

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## FOLDED GRAVE CLOTHES

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If there is one household chore that really seems to divide opinions it is ironing. I quite like it, albeit in small doses, my wife however hates it and would rather I do all of it. Ironing comes at the end of the laundry process. First the clothes have to be washed, made clean, with all the stains removed. Then they have to be dried, carefully, to avoid too many creases. And lastly the ironing, folding and putting them away, ready to use again.

Now this process reminded me of a verse in the bible. Or at least I thought it did. What I actually found, as I studied the matter, was a trail of mistranslations, misinterpretations, and bizarre internet theories that rely on fairly detailed understandings of Jewish traditions.

The bible passage in question is from John chapter 20 verses 3 to 9.

“Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stopped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed – for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said that said Jesus must rise from the dead.”

This version is taken from the New Living Translation, or NLT for short.

Now there is a famous old hymn called Thine Be the Glory. Verse 2 of this hymn goes like this: “Angels in bright raiment, Rolled the stone away, Kept the folded grave clothes, Where Thy body lay”

Now the word I am looking at here is “folded”. It appears in the hymn and it appears in the NLT. Now sometimes when we look at scripture we get ideas about what a certain word might be there for. Why did John record that the

grave-clothes were folded? Was it to tell us that Jesus left things neat and tidy when He left? Or is its meaning hidden now because we don't understand Jewish tradition? Well, there is no shortage of theories out there to suggest the meaning of the fact that the grave-clothes were folded, but here is the problem. Scripture always speaks for itself. It can be read by anyone anywhere and will speak to you plainly as long as you follow a few simple rules.

Firstly we must consider each word in the context of the sentence it is in, secondly we must consider the sentence in the context of the chapter it is in, thirdly we must consider the chapter in the context of the book it is in, and lastly we must consider the book within the overall context of the Bible as a whole.

Now if you have a different version of the Bible you will know that not all versions use the word "folded". The King James uses the word "wrapped" whereas the North American Standard uses the word "rolled". The English Standard, which was the version used by the hymn writer, and the New International Versions also use "folded" which probably explains why I thought of this verse when I was considering folding the laundry. Now without going into too much detail I have found that the best translation is "rolled". Now using this translation we can perhaps better understand what John is saying.

In an earlier verse we see Mary Magdalene reporting to the disciples that someone had taken Jesus' body away. Now this theory has always been popular by those who don't want to believe that Jesus is who He says He is. Matthew tells us in his gospel that the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was concerned that the disciples would steal the body and claim that Jesus had risen from the dead just as He had said He would. He ordered the tomb to be guarded day and night to prevent this from happening.

The key reason that John is telling us about the grave-clothes is to counteract the idea that Jesus' body had somehow been physically removed from the tomb as Mary had assumed. He is telling it exactly as he saw it. He saw that the clothes were arranged as they would have been had Jesus just left them behind having bodily departed from the tomb directly from the place whence He had been laid. If somebody had taken the body they would probably have taken the clothes as well, but had they attempted to unwrap the body then the grave-clothes would probably all be in the same pile.

So here is the key point. John has demonstrated that the only way Jesus could have left the tomb would be if He had risen from the dead exactly as He said He would. John was telling us that it was because of this observation, that he finally believed that Jesus was the Son of God.

We live in a world that likes to explain everything according to scientific principles. There is no room in science for Jesus' resurrection. Back in Jesus

time it wasn't science that stopped them from believing that a resurrection could take place, but the religious beliefs of the day. So we aren't actually any different now to what they were then. Our reasons are different but the result is the same. Societal norms make it difficult to believe in a resurrection.

It is essential, as a Christian, to believe in the resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from the dead the neither will we, and if that is the case then we are, sadly, without any real hope. Our faith would be pointless if there is no resurrection.

John has presented here, for us, the evidence, that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. This is further attested to by other writers in the Bible.

So, from an every day task, ironing, we find ourselves at the greatest victory ever won, the focal point of our faith, the greatest expression of love for sinful people there ever has been.

Next time I do some ironing I will be glad that it reminds me of the sacrifice that Jesus made, so that I might spend eternity in His presence.



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