

‘All Greek To Me’ : Folded

ἐντυλίσσω entulissō

More than 2½ years ago, an old friend and I were comparing notes on our understanding of the scene recorded in **John 20:3-10**, where Peter and John (‘the other disciple whom Jesus loved’) ran to the tomb where Jesus had been laid just a few days before. Peter ran straight into the tomb, past John, who had arrived first but had waited outside, initially just looking inside and only entering after Peter.

*“The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but **rolled up** in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed.” (John 20:4-7, NASB 1995)*

It’s that word *entulissō* which has been translated ‘rolled up’ in this version. On a quick (computer-based) check, it seems that 17 out of 53 translations translate this word as ‘folded’. The others choose different expressions such as ‘rolled up’ and ‘wrapped together’.

Entulissō is used in only two other places in the New Testament, each one being another account of the burial of the Lord Jesus. *“And Joseph took the body and **wrapped** it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.” (Matthew 27:59-60)* And: *“this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and **wrapped** it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain.” (Luke 23:52-53)* In his account, Mark uses a different but very similar word which has some of the same origins and means the same: wrapped together (**Mark 15:46**).

Entulissō itself means ‘From ἐν *en* and τυλίσσω *tulissō* (to *twist*; - roll together.); to *entwine*, that is, *wind up in*: - wrap in (together)’ (*Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*) and is exactly descriptive of the process of wrapping a dead body with linen. In John’s own account of the same process, he uses a different word, saying *“So they took the body of Jesus and **bound** it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews” (John 19:40)* A much more common word, which always means to ‘bind’ in the same way that we use it – to literally or metaphorically tie up.

By now, you may be wondering why I am going into so much detail about this wrapping up or binding up of Jesus’ body. Simply because it shows us the way that the ‘face-cloth’ had been wrapped or bound around his head and face, perhaps in a similar way to a turban, and was **still wrapped together in the same way** when John ‘saw it and believed’.

This ‘face-cloth’ was actually a ‘sweat-cloth’, used for wiping your face in the heat, and they remain in common usage in hot eastern countries. ¹ I was very glad of one when working in the heat of India some years ago, and you will often see them in photos of street scenes in the East, just casually thrown over men’s shoulders. ² The word turns up in three other places in the New Testament:

1) **Luke 19:20**, where the fearful slave in Jesus’ parable wraps his master’s money in a cloth instead of using it to trade and make a profit.

2) **Acts 19:12**, where ‘handkerchiefs’ that Paul had touched were used to heal diseases and spirit possession.

3) **John 11:44**, where the resurrected Lazarus emerges from his tomb and needs to be released because he was *“bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a **cloth**.”*

¹ **Soudarion** Of Latin origin; a *sudarium* (sweat cloth), that is, *towel* (for wiping the perspiration from the face, or binding the face of a corpse) (*Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*)

² E.g. see <https://www.travel-pictures-gallery.com/south-india/karnataka/karnataka-0012.html>

The example of Lazarus is very relevant. The word 'bound' for the wrappings around his limbs is the same one used in **John 19:40** as we have seen, and the word translated 'wrapped' is actually the same word with 'around' added to it. So Lazarus' face was actually 'bound around' with this sweat-cloth, and we can be fairly sure that much the same procedure would have been carried out when Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus.

As far as I remember, my own 'sweat-cloths' in India were probably about 60 centimetres to one metre long, and the ones mentioned in the New Testament would need to be about that long, or perhaps longer, in order to be used to bind around the head and face of a dead person.

Lazarus needed to be released from his grave-clothes and face-cloth. By contrast, when Peter and John entered the empty tomb, they saw *"the linen wrappings lying there, and the **face-cloth** that had been on his head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but **rolled up** in a place by itself."* Jesus had risen from death but neither his body nor his head had needed to be unwrapped. His resurrection body was VERY different from Lazarus's – it had passed **through** the wrappings and face-cloth and had left them still wrapped together but like empty shells. His physical arrival into a securely locked room later that day, and a week later, demonstrated the same qualities (**John 20:19,26**).

Jesus's resurrection body was now deathless. In this same body, he physically ascended into the sky and is, right now, the **human being at God's right hand!**¹ By contrast, Lazarus, though raised from death as recorded in **John 11**, was sure to die at a later date. John had witnessed the raising of Lazarus. This was completely different!

No wonder that John 'saw and believed' when he entered the empty tomb! What he saw was not an empty tomb without body or wrappings, as would surely have been the case if someone had simply stolen Jesus' body for whatever reason. Nor was it the disorder that would have resulted if Jesus had merely revived and had needed to get out of the grave-clothes as Lazarus had done, leaving both the linen wrappings and the face-cloth unwound. The fact that the face-cloth was still 'wrapped together' – because the head inside it had simply disappeared – will have clinched it for John. His Master had risen from death in an unimaginable way.

'Folded' gives us completely the wrong impression, as if Jesus (or perhaps the angels whose appearance is noted in some accounts) had been very neat and tidy after his resurrection and had made sure to fold everything away properly. No, he had been raised from death with a completely new sort of body, but a physical body none the less, and the grave-clothes were undisturbed.

And here's another thought: With a body like that, he didn't need to have the stone rolled back from the entrance in order to get out. So why was it rolled back? Surely so that the disciples could go **in** – and see the proof of his very real resurrection! Matthew is the only one who records the actual event of the stone being rolled back, and there is absolutely no indication that Jesus walked out once the stone was removed. No – he was already gone! (**Matthew 28:1-7**)

All of this is amazing, and it gets me thinking about the resurrection that is promised to each of us who is in Christ. *"If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the **first fruits**, after that those who are Christ's at his coming, then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death."* (**1 Corinthians 15:19-26**) We are not going to share in a 'Lazarus-style' temporary resurrection, but in the deathless resurrection of our Lord Jesus. First fruits are predictors of what is to follow!

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¹ **Acts 1:9, 1 Timothy 2:5** The word translated 'man' actually means 'human being'.