

Call to Obedience #243
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God is a God of diversity.

The First Witnesses of the Resurrection

By Reimar Schultze

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

—John 20:1

Each Gospel account gives us a somewhat different picture of the first witnesses of the resurrection. Matthew speaks of two women who came to the grave early, Mark of three women, Luke of several women, and John speaks of one woman who came for the early morning embalming. We could take several positions regarding this matter. We could say that of all the Gospel writers, John's account is the most authentic because he was the only one of the writers who was there. Or we could say that because Mary arrived a little earlier than the others, this gives the other stories similar credibility.

I believe, however, the best position to take is that each Gospel writer tried to highlight a different aspect of the resurrection and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, selected material that would give the best account of the resurrection from his perspective. The book of John gives us a picture of three distinct personality types, as we observe the way each responded to the empty tomb.

Mary: the Runner!

"Mary Magdalene...seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth..." (John 20:1–2).

There are those of us who at the first evidence, at the first sign of the unusual, make quick judgments and then run to tell. This is the excitable type. It seems that, in general, women tend to "run" sooner than men. They are often more driven by "first impulse"! Mary Magdalene did not look into the sepulchre, nor did she go into the sepulchre, nor did she do an inquiry at the scene of the resurrection. She simply saw and ran.

Fortunately, she knew who to run to. Our text says, "Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved..." (v. 2). This other disciple is, of course, John who wrote the Gospel.

If you are a runner type, be sure you know who to run to. By now, Mary knew who to run to, for the prominence of Peter as the spiritual leader was obvious to all Jesus' followers. Mary Magdalene was the first to arrive at the empty tomb, and so she rightly ran. A stone removed from the tomb of her Lord was occasion to run and report. She was also correct in running to Peter. She knew to whom our Lord had invested the most authority. Where she was wrong was in her assumption that Christ's dead body had been moved.

John: the Peeker!

As we read on, we see Peter and John, probably still in a depressed sleep, being awakened by pounding at their door, getting into their robes and running to the tomb. Mary ran, Peter ran, and John ran. This was runners' day in Jerusalem! The city was still sound asleep. Darkness engulfed her sacred edifices, while three of Jesus' followers were running to and from the tomb. Our text said that "they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter..." (v. 4).

From this, we learn that Peter was the first out of bed, the first dressed, and the first on the run. What else do we expect from Peter? We then read that John outran Peter, indicating that John was slower in getting started, but then caught and outran Peter, arriving first at the tomb. Can you see, my friend, that this was not a jog, but surely a serious race!

Now, what does John do as he arrives at the tomb? "And [John] stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in" (v.5). Why did he not go in? Because he was a peeker. He was a visionary. He saw a little bit of the evidence, and with that small portion of evidence, he constructed a picture in his mind.

So then, there are the runners and the peekers. Are you a runner or a peeker, and which of the two is better?

Peter: the Investigator!

"Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" (vv. 6-7).

Peter went in! Of course, again, what else do we expect from him—the only one of the apostles who said, "Lord, [wash] not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:9). Peter is the only apostle who said to Jesus, "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (13:37)

Peter went in—all the way in. That was his life. Peter was the one who asked almost all the questions asked by the twelve apostles as recorded in the four Gospels. His name is found ninety-four times in these writings. Peter was the investigator. He wanted all the facts, by revelation, by observation, and by investigation.

It was only after Peter went into the tomb that John followed. Peter and John were a wonderful pair. They stayed together in Jerusalem during Jesus' trial, and they were found together after Pentecost, going to the temple to pray, "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour" (Acts 3:1).

So, we have the runner, we have the peeker, and we have the investigator. Which of these three types are you? Or are you some of each? This is only an academic question. It does not matter in the practical arena. The first point of this article and what matters most is that: **Every person responds differently to a phenomenon, to an event, and we must not be critical of people who respond differently than we.**

Jesus loved all these responses and he loved all these people, for each of them was totally devoted to God. Diversity of gifts, callings, and personalities invoke a diversity of responses. So Jesus rewarded all of the three witnesses of the resurrection in a special way. He rewarded Mary, the runner, by letting her be the first person to see the risen Christ! Jesus rewarded John, the peeker, by giving him a revelation of the trium

phant Christ, as we see it in the last book of the Bible. And Jesus rewarded Peter with opening Pentecost and allowing him to be crucified upside-down.

If you are a runner, keep running. If you are a peeker, keep peeking. If you are an investigator, keep investigating. Don't try to be anybody else. Don't try to be someone you are not called to be, and couldn't be even if you tried.

Now, we are ready for point number two: **None of the physical evidence sufficed as proof of the resurrection. His followers needed to see Jesus to believe.**

Mary did not believe when she saw the empty tomb. She did not believe when she saw the angels in the tomb. She only believed when she heard the Lord Jesus speak her name and turned to see his face (John 20:16). Peter and John did not believe the physical evidence. Jesus told them over and over again that he would rise on the third day. Now here was the evidence in front of their faces: "And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" (20:7).

All of the investigative skills of Peter did not suffice to make him a believer in the resurrection of Christ. Even Mary Magdalene's credible report to the disciples later that day that she had seen the risen Christ did nothing to convince him or the others. Peter, and the rest, did not believe until, like Mary Magdalene, they saw Jesus standing in their midst. Even so, Thomas did not believe in the resurrection until he, too, saw the Christ with his wounded hands and feet standing before him.

Dear ones, we say we believe in the resurrection of Christ. We have two thousand years of documentation and tradition behind us. But, for most of us, we only believe in the historical Christ. We have not yet come to a personal revelation of Jesus, for if we had one, we would be a praying people, a pure people, a witnessing people, a non-judgmental people, a patient, long-suffering people, filled with the Holy Spirit.

When we really meet Jesus, really see Jesus, we will be completely changed, and our lives will show it. We will have the Holy spirit in us. We will display the fruits of the Spirit, and we will want to reach the world for Jesus. Oh, how we, like the first witnesses, need to have hearts that seek after God more than anything else. Then we shall see Jesus, too, and we shall be his ambassadors through his precious Holy Spirit, each as God has created and equipped us for the task.