

Synchronizing the Resurrection Narratives, Event #3: Mary Magdalene Returns to the Tomb Sunday morning before Daybreak, John 20:1.

Review of the resurrection narrative thus far:

Event #1: Saturday, late on the Sabbath just before sundown (around 5:45 p.m. Saturday)—which will begin the first day that the two Mary’s came to “look” at the grave after which they returned home.

Matthew 28:1 Now **late** on the Sabbath, as the first day (Sunday) was **about to begin**, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.

Event #2: Sunday, early morning (perhaps around 3:00-4:00 a.m.) a severe earthquake occurred as an angel of the Lord came from heaven and rolled away the stone to enable the women, Peter, and John to enter the tomb Sunday morning.

Matthew 28:2-4 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. ³ And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; ⁴ and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

This brings us to **event #3**: Mary Magdalene’s visit to the tomb probably around **4:00-5:00 a.m. Sunday while it was still dark**. This is recorded in

John 20:1 Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb (NAS).

A few principles:

1. Although the verbs in John 20:1 are translated in the past tense (“came” and “was”), in the original Greek they are in the present tense. The scene is evidently very vivid to John who sees it as he describes it. This is based on historical eye-witness testimony.
2. The participle behind “taken away” is in the perfect tense emphasizing permanence. A closed tomb has no more relevance to Jesus.

3. The “problem” of reconciling the synoptic gospels with this account in John is resolved by recognizing that this event occurred at a unique time. For example, this early morning visit of Mary Magdalene is different from the visits of the *two* Marys of Matthew 28:1.
4. This account in John is unique visit and is not to be viewed as a variation of the visits in the synoptic Gospels: e.g., two Mary’s of Matthew 28:1; Salome in Mark 16:1; two Marys and Joanna in Luke 24:10.
5. That Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Jesus is explicitly declared in Mark 16:9.
6. By recognizing that the visit in John 20 is unique solves the problem of trying to reconcile the accounts which say “it was dark” in John 20:1 and “the sun had risen” in Mark 16:2.
7. Mary Magdalene is a beautiful picture of God’s marvelous matchless grace. Mary was from Magdala, located on the southwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Magdala was a port town known for its prostitution services for Roman soldiers. It is very likely that Mary Magdalene was *formerly* a prostitute from that area: the same Mary of Luke 7:36-50 who is described as loving Christ so very much. Christ had also delivered her from demon possession (Luke 8:2). It is also very likely that Mary Magdalene is Mary of Bethany. It is interesting that she is explicitly called Magdalene in the context of Resurrection Sunday and that she was the first one given the privilege of seeing the Resurrected Jesus. What a manifestation of grace! Though the world and the disciples did not think much of her (as evidenced by their attitude toward her even on resurrection morning), the Lord Jesus Christ graced her with this unique privilege. Let’s also remember: Grace is infinitely more powerful than any of our depravity, shame, guilt, impiety, and sin. Regardless of our past or any skeletons we may have in our closets, the river of Christ’s grace is able to wash away it all away and make us clean. There is no impasse for the grace of God. Grace is the only way; without grace we have no chance before God; without grace the jig is up. Mary *Magdalene* really tasted the sweet grace of God and was far more grateful than even the disciples of Jesus. There is nothing like the grace of God per se:

Luke 7:36-50, Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee's house, and reclined *at the table*.³⁷ And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume,³⁸ and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume.³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two

debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." ⁴⁴ And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶ "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." ⁴⁹ And those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

What unalloyed grace! What a miracle! What beauty! What blessedness! What a polar opposite to the ways of religion!

In Christ, the Alpha and Omega of thought and life,

Pastor Don