

I Will Not Return to This Place

John 20:1-31 This passage in John was always a mystery to me. Why did Peter and John believe Jesus was raised from the dead when they saw the linen napkin? Part of the burial clothing of a person in that day was a linen napkin that was wrapped around the head of the deceased. This part of Jesus' burial clothing was lying neatly folded in a place by itself. Listen carefully as John describes that event: "Peter therefore went out and the other disciple, were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw linen cloths lying there, And the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed" (vv. 3-8).

The moment John saw the napkin wrapped neatly in a place separate from the linen clothing, he knew instantly Jesus was risen from the dead. I have heard so many theories about this, and one I found was very amusing. A teacher said Jesus was a neat person, and He was careful to fold the napkin neatly; this is why John knew it was Jesus who was risen and not someone else who had taken His body away. That explanation never satisfied me.

Finally, I discovered the full meaning of this scripture when I went to a conference on Jewish roots. At this conference we learned a lot about Jewish customs, and one in particular related to this incident recorded in John. In Jesus' day people ate with their fingers at low tables, so the host always supplied his guests with large linen napkins. If the

guest enjoyed his meal and the dinner conversation, he let it be known to his host without a word. He crumpled his napkin and left it in the place where he ate. However, if the guest did not enjoy the evening, he also let it be known to his host without a word. He neatly folded his napkin just as it was at the beginning of the meal and left it beside his place. With this action, he was telling his host that he would never return to his home again. The moment John saw the napkin neatly folded in another place, he knew Jesus was saying, "I will not return to this grave ever again." John immediately recognized the message encoded in the piece of rolled-up fabric.

How much richer the Scriptures become when we understand the Jewish customs of Jesus' day. Reading the Bible is like searching for hidden treasure, and I am so thankful I finally struck gold with this passage after being taught about Jewish customs. We all would benefit if we knew more about our Jewish roots. Dig a little deeper today as you study the Word.

**READ: 2 Samuel 18:1-19:10; John 20:1-31; Psalm 119:156-176;
Proverbs 16:14-15**