

# The Gardener

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[ 0 : 01 ] Well, again, let me welcome all of you who are here joining us. Happy Easter to you all. A lot of people I know in my life have FOMO. It's a major issue for them.

Fear of missing out. They constantly have anxiety that amazing, cool, fun, momentous things are happening, and they're not a part of it. So they're wired to sort of be where the action is.

They always want to know the news when it first comes out. They always want to be the first to arrive. And I've just never identified with that. My struggle is not FOMO.

I'm more of a ROMO kind of person. I have relief of missing out. And I don't know if anybody else is like me, but in this kind of fast-paced, yeah.

Who is a ROMO person, okay? Here's to the ROMO people. Listen, I'm the kind of person who I kind of secretly hope the COVID test is positive.

[ 1 : 02 ] I'm the kind of person who when the plans fall through, you know, I might have been looking forward to them. But when I find out that we have to cancel last minute and that I am doomed to an evening of locking the door, putting on my most comfortable clothes, and watching a movie, I'm like as giddy as a child on Christmas morning.

And because we live in this fast-paced, high-intensity culture, where we are hyper-connected all around the world, we are always aware of everything that is happening all the time the minute it happens.

And so it can be nice to disconnect and to not know right away when the big thing happens. Now, all of that being the case, I think we can all agree that there are some things, some events that when they happen, no matter what your wiring is, if you're a FOMO person or a ROMO person, everybody would want to be there.

And of course, the top of the list of those kinds of events would be the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that first Easter. Because the resurrection is potentially the single most... There you go.

The single most important event in human history, right? It's the determining factor of everything else. If the resurrection didn't actually happen, then as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, the entire Christian faith is empty and pointless.

[ 2 : 28 ] No amount of memorializing or turning it into a metaphor would really change that. If it didn't happen, there's no point to any of what we're doing this morning. However, if it did happen, if someone actually went into the tomb and then came out of the tomb, then this is the single most important event in history.

And what it means is that it's all true. That everything that Jesus said is true. It means that God has actually put in motion a plan to save and restore all people and to bring all of us into a new creation existence.

In that case, it means that the whole world needs to know about Jesus. And so, if they ever invent time travel, like if there's a version of the iPhone that comes out with personal time travel feature, that's the first place that we should all go.

It's the most important event. Even though we weren't there, and I've long wished I could have been there, even though none of us in this room were able to be there, God did actually bestow that honor on someone.

In all of history, God said, I want this person to be the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus. And that person is Mary Magdalene.

[ 3 : 53 ] She was the first witness to the resurrection according to John's gospel. And Mary has become since then an example for all people throughout history for how we should approach and respond to the resurrection.

So, I want to look together at John chapter 20 and see what it teaches us. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this celebration this morning.

We thank you for the sound of bells. We thank you for the singing. We thank you for all of this. And we thank you for what's at the center of it, the resurrection of Jesus, Lord. We pray that this morning we would come together to look at the empty tomb, to contemplate what that means for us.

Lord, and I pray that you would bring this resurrection life into our hearts, even as we consider it together. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So, I want to tell you a little bit of the back story of Mary.

Mary Magdalene was probably called Mary Magdalene because she was from a Galilean village called Magdala. And it was on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, what is now Israel.

[ 5 : 04 ] There were a lot of Marys, and it was important to distinguish one Mary from another. So, she was Mary Magdalene. And we learn from Luke chapter 8 that she originally met Jesus when he cast seven demons out of her and that she had since been dedicated as a follower to Jesus throughout his entire earthly ministry.

It even says there in Luke 8 that she provided for Jesus out of her own means. If you can imagine that, that she was actually providing and meeting Jesus' needs, making sure he got enough to eat, making sure he had a place to sleep, making sure that his basic human needs were met.

And Mary became one of Jesus' most devoted followers. And this is clear during the final hours of Jesus' earthly ministry. By this point, many of his most devoted followers had deserted him.

And yet, Mary witnessed all of the events. She was there for the trial. She was there for the torture. She was there at the moment on the cross when Jesus breathed his last.

She saw him placed in the tomb. And in John 20, she's coming to pay her respects and potentially finish the job. When she arrives and sees the stone rolled away and she sees the empty tomb, her first thought is obviously the resurrection.

[ 6 : 40 ] No, that's not her first thought. Her first thought is the kind of thought that we would probably have, grave robbers. So, she's upset that people may have stolen the body of Jesus.

She immediately runs to go get Peter and John. They run all the way back to the tomb to see for themselves. But even though the tomb is empty, Peter doesn't know what to make of it. And John tells us in verse 9, for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. They're not expecting this. But then even after they leave, Mary stays. She's so like Mary. She stays and she weeps by the tomb.

And then she turns to look in the tomb again and she sees two angels. But she doesn't even realize what she's looking at. She has only one thought in her mind, and that is finding Jesus.

And so, they ask, why are you crying? And she says, in essence, I'm not leaving until I get to the bottom of this. That's exactly the kind of thing we would expect her to say.

[ 7 : 42 ] Even when she turns around, though, and sees Jesus, she doesn't yet recognize Him. She thinks He's the gardener, because they were, in fact, in a garden.

And look what she says. She says, are you the one who took Him? Just tell me where He is. I'm going to go get Him. Still devoted. And then Jesus speaks her name.

And she recognizes Him. And she cries out, teacher. And then Jesus sends her to tell the disciples the good news.

And so, she goes to tell them, and she announces the good news. I have seen the Lord. So, there are a couple of things that, as we consider this story together, we can learn about how to approach and respond to the resurrection of Jesus on Easter.

We see something about how people come to faith, and we see what to do with our faith once we have it. How people come to faith. How people come to faith.

[ 8 : 47 ] Faith is the product of a couple of things that happen at the same time, a convergence of two things. It's the product of honest inquiry meeting divine grace.

It is honest inquiry meeting divine grace. Honest inquiry. On the one hand, Mary is, I think, a phenomenal example of honest inquiry.

And what do I mean by that? I mean that Mary genuinely, honestly wants to know the truth of the empty tomb. She's not coming with any preconceived notions.

She's not coming with any kind of confirmation bias. She genuinely wants to know what happened and where to find Jesus. When she first comes to the tomb, she's not even remotely considering the possibility that Jesus has risen from the grave.

And John tells us that the disciples did not yet understand the Scriptures about the resurrection. And I think for most of us, it's easy to look back at this story that is 2,000 years old and to assume that the disciples all expected this, that they all got together and they said, well, you know, Jesus has been killed, but we want to keep the movement going.

[ 9 : 56 ] We want to keep the, you know, great things were happening. And so, if we just sort of fake a resurrection, we'll steal the body, we'll tell the whole world that He rose from the dead, we'll continue pressing forward, and nobody even has to know that our leader was defeated, right?

The problem is that doesn't actually hold up under scrutiny at all. They actually, not only did they not expect that this was going to happen, but they stood to gain nothing from the movement continuing, other than a couple of hundred years of severe persecution.

I think there's this idea that people were more gullible back in the past, that they were more superstitious, that the idea of resurrection was far more plausible in a pre-scientific world. And that's simply not the case. C.S. Lewis rightly labels this kind of assumption chronological snobbery, right? The idea that we are somehow inherently smarter than people who lived before us. Simply not true. The idea of resurrection was no more plausible to them than it is for people like us. And so, honest inquiry means that you're willing to look at the evidence for the resurrection, you're willing to let go of any preconceived notions, you're willing to check your confirmation bias, and you come with a genuine desire to know the truth.

[ 11 : 09 ] And, you know, there is compelling evidence for the truth of the resurrection. We have, for instance, eyewitness account reports of the resurrection. And, you know, scholars used to claim that the Gospels were written hundreds of years later, and so it was easy to say, well, they just made all of this up.

But that thinking is actually pretty outdated. The most recent scholarship has determined that these accounts were written much earlier than previously thought. There's a great book on that by Richard Baucom called *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

So, these accounts were written within the lifetime of people who were around when it happened. And that actually leads to the second point, all of the random details that are included in the Gospel accounts.

The enormous amount of specific details, like specific names of people and where they're from, like the person whose ear gets cut off is named Malchus, right?

And he's a servant in the temple. You can go find him. These details are baffling if you're trying to make a story up.

[ 12 : 15 ] Because if you're trying to make this up and convince the world that something happened when it didn't, you would want to make it as obscure as possible. You would want to make it as impossible as you could for anybody to fact-check the claims that you were making.

But Christianity, from the very beginning, allows itself to be openly falsifiable. It claims that all of these events are public knowledge, that there were lots of people, lots of eyewitnesses who saw the risen Jesus, hundreds of eyewitnesses.

You know, Paul says to Agrippa at one point in Acts, you know that these things did not happen in a closet. Everybody knew. It was news all around town. And so, it allows itself.

So, other religions say, well, you know, we have all of this, but it's all been revealed to this one specific person. God came, and when nobody else was around, an angel appeared and revealed all of this to this one person.

And now this one person is the bearer of all of this news, and you're just going to have to take their word for it. But Christianity is not like that. Christianity has lots and lots and lots of people, multiple accounts of the same events written from different people, different perspectives, but all agreeing on the same thing.

[ 13 : 26 ] Jesus rose. And then the third thing that we would look at is the fact that, as this sermon is focusing on, the primary witnesses were women. In this culture, if you wanted to make up a credible story to convince the world of something, like the resurrection, you wouldn't use women as your primary witnesses.

And it's a shame to say that looking back from our perspective, but that's the case. Women's testimony wasn't even legally admissible. And yet the gospel writers clearly tell us that the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Joanna, and other women.

So, if you wanted to make up a credible story to convince the world of something, you would never use women as your star witnesses. And so, we have to ask, why would the gospel writers include this detail? I mean, you can even imagine them, as they're writing it, kind of wincing and saying, nobody's going to believe this.

The only explanation that makes sense of all of this is that it actually happened. So, if you're here and you're not sure what you believe about the resurrection, let me just ask you this.

Are you an honest seeker? Are you at least willing to look at the evidence? N.T. Wright's resurrection of the Son of God is an absolute must-read because it goes into incredible detail on things that I'm just touching on here this morning about the truth of the resurrection.

[14:57] About 10 years ago, NPR did an April Fool's Day prank. And I don't know if you all celebrate April Fool's. I'm not a huge fan of April Fool's, but my kids love April Fool's.

And so, this past year, for instance, we found fake cockroaches in just about everything in our house. So, if you're ever at our house and you see a cockroach, I can almost guarantee it's fake. So, don't freak out.

And please do come back. But about 10 years ago, NPR, they did a prank on their readers and they posted a fake headline that said, why doesn't America read anymore?

It's a fake headline on social media. If you clicked on the link to actually read the article, it would say, you know, April Fool's. And it kind of made this joke about congratulations.

You were actually willing to read the article, right? But guess what happened? You know what happened. This is on social media. So, the comment section immediately blows up. People read the headline and they just start getting defensive and angry and thrashing the article.

[15:58] See, this is the problem. I read all the time. I read books and magazines. If you put out stuff worth reading, then I would read it. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And people just go nuts, right? And it was this delicious irony. America doesn't read anymore.

You didn't even read the article, right? So, I love that. I thought that was really brilliant. But when it comes to the resurrection, don't just read the headline. Don't just hear the idea, the claim of the resurrection and immediately react and say, oh, there's no way that could have happened.

The invitation is to be an honest seeker. Click the headline. Read the evidence. Read the accounts. Be open to changing your mind.

Now, having said all of that, honest inquiry is necessary, but it's not sufficient. It's necessary, but it's not sufficient for genuine faith.

And this is where honest inquiry has to encounter divine grace. Notice that when Mary first sees Jesus, and God blessed John for including this detail.

[17:08] It completely changes the story. When she first sees Jesus, she doesn't recognize Him. She thinks He's the gardener. It's not until He speaks her name that she recognizes Jesus.

He's clearly different in some way. It's the same Jesus, but this is His glorified, resurrected body. And there are occasions when people at first do not recognize Him following His resurrection.

So, she doesn't recognize Him. And yet, there's more going on here. There's a point at which her openness to meeting Jesus has to encounter His call, His willingness to meet her.

It brings us back to John chapter 10, when Jesus teaches us that He is the great shepherd, and that He calls His sheep by name, and they follow Him and listen to His voice.

Now, He has risen, and He's the great shepherd, and He has to call His sheep by name. So, He calls out to Mary. The point is this. No one can be intellectually persuaded into faith, no matter how much evidence there is, no matter how many wonderful books full of great arguments there are.

[18:27] Nobody can be intellectually persuaded into faith. Jesus has to call your name. In other words, God has to open your heart to the truth of the gospel.

The good news is, if you are genuinely seeking to know Jesus, Scripture says that you will find Him, or rather, He will find you. So, if you're even curious about it, if you're even thinking, man, I should really, I should pick that book up.

But that's interesting. That's probably a sign, with all due respect, that Jesus is already calling your name. So, the first thing that we see is this.

This is something about how people come to faith. It's the coming together of an honest inquiry and divine grace. But we also see something else. What do we do with our faith, those of us who come to faith?

You know, I've read this story hundreds of times, as you probably have as well. And yet, there's, you know, the great thing about the Bible is you can read it again and again and again and again, and there are always details that you see that you never saw before.

[ 19 : 35 ] That's a living text. And so, I noticed something the past couple of weeks as I was looking at this. In the Greek version of John's gospel, Mary is always referred by John, she's always referred to in the Greek version of her name, Maria.

Right? So, whenever he's talking about Mary, he's talking about, he refers to her as Maria. That's the norm in John's gospel. But curiously, in this place alone, when Jesus speaks her name in the garden, he uses a Hebrew name.

Not Maria, but Miriam. He calls her Miriam. Now, John's gospel is full of double meanings and symbolism.

Bible commentators point out that this is very intentional on Jesus' part. Who do we know in the Bible who's named Miriam? Right?

This is an allusion to Miriam, the sister of Moses in the Old Testament. Now, who's Miriam? She's not just the sister of Moses. In Exodus chapter 15, God miraculously delivers His people from bondage in Egypt.

[ 20 : 52 ] They pass through the Red Sea. They are saved from certain death. They walk on dry ground and they come out the other side. And then it says in Exodus 15, Miriam, the prophetess, took a tambourine in her hand and began to sing about God's glorious victory and deliverance through the Red Sea.

And we need to see what Jesus is saying here. He is commissioning her. He's commissioning her. You are no longer merely Mary Magdalene.

You are no longer merely the woman people used to know as demon-possessed. Now, from this day forward, you are Miriam, the prophet.

And I am sending you out to announce to the world the good news of God's glorious victory, not merely through the Red Sea, but His deliverance for all people everywhere.

I don't think it's a coincidence that Mary mistakes Jesus for a gardener. It's no coincidence that all of this takes place in a garden.

[ 21 : 59 ] It's no coincidence that Mary sees angels in the garden. For a first-century Jewish person who was saturated with Old Testament imagery and for a gospel writer like John who loves symbolism, all of this would point back to a very familiar story.

Adam and Eve, the first gardeners, who failed and rebelled against God. And they were cast out of the garden, and what happened? God placed an angel with a flaming sword to keep them out. But here, the resurrected Jesus comes as the new gardener, the new Adam to succeed where the first Adam failed. The angels are there in the garden as they were, but no longer to keep people out. They invite Mary in. And all of this means that Jesus has achieved a victory that is exponentially greater than the Exodus in the Red Sea. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has given birth to a new humanity.

And so when we meet and encounter Jesus as our honest inquiry meets His divine grace and He calls out our name, He is also commissioning us. We are entering into a new humanity with a new restored purpose.

[ 23 : 20 ] We're picking up the mantle that was laid down in that first garden, and we're doing what we were created to do as we are sent out by Jesus into the world. So for those of us who come to faith, this shows us what to do with our faith.

Faith is meant to be shared. Like Mary, we need to be willing and even joyful to say to the world, I have seen the Lord.

I have seen the Lord. I was curious. I was inquiring, and somewhere along the way, He met me, and He called my name. Come and see. Come and see. So this is, I believe, why Mary is such a beautiful example for all of us to consider.

She shows us how people come to faith, that honest inquiry meets divine grace as Jesus calls our name. And then she shows us what to do with our faith. As we said at the very beginning, when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, if it didn't happen, then our faith is empty and pointless.

But if it did actually happen, then it is the single most important event in all of human history. It means that all of this is true, that God is offering the opportunity for us to become a new humanity, preparing for a new world.

[ 24 : 37 ] And that means that the whole world needs to know about Jesus. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for this encounter.

We thank You for Mary. We thank You for the incredible example that she sets. I pray that she would inspire us. I pray that she would challenge those of us who are not sure what we believe to pursue truth.

I pray that for those of us who do believe, she would inspire us to share our faith and to discover in Jesus Christ our true identity.

Lord, that we would recognize as He speaks our name, that we would recognize the purpose for which we were made, Lord, and that You would give us the faith to pursue it. We pray this in Your Son's holy name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.