



“From Grief to Belief”

John 20:11-18

Sermon Date: April 11th, 2021

Reflections on Sunday’s Sermon

Prayer

As you begin your study, spend some time thanking the Lord for the resurrection of Jesus Christ (as recorded in John 20:1-8). Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the profound realities and implications of Jesus being our resurrected Savior as you dig into His Word this week. As you pray, make the following words your own before the Lord (prayer written by John MacArthur and taken from At the Throne of Grace: A Book of Prayers).

*“Precious Father, we marvel that You sent Your Son to redeem this fallen world.
We are filled with wonder at the thought that He took on human flesh
and willingly experienced crucifixion, death, and burial.
We marvel even more that He rose from the dead.
The empty grave calls forth our adoring honor!
It is an emblem of assurance for us and the most vivid earthly symbol of heaven’s hope.
We know beyond question that Christ rose bodily...history vindicates it. The church affirms it.
The powerful influence of the gospel proves it conclusively.
Our hearts’ experience knows it well, for just as Christ was raised physically from the dead
by Your glory, we too were spiritually resurrected to walk in newness of life.
We thank You that our old self was crucified so that we might live again.
May we earnestly seek to live always in the power of Christ’s resurrection.
May we devote all our energies to knowing Him who said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life;
he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me
will never die.’
Christ’s resurrection is the precious truth that vindicates His atoning work.
It is the seal of Your approval on the great sacrifice He offered – laying down His life for our sakes.
He was raised for our justification; brought up from the dead as proof our sins were fully forgiven.
Thus because of the resurrection we know with settled assurance that all our transgressions
have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west.
We thank you for that forgiveness, Father...
May we be both holy and full of joy as we think about what it means to have life that is eternal
through union with the risen and ever-living Christ!
May the truth and power of the resurrection permeate our thoughts,
control every aspect of our living, and extend from us to those who will see
the glorious transformation and resurrection power.
We thank You for all You have done for Your people. In the holy name of Christ we pray. Amen.”*

Scripture

John 20:11-18 – (English Standard Version)

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Handling the Word

1. Each of the four Gospels gives us a unique perspective of the resurrection of Jesus, particularly in regard to Mary Magdalene and the other ladies who were present on Easter morning. Look up the narrative of the resurrection in the other three Gospels and write down what you learn from those accounts that add to the story as told here in John (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-10; Luke 24:1-10.)

Understanding and Applying

1. We know that the “Mary” mentioned here in v. 11 is Mary Magdalene. She is mentioned by name twelve times in the Gospels, more than most of the disciples of Jesus and more than any other woman, except Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is obviously a significant person and a devoted follower of Jesus. Look up the following verses and write down what you learn about Mary (Luke 8:1-3, John 19:25, John 20:1-2). As you learn what her life was like before meeting Jesus and then see what she did with her life after meeting Jesus, how does this encourage you to live a life totally devoted to Christ? What does this also tell you about Jesus and his grace and compassion?
2. V. 11 tells us that Mary was “**weeping**” outside the tomb. Why was she responding in this way to the empty tomb (see 20:2 and 20:13 for help)? We know that Jesus had told his disciples and almost surely Mary Magdalene as well, that he would die, be buried, but rise from the dead on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22). Why do you think Mary, as well as the other disciples didn’t believe Jesus when he told them he would rise on the third day? Do you think you would have believed Him? Why or why not?
3. In the midst of her grief and sorrow in v. 13, Mary makes a profound statement to the angels, “They have taken away my Lord.” She didn’t just say “They have taken away Jesus, but, they have taken away *my Lord*.” Why is it significant that Mary didn’t simply recognize Jesus as a friend or even as a Rabbi, but as her *Lord*, a name reserved for God alone? Do you recognize Jesus as your Lord (which means Master)? How is that evident in your life on a daily basis? Is Jesus the Master of your life or are you the master of your life? What needs to change to truly make Jesus your Lord?

4. This narrative in the Gospel of John tells us that the very first person to see the resurrected Jesus was Mary Magdalene, a woman. Many have suggested that if the gospel writers were making up this story (which of course they were not) they would *not* have written the facts in this way, because a woman was not permitted to be a witness in a court of law and women in general were looked down upon in the society of the time. How do these facts lend credence to the validity of this story? What else might this suggest to us about God's view of those who are often at the bottom of the social strata? Can you think of other examples in the Bible where God exalts those who are the most oppressed and looked down upon?
5. Look up the following verses and write down what you learn about God's love for the oppressed and the "least of these" in the world? What is your response to God by being reminded of these truths? How should we as Christians respond to those in our world who are oppressed and looked down upon?
- a. Deuteronomy 10:18 –
 - b. Psalm 10:17-18 –
 - c. Psalm 146:7-9 –
 - d. Luke 17:11-19 –
6. Another significant lesson we can learn from Jesus coming to Mary Magdalene first is what is most important to Jesus for ministry. Jesus is not interested in using people in ministry just because they have a high standing in society or are rich or famous or talented. What is important to Jesus for ministry is faithfulness. Jesus knew Mary would be faithful to go and tell his disciples the good news of the empty tomb and that's exactly what she did. Look up the following verses and write down what you learn about whom God uses for His sovereign purposes and for His glory in ministry. How will you (none of us are famous or important people in this world) commit to being used of the Lord in any way He sees fit to build Christ's Church and proclaim the Gospel?
- a. Matthew 5:2-11 –
 - b. 1Corinthians 1:18-31 –
 - c. 1Corinthians 4:1-2 –
7. In v. 15, even though Mary confuses Jesus as the Gardener (boy is she in for a surprise), she responds by saying, **"tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."** She is willing to do whatever it takes to go get Jesus' body back. You have to love her tenacity. Look up the following verses and write down what you learn about the biblical mandate to be steadfast and unswerving in our commitment to Christ. What practical steps can you take to grow in these areas in your own life?

- a. 1Corinthians 15:58 –
 - b. Philippians 3:12-21 –
 - c. 2Timothy 2:1-13 –
 - d. Hebrews 12:1-3 –
8. In v. 16, Jesus reveals his true identity to Mary. She responds by calling Jesus, “Rabboni” or “Teacher”. Can you think back, just in the Gospel of John, to some of the things Jesus has taught you the most? How are you allowing Jesus to teach you and be your Teacher on a regular basis? Very importantly, how might you improve in this critical area of our spiritual lives and allow Jesus to be the voice you listen to most in the world?
9. In summary, what Mary thought was a catastrophe (Jesus’ body had been stolen) ended up being just the opposite (He had risen from the grave) and a reason for great rejoicing. It’s not an overstatement to say that Jesus is in the business of taking our grief and turning it into joy. Have you ever experienced a similar situation in your own life, when you thought something was going to turn out bad, only to be surprised to see that God was at work the whole time and had turned the situation into a time for rejoicing and spiritual growth? If you are able, share this experience with your group. It may be a great encouragement to someone else.
10. What aspects of this brief resurrection appearance by Jesus do you find to be most encouraging? What about this account leads you to a greater sense of gratitude for, and worship of, Jesus Christ?

“Of all the accounts of the appearances of our Lord after he rose from the dead, none perhaps is so touching as this one. He that can read this simple story without deep interest, must have a very cold and unfeeling heart.”

J.C. Ryle