

## Snapshots of the Resurrection

John 19:38–20

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 16, 2017

The after-life is a subject that has interested human beings since the beginning of time. From television shows like *John Edwards' Crossing Over* to the ancient tombs of Egypt, to the modern craze with vampires and werewolves, we have always been fascinated with what happens to us after we die.

So there are many theories on the subject that have come to us throughout the years. Let me just mention a few of them to you. First is reincarnation. The word “reincarnation” means “to come again in the flesh” and that’s the idea. You come again in the flesh of someone else. This is the theory that once you die you come back to life as another person or as another life form. At death your soul migrates from your body into another body - to live another life. Reincarnation is very popular among the religions of the East, religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Hare Krishna. Some Greek philosophers like Pythagoras believed this as well. These groups teach that what you do in this life determines how you will come back in the next life. If you have been good in this life you will come back as a higher life form, like a rich person or a King. If you have been bad, you will come back as a lower life form, like a slave or a dog. If you’ve been really bad, you might come back as a cockroach or something like that. But either way, you are re-incarnated. You are given a second chance to come back as something else.

The second theory of life after death is that of purgatory. Purgatory is the teaching that after this life you go to an intermediate place where you can be purified and made ready for heaven, where you can be punished for the sins you committed on earth. “Purgatory” comes from a Latin word meaning “to purge something” or “wash it off”. Purgatory is the place where the righteous go to be washed off, before entering God’s presence. The wicked go to hell, the righteous go to purgatory. There they receive a long bath before they can enter into heaven. And the length of time in purgatory is different for everyone depending on how wicked you were. For some it lasts thousands of years, for others, it can last for millions. The only organization that holds to this doctrine that I am aware of is the Roman Catholic Church. But, that is another theory of life after death – purgatory.

Another one is annihilationism. Annihilationism says that when you die, you are annihilated - you are wiped away. This one is pretty bleak, but it is usually held by atheistic or agnostic groups. And the idea is that there is no soul anyway. There is no hidden part of man so that when you die you just disappear, you go back to the nothingness from which you came, you are erased off the map. There is no life after death. There is no punishments or rewards. There is just now. “So eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Some Christian cults teach annihilationism like the Jehovah’s Witness and the Christadelphians, but there are very few. They say that the righteous go to heaven and the wicked are annihilated.

And that leads to one more theory of life after death, one that I thought was the most creative: alternative worlds. According to this theory, when people die they go to alternative worlds. Their souls exist forever on distant planets. This is pretty wild isn’t it? We have never found life on other planets. That may come as a shock to some of you Star Wars fans. But as of yet, we haven’t

found any life on another planet. This theory says that we will spend forever living among the Klingons or Vulcans. We will all spend eternity on Mars or Neptune or Pluto. But that's quite a list – isn't it? Pretty interesting stuff; reincarnation, purgatory, annihilationism, alternative worlds. We could also mention some other views like universalism, which says that everyone goes to heaven. Or moksha, where the soul becomes one with God. It just kind of dissolves into god-ness. We could talk about re-intarnation ... That one is my favorite - "re-intarnation". This means that you die and come back as a hillbilly. Re-in-tarnation; get it? I thought that was pretty funny.

But what does the Bible say about all of this? What do the Scriptures teach about the afterlife? I would dare say that's an important question. I don't think there is a person on the planet who hasn't asked this at one time or another. A pastor friend of mine told me the story of when he was visiting with a funeral director and asked him, "Do you ever think about death?" And the man said, "Only my Own." We all think about our own death, don't we? We all wonder what is going to happen, when we pass to the other side. So what's going to happen?

There is a tombstone in Indiana that really highlights this when it says:

Pause, stranger, when you pass me by  
As you now are, so once was I  
As I now am, so you will be  
So prepare for death and follow me

And below those words someone scribbled: "To follow you I'm not content, until I know which way you went." That's it isn't it? Which way did you go? That's what I want to know. Which place did you end up when you died?

Let's talk about that this morning. Today is Easter Sunday, so it's a good day to talk about the resurrection. That's the Biblical view of life after death: resurrection. When you die, you will come back to life in a physical body. You will be resurrected. You won't be annihilated or dissolved into god-ness. You won't be reincarnated and come back to life as something else. You won't be purged or live on another planet. You will be resurrected. You will come back to life in your own body, not in the body of someone else. You will come back to life as yourself. And the best way to see this is through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you were with us on Friday morning, you will know that on Good Friday we took an in-depth look at Jesus' Crucifixion. We talked about the physical aspects of His death and betrayal and trial. Then we talked about what that meant spiritually. We talked about how it paid the price for our sins. This morning, I want to do that same thing with the Resurrection. As you know, Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected three days later. That's what we celebrate at Easter time. That's what we remember this time of year. That's what it's all about.

And the Scriptures tell us that our resurrection will be just like His. Philippians 3:20-21 says that: "For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord, Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." Philippians says that Jesus will, "transform our body into conformity with the body of His glory." In other words, our bodies will look like His. We will go through the same thing He went through at the resurrection. So the question is, what did He go through? If I am going to

experience what Jesus experienced, then what did He experience? What happened to Him? Let me answer this question by giving you some snapshots of the Resurrection.

Here are some brief accounts of what happened to Jesus Christ after He died. I am calling them snapshots, because they will be pretty quick. Friday, we saw some snapshots at the Crucifixion. Today, some snapshots of the Resurrection. And the first one is this: the tomb was new. The tomb was new. Turn with me in your Bibles to John 19.

And as you are turning there, there are several ancient tombs in Israel today that are open to the public. Katie and I saw one of these on our trip to Israel, and let me describe it to you. As we were walking alone in the countryside, we came up to a small hill. And as we looked on the other side, there was a shoulder-high cave about four feet high. You actually had to stoop to get inside it. In front of the entrance was a one-ton stone placed into a groove that allowed it to move back and forth to prevent robbers and wild animals from entering the grave. Above and around the stone is nothing but solid rock. The only way in and out of the tomb is the one entrance. Once inside the tomb, the first room contains two slabs cut into the rock where bodies were placed (one slab on each side of the doorway, one on the right and one on the left). They looked like stone benches. Further into the tomb, in the second room. (There were only two rooms.) Right at the floor level were several two-by-one-foot holes in the wall called ossuaries. In these ossuaries, the bones of the deceased were laid after the body had decomposed on the slab in the first room. A slave would actually come and take the bones of the decayed body, put them in a pile place them in the ossuaries in the second room. You think your job stinks. How would you like that job? Once the bones were in the ossuaries, they would stay there indefinitely.

But because of this setup, the Jews could have “family tombs” that weren't all that big. Family tombs were nothing more than two rooms built into solid rock, and they did it by hand. It would cost a fortune, so people typically shared that cost with family members. Most of the Jews were buried in tombs that had been used by their family for centuries.

Yet what does John 19 say about Jesus' tomb? Read John 19:38-42 with me.

38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. 39 Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

John says that Jesus was buried “in a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid”. We read that and don't think twice about it because everyone today is buried in a new tomb. Why would you want to be buried in an old one? But people back then did it all the time. In fact, being buried in a new tomb was unheard of back then. Nobody did this, because you couldn't afford it. The cost was just too high. And it's even stranger when you think of how Jesus died.

Like I mentioned on Friday, crucifixion was the most degrading form of torture the Romans could come up with. According to the first century Roman Cicero, “To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to kill him is an act of murder; to crucify him is – what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed.” And the Old Testament echoes this. Deuteronomy says, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” And the Romans believed this as well. They figured that if you were being crucified, you must have done something really bad, so they wouldn't bury you. They would just leave you up on the cross to rot, or they would put you in an unmarked grave so no one could tell where you were. The men who were crucified next to Jesus would have been taken down off the cross and thrown together into some kind of mass grave. And yet, John 19 says that Jesus was crucified and placed in a new tomb. In all the history of the world, Jesus might have been the only person who was ever crucified and buried in a brand-new grave. Those two things did not go together in the first century. Nobody would have ever done this for a crucified man.

Now what's the point in all of this? What does Jesus' burial in a new tomb have to do with His resurrection? The point is that there was only one body in this tomb. There weren't multiple bodies. The point is that the tomb was empty. And here is the clincher: there is only one body that could have gone missing, the body of Christ.

And that leads us to our next snapshot of the resurrection: the body was gone. Not only was the tomb new, but the body was gone. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record different parts of the Resurrection Story, so we're going to flip back and forth to fill in the gaps here.

But turn with me to Mark 16:1-6. After Jesus' arrest, the disciples went into hiding for fear of the Jews. And some of Jesus' closest female disciples (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome) came to pay their respects to the Lord by anointing His body with spices. In the Ancient World, bodies were anointed with aloes and myrrh to delay the process of decomposition and to keep the body from stinking. The anointing would keep it from reeking with the smell of death. Read Mark 16:1-6 with me.

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” 4 Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. 5 Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6 And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.”

Verse 4 says that as the woman came to the anoint Jesus' body, the stone had been rolled away and the entrance was open. Now put yourself in their sandals for a moment. It's early in the morning, verse 2 says, “Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.” These women were probably half awake when this happened. They hadn't had their coffee yet and the stone was rolled away, what would you be thinking? Robbers - right? You would think that the tomb had been robbed. You would think that the Jewish leaders or some petty thieves had come in stolen Jesus' body. Afterall, Jesus had a lot of enemies. There were a lot of people who would do this, so naturally the women wanted to find out for themselves what

was going on. So verse 5 says that they entered the first room of the tomb and found a young man sitting on the stone slab on the right. He was sitting on one of the benches I was talking about. Matthew says that the young man was an angel and verse 6 says that, "...he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.'"

"Do not be amazed" he says, "Jesus is risen. His body is no longer here." Now I don't know about you, but there's a lot to process first thing in the morning, isn't it? That's a lot to take in before 8 a.m. What would you be thinking about as you heard this? This would have been especially hard for these ladies to process because Mark 15:40 says that they were all at Jesus' crucifixion. They saw Him die, they saw His beating, they saw His flogging and now they are being told He has risen from the dead. What would you say to all of this? Here is what they said: "They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." I would say that's a very normal reaction to all of this, wouldn't you? That's a very logical response first thing in the morning. They freaked out and ran. Jesus' body is missing and there is a strange young man just hanging out in his tomb. I would run too. I would run 100 miles an hour.

And that brings us to our next snapshot of the Resurrection: the grave clothes were undisturbed. The grave clothes were undisturbed. Turn back to John 20. The women weren't the only ones to notice that the body was gone. The Apostles noticed as well. If you read John 20:1-9,

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. 2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. 4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; 5 and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. 6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

It's a little confusing to read of Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James and Salome finding the tomb empty and then reading of Mary Magdalene finding it all by herself. But, apparently the three women set out for the tomb together and Mary Magdalene went on ahead of the others. She arrived at the tomb, saw that the stone had been rolled away and ran to tell Peter and John. And Mary the mother of James and Salome came later, which is what Mark 16 talked about.

But after Mary Magdalene told Peter and John, the two Apostles came running to the tomb. And what they saw gives us some great insight into the Resurrection. Look at John 20 again with me. In verse 5 it says that John saw strips of linen lying on the stone slab where Jesus' body had been. In verse 6 it says that Peter saw the same thing. In verse 7 it says that the burial cloth for Jesus' head was separate from the burial cloth for His body. And verse 8 says this, "So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed." Why does it

say that? What did John believe? Did he believe that Jesus' body was stolen? There's no sense in saying that because everyone would have believed that. Many believed that the other woman believed that. No, John believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. He believed that the Lord had come back to life. Not because of the Scriptures, as verse 9 says, but because of what he saw. The end of verse 8 says, "he saw and believed". John saw something that made him believe that Jesus had come back to life.

What did he see? What did he look at that made him think that Jesus had come back? John saw the grave clothes. He saw the grave clothes. He saw the clothes that were put on Jesus after he was taken down off the cross. Men and women were usually crucified naked back then. But out of respect for His body verse 40 says that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus in strips of linen. And let me show you why this is significant. John 20:7 says that the face-cloth was separate from the linen wrappings that held Jesus' body, which meant that the clothes looked just like they did when Jesus body was in them. Grave robbers wouldn't have done that. Grave robbers would not have taken the time to undress Jesus' body and then put the clothes back on the slab the way they were. They would have taken the body, clothes and all. And John knew this. When he saw the clothes left behind undisturbed, He believed. He saw the burial shroud left as it was when Jesus in it, and he knew that Jesus was alive. In theological terms, He had resurrected. Jesus had passed from one state of existence into another. And when He did that, He simply left His grave clothes behind. They stayed on the stone slab where His body had been. The head piece stayed at the head, and the body piece stayed where the body was. The burial shroud stayed put as if a body was still in it, and when John saw this, He believed. He knew what had happened - Jesus was alive. In his book, *Basic Christianity*, John Staff has a helpful quote on this. It's kind of long, but it says:

Now supposing we had been present in the sepulcher when the resurrection of Jesus actually took place, what should we have seen? Should we have seen Jesus begin to move, and then yawn and stretch and get up? No. We do not believe that he returned to this life. He did not recover from a swoon. He died, and he rose again. He was a resurrection, not a resuscitation. We believe that he passed miraculously from death into an altogether new sphere of existence.

What then should we have seen, had we been there? We should suddenly have noticed that the body disappeared. It would have "vaporized," being transmuted into something new and different and wonderful. It would have passed through the graveclothes as it was later to pass through closed doors, leaving them untouched and almost undisturbed.

For the body cloths, under the weight of 100 lbs. of spices that Nicodemus had put on him, once the support of the body had been removed, would have subsided or collapsed, and would now be lying flat. A gap would have appeared between the body cloths and the head napkin where his face and neck had been. And the napkin itself, because of the complicated crisscross pattern of the bandages, might well have retained its concave shape, a crumpled turban, but with no head inside it.

It is not hard to imagine the site which greeted the eyes of the apostles when they reached the tomb: the stone slab, the collapsed grave-clothes, the shell of the head-cloth and the gap between the two. No wonder they "saw and believed". A glance at these grave clothes proved the reality and indicated the nature of the resurrection. They had been

neither touched nor folded nor manipulate by any human being. They were like a discarded cocoon from which the butterfly had emerged.

And that leads to another snapshot of the Resurrection: Jesus' body was transformed. Jesus' body was transformed. It is important to point out, as John Stott did, that when Jesus rose from the dead, He didn't just rise, He transformed. His body changed from an earthly body to a resurrected body. He rose in the sense that He came back to life, but He didn't rise in the sense that he literally sat up and yawned and walked out of the tomb. He didn't come back to life in His old earthly body, He came back to life in a new heavenly body, which was different from the old one.

For an example of how different His resurrection body was, turn with me to Luke 24. While His new body had some similarities to the old one, while He could eat and drink and He still had scars in His hands, while He could still walk and talk and sit and stand and be touched, He didn't have the same old body. After the resurrection, Luke 24 says that Jesus visited with two of His disciples on the Road to Emmaus. And at first, they didn't know who He was. But towards the end of the visit, verses 30-37 says this,

30 When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. 36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and \*said to them, "Peace be to you." 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

Jesus disappeared and reappeared right in front of their eyes. He did it with two of the disciples, and He did it with all of them a few days later. They were so surprised that they thought they had seen a ghost. Locked doors couldn't keep Jesus out of a room because His new body could come and go as He pleased. It was transformed, it was different. It didn't have the same limitations as the old one. And because of this, it's probably worth mentioning that the stone wasn't rolled away so Jesus could get out, the stone was rolled away so everyone else could get in. Can I get an "amen" to that? Can I get a "hallelujah?" Jesus didn't need the stone to be rolled away more than He needed doors to be unlocked. The stone couldn't have stopped Jesus any more than a wall could. His new body was limitless, it had no earthly physical boundaries. It was something unlike the world had ever seen.

And can I encourage you this morning? Philippians 3:21, which I read to you earlier, says that: "The Lord Jesus will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." After we die, if we are in Christ, Jesus will transform our bodies. He will give us the same kind of body that He has. When you die, your soul will leave your body like a hand leaves a glove to wait until a later time when they will meet again. I don't know if we will be able to walk through walls reappear and disappear at will, but it will be transformed – it will be changed.

You are getting an upgrade, amen? For some of you, you couldn't hear anything more encouraging than that. Some of you want to shout "amen" to that? You're tired of going to the doctor, tired of going to the hospital. You're tired of not being able to sleep at night. You're tired of feeling weary all the time. You are tired of taking medicine, tired of having surgery, tired of seeing the effects of cancer and disease destroy your body. You are tired of not being able to do what you need to be able to do. But my friends, don't you see? If you are in Christ, then this body is only temporary. If you are in Christ, then you are going to get a new one. The cancer won't last, the sickness won't last, the weariness and fatigue and medicine won't last. A day is coming when you will shed this old body like a butterfly sheds its cocoon. And you will get something a thousand times better, something unlike this world has ever seen.

That leads to one more snapshot of the Resurrection. Fifth and finally: Jesus' body was indestructible. Jesus' body was indestructible. This is not stated in the Gospels, but when we turn to the book of 1 Corinthians, we see it there. If you want to flip over there ... (last time I will ask you to do this, I promise) ... but First Corinthians 15 tells us about the indestructibility of our new bodies.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Notice what Paul says our resurrection bodies will be like? Verse 42 says they will be imperishable. Verse 43 says they will be raised to glory. Verse 44 says they will be spiritually (not spiritual in the sense of being non-physical, but spiritual in the sense of being holy) sinless. The word "perishable" in verse 42 could be translated "able to be destroyed" "subject to corruption". Jesus' resurrection body was incapable of being destroyed. It could not be corrupted and ours will be the same. Our resurrection bodies will be incapable of being corrupted. It will not taste death. As 1 Corinthians 15:55 says, the sting of death is gone for the Christian. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting?" It's gone. The moment you die, you will go to heaven where you will one day receive a body like this. This is something to think about. Did you know that from the time Jesus' left the tomb until today, He has the same body? He has had the same set of skin? It is indestructible. It won't ever wear out. Did you know that from today until we reach the new heavens and the new earth, He will still have the same body? He will still have the same set of skin. It is indestructible. It is imperishable. It is incorruptible. You won't need knee replacement surgery in heaven, amen? You won't need any surgery. You won't need to get a heart transplant or a kidney transplant. You won't need prosthetic limbs or cancer treatment. You won't need a tracheotomy or a myotomy or any kind of "-otomy", because nothing, I repeat, nothing will wear out. All the doctors in this room will be out of a job, because the only great physician there - there's only one healer in that place.

Which leads to an important question. How do I get this? How do I get an indestructible body? How do I get a body free from cancer and free from sickness and free from surgery? The answer is very simple: believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that the way to have the body He had is to believe in Him. He is the first fruits, as First Corinthians 15:23 says it. He had this kind of body first, and all of us will have it afterwards, if we believe in Him.

In just a minute, we are going to have some baptisms and you are going to watch as people demonstrate this. They are going to demonstrate what it means to believe in Jesus. Just as their body will go down into the water, so their soul has gone down into the grave to die; die to sin, die to self, die to the old way of life. And just as the body will come up out of the water, so their soul has come up out of the grave to live again; to live a new way of life, a holy way of life, a godly way of life.

But it all starts with Jesus. He raises our souls and our bodies from the dead. He raises our inner man and our outer man from the grave. And if you trust in Him, He will raise you too.

Several years ago, a major television station reported the story of a skydiver who died while filming his jump. The cause of his death was that he forgot to bring a parachute. He put his faith in the wrong thing - he believed a lie. You don't want to do that this morning. You don't want to put faith in reincarnation or purgatory. You don't want to believe in alternative worlds or in annihilation. You want to believe in Jesus Christ who died and rose again. He was the sinless Son of God who died so that sinners could be forgiven. He was the sinless Son of God who rose again so that sinners could rise in Him.

Will you put your faith in Him today? He is the only real parachute. My friends, He is the only one who can catch you when you fall. If you have never trusted in Him but would like to, then please come talk to me after the baptisms, or grab some of the men in our church. They would love to tell you about Jesus. There is no greater way to celebrate Easter than by trusting in Him.