

## ***John 20 – The Empty Tomb Scene - Continued***

**Setting:** Picking up where we left off last week, we find ourselves still at the tomb scene. At this point, Christ has been crucified, died and taken to Joseph's tomb. The chief priests, Pharisees and Pilate were afraid that Jesus' disciples would come and steal his body after he had been placed in the tomb. Pilate orders that a stone be put in front of the tomb for 2 reasons, 1) to keep Jesus in and 2) to keep the people out.

Mary was distraught when she went to the tomb and found that Jesus' body was not there. When she came to Peter and John, she said "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter and John run to the tomb (John being pretty much an Olympian, beats Peter the slow poke to the tomb) and find the same outcome that Mary found. The stone was not there and the body of Christ was not there and his grave clothes were lying there and his head cloth was folded separately.

As I said last week, the resurrection of Christ is the event in history that all of Christianity hinges on. We may not have been in the same situation as Mary, Peter and John, here but we are here today because of what happened in this scripture. We gather in Christ name because he is not like all of the other "little g" gods but he is the God-Man who actually rose from the dead, and our lives we live and the hope we have is because of this fact.

We ended our last study with the disciples headed back to their homes, and we will look specifically tonight into the experience of Mary Magdalene.

**John 20:11-18** - Read

### **1) Mary Stayed at the tomb**

- Peter and John have now returned to the city and we have this scene of Mary still at the tomb of Christ. Now we know that there may have been other women with Mary there because Mark's gospel told us that the women had gone to anoint Jesus' body one last time. However, John does not give us that detail just zero's in on this picture of Mary at the empty tomb of Christ.

-Who is Mary Magdalene?

Lets take a look at the scripture to give us a look at Mary and her story. We are told in Mark and Luke's gospel that Mary was healed by Jesus of 7 demons.

**Mark 16:9** "[Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons".

**Luke 8:1-2** (talking about the women accompanying Jesus during his earthly ministry)- "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out..."

This man who had changed Mary's life had died and to her knowledge, had been taken. We see Mary's true emotion here. Mary had an overwhelming feeling of heaviness and despair and she stood at the empty tomb of Christ. Scripture tells us that Mary stood there "weeping". Just doing a quick word study on the word that was used here "Weeping" means to "weep or wail, with emphasis upon the noise accompanying the weeping." Mary was not silently upset, no, she was loudly crying out. I'm sure we all can imagine the times we have maybe heard one of those "skin crawling" screams or loud cries. It is terrifying and also heart breaking, especially if you had any inclination of the reason. The death of a loved one is something that we all face at some point in our lives. We may not know Mary's exact feelings, but we can relate on some level to this. It is absolutely gut wrenching.

As Mary was weeping she stooped down to look into the tomb of Jesus, and now she sees something that not even Peter or John were blessed to see; Two angels in white, and they were sitting where the body of Jesus had been laying. Although they were angels Mary didn't even recognize that they were angels, she was so focused on the terrible thing she believed had happened. Mary's despair was about to be change.

The Angels asked Mary "Why are you weeping"? Why do any of us weep? As I said last week, when any of us get bad news, it does typically generate some kind of emotional response. Can we trust our feelings? No, we cannot trust our feelings. I don't say that to sound hard hearted or to come off as cold by saying that, but I say that to remind you of the main point of the whole book of John. (V31) So that we might believe and have life in his name. Our feelings change constantly, we must focus on what we know! John's writings talk so much about knowing and believing that we can quickly fly past those things.

Weeping is not a wrong response to tragedy. I'm not really sure where the idea started, but at some point in time, crying began to be frowned upon as a sign of

weakness. Jesus himself wept when he was brought the news of the passing of his friend Lazarus. So, if Jesus cried, I think we are good to cry folks. Let's look at that scripture really quick.

### **John 11:32-36**

"Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved[c] in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" We find in scripture that our thoughts are not Gods thoughts and his ways are so much higher than our ways. But what we also find is that Christ was no stranger to grief and sorrow.

Here is a quote from the book "Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers" – *"Meek. Humble. Gentle. Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms"*

Jesus is fully God so much that he could resurrect from the dead, and fully man so much that he was deeply moved and wept at the passing of his friend Lazarus. Thank you Lord for this reminder. Scripture tells us in **Hebrews 4:15** "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

- That phrase "unable to sympathize" or "have sympathy for" means: To share someone's feeling in the sense of being sympathetic with.
- Scripture tells us in **2 Corinthians 4:17-18** "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."
  - Experiencing the death of someone you love is so hard! The greatest reminder we can have is from the scripture, that causes us to view that affliction in with eternity in view.
  - We know and can sing with the Psalmist David "For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30)

- Oh how the tide was about to turn for Mary. But what do we know? The resurrection is the most important thing that has ever happened in Christianity. As I've said, all of Christianity hinges on it. Mary's hope, our hope, hinge on it. As Paul told us in scripture, if Christ isn't raised and our faith is in vain and we are yet in our sin. Think about that from Mary's perspective. She had previously been possessed by 7 demons, and Christ had taken her sin away. If Christ isn't raised there is no hope for current or future victory over sin.

## **2) Mary's confession**

Even though Mary at this moment was still upset she makes a beautiful profession. She says they have taken away MY LORD

- Jesus, in Mary's mind, was gone but we see that he is still HER LORD.

## **3) Jesus appears to Mary**

As Mary makes this confession to the Angels she turns around and saw Jesus standing there even though she didn't recognize that it was him. Mary here is the first to see the resurrected Christ. It wasn't the religious leaders, or the other disciples, but this woman who was possessed by 7 demons before she met Christ! If you'll remember last week I mentioned that some will try to point out contradictions in the 4 gospel accounts of the resurrection to say that they are not true. We know that there is not contradictions there just 4 men by inspiration of the Holy Spirit telling their own account of the same instance. The fact that it is recorded that Mary is the first person to see the resurrected Christ is amazing. Why is that significant though? This would have thrown the religious rulers for a loop because in first-century Israel, women were not allowed to testify in a court of law and were considered to be "unreliable" witnesses.

I love how the bible shows us so many examples of how Jesus always takes the least expected people and uses them for great things to bring glory to God. We do not see him in scripture using the people who "have it all together" (aka the self-righteous crowd) but those that were not wise according to the world, or powerful, or wealthy. He chose to use those that the world despised and looked down their noses at to bring the gospel to the world.

Jesus asks her “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Scripture tells us that she thought he was the gardener. There is a whole other lesson in that little bit of scripture there about Jesus “the gardener”. I will not be getting into that, but it is such an awesome picture of the first Adam, and the second Adam (Christ).

Mary insists that if this man she thinks is the gardener has taken her Lord away, please tell her and she will go and take him herself. That’s when he drops the bomb on her, he says “Mary”. Wow what I would give to have been able to see the look on her face when Christ called her name.

The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name.

I’m reminded of John Chapter 10. Let’s go back and read what Jesus said about being this good shepherd: V3-5 “To him the gatekeeper opens. **The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name** and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, **for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow**, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

Mary knew exactly who it was when Jesus called her by name. How could she know who it was now? It is because, as Jesus said in John 10, his sheep hear his voice, he calls them by name, and they know his voice. What a good shepherd we have in Christ to call each of us by name. Notice what Mary says next “Rabboni!” meaning Beloved master or teacher.

*John Calvin said “The efficacy of the address is evident from this circumstance, that Mary immediately renders to Christ the honor which is due to him; for the word Rabboni is not only respectful but involves a profession of obedience. Mary therefore declares, that she is a disciple of Christ, and submits to him as her Master. This is a secret and wonderful change effected on the human understanding, when God, enlightening her by his Spirit, renders her clear-sighted, who formerly was slow of apprehension, and, indeed, altogether blind. Besides, the example of Mary ought to serve the purpose of exhortation, that all whom Christ invites to himself may reply to him without delay.”*

Mary, right away gave Jesus glory, and she even attempts to cling on to him and he tells her “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father”. There are differing opinions as to why Jesus told Mary not to cling to him but tells Thomas to

touch him a few verses later, but the majority believe it to be because she had thrown herself at his feet and was attempting to cling to him. Think of her situation here...She had been possessed by 7 demons and Jesus came along one day and cast them out. She was committed to spending the rest of her days serving him, and then when he dies at Calvary, she believes his body has been taken from the tomb instead of resurrected. As she stands at the empty tomb, feeling hopeless, the resurrected Christ himself stands in front of her and calls her by name. As the old saying goes "That'll make a Presbyterian shout." Who could blame Mary for wanting to cling to the one who had taken away her sin?

"Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

- Tell my brothers- Mary is told by Christ to "Go and tell". This is the greatest assurance for Mary and what a message to take back to the disciples!
- Union with Christ to God – When I read Christ words "to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" I'm reminded of the scripture in **Romans 8:14-17**

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

God is our Father and our God. This union with Christ that we have is brought forth by the death and resurrection of our Savior! We remember this by Baptism to show our union with Christ and that God is our Father and our God because of the work of Christ.

What does the scripture tell us there in Romans? That The Spirit himself bears witness of our adoption as sons. The Spirit bears witness that we are children of God, and heirs of God and fellow heirs with our Savior Jesus. What a privilege we have. What comforting words for Mary to hear. Was she a great sinner? Yes! Are we great sinners? Yes! What made the difference in our lives? Jesus Christ called us by our name, and we believed

in his death burial and resurrection! We have Union with Christ and peace with God.

### **In Closing**

The fact that Christ has resurrected changes everything. Weeping is turned to joy, death is turned into life, and temporary is turned to eternal! We can and do confess with Mary when she calls Christ "My Lord".

In studying this I did find some folks that sum up this passage of scripture as "This is what dedication looks like" speaking of Mary's persistence. Be dedicated, etc. I will say, although we can make that application, it could cause us to look inwardly instead of "extra nos" or outside of ourselves. Any bit of Scripture we study should always point us to Christ and his finished work. Thankfully this portion of scripture is finished by a statement from Christ that declares our union with him and our relationship to God because of him!

As Mary was told by Christ to "Go and Tell" we are told to do the same thing. Go and tell that Jesus has risen from the dead! Go and tell others that this man Jesus is exactly who he said he was.

Tonight we've been able to see first hand in the scripture the account of the very first person to see Christ after his resurrection from the dead. This is our hope that we cling to as Christians. Because rose, we will rise also! I thought of the first question in the New City Catechism: "What is our only hope in life and death?" The answer to the kids version is "That we are not our own but we belong to God." Is the answer in the kid version, but the "grown up" version is Romans 14:7-18 : For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

We belong to the Lord, as Mary answered MY Lord we can say the same, and as Christ reassures her, God is his father our OUR Father, His God and OUR GOD.