

Responding to the atheists and skeptics-4: The purposes of the women going to the tomb.

SUMMARY OF THE RESURRECTION EVENTS

- Event #1: Saturday, 5:45 p.m., April 4, 33: Two Marys go to “look” at tomb then return, Matt. 28:1.
Event #2: Sunday, 3:00 a.m., April 5, 33: Earthquake and angel from heaven, Matt. 28:2-4.
Event #3: Sunday, 4:00 a.m., April 5, 33: MM visits the tomb before daybreak, Jn. 20:1.
Event #4: Sunday, 4:15 a.m.: MM reports empty tomb to John & Peter, Jn. 20:2.
Event #5: Sunday, 4:30 a.m.: Peter and John run to the tomb, Jn. 20:3-9.
Event #6: Sunday, 4:40 a.m.: MM returns to tomb & sees 2 angels, Jn. 20:10-13.
Event #7: Sunday, 4:50 a.m.: MM sees the Risen Lord, Jn. 20:14-17.
Event #8: Sunday, 5:00 a.m.: MM tells disciples who do not believe her, Jn. 20:18; Mk. 16:9-11.
Event #9: Sunday, 6:00 a.m.: MM & other women go to tomb of Jesus, Mk. 16:1-3; Lk. 24:1-2.
Event #10: Sunday, 6:30 a.m.: Women enter tomb; 3 angels, Mt. 28:5-7; Mk 16:4-7; Lk. 24:3-8.
Event #11: Sunday, 7:00 a.m.: Women run in fear; Jesus meets them, Mt. 28:8-10; Mk. 16:8.
Event #12: Sunday, 8:00 a.m.: Women went to tell disciples; soldiers report, Mat 28:11-15.
Event #13: Sunday, 8:10 a.m.: Once again, the disciples do not believe the women, Lk. 24:9-11
Event #14: Sunday, 8:30 a.m.: However, Peter runs to the tomb a second time, Lk. 24:12.
Event #15: Sunday, 8:45 a.m.: Private meeting between Jesus and Peter, 1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34.
Event #16: Sunday, 10 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Jesus & 2 travelers to Emmaus, Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13-32.
Event #17: Sunday, 5:00 p.m. The 2 travelers tell the 11 Disciples, Mk. 16:13; Lk. 24:33-35.
Event #18: Sunday, 5:20 p.m. Thomas leaves; Jesus appears, Lk. 24:36-49; Jn. 20:19-25.
Event #19: 8 days after the resurrection. Jesus appears to Thomas, Mk. 16:14-18; Jn 20:26-31.
Event #20: 2 weeks after the resurrection. Jesus appears to disciples on shore of Galilean Sea, Jn 21:1-25.
Event #21: 3 weeks after the resurrection. Jesus appears to eleven disciples on mountain, Matt. 28:16-20.
Event #22: 40 days after the resurrection. Jesus’s last group appearance, and His ascension into Heaven, Mk 16:19-20; Lk. 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-12.
Event #23: 3-6 years after the resurrection. Jesus appears to Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:3-9.

We are now in the final chapter of these studies where I will directly answer the specific **attacks** on the resurrection narratives by various atheists and skeptics. A good representation of the attacks on the resurrection accounts of Jesus Christ is found at Dan Barker's website. (cf. <http://www.ffrf.org/legacy/books/lfif/?t=stone>):

Following is his next **alleged discrepancy (in red; my responses are in black)**:

What was their purpose? [women going to the tomb]

- **Matthew: to see the tomb (28:1).** I have documented that this took place Saturday evening, “late on the Sabbath.” I have also noted that the purpose of this visit was *only* to “see” the tomb. This fits perfectly with the other statements in the Gospels which demonstrate that the women did in fact go to the tomb before Sunday morning.
- **Mark: had already seen the tomb (15:47), brought spices (16:1).** Clearly, the women “looked” at the tomb in Mark 15:47 *prior* to their trip in recorded 16:1 “when the Sabbath was over Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, brought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.” This agrees with an earlier “look” as recorded in Matthew 28:1 (however, this earlier Markan visit need not be the same one as in Matthew 28:1). Mark 15:47 would be sometime around event #1 and Mark 16:1 would be event #9. Just a plain reading of Mark 15:41-47 indicates that after the crucifixion Joseph took the body of Jesus and placed it in the tomb after which two Marys went to look at the tomb and *then* on Sunday went *again* with spices. So where is the discrepancy?
- **Luke: had already seen the tomb (23:55), brought spices (24:1).** We have the same two events recorded in Luke that agree with both Mark and Matthew. Shortly after Jesus was buried, the women went to “look” at the tomb (Luke 23:50-55). *Then* “on the first day of the week, at early dawn,” they went again to the tomb to bring spices (Luke 24:1). Once again, the text is clear: before Sunday they went to go look at the tomb and then on Sunday morning they went again and brought spices.
- **John: the body had already been spiced before they arrived (19:39,40).** John 19:38-42 records that Nicodemus put spices on the body of Jesus shortly after His body was taken down off the cross. I guess the point that Barker is making is that we must have a contradiction between Nicodemus spicing the body of Jesus shortly after crucifixion (Friday) and the women also coming to spice the body Sunday morning—two days later. Maybe I am missing something here.

In sum, Scripture clearly teaches two events: the women went to “see” the tomb (Matt. 28:1; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55) before resurrection morning, and then “after the Sabbath” (resurrection morning) they brought spices to anoint the body, which Nicodemus had anointed *two days hence*. The Bible is very plain about the women visiting the tomb more than once: at least once on Friday/Saturday and then again Sunday morning. There is no problem.

Scorecard on the veracity of the atheistic and skeptical attacks on the resurrection narratives of Jesus Christ:

1. It is impossible to provide a reasonable and non-contradictory narrative of the resurrection narratives that includes every single passage.
FALSE: See above for hour-by hour narrative—not a single passage is omitted. Above is a reasonable account-- it is very plausible.
2. There is a contradiction regarding the earthquake occurring after the women visit the tomb (Matt 28:1-2) versus before visiting the tomb.
FALSE: Matt. 28:1-2 occurred Saturday evening (see event 1 above) before earthquake and should not be confused with event 9.
3. There is contradiction between the times of morning the women visited the tomb
FALSE: Skeptics make the *error* in conflating events 1, 3, and 9.
4. There is discrepancy in the names of the women; or at least we do not know who they were.
FALSE: There is no discrepancy. All of the accounts list Mary Magdalene as a principal witness. Lack of ability to identify other Marys is not an argument against the historicity of resurrection accounts in the Gospels.
5. Somehow there must be a conflict of purposes of woman coming to the tomb.
FALSE: The Bible is clear that the women came to the tomb at least twice: once before Sunday to see the tomb and *then* on Sunday morning to anoint the body

One of the biggest surprises to me in doing this study is just how baseless and weak the various arguments are that are used to attack the resurrection narratives—especially this “problem.” Just a plain reading of the text reveals more than one visit to the tomb with different purposes.

When one takes the time to put all of the pieces together we have not only harmony, we also have the added fact that these narratives refute any idea of collusion since they were all written independent of each other—all with different emphases; yet when they are put together they give us incredible reliability.

While I continue to believe that the most important thing for the believer is the spiritual life, one that is undergirded by the Holy Spirit and Bible doctrine, this study shows just valuable apologetics is. Apart from apologetics it would be very easy for a Christian to feel embarrassed or experience a measure of doubt when someone slams Christianity claiming that you can't trust Christianity because the narratives contradict each other, and adds something like:

1 Corinthians 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

Although my faith would not fall apart even if I could not reconcile every detail, it certainly is fortified by understanding just how reliable the Bible is. The Truth is indeed on our sides! We have nothing to fear!

Blessed,

Pastor Don