

The Miracles of Calvary

Week 5 – The Empty Grave Clothes – John 20:6-8

Scripture Reading – 1Corinthians 15:35-52

Introduction

We have been going through a series titled *The Miracles of Calvary* and since this is Easter Sunday I thought I would begin by mentioning some Easter miracles that we can only hope to see one day

Who knows, maybe one day kids will be as enthused about an Easter egg hunt as the adults that brought them
[egghunt.jpg]

And just maybe Peeps might one day taste as good as they look [peeps.jpg]

At least this person found a functional use for those unsavory sugar bombs [usefulpeeps.jpg]

Then, some child somewhere might find a chocolate rabbit in their Easter basket that has its ears intact [noears.jpg]

Lastly, and most unlikely, some kid will actually enjoy meeting the Easter Bunny [easterbunny.jpg]

Well, a guy can dream

Seriously though, over the past few weeks we have opened our eyes to the events surrounding the crucifixion and several of you have told me you have seen things in God's Word you never saw before

And that's great because our tendency is to read right past the miracles and therefore to miss the truths they contain

Up to this point we have looked at the series of miracles that God performed on the day of the crucifixion

We began by considering the three hours of darkness that enveloped the world as God the Father demonstrated his holiness and shielded the Son's intense suffering from human eyes

Then we looked at the torn curtain in the Temple followed by the earthquake and then the opened graves

And this morning we come to a very timely miracle that is just perfect for us to consider on this Resurrection Sunday as we will be taking a look at the empty grave clothes that were found in Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning

First, we will consider the condition of the grave clothes

Second, we will take a look at what the grave clothes reveal or the revelation of the grave clothes as it appears on your note sheet

Then **lastly**, we will consider what the empty grave clothes tell us about the future reality for believers

If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to open your Bible to **John 20:1-10** and follow along as I read

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.

Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples went back to their homes.

I. The Condition of the Grave Clothes

The first thing we want to notice is that the cloths that Jesus' body was wrapped in were undisturbed

In fact, the main point of this entire 10 verse narrative in the Gospel of John is to inform us as to the condition of the grave clothes and how they were arranged which shows that this is no unimportant matter

And we see in **verse 8** of our passage that it was the appearance of the grave clothes that caused John to believe that Jesus had truly risen from the dead

Burial Practices

In first-century Israel, bodies of the dead were typically prepared for burial and interred on the day they died

As soon as death was certain, the deceased eyes were closed and the corpse was washed and bound tightly in strips of cloth intermixed with spices and perfumes that would serve to somewhat preserve the body

Then the prepared corpse would have been laid gently within the tomb – typically on a little shelf or bench-like protrusion that was likely hewn into the wall of the tomb

We see this kind of burial method in the case of Lazarus in **John 11:44** where we read that Lazarus came out of his tomb with his *“hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth”* and Jesus telling the onlookers to *“Unbind him and let him go”* indicating that Lazarus needed help extricating himself from the grave clothes

The Account of Sunday Morning

John's account of what transpired on that Sunday morning is this:

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb very early in the morning only to find that the stone barricading the door had been moved

She ran back and told the disciples that the body of Jesus that they had placed in the tomb on Friday was no longer there and furthermore that her opinion was that enemies had removed it to an unknown location

Peter and John immediately sprinted to the tomb with the younger John outrunning Peter and arriving first

John remained outside the tomb but looked inside and saw *“the linen cloths lying there”*

We aren't told what kept John from entering the tomb but always impetuous Peter apparently barged right in and our text says he also saw the *“linen cloths lying there”*

But from his vantage point inside the tomb he saw an additional detail that John missed from outside the tomb

Peter saw *“the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself”*

John then joined Peter in the tomb and **verse 8** says he *“saw and believed”*

What John Believed

We could easily read right past that statement without giving it a moment's thought but it's an important inclusion that contains the key to this whole passage

So, what was it that John believed only after going into the tomb?

It wasn't that the body of Jesus was missing – Mary Magdalene had already reported that and he had verified it when he looked into the tomb from outside – so what did John believe?

Perhaps it could be that John believed Mary's suspicion that their enemies had stolen Jesus' body away

That seems highly unlikely when you consider that someone stealing a body would have no reason to unwrap it first

And even if they did, they would undoubtedly just throw the linen bandages aside and wouldn't take the time to lay them neatly back in their place

Yet the verbiage used here indicates that the linen cloths were lying neatly as if they were carefully and purposely positioned

There is really only one possible meaning here:

When John saw how the grave clothes were arranged; he instantly believed that Jesus had risen from the dead

The Face Cloth

For some reason seeing the face cloth in conjunction with the other grave clothes caused John to believe

There was something about their configuration that clearly expressed a supernatural occurrence to John

So let's consider what he records about that face cloth in **verse 7**

He writes that Peter went into the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there – again placed neatly and with purpose – *and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself*

The Greek word translated as “folded up” in our ESV Bible and as “rolled up” in other English versions means:

To wrap up, or to envelop, to enclose a thing by winding something around it, or to bandage – in other words to wrap something up in another thing

This same root word is used in **Matthew 27:59** and in **Luke 23:53** both of which tell us about the **wrapping** of the body of Jesus in the strips of linen cloth in preparation for his burial

And that speaks directly to just what would have been done with this face cloth – Jesus' head was wrapped up in this cloth which was a separate wrapping from the cloth that bound his body

And what John is conveying here is that the cloth was collapsed and laying in that same formation

The face cloth hadn't been unfastened and manually unwrapped indicating that it had been removed from Jesus' head

It was intact showing that Jesus' head had been removed from it without disturbing it

I believe Peter and John saw the grave clothes lying exactly in the same position where Jesus' body had been laid the previous Friday

The cloth wrappings that had been around his body were where his body had been and the cloth that was about his head and face was where it had been

Nothing was undone, none of the folds were disturbed, and there was no change in the location of the grave clothes

They had simply collapsed in place when Jesus' body was no longer inside them

Luke's account lends support to this conclusion in **Luke 24:12** which says that Peter found that the linen cloths were “*by themselves*” which can only mean that the body of Jesus was missing but the grave clothes were lying in such a way as to suggest the body which had been contained in them

And while it seems that Peter went away with a bit of amazement or wonder at what had taken place seeing the grave clothes caused John to believe that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead even though **verse 9** says he still didn't understand what Scripture had to say about the necessity of the resurrection

But we know all too well that understanding is like that and we often only understand in part and as God progressively reveals things to us our understanding increases

For John, the undisturbed grave clothes revealed that Jesus had actually risen from the dead but they also reveal something about the nature of Jesus' resurrection

II. The Revelation of the Grave Clothes

The fact that the grave clothes were undisturbed tells us about the nature of Jesus' resurrection

The first thing we notice about Jesus' resurrection is that it was truly a miracle

You may remember that we said a miracle is something which is the result of God's direct intervention but that doesn't have a natural cause

In other words, a miracle is caused and carried out exclusively according to an act of God's will and is beyond the laws of nature

I think we would all agree that anytime a person returns to life after being dead and buried we can call that a bona fide miracle

There are nine such instances in the Bible not including Jesus:

- Elijah raised the widow's son in 1Kings 17
- Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son in 2Kings 4 and his bones raised another man in 2Kings 13
- Jesus raised a widow's son in Luke 7 and Jairus' daughter in Luke 8 and Lazarus after 3 days in John 11
- Of course there is the instance of the raising of many of the saints which we will look at next week as our final miracle of Calvary
- Peter raised Dorcas in Acts 9
- And Paul raised Eutychus in Acts 20 to round out the list

Each of these instances of people being brought back from the dead are miraculous to be sure but none of them were like the resurrection of Jesus Christ – they all pale in comparison

In each of those instances the dead were brought back to life in their natural bodies

In reality, they were not resurrections at all in the true sense of the word; they were resuscitations or revitalizations where the bodies and spirits of the people involved which had been separated at death were reunited

We saw that clearly last week as we determined that was the reason the graves of the saints had to be opened – otherwise the risen saints would not be able to come out of their tombs when it was time for them to do so

And when we look at the account of Lazarus we see that Jesus commanded the stone to be removed and that he needed assistance from the onlookers in getting out of his grave clothes – I kind of imagine Lazarus hopping out of the grave with his legs bound together and his arms pinned against his sides

Jesus' resurrection was both physical and spiritual

But that wasn't the case with Jesus – his body simply passed through the grave clothes and left them behind perfectly intact as it continued to pass out of the closed and sealed tomb –

The stone was only rolled away after he was already gone so that his absence could be discovered

So, it was unlike the other raisings in that it had an unnatural, spiritual element to it

Still, we know that Jesus' natural body was raised because it was no longer there so it was also a physical, bodily resurrection

Further, we know that when he met with his disciples after his resurrection they were able to touch and handle him and he was able to eat – both indicating a real body

Luke describes the scene where we see both of those truths in **Luke 24:38-43**

And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

But look just a couple of verses back to the start of this account and you will see why this demonstration was necessary

Starting at verse 36 – (Luke 24:36-37)

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

The disciples were gathered in a closed room when Jesus appeared among them – they no doubt thought he was a ghost or some manner of apparition so Jesus had to demonstrate to them that he was indeed real

Therefore, we can only conclude that in some way that we can't fully understand, Jesus' natural body formed the basis of his resurrection body

His resurrection body was in many ways the same as his pre-resurrection body

For instance he was recognizable to his disciples and his body had substance

But it was also different – it had passed through the grave clothes and it could pass through walls and Jesus could appear in distant places in an instant and just as quickly be gone

As Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 15 which we heard as our Scripture reading – Jesus' body had changed

Lazarus and the others who were raised were raised in their natural bodies

They still had all their infirmities and they would one day return to the grave

And before his crucifixion we know that Jesus had all the same weaknesses and limitations as the rest of mankind – except for the fact he didn't have a sin nature that is

But that wasn't the case with his resurrection body

Jesus' resurrection body was still a genuine body but when he rose he left all infirmities behind and his body is now as devoid of fleshly weakness as the grave clothes he left behind in the tomb were devoid of a body

His resurrection body was independent of the laws of this physical world, never tiring, swift as light, grand, and glorious

The resurrection of Jesus was in a way the culmination of his incarnation as his fleshly body was changed into a glorious resurrection body

Because when Jesus took on human flesh and became a man he knew he would remain in that body forever

And Jesus today is still in his resurrection body beside the Father

III. The Future Reality for Believers

The present reality of Jesus' resurrection body tells us of the future reality for all believers

Jesus is called the firstfruits of the resurrection by Paul in 1Corinthians 15

Look with me at **1Corinthians 15:20-23**

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

All who have accepted Christ as their Savior will one day have their natural, physical body changed into a glorified, incorruptible body as Jesus did

Philippians 3:20-21 tells us that anyone who knows their true citizenship is in heaven only has to wait for the Lord to return because when he does, he will *"transform [their] lowly body to be like his glorious body"*

I admit, we don't know how God is going to do this because we aren't told how it happened for Jesus

There is no record of how the transformation took place when Jesus was resurrected

The biblical record says he was prepared for burial and laid in the tomb and then we are simply told that his body wasn't there because he had risen

But the great reality is that we don't need to know **how** it happened; we only need to know **that** it happened and the historical record shows that it did

No one at the time denied that Jesus had died on the cross and been buried – the Jews, Romans, and disciples were all in agreement

No one ever survived a Roman crucifixion and his burial was well supervised by the authorities and then guarded by formidable Roman troops

Everyone also agreed that on the morning of the third day his body was missing from the tomb

And it was obvious to every reasonably thinking person that the disciples hadn't removed the body because there was no way they could have gotten past the Roman guard that was posted to protect the tomb

And then we have the record of the personal appearances and interactions of Jesus in the days following his resurrection

So the record is indisputable when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus

Then we have God's Word that tells us we will be likewise changed when the Lord returns

So we can have every confidence that our current physical bodies will be transformed into glorified, spiritual bodies just as Jesus' body was whether we have died or are still alive

I don't know about you, but I think I'm going to like having a new body

I'm kind of looking forward to being able to walk through walls, to being able to eat what I want without worry, to not getting tired or sick

Conclusion

We take time on this Sunday each year to remember the miraculous resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

The resurrection that was prophesied hundreds of years before he was even born

And Christians all over the world celebrate the fact that we serve a risen Savior and the truth that because he lives we also will live with him forever

But the sad reality is that this won't be true for the majority of people who live and die without ever trusting in his payment for their sins

Instead, they will be raised to a kind of living death apart from God for all eternity

God won't force himself on anyone and everyone who would be saved must come to him of their own free will

All a person needs to do is to admit that they know they have violated God's perfect standard and that, as a sinner, they are estranged from God

That on their own they can never bridge the gulf that exists between them and God and that they realize it's useless to even try

Then they need to accept the payment that Jesus made on that cross on Calvary for them personally some 2,000 years ago

They need to come to the place where they can say that they are relying on nothing but the shed blood of Christ for their salvation

Then God's own Word says that they will indeed be saved

And like the thief that hung on his cross beside Jesus they will be in paradise with him at the moment they die and the empty grave clothes of Jesus gives tangible evidence that they will be raised again to live with him forever in their own resurrection body

I don't know the condition of every heart here and whether everyone has made that choice

So as I close in prayer I am going to pray that if there are any here today who cannot say with assurance that they are trusting in Christ that they will come to that decision this very morning

If you have never accepted Christ and would like to, would you just simply look up as I am praying and make eye contact with me – I promise not to call you out by name or embarrass you in any way – I would just like to pray specifically for you

Let's pray