

Harmonization of the Resurrection Day Events The Four Gospel Accounts (and 1 Corinthians 15)

Introduction

Anyone reading the four Gospel accounts of the Resurrection of Christ quickly realizes that the four accounts are told from different points of view. And it can be confusing because none of the four accounts speaks of everything that actually took place and none of the four accounts speaks directly as to the chronology of all of the events that took place that day, especially the different appearances of the Risen Lord to various people. And we don't even learn of two of the appearances that happened that day from the Gospel accounts. We learn about several of our Lord's post-resurrection appearances from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Obviously the Gospel accounts are not intended to give us all of the events that occurred surrounding our Lord's Resurrection from the dead, the most glorious event in the annals of human history – and beyond that too.

While I'm certain there are plenty of 'harmonies' out there, I set out to put together my own harmony of the events of that glorious day, Sunday, April 5, 33 AD, in Jerusalem, Israel (from the Scriptural accounts).

1. CHRIST AROSE – sometime after midnight (Saturday night) and before dawn (Sunday Morning).
2. There was a tremendous earthquake (another one as there had been one on Friday afternoon when Jesus died – Matt. 27:51-52), an Angel descended from heaven and rolled away the great stone from the front of the tomb and proceeded to sit down on the stone! (Mt. 28:2) – I absolutely LOVE this little detail added to the story!!!
3. The women who were watching the proceedings of the burial of Jesus' body on Friday afternoon (Lk 23:55, Mt. 27:61, Mk.15:47), had gone out on Saturday afternoon after the Sabbath had ended and bought the spices with which to anoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1). Then on Saturday evening they had prepared the burial spices with which to anoint Jesus' body (Lk. 23:56), and were on their way to the tomb before dawn on Sunday morning. On their way there, they had a discussion about the STONE. They wondered among themselves how they were going to be able to get inside the tomb to anoint Jesus' body (Mk. 16:1-3). This makes it clear that they had watched the whole proceeding of the burial of Jesus in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, including the rolling of the great stone over the doorway to close the entrance of the tomb – a task that would have taken a number of strong men with huge leverage tools designed to roll that great stone into place. And there was a significant depression carved into the rock ledge in front of the door to the tomb to receive the huge stone – making it virtually impossible for any small group of people to roll that stone away from the door. And the women were apparently not aware of the Jewish Chief Priests' sealing the rock over the doorway and posting guards at the tomb. Had they known that, they probably would NOT have come to the tomb that morning.

****Note:** We know from the various accounts that there were AT LEAST five women in the party of ladies that went to the tomb that Sunday morning. Four of them are named: Matthew names Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James (and Joses/Joseph) whom he calls, "the other Mary". Mark names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark's naming of these women is in connection with their going out and buying the anointing spices after the Sabbath was complete on Saturday evening). Luke names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James,

Joanna and “the other women” (obviously meaning that there were at least 5 women in the party, possibly more). John only names Mary Magdalene. So, there are four women who are actually named in the four Gospel accounts. There was at least one more, and maybe more than that. The mother of James and John (sons of Zebedee) is mentioned in Mt. 27:56 as being present at the Crucifixion. John (19:25) also names Mary, Jesus’ mother as being present at the Crucifixion and Mary, the wife of Clopas (who may be the “other Mary” of Matthew’s account and Mary, the mother of James in Mark’s and Luke’s account). John also mentions Mary’s sister (who is probably the mother of James and John, sons of Zebedee) as being present at the Crucifixion. It is probably likely that these were the women who were in that core group of ladies. It does make sense that Jesus’ mother, Mary and her sister (likely the mother of the sons of Zebedee, - James and John) were NOT in the group of women who went to the tomb early on Sunday morning as they were intending to do the grizzly task of washing and anointing Jesus’ body for permanent burial and they probably spared Mary, Jesus’ mother the terrible duty of participating in that difficult task. It is likely that Mary’s sister would remain with Mary to provide moral support for her in her hour of grief. Mary Magdalene is clearly the focus of the account as she is mentioned first, named in all four accounts, is the only one mentioned in John’s account and is one of the first people to see the Resurrected Christ.

4. Upon arriving at the tomb, the women discovered that the stone had been rolled away. Harmonizing the four Gospel accounts, we learn that Mary Magdalene must have immediately turned around (perhaps even before the other women in the party arrived at the tomb – and probably in her haste took another, shorter route) and raced back to the place where the Eleven Disciples were gathered. But, she apparently found and told only Peter and John that the stone was rolled away from the door – obviously indicating to her that Jesus’ body had been stolen or moved (we get that from John’s Gospel – Jn 20:2). Apparently the other women (who were possibly well behind Mary Magdalene) arrived at the tomb and went inside (Lk 24:2, Mk. 16:5), saw the body of Jesus was gone and were confronted by the two Angels while they were still inside the tomb. They were terribly afraid, bowed their faces to the ground and there ensued the little ‘sermon’ by the two angels (Lk. 24:5-7, Mk. 16:5-7, Mt. 28:5-7).
5. Apparently the “other women” hastily left the tomb, in a state of shocked joy. They were heading back to the place where the Eleven Disciples and all the others were gathered to tell them about what they’d just seen and experienced. Apparently somewhere while they were *en route* back to the gathering place, the Resurrected Lord appeared to these women and they fell at His feet and worshipped Him. He told them to go tell the Apostles (Mt. 28:8-10, Mk. 16:8, and Lk 24:9).
6. Meanwhile Mary Magdalene arrived back at the gathering place and told Peter and John about the stone being rolled away and that she feared that someone had stolen the body of Jesus (John 20:2). Apparently Mary Magdalene didn’t talk to the other 9 Disciples or the other people gathered with them. Peter and John immediately set out running to the tomb and Mary Magdalene ran after them – making her 2nd trip to the tomb that Sunday morning. (John 20:2-4, Lk. 24:12).
7. The women (apart from Mary Magdalene) arrived at the place where the others were gathered and began telling the 9 remaining disciples and all the others what had happened (Lk. 24:9-10).
8. The first reaction of everyone there to the women’s’ report was DISBELIEF. They actually believed the women were telling ‘idle tales’ – why they thought that is not said. (Lk. 24:11, Mk. 16:11)

9. But, Peter and John had already, upon Mary Magdalene's report, instantly begun to run to the tomb to see for themselves. Luke tells only Peter's part – which is simply stated that Peter ran to the tomb and “stooping down” he saw the linen wrappings that were hastily wrapped around Jesus' body by Joseph of Arimathea on Friday evening. John reports that Peter actually went inside the tomb and observed the linen wrappings. These wrappings were lying undisturbed (apparently still in the shape of Jesus' body & thus dispelling any notion of a ‘hasty theft’ of the body). Luke tells us that “Peter departed marveling to himself at what had happened.” (Lk. 24:12).
10. John added his own personal part of that particular set of events on that glorious Sunday morning. John tells us that both he and Peter “RAN” to the tomb. John was apparently a faster runner than Peter so he arrived at the tomb first – but probably being the more-timid personality, did NOT go into the tomb itself. Rather, he stooped down and looked into the tomb. John specifically notes that he did not go into the tomb. BUT Peter, when he arrived at the tomb ran past John and went straight on into the tomb. John specifically notes the ‘handkerchief’ that covered the face of Jesus (probably a wrapping that wrapped the face and head separate from the body wrappings) was lying separately (and folded) from the undisturbed linen strips that had been wrapped around Jesus' body – still in the shape of the body and thus making it impossible for any story of ‘theft’ of Jesus' body to be true. If thieves had stolen the body, it would not have been possible for the linen cloths to be still lying in the shape of Jesus body – just without His body in them. Obviously if thieves had taken Jesus' body, there would be no linen cloths even present as they wouldn't take the time to unwrap the body and even if they had done so, the wrappings would certainly not still be in the shape of Jesus' body. John also notes that the face covering handkerchief was “folded” and lying separate from the linen cloths. This was further proof that this was not a “theft” for there is absolutely no reason whatsoever that thieves would take the linen face cloth/wrapping off Jesus' head and face and “fold” it and leave it behind! While Luke said that Peter “marveled” at that sight, John tells us that it was these linen cloths and the face handkerchief/wrapping that were lying there as they were that convinced him that Jesus had indeed ARISEN from the dead. John says that he “BELIEVED” then and there! (John 20:3-9).
11. Peter and John both apparently left the tomb. John 20:10 says they went “to their own homes”. That is something of an odd statement and I don't know why it is placed where it is placed – except to say it is probably a summary statement that generally describes what happened later as we know that our Resurrected Lord appeared to the Eleven and others later that evening in Jerusalem. Also, most of the Disciples lived in Galilee around the Sea of Galilee, so the statement that they returned to their homes is a general, summary statement indicating that after Resurrection Sunday and the Resurrected Lord's instructions to the women to return to Galilee, they did just that. We know that they did go there – probably leaving early in the morning of the following day. John specifically tells us that the Resurrected Lord appeared to them all together (Thomas was absent) “that same day at evening”. That is when Jesus “breathed on them” and ‘gave them the Holy Spirit’ (Jn. 20:22).
12. Mary Magdalene arrived back at the tomb. Peter and John had already been there and left again. After they left, apparently Mary Magdalene still outside the tomb, stooped down and looked inside the tomb (John's account – Jn. 20:11-12). She saw that Jesus' body was indeed gone and then she saw the two angels still inside the tomb. There was a short conversation between Mary Magdalene and the two angels, when Jesus suddenly appeared behind her and spoke to her. She thought Him to be the Gardener and then the famous, beloved conversation between Mary

Magdalene and our Resurrected Lord ensued (Jn. 20:14-17). She went back and told everyone her version of the story (Jn. 20:18).

13. Luke 24:34 teaches (and 1 Corinthians 15:5) that at some point that day, after the appearance to Mary Magdalene and before the appearance to the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35), that the Resurrected Savior made a personal appearance to Peter.
14. In the evening of that same day, our Lord made His appearance to the disciples (Jn. 20:19-25) but Thomas was not present.
15. Jesus made other appearances to people as well. 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 indicates that our Lord appeared to His half-brother James as well as the striking fact that Jesus appeared to 500 people at once. Of these appearances we have no other knowledge – it is here in 1 Corinthians 15 alone that we know anything of those appearances.
16. We also know that from Jerusalem on that glorious Sunday, the action moved to Galilee. John 21 has the absolutely heartwarming account of Jesus meeting with 7 Apostles on the shore of the Sea of Galilee having made breakfast for them there on the shoreline.

This harmonization seems to me to be the most reasonable and the least problematic explanation of the series of events, experiences, movements and reactions of these people who were Jesus' closest friends to His Resurrection from the dead! There are clearly different perspectives represented in the four accounts and none gives all the details. The one thing that no one specifically mentions that seems to me to be the "key" element to understanding the events as described is that Mary Magdalene ended up making two trips to the tomb. And it was on her 2nd arrival there that the Lord appeared to her.

This glorious event – this indescribably monumental event – is unparalleled in terms of its importance. There is nothing in all of human history that compares to it. It is the hinge upon which all of human existence swings. Yet, in all its splendor and majesty this Day also represents our LORD JESUS, THE CHRIST in all of His love and grace. This Day and our Resurrected Lord's way of dealing with people is full of tenderness, kindness, forgiveness, grace and mercy. He is the Sovereign King and yet He is the Loving Shepherd. HOW WORTHY HE IS TO BE WORSHIPPED with the HIGHEST PRAISES, HONORS and GLORY possible for human beings to offer. CELEBRATE THE LIFE!!!