

The Heart of the Risen Jesus

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[0 : 00] We're going to be in John chapter 20 this morning. John chapter 20. As we think about the resurrection as we have it in John's gospel. We're going to read the first 18 verses. If you've got a Bible or a device, you can look at it. If not, the words are on your screen.

John chapter 20 at verse 1. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 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. So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

[1 : 35] As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They 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. At this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus. He 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. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus 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. Mary 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. Amen. This is God's Word. So we're thinking about the heart of the risen Lord Jesus today, but we're going to begin thinking about this idea of a wonderful reunion. I want to take you, first of all, to, of all places, Buchanan Street bus station in Glasgow. If you've ever had the privilege of being there, you might recognise or remember the Winchers statue. It's a statue that captures really well that picture of happy reunion. As a couple have obviously been parted for some time and they are reunited. For me as a student and then living there, I was down there in Buchanan Street, often welcoming friends or welcoming family, coming to visit. It's a happy place in some ways. Other times people are departing. But we know about reunions. When you think about the emotions that go with them, friends you haven't seen for years.

And maybe you make time to catch up with old university friends or distant relatives coming to town. And the joy that accompanies that. Think about our great hope beyond restrictions. What do we want? We want to be able to gather together with our loved ones without feeling disembodied. We want to be present with them. I came across a quote from Tyron Edwards, who was a minister in the States in the 19th century, who wrote a little dictionary of thoughts. And I like this quote, every parting is a form of death, as every reunion is a type of heaven. And I want us to think about that in Mary's story. Here is Mary who is now reunited with the Lord Jesus. And when they had parted on Good Friday, there was a death.

[4 : 45] Jesus had been crucified and died. But now in this reunion, as Mary meets the risen Lord Jesus, well, the hope of heaven is now given to her. So we're going to think about Mary's story, to

think about her reunion with the Lord Jesus, and use it to help us to see the continuing heart of love that Jesus has for Mary and for his church. So this would be good news for us today, just as it was for Mary. First thing I want us to think about is the honor that Mary is given, because she becomes the first eyewitness of the resurrection. Start with the basic point that we always make whenever we come to the resurrection accounts in the Gospels, simply to say, these are history, they are not myth.

One of the ways that we see that in John's Gospel is the small details. So we get the time of Mary's arrival at the tomb. We get the story of the disciples running. We get where the grave clothes are left and they are folded, which incidentally is a sign that Jesus' body hadn't been taken by grave robbers. This is far too peaceful a scene for that. So there are lots of details that could only have come from eyewitnesses. But it's not just the fact that there are details, there are also embarrassing details within this Gospel that help us to realize that the first church hasn't got together and created a story, because this isn't how you would tell it unless it was true. So for example, we have Mary Magdalene reporting not that Jesus has been risen, but she sees the empty tomb and she presumes the body's been stolen.

John, who writes our Gospel, is very honest in verse 9 to say that the disciples had not made the connection between the Old Testament part of the Bible and Jesus having to die and then the resurrection.

And then we have the simple fact that the first eyewitness isn't one of the chief disciples, rather it's a woman. And in Jesus' day, the testimony of a woman was not respected and listened to in the courts.

This is not myth, this is history. Now what do we know about Mary? We can go to Luke chapter 8 and verse 2 for some brief detail. At the beginning of Luke chapter 8 we read this, So, Mary is someone who was possessed by seven demons and Jesus released her from that. And after that, she then travels with Jesus and she supports his ministry. We read the other Gospels and we discover that Mary Magdalene is someone who was there at the cross. She was there as Jesus was buried and now she is here at the empty tomb. Now the significance that I want us to see in this is that Mary is someone who has been honoured by Jesus. Jesus has shown grace and love and kindness to her and her reflex action is that she wants to honour her Lord and Saviour Jesus. When faith and grace and love have been received, the impulse is towards worship and love and service. And we see a great example of that in Mary.

[8 : 39] Now back to John 20, Mary on this day, as we saw in verse 1, arrives at the empty tomb and presumes the grave has been robbed, that the body has been removed. And in verse 11, we see her emotional state.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. And as she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb. So she is caught up by a sense of grief. What's clear is that up until this moment, she is blind to what's going on.

So even when she sees the angels in the tomb, those two angels there, evidence that God has been at work. Here are these messengers from God. She still doesn't get it. And their question comes to her in the form of a mild rebuke.

Verse 13, they asked her, woman, why are you crying? Why are you crying? At the tomb of the risen Lord Jesus, tears are totally inappropriate. This is the most joyful event that should be celebrated.

So weeping and grief are inappropriate. Just like we would find it inappropriate for someone to be weeping and sobbing with sadness at a wedding or laughing at a funeral, so it is inappropriate for Mary to be crying because Jesus is risen and alive. And we see that in the very next verse, because Jesus himself comes to her. Verse 14, at this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?

[10 : 38] She thinks he's the gardener. Maybe he's helped to remove the body. Now, perhaps her eyes have been blurred by her tears, and that's why she can't recognize.

Perhaps her mind has been blurred by grief and confusion, and that's why she can't recognize Jesus. Perhaps there's a different quality to Jesus' resurrection body, because she's not the only disciple who fails to recognize Jesus at once. We're not exactly sure, but we do know that she still cannot see clearly and make the connection between the empty tomb and the reality of the resurrection.

So Jesus also has some questions for her. That first question again, why are you crying? Gentle rebuke. And the second one, who is it you're looking for? Mary, what kind of Messiah do you expect?

And she's about to discover that her expectations were too small. Some lessons for us at this stage. First of all, a reminder once again, the resurrection is historical. And if you've got any questions about that, whether you're at home or here, please do get in touch if you want further reading or to talk about that. It's so crucial to our faith, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians, to understand that Christian faith rests on facts and not fables. And to understand the implications of that, that we are dealing then with a crucified and resurrected Jesus. And to think about that, Jesus who claimed, I am the Son of God.

I am the Savior of the world. I am the only way to life with God. And then we begin to understand, here is someone who is too big. His claims are too big for us simply to ignore or to pass by.

[12:26] Because the resurrection is history, we need to deal with Jesus personally. I want us all to recognize that Jesus, the risen Lord Jesus, is a gracious King.

Struck me thinking about it this week. Jesus was in complete control of timing, in control of all the events here. So he could easily have appeared first to Peter and John as they arrived at the empty tomb. But Jesus deliberately chose to honor Mary.

And that's so often God's way. God delights to honor the weak. God delights to show favor to those who are often overlooked. Our God is a God of grace. And the story of Mary shows that. Francis Schaeffer wrote a book called No Little People in God's Eyes. And Mary's story is a wonderful reminder of that.

Mary's story speaks hope to you and to me. Perhaps sometimes we feel weak or insignificant. We think, God in heaven wouldn't be interested in me. Jesus the Savior wouldn't have time for me.

Our God is a big-hearted God. Jesus is the big-hearted Savior. There are no little people in his eyes. And it's also encouragement for us when we think about the people that we care about, who don't know and love and follow Jesus. That we don't need to write them off either and to imagine that Jesus is not for them. The story of Mary speaks hope to us all in Jesus' desire to honor her.

[14:07] So the first thing we can see about Jesus' heart is the honor that he shows to Mary. And then I want to think about the theme of friendship. And we'll see that in verse 16.

This evening, we're finishing off our series on the Beatitudes. And the last Beatitude, Jesus is blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So I've been thinking about persecution this week. And so I wanted to share a story from the Barnabas Fund. That's an organization that works to support persecuted Christians around the world. And there was a story on their website from 2018 of an Egyptian female Christian student by the name of Amani. And in 2018, she was abducted from her university.

She was forced to convert to Islam. And her family had no contact with her and presumed that she was either gone forever or she was dead. But then after a month, her dad got a phone call saying, I'm coming home. And on the website, there's a wonderful picture of this dad carrying his daughter, a manny on his shoulders through this packed part of the town. And there's joy everywhere for family and friends. A situation completely transformed because a dad heard his daughter's voice.

I want us to think about that as a window into Mary's experience. Remember, Jesus hadn't just left. And Mary, Jesus had died. And Mary, we find her overwhelmed by grief. But then in verse 16, Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher.

Just one word. Jesus speaking her name. And light and hope begins to dawn. Now those tears of grief become tears of joy. Why is that? Now we thought a few weeks ago about John chapter 10, where Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd. I want to read a couple of verses from John chapter 10, beginning at verse 3.

[16:37] The gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd and the sheep listen to his voice. Mary heard the voice of her good shepherd. That same Jesus who spoke to remove those demons, that same Jesus who spoke and invited her into the kingdom of God, is now speaking to her in resurrection victory. For Mary, her teacher is back. Her friend is back. Her saviour is back. He's alive.

And she is discovering that Jesus' heart of love remains the same. Mary is invited to continue in loving friendship and fellowship with her saviour.

And this little verse reminds us that the resurrection isn't just historical. The resurrection is also personal. It's not just enough to know the facts about the resurrection of Jesus.

This isn't just a truth confined to the history books. This is something that each of us must know and experience personally. We must know the risen Lord Jesus. To know him in the same way as Mary. That we would know Jesus as our teacher.

Where does Jesus look to teach us? In his word, the Bible. That we would be a people who would listen to Jesus and would obey, like Mary, out of love. That like Mary, we would know Jesus as our friend. The one who is present with us in all our joys and sorrows. The one whose love remains constant when perhaps sometimes we feel all alone. The one who promises that he is sympathetic and he is able and willing to help. The one who by his spirit comes to be with and to be in us.

[18:42] And that like Mary, we would know him as our saviour. That we could sing with a hymn writer, he bore my sin and my sorrow. He made them his very own. He bore my burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone. That those great gospel truths would belong to us. And to recognize that Jesus is risen in victory for me. That he is ruling as king in heaven for me. This has to make a difference. We're invited personally by Jesus to hear his voice, to know him, to love him, to enjoy him by turning from sin and by putting our faith and trust in him. One last thing to say about this, and there's so much in here again, but I want to think about love and I want to think about mission and the reality that Mary has good news to share. We would talk about this first Easter weekend as a real emotional roller coaster for Mary, wouldn't we? Her friend, her saviour, died. And with that, her hope had died. But now she's seen the Lord again. Everything changed for her that first Easter Sunday. And her response is to fall on her knees and to hold on to Jesus' feet. And then we read in verse 17,

Jesus 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. Jesus says, don't hold on to me, Mary. Why? Well, I think in the first instance, we can certainly say, Jesus says, don't hold on to me because I'm not leaving just yet. You don't need to be afraid that I'm going to go right now. Rather, this is a time of joy. This is good news to share with the disciples. But also, don't hold on to me, Mary, because I must leave. So he talks to her of his ascension, his return to glory, to heaven, to be at the Father's right hand, to rule as king. And what Jesus has said to his disciples is that that is also good news for them and for us. We've been thinking about it as he was preparing his disciples for the cross. John chapter 14, I'm going to my Father's house, but there's many rooms and I'm going to prepare a place for you. There's comfort. Jesus promises that he won't leave us as orphans. Rather, he'd send the Spirit, that he would come to be with us. And ultimately, Jesus said, I'm going to return, to return to take you to be with me. Jesus longs to be with his people forever, that we might share and enjoy his love forever. So it's good news that Jesus ascends. So Mary's not to hold on, because there's more still to come. I think Jesus says to Mary, don't hold on, because this is not a return to the way it was. She'd been with Jesus on his mission and moving towards the cross, but he's not resuming that former mission. He's been to the cross. He's risen in victory. Now he's moving towards his return to glory. Mary may want to freeze time to hold on to this moment. And maybe we know what that's like. I know sometimes you feel like your kids are growing up really fast and you wish you could just sort of freeze the moment. Mary wants to hold on to this special moment, but Jesus says, no, I'm on this journey towards glory and that's for your good. And so don't hold on. But also, and I want us to see this, Jesus says, don't hold on to me because I've got a job for you. I've got a mission for you. I've got a message for you to share. And as we listen to this message, notice how full of grace this is for his disciples. So Jesus said, do not hold on to me, for I've not yet ascended to the

Father. Go instead to my brothers and give them this news. My brothers, who's he talking about? He's talking about the disciples, those disciples who abandoned him at his time of suffering. He's talking about Peter who denied three times even knowing him. Those disciples who failed to grasp that Jesus had to die and that he would rise. Jesus, our gracious Savior, calls them his brothers. He's not ashamed to call us his brothers, despite our many failures. And he goes on, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. And there's the wonderful truth that the cross and the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus into glory are all part of that way for disciples, followers of Jesus to be adopted into the family of God so that we can call God our Father in heaven as we are united to Jesus by faith. And that's that message that Jesus gives to Mary. And Mary in verse 18 went to the disciples with the news, I have seen the Lord. And she told them that

he had said these things to her.

Now I want us to recognize that in the mission of Mary, we're also seeing the mission of the church. So Mary is speaking, first of all, to encourage the 11 remaining disciples. But those disciples then, we read this in the book of Acts and we see it in the church through history, would take the news of the risen Lord Jesus, and that would go across the globe. This news of Jesus, the light of the world, the one who conquers the darkness. Jesus, the hope of the world, who gives hope despite whatever despair we might find ourselves in. Jesus, who invites sinners to come to him and there's forgiveness wide enough and deep enough for us, whoever we are, through trusting in what he came to do.

It's the mission of the church, like Mary, to bring the good news to one another, to encourage each other, to keep looking to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and to bring that message to the world.

[25 : 15] So a reminder, the resurrection isn't just historical or personal, it's also universal in its significance. This isn't just for one, this isn't just for Jesus and Mary only. It's not just for some, it's not just for the disciples, rather this is good news for all, that Jesus was crucified, he has risen, and he is ruling for you. It's a word that demands our personal response, a response of turning away from sin and self-reliance and pride, turning to God, to Jesus as Savior.

Today we were changing our focus. We spent a few weeks thinking about the heart of Jesus before the cross. Now we find Jesus after the resurrection. Here in this first Easter Sunday, Jesus has now purchased eternal life and glory for himself and the church. He has fulfilled all those Old Testament promises of a priest that would come, a true priest, and Jesus is that priest, and he offers himself as the sacrifice to atone for sin. And he has come as God's true king to rule for and over his church. Jesus has been on a journey. He left glory to become one of us, to become the suffering servant. He's gone to his lowest point at the cross, but now he's on a different journey back to the glory of heaven. On that new trajectory, the question then is, does the heart of Jesus change?

Does his love for his disciples change as he's now heading towards glory? And the answer, as we see it in Mary's story, is absolutely not. Jesus' love remains the same. Jesus in heaven loves the church.

What's he doing right now? He's praying for us. He's with us, and he longs that we would be with him forever. And that truth was hope for Mary then. May it be hope for you and me today.