

41. Jesus Appears to Mary and the Disciples John 20:10-31

Warm-up Question: When was the last time you had tears of joy? What was the occasion?

¹⁰Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. ¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). ¹⁷Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her (John 20:10-18).

On Saturday night as soon as the sun was down and the first two stars had appeared in the sky, the Friday Sabbath was over. Mark records that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices to anoint further Jesus' body (Mark 16:1). Since it was too dark to do anything that night, they decided to go together the next morning, Sunday. Luke tells us that the women had watched where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had buried Jesus (Luke 23:55), no doubt with many tears. The women started for the tomb very early in the morning. The Greek word translated *very early* refers to the last of the watches, so it was sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Mark tells us that neither of them had considered what they would do about getting into the tomb—"they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3).

Love never considers difficulties. Their only thought was lovingly to honor and express their love of Christ by bringing more spices to add to what Nicodemus and Joseph had buried with Him. As they approached the tomb, Matthew tells us that an earthquake occurred and an angel of the Lord came down, walked up to the tomb, rolled the stone away, and then sat on the stone (Matthew 28:2). The Roman soldiers on guard at the tomb were so terrified at the angelic appearance that they fell to the ground, trembled at the sight, and acted as if they were dead (Matthew 28:4).

The angel spoke to the women, instructing them to go and tell the disciples the good news that Jesus had risen from the grave! It is possible that there were two groups of women. Luke's account tells us that a number of women reported what had happened to the disciples: "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and *the others with them* who told this to the apostles (Luke 24:10 Emphasis mine).

John the apostle describes how the disciples received the news that morning. When we read John's account, he seems to focus on the personal relationships and interactions. He describes how he and Peter ran for the tomb after Mary Magdalene burst into the room to tell them the incredible news. I can imagine that Mary Magdalene was exhausted after running, so upon catching her breath, she started back to the tomb. Confused but determined, I can picture her hurrying back to the tomb with the recent events running through her mind, trying to make sense of what was happening. She had heard the angel tell the good news of Jesus' being alive, but she certainly did not understand it.

Since the story is now so familiar to us after hearing the resurrection account, we find it hard to imagine what it must have been like for the disciples! The concept of Jesus being resurrected was one that they still failed to grasp, despite Jesus' attempts to describe to them what would happen. Mary Magdalene could not accept the thought, perhaps because it was too wonderful to believe. Her only thought at this moment seems to be the urgency to find her Savior's body. She saw Him being crucified (Matthew 27:56). Where was His body? It was no longer there, and the only reasonable explanation was that it had been stolen out of the tomb! When she got back to the tomb, John and Peter had already left (John 20:10) after being puzzled by the cocoon of linen strips with the spices still inside.

[Jesus appears first of all to Mary Magdalene, giving her the honor of being the first to proclaim the news of His resurrection. What about this stands out to you?](#)

Why does John not mention any other women that resurrection morning? Most commentators and scholars believe that John is writing his gospel later in his life and knew what the other gospel writers had already written. It is possible that he decided to fill in some of the details and focus on certain aspects of the resurrection by giving personal testimony of what it was like for certain individuals, for instance, Peter and John (verses 1-10), Mary Magdalene (verses 11-18), the disciples (verses 19-23) and Thomas (verses 24-29).

Mary Magdalene was a woman who had been delivered of seven demons by the Lord Jesus (Mark 16:9). Such gratitude for her deliverance had welled up with a sincere love for the grace, mercy and power that Jesus had bestowed on her. Whosoever is forgiven much, loves much. It is a beautiful thought that the Lord appeared to a woman who had been in the depths of sin and evil, but who is now transformed by the grace and power of God. **The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18).**

Mary is a picture to us of the very people He has come to save. Jesus said, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"** (Mark 2:17). It had been a traumatic experience for her to witness Jesus being crucified, and many tears had been shed.

This morning as she stood before the tomb, her emotions got the better of her again. John tells us that she stood outside the tomb crying (John 20:2). This word "crying" is the Greek word *klaiō* and indicates more of a loud lamentation than a quiet sobbing. When she looked inside the tomb, she saw two angels seated at the foot and at the head of the empty cocoon-like strips of burial cloth. The Roman soldiers, long gone now, had been terrified at the sight of angels, but Mary was in emotional shock and only had one thought on her mind—"Where is the Lord?"

Jesus Reveals Himself to Mary Magdalene

The angels then ask Mary a question:

¹³They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him” (John 20:13-15).

Why did Mary not recognize Him at first? Are there times in our lives when the Lord hides from us? Why would He do that?

Love never sees difficulties. The group of women that morning never thought through how they would move the stone, and Mary did not know what she would do with the body of Christ if the one she thought was the Gardener were to give a dead body to her. When a lover of God is low in spirit, only the presence of Christ will do.

Some would suggest that Mary did not recognize who was speaking with her because of the deep sobbing and tears that had clouded her vision. Others say that maybe the rising sun behind Him made it difficult for her to see. It is possible that she did not recognize Him through her tears, but we can only speculate on this.

There are times when the Lord deliberately hid Himself from people, for example on the Emmaus road. Unrecognized, Jesus had talked with two disciples for some time as they walked. When the two disciples came to turn off the highway road toward Emmaus, He made as if He was going further on. It was only at their insistence that He stayed with them. When at supper, He took bread and broke it, “their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight” (Luke 24:28-32). We are no longer to walk by sight, but by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). When the Lord met the disciples as they fished on the Sea of Galilee, they did not recognize Him (John 21:4). When Jesus told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat and they did so, they filled their net full of fish! It was only then that the disciples recognized that it was the Lord. Do not limit the Lord Jesus in your mind by thinking that He will only come to you a certain way. Be open to the Lord showing up in any way He wants to appear.

When Jesus spoke Mary’s name in His own intimate way, she suddenly recognized who it was. Now, her tears were tears of joy! How wonderful it will be for all of us to finally look upon the One we have longed to see in all of His glory! I imagine Mary putting her arms around Him and hugging Him so tightly with her head on His chest. She would not let Him go again! I wonder how long that hug lasted. Jesus now gives her a mission:

¹⁷Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17).

The King James Version does not help us in our understanding of what Jesus is saying here, “Touch Me not,” because just a few hours later in the evening Luke tells us that Jesus showed up

in their midst and said, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! **Touch me** and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39 **Emphasis mine**). The NASB translates Jesus as saying to Mary, “Stop clinging to me.” It is possible that Mary was so overwhelmed at seeing Jesus that she would not let Him go. Jesus had a mission for her to complete. God uses the greatest of sinners to be the greatest of evangelists. Jesus trusted her to be the first to deliver this great news. What an honor it was for Mary to bring this news to the disciples! In just a few brief moments, Mary had gone from grief to overwhelming joy!

How do you think she sounded as she broke the news to the other disciples? If we look at other accounts of this event (Mark 16:10-11 and Luke 24:9-11), they did not believe her at first. Perhaps, they felt she was hallucinating due to her emotional state. However, she must have persisted because they ran to see what she was talking about. Sometimes, we need to be persistent in spreading the good news of Christ. The message is not always received immediately. Trust in the truth of the message you carry and do not be discouraged if you are not immediately met with a positive response. Let your joy and your personal experience of Christ be a witness to others and leave the results with the Lord.

There would be more time later to spend with one another—Jesus’ physical presence would not depart from them for another forty days, seven days before the day of Pentecost. In that time period, the Lord gave His disciples many convincing proofs that He was alive and taught them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). There would be time for Mary and the other disciples to be with Christ before His ascension, but for now, there was good news to share with others.

Just as Mary was told to go to those with whom she was in relationship, so we, too, are to go with the good news to those around us. He is risen! Through His redemptive death on the cross, Christ has made the way open for us to enjoy relationship with God—we are able to call Him Father. He is our God and our Father. If we have entrusted our lives to Him, we are in His family!

Jesus Reveals Himself to His Disciples

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit ²³If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:19-23).

On that first resurrection evening, the two disciples who had met the Lord on the road to Emmaus returned to the disciples gathered together (Luke 24:33). In the middle of that excited gathering with the doors locked, Jesus showed up in the middle of the room. Can you imagine their joy at seeing Him? Their minds told them that this appearance of the Lord was impossible, but here He was, up close and personal. His manifestation in their midst proves that the resurrection body is different from the body we have now. Jesus was able physically to move from one place to another, walls and doors not being a barrier. In the same way, the bodies that we will receive at the resurrection of the dead will be of a much higher order. Paul the apostle said that our new body would be: “**raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in**

glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Christ’s resurrection is not only the best proof of immortality, but also we have no certain evidence of immortality without it. Death itself died when Christ arose. For the true believer, death is no longer an enemy but has been vanquished at the cross of Jesus. The resurrection is the evidence to the believer that God has accepted Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of the believer and that everyone who trusts in the finished work of Christ on the cross is reconciled to the Father.

Just to prove that His body was real and that He was not a ghost, He ate in their presence:

³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate it in their presence (Luke 24:37-43).

In the above passage, Luke 24:38, Jesus lovingly confronts them saying, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?” What doubts do you think would be troubling their minds? What doubts trouble your mind?

Jesus Reveals Himself to Thomas

John the apostle now brings up one last witness of the resurrection and shares his story of coming to belief.

²⁴Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” ²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ²⁸Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ³⁰Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:24-31).

How had the disciple Thomas missed the appearance of Jesus? He had withdrawn and was not with the other believers when Jesus first appeared to them. Before we judge this disciple too harshly, let us acknowledge that each person handles tragedy and pain in his own way. Thomas

perhaps retreated and isolated himself. He sought solitude instead of fellowship. Everyone needs solitude at times, but when a believer is low in spirit, it is wise to seek the company and encouragement of other believers. When we isolate ourselves, we are not aware of how vulnerable we can be and what blessings we may miss. Now, Thomas hears the others talking about Jesus' appearance with great excitement, but He will not allow himself to believe it.

How gracious the Lord is to Thomas! He invites him to check out the evidence first hand so that he may believe! It is interesting to note that, even though the Lord was not there when Thomas was told of Jesus' visit, the Lord was listening to his refusal to believe. We should always remember that all of what comes out of our mouths is heard. Nothing escapes God's attention and every idle word and action is recorded (Matthew 12:36).

Thomas was not ready to walk by faith. He was trusting only in what he could see and experience through his senses. The disciples were entering into a new relationship with Jesus, one that would require them to walk by faith, not by sight. Thomas wanted to see and feel before he would believe that Christ had indeed risen. When the Lord invited Thomas to feel the nail marks in His hands, Thomas no longer needed to feel the nail prints or the spear hole, and he fell to his knees, saying, "My Lord and my God!"

To Thomas' credit, once he saw Jesus, he did not hold back but immediately worshiped Him. He finally enters into the blessing and joy that the other disciples had experienced. Not all believers will have evidence given to their senses. Some people, like Thomas, are waiting for absolute proof before acting in faith. There are those who will not take a step of faith because they are waiting for a supernatural sign or a prophetic word from the Lord. God may on occasion give a person confirmation in an unusual way, but we should step out in faith on the objective word of God and the inner confirmation and peace of the Spirit inside us. We must live by faith and not by sight. Jesus said to Thomas, "**Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed**" (John 20:29) If you are a believer, Jesus was speaking about you!

In the C.S. Lewis book, *Screwtape Letters*, a fictional training session is going on between a seasoned senior demon and a young demon. The young demon is in need of advice on his first assignment trying to disrupt and destroy the faith of a new Christian. C.S. Lewis offers interesting insight as to a Christian learning to walk by faith and not by sight:

"He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with the stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our enemy's will, looks around upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys."¹

Those who have not perceived by the five senses but still have believed express the kind of faith for which God is looking. The African impala gives us a perfect illustration of the difference

¹ C.s. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1959), page 47.

between our sense knowledge and faith. The impala can be kept in an enclosure with a wall only three feet high, even though these animals can jump to a height of over ten feet and cover a distance of more than thirty feet with a single bound. However, the impalas will not jump unless they can see where their feet will land. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see and leap out of whatever barriers keep us bound to the realm of the senses.

Thomas is the last of a series of people that John has brought forward as a testimony to you and me to help us to believe and trust in Christ.

³⁰Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

What joy the disciples must have experienced as Jesus spent time with them after His resurrection. John tells us that many other signs were performed, but not all of these signs were recorded. Have you ever thought about that? In eternity, I believe we will know the whole wonderful story. Jesus knew that they would need these signs to strengthen their faith, for He would soon be leaving them. In that day, they would have to rely on their faith alone and not on their present experience or senses. Perhaps, you find yourself in a similar situation. Remember how the Lord is pleased with you when you choose to cling to His Word despite difficulties. Even when you do not feel His presence and even when this world seems to contradict the message of the Kingdom, we know that we are His and that He is pleased with our faith.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the resurrection of Christ, the evidence that the substitutionary work of Christ on our behalf has been accepted. Help us to walk by faith and not by the evidence of our senses. We look forward to the Day when we will no longer have to walk by faith but we will see You in all of your glory (Job 19:25-27).

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