

John 19:38–20:31: Discipleship after the Death of Jesus

Ken Chan¹

Abstract

Most commentaries see John 19:42 as the end of the description of Jesus' death and burial, and 20:1 as the beginning of his resurrection account. While this is true of the chronology in the life of Jesus, how does the narrative account of Jesus contribute to John's aim in 20:30–31? This article suggests that the narrative after the death of Jesus in 19:38–20:31 presents two patterns of discipleship: (a) those whose faith is based on seeing the resurrected Jesus, and (b) those who follow him even without having seen his resurrected body. A detailed investigation in the Johannine text of the responses of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, Peter, the beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas to the death of Jesus shows that the passage in question is structured chiastically. John 19:38–42 is tied to John 20 and balances 20:30–31. The intent of this chiasm is to emphasise the fact that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are disciples *par excellence*. Their willingness to follow Jesus after his death, even when they did not have the chance to see him resurrected, is exactly the kind of faith called for by John

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

in 20:30–31. The beloved disciple fits this mould to a lesser extent, whereas Thomas and Mary Magdalene do not.

1. The Problem

John 19–20 is normally understood to be about the chronology of Jesus. This can be seen in the division labels of UBS³, where Jesus' crucifixion begins in 19:16, the 'death of Jesus' in 19:28, the 'piercing of Jesus' side' in 19:31, the 'burial of Jesus' in 19:38, the 'resurrection of Jesus' in 20:1, and what happened after the resurrection of Jesus thereafter. This view is widely supported across confessional divides in the literature, as shown in table 1 below.

| Author | Jesus' death | Jesus' resurrection |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Hoskyns (1947:14) | 'The Narrative of the Passion' (18:1–19:42) | 'The Resurrection Appearances' (20:1–21:25) |
| Tenney (1948:270–72) | 'The Burial' (19:38–42) | 'The Resurrection' (20:1–29) |
| Lightfoot (1956:318–334) | 'The Crucifixion of the Lord' (18:1–19:42) | 'The Lord's Resurrection' (20:1–31) |
| Brown (1970:ix–x) | 'The Passion Narrative' (18:1–19:42) | 'The Risen Jesus' (20:1–29) |
| Bultmann (1971:xi–xii) | 'The Passion' (18:1–19:41[<i>sic</i>]) | 'Easter' (20:1–29) |

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Lindars (1972:583–94) | ‘The Deposition and Burial’ (19:31–42) | ‘The Resurrection’ (20:1–31) |
| Bligh (1974:5) | ‘The death of Jesus’ (19:28–30), ‘The piercing of the side of Jesus’ (19:31–37), ‘The burial of Jesus’ (19:38–42) | ‘The Empty Tomb’ (20:1–13) |
| Barrett (1978:vi) | ‘The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus’ (19:17–30), ‘The Burial of Jesus’ (19:31–42) | ‘The Empty Tomb and the First Resurrection Appearance’ (20:1–18), ‘Jesus appears to the Eleven: Conclusion’ (20:19–31) |
| Schnackenburg (1982:viii) | ‘The Passion: Journey to the Cross, Crucifixion and Lying in the Tomb’ (19:16b–42) | ‘Easter: Open Tomb and Appearances, Conclusion of Jesus’ Revelation before the Disciples’ (20:1–31) |
| Bruce (1983:26–27) | ‘The Passion Narrative’ (18:1–19:42) | ‘The Resurrection Narrative’ (20:1–29) |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Beasley-Murray (1987:viii) | 'The Passion Narrative: The Arrest, Trial, Crucifixion, and Burial of Jesus' (18:1–19:42) | 'The Resurrection of Jesus' (20:1–31) |
| Carson (1991:622–63) | 'The Piercing of Jesus' Side' (19:31–37), 'The Burial of Jesus' (19:38–42) | 'The Resurrection of Jesus' (20:1–31) |
| Ridderbos (1997:x) | 'Jesus' Suffering and Death' (18:1–19:42) | 'The Empty Tomb and the Appearances of the Risen One' (20:1–31) |
| Moloney (1998a:vii) | 'The Passion' (18:1–19:42) | 'The Resurrection' (20:1–29) |
| Smith (1999) | 'The Passion Narrative' (18:1–19:42) | 'The First Resurrection Narratives' (20:1–31) |
| Köstenberger (2004:vii) | 'The Passion Narrative' (18:1–19:42) | 'Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances and the Commissioning of His Disciples' (20:1–29) |

Table 1: Understanding John 19–20 as Jesus' death and Jesus'

There is no problem with the fact that Jesus came to die for man and then rose from the dead. But John did not record these historical facts

here as archive. The exhortation in 20:30–31, that ‘these things have been written so that the readers “should believe” (πιστεύσητε), or “may continue to believe” (πιστεύητε)’, shows that John is primarily interested in helping the readers receive spiritual life (or to remain in it) as they get to know the life of Jesus, and what that reveals about his heavenly status.² This observation, that John wants to point people to Jesus, leads to the corollary question of what effect the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus actually had on the biblical characters that experienced this sequence of events.

Stibbe (1993:203) asks: ‘the key question has always been, “will characters *recognise* who Jesus really is?”’ Howard-Brook (1994:x) also made this shift in thinking when he interpreted 20:1–18 as (the disciples) ‘encountering the empty tomb for the first time’. He turned the research focus of this passage from what Jesus was doing to how the disciples were reacting to the life of Jesus. Similarly, Heil (1995:vii) labels 20:1–32 as a section where ‘the disciples see and believe in the risen Jesus’, rather than one where Jesus appeared to the disciples.³

How did the faith of the various characters differ after Jesus’ death? Is there a kind of faith that can serve as a prototype for believers in the biblical age? Researchers who tried to answer these questions are not in agreement, nor are they able to explain the responses of the biblical characters to the death and resurrection of Jesus in 19:38–20:31 as a unity.

This article will show that the passage in question can be explained as exhibiting two types of discipleship in response to the death of Jesus:

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author and are based on the USB³ text. For a fuller discussion on the difference between πιστεύσητε and πιστεύητε in this context, see Carson (1987:2005) and Fee (1992).

³ Also see Moloney (1998b:154).

(a) Discipleship based on seeing the resurrected Jesus (pattern #1), and
(b) discipleship not based on seeing the resurrected Jesus (pattern #2).
John 19:38–20:31 is a rhetorical unit, and its purpose is to encourage the readers to follow Jesus even though they do not see him physically present.

2. John 19:38–20:31 as a Literary Unit

Time indicators, locative indicators, and change in the cast of characters are three major ways of signalling the beginning of a literary unit. In 19:38–20:29, there are four places where the temporal indicators and the cast of characters change.⁴

- (a) The section on Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus begins with 'after these' (μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα) in 19:38.
- (b) The scene shifts to Mary Magdalene in 20:1 with 'on the first of the Sabbaths' (τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων). The responses of Peter to the empty tomb and that of the beloved disciple (20:3–10) are embedded in this section (20:1–18).
- (c) The appearance of Jesus to the fearful disciples in 20:19 opens with another temporal phrase, 'when it was evening, on that day, on the first of the Sabbaths' (οὐσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ τῇ μιᾷ σαββάτων). The doubt of Thomas as he interacted with the disciples is found in this same section (20:19–25).
- (d) The appearance of Jesus to Thomas in 20:26 again begins with a temporal phrase, 'and after eight days' (καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ὀκτὼ).

⁴ For an alternate view that the passage is primarily divided by movement between locations, see Moloney (1998b:156–57), who labels 20:1–18 as 'Scenes at the Tomb', and 20:19–29 as 'Scenes in the House'.

John 19:38–20:31 is similar to a chiasm, where 20:1–18, 20:19–25, and 20:26–29 deal with the first pattern of discipleship, and 19:38–42 together with 20:30–31 pertain to the second pattern of discipleship (table 2).

| Verses | Themes | Discipleship Pattern |
|----------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 19:38–42 | Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus | pattern #2 |
| 20:1–18 | Mary Magdalene | pattern #1 |
| 20:19–25 | The disciples | pattern #1 |
| 20:26–29 | Thomas | pattern #1 |
| 20:30–31 | A call for discipleship | pattern #2 |

Table 2: The structure of 19:38–20:31

La Potterie (1984) regards the theme of seeing and believing in John 20 as forming a chiasm in itself.⁵ This theory is not entirely satisfactory. It is true that the appearance of Jesus to the disciples is followed by their belief in Jesus in 20:19–25, and this finds a thematic parallel with the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene and her recognition of Jesus in 20:11–18; but Jesus’ appearance to Thomas in 20:26–29 is not parallel to 20:1–10, since Jesus has not yet physically revealed himself to Peter, the beloved disciple, or Mary Magdalene, prior to 20:10.

The other difficulty with the proposal by La Potterie is with the definition of ‘seeing’. The different verbs used to express ‘seeing’ in

⁵ For the significance of seeing and believing, see Dodd (1953:186).

John 20 overlap with one other semantically, and therefore, do not correlate to different levels of faith.⁶ The physical act of seeing is expressed by βλέπει in 20:1 (Mary 'sees' the stone taken from the tomb) and in 20:5 (the beloved disciple 'sees' the linen cloths lying in the tomb); but a different verb θεωρεῖ is used in 20:6 to indicate that Peter 'sees' the linen cloths. Furthermore, θεωρεῖ is used in 20:14 to indicate that Mary Magdalene physically 'sees' Jesus.

At the beginning of John 20, it first appears that the verb εἶδεν in 20:8 is linked to a deeper kind of faith in Jesus (by the beloved disciple). Similarly, ἰδόντες in 20:20 (which is from the same root εἶδον), and ἑώρακα in 20:18 and 20:24 (from another root ὁράω) are used in the context of apprehending the risen Jesus as Lord. But this assumption is overturned by Jesus' use of these terms in 20:29. 'Not seeing and believe' (μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πισπεύσαντες) in the latter part of 20:29 shows that 'seeing' (ἰδόντες) does not necessarily equate with believing (πισπεύσαντες) or the deepening of one's conversion. Hence, the use of ἰδόντες could mean the same thing as βλέπει or θεωρεῖ. This result illumines the intended meaning of ἑώρακάς in the first part of 20:29 (ἑώρακάς με πεπίστευκας). Since it and the second part of 20:29 (μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πισπεύσαντες) are in parallel (the presence of seeing or the absence of seeing, followed by believing), it can be inferred that the semantic range of ἑώρακάς in the first part of 20:29 should be the same as that of ἰδόντες in the second part of 20:29. Hence, ἑώρακάς, like ἰδόντες, also does not automatically imply faith.

⁶ Also see Schnackenburg (1982:312).

3. Discipleship Based on Seeing the Resurrected Jesus (pattern #1)

In 19:38–20:31, the first pattern of discipleship is characterised by renewed hope after Jesus takes the initiative to show himself physically.⁷ This is illustrated by three examples: Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas.

The narrative about Mary Magdalene in 20:1–18 is divided into four parts:⁸ (a) Mary Magdalene tells the disciples about the empty tomb in 20:1–2 and this is contrasted by (b) her announcement of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples in 20:17–18. Sandwiched in between are: (c) the reaction of Peter and the beloved disciple to the empty tomb in 20:3–10, which is paralleled by (d) Mary Magdalene's reaction to the empty tomb in 20:11–16.⁹

The suggestion by Crotty (1999:163) that the focus on Mary Magdalene extends into 20:18–28 is more difficult to see, since there is no indication in the text that Mary Magdalene was even there in 20:18–28.

Mary Magdalene's initial response to the glorified Jesus was positive.¹⁰ She went to the tomb of Jesus 'just before dawn', which presumably refers to the first chance that she had to visit the tomb (20:1). The darkness of the hour when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb (σκοτίας ἔτι οὐσης) is not a sign of her desolation; rather, the timing of her visit

⁷ Also see Senior (1991:137).

⁸ Schnackenburg (1982:301–2) and Talbert (1994:248) also regard Mary Magdalene as the main character in 20:1–18. For the view that 20:1–18 is not mainly about Mary Magdalene, but is equally about Peter, the beloved disciple and Mary Magdalene, see Stibbe (1993).

⁹ For another scheme of 20:1–18, see Howard-Brook (1994–437).

¹⁰ Also see Jasper (1993).

to the tomb signifies the imminent breakthrough of physical and spiritual light.¹¹ At the least, she was not afraid of what would happen to her if she were caught on the way and questioned by the religious authorities. She had also referred to Jesus as 'Lord' in 20:2 even though Jesus had died.

However, she was shaken at the sight of the empty tomb. Her focus shifted to who took Jesus' body (implied by the third person plural of the verbs ἦραν and ἔθηκαν), and *where* they had placed it. As she ran to Peter and the beloved disciple in 20:2, she was uncertain about the status of Jesus' body (οὐκ οἶδαμεν).¹²

When Mary Magdalene comes back to the scene again in 20:11, she 'was crying'. Her love for Jesus is unquestionable, but she was unable to resolve her plight, and she did not know what to do about it.¹³ It is at this point that the two angels appeared to her (20:12).

Although she should be commended for not showing any fear at the sight of the angels, all she could do in response to their question (λέγουσιν αὐτῇ) in 20:13 was to rephrase what she had said to Peter and the beloved disciple earlier in 20:2: 'they took my Lord, and I do not know where they put him'. The change of the inflection of οἶδα from the plural in 20:2 to the singular here in 20:13 may be John's way of focusing the reader's attention on her intra-psychic state of uncertainty and even anxiety. Up to this point, her faith, therefore, is less than desirable. Her inability to see Jesus comes to the fore in 20:14 when she

¹¹ See Howard-Brook (1994, 441), *contra* Stanley (1986:279).

¹² The identity of the rest of the people indicated by the first person plural of οἶδαμεν is not certain.

¹³ Also see Keener (2003:1185).

turns around and ‘sees Jesus’, and yet, ‘does not know that he is Jesus’.¹⁴ Instead, ‘she thinks that he is the gardener’ in 20:15.

But all this changed in 20:16 when Jesus called her by name, ‘Mary’.¹⁵ It helps to state the obvious—that Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the risen Jesus came as a result of Jesus’ initiative to show himself to her. Her heart was enlightened and she was enabled to recognise Jesus as risen and glorified. Since Mary Magdalene had already ‘physically turned around’ (ἐστράφη) to face Jesus in 20:14, στραφεῖσα in 20:16 cannot mean that she physically turns again to situate herself away from Jesus.¹⁶ This opens up the interpretative possibility that στραφεῖσα in 20:16 indicates a spiritual turning of her mind to the full reality and presence of Jesus in her life.¹⁷ This reading is supported by the usage of this verb in 12:40, ‘so that they should not see with (their) eyes nor understand with (their) hearts and turn’ (νοήσωσιν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ στραφῶσιν). Since στραφῶσιν is collocated with νοήσωσιν τῇ καρδίᾳ in 12:40, it is possible that στραφεῖσα in 20:16 refers to a spiritual turning rather than a turning of the body.¹⁸

¹⁴ The end of the appearance of angels in 20:14 does not necessarily mean that the scene involving the angels was ‘artificially’ inserted, *contra* Schnackenburg (1982:316). The appearance of the angels is only a precursor to the entrance of Jesus into this scene. When the main character (Jesus) arrives, there is no reason for the narrator to refer back to the angels.

¹⁵ For an alternate view that the divine initiative in John 20 does not begin until 20:19, see Brodie (1993:557).

¹⁶ For a different perspective, see Morris (1971:839).

¹⁷ Also see Brodie (1993:570); Howard-Brook (1994:450); Lee (1998); Kim (2004:209).

¹⁸ Schnackenburg (1982:317) also shares this view. But curiously, he uses the wrong evidence, since his evaluation of ‘στραφέσθαι’ as meaning ‘to turn to’ (Luke 7:44; 10:23; 22:61; 23:28) is in fact the same as turning one’s body.

Her renewed faith, hope, and joy in the risen Jesus are put into action when she followed Jesus' instruction in 20:17 to tell the disciples about this good news.¹⁹

The disciples (20:19–25), like Mary Magdalene, were transformed by the appearance of Jesus to them. In 20:19, the disciples were initially afraid of the Jews. The 'doors that were shut, where the disciples were' is a graphic portrayal of their fear.²⁰ But after Jesus came 'in their midst', declared peace to them, and showed them the wounds of his 'hands' and his 'side', the fear of the disciples changed to joy because they finally recognised that this was the risen Jesus (20:19–20).

Like Mary Magdalene and the disciples, Thomas only recognised the risen Jesus after he saw Jesus' self-revelation to him (20:26–29). Initially, Thomas doubted the testimony of the disciples, and insisted that he 'will not believe' unless he could verify the resurrection of Jesus by putting his hands into the wounds of the body of the risen Jesus (20:25). In 20:26, Jesus came to Thomas, who was behind 'closed doors' at the time. This was similar to the situation of the disciples before they saw the risen Jesus. Jesus proclaimed the same blessing of 'peace to you' in 20:26 to Thomas (and others), as he did to the disciples in 20:19. Although Jesus offered in 20:27 (φέρει τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὧδε καὶ ἴδε) to meet the conditions of belief set out by Thomas in 20:25 (ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω), there is no textual evidence that Thomas actually carried out the verification. His doubt had changed to confidence and

¹⁹ Also see Stanley (1986:280); Skamp (2000).

²⁰ Segovia (1985) agrees with this assessment. He writes: 'Despite the arrival and identification of "the hour," the disciples still fail to see and understand the nature and meaning of Jesus' glorification' (p. 92).

belief,²¹ for the very next verse (20:28) records his declaration: ‘my Lord and my God’.²²

Thomas underwent a ‘growth in faith’, but that growth was in response to the initiative of Jesus.²³ In spite of the certainty of Thomas’s confession in 20:28, the author does not praise him as having ‘reached the high peak of belief’.²⁴ It is also difficult to see how the insistence of Thomas to ‘see and touch’ Jesus is a positive action, for his desire for evidence stems from doubt rather than faith.²⁵ Jesus’ statement in 20:29 is a soft rebuke designed to highlight the inadequacy of Thomas’s faith. By itself, the statement of Jesus in 20:29, that ‘blessed are those who do not see and believe’, may be interpreted as a neutral pronouncement, but this is immediately preceded by Jesus’ comment about the conditional nature of Thomas’s faith, ‘because you have seen me, you have believed’. These two clauses are juxtaposed to show the contrast between the conditionality of Thomas’s faith and the unconditional faith that alone is blessed. So Thomas is a reminder that believers should not insist on seeing signs as a necessary condition for belief.²⁶

²¹ Although Thomas is the only character who explicitly confessed faith in the deity of Jesus after his resurrection (Bauckham 2008:129), his faith is not worthy of emulation because it is by sight and not by faith.

²² Also see Bernard (1985:683); Beasley-Murray (1987:390).

²³ Byrne (1985:84).

²⁴ Tenney (1948:284).

²⁵ For a different perspective, see Lee (1998:43): ‘Thomas’s stress on the incarnate presence of the Lord and his conviction that the wounds are intrinsic to that reality, are signs of awareness and insight.’

²⁶ O’Brien’s (2005:295) positive evaluation of Jesus’ statement to Thomas is based on equating the linguistic form of 20:29 (‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe’) with Jesus’ statement to Nathanael in 1:50 (‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these’). But there is an important difference between the two. Whereas the statement after the question in 1:50 is stated positively, the statement after the question in 20:29 is stated negatively. The result

4. Discipleship Not Based on Seeing the Resurrected Jesus (pattern #2)

In contrast to the first pattern of discipleship, which is faith in response to seeing the risen Jesus, the second pattern of discipleship is based on one's ability to discern his presence and one's courage to follow Jesus even when one has not seen him physically-risen.²⁷ This discipleship pattern is illustrated by the faith of the beloved disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus in the period after Jesus was crucified and before his resurrection appearances.²⁸

The section on Peter and the beloved disciple (20:3–10), which is sandwiched in between 20:1–2 and 20:11–18, is an excursus. It appears in the section on Mary Magdalene in order to provide a contrast between the faiths of Mary Magdalene with that of the beloved disciple.

But first, Peter is placed next to the beloved disciple to act as his foil. After Peter (and the beloved disciple) hears from Mary Magdalene about the news of the disappearance of Jesus' body, he (and the beloved disciple) ran to the tomb (20:3–4). Although Peter lagged behind the beloved disciple in getting there (ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου), he 'entered into the tomb' ahead of the beloved disciple in 20:6. But the text only reads that 'he saw the linen cloths lying' there. In contrast to the beloved disciple, there is no indication at all in the text that Peter grasped the significance of what he saw.

actually is to contrast Jesus' approval of Nathanael in 1:50 and his disapproval of Thomas in 20:29.

²⁷ Also see Hoskyns (1947:639).

²⁸ *Contra* Bultmann's (1971:696) view that 'all the other disciples as well ... indeed, like Mary Magdalene, believed only when they saw.'

As for the beloved disciple, his initial description, like that of Mary Magdalene, is one of excitement and expectancy. He ran with Peter to the tomb and even outran him (20:3–4).²⁹ The beloved disciple was able to discern the glorified Jesus in 20:8.³⁰ He ‘saw and believed’.³¹ His ability to believe in Jesus even without seeing his resurrection body is in stark contrast to Mary Magdalene’s initial inability to recognize Jesus even when the risen Jesus stood right in front of her (20:14). And he is a foil to her, in that she only recognised Jesus after Jesus revealed himself to her in 20:16.³²

Although the beloved disciple’s faith belongs to the second pattern of discipleship, he is by no means perfect, nor is his faith ‘the climax of the narrative’.³³ And Moloney (2009:364) is only partially right when he says that ‘for the Fourth Evangelist the beloved disciple is the model of all disciples.’

Firstly, after his initial excitement, the beloved disciple displayed hesitancy in entering the tomb.³⁴ Though he reached the tomb before

²⁹ It is unlikely that the beloved disciple got there first by taking a shortcut that Peter did not know about, since 20:3 says that ‘they were running together’. The imperfect tense reflects an imperfective aspect of the action, meaning that they were running together for the entire time.

³⁰ Also see Talbert (1994:250).

³¹ John 20:8 only says that ‘he saw’ something, and does not say what he actually saw. The clue is in the preceding clause (καὶ τὸ σουδάριον ... οὐ μετὰ τῶν ὀθνίων κείμενον ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἓνα τόπον). This stative clause (20:7) functions to introduce the ‘facecloth’ (σουδάριον) in the text, and this is the object that the beloved disciple finally saw when he entered the tomb.

³² Minear (1976:127–28) offers an alternate theory that the beloved disciple’s statement was his agreement with Mary Magdalene that Jesus’ body had been taken away by somebody.

³³ Hoskyns (1947:540). Also see Lenski (1942:1344); O’Brien (2005). For another perspective, see Lightfoot (1956:332); Gloer (1993:269–302); Keener (2003:1184).

³⁴ Lightfoot (1956:332) explains the hesitancy of the beloved disciple as ‘natural reverence and reserve’. For another perspective, see Countryman (1994:133).

Peter, 'he did not actually enter' it in 20:5. The description in 20:5, that he peers in and 'sees the linen cloths lying' there and yet does not see the 'facecloth' of 20:7, makes one wonder what could possibly have prevented him from exploring the tomb further at this point.

Secondly, in 20:9, 'for they did not yet know the scripture that it was necessary for him to rise from the dead', gives the context for his faith (καὶ ἐπίστευσεν) in 20:8. The particle γάρ is used here to signal that 20:9 provides the background information for interpreting the preceding verses. John 20:9 is teaching that although scripture has foretold that Jesus would rise from the dead, the beloved disciple did not know (the Old Testament) scripture sufficiently well in order to understand this or to believe in it through scripture alone.³⁵

Lastly, silence in the text suggests that the beloved disciple kept his faith to himself and that he did not relay the good news to the disciples.

These three points suggest that (even though the faith of the beloved disciple is categorically different from that of Mary Magdalene) he is not the best example of the second pattern of discipleship. For that, we need to turn to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.³⁶ Unlike the beloved disciple, they believed in Jesus even when they had not seen the slightest evidence of his resurrection after his death.³⁷

Joseph of Arimathea needed a lot of courage to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus for burial (ἄρη τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) in 19:38.³⁸ The boldness of

³⁵ Psalms 15:10 (LXX) (ὅτι οὐκ ἐγκαταλείψεις τὴν ψυχὴν μου εἰς ἄδην οὐδὲ δώσεις τὸν ὅσιόν σου ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν) might be the referent here.

³⁶ This point is sometimes neglected, even in a major monograph on discipleship (Chennattu 2006).

³⁷ Also see Lenski (1942:1324); Lawton (1967:96); Brown (1970:940, 959; 1979:72); Schnackenburg (1982:13–21); Brodie (1993:559).

³⁸ Also see Morris (1971:826); Keener (2003:1157, 1160).

his action, which is coded in the main clause, is more salient in light of the preceding qualifying participial clause (κεκρυμμένος δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων). Whereas he was a disciple of Jesus only in secret (due to his fear of the Jews), the glorification of Jesus at the cross has somehow transformed his heart and has now given him the inner strength to follow Jesus, regardless of the consequences.³⁹

He was not the only person who followed Jesus courageously after the glorification of Jesus. Nicodemus also came to Jesus (19:39). The affinity of the courage of Nicodemus and that of Joseph of Arimathea is coded by the similarity of the clausal structures of 19:38 and 19:39. Whereas, the participial clause describing Joseph of Arimathea (κεκρυμμένος δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων) is inserted within the rest of the clause in 19:38, the participial clause describing Nicodemus's 'coming to Jesus at night in the past' (ὁ ἐλθὼν πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτὸς τὸ πρῶτον) is placed within the rest of 19:39.

Nicodemus came to Jesus 'at night' (νυκτὸς) back in 3:2 because he was afraid. Νυκτὸς symbolised his fear then; but now, like Joseph of Arimathea, his heart is enlightened by the glorification of Jesus.⁴⁰

Bassler (1989:641) reads the coming of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to Jesus at night in 19:38–42 as a sign of their 'fear of the Jews', in the same way that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night in 3:2 because he did not want his Jewish peers to know about it.

Bassler asks, if 'fear of the Jews' compromises the faith of Joseph and Nicodemus, how are they to be distinguished from the rest of the

³⁹ The synoptic accounts of the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea in Matthew 27:57–60, Mark 15:42–46, and Luke 23:50–54 appear to make the same point.

⁴⁰ Carson (1991:629) likewise sees a profound change of attitude on the part of Nicodemus towards following Jesus.

disciples, who, after the crucifixion, hid behind closed doors 'for fear of the Jews' (20:19)?

This argument presumes that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were fearful of the Jews. Their faith was hence compromised, and they were no different from the rest of the disciples. But 19:38–42 shows the opposite.⁴¹ The perfect tense of the participle *κεκρυμμένος* (19:38), which qualifies the main noun, Joseph of Arimathea, refers to his emotional state prior to 19:38, just as the adverbial phrase *τὸ πρῶτον* in 19:39 refers to Nicodemus's visit to Jesus prior to 19:39.⁴² And Joseph of Arimathea's former 'fear of the Jews' in 19:38 is in stark contrast to his lack of fear in approaching Pilate for Jesus' body 'now'.⁴³ As for the timing of the burial, it is highly probable that it did take place as the day grew dark. But since the crucifixion of Jesus took place in late afternoon, what other time could Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have used to prepare the body of Jesus for burial if not in the few hours of dusk before the Sabbath arrived?

The actions of these two go beyond their fine sentiment of Jesus as merely a teacher (or a friend).⁴⁴ If Nicodemus did not have the courage to ally himself to Jesus in 3:2 (even though he regarded Jesus as a

⁴¹ Köstenberger (2004:120 n. 15, 554–55) seems to agree with Goulder (1991) in seeing the portrayal of Nicodemus in John as negative. But whatever was Nicodemus's reaction to Jesus in 3:2 can only be counted against him if his characterization remains the same in 19:38–42, which is not the case.

⁴² While the Greek perfect tense does not automatically correlate with any particular temporal tense, the perfect tense does indicate past temporal in certain contexts (see the discussion of the perfect tense by Porter (1989:252–65).

⁴³ This reading separates the qualifying clause into two parts, where (a) *ὢν μαθητῆς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ* is translated as 'being (now) a disciple of Jesus', and (b) *κεκρυμμένος δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων* as 'but who was in secret because of the fear of the Jews'.

⁴⁴ For a contrary view, see Talbert (1994:242); Koester (1995:240–43); Collins (1995:363).

teacher), then Nicodemus is certainly not risking his life now (at a time when being associated with Jesus was especially dangerous) to give Jesus a proper burial. It is not just a positive regard for Jesus that prompted the two of them to bury Jesus. There must have been a qualitative change in their hearts, which gave them the courage to act on behalf of Jesus. This change came about when they discerned the glorification of Jesus in his death and the continued presence of Jesus before he rose from the dead. For them, Jesus was not just a man, a religious teacher with superior insight, or a prophet; Jesus was the Son of God who was sent into the world to reveal God's love on the cross.

It is hard to see how Nicodemus's generous contribution of burial spices or the fact that he and Joseph of Arimathea bound Jesus in linen cloths can be interpreted as their inability to see beyond the death of Jesus.⁴⁵

The point of 19:38–42 is to demonstrate the extent of their courage to follow Jesus as Jews. Nicodemus brought spices because the burial that they sought to give Jesus in 19:40 was a Jewish one (καθὼς ἔθος ἐστὶν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐνταφιάζειν), and the large quantity showed that he had the utmost respect for Jesus.⁴⁶ The fact that they were concerned to avoid prolonging the burial beyond the day of preparation (διὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων) in 19:42 was also John's way of emphasising their concern for their Jewish tradition. The text is highlighting the costliness of their discipleship, since they could have

⁴⁵ Also see Osiek (1989). For a contrary perspective, see Meeks (1972); Jonge (1977); Howard-Brook (1994:435); Heil (1995:115). Newbiggin (1982:260) says: 'Reverence for a dead prophet is part of the old creation. Joseph, Nicodemus, and the costly materials of their devotion still belong to the world which is passing away.'

⁴⁶ The use of spices (cf. the burial of Herod the Great [Josephus, *Ant.* 17.8.3]) and binding the dead (cf. Lazarus in John 11:44) were Jewish practices.

been expelled from the community whose customs and traditions they cherished.

5. Conclusion

Summarising the responses of the various characters to the death of Jesus, we see two patterns of discipleship (table 3).

| | Pattern One: Discipleship Based on Seeing the Physically-risen Jesus | | | Pattern Two: Discipleship not Based on Seeing the Physically-risen Jesus | |
|---|---|----------------------|---------------|---|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Mary Magdalene</i> | <i>The Disciples</i> | <i>Thomas</i> | <i>Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus</i> | <i>The beloved disciple</i> |
| Attitude or action before encountering the physically-risen Jesus | Fearful of not finding the body of Jesus | Fearful | Doubt | Courageous; took the risk to bury the body of Jesus | Believed |
| Encountered the physically-risen Jesus | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| Attitude or action after encountering the physically-risen Jesus | Joyful; declared the good news to the disciples | Joyful; declared the good news to Thomas | Confessed Jesus as Lord | n/a | n/a |
| Fits the call to believe without seeing the physically-risen Jesus | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |

Table 3: Two patterns of discipleship

Making a contrast between these two patterns of discipleship does not demean the faith of Mary or Thomas (or the disciples) as worthless. Mary's recognition of Jesus after his resurrection, and Thomas's final declaration of faith in Jesus is admirable. In spite of their initial hesitancy, they did end up believing in Jesus' triumph over death.⁴⁷ In this regard, their faith is commendable, especially when contrasted with the Pharisees' blatant refusal to believe regardless of how many signs and miracles were demonstrated before them (cf. 9:16). But, lest one believes that all characters in the gospel of John are equal in their quality of discipleship after the death of Jesus, one must ask why John did not use the narrative strategy of 'misunderstanding' for Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in 19:38–42, *contra* O'Brien (2005:288).

⁴⁷ Moloney (1998b:162, 166) sees a progression of faith in the life of Mary Magdalene and the beloved disciple. Also see Byrne (1985).

Although Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and Thomas all came to full faith in Jesus after seeing the physically-risen Jesus, the point of this passage is elsewhere. In 20:30–31, the readers are called to learn from Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the beloved disciple and to believe even when it is impossible now (since the time of his ascension) to see the physically-risen Jesus.

The first pattern of discipleship seems to suggest that the followers of Jesus are able to see the glorified Jesus only when Jesus takes the initiative to show himself to them. But Jesus' closing response to Thomas's confession in 20:29, 'blessed are those who do not see and believe', is a reminder to people that it is possible to have faith in Jesus as revealed in both the Old and the New Testaments, even though they have not actually seen the physically-resurrected body of Jesus.⁴⁸

Is it not possible that 'these things' (ταῦτα) in 20:31 not only refers (a) to the individual signs (changing water to wine in 2:1–11, the healing of the official's son in 4:43–54, the feeding of the five thousand in 6:1–14, the healing of the blind man [cf. 9:16], the rising of Lazarus [cf. 11:47; 12:18]), or (b) to the whole gospel of John (more generically), but also (c) to 19:38–20:29? 'These things stand written so that you may believe', even though you have never seen the physically-risen Jesus. It is possible and normative for us in this day to follow the second pattern of discipleship and to believe in Jesus in the manner of Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the beloved disciple once we lay aside our predisposition to fear and chronic doubt. Then, we shall see the risen Jesus in our hearts.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Also see Lightfoot (1956:334).

⁴⁹ This article is a revision of a paper that was read by the author at the Johannine section of the 2011 SBL International Conference at King's College London. Thanks to Dr. Stephen H. Levinsohn for his critiques.

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