

The Word Became Flesh
Week 61
John 20:1-18 (CSB)
“From Rags to Riches”

Introduction

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, “There is no resurrection of the dead”? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith. Moreover, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified wrongly about God that He raised up Christ — whom He did not raise up, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 1 Corinthians 15:12-17

Everyone loves a good “comeback story”. You know the kind I mean. The ones where the hero seems to be down and out for the count, but then somehow, he manages to rise up victorious against all odds. Just ask any sports fan about his favorite team, and his all time favorite game. Nine out of ten times, they will passionately recall a game when the team was so far behind and time was running out, then somehow miraculously one of the players made an incredible play that breathed life back into his downtrodden teammates. And then, they overcame what seemed a hopeless defeat and turned it into victory! Those are the moments that every fan lives for. And they always leave an indelible impression upon our memory.

Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection is the ultimate come back story! Just when the world and the devil had counted Him out, He rose victoriously! And because He rose, His followers, or fans if you will, have something to cheer about for eternity. In fact, it was such an amazing comeback that it forever changed the normal day of worship. Just imagine an event so glorious, that it even causes people to worship on a different day to which they had been accustomed all their lives! Now that, could only be brought about by some monumental event. And that is exactly what the resurrection was and is. It has forever changed the course of human history. Since the resurrection of Christ, nothing has been, nor will ever be, the same as it was before. It is, to continue with our sports vernacular, a game-changer.

For you see, *The Bible* tells us that God created the entire world in six days, and after the sixth day He rested (**Genesis 2:2-3**). And then, He commanded His creation to honor His work by taking a Sabbath day of rest (**Exodus 20:8-9**). This command was given to honor the first order of Creation. But Jesus’ finished work upon the cross is God’s second work of creation. For mankind was created in the image of God, but sin separated men from their Creator. So God set about to do the work of a second creation, by which men were redeemed and re-connected to Him. This finished work of creation was accomplished in the death, burial, and resurrection of The Son. After God finished the first creation, He rested, and after Jesus finished the work of the second creation, He sat down at the right hand of The Father (**Hebrews 1:3**)! Now, *all who will place their faith in Him are reborn, and made new!*

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away and see, the new has come! **2 Corinthians 5:17**

And that, my brothers and sisters, is why we now observe a new sabbath day. For the resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the beginning our new creation! So let us look together at this wondrous event that forever changed the world. John’s account of that first resurrection Sunday is a beautiful story of *The Race, The Rags, and The Risen Savior*. As we study together, let us be reminded of how the resurrection changes everything for the better. Thanks to Jesus, we have been taken from the depths of despair to the very pinnacle of glory. It is the greatest “rags to riches” story ever told!

The Race (vs. 1-4)

On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put Him!" At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first.

John 20:1-4

The sequence of the resurrection morning events can be pieced together by combining the narratives offered up in the four gospels; namely Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It would seem that Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus had delivered from demonic possession (**Luke 8:2**) was the first to arrive at the tomb. Apparently, she was supposed to meet the other women; Mary and Salome and others who had planned to meet at the tomb early, in order to more properly anoint the body of Jesus.

For whatever reason, Mary Magdalene arrived before all the others. I am reminded here of the words of Jesus, **"Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little."** (**Luke 7:47**). This could be the reason that Mary Magdalene arrived so much earlier than her companions. Simply put, she loved Jesus more than the rest, and she could not wait a moment longer to bring Him honor. So she arrived at the tomb before daylight.

When the other women arrived just after the sun came up, everyone noticed that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. Mary ran immediately to tell the disciples, while the others stayed and closely inspected the empty tomb. It is at this point when the two angels appear to the other women and asked them, **"Why are you looking for the living among the dead. He is not here, but He is risen!"** (**Luke 24:5-6a**). After this the other women also ran to tell the disciples what they had seen.

Peter and John took off running towards the tomb, but none of the disciples had believed what the women had said. John, being the ever-competitive one, wanted to make sure that everyone knew that he had outrun Peter in the race to the tomb! Human nature is human nature. When John arrived first, it seems that he was afraid to go inside, possibly out of reverence, or perhaps just the anxiety of entering a tomb. When Peter arrived upon the scene, he did exactly what we would expect Peter to do. He went barging inside without a moment's hesitation. That's just his personality. He wasn't known for his careful consideration for what might be prudent, whether in word or deed. It was a penchant that often led him into trouble.

Neither of the two men were exactly sure of what had occurred. They had raced to the tomb to find the answers, but at the finish line, they only found more questions. As they looked around at the evidence left behind, for John at least, the picture slowly began to come into view. Peter, however, would need more convincing before he would believe.

The Rags (vs. 5-10)

Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

John 20:5-10

After Peter barged into the tomb, John also decided to enter. As they looked around, they were astonished at what they saw. The grave cloths were lying there like a cocoon. They weren't unwrapped, it was as if the body within them had vanished into thin air and all that remained was the shell of the grave cloths. The cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head was also there. The word translated as "folded" actually means "rolled up". I believe that this was a similar phenomena to that of the cloths around the body. For you see, the napkin, or head wrapping, would have been wound around The Savior's head, and now just like the grave cloths, it was a wound up empty shell!

When John saw the condition of the grave cloths, he realized two things. First, no grave robber in his right mind would have taken the body and left the cloths behind. And second, even if they had intended to take the body without the cloths, the cloths would have had to be unwound. Therefore, it could mean only one thing; Jesus had risen! His body had miraculously passed through the grave clothes and left them behind fully intact. John saw a miracle. But Peter was, at this point, simply more confused. He would need more convincing to be able to come to the same conclusion as John. It's a good thing for him Jesus always finishes the work that he begins in us ([Philippians 1:6](#)).

There really was no excuse for the disciples to be skeptical in regards to the resurrection. Jesus had told them over and over again, that He would suffer and die, be buried, and rise again. *The Old Testament* Scriptures had eluded to this reality, but Jesus had said it plain over and over again. And still they doubted. Aren't you glad that God doesn't quit on us when our faith is weak?

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. 2 Timothy 2:13

When Peter and John went to the tomb that day, all they saw were rags. But very soon, those rags would be turned to riches!

The Risen LORD (vs. 11-18)

But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put Him."

14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?"

Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried Him away, tell me where you've put Him, and I will take Him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" — which means "Teacher."

"Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God."

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what He had said to her. **John 20:11-18**

Peter and John left the tomb; one of them believing in a miracle and the other simply confused. After they had left, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb alone. It was there that she met the two angels sitting at the head and the foot of the stone slab where Jesus body had lain. There is a beautiful picture in view here. Remember the Ark of The Covenant? Every year upon the day of atonement, the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat as a “covering” for sin. On the mercy seat of the Ark there were two golden angels stationed at either end. And in the empty tomb Mary saw two angels on either side of the “Mercy Seat” where Jesus blood was sprinkled, when His body was placed upon the slab. For He is the ultimate High Priest, and His blood was no mere “covering” for sin, but rather, it washed our sins away completely!

Mary, of course, overcome with grief was unable to discern the image that was before her. Instead she began to wail uncontrollably prompting the angels to speak to her, and possibly even motion for her to turn and see The One Who stood behind her. When Mary turned around, she did not even recognize The Savior. The spiritual truth of the matter is that no one can recognize Jesus, unless they are enabled to by The Spirit. This is why we have so many in this world today who still do not recognize Him.

Jesus’ revealed Himself to Mary simply by calling her name, to which she replied “Rabboni”, which means teacher and Master. It is the same for us today. When Christ calls us by name, we respond simply by calling Him LORD, and we are saved.

If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is LORD”, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be SAVED. Romans 10:9 (emphasis added)

Mary fell to the ground and grasped Jesus by His feet. She was afraid of losing Him again, so she held on for dear life. He told her that she need not cling to Him, for He had not yet ascended to His Father. Many people have speculated about the meaning of His words. Some say that it is a reference to ***Hebrews 9:12***, that tells us Christ presented His redeeming blood before the throne in heaven. While others say that Jesus was simply telling Mary that she need not cling to Him for He wasn’t going back to The Father just yet. Either way, He commanded Mary to return to the disciples and to tell them what she had seen and heard. He sent her forth as a witness to the resurrection. The same is true for us today, we have been sent to tell the world that Christ has risen. ***He has risen indeed!***

There is also a spiritual truth for us in the words Jesus spoke to Mary that day. If you love Him, as she did, you need not worry about clinging to Him, for it is He that shall hold fast to you! The disciples faith was weak indeed, and yet, Christ went and confirmed to them personally that He had risen. You see, when you belong to Jesus, it is because of the efforts that He has made on your behalf. Your salvation is a work of God. No one has ever been saved based upon what they have done. ***We are saved because of what He has done.*** All that is required of us is to accept this great salvation He offers.

Which brings me back to those rags we spoke of earlier. According to Scripture, our very best works are filthy rags in the sight of a Holy God (***Isaiah 64:6***). We can neither be good enough to be saved, nor can we keep ourselves in God’s grace once we are saved. ***We are saved and then kept save by the finished work of Christ and Christ alone.***

When Jesus died upon the cross, He took our sins upon Himself. And just like those man made rags that the priests wrapped around Him for His burial, as good as the intentions were behind them, they were insufficient to contain His glory! The best that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had to offer, still was far less than The LORD of heaven and earth deserved. But at Calvary, our Savior temporarily clothed Himself in our filthy rags of unrighteousness, so that we could be clothed in His righteousness forevermore! In Him, we have gone from rags to riches!

I will rejoice greatly in The LORD. My soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation. He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ***Isaiah 61:10***

In just a three day span, the disciples of Christ went from the lowest depths to the highest of heights. At the resurrection, all our hopes are realized. Jesus, The Risen LORD, is the firstfruits from among the dead (**1 Corinthians 15:20**). This simply means that those who believe in Him no longer need to fear death, for because He rose, we too shall rise. And because He took the rags of our unrighteousness upon Himself, we can now be clothed in His righteousness. And that is why to the Believer, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate “rags to riches” story.

For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.

Galatians 3:27

And let the saints of God who are clothed in Him say... **TRUTH!!**