

41. Jesus Appears to Mary and the Disciples

John 20:10-31

The Gospel According to John

On Saturday night as the sun was down and the first two stars appeared in the sky, the Sabbath was over. Mark records that, as soon as darkness fell and the Sabbath was over, 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 watched where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus (Luke 23:55), no doubt with many tears. John and Luke both wrote that the women started for the tomb very early while it was still dark (John 20:1; Luke 24:1), and only on the way did they consider the difficulties of getting into the tomb and moving the one-ton door: "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 the seventy-five pounds of spices of Nicodemus and Joseph. As they approached the tomb, Matthew wrote that a violent earthquake occurred and that an angel of the Lord came down, walked to the tomb, rolled the stone away, and sat on it (Matthew 28:2). The Roman soldiers guarding 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).

Luke writes that, only when the women entered the tomb and saw that Jesus' body was not there, the angels then appeared:

²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were puzzling over this, suddenly two men in radiant apparel stood beside them. ⁵As the women bowed their faces to the ground in terror, the two men asked them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; He has risen! (Luke 24:2-6).

The angels spoke to the women and instructed them to go and tell the disciples the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead. It is possible that there were two groups of women: "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). It is hard to get our minds around Mary's still thinking that someone stole the body of the Lord, but, maybe, she left right away to tell John and Peter before the angels had a chance to describe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

John the Apostle described how the disciples received the news that morning, i.e. how he and Peter ran for the tomb after Mary Magdalene burst into the room to tell them that someone had stolen the body: "So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (John 20:2).

Why does John not mention any other women that resurrection morning? Most commentators believe that John wrote his Gospel later in life and knew what the other Gospel writers had

written. It is possible he decided to fill in some of the details and focus on specific aspects of the resurrection by giving personal testimony of what it was like for certain individuals, for instance, Peter and John (vv. 1-10), Mary Magdalene (vv. 11-18), the disciples (vv. 19-23) and Thomas (vv. 24-29). When we read John's account, he focuses on the personal testimonies and interactions with the risen Lord Jesus.

After John and Peter ran to the tomb, Mary was possibly exhausted after running, and she may even have gone to others with the news as well. After she caught her breath, she hurried back to the tomb, trying to make sense of what was happening. If Mary heard the angel tell the good news of Jesus' being alive, she certainly did not understand it. When she got back to the tomb, John and Peter had already left (John 20:10).

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 (John 20:10-12).

Many of us have heard the resurrection account so many times that it has become very familiar to us. We find it hard to imagine what it was like for the disciples that first resurrection morning. The concept of the resurrected Jesus was one they still failed to grasp, despite the Lord's attempts to inform them ahead of time as to what would happen. Mary Magdalene could not accept the thought, perhaps because it was too fantastic to believe. Psychologists call this state of mind *Cognitive Dissonance*, a mental discomfort that comes when your beliefs run counter to new information that you receive. How could Jesus be alive when she so clearly saw Him crucified (Matthew 27:56). How can a person overcome death? Her only thought was the urgency to find her Lord's body. The body was no longer there, and the only reasonable explanation was that it was stolen from the tomb!

Why was Mary not shocked at being spoken to by angels? Why did Jesus appear first to a woman, Mary Magdalene, giving her the honor of being first to share the good news? Why did Christ not appear first to a man?

Mary Magdalene was a woman who had been delivered of seven demons by the Lord Jesus (Mark 16:9). Such gratitude for her deliverance welled up with a sincere love for the grace, mercy, and power 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, 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). Apart from the faith of Christ, all religions look down on women as not reputable witnesses, but not so with Jesus. He elevates women to equals citizens in the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28).

Mary Magdalene is a picture of the very people Christ 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 was a traumatic experience for Mary to witness Jesus crucified (Mark 15:40), and undoubtedly many tears were shed that weekend. In front of the tomb that morning, 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 it 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

the head of the empty cocoon-like strips of burial cloth. The Roman soldiers were gone at this point, having been terrified at the sight of the two angels, but Mary was in emotional shock and only had one thought on her mind: “Where is the Lord?”

Jesus Revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene

The angels then asked 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.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”) (John 20:13-16).

[Why did Mary not recognize Christ at first? Do you think there have been times when the Lord has come to you but in a different form? Why would Jesus hide Himself?](#)

There are times when the Lord deliberately hid who He was from people, for example, on the Emmaus road in Luke 24. Unrecognized, Jesus 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. It was only at their insistence that Jesus stayed with them. When at supper, He took the 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.

Some suggest that Mary did not recognize Who was speaking with her because of the deep sobbing and tears clouding her vision. Others say that, maybe, the rising sun behind Jesus made it difficult for her to see. When Mary spoke to Him Whom she thought was the gardener, she had not yet considered what she would do with a body. All she knew was that she wanted to be near the Lover of her soul. When a lover of God is low in spirit, only the presence of Christ will do. Love will find a way.

When Jesus spoke Mary’s name in His own intimate way, she suddenly recognized Who it was. God’s sheep know His voice (John 10:4). This writer has known several people who have heard the audible voice of God, but even though I have not yet heard Him audibly, a mature believer knows in his inner man when God speaks to him. Mary knew Him by His voice. Now, her tears were tears of joy! How wonderful it will be for all of us who know Christ finally to look upon Him Whom we have longed to see in all of His glory and to hear His audible voice! I imagine Mary’s 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.’” 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 20:17-18).

The English King James Version translates Jesus as saying to Mary, “Touch Me not,” but this confuses what is said because, just a few hours later in the evening, Luke wrote 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 and most up-to-date Bibles translate Jesus as saying to Mary, “Stop clinging to me,” or stop holding on to me. It is possible that Mary was so overwhelmed at seeing Jesus that she threw her arms around Jesus and would not let Him go. However, Jesus had a mission for her to tell the good news to others. God used the greatest of sinners to be the greatest of evangelists. The Lord honored and trusted her to be the first to deliver this great news to the disciples. In just a few brief moments, Mary had gone from grief to overwhelming joy!

If we look at other accounts of this event, it seems that the eleven couldn’t believe Christ was raised. Their words “**seemed to them like nonsense**” (Luke 24:11). Maybe, they felt Mary was hallucinating due to her emotional state. Sometimes, when we share the good news with others, we need to be persistent, for the message is not always received immediately. Trust in the truth of the message that you carry and do not be discouraged if you do not receive a positive response. Let your joy and your personal experience of Christ be a witness to others, and leave the results with the Lord.

Jesus’ physical presence would not depart from them for another forty days, i.e., seven days before the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In that time period, the Lord gave His disciples many convincing proofs that He was alive, and He 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. We, too, are to go with the good news to those around us. He is risen!

[When Jesus told Mary to go tell the disciples, what did He call them, and what is new about the relationship Christ now has with them? \(John 20:17\).](#)

Through Christ's redemptive atoning death on the cross, God has torn the veil and made way for us to enjoy a relationship with Him: we can call Him Father. If we have entrusted our lives to Him, then we are in His family! The Lord now calls us brothers, i.e., all those in covenant relationship with God through the blood of the New Covenant. All of us who are Gentiles are grafted into the Olive Tree of faith (Romans 11:17-21). There are not two churches, i.e., one Gentile and one Jewish. No, the Gentiles who respond to the good news of the Gospel are all brothers and sisters in the faith. There is only one body of Jesus, which is composed of all believers. We are brothers and sisters in the faith: “**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise**” (Galatians 3:29).

Jesus Revealed 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 met the Lord on the road to Emmaus returned to the disciples gathered together (Luke 24:33). Amid that excited gathering with the doors locked, Jesus appeared 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 we receive at the coming of Jesus is different from the body we now have. Jesus was able to physically 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 believer, death is no longer an enemy but has been conquered at the cross of Jesus. The resurrection is the evidence to believers that God has accepted Christ's sacrifice on behalf of His called-out ones (the church). All who trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross are reconciled to the Father.

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 by 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? Why did Jesus eat something in their presence?

To prove that His body was real and that He was not a ghost, Jesus ate in front of them.

Jesus Reveals Himself to Thomas

John the Apostle now brings up one last witness of the resurrection and shares his story of coming to faith that Jesus was very much alive.

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” (John 20:24-29).

How did Thomas miss the appearance of Jesus that night? Before we judge him too harshly, let us acknowledge that each person handles tragedy and pain in his own way. Perhaps, Thomas retreated and isolated himself by seeking solitude instead of fellowship. Everyone needs solitude at times, but when a believer is low in spirit, it is wise to find 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. Thomas heard the other disciples talking about Jesus' appearance with great excitement, but He would not allow himself to believe it.

How gracious the Lord was to Thomas! He came close and invited 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 had been 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, 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 entered into the blessing and joy that the other disciples experienced. Not all believers will have evidence given to their senses. Like Thomas, some people are waiting for absolute proof before putting faith in Christ. Some will not take a step of faith because they are waiting for a supernatural sign or a prophetic word from the Lord. On occasion, God may unusually give a person confirmation, but we should step out in faith on the objective word of God and the testimony of the Holy 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, *The Screwtape Letters*, a fictional training session is going on between a seasoned senior demon and a young demon. The young demon requires advice on his first assignment to try 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 [God] 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 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 some people John presents as a testimony to you and me to help us 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).

John wrote that many other signs were performed, but not all of these signs were recorded. Like us, 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 when this world seems to contradict the message of the kingdom, we know we are His, and 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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¹ C.S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York, N.Y. The Macmillan Co., 1959, page 47.