Miracle of the Undisturbed Grave Clothes of Jesus

John 20:6-8 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.”

Another Calvary miracle was the marvelous arrangement of thins in the grave of the just risen Jesus. The claim of the text is not alone to declare the fact of the resurrection, but exhibits proof of Christ’s resurrection beyond question — and takes rank with the other Calvary wonders, that outwardly demonstrates the value and efficiency of Christ’s redeeming death.

It is noticeable that Matthew, whose account of the Calvary signs is otherwise complete, makes no allusion to the undisturbed grave clothes of Jesus. And the reason of that omission is interesting. The striking feature of Matthew’s account is his being uninterrupted in his descriptions. After mention the darkness – the sign of the sufferings of the cross – he speaks of the sings of the victory of the cross, taking as his starting point and second of the two loud cries from the cross, and limiting his remarks to the effect of that cry of victory. It rent the veil of the Temple, and shook the earth, and opened the graves. And, as explanatory of the opened graves, Matthew states, “many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves,” after the Lord Himself had risen.

Matthew’s description so perfectly continuous, there is no room between the opening of the graves and the rising out from them of the saints for an account of the state of things in the deserted tomb.

Matthew mentions the Lord’s resurrection as the forerunner and cause of that of the saints’ resurrection. However, it was out of harmony with his arrangement to have inserted at this junction an account of the condition of the tomb, because its condition was not brought about by that cry of victory uttered long before.

After mentioning the first four of the Calvary miracles Matthew then describes the rising of the saints, the last wonder, omitting the fifth.

Meanwhile, what Matthew omits John supplies. John, while making no other allusion to the Calvary miracles, puts us in possession of this nearest approach to a description of he Lord’s resurrection, and enable us to consider it in certain aspects of its occurring.

Very early on Sunday morning, then, Peter and John heard from Mary Magdalene that the body of Jesus placed in the sepulcher on Friday afternoon, was no long there. She also announced her conclusion that enemies had taken it away.

Instantly the two apostles hastened and came to the sepulcher – John out-running Peter and arriving first. And he, “stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying, yet went not in.” But Peter “following him, went into the sepulcher, and sees the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about his head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” After which John also went in, “and he saw and believed.”
When Peter and John entered the sepulcher, they did not see the body of Jesus; but they did see the grave clothes. And they saw the clothes in a certain order -- “the linen clothes lying,” and the napkin for the head being “in a place by itself.” And “wrapped together.”

To acquaint us with the exact arrangement of the clothes is the sole purpose of nine verses of the Gospel history. So great an expenditure of this account certainly shows how important it was. This passage is intended to describe a wonderful state of things as they appeared in the tomb Jesus was raised from. It is evident from the fact that it is the essential force of this whole Scriptural description of Jesus’ tomb.

According, see further what an impression it produced on the mind of John. He “saw and believed.” What did the arrangement of the grave clothes cause John to believe? Was it the story that Magdalene told of Jesus’ body not being there that he believed? Surely, when he saw it was not there, it was hardly needful to add that he believed it was not there. Besides, what had the arrangement of the clothes to do with his seeing that the body was not there? Yet it was the arrangement that caused him to believe.

Or, could it be that he believed in Mary’s conclusion that, since the body was not there, therefore the enemies of Jesus had stolen it? No, for that is what the order and arrangement of the clothes showed to be false. It is inconceivable that if the body had been stolen, and enemy would have spent the time to abstract the body from the clothes and so arrange them. Scripture clearly tells us that when John “saw he arrangement of the grave clothes, he believed, beyond all doubt, that Jesus was risen.” So expressive of a divine interposition was that arrangement, that he became an instant convert to the truth of the Lord’s resurrection; although till then, as is added in the next verse, he knew not the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead (John 20:9). These graves garments were arrangement in such an order that they produced an effect that gave a scene that provide evidenced that Christ’s arose from the dead. In the light of this, let’s proceed to interpret our text.

When John saw “the linen clothes lying,” he believed. The word “lying” does not merely refer to the fact that they were “remaining of the floor of the sepulcher,” but rather, the word used, means that they were “lying precisely as the body had lain in them.” The grave clothes were in exactly the position the body had occupied.

“Linen clothes” refer to the manner in which they prepared the body for burial in that day. They would wrap the body with a wide long cloth, somewhat like a bandage is applied to an injured leg or arm, the wrappings continued until they reached the neck. They did not wrap the face and head, but instead tied a square napkin-like cloth around the head. This was the method they used to prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Like a giant bondage, these wrappings were wound around the body of our Lord, beginning at the feet, and ending at the head. A napkin that was tied around it protected the head and face itself. When John saw these “linen clothes lying” undisturbed, just as they had been when the body of Jesus lay within them, but now there was no body, the linen clothes were empty!

John 19:39-40 tells us that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea brought about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes spices and wound the body of Jesus in the cloth
wrappings with the spices. As they wrapped the cloth strip around and around Jesus’
body, they poured in 100 pounds of spices into the wrappings and upon the body. All
these liquid spices would soon harden and would cause the cloth wrappings to become
an encrusted cocoon around the body of Jesus. All the wrappings followed the contours
of the body, it would be a tight solid covering that would protect the body, and from
which the body could not be pulled by any human means. The only way, humanly
speaking, a body could be removed from such encrusted wrappings would be by
cutting the cloth from end to end and laying back each side so the body could be pulled
from its wrappings.

When the disciples saw the “linen clothes lying” — uncut, undisturbed, lying just
as they had been, yet they were empty — it convinced them that the body had been
miraculously, supernaturally removed. Had some human hand stolen the body, he
would have been forced to slit open the bindings in order to remove the body. The
Greek words translated, “wrapped together” in John 20:7, actually mean, “twisted together”
or “rolled up” — it speaks of a fixed position - much like a cocoon. The linen cloths were
“wrapped” or “rolled together,” however the body was missing. The “linen clothes” had not
been unfolded, loosed or disturbed in anyway! They just lay there!, an empty shell of the
linen clothes that had been wrapped around and around he body of Jesus.

The napkin “was in a place by itself”

John 20:7 also tells us that the napkin, that was placed over the face of Jesus, was
not just thrown aside, but Scripture takes an entire verse to tell us that the napkin was
“neatly folded and placed by itself.” John and Peter, after seeing “linen wrappings, like a
giant cocoon,” lying there, the noticed the “napkin,” that had covered Jesus' head was
folded and lying to the side. Is it significant!

In order to understand the significance of the “folded napkin,” we need to know
about Hebrew tradition of that day. The folded napkin had to do with the Master and
Servant, and every Jewish boy knew this tradition. When the servant set the dinner table
for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it. The table
was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the
master had finished eating, and the servant would not dare touch that table until the
master was finished. When the master was through eating, he would rise from the table,
wipe his fingers and mouth with that napkin and toss it on to the table. The servant
would then know to clear the table. For in those days, the wadded napkin meant, “I'm
done.” But if the master got up from the table, and folded his napkin, and laid it beside his
plate, the servant knew that the folded napkin meant, “I'm not finished yet.” But the
folded napkin meant, “I'm coming back!” -- HALLELUJAH!!!!

It would appear that in spite of all the Calvary miracles that had taken place,
according to John 20:9, the disciples still did not realize that Jesus would rise from the
dead. However, when Peter and John saw “the linen clothes wrapped together” – and - “the
napkin folded” – realizing that Christ’s physical body had dissolved and vanished
supernaturally into a spirit body and merged right through the grave cloths,
disappearing from within the knots and folds undisturbed -- they were convinced
beyond all doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead.
Remarkable, while the fact of the Lord’s resurrection is everywhere proclaimed throughout Scripture, the act itself is never described. We do not read so much as, “then He arose and left the tomb,” but only, “He has risen!” Exactly what happened and how it took place is left to the imagination of the reader — almost as wonderful as the event itself — were these God-ordained memorials of Christ’s resurrection. They served as argumentative wonders, miraculous demonstrations of the fact that Christ arose. Those silent memorials, those undisturbed grave cloths, still clutching at the vanished body, left testimony to the presence and power of Almighty God.

There, of course, were other arguments confirming Christ’s resurrection — such as His personal appearances and the moral power of the truth of His resurrection as displayed in the hearts and lives of Christians, however, the cocoon like grave cloths and the napkins neatly wrapped together, is certainly one of the great proof given in the inspired Word of God.

Noting the difference between Lazarus’ revived body and Jesus’ resurrection body; Lazarus come forth, in his former flesh body, “bound hand a foot with grave clothes” (John 11:44), Jesus did not. Lazarus still had the same infirmities and liabilities as he had before. Jesus did not! Lazarus died again and his body awaits “a better resurrection.” What symbolical relics, then, were those deserted grave clothes in the Lord’s sepulcher?

True resurrection body, while yet a authentic body, is a body not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. When Jesus left behind Him His grave clothes, it was symbolized that He had gotten rid of the flesh as flesh, and all the infirmity, and meddlesome mass that characterize the flesh as it is born into this world. When Jesus left behind Him His grave clothes, emptying them of Himself and vanishing from within them, it was shown that He had attained to a spirituality of bodily condition — a condition independent of the laws of gross matter, and having power of motion to “appear” at will.

When one plants a flower seed in the ground, he does not expect the same seed to come back up. The reason one plants a knurled, twisted, dirty (even ugly) tulip bulb in the ground is that he expects a glorious flower to appear in all its exquisite glory in the spring. There, of course, is a connection between the seed planted and the flower that grows, but one is certainly not the other.

At death, the spirit goes to be with the Lord while the body is either laid in the grave, where dust returns to dust, or it is buried at sea, burned in a fire, or, eaten by wild animals. Is God really able to put the body back together again and give us “glorified bodies” at the last resurrection? Yes! I don’t know how God can do it! I know that He will! I do not know how one tiny, little watermelon seed can produce a whole vine, yielding millions of other seeds, nonetheless, it does — How? — Because God is able to do anything!

I don’t understand it all, but, as surely as I know that a seed must die, and decay in the ground before any harvest can appear, I know that those Christians who have gone on before us are today walking around in youthful, vigorous, spiritually-healthy bodies! I know that no one actually goes into the “grave” — long before the “body” is placed there, the person who lived inside the body is gone!
No one has ever looked at the body at a funeral know instinctively it is **NOT** the loved one they knew lying there! Scripture teaches that when the Christian dies, he is, “absent from the body and present with the Lord!”

Philippians 3:20-21 says, “For our citizenship is in heaven: from which we expect the Lord Jesus Christ as Deliverer: Who shall change, (transform), our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.”