human assistance. If the beloved disciple is Lazarus, as some believe, then the significance of the grave clothes would not be lost on him and may be instrumental in his coming to faith.⁴

¹ Borchert, G. L. (2002). *John 12–21* (Vol. 25B, p. 291). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible reader’s companion* (electronic ed., p. 697). Wheaton: Victor Books.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 266). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ McFadyen, P. (1998). *Open Door on John: a gospel for our time* (p. 115). London: Triangle.