

EASTER

“Five Truths that Flow From Resurrection”

John 20:1; 11–18

Sunday, April 9, 2023 (Easter)

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Scripture Reading

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb...¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They 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.” ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus 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.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus 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.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her (John 20:1; 11–18, ESV).¹

This is God’s Word. *Thanks be to God.* You may all have a seat.

Exposition

The hope of the Christian gospel is the hope of resurrection.

The resurrection means that the Christian gospel does not merely help marginally bad people become slightly better people. The resurrection means that those who are spiritually dead in their sin can be given new life in Christ.

This gospel of resurrection is not just an abstract theological truth. The gospel is a deeply personal reality. The resurrection of Jesus has deeply personal implications. And today, as we walk through this Easter Sunday passage, I want to explore five live-changing truths that flow from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Jn. 20:1; 11–18.

And I pray that you all will experience these truths in your life today.

1.) Jesus meets you in your brokenness.

Look at verses 1 and 11, “*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.... But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb*” (John 20:1, 11).

It is just before dawn on a Sunday morning. And a woman named Mary is going to visit a garden tomb.

Tears stream down her face. She aches with sleeplessness and grief. In the last few days, Mary’s world has fallen apart. She was a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was a Jewish teacher, a prophet, and a miracle-maker. And Mary, along with the disciples of Jesus, had hoped that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah—the anointed, liberator king who would bring God’s kingdom to earth.

But more than all that, Jesus was Mary’s friend. Mary loved Jesus with all of her heart.

You see, she was a woman with the past. Some would have called her crazy or damaged goods. But Jesus noticed Mary. Jesus was different. And when she was in a dark place, Jesus delivered Mary from demonic oppression (see: Luke 8:2).

No one had ever loved Mary like Jesus. And Mary wanted to follow Jesus wherever he would lead her.

But just a few days ago, Jesus Christ was arrested, beaten, mocked, condemned, tortured, and murdered upon a cross as a criminal of the state. Mary’s world has fallen apart. But things are about to change in the most astonishing way imaginable.

Mary is about to become *the very first Christian*. She is going to be the very first person to *encounter* and *believe* in the resurrected Jesus. Now, this should surprise us. As I said before, Mary had a messy, sinful past. More than that, the fact that a woman was the first person to witness the resurrected Jesus would have been profoundly surprising in the ancient world.

And in the first-century Roman Empire, especially in the ancient Near East, the words of a woman were not viewed seriously at all. In fact, in this culture, the testimony of a woman was not even legally admissible as evidence in a court of law.

But still, God chooses Mary to be the one to see that Jesus is not just a teacher, not just a prophet, not just a good example, but the resurrected Lord and God. Jesus meets Mary in her sin and her pain, and he saves her.

As it turns out, this is how God works. This is how the gospel works. Pastor Timothy Keller says it this way, “... *Jesus Christ specifically chose a woman, not a man; chose a reformed mental patient, not a pillar of the community; chose one of the support team, not one of the leaders, to be the first Christian. How much clearer can he be? He is saying, ‘it doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. My salvation is not based on pedigree, it's not based on moral attainments, raw talent, level of effort, or track record. I have not come to call those who are strong, but to call those who are weak. And I'm not mainly your teacher but your Savior. I'm here to save you not by your work, but my work.’... Real Christian faith believes that Jesus saves through his death and resurrection so that we can be accepted by sheer grace. That's the gospel—the good news that we are saved by the work of Christ through grace.*”²

The Christian gospel is not about what you can do to get to God; it's about what God has done to get to you. This means no matter where you are, no matter how broken you are, no matter your pain, your disappointment, your fear, your failure, or your doubt, Jesus can meet you today.

2.) Jesus isn't who you think he is—he's so much better.

Let's continue to look at the text. “*And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They 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.’ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus 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’” (John 20:12-15).*

Mary is in such a state of surreal, hysterical grief that even when she encounters two angels, all she can do is ask where the body of Jesus is. Then, when she sees the very real, very resurrected Jesus, she assumes that he is the gardener!

Notice Mary is not even considering resurrection as a potential option right now. She knew a lot about Jesus. She even loved Jesus. But up until this point, Mary still had not recognized the most important truth about Jesus. To Mary, Jesus was a great man who had made her life much better—but she didn't yet know and worship him as one who is Lord and God.

Maybe along your life's journey, you rejected Jesus because the church wounded you. Maybe, to you, Jesus is a symbol of people who are self-righteousness, prideful, and hypocritical.

² Timothy Keller, *Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life's Biggest Questions* (New York: Dutton, 2013), 99.

And if that is you, I get it. I really do. But might I submit, perhaps the version Jesus you rejected is not the real Jesus. Maybe the real Jesus is different. Maybe the real Jesus is better.

For others, we like to think of Jesus—not as the rightful king of our lives—but as a nice teacher, a positive example, or a personal life coach, or a genie who grants us blessings and wishes if we pray to him the right way. But the resurrection of Jesus has shown us that Jesus is so much more than any of these misconceptions.

As C.S. Lewis once famously wrote: *“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”*³

3.) Jesus knows your name.

This is a mystifying and humbling truth: The infinite God who spun the galaxies into motion knows you by name.

And here, in John 20, the God of all creation speaks the name of one he loves. Verse 16 reads: *“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher)” (John 20:16).* This is the single moment that changes everything for Mary.

For whatever reason, she has not been able to recognize Jesus until this point. Maybe she cannot clearly see in the dimness of early dawn. Maybe she is spiritually prevented from acknowledging the truth that the man standing before her is Jesus. Maybe resurrection is so far out of her paradigm that she simply cannot dare to hope that Jesus is alive. But all of her fears, her sorrows, her shame, and darkness melt away the moment Jesus says her name.

The Good Shepherd calls, and his sheep hear his voice (cf. John 10:3-4).

Like a shard of sunlight that breaks through the darkness, the voice of God pierces through the clouds of doubt and awakens Mary. Immediately she recognizes him and responds to him by calling him *“Rabboni,”* which means teacher and master.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 40-41.

This miraculous moment still happens for those who come to truly know Jesus today. Theologians call this “*effectual calling*.”⁴ It is when the Holy Spirit illuminates the gospel in your heart.

For me as a one-time agnostic college student who was burnt out on religion, my “*effectual calling*” was the moment that I suddenly went from knowing a lot about Jesus to knowing Jesus, loving Jesus, and committing my life to follow Jesus.

I believe that there are some of you hearing my words that need to have that moment today. Maybe you have grown up in church. Maybe you even would say that you believe the Bible. You believe that Jesus came to this earth. You believe that Jesus died. You believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

But you don’t yet believe that he did this for *you*.

If that is you—if you feel that you have known about God but that you have never known God personally. I want you to know that, through his word, he is calling your name today.

4.) Jesus has made union with God possible.

Look what happens next. “*Jesus 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”’*” (John 20:17).

This is a verse that is easy to misunderstand. Initially, it might seem like Jesus is telling Mary that he is too holy for her to touch. Quite the contrary. In fact, later on in this same chapter, Jesus will openly invite many of his disciples to touch his resurrected body so that they might believe in the miracle of resurrection (John 20:27).

What is happening is that Mary grasping Jesus. She is *clinging* to him. She won’t let go because she never wants to lose Jesus again. But Jesus lovingly and gently tells her that she needs to let him go.

Why does he tell her this? It is because Jesus knows that he may eventually ascend to the Father, take his rightful place on the throne of heaven, and send the Holy Spirit to dwell within the hearts of all who believe in him.

Jesus is telling Mary, “*I have something better for you. A day is coming when I am not just around you, my Spirit will dwell within you. I will abide in you, and you will abide*

⁴ “Thus in *Mary* we have a lively image of our calling; for the only way in which we are admitted to the true knowledge of Christ is, when he first knows us, and then familiarly invites us to himself, not by that ordinary voice which sounds indiscriminately in the ears of all, but by that voice with which he especially calls the sheep which the Father hath given to him.” John Calvin and William Pringle, [Commentary on the Gospel according to John](#), vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 258.

in me. And through me, God will not just be a God; he will be your God. God will not just be a Father; he will be your Father!”

That promise is true for you today, as well.

5.) Jesus gives your life purpose.

Let’s look at the last verse. *“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’—and that he had said these things to her” (John 20:18).* Think of how extraordinary this is. Jesus commands Mary to be the first person to proclaim and announce the gospel of the risen Christ to the Apostles. Jesus has done more than just save Mary. Jesus has given Mary’s life an astronomical sense of value, honor, and purpose.

And if you are a Christian, Jesus gives your life purpose too. Think about it this way. If this story that has given hope to centuries of Christians around the globe really is true, if Jesus Christ is the resurrected God and Lord, nothing is more important than his kingdom.

Does this mean you need to leave your job, go to seminary, and go into vocational ministry? Not necessarily. But it does mean that you are called to be a missionary that declares and displays the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever God has uniquely and providentially placed you. Your family and your friends need Jesus. Those whom you work with need Jesus. Your neighborhood needs Jesus. Your city needs Jesus and the hope of his resurrection.

And if you are a Christian, God has sent you to be a missionary in these contexts. He has not just saved you by grace; he has sanctified you and sent you by grace as well. Now it is our turn to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ.

Conclusion

The story recorded in this passage of Scripture is not just *a* story; it is *the* story. That is because the resurrection of Jesus is the central, defining, and shocking climax of the entire Bible.

I find it interesting that John makes sure to note that Mary mistakes Jesus for a *“gardener”* (John 20:15). It’s a small and specific detail. But of all the limited words that God has given us in his Scripture, you might ask, *“Why is this significant?”* Well, for starters, *the story of the Bible, and indeed the story of humanity, begins in a garden.*

The book of Genesis teaches us how God makes the first man named Adam and places him in a garden called Eden. He is created in the image of God to steward God’s creation to God's glory.

But rather than living his life for the glory of God and the good of creation, Adam rejects the rule and reign of God, by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rather than walking in communion with God and allowing God to define what was good, Adam chooses to define what was good in terms of *self*.

And, there in the garden of Eden, the world's first gardener shatters creation by his sin and plunges humanity into a destiny of death. And as Adam's descendants, we have repeated Adam's sin over and over and over again.

But here in John 20, the Holy God of all creation steps into the story of sinful men and women to reverse the curse and show us that just as creation was broken in a garden, New Creation will begin in a garden as well.

For as in a garden one man led humanity into sin, in this garden one man will lead humanity into redemption.

Through one gardener named Adam, we were doomed to death. But through this "gardener" named Jesus, we can be granted new and eternal life.

As the book of Romans tells us, *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous"* (Rom 5:18–19).

The resurrected Jesus becomes the new Adam, the true Adam, and in the words of the Apostle Paul, "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45).

Jesus redeems Adam's story, and he can redeem your story as well.

Today is an invitation to be found in Christ—to step out of death and into eternal life! It is an invitation to all who would believe the good news *he is risen!*

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

- 1) Read John 20:1; 11 –18 out loud. Why is the resurrection such a central component of the Christian gospel?
- 2) Have you ever felt like Mary Magdalene at the beginning of this story, completely broken and hopeless? How can you relate to her story, and how does the hope of the resurrection give you comfort and hope in your own life?
- 3) Do you at times struggle with feeling like you're not good enough for God's love and grace? How can the truth that salvation is a gift of grace, not something we earn or deserve, bring freedom and peace to your heart?

- 4) At the end of this passage, Mary is called to announce the good news of resurrection to others. How can you share the hope of the resurrection with others, especially those who are hurting, broken, and lost? How can you be a witness to the transforming power of Jesus in your own life and in the lives of those around you?