

Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

Contradictions in Scripture: At the Tomb

There are other matters of debate that I could find to write upon concerning proposed contradictions in Scripture, although we have already covered many of them. Yet for now we will pass over other matters we might consider and move on to complete our study for now with an examination of the visits to Christ's tomb. Here again we have a difficulty caused by differing details among the four gospels. There were apparently several visits to the tomb by different groups of women. If we note the given occurrences, we will find them as follows:

1.) In Matthew chapter 28 we have "as the first day of the week began to dawn." Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb. This is not Jesus' mother, whose Greek name was "Mariam," as was Mary (Mariam) Magdalene's name. This was an actual "Maria." They found the angel who had rolled away the stone. (Compare verse 4 with verse 5, "the angel.") He invites them to see the place where the Lord lay, and then instructs them to go and tell the disciples that a.) He is risen and b.) He is going before them into Galilee, where they will see Him. These two (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary) run from the tomb with fear and joy to bring the disciples word. Jesus meets them on the way, and allows them to touch His feet.

2.) In Mark, we have very early in the morning, "at the rising of the sun" (as it was rising into the sky). We have Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome come with spices prepared (notice there was no mention of spices in the previous occurrence.) They are worried about rolling the stone away, not knowing that this has already been done. When they find it already rolled away, they enter the tomb and find a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. They are alarmed, but he tells them not to be alarmed, invites them to see the place where he was laid, and tells them a.) He is risen and b.) He is going before them into Galilee, where they will see Him. These three leave the tomb quickly and flee, are amazed, and say nothing to anyone, being afraid.

3.) In Luke, we have it still very early. We have "the women who had come with Him from Galilee" (Luke 23:55) along with certain other women. These were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women with them. They come to the tomb bearing spices. They find the stone rolled away, but not Jesus' body. They stand around greatly perplexed, but at this time two men in shining garments stand by them and tell them a.) He is risen and b.) He told them that He would rise before His death. No instructions for His disciples are given. So that they remember His words and, leaving the tomb, go and tell the eleven and all the rest of what they have seen.

4.) In John, we have Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb while it was still dark. She sees the stone taken away, and runs to tell Peter and John. They come and survey the scene, but believe her story of someone taking His body away and leave. She remains there weeping, where the Lord meets her, although He does not allow her to touch Him. After recognizing Him and talking with Him, she runs and tells the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and explains what He told her.

This is perhaps the most confusing and hard to figure out of our "discrepancies" yet. It would appear that this was a very confusing and unbelievable time for all involved, and no doubt they were as worn out emotionally as they could possibly be. These women probably kept trying to convince themselves that the things that they were seeing were just imagination or hallucination, and this would explain their repeated returns to the tomb. But it appears most likely to me that Mary's trip to the tomb while it was still dark was the first of these events (recorded in John.) She

was going there most likely to weep, not being able to sleep for sorrow. Finding the tomb empty, she runs in alarm to Peter and John. Her meeting with Christ in the garden then takes place, with Him revealing to her that she cannot touch Him as He is about to ascend to His Father. She goes and tells His disciples, but they do not believe her. Then she goes to meet the other women, having no doubt already made plans with them to return to the sepulcher at dawn to adorn His body with the spices. She returns with them as recorded in Mark. Perhaps she is starting to doubt what she saw earlier, the disciples' unbelief having dampened her spirits, and so she does not comment as the other two women discuss how they will move the stone away from the sepulcher. Then, upon seeing the empty tomb, they enter and talk to the young man. He gives them instructions, but they are afraid and leave without telling anyone. No doubt they then go and join a larger group of women, who, seeing the spices and so forth that they are carrying and noting their distress (although they say nothing of what has happened to them), deduce that they are heading for the sepulcher and steer them back in that direction, coming along to help as is recorded in Luke. Upon reaching the sepulcher, they enter and find His body not there. The women (at least, all those for whom this is a first trip to the sepulcher this morning) are very perplexed, but the angels come and speak to them. There being more reason (not to mention security) in numbers, these women respond with less fear and more dawning joy, and immediately go to tell the disciples, who do not believe them. Growing frustrated with the disciples for not accepting their story, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary return to the sepulcher to see what they can see as is recorded in Matthew. This time the angel talks to them and gives them the instructions as to what they are to tell the disciples. At last having overcome their fear and basking in the joy of what they finally believe, they rush to tell the disciples the instructions that the angel has given them. Meanwhile Jesus has completed His ascension to heaven and meets them on the road, allowing them now to touch Him and repeating to them the instructions that they are to give.

I will admit that this is my interpretation of events. There are some weak points to my interpretation, most notably Mary Magdalene seeing Christ in John and then returning with the other women as if she has not yet seen Him in Mark. I admit that someone else might propose another order of events that may make more sense than the one I have set forth. I do insist, however, that these are different events, and indicate an order of visits to the tomb that are greatly confused by the women's existing sorrow, their unbelief, the doubting of their own senses caused by the disciples' refusing to accept their story, and the eventual realization and acceptance that the Lord has indeed risen. It is no wonder that they returned to the tomb several times, or that they had to assure themselves several times that what they had seen was indeed the truth. It is also no wonder that women who were doubting their own senses would not speak of what they had seen to other women whom they met who were also traveling to the tomb. No, there is no discrepancy here, only a difficulty, and that difficulty can be overcome by carefully examining and considering the differences between the four passages. Only by examining all four gospels can we hope to arrive at the truth. But there is no contradiction here, only the confusion preceding the joy that came about as these women realized the truth that their Lord had risen from the dead.

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