***Standing Before the Empty Tomb***

**Resurrection Sunday, John 20:1-18 April 4, 2021**

***He saw and believed.*John 20:8**

**Starting in the darkness**

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”*

John 20:1-2

1) Creation, incarnation (John 1) and now resurrection begin with darkness

2) The ladies are given the blessed task of being apostles to the Apostles

**Running through the cemetery**

*3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside . . . .*

John 20:3-8 (but not all the way to the end of verse 8!)

1) All the running reflects the “disbelief with joy” of the eye witnesses

2) The grave clothes mean the Jesus’ body was not stolen, he was not resuscitated, not wrong tomb

3) Empty tomb means the resurrection is not “spiritual”

**Learning from Peter and John**

*Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.   
9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)   
 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes . . . .*

John 20:8-10

1) While many believed WHEN they met Jesus, John believed BEFORE he met Jesus

2) Peter and John didn’t need to know everything – only that Jesus said he wouldn’t be there!

3) “Back to their homes” meant they started spreading the word

**Mary’s story**

*Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.*

*13 They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”*

*“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.*

*15 “Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”*

*Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”*

*16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”*

*She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).*

*17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”*

*18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.*

John 20:10-18 (see especially D. A. Carson’s comments on this passage, included below)

1) Mary returned! I don’t know these ladies well enough.

2) Jesus’ response to Mary of Magdala reveals how different he now is and how we are still

3) Jesus begins already preparation for his post-resurrection ministry and ascension

**John wants us to remember**

1) Listen to the ladies!

2) The empty tomb is the second apologetic – Jesus’ promise was the first!

3) Standing in front of the empty tomb is the place John wants us *goyim* to begin

**Resources for further studies in John’s gospel**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on John at <https://open.life.church/items/179216-john-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon has a “Who is the King?” sermon at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-triumphal-entry-into-jerusalem/#flipbook/*](%20https:/www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-triumphal-entry-into-jerusalem/%23flipbook/)

Spurgeon’s “Gardener” sermon is not, I think, his best at [*https://archive.spurgeon.org/sermons/1699.php*](https://archive.spurgeon.org/sermons/1699.php)

Spurgeon has resurrection sermons at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-power-of-his-resurrection/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-power-of-his-resurrection/%23flipbook/%20%20)  and my favorite at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0018.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0018.htm)

J. C. Ryle’s commentary on John at [*http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle\_gospel\_of\_john.htm*](http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle_gospel_of_john.htm)

Deffinbaugh’s sermon at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/28-un-triumphal-entry-john-129-19*](https://bible.org/seriespage/28-un-triumphal-entry-john-129-19) *and* [*https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209*](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209)

I have really appreciated D. A. Carson’s commentary in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series (Eerdmans, 1991) and Earl Palmer’s *The Intimate Gospel* (Word Books, 1978)

The two resources on our union with Christ are Johm Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1955) and Rankin Wilbourne’s *Union with Christ* (David C. Cook, 2016). I also recommend Marcus Peter’s short study at [*https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/)

S. M. Lockridge’s “That’s My King” at [*https://thatsmyking.wordpress.com/words/*](https://thatsmyking.wordpress.com/words/)

Leon Morris has a short essay on the atonement in John’s gospel at [*http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/CTR-NT/Morris-JohnsAtonement-CTR.pdf*](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/CTR-NT/Morris-JohnsAtonement-CTR.pdf)

# The Burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 19:38-20:9) Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209*](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209)

### Introduction

When I was more deeply involved in prison ministry a few years ago, I had the opportunity to meet a number of prison chaplains. Among these was the chaplain for the death row unit in Huntsville, Texas. He told of some condemned men he had dealt with who had truly come to faith, and of others who were hardened to the gospel. As a death row chaplain, one of his responsibilities was to meet with each condemned man just before his execution. Whether or not they wished to speak with him about spiritual things, there were some other matters which had to be discussed. In particular, they had to discuss their burial arrangements. Unless other arrangements were made in advance by family or loved ones, the body of the executed criminal would be buried in what was, in effect, “boot hill”—a gravesite designated for executed criminals near the prison.

As we come to John’s account of the burial of our Lord, I am reminded of the fact that in all likelihood, our Lord would have been buried in the “boot hill” of His day:

Under Roman law, the bodies of executed criminals were normally handed over to their next of kin, but not so in the case of those crucified for sedition. They were left to the vultures, the culminating indignity and shame. The Jews never refused to bury any executed criminal, but instead of allowing the bodies of such sinners to be placed in family tombs, where they might desecrate those already buried, they provided a burial site for criminals just outside the city (*cf.* Jos., *Ant.* v. 44).[188](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209#P5462_2171163)

Most of the disciples were keeping their distance from Jesus at this point in time.[189](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209#P5464_2171361) It does not even appear to be possible for any of Jesus’ disciples or family to secure His body and give it a proper burial. And to make the situation even more difficult, time to give Jesus a proper burial had virtually run out. By the time Jesus and the two men beside Him had died, it was getting late. The bodies must be quickly buried, before dark, when the Sabbath began (see [Luke 23:54](javascript:%7b%7d)). Every indication was that the body of our Lord would be hastily buried in “boot hill.”

Looking back on this great moment in history, we know something else, something which the disciples did not realize at the time: the Old Testament had prophesied that the Messiah would be buried in a rich man’s tomb: “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” ([Isaiah 53:9](javascript:%7b%7d), NIV). Somehow, the Messiah would be put to death as a criminal ([Isaiah 53:3-4](javascript:%7b%7d)), with criminals (53:9), and yet He was also to be buried with the rich (53:9). How could all these things possibly take place at the same time?

In spite of the difficulties, Jesus was crucified as a criminal, with criminals. And in our text, we shall see that after His death He was given a rich man’s burial. We might even say that Jesus was given a burial “fit for a king.” How did all of this come about? What caused this amazing turn of events? Our text, complimented by the parallel accounts of the Synoptic Gospels, gives us the answer.

Before we concentrate on John’s account of the burial and resurrection of our Lord, allow me to call your attention to the contribution of the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew’s Gospel has some especially important information, which enhances our study in John. Matthew informs us of the request the Jewish religious leaders made of Pilate after the death and burial of Jesus. They remembered that Jesus claimed He would rise from the dead after three days:

39 But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet [Jonah. 40](javascript:%7b%7d) For just as Jonah was *in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights*, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights” ([Matthew 12:39-40](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 2:19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Even though the disciples had forgotten our Lord’s words about His resurrection, the Jewish religious leaders had not:

62 The next day (which is after the day of preparation) the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled before Pilate 63 and said, “Sir, we remember that while that deceiver was still alive he said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 So give orders to secure the tomb until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may come and steal his body and say to the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” 65 Pilate said to them, “Take a guard of soldiers. Go and make it as secure as you can.” 66 So they went with the soldiers of the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone ([Matthew 27:62-66](javascript:%7b%7d)).[190](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209#P5471_2174671)

In my mind’s eye, I can see the smug look of satisfaction on the faces of those who had brought about the death of our Lord. What could be more perfect? The body of Jesus was in a chamber hewn out of rock, with a very large stone sealing the entrance to the tomb. Once the stone was “sealed,” no one would dare to try to steal the body of Jesus, to make it look as if He had been raised from the dead in fulfillment of His own prophecies. And to be doubly sure, guards were posted at the tomb so that no one could gain access to the body of Jesus. These guards would terrify anyone who dared to attempt to gain entrance to the tomb.

Matthew’s account shows how useless these efforts were to “contain” the Son of God:

2 And there was a severe earthquake, for[191](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209#P5475_2175708) an angel of the Lord descending from heaven came and rolled back the stone, and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were shaken and became like dead men because they were so afraid of him ([Matthew 28:2-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Did the Jewish religious leaders hope to strike terror into the hearts of our Lord’s disciples to prevent them from attempting to steal the body of Jesus from that tomb? It was not the disciples they were opposing; it was God. The guards were no match for the angels, and a sealed stone was no match for an earthquake. In an instant, every barrier to that tomb was removed. And to think that the women had wasted their time worrying about how they would remove that stone (see [Mark 16:3](javascript:%7b%7d))! It was the Roman guards who were “all shook up” by the earthquake. They were petrified with fear at the sight of the angel of the Lord.

I don’t think you need to be reminded of this, but that stone was not removed so that Jesus could get out of the tomb (see [John 20:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). The stone was removed to make it completely clear to those outside that Jesus was not inside—that He had been raised from the dead, just as He had said.

Matthew supplies us with some other valuable information. He alone informs us that Joseph of Arimathea was a “**rich man**” (27:57). He also is the one who tells us that the tomb in which our Lord is buried is Joseph’s own new tomb, which has been hewn out of solid stone (27:60).

The Synoptic Gospels portray Joseph of Arimathea in a favorable light. He is said to be a “**disciple**” of our Lord ([Matthew 27:57](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [John 19:38](javascript:%7b%7d)), who was looking for the kingdom of God ([Mark 15:43](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 23:51](javascript:%7b%7d)). He was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin ([Mark 15:43](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 23:50](javascript:%7b%7d)), but he opposed their plans to put Jesus to death ([Luke 23:51](javascript:%7b%7d)). All the Gospels identify him as the one who went to Pilate, requesting the body of Jesus:

43 Joseph of Arimathea, a highly regarded member of the council, who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate was surprised that he was already dead. He called the centurion and asked him if he had been dead for a long time. 45 When Pilate was informed by the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph ([Mark 15:43-45](javascript:%7b%7d)).

From what we are told in John’s Gospel, I am not so sure that I am willing to accept the translation in verse 43, which would indicate that Joseph “**boldly**” approached Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. I doubt that anyone would boldly approach Pilate on such an occasion. For one thing, Joseph was a “secret disciple” of Jesus. For him to identify himself with Jesus at this point did take courage, but I don’t think that his courage was reflected by a “boldness” in his approach to Pilate. Pilate may have had just about enough from the Jews for one day, especially when it came to Jesus. He was far from happy over the way the religious leaders had forced his hand in bringing about the crucifixion of Jesus. I think that these translations more accurately reflect the sense of Mark’s words:

Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus ([Mark 15:43](javascript:%7b%7d), NAB).

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus ([Mark 15:43](javascript:%7b%7d), NKJV).

It was a courageous thing that Joseph of Arimathea did, going before Pilate and requesting the body of Jesus. But I don’t think that it was something he did “**boldly**.” I think that he worked up the courage to request an audience with Pilate and then made his request, but not with the arrogance and smugness with which the Jewish religious leaders had dealt with him. His was a humble request, but a reasonable one. Unlike the crucifixion of our Lord, it does not appear to be something that Pilate begrudgingly granted. Indeed, if he felt guilty over condemning an innocent man, he may have felt good that Jesus (this “**righteous man**,” as Pilate’s own wife had referred to Him—[Matthew 27:19](javascript:%7b%7d)) was given an honorable burial. And if the other religious leaders happened not to like it, so much the better.

The Synoptic Gospels all call attention to the women who were present at the cross, and then followed those who buried Jesus to note the place where the body of Jesus was laid to rest ([Matthew 27:61](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 15:47](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 23:54-56](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was their intention to come back after the Sabbath and do a more thorough job of preparing the Lord’s body for burial.

### The Burial of Jesus (19:38-42)

38 After this Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus (but secretly, because he feared the Jewish authorities), asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he went and took away the body. 39 Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus earlier at night, went with Joseph too, carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing seventy-five pounds. 40 So they took Jesus’ body and wrapped it, with the aromatic spices, in strips of linen cloth according to Jewish burial customs. 41 Now at the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden was a new tomb where no one had yet been buried. 42 So because it was the Jewish day of preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

The trial(s), execution, death, and burial of our Lord were all hurried. The Jews did not wish to arrest and do away with Jesus during the Passover, but their hand was forced and they had to act quickly. The trial of Jesus had been prolonged (with Jesus being sent to Herod), and because Passover was soon to commence, it was necessary to break the legs of the two men beside Jesus to speed up their deaths. Pilate was surprised to learn that Jesus had already died ([Mark 15:44](javascript:%7b%7d)). The bodies had to be taken down and buried before nightfall. It was this “rush” which seemed, at first, to be an obstacle to a proper burial for our Lord, but it actually played an important part in bringing about our Lord’s “royal” burial.

John’s account makes a point of indicating that the Lord’s burial was a hurried one (19:42). Time was short, and no one who was close to Jesus seems to be able to secure the body of Jesus. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, two men emerge: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Nicodemus is never mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels, and Joseph of Arimathea is referred to only after the death of Jesus. While the Synoptics speak very favorably of Joseph, John is not quite as complimentary in his description of this man. John does not mention that Joseph was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin or that he opposed their efforts to kill Jesus. John describes Joseph only as a disciple who kept his allegiance to Jesus a secret, for fear of the Jews.

It looks as though John wants us to view Joseph as a pretty unlikely candidate to bring about what the Scriptures require, so far as our Lord’s burial is concerned. Added to this is the fact that Nicodemus is just as unlikely. Who can pull off what is required here, and in such a short period of time? From what I know of Nicodemus, and from what little I know of Joseph of Arimathea, these two men would not be at the top of my “most likely to be helpful” list.

So far as their loyalty to our Lord in the past is concerned, these two men are not impressive. But so far as their ability to accomplish the task (of burying Jesus in a kingly fashion), they are well qualified. This is not the time for a family member or a close follower of Jesus to request His body for burial. But Joseph of Arimathea is a member of the Sanhedrin and a very wealthy man. He offers Pilate the opportunity to rid himself of the responsibility for burying the body of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea is not alone in his efforts to obtain the body of Jesus and to give Him a proper burial. He is working with Nicodemus, another very prominent member of the Sanhedrin. These two men must have begun their association as colleagues on the Council of the Sanhedrin. When Nicodemus objected to the way the Council was proposing to deal with Jesus, Joseph must have taken notice. They may have talked privately and discovered that they were of like mind regarding Jesus. They may have attempted to support each other as they objected to the course the Sanhedrin seemed bent on taking. While Jesus was being crucified, they seem to have mutually agreed upon a plan to obtain His body in order to give Him a proper burial.

One cannot discern from the Gospels just when Joseph and Nicodemus agreed to work together, or when they commenced their efforts to prepare for the burial of Jesus. It may be that Joseph agreed to ask Pilate for permission to remove and bury the Lord’s body. At the same time, Nicodemus could have begun to acquire the necessary spices and material to prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Working together, these two men are able to accomplish something that none of our Lord’s family or His eleven disciples could achieve—they are able to gain access to Pilate and to gain possession of the body of Jesus.

In his account of the burial of Jesus, John gives us some very important details. He not only mentions Joseph of Arimathea, he tells us about Nicodemus. It is only from John’s Gospel that we even know of Nicodemus. No other Gospel mentions this fellow. Nicodemus is the same man who “**came to Jesus by night**,” as we read in [John 3:1-2](javascript:%7b%7d), and as he reminds us in 19:39. It is John’s mention of Nicodemus in chapter 7 of his Gospel that now catches my attention. You will remember that Jesus had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-10ff.). The Pharisees and chief priests decided it was time to arrest Jesus, so they sent the temple police to bring Jesus to them (7:32). When these men returned empty-handed, the Pharisees were incensed. The officers explained that they had never heard anyone speak as Jesus did (7:45-49).

Nicodemus then sought to speak a word (cautiously, it would seem) on Jesus’ behalf. He did not openly defend Jesus and His teachings, but he did question his fellow Pharisees about the legality of the method by which they proposed to deal with Him.

50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before and who was one of the rulers, said, 51 “Our law doesn’t condemn a man unless it first hears from him and learns what he is doing, does it?” 52 They replied, “You aren’t from Galilee too, are you? Investigate carefully and you will see that no prophet comes from Galilee!” ([John 7:50-52](javascript:%7b%7d))

In today’s legal terminology, Nicodemus is objecting that Jesus is not being given “due process of the law.” Jewish law required that charges against Jesus first be substantiated and, after this, that Jesus be given the chance to speak in His own defense. This had not been done, Nicodemus pointed out, and no one seemed to be heading in the direction of making things right. His peers were not at all gentle in the way they responded to his objections. Here was a highly respected teacher of the law, a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, and yet he was dealt with as though he were an incoming freshman. “**You are not a Galilean, too, are you?**” This was no compliment. It was like saying, “How could you be so ignorant?” And then, adding insult to injury, they challenged Nicodemus to look into this subject more carefully, implying that his grasp of the issues was shallow and superficial.

I must admit that I had nearly written Nicodemus off in chapter 3, but after reading about Nicodemus in chapter 7, I had totally given up on this man. I assumed that he just sort of wilted under the criticism of his peers, never to be heard from again. I now must rethink my hasty conclusion. I believe that Nicodemus rose to the challenge. I think that he did investigate more thoroughly and found that the Scriptures did point to Jesus as the Messiah. Furthermore, I think that as Nicodemus became more convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he spoke out more openly, and at least one other person on the Council agreed with him—Joseph of Arimathea. I am willing to go even farther. I wonder if it was not because of the objections of Nicodemus (and perhaps Joseph as well) that the Sanhedrin felt compelled to modify the way they sought to deal with Jesus, so that they at least appeared to be following Jewish law. Is this why Jesus was first brought before Annas, and then Caiaphas, and then finally brought before the whole Council? Is this why the assistance of Rome was requested? If this is the case, then Nicodemus contributed greatly to the process which led to our Lord’s crucifixion rather than to death by stoning, as the Jews seemed to prefer. It would also seem that the Sanhedrin voted to hand Jesus over to Pilate, but not without hearing objections from both Joseph and Nicodemus (if, indeed, they were both present). This act of requesting the body of Jesus and giving Him a proper burial may have been a public protest on the part of these two members of the Sanhedrin. All of this would mean that Joseph and Nicodemus were not as passive in their disagreement with their peers on the Sanhedrin as I had assumed.

It is John’s Gospel alone that informs us of these two men’s lavish use of spices in their preparation of Jesus’ body for burial (19:39-40). From the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels, we might have assumed that our Lord’s body was not even properly prepared for burial. We read there only that the body of Jesus was “**wrapped in a clean linen cloth**” ([Matthew 27:59](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Mark 15:46](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 23:53](javascript:%7b%7d)). We read also in the Synoptics of the intent of the women to return to the tomb and to prepare the Lord’s body with spices ([Mark 16:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 23:55-56; 24:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was almost as though the women were unaware of the fact that nearly 75 pounds of spices had been used by Joseph and Nicodemus. Or, perhaps they just felt they could not trust these men to do it right, and they would have to come back later to improve on the work of these two men.

The thing that strikes me in John’s account is that no mention is made of the fact that the tomb in which Jesus was laid was the one that Joseph had custom-built for himself ([Matthew 27:60](javascript:%7b%7d)). From a reading of John’s account, one would assume they were carrying the Lord’s body away from the cross and through a garden (only John mentions the garden). It was getting late, and they had no time to lose. There was an available tomb nearby, in the garden, and they made use of it. It appears the reason for using this tomb was not because it belonged to Joseph, but because it was close, and it seemed expedient to use it because they had run out of time.

This makes sense to me. The question which the reader must ask is, “How was it possible for Jesus to be given a rich man’s burial, when none of His eleven disciples were present, and when the time was so short?” Putting together all of the data from the four Gospels, I would conclude that something like this occurred. Joseph and Nicodemus had opposed the Sanhedrin’s plan to kill Jesus. At some time during the crucifixion process, they determined to acquire the body of Jesus to give Him a proper burial. Joseph went to Pilate and obtained the body while Nicodemus acquired the necessary spices and cloth. They both went to the cross, took down the Lord’s body, and wrapped it in a clean linen sheet. They were carrying the body through the garden, noting the lateness of the hour, and wondering what they should do. Joseph may have looked up and seen the freshly-hewn tomb which he had acquired for his own burial (and perhaps for the use of his family as well). Realizing they were out of time, Joseph told Nicodemus that they would stop right here and bury the body of Jesus in his own tomb. There was no time to do anything else.

I am assuming here that Joseph had intended from the beginning to give Jesus a proper burial, but that he had not necessarily planned to bury Jesus in his own tomb. As nightfall approached, Joseph realized that he was in trouble, time-wise. He looked about, and his eyes fixed on his own personal burial place. There was really no other choice, given the time, and so this is the place where they chose to lay the body of Jesus. John tells the story in such a way that the reader sees, once again, the sovereign hand of God, orchestrating these events so that they fulfill the prophecies of old. Jesus was put to death with criminals, but in the final analysis, He was buried with the rich. The One who seemed destined to be buried on “boot hill” is now buried on “snob hill.” And in so doing, prophecy is once again fulfilled.

Note, incidentally, that John does not tell us every time that a prophecy is fulfilled. Three times in his account of our Lord’s death he indicates that the details of Jesus’ death fulfilled prophecy. But here he does not tell us that the Scriptures were fulfilled, even though they were. I believe John expects his readers to figure some things out for themselves. A good teacher does not give the student the answer to every question. A good teacher teaches the student how to find the answers to his questions. John is a good teacher.

### The Resurrection (20:1-9)

1 Now very early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw the stone had been moved away from the opening. 2 So she went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him!” 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out to go to the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 Bending over, he saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who had been following him, arrived and went right into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, 7 and the face cloth, that had been around Jesus’ head, not lying with the strips of linen cloth but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first came in, and he saw and believed. 9 (For they did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.)

In this text, we come upon another unlikely player in the drama of our Lord’s burial and resurrection. Mary Magdalene is mentioned at this point in all the Gospel accounts. Only Luke refers to Mary Magdalene earlier in the life of Christ:

1 Sometime afterward he went on through towns and villages, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and disabilities: Mary (called Magdalene), from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Cuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their own resources ([Luke 8:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This is not a very flattering introduction, is it? Mary Magdalene is the woman from whom Jesus had earlier cast out seven demons. From that point in time, she seems to have faithfully followed Jesus, along with the other women named. These women supported Jesus and His disciples out of their own means.

All the Gospels honor Mary Magdalene by naming her as the first woman to come to the tomb to anoint the body of her Lord. Matthew also mentions the “**other Mary**” (27:61), Mark refers to “**Mary the mother of Joses**” (15:47), and “**Mary, the mother of James and Salome**” (16:1). Luke includes “**Joanna**” and “**other women**” (24:10). These women came prepared to anoint the dead body of Jesus. They did not come with the intention of becoming witnesses to His resurrection, but that is precisely what happened.

John chooses to focus only on Mary Magdalene. This woman is the first one to arrive at the empty tomb. She came to the tomb while it was “**still dark**” (20:1), and when she got close enough she saw that the stone had been removed. That was all the information she needed. She jumped to the wrong conclusion. She was right, of course, in assuming that the body of her Lord was gone. She was wrong to conclude that someone (“**they**”) had taken the Lord’s body from the tomb. Exactly who “**they**” are is not indicated. She may have been thinking in terms of thieves, but more likely she was thinking of the Romans, or perhaps the Jewish religious leaders, or even the “**gardener**.” No matter; she was wrong.

Mary first ran to where Peter was and then to where John (and Mary, the mother of our Lord) was staying.[192](https://bible.org/seriespage/45-burial-and-resurrection-jesus-christ-john-1938-209#P5514_2197072) She repeated the conclusion she had reached. The body of Jesus had been taken, and she had no idea where His body could be found. Her highest ambition was to locate the Lord’s body, so that she could see to it that He was properly buried. Is this not an illustration of a marvelous biblical truth?

6 Now we do speak wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are perishing. 7 Instead we speak the wisdom of God, hidden in a mystery, that God determined before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it. If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But just as it is written, “***Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him***” ([1 Corinthians 2:6-9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

20 Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think, 21 to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen ([Ephesians 3:20-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Mary was to experience a far greater blessing than she could have imagined at this dark moment in her life, no doubt the darkest she had ever known. She had been delivered from bondage to Satan. She had been privileged to follow her Lord and to help support Him and His ministry. She had placed all her faith and hope in Him, and yet He had been put to death as a criminal. That was bad enough, but now she thought that she would not even be able to honor His memory by properly anointing His body for burial. It couldn’t get any worse—or so she thought. But the truth was that it could not get much better. How slow we are to see God’s richest blessings in the things which appear to be great adversity!

Peter may have followed Mary to the home of John, where Mary repeated her story. The two men must then have alternately walked and run to the tomb to check out the situation. John seems to have outrun Peter. Was this because he was younger, or might it be because Peter had already run some distance from his house to John’s home? We don’t know, and it doesn’t really matter. The entrance to the tomb would not be any bigger than necessary. After all, this tomb was hewn out of solid rock. A smaller entrance would make it easier to seal the tomb, and it was not as if people routinely entered the place. John therefore had to stoop to look into the tomb. Some have wondered why he was so slow to enter in and investigate more thoroughly. I think John was too good a Jew to defile himself by rushing into a tomb. Peter, on the other hand, was not as scrupulous. When he arrived, he seems to have entered the tomb without giving it a thought. Peter came out scratching his head, so to speak. It was a mystery to him, one that he couldn’t reason out. The body of Jesus was definitely gone, but the scene inside the tomb was not what one would expect if the grave had been robbed. And where were the guards? Who had moved the stone? What was going on? Peter simply didn’t know (see [Luke 24:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

John’s curiosity now overcomes his scruples about entering the tomb. He had earlier noted the strips of linen cloth. They may not have been in the form of a cocoon, but neither were they the unraveled mess one would expect after grave robbers had done their work. Entering into the tomb and looking more closely, John could now see the whole scene. In addition to the linen strips, he could see the face cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. It was laying separately, neatly placed by itself. John pondered as he looked, and believed (20:8).

It is incredible that some would conclude from this statement that John “believed that Mary was right, and that Jesus’ body was gone.” That would be to state the obvious. It seems to me what John wants us to grasp is that while Peter was still pondering the evidence, John had reached his conclusion. John had come to believe that Jesus really had somehow risen from the dead. John “**saw**” and he “**believed**.”

The parenthetical comment in verse 9 is further confirmation of this. Neither Mary Magdalene, nor Peter, nor John understood at this point that it was prophesied that their Lord would rise from the dead. Of course Jesus had said it, and Old Testament prophecies had foretold it as well. But like many of the things Jesus had spoken to His disciples, they simply did not remember or comprehend what He meant.

Why does John tell us this here and now? I think the reason is very simple, and very important. The disciples were not predisposed to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. It was not something which Jesus suggested to them, so that when His body was found to be missing, they would jump to the conclusion that He had truly been resurrected. John is telling us that he came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus before he even realized that he was supposed to do so.

There is a country and western song that goes something like this: “I was (fond of) country (music), when country wasn’t cool.” John is telling us here that he became a believer in the resurrection of Jesus before it was understood to be a necessary part of the Christian faith (see [Romans 10:9](javascript:%7b%7d)). John believed Jesus had risen from the dead, by the sheer force of the evidence, not because he thought he was supposed to. What an incredible event this must have been. There, in the darkness of that tomb, John “saw the light.”

### Conclusion

There are a number of things which catch my attention in our text. The first is that there is a clear change of players. The regular team—the eleven disciples—have been called off the field, and a number of substitutions have been made (to speak in sports terms). Among these are Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and Mary Magdalene. Who would have expected such folks to play a key role in the burial and resurrection of our Lord?

There is a lesson to be learned here: *God provides*. I am reminded of the story of Abraham, when he took his son Isaac up Mount Moriah to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Isaac asked his father where the animal to be sacrificed was, and Abraham assured him that the Lord would provide the sacrifice. And God did provide. Our text is another demonstration of God’s faithful provision of all that He has purposed and promised. He provided a rich man’s burial for Jesus, who should have been buried on “boot hill.” He provided a place near the cross, within a very narrow window of time. He provided, not through the expected means, but through a man whose name (Joseph of Arimathea) we have never seen before in the Gospels, and through another (Nicodemus) whom we would never have expected to help bury the body of our Lord. The women who followed Jesus wanted to be able to anoint the body of our Lord, but the barriers to entering the tomb seemed insurmountable. A large stone covered the tomb; it had been sealed by Rome, and soldiers were there guarding the tomb to make certain it was undisturbed. God provided. Neither the stone, the seal, nor the soldiers kept Jesus in the tomb—or the disciples out.

God always provides for the fulfillment of His promises. He does so by the instruments of His choosing. He does so in His time. The human instruments were those we would not have chosen, people we would never even have considered. It never occurred to me that, among the members of the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to die, there would be some who believed in Jesus, who opposed the plan of their peers, who managed to obtain the body of Jesus and give it a rich man’s burial. God was at work in the hearts of these two men—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus—and at just the right time, He used them for His glory, and their good.

How often we are like the eleven disciples of our Lord, so frightened and lacking in faith that we do nothing, or like the women in our text who are preoccupied with fears about how we can move a stone. How foolish these fears seem to us now, and yet is it not our own fears that keep us from attempting what our Lord has commanded us to do?

As I read through this text describing our Lord’s burial and resurrection, I am impressed with how unlikely it all seemed at the time. It looked impossible to secure the Lord’s body and to properly prepare it for burial before nightfall. It seemed impossible to find a burial place. There seemed to be no one who would be able to secure the release of our Lord’s body. And once the body of our Lord was discovered to be missing, there seemed to be no way to recover it. Much of what occurred in our text was contrary to the expectations and desires of those who were present. It does not seem as though Joseph really intended to have Jesus buried in his burial place, but as time ran out, it became the only thing he could do. For John, at least, there is an unavoidable conclusion: *God raised Jesus from the dead*. All these things were orchestrated by God, at just the right time, and in just the right way, so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled.

This was not a conclusion John felt he was obliged to reach, based upon our Lord’s prophecies of His resurrection. John had completely forgotten about these prophecies. He believed in the resurrection of Jesus because there was no other explanation. The resurrection is a foundational truth for the Christian. *Saving faith is resurrection faith.* Christians do not believe in the resurrection simply because they feel obliged to do so; they believe in the resurrection because it is true, and there is no other reasonable explanation for the events which we find described in our text, or in the rest of the Bible.

By bringing about the fulfillment of prophecy in the way He did, God gave compelling proof of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The disciples and followers of Jesus believed in the resurrection because the evidence was compelling. That’s the way God wanted it to be. That’s the way God caused it to work out. He arranged for the body of Jesus to be placed in a hewn tomb, the entrance of which was covered by a great stone, sealed with the Roman seal, and guarded by Roman soldiers. The open and empty tomb was compelling proof that the claim of our Lord to be the Messiah, the King of the Jews, was true.

As I think of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, I am reminded that these were men of position and power, and at least Joseph was a man of wealth. I would never have imagined God would have used them to provide for our Lord’s royal burial, but this is precisely who He used. While it is true that God uses the weak and foolish things of this world, it is also true that He sometimes uses the rich and the powerful, as He does here in our text. God always uses just the right instrument to accomplish His purposes.

As I have reflected on this passage, I have come to realize that it describes one of the great turning points of all time. Our Lord is put to death, and His body is placed in a tomb, only to be raised to new life on the third day. This event turned the disciples’ sorrow to joy, their weakness to strength, their fears to boldness and courage. It was the turning point for men and women like Joseph, and Nicodemus, and Mary Magdalene, not to mention Peter and John and the other disciples.

It is by His death, burial, and resurrection that Jesus Christ saves us from our sins, and from the penalty of death. Have you trusted in Him, in His death on the cross of Calvary for your sins, and His resurrection from the dead, so that you may have eternal life? Let me invite you to do so this very hour. May the truth of this text be a turning point in your life, to His glory and to your eternal good.

188 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 629.

189 From [Luke 23:49](javascript:%7b%7d), it would appear that some or all of Jesus’ disciples watched the crucifixion from a distance, with the exception of John, who stood near our Lord, along with some of the women who followed Him ([John 19:26-27](javascript:%7b%7d)).

190 Ironically, the religious leaders must have been pleased to learn that Jesus’ body had been secured by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and placed in a grave hewn out of stone, with a large stone sealing the entrance. This was the perfect place to “secure” the body of our Lord.

191 I am impressed by the term “**for**” here, and am tempted to say that the angel somehow employed the earthquake to move the stone. I know that we might be inclined to think that the angel put his shoulder to the stone and moved it, but it almost seems that he simply summoned an earthquake, the rolling motion of which would make short work of this massive stone. It may be worth noting that the word John uses (rendered “**moved away**” in [John 20:1](javascript:%7b%7d)) is not the normal word for rolling (as the Synoptic Gospels describe it), but a word which can mean “lifted” or “removed,” among other things. We think in terms of “rolling” a great stone because of its mass and our human weakness. God is able to dispose of such things with the greatest of ease. It seems that the earthquake was the means of moving this great stone, and the angel appears to have dispatched it.

192 In the Greek text, there is a repetition of the word “**to**” in [John 20:2](javascript:%7b%7d): “**So she went running *to* Simon Peter and *to* the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, …**” This implies that Peter and John were staying at two different places.

# Supposing Him to be the Gardener

A Sermon[(No. 1699)](http://archive.spurgeon.org/index/c29.php)  
Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, December 31st, 1882, by  
C. H. SPURGEON,

"Supposing him to be the gardener."—John 20:15.

WAS sitting about a fortnight ago in a very lovely garden, in the midst of all kinds of flowers which were blooming in delightful abundance all around. Screening myself from the heat of the sun under the overhanging boughs of an olive, I cast my eyes upon palms and bananas, roses and camellias, oranges and aloes, lavender and heliotrope. The garden was full of color and beauty, perfume and fruitfulness. Surely the gardener, Whoever he might be, who had framed, and fashioned, and kept in order that lovely spot, deserved great commendation. So I thought, and then it came to me to meditate upon the church of God as a garden, and to suppose the Lord Jesus to be the gardener, and then to think of what would most assuredly happen if it were so. "Supposing him to be the gardener," my mind conceived of a paradise where all sweet things flourish and all evil things are rooted up. If an ordinary worker had produced such beauty as I then saw and enjoyed on earth, what bounty and glory must surely be brought forth "supposing *him* to be the gardener"! You know the "him" to whom we refer, the ever-blessed Son or God, whom Mary Magdalene in our text mistook for the gardener. We will for once follow a saint in her mistaken track; and yet we shall find ourselves going in a right way. She was mistaken when she fell into "supposing him to be the gardener"; but if we are under his Spirit's teaching we shall not make a mistake if now we indulge ourselves in a quiet meditation upon our ever-blessed Lord, "supposing him to be the gardener."  
  
It is not an unnatural supposition, surely; for if we may truly sing

"We are a garden walled around,  
Chosen and made peculiar ground,"

# that enclosure needs a gardener. Are we not all the plants of his right hand planting? Do we not all need watering and tending by his constant and gracious care? He says, "I am the true vine: my Father is the husbandman," and that is one view of it; but we may also sing, "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine"—that is to say, he acted as gardener to it. Thus has Isaiah taught us to sing a song of the Well-beloved touching his vineyard. We read of our Lord just now under these terms—"Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice." To what purpose does he dwell in the vineyards but that he may see how the vines flourish and care for all the plants? The image, I say, is so far from being unnatural that it is most pregnant with suggestions and full of useful teaching. We are not going against the harmonies of nature when we are "supposing him to be the gardener." Neither is the figure unscriptural; for in one of his own parables our Lord makes himself to be the dresser of the vineyard. We read just now that parable so full of warning. When the "certain man" came in and saw the fig tree that it brought forth no fruit, he said unto the dresser of his vineyard, "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" Who was it that intervened between that profitless tree and the axe but our great Intercessor and Interposer? He it is who continually comes forward with "Let it alone this year also till I shall dig about it and dung it." In this case he himself takes upon himself the character of the vine-dresser, and we are not wrong in "supposing him to be the gardener." If we would be supported by a type, our Lord takes the name of "the Second Adam," and the first Adam was a gardener. Moses tells us that the Lord God placed the man in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. Man in his best estate was not to live in this world in a paradise of indolent luxury, but in a garden of recompensed toil. Behold, the church is Christ's Eden, watered by the river of life, and so fertilized that all manner of fruits are brought forth unto God; and he, our second Adam, walks in this spiritual Eden to dress it and to keep it; and so by a type we see that we are right in "supposing him to be the gardener." Thus also Solomon thought of him when he described the royal Bridegroom as going down with his spouse to the garden when the flowers appeared on the earth and the fig tree had put forth her green figs; he went out with his beloved for the reservation of the gardens, saying, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes." Neither nature, nor Scripture, nor type, nor song forbids us to think of our adorable Lord Jesus as one that careth for the flowers and fruits of his church. We err not when we speak of him, "supposing him to be the gardener." And so I sat me still, and indulged the suggested line of thought, which I now repeat in your hearing, hoping that I may open many roads of meditation for your hearts also. I shall not attempt to think out such a subject thoroughly, but only to indicate in which direction you may look for a vein of precious ore. I. "Supposing him to be the gardener," we have here THE KEY TO MANY WONDERS in the garden of his church. The first wonder is *that there should be a church at all in the world;* that there should be a garden blooming in the midst of this sterile waste. Upon a hard and flinty rock the Lord has made the Eden of his church to grow. How came it to be—here an oasis of life in a desert of death? how came faith in the midst of unbelief, and hope where all is servile fear, and love where hate abounds? "Ye are of God, little children, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." Whence this being "of God" where all beside is fast shut up in the devil? How came there to be a people for God, separated, and sanctified, and consecrated, and ordained to bring forth fruit unto his name? Assuredly it could not have been so at all if the doing of it had been left to man. We understand its existence, "supposing him to be the gardener," but nothing else can account for it. He can cause the fir tree to flourish instead of the thorn, and the myrtle instead of the briar; but no one else can accomplish such a change. The garden in which I sat was made on the bare face of the rock, and almost all the earth of which its terraces were composed had been brought up there, from the shore below, by hard labor, and so upon the rock a soil had been created. It was not by its own nature that the garden was found in such a place; but by skill and labor it had been formed: even so the church of God has had to be constructed by the Lord Jesus, who is the author as well as the perfecter of his garden. Painfully, with wounded hands, has he built each terrace, and fashioned each bed, and planted each plant. All the flowers have had to be watered with his bloody sweat, and watched by his tearful eyes the nail-prints in his hands, and the wound in his side are the tokens of what it cost him to make a new Paradise. He has given his life for the life of every plant that is in the garden, and not one of them had been there on any other theory than "supposing him to be the gardener." Besides, there is another wonder. *How comes the church of God to flourish in such a clime?* This present evil world is very uncongenial to the growth of grace, and the church is not able by herself alone to resist the evil influences which surround her. The church contains within itself elements which tend to its own disorder and destruction if left alone; even as the garden has present in its soil all the germs of a tangled thicket of weeds. The best church that ever Christ had on earth would within a few years apostatise from the truth if deserted by the Spirit of God. The world never helps the church; it is all in arms against it; there is nothing in the world's air or soil that can fertilise the church even to the least degree. How is it, then, that notwithstanding all this, the church is a fair garden unto God, and there are sweet spices grown in its beds, and lovely flowers are gathered by the Divine hand from its borders? The continuance and prosperity of the church can only be accounted for by "supposing him to be the gardener." Almighty strength is put to the otherwise impossible work of sustaining a holy people among men; almighty wisdom exercises itself upon this otherwise insuperable difficulty. Hear ye the word of the Lord, and learn hence the reason for the growth of his church below. "I, the Lord, do keep it: I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." That is the reason for the existence of a spiritual people still in the midst of a godless and perverse generation. This is the reason for an election of grace in the midst of surrounding vice, and worldliness, and unbelief. "Supposing him to be the gardener," I can see why there should be fruitfulness, and beauty, and sweetness even in the center of the wilderness of sin. Another mystery is also cleared up by this supposition. The wonder is *that ever you and I should have been placed among the plants of the Lord.* Why are we allowed to grow in the garden of his grace? Why me, Lord? Why me? How is it that we have been kept there, and borne with in our barrenness, when he might long ago have said, "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" Who else would have borne with such waywardness as ours? Who could have manifested such infinite patience? Who could have tended us with such care, and when the care was so ill-rewarded who would have renewed it so long from day to day, and persisted in designs of boundless love? Who could have done more for his vineyard? who could or would have done so much? An mere man would have repented of his good intent, provoked by our ingratitude. None but God could have had patience with some of us! That we have not long ago been slipped off as fruitless branches of the vine; that we are left still upon the stem, in the hope that we may ultimately bring forth fruit, is a great marvel. I know not how it is that we have been spared, except upon this ground—"supposing him to be the gardener"—for Jesus is all gentleness and grace, so slow with his knife, so tardy with his axe, so hopeful if we do but show a bud or two, or, perchance, yield a little sour berry—so hopeful, I say, that these may be hopeful prognostics of something better by-and-by. Infinite patience! Immeasurable longsuffering! where are ye to be found save in the breast of the Well-beloved? Surely the hoe has spared many of us simply and only because he who is meek and lowly in heart is the gardener. Dear friends, there is one mercy with regard to this church which I have often had to thank God for, namely, *that evils should have been shut out for so long a time.* During the period in which we have been together as pastor and people, and that is now some twenty-nine years, we have enjoyed uninterrupted prosperity, going from strength to strength in the work of the Lord. Alas! we have seen many other churches that were quite as hopeful as our own rent with strife, brought low by declension, or overthrown by heresy. I hope we have not been apt to judge their faults severely; but we must be thankful for our own deliverance from the evils which have afflicted them. I do not know how it is that we have been kept together in love, helped to abound in labor, and enabled to be firm in the faith, unless it be that special grace has watched over us. We are full of faults; we have nothing to boast of; and yet no church has been more divinely favored: I wonder that the blessing should have lasted so long, and I cannot make it out except when I fall into "supposing *him* to be the gardener." I cannot trace our prosperity to the pastor, certainly; nor even to my beloved friends the elders and deacons, nor even to the best of you with your fervent love and holy zeal. I think it must be that Jesus has been the gardener, and he has shut the gate when I am afraid I have left it open; and he has driven out the wild boar of the wood just when he had entered to root up the weaker plants. He must have been about at nights to keep off the prowling thieves, and he must have been here, too, in the noontide heat to guard those of you who have prospered in worldly goods, from the glare of too bright a sun. Yes, *he* has been with us, blessed be his name! Hence all this peace, and unity, and enthusiasm. May we never grieve him so that he shall turn away from us; but rather let us entreat him, saying, "Abide with us. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, let this be one of the gardens in which thou dost deign to dwell until the day break and the shadows flea away." Thus our supposition is a key to many wonders. II. Let your imaginations run along with mine while I say that "supposing him to be the gardener" should be A SPUR TO MANY DUTIES. One of the duties of a Christian is *joy.* That is a blessed religion which among its precepts commands men to be happy. When joy becomes a duty, who would wish to neglect it? Surely it must help every little plant to drink in the sunlight when it is whispered among the flowers that Jesus is the gardener. "Oh," you say, "I am such a little plant; I do not grow well; I do not put forth so much leafage, nor are there so many flowers on me as on many round about me!" It is quite right that you should think little of yourself: perhaps to droop your head is a part of your beauty: many flowers had not been half so lovely if they had not practiced the art of hanging their heads. But supposing him to be the gardener," then he is as much a gardener to you as he is to the most lordly palm in the whole domain. In the Mentone garden right before me grew the orange and the aloe, and others of the finer and more noticeable plants; but on a wall to my left grew common wallflowers and saxifrages, and tiny herbs such as we find on our own rocky places. Now, the gardener had cared for all of these, little as well as great; in fact, there were hundreds of specimens of the most insignificant growths all duly labelled and described. The smallest saxifrage could say, "He is my gardener just as surely as he is the gardener of the Gloire de Dijon or Mar�chal Neil." Oh feeble child of God, the Lord taketh care of you! Your heavenly Father feedeth ravens, and guides the flight of sparrows: should he not much more care for you, oh ye of little faith? Oh little plants, you will grow rightly enough. Perhaps you are growing downward just now rather than upward. Remember that there are plants of which we value the underground root much more than we do the hull above ground. Perhaps it is not yours to grow very fast; you may be a slow-growing shrub by nature, and you would not be healthy if you were to run to wood. Anyhow, be this your joy, you are in the garden of the Lord, and, "supposing him to be the gardener," he will make the best of you. You cannot be in better hands. Another duty is that of *valuing the Lord's presence, and praying for it.* We ought whenever the Sabbath morning dawns to pray our Well-beloved to come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits. What can we do without him? All day long our cry should go up to him, "O Lord, behold and visit this vine, and the vineyard which thy right hand has planted." We ought to agonize with him that he would come and manifest himself to us as he does not unto the world. For what is a garden if the gardener never comes near it? What is the difference between it and the wilderness if he to whom it belongs never lifts up spade or pruning-hook upon it? So that it is our necessity that we have Christ with us, "supposing him to be the gardener;" and it is our bliss that we have Christ walking between our beds and borders, watching every plant, training, tending, maturing all. "Supposing him to be the gardener," it is well, for from him is our fruit found. Divided from him we are nothing; only as he watches over us can we bring, forth fruit. Let us have done with confidence in man, let us forego all attempts to supply facts of his spiritual presence by routine or rant, ritualism or rowdyism; but let us pray our Lord to be ever present with us, and by that presence to make our garden grow. "Supposing him to be the gardener," there is another duty, and that is, let each one of us *yield himself up entirely to him.* A plant does not know how it ought to be treated; it knows not when it should be watered or when it should be kept dry: a fruit-tree is no judge of when it needs to be pruned, or digged, or dunged. The wit and wisdom of the garden lieth not in the flowers and shrubs, but in the gardener. Now, then, if you and I are here to-day with any self-will and carnal judgment about us, let us seek to lay it all aside that we may be absolutely at our Lord's disposal. You might not be willing to put yourself implicitly into the hand of any mere man (pity that you should); but, surely, thou plant of the Lord's right-hand planting, thou mayest put thyself without a question into his dear hand. " Supposing him to be the gardener," thou mayest well say, "I would neither have will, nor wish, nor wit, nor whim, nor way, but I would be as nothing in the gardener's hands, that he may be to me my wisdom and my all. Here, kind gardener, thy poor plant bows itself to thy hand; train me as thou wilt. Depend upon it, happiness lives next door to the spirit of complete acquiescence in the will of God, and it will be easy to exercise that perfect acquiescence when we suppose the Lord Jesus to be the gardener. If the Lord hath done it; what has a saint to say? Oh thou afflicted one, the Lord hath done it: wouldest thou have it otherwise? Nay, art thou not thankful that it is even so, because so is the will of him in whose hand thy life is, and whose are all thy ways? The duty of submission is very plain, "supposing him to be the gardener." One more duty I would mention, though others suggest themselves. "Supposing him to be the gardener," then *let us bring forth fruit to him.* I do not address a people this morning who feel no care as to whether they serve God or not. I believe that most of you do desire to glorify God; for being saved by grace, you feel a holy ambition to show forth his praises who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. You wish to bring others to Christ, because you yourselves have been brought to life and liberty in him. Now, let this be a stimulus to your fruitbearing, that Jesus is the gardener. Where you have brought forth a single cluster, bring, forth a hundred! "supposing him to be the gardener." If he is to have the honor of it, then labor to do that which will give him great renown. If our spiritual state were to be attributed to ourselves, or to our minister, or to some of our fellow Christians, we might not feel that we were tinder a great necessity to be fruitful; but if Jesus be the gardener, and is to bear the blame or the honor of what we produce, then let us use up every drop of sap and strain every fibre, that, to the utmost of which our manhood is capable, we may produce a fair reward for our Lord's travail. Under such tutorship and care we ought to become eminent scholars. Doth Christ train us? Oh let us never cause the world to think meanly of our Master. Students feel that their *alma mater* deserves great things of them, so they labor to make their university renowned. And so, since Jesus is tutor and university to us, let us feel that we are bound to reflect credit upon so great a teacher, upon so divine a name. I do not know how to put it, but surely we ought to do something worthy of such a Lord. Each little flower in the garden of the Lord should wear its, brightest hues, and poor forth its rarest perfume, because Jesus cares for it. The best of all possible good should be yielded by every plant in our Father's garden, supposing Jesus to the gardener. Thus much, then, on those two points—a key to many wonders, and a spur to many duties. III. Thirdly, I have found in this supposition A RELIEF FROM CRUSHING RESPONSIBILITY. One has a work given him of God to do, and if he does it rightly he cannot do it carelessly. The first thing when he wakes he asks, "How is the work prospering?" and the last thought at night is, "What can I do to fulfill my calling?" Sometimes the anxiety even troubles his dreams, and he sighs, "O Lord, send now prosperity!" How is the garden prospering which we are set to tend? Are we broken-hearted because, nothing appears to flourish? Is it a bad season? or is the soil lean and hungry? It is a very blessed relief to an excess of care if we can fall into the habit of "supposing him to be the gardener." If Jesus be the Master and Lord in all things it is not mine to keep all the church in order. I am not responsible for the growth of every Christian, nor for every backslider's errors, nor for every professor's faults of life. This burden must not lie on me so that I shall be crushed thereby. "Supposing him to be the gardener," then, the church enjoys a better oversight than mine; better care is taken of the garden than could be taken by the most vigilant watchers, even though by night the frost devoured them, and by day the heat. "Supposing him to be the gardener," then all must go well in the long run. He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep; we need not fret and despond. I beg you earnest workers, who are becoming depressed, to think this out a little. You see it is yours to work under the Lord Jesus; but it is not yours to take the anxiety of his office into your souls as though you were to bear his burdens. The under-gardener, the work-man in the garden, needs not fret about the whole garden as though it were all left to him. No, no; let him not take too much upon himself. I pray you, bound your anxiety by the facts of the case. So you have a number of young people around you, and you are watching for their souls as they that must give account. This is well; but do not be worried and wearied; for, after all, the saving and the keeping of those souls is not in your hands, but it rests with One far more able than yourself. Just think that the Lord is the gardener. I know it is so in matters of providence. A certain man of God in troublous times became quite unable to do his duty because he laid to heart so much the ills of the age; he became depressed and disturbed, and he went on board a vessel, wanting to leave the country, which was getting into such a state that he could no longer endure it. Then one said to him, Mr. Whitelock, are you the manager of the world? No, he was not quite that. "Did not God get on pretty well with it before you were born, and don't you think he will do very well with it when you are dead?" That reflection helped to relieve the good man's mind, and he went back to do his duty. I want you thus to perceive the limit of your responsibility: you are not the gardener himself; you are only one of the gardener's boys, set to run on errands, or to do a bit of digging, or to sweep the paths. The garden is well enough managed even though you are not head manager in it. While this relieves us of anxiety it makes labor for Christ very sweet, because if the garden does not seem to repay us for our trouble we say to ourselves, "It is not, my garden after all. 'Supposing him to be the gardener,' I am quite willing to work on a barren piece of rock, or tie up an old withered bough, or dig a worthless sod; for, if it only pleases Jesus, the work is for that one sole reason profitable to the last degree. It is not mine to question the wisdom of my task, but to set about it in the name of my Master and Lord. 'Supposing him to be the gardener,' lifts the ponderous responsibility of it from me, and my work becomes pleasant and delightful." In dealing with the souls of men, we meet with cases which are extremely difficult. Some persons are so timid and fearful that you do not know how to comfort them; others are so fast and presumptuous that you hardly know how to help them. A few are so double-faced that you cannot understand them, and others so fickle that you cannot hold them. Some flowers puzzle the ordinary gardener: we meet with plants which are covered with prickles, and when you try to train them they wound the hand that would help them. These strange growths would make a great muddle for you if you were the gardener; but "supposing him to be the gardener," you have the happiness of being able to go to him constantly, saying, "Good Lord, I do not understand this singular creature; it is as odd a plant as I am myself. Oh, that thou wouldest manage it, or tell me how. I have come to tell thee of it." Constantly our trouble is that we have so many plants to look after that we have not time to cultivate any one in the best manner, because we have fifty more all wanting attention at the time; and then before we have done with the watering-pot we have to fetch the hoe and the rake and the spade, and we are puzzled with these multitudinous cares, even as Paul was when he said, "That which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Ah, then, it is a blessed thing to do the little we can do and leave the rest to Jesus, "supposing him to be the gardener." In the church of God there is a discipline which we cannot exercise. I do not think it is half so hard to exercise discipline as it is not to be able to exercise it when yet you feel that it ought to be done. The servants of the householder were perplexed when they might not root up the tares. "Didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?" "An enemy hath done this." "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" "Not so," said he, "lest ye root, up the wheat with them." This afflicts the Christian minister when he must not remove a pestilent, hindering weed. Yes, but "supposing *him* to be the gardener," and it is his will to let that weed remain, what have you and I to do but to hold our peace? He has a discipline more sure and safe than ours, and in due time the tares shall know it. In patience let us possess our souls. And then, again, there is that succession in the garden which we can not keep up. Plants will die down, and others must be put into their places or the garden will grow bare, but we know not where to find these fresh flowers. We say, "When yonder good man dies who will succeed him?" That is a question I have heard many a time, till I am rather weary of it. Who is to follow such a man? Let us wait till he is gone and needs following. Why sell the man's coat when he can wear it himself? We are apt to think when this race of good brethren shalt die of it that none will arise worthy to unloose the latchets of their shoes. Well, friend, I could suppose a great many things, but this morning my text is, "Supposing him to be the gardener," and on that supposition I expect that the Lord has other plants in reserve which you have not yet, seen, and these wilt exactly fit into our places when they become empty, and the Lord will keep up the true apostolical succession till the day or his second advent. In every time of darkness and dismay, when the heart sinks and the spirits decline, and we think it is all over with the church of God, let us fall back on this, "Supposing him to be the gardener," and expect to see greater and better things than these. We are at the end of *our* wits, but he is not at the beginning of his yet: we are nonplussed, but he never will be; therefore let us wait and be tranquil, "supposing him to be the gardener." IV. Fourthly, I want you to notice that this supposition will give you A DELIVERANCE FROM MANY GLOOMY FEARS. I walked down the garden, and I saw a place where all the path was strewn with leaves and broken branches, and stones, and I saw the earth upon the flower-beds, tossed about, and roots lying quite out of the ground: all was in disorder. Had a dog been amusing himself? or had a mischievous child been at work? If so, it was a great pity. But no: in a minute or two I saw the gardener come back, and I perceived that *he* had been making all this disarrangement. He had been cutting, and digging, and hacking, and mess-making; and all for the good of the garden. It may be it has happened to some of you that you have been a good deal clipped lately, and in your domestic affairs things have not been in so fair a state as you could have wished: it may be in the Church we have seen ill weeds plucked up, and barren branches lopped, so that everything is *en deshabille.* Well, if the Lord has done it out, gloomy fears are idle. "Supposing him to he the gardener," all is well. As I was talking this over with my friend, I said to him—"Supposing him to be the gardener," then the serpent will have a bad time of it. Supposing Adam to be the gardener, then *the serpent* gets in and has a chat with his wife, and mischief comes of it; but supposing Jesus to be the gardener, woe to thee, serpent: there is a blow for thy head within half a minute if thou dost but show thyself within the boundary. So, if we are afraid that the devil should get in among us let us always in prayer entreat that there may be no space for the devil, because the Lord Jesus Christ fills all, and keeps out the adversary. Other creatures besides serpents intrude into gardens; caterpillars and palmerworms, and all sorts of destroying creatures are apt to devour our churches. How can we keep them out? The highest wall cannot exclude them: there is no protection except one, and that is, "supposing him to be the gardener." Thus it is written, "I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts." I am sometimes troubled by the question, What if roots of bitterness should spring up among us to trouble us? We are all such fallible creatures, supposing some brother should permit the seed of discord to grow in his bosom, then there may be a sister in whose heart the seeds will also spring up, and from her they will fly to another sister, and be blown about till brethren and sisters are all bearing rue and wormwood in their hearts. Who is to prevent this? Only the Lord, Jesus by his Spirit. He can keep out this evil, "supposing him to be the gardener." The root which beareth wormwood will grow but little where Jesus is. Dwell with us, Lord, as a church and people: by thy Holy Spirit reside with us and in us, and never depart from us, and then no root of bitterness shall spring up to trouble us. Then comes another fear. Suppose the living waters of God's Spirit should not come to water the garden, what then? We cannot, make them flow, for the Spirit is a sovereign, and he flows where he pleases. Ah, but the Spirit of God will he in our garden, "supposing our Lord to be the gardener." There is no fear of our not being watered when Jesus undertakes to do it. "He will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." But what if the sunlight of his love should not shine on the garden? If the fruits should never ripen, if there should be no peace, no joy in the Lord? That cannot happen "supposing him to be the gardener;" for his face is the sun, and his countenance scatters those health-giving beams, and nurturing warmths, and perfecting influences which are needful for maturing the saints in all the sweetness of grace to the glory of God. So, "supposing him to be the gardener" at this the close of the year, I fling away my doubts and fears, and invite you who bear the church upon your heart to do the same. It is all well with Christ's cause because it is in his own hands. He shall not fail nor be discouraged. The pleasure of the, Lord shall prosper in his hands. V. Fifthly, here is A WARNING FOR THE CARELESS, "supposing him to be the gardener." In this great congregation many are to the church what weeds are to a garden. They are not planted by God; they are not growing under his nurture, they are bringing forth no fruit to his glory. My dear friend, I have tried often to get at you, to impress you, but I cannot. Take heed; for one of these days, "supposing him to be the gardener," he will reach you, and you shall know what that word meaneth, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath, not planted shall be rooted up." Take heed to yourselves, I pray. Others among us are like the branches of the vine which bear no fruit. We have often spoken very sharply to these, speaking honest truth in unmistakable language, and yet we have not touched their consciences. Ah, but "supposing him to be the gardener," he will fulfill that sentence: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." He will get at you, if *we* cannot. Would God, ere this old year were quite dead, you would turn unto the Lord with full purpose of heart; so that instead of being a weed you might become a choice flower; that instead of a dry stick, you might be a sappy, fruit-bearing, branch of the vine. The Lord make it to be so; but if any here need the caution, I pray them to take it to heart at once. "Supposing him to be the gardener," there will be no escaping from his eye; there will be no deliverance from his hand. As "he will thoroughly purge his floor, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire," so he will thoroughly cleanse his garden and cast out every worthless thing. VI. Another set of thoughts may well arise as A QUIETUS TO THOSE WHO COMPLAIN, "Supposing him to be the gardener." Certain of us have been made to suffer much physical pain, which often bites into the spirits, and makes the heart to stoop: others have suffered heavy temporal losses, having had no success in business, but, on the contrary, having had to endure privation, perhaps even to penury. Are you ready to complain against the Lord for all this? I pray you, do not so. Take the supposition of the text into your mind this morning. The Lord has been pruning you sharply, cutting off your best boughs, and you seem to be like a thing despised that is constantly tormented with the knife. Yes, but "supposing him to be the gardener," suppose that your loving Lord has wrought it all, that from his own hand all your grief has come, every cut, and every gash, and every slip: does not this alter the case? Hath not the Lord done it? Well, then, if it be so, put your finger to your lip and be quiet, until you are able from your heart to say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." I am persuaded that the Lord hath done nothing amiss to any one of his people; that no child of his can rightly complain that he has been whipped with too much severity; and that no one branch of the vine can truthfully declare that it has been pruned with too sharp an edge. No; what the Lord has done is the best that could have been done, the very thing that you and I, if we could have possessed infinite wisdom and love, would have wished to have done; therefore let us stop each thought of murmuring, and say, "The Lord hath done it," and be glad. Especially I speak to those who have suffered bereavement. I can hardly express to you how strange I feel at this moment when my sermon revives a memory so sweet dashed with such exceeding bitterness. I sat with my friend and secretary in that garden some fifteen days ago, and we were then in perfect health, rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord. We returned home, and within five days I was smitten with disabling pain; and worse, far worse than that, he was called upon to lose his wife. We said to one another as we sat there reading the word of God and meditating, "How happy we are! Dare we think of being so happy? Must it not speedily end?" I little thought I should have to say for him, "Alas, my brother, thou art brought very low, for the delight of thine eyes is taken from thee." But here is our comfort: the Lord hath done it. The best rose in the garden is gone. Who has taken it? The gardener came this way and gathered it. He planted it and watched over it, and now he has taken it. Is not this most natural? Does anybody weep because of that? No; everybody knows that it is right, and according to the order of nature that he should come and gather the best in the garden. If you are sore troubled by the loss of your beloved, yet dry your grief by supposing him to be the gardener." Kiss the hand that has wrought you such grief? Brethren beloved, remember the next time the Lord comes to your part of the garden, and he may do so within the next week, he will only gather his own flowers, and would you prevent his doing so even if you could? VII. "Supposing him to be the gardener," then there is AN OUTLOOK FOR THE HOPEFUL. "Supposing him to be the gardener," then I expect to see in the garden where he works the best possible prosperity: I expect to see no flower dried up, no tree without fruit: I expect to see the richest, rarest fruit, with the daintiest bloom upon it, daily presented to the great Owner of the garden. Let us expect that in this church, and pray for it. oh, if we have but faith we shall see great things. It is our unbelief that straitens God. Let us believe great things from the work of Christ by his Spirit in the midst of his people's hearts, and we shall not be disappointed. "Supposing him to be the gardener," then, dear friends, we may expect divine intercourse of unspeakable preciousness. Go back to Eden for a minute. When Adam was the gardener, what happened? The Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. But "supposing him to be the gardener," then we shall have the Lord God dwelling among us, and revealing himself in all the glory of his power, and the plenitude or his Fatherly heart; making us to know him, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. What joy is this! One other thought. "Supposing him to be the gardener," and God to come and walk among the trees of the garden, then I expect he will remove the whole of the garden upward with himself to fairer skies; for he rose, and his people must rise with him. I expect a blessed transplantation of all these flowers below to a clearer atmosphere above, away from all this smoke and fog and damp, up where the sun is never clouded, where flowers never wither, where fruits never decay. Oh, the glory we shall then enjoy up yonder, on the hills of spices in the garden of God. "Supposing him to be the gardener" what a garden will he form above, and how shall you and I grow therein, developing beyond imagination." It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Since he is the author and finisher or our faith, to what perfection will he conduct us, and to what glory will he bring us! Oh, to be found in him! God grant we may be! To be plants in his garden, "Supposing him to be the gardener," is all the heaven we can desire.

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| The Tomb of Jesus |  |

A Sermon [(No. 18)](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/c01.htm)

Delivered on Sabbath Morning, April 8, 1855, by the REV. C. H. Spurgeon

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."—Matthew 28:6.

very circumstance connected with the life of Christ is deeply interesting to the Christian mind. Wherever we behold our Saviour, he is well worthy of our notice.

"His cross, his manger, and his crown,  
Are big with glories yet unknown."

All his weary pilgrimage, from Bethlehem's manger to Calvary's cross, is, in our eyes, paved with glory. Each spot upon which he trod is, to our souls, consecrated at once, simply because there the foot of earth's Saviour and our own Redeemer once was placed. When he comes to Calvary, the interest thickens; then our best thoughts are centered on him in the agonies of crucifixion, nor does our deep affection permit us to leave him, even when, the struggle being over, he yields up the ghost. His body, when it is taken down from the tree, still is lovely in our eyes—we fondly linger around the motionless clay. By faith we discern Joseph of Arimathea, and the timid Nicodemus, assisted by those holy women, drawing out the nails and taking down the mangled body; we behold them wrapping him in clean, white linen, hastily girding him round with belts of spices; then putting him in his tomb, and departing for the Sabbath rest. We shall, on this occasion, go where Mary went on the morning of the first day of the week, when waking from her couch before the dawn, she aroused herself to be early at the sepulchre of Jesus. We will try, if it be possible, by the help of God's Spirit, to go as she did—not in body, but in soul—we will stand at that tomb; we will examine it, and we trust we shall hear some truth-speaking voice coming from its hollow bosom which will comfort and instruct us, so that we may say of the grave of Jesus when we go away, "It was none other than the gate of heaven"—a sacred place, deeply solemn, and sanctified by the slain body of our precious Saviour.  
I. AN INVITATION GIVEN. I shall commence my remarks this morning by inviting all Christians to come with me to the tomb of Jesus. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." We will labor to render the place attractive, we will gently take your hand to guide you to it; and may it please our Master to make our hearts burn within us while we talk by the way.  
Away, ye profane—ye souls whose life is laughter, folly, and mirth! Away, ye sordid and carnal minds who have no taste for the spiritual, no delight in the celestial. We ask not your company; we speak to God's beloved, to the heirs of heaven, to the sanctified, the redeemed, the pure in heart—and we say to them, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Surely ye need no argument to move your feet in the direction of the holy sepulchre; but still we will use the utmost power to draw your spirit thither. Come, then, for 'tis the *shrine of greatness,* 'tis the resting-place of *the man,* the Restorer of our race, the Conqueror of death and hell. Men will travel hundreds of miles to behold the place where a poet first breathed the air of earth; they will journey to the ancient tombs of mighty heroes, or the graves of men renowned by fame; but whither shall the Christian go to find the grave of one so famous as was Jesus? Ask me the greatest man who ever lived—I tell you the man Christ Jesus was "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellow." If ye seek a chamber honored as the resting-place of genius, turn in hither; if ye would worship at the grave of holiness, come ye here; if ye would see the hallowed spot where the choicest bones that e'er were fashioned lay for awhile, come with me, Christian, to that quiet garden, hard by the walls of Jerusalem.  
Come with me, moreover, because *it is the tomb of your best friend.* The Jews said of Mary, "she goeth unto his grave to weep there." Ye have lost your friends, some of you, ye have planted flowers upon their tombs, ye go and sit at eventide upon the green sward, bedewing the grass with your tears, for there your mother lies, and there your father or your wife. Oh! in pensive sorrow come with me to this dark garden of our Saviour's burial; come to the grave of your best friend—your brother, yea, one who "sticketh closer than a brother." Come thou to the grave of thy dearest relative, O Christian, for Jesus is thy husband, "Thy maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name." Doth not affection draw you? Do not the sweet lips of love woo you? Is not the place sanctified where one so well-beloved slept, although but for a moment? Surely ye need no eloquence; if it were needed I have none. I have but the power, in simple, but earnest accents, to repeat the words, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." On this Easter morning pay a visit to his grave, for it is the grave of you best friend.  
Yea, more, I will further urge you to this pious pilgrimage. *Come, for angels bid you.* Angels said, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." The Syriac version reads, "Come, see the place where *our* Lord lay." Yes, angels put themselves with those poor women, and used one common pronoun—*our*. Jesus is the Lord of angels as well as of men. Ye feeble women—ye have called him Lord, ye have washed his feet, ye have provided for his wants, ye have hung upon his lips to catch his honeyed sentences, ye have sat entranced beneath his mighty eloquence; ye call him Master and Lord, and ye do well; "But," said the seraph, "he is my Lord too;" bowing his head, he sweetly said, "Come, see the place where *our* Lord lay." Dost fear then, Christian, to step into that tomb? Dost dread to enter there, when the angel pointeth with his finger and saith, "Come, we will go together, angels and men, and see the royal bedchamber?" Ye know that angels did go into his tomb, for they sat one at his head and the other at his foot in holy meditation. I picture to myself those bright cherubs sitting there talking to one another. One of them said, "It was there his feet lay;" and the other replied, "and there his hands, and there his head;" and in celestial language did they talk concerning the deep things of God; then they stooped and kissed the rocky floor, made sacred to the angels themselves, not because there they were redeemed, but because there their Master and their monarch, whose high behests they were obeying, did for awhile become the slave of death, and the captive of destruction. Come, Christian, then, for angels are the porters to unbar the door; come, for a cherub is thy messenger to usher thee into the death-place of death himself. Nay, start not from the entrance; let not the darkness affright thee; the vault is not damp with the vapors of death, nor doth the air contain aught of contagion. Come, for *it is a pure and healthy place.* Fear not to enter that tomb. I will admit that catacombs are not the places where we, who are full of joy, would love to go. There is something gloomy and noisome about a vault. there are noxious smells of corruption; oft-times pestilence is born where a dead body hath lain; but fear it not, Christian, for Christ was not left in hell—in Hades—neither did his body see corruption. Come, there is no scent, yea, rather a perfume. Step in here, and, if thou didst ever breathe the gales of Ceylon, or winds from the groves of Araby, thou shalt find them far excelled by that sweet, holy fragrance left by the blessed body of Jesus; that alabaster vase which once held divinity, and was rendered sweet and precious thereby. Think not thou shalt find aught obnoxious to thy senses. Corruption Jesus never saw; no worms ever devoured his flesh; no rottenness ever entered into his bones; he saw no corruption. Three days he slumbered, but no long enough to putrefy; he soon arose, perfect as when he entered, uninjured as when his limbs were composed for their slumber. Come then, Christian, summon up thy thoughts, gather all thy powers; here is a sweet invitation, let me press it again. Let me lead thee by the hand of meditation, my brother; let me take thee by the arm of thy fancy, and let me again say to thee, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay."  
There is yet one reason more why I would have thee visit this royal sepulchre—*because it is a quiet spot.* Oh! I have longed for rest, for I have heard this world's rumors in my ears so long, that I have begged for

"A lodge in some vast wilderness,  
Some boundless contiguity of shade,"

where I might hide myself forever. I am sick of this tiring and trying life; my frame is weary, my soul is mad to repose herself awhile. I would I could lay myself down a little by the edge of some pebbly brook, with no companion save the fair flowers or the nodding willows. I would I could recline in stillness, where the air brings balm to the tormented brain, where there is no murmur save the hum of the summer bee, no whisper save that of the zephyrs, and no song except the caroling of the lark. I wish I could be at ease for a moment. I have become a man of the world; my brain is racked, my soul is tired. Oh! wouldst thou be quiet, Christian? Merchant, wouldst thou rest from thy toils? wouldst thou be calm for once? Then come hither. It is in a pleasant garden, far from the hum of Jerusalem; the noise and din of business will not reach thee there; "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." It is a sweet resting spot, a withdrawing room for thy soul, where thou mayest brush from thy garments the dust of earth and muse awhile in peace.  
II. ATTENTION REQUESTED. Thus I have pressed the invitation; now we will enter the tomb. Let us examine it with deep attention, noticing every circumstance connected with it.  
And, first, mark that it is a *costly tomb.* It is no common grave; it is not an excavation dug out by the spade for a pauper, in which to hide the last remains of his miserable and overwearied bones. It is a princely tomb; it was made of marble, cut in the side of a hill. Stand here, believer, and ask why Jesus had such a costly sepulchre. He had no elegant garments; he wore a coat without seam, woven from the top throughout, without an atom of embroidery. He owned no sumptuous palace, for he had not where to lay his head. His sandals were not rich with gold, or studded with brilliants. He was poor. Why, then does he lie in a noble grave? We answer, for this reason: Christ was unhonored till he had finished his sufferings; Christ's body suffered contumely, shame, spitting, buffeting, and reproach, until he had completed his great work; he was trampled under foot, he was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" but the moment he had finished his undertaking, God said, "No more shall that body be disgraced; if it is to sleep, let it slumber in an honorable grave; if it is to rest, let nobles bury it; let Joseph, the councillor, and Nicodemus, the man of Sanhedrim, be present at the funeral; let the body be embalmed with precious spices, let it have honor; it has had enough of contumely, and shame, and reproach, and buffeting; let it now be treated with respect." Christian, dost thou discern the meaning? Jesus, after he had finished his work, slept in a costly grave; for now his Father loved and honored him, since his work was done.  
But, though it is a costly grave, *it is a borrowed one.* I see over the top of it, "Sacred to the memory of the family of Joseph of Arimathea;" yet Jesus slept there. Yes, he was buried in another's sepulchre. He who had no house of his own, and rested in the habitation of other men; who had no table, but lived upon the hospitality of his disciples; who borrowed boats in which to preach, and had not anything in the wide world, was obliged to have a tomb from charity. Oh! should not the poor take courage? They dread to be buried at the expense of their neighbors, but if their poverty be unavoidable, wherefore should they blush, since Jesus Christ himself was interred in another's grave? Ah! I wish I might have had Joseph's grave to let Jesus be buried in it. Good Joseph thought he had cut it out for himself, and that he should lay his bones there. He had it excavated as a family vault, and lo, the Son of David makes it one of the tombs of the kings. But he did not lose it by lending it to the Lord; rather, he had it back with precious interest. He only lent it three days; then Christ resigned it; he had not injured, but perfumed and sanctified it, and make it far more holy, so that it would be an honor in future to be buried there. It was a borrowed tomb; and why? I take it, not to dishonor Christ, but in order to show that, as his sins were borrowed sins, so his burial was in a borrowed grave. Christ had no transgressions of his own; he took ours upon his head; he never committed a wrong, but he took all my sin, and all yours, if ye are believers; concerning all his people, it is true, he bore their griefs and carried their sorrows in his own body on the tree; therefore, as they were others' sins, so he rested in another's grave; as they were sins imputed, so that grave was only imputedly his. It was not his sepulchre; it was the tomb of Joseph.  
Let us not weary in this pious investigation, but with fixed attention observe everything connected with this holy spot. The grave, we observe, *was cut in a rock.* Why was this? the rock of Ages was buried in a rock—a Rock within a rock. But why? Most persons suggest that it was so ordained, that it might be clear that there was no covert way by which the disciples or others could enter and steal the body away. Very possibly it was the reason; but O! my soul, canst thou find a spiritual reason? Christ's sepulchre was cut in a rock. It was not cut in mould that might be worn away by the water, or might crumble and fall into decay. The sepulchre stands, I believe, entire to this day; if it does not naturally, it does spiritually. The same sepulchre which took the sins of Paul, shall take my iniquities into his bosom, for if I ever lose my guilt, it must roll off my shoulders into the sepulchre. It was cut in a rock, so that if a sinner were saved a thousand years ago, I too can be delivered, for it is a rocky sepulchre where sin was buried—it was a rocky sepulchre of marble where my crimes were laid forever—buried never to have a resurrection.  
You will mark, moreover, that tomb was *one wherein no other man had ever lain.* Christopher Ness says, when Christ was born, he lay in a virgin's womb, and when he died, he was placed in a virgin tomb; he slept where never man had slept before. The reason was that none might say that another person rose, for there never had been any other body there, thus a mistake of persons was impossible. Nor could it be said that some old prophet was interred in the place, and that Christ rose because he had touched his bones. You remember where Elisha was buried; and as they were burying a man, behold he touched the prophet's bones and arose. Christ touched no prophet's bones, for none had ever slept there; it was a new chamber where the monarch of the earth did take his rest for three day and three nights.  
We have learned a little, then, with attention; but let us stoop down once more before we leave the grave, and notice something else. We see the grave, but do you *notice the grave-clothes*, all wrapped and laid in their places, the napkin being folded up by itself? Wherefore are the grave-clothes wrapped up? The Jews said robbers had abstracted the body; but if so, surely they would have stolen the clothes; they would never have thought of wrapping them up an laying them down so carefully; they would be too much in haste to think of it. Why was it then? To manifest to us that Christ did not come out in a hurried manner. He slept till the last moment; then he awoke; he came not in haste. They shall not come out in haste, neither by flight, but at the appointed moment shall his people come to him. So at the precise hour, the decreed instant, Jesus Christ leisurely awoke, took off his cerements, left them all behind him, and came forth in his pure and naked innocence, perhaps to show us that as clothes were the offspring of sin—when sin was atoned for by Christ, he left all raiment behind him—for garments are the badges of guilt: if we had not been guilty we should never have needed them.  
Then the napkin, mark you, was laid by itself. The grave-clothes were left behind for every departed Christian to wear. The bed of death is well sheeted with garments of Jesus, but the napkin was laid by itself, because the Christian, when he dies, does not need that; it is used by the mourners, and the mourners only. We shall all wear grave-clothes, but we shall not need the napkin. When our friends die, the napkin is laid aside for us to use; but do our ascended brethren and sisters use it? No; the Lord God hath wiped away all tears from their eyes. We stand and view the corpses of the dear departed, we moisten their faces with our tears, letting whole showers of grief fall on their heads; but do *they* weep? Oh, no. Could they speak to us from the upper spheres they would say, "Weep not for me, for I am glorified. Sorrow not for me; I have left a bad world behind me, and have entered into a far better." They have no napkin—they weep not. Strange it is that those who endure death weep not; but those who see them die, are weepers. When the child is born it weeps while others smile, (say the Arabs,) and when it dies it smiles while others weep. It is so with the Christian. O blessed thing! The napkin is laid by itself, because Christians will never want to use it when they die.  
III. *Emotion excited.* We have thus surveyed the grave with deep attention, and, I hope, with some profit to ourselves. But that is not all. I love a religion which consists, in a great measure, of emotion. Now, if I had power, like a master, I would touch the strings of your hearts, and fetch a glorious tune of solemn music from them, for this is a deeply solemn place into which I have conducted you.  
First, I would bid you stand and see the place where the Lord lay with *emotions of deep sorrow.* Oh cone, my beloved brother, thy Jesus once lay there. He was a murdered man, my soul, and thou the murderer.

"Ah, you my sins, my cruel sins,  
His chief tormentors were,  
Each of my crimes became a nail,  
And unbelief the spear."

"Alas! and did my Saviour bleed?  
And did my Sov'reign die?"

I slew him—this right hand struck the dagger to his heart. My deeds slew Christ. Alas! I slew my best beloved; I killed him who loved me with an everlasting love. Ye eyes, why do you refuse to weep when ye see Jesus' body mangled and torn? Oh! give vent to your sorrow, Christians, for ye have good reason to do so. I believe in what Hart says, that there was a time in his experience when he could so sympathize with Christ, that he felt more grief at the death of Christ than he did joy. It seemed so sad a thing that Christ should have to die; and to me it often appears too great a price for Jesus Christ to purchase worms with his own blood. Methinks I love him so much, that if I had seen him about to suffer, I should have been as bad as Peter, and have said, "That be far from thee, Lord;" but then he would have said to me, "Get thee behind me, Satan", for he does not approve of that love which would stop him from dying. "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" But I think, had I seen him going up to his cross, I could fain have pressed him back and said "Oh! Jesus, thou shalt not die; I cannot have it. Wilt thou purchase my life with a price so dear?" It seems too costly for him who is the Prince of Life and Glory to let his fair limbs be tortured in agony; that the hands which carried mercies should be pierced with accursed nails; that the temples that were always clothed with love should have cruel thorns driven through them. It appears too much. Oh! weep, Christian, and let your sorrow rise. Is not the price all but too great, that your beloved should for you resign *himself?* Oh! I should think, if a person were saved from death by another, he would always feel deep grief if his deliverer lost his life in the attempt. I had a friend, who, standing by the side of a piece of frozen water, saw a young lad in it, and sprang upon the ice in order to save him. After clutching the boy, he held him in his hands and cried out, "Here he is! Here he is! I have saved him." But, just as they caught hold of the boy, he sank himself, and his body was not found for some time afterwards, when he was quite dead. Oh! it is so with Jesus. My soul was drowning. From heaven's high portals he saw me sinking in the depths of hell; he plunged in:

"He sank beneath his heavy woes,  
To raise me to a crown;  
There's ne'er a gift his hand bestows,  
But cost his heart a groan."

Ah! we may indeed regret our sin, since it slew Jesus.  
Now, Christian, change thy note a moment. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," *with joy and gladness.* He does not lie there now. Weep, when ye see the tomb of Christ, but rejoice because it is empty. Thy sin slew him, but his divinity raised him up. Thy guilt hath murdered him, but his righteousness hath restored him. Oh! he hath burst the bonds of death, he hath ungirt the cerements of the tomb, and hath come out more than conqueror, crushing death beneath his feet. Rejoice, O Christian, for he is not there—he is risen.  
"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."  
One more thought, and then I will speak a little concerning the doctrines we may learn from this grave. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." *with solemn awe* for you and I will have to lie there too.

"Hark! from the tomb a doleful sound,  
Mine ears, attend the cry,  
Ye living men, come view the ground  
Where ye must shortly lie."

"Princes, this clay must be your bed,  
In spite of all your powers.  
The tall, the wise, the reverend head,  
Must lie as low as ours."

It is a fact we do not often think of, that we shall all be dead in a little while. I know that I am made of dust, and not of iron; my bones are not brass, nor my sinews steel; in a little while my body must crumble back to its native elements. But do you ever try to picture to yourself the moment of your dissolution? My friends, there are some of you who seldom realize how old you are, how near you are to death. One way of remembering our age, is to see how much remains. Think how old eighty is, and then see how few years there are before you will get there. We should remember our frailty. Sometimes I have tried to think of the time of my departure. I do not know whether I shall die a violent death or not; but I would to God that I might die suddenly; for sudden death is sudden glory. I would I might have such a blessed exit as Dr. Beaumont, and die in my pulpit, laying down my body with my charge, and ceasing at once to work and live. But it is not mine to choose. Suppose I lie lingering for weeks, in the midst of pains, and griefs, and agonies; when that moment comes, that moment which is too solemn for my lips to speak of, when the spirit leaves the clay—let the physician put it off for weeks, or years, as we say he does, though he does not—when that moment comes, O ye lips, be dumb, and profane not its solemnity. When death comes, how is the strong man bowed down! How doth the mighty man fall! They may say they will not die, but there is no hope for them; they must yield, the arrow has gone home. I knew a man who was a wicked wretch, and I remember seeing him pace the floor of his bedroom saying "O God, I will not die, I will not die." When I begged him to lie on his bed, for he was dying, he said he could not die while he could walk, and he would walk till he did die. Ah! he expired in the utmost torments, always shrieking, "O God, I will not die." Oh! that moment, that last moment. See how clammy is the sweat upon the brow, how dry the tongue, how parched the lips. The man shuts his eyes and slumbers, then opens them again: and if he be a Christian, I can fancy that he will say:

"Hark! they whisper: angels say,  
Sister spirit, come away.  
What is this absorbs me quite—  
Steals my senses—shuts my sight—  
Drowns my spirit—draws my breath?  
Tell me, my soul, can this be death?"

We know not when he is dying. One gentle sigh, and the spirit breaks away. We can scarcely say, "he is gone," before the ransomed spirit takes its mansion near the throne. Come to Christ's tomb, then, for the silent vault must soon be your habitation. Come to Christ's grave, for ye must slumber there. And even you, ye sinners, for one moment I will ask you to come also, because ye must die as well as the rest of us. Your sins cannot keep you from the jaws of death. I say, sinner, I want thee to look at Christ's sepulchre too, for when thou diest it may have done thee great good to think of it. You have heard of Queen Elizabeth, crying out that she would give an empire for a single hour. Or have you heard the despairing cry of the gentleman on board the "Arctic," when it was going down, who shouted to the boat, "Come back! I will give you £30,000 if you will come and take me in." Ah! poor man, it were but little if he had thirty thousand worlds, if he could thereby prolong his life: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." Some of you who can laugh this morning, who came to spend a merry hour in this hall, will be dying, and then ye will pray and crave for life, and shriek for another Sabbath-day. Oh! how the Sabbaths ye have wasted will walk like ghosts before you! Oh! how they will shake their snaky hair in your eyes! How will ye be made to sorrow and weep, because ye wasted precious hours, which, when they are gone, are gone too far to be recalled. May God save you from the pangs of remorse.  
IV. INSTRUCTION IMPARTED. And now, Christian brethren, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," to learn a doctrine or two. What did you see when you visited "the place where the Lord lay?" "He is not here; for he is risen." The first thing you perceive, if you stand by his empty tomb, is *his divinity.* The dead in Christ shall rise first at the resurrection: but he who rose first—their leader, rose in a different fashion. They rise by imparted power. He rose by his own. He could not slumber in the grave, because he was God. Death had no more dominion over him. There is no better proof of Christ's divinity that that startling resurrection of his, when he rose from the grave, by the glory of the Father. O Christian, thy Jesus is a God; his broad shoulders that hold thee up are indeed divine; and here thou hast the best proof of it—because he rose from the grave.  
A second doctrine here taught well may charm thee, if the Holy Spirit apply it with power. Behold his empty tomb, O true believer: it is a sign of *thine acquittal*, and thy full discharge. If Jesus had not paid the debt, he ne'er had risen from the grave. He would have lain there till this moment if he had not cancelled the entire debt, by satisfying eternal vengeance. O beloved, is not that an overwhelming thought?

"It is finished, it is finished,  
Hear the rising Saviour cry."

The heavenly turnkey came, a bright angel stepped from heaven and rolled away the stone; but he would not have done so if Christ had not done all: he would have kept him there, he would have said, "Nay,nay, thou art the sinner now; thou hast the sins of all thine elect upon thy shoulder, and I will not let thee go free till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." In his going free I see my own discharge.

"My Jesu's blood's my full discharge."

As a justified man, I have not a sin now against me in God's book. If I were to turn over God's eternal book, I should see every debt of mine receipted and cancelled.

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,  
It matter not how black their cast,  
And O my soul, with wonder view,  
For sins to come, here's pardon too.  
Fully discharged by Christ I am,  
From Christ's tremendous curse and blame."

One more doctrine we learn, and with that we will conclude—*the doctrine of the resurrection.* Jesus rose, and as the Lord our Saviour rose, so all his followers must rise. Die I must—this body must be a carnival for worms; it must be eaten by those tiny cannibals; peradventure it shall be scattered from one portion of the earth to another; the constituent particles of this my frame will enter into plants, from plants pass into animals, and thus be carried into far distant realms; but, at the blast of the archangel's trumpet, every separate atom of my body shall find its fellow; like the bones lying in the valley of vision, though separated from one another, the moment God shall speak, the bone will creep to its bone; then the flesh shall come upon it; the four winds of heaven shall blow, and the breath shall return. So let me die, let beasts devour me, let fire turn this body into gas and vapor, all its particles shall yet again be restored; this very self-same, actual body shall start up from its grave, glorified and made like Christ's body, yet still the same body, for God hath said it. Christ's same body rose; so shall mine. O my soul, dost thou now dread to die? Thou wilt lose thy partner body a little while, but thou wilt be married again in heaven; soul and body shall again be united before the throne of God. The grave—what is it? It is the bath in which the Christian puts the clothes of his body to have them washed and cleansed. Death—what is it? It is the waiting-room where we robe ourselves for immortality; it is the place where the body, like Esther, bathes itself in spices that it may be fit for the embrace of its Lord. Death is the gate of life; I will not fear to die, then, but will say,

"Shudder not to pass the stream;  
Venture all thy care on him;  
Him whose dying love and power  
Stilled its tossing, hushed its roar,  
Safe in the expanded wave;  
Gentle as a summer's eve.  
Not one object of his care  
Ever suffered shipwreck there."

# Come, view the place then, with all hallowed meditation, where the Lord lay. Spend this afternoon, my beloved brethren, in meditating upon it, and very often go to Christ's grave, both to weep and to rejoice. Ye timid ones, do not be afraid to approach, for 'tis no vain thing to remember that timidity buried Christ. Faith would not have given him a funeral at all; faith would have kept him above ground, and would never have let him be buried; for it would have said, it would be useless to bury Christ if he were to rise. Fear buried him. Nicodemus, the night disciple, and Joseph of Arimathea, secretly, for fear of the Jews, went and buried him. Therefore, ye timid ones, ye may go too. Ready-to-halt, poor Fearing, and thou, Mrs. Despondency, and Much-afraid, go often there; let it be your favorite haunt, there build a tabernacle, there abide. And often say to your heart, when you are in distress and sorrow, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

**Carson’s summary of the difficult exegesis of 20:17**

(4) On balance, it seems best to opt for another fairly common explanation. Although a prohibition using the present imperative form (*mē mou haptou*) does not *necessarily* signal the stopping of something in progress, or the preventing of something being attempted (*cf.* Porter, ch. 7), it is commonly used in instances where contextual features show that is what is meant. The verb *haptomai* (often ‘to touch’) can refer to many kinds of physical contact, including clinging, seizing, holding. Probably Mary had fallen to her face and grasped him by the feet (*cf.* Mt. 28:9, where the verb is *krateo̅*). Moreover, if the suggestion of Lagrange is set aside, *I am ascending* is part of the message Mary is to convey, not part of the reason Mary should not cling to Jesus. And finally, the present tense *I am ascending* is no more problematic than the present tense in 10:18, ‘I *lay down* [my life] of my own accord’: in both cases it rather misses the point to ask with a straight face, ‘Right away?’

The thought, then, might be paraphrased this way: ‘Stop touching me (or, Stop holding on to me), *for* (*gar*) I have not yet ascended [niv’s “returned” is too weak] to my Father—*i.e.* I am not yet in the ascended state (taking the perfect *anabebēka* with Porter), so you do not have to hang on to me as if I were about to disappear permanently. This is a time for joy and sharing the good news, not for clutching me as if I were some jealously guarded private dream-come-true. Stop clinging to me, but (*de*) go and tell my disciples that I am in process of ascending (*anabainō*) to my Father and your Father.’

This makes the contrast between the prohibition to Mary and the invitation to Thomas easier to understand. Mary is told to stop, because her enthusiastic and relieved grasping of Jesus does not really comprehend what is transpiring. She now believes him to be alive, but has understood neither that he is not about to disappear, nor that he soon will. Thomas is told to touch, because he has not yet believed that Jesus has risen from the dead.

That Jesus is in process of ascending to his Father, on the way as it were, is in conformity with the significance of the ascension described in Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9–11. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times, but he was not continually with them as in the days before his crucifixion. His abode, his habitat, was no longer this earth; in his ‘spiritual body’ (to use the language of Paul) he was no longer constrained as in ‘the days of his flesh’ (Heb. 5:7 av), but was already glorified. It is a commonplace of the New Testament writers that in the wake of his resurrection Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high. But as long as his resurrection appearances continued, the disciples might expect him to show up at any time. His final departure was therefore dramatic and decisive, a kind of acted farewell, so that the finality of what was taking place might be clear. In that sense, in both John and Luke/Acts, Jesus is in process of ascending to the Father until the culminating ascension. To use John’s language, Jesus is not at this point in the state of ascension: he is still in process. But the farewell discourse has made it clear that he must depart to prepare a place for them (14:2), to send the promised Paraclete (16:7), and ultimately to return to take them to be with him (14:3). John 20:17 is not the virtual replacement of the language of resurrection by the language of ascension, as some have thought, but the insistence that the resurrection is so tied to the ascension, to Jesus’ return to his Father, that if Mary can accept the one she must be prepared to accept the implications of the other.

The message Mary is to convey to the disciples is more than the mere announcement that Jesus is in process of ascending: ‘Go … to *my brothers* and tell them, “I am ascending (niv, returning) to my Father *and your Father*, to my God *and your God*.” ’ Mary (unlike Dodd, *HTFG*, pp. 147, 324; *cf.* Mt. 28:10, 16) understands that these are not Jesus’ physical brothers (as in 7:5), and goes *to the disciples* (v. 18). Because of Jesus’ death/resurrection/exaltation, his disciples come to share in his sonship to the Father. The unique features of his sonship are of course presupposed (*cf.* notes on 1:12–13, 18; 5:19–30): the expressions *my Father and your Father* and *my God and your God* assume distance between Jesus and his followers, even as they establish links. But the emphasis here is on the shared privileges (*cf.* Rom. 8:15–16; Heb. 2:11–12, citing Ps. 22:22).

**20:18**. Mary of Magdala (*cf.* 19:25) did as she was told, not only announcing *I have seen the Lord!* but also telling them *that he had said these things to her*. The words *the Lord* still do not constitute a confession akin to that of Thomas (*cf.* notes on vv. 2, 15, 28). At this point Mary is simply identifying the one she saw in the garden with the Master they all knew, and knew to have been crucified. But she spoke better than she knew.

John does not tell us how the disciples responded, but there is no reason to think that they reacted any better than they did to the women’s report of the empty tomb (Lk. 24:9–11).[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcjohn?ref=Bible.Jn20.17&off=7664&ctx=t+are+unconvincing.%0a~(4)+On+balance%2c+it+s) (pp. 644–646). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)