

Believe

JOHN

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Community Group Material:

Bible Reading: John 20:1-10

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“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. ² So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, & said to them, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!” ³ At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. ⁵ Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. ⁷ 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. ⁸ The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, & believed. ⁹ For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.” (John 20:1-10 CSB)

SUMMARY:

In the 4th Gospel, Jesus’ first resurrection appearance is to Mary Magdalene; John, the ‘Beloved Disciple’ is the first to believe (without seeing). In stark contrast, Paul and Luke emphasize Peter as the primary resurrection eyewitness, while the Beloved Disciple is conspicuously absent from their accounts. Peter and Paul loomed large in the early church, shaping its direction. Yet, decades later, the 4th Gospel emerged as a counterpoint centered on John, the Beloved Disciple, challenging traditional perspectives.

John's detailed 'race to the tomb' is purposeful, placing the Beloved Disciple on par with Peter, without diminishing the latter. Moreover, it shifts the focus from authoritative apostolic appearances to the believers' saving faith in Jesus' resurrection. John also elevates women's roles, exemplified by Mary Magdalene. In the 'race to the tomb,' Peter and John are representative figures, symbolizing contrasting paradigms for the church: one rooted in institutional hierarchy, the other in a more egalitarian familial structure.

This narrative has contemporary relevance. Just as the early church faced alternatives, modern congregations must choose between hierarchical rigidity and inclusive egalitarianism. The 'race to the tomb' serves as a poignant metaphor for these options: What kind of church do we aspire to be?

Discussion Questions

1. The earliest written NT account of Jesus' resurrection appearances is that of Paul. He wrote:
 - o "I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the 3rd day according to the Scriptures, & that *he* appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the Twelve..." (1 Cor. 15:3-5)
 - o How does Paul's list compare with John's Gospel? What factors might explain the differences? Discuss.
2. Why has John's Gospel included this elaborate account of the 2 disciples' "race to the tomb"? Luke's Gospel uses only 1 verse (Luke 24:12) to describe this event; in contrast John uses 8 verses. Why? Discuss.
3. Here's Luke's account of the "race to the tomb": On hearing the women's report "Peter... got up & ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went away, amazed at what had happened." (Luke 24:12). Compare this with John's account (Jn. 20:3-8 above). What's different? Why?
4. Based on John's account
 - a. Who was the first to believe? (Based on what did he believe?)
 - b. According to both John's & Luke's accounts did Peter believe at that time or not?
5. One scholar says that in the 'race to the tomb': "The Beloved Disciple ['John'] has a unique position *alongside that of Peter...*, but *without in any way diminishing Peter's special place among the disciples.*"
 - a. Do you agree with this statement? (Why or why not?)
 - b. What might have motivated the author to 'elevate John to be on par with Peter'?
6. Some scholars suggest that the 'Beloved Disciple' (John) and Peter are symbols portraying different kinds of church. One says: "*Peter in the archetype [symbol] of an institutional model of church government, while... the Beloved Disciple is the archetype of a familial model [of the church].*" Do they have a case? Discuss.