

Reimagining Your Soul Pt. 2

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[0 : 0 0] If you can get Matthew 28 in front of you, that would help, but I'm going to read a few verses for you. If you need a Bible, just raise your hand in the air and someone will bring you a church Bible.

If you need a large print one, I think there's some large print ones there, but we're going to look at Matthew 28. And while you're finding that, I'll remind you that we are looking at the whole idea that when the disciples said to Jesus, we had hoped, and they were saying we had hoped this would happen, but it didn't, we were reminding ourselves that many of us have that experience.

We had hoped that this would happen in our life, but it didn't. We had hoped this would not happen, and it did. And around the time of the resurrection of Jesus, there were hundreds and thousands of people in the area who had hoped there was going to be a different outcome, but then he died.

And so we're picking up the story of these individuals who met him, and their had hopes were transformed, and their dying hearts were transformed into rising hearts.

I mentioned the book Jesus and the Racing Rat. Well, the book that's going to come out next year, please God, is called Jesus and the Rising Heart. And it's all going to be about those ten resurrection appearances that we are looking at.

[1 : 2 1] And today we're going to look at the second one, and it's in Matthew 28, and it's in verse 8. It says this, So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly, Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. If you've not been a slave, it will be very hard for you to feel the yoke of slavery on your neck.

If you've not been to jail, it's very hard for you to contemplate what loss of freedom may be like. If you were raised white, middle class, you may have no or little experience of casual and regular racism.

which exists throughout the world. And the discrimination that goes with it. If you're born in a land of free speech, it's quite hard to understand what it's like to guard your words in case you might get arrested for what you say.

[2 : 4 3] If you are born a man, it's quite hard to appreciate the oppression of women, if you've been born a man.

The world is different for men and women. It looks different, and it is different, growing up a man and a woman.

It may not be apparently so different in this country, but I suspect it also is. Jimmy Carter, who was U.S. president a number of years ago, gave what's called a TED Talk.

If you've not discovered TED Talks, they're very interesting little things that you can find on the web. And he said this, The number one human rights issue around the world is the oppression of women and girls.

That's what he says, the number one human rights issue. I'm going to keep it as far away from the immediate as possible, but in the U.S., every 50 seconds, a woman is abused.

[3 : 44] 15 seconds, a woman is abused. Every 90 seconds, a woman is raped. There are more than 100 million women missing in the world.

Just disappeared. Missing. And every year, 2 million disappear due to gender discrimination. Not every woman experiences extreme abuse and oppression, but it is there historically and globally.

And the facts are astounding. I've got a book at home called Half the Sky. And it's called Half the Sky because as everybody looks up, over half the people that look up are women.

And so it's pointing out that this huge percentage, it's usually larger than 50%, are women who look up and experience this oppression. Girls are kidnapped from schools on a regular basis.

When women fight for the right to vote, it's come late. You look at it historically. Men have had the right to vote for much longer than women.

[4 : 52] There is one place where it's still very difficult for women to vote. It's the one place in the world. Do you know what it is? The Vatican. Inheritance laws favor the sons over the daughters.

Education favors sons over daughters. Healthcare favors sons over daughters. Daughters are held back, kept inside, despised, rejected, and sometimes killed.

They're called honor killings. They're not honor killings. They're murders. But they go on regularly throughout the world. Those women who break through and get into the workplace find there's a glass ceiling inhibiting their progress and their rise into positions of power.

In China many years ago, admittedly, but it happened, women, young girls' feet were bound so tight because the taste was to have small feet.

That's what people found attractive. Women and girls are trafficked in huge numbers. In the 1930s and 1940s, talking about the war, the men went off to the front lines and women stepped into their places, didn't they?

[6 : 07] They took over in the factories and in the farms and did a massive amount of work, work that was supposed to be men's work in the eyes of the culture and people thought women could not do, but they did do.

But what happened when the men came back? Women were displaced and forced out of work. And religions, I'm a religious man, that's why I'm standing here.

You're fairly religious, otherwise you wouldn't be here. But religion has an appalling track record on the treatment of women. And one Jewish rabbi said, I thank God every day that I was not born a woman.

I'm sure God was not interested in his thanks at all. It's a despicable prayer. Women get blamed, or the woman gets blamed.

Eve gets blamed for what's happened in this world. It's interesting that when Eve gets blamed, what's airbrushed out of the story is that Eve was deceived by a professional deceiver, an expert deceiver.

[7 : 14] Adam was deceived by his wife. So who was the most amateurish when dealing with that deceit? That's just a thought for you. There are clubs that women can't join.

See all this big debate that's going on about can women join this club? Not all women are acutely oppressed. Many men are oppressed. But we live in a man's world still, globally.

And into this world steps Jesus of Nazareth. Women in his day were considered by nature to be inferior intellectually to men and incapable of being reliable witnesses.

And Jesus gives them a gift, a loving, honoring experience. A moment when Jesus approaches the oppressed heart that these women carry, which beats in every woman's chest and which he has inherited from her ancestors.

And Jesus despises conventions, replacing oppression with liberation. And that's what we've read in those verses. So let me give you a quick reminder. It's early Sunday morning.

[8 : 37] A group of about five women have got up very early while it's still dark to go to the tomb of their friend Jesus of Nazareth. Mary Magdalene, who we met last week, Mary the Tower, remember?

Joanna, who was the wife of a gentleman called Chusa. I don't know whether that's how his name was pronounced, but he was Herod's steward. So she was a wealthy woman. She was one of the people going early Sunday morning to the tomb.

Then there's a lady called Salome. Salome was sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus. So if you're following me, Salome was Jesus' aunt. So she was Auntie Salome.

Mary, and there was another Mary who was the wife of Clopas. You may remember last week we talked about the couple walking down the road to Emmaus. Well, one of them was called Clopas, and Mary is his wife.

It may have been that the two of them were walking. We don't know for sure, but it might have been the two of them were walking. But anyway, if the story of the road to Emmaus is true, which I'm suggesting it is, Clopas was the first man to see Jesus alive after his death.

[9 : 46] Anyway, so his wife, Mary, had been a part of that group. Possibly another one called Susanna, who was a wealthy supporter of Jesus, was in the group as well.

My daughter is called Susanna. I've reminded her regularly that Susanna supported Jesus out of her own funds. I've just reminded my daughter of that principle. Anyway, they all visited the tomb.

They all saw it was empty, and they all were going back home except Mary Magdalene, who we spoke about last week. And Mary Magdalene met Jesus at the tomb.

Now, they are on their way. This group of women are on their way back home. Now, even in the telling of this story in the Bible, you can see the theme of the oppression of women, even in the telling of the story.

Because when they got back, Mary and the other four, or three or four, told the men, as they'd been invited to do. And what did the men say? Their words seemed like nonsense to us.

[10 : 53] In other words, they didn't believe them. Can you imagine the exasperation? These women have just seen Jesus alive. They're telling their male colleagues in the discipleship group, and they're not being believed.

They're the only ones who've seen him, but the men don't believe them. Peter and John go to the tomb and confirm the tomb is empty, but they don't see Jesus of Nazareth.

Later on, listen to this. Later on, it says, It's true. The Lord has risen and appeared to Simon. It was true before he appeared to Simon, but now it's true because he's appeared to a man.

Can you see the bias even in the telling of the story? Now, it's great that the Lord met Simon, but it was true before he was alive. Utterly insulting to the women.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, lists the people who saw Jesus alive after he was dead. And he goes through the list and misses out the women.

[11 : 57] And some of you are thinking, how could Paul, the great Saint Paul, who wrote so much of the Bible, did he make a mistake? Yes, he did. And he would be the first person to admit that he was a sinner and made mistakes.

He was a child of his generation. The two appearances to the women are not mentioned at all in Paul's list. Now, as usual, God uses even stuff like this and turns it around.

Because in those days, if you wanted people to believe your story, you would airbrush the story of the women out completely. But the fact that it's still there in the story tells you that it really happened.

If you wanted to make a convincing case in that culture, you wouldn't have mentioned the women. But the fact that the stories are there is because they're true. It's because it happened. Anyway, back to the group of women.

They are coming back from the empty tomb. And they are afraid, yet filled with joy. It's an interesting combination, and we'll look at it in a minute.

[13 : 06] But they're hurrying. They may have even been running. These women were handpicked for this moment. They probably didn't know it. There's fear because there's something inexplicable going on, something dangerous.

And there's joy because they're daring to believe what that might be. And as they go along the road, Jesus meets them and says, greetings.

Now, what did they hear? Yes, he said the word greetings. But he may as well have said, surprise! Surprise! That's what I would have heard.

That's what I would have heard if somebody who I'd seen die suddenly met me on the road and said greetings. I'd be surprised. So he may as well have said, surprise! It's a moment of pure joy.

They fell down and worshipped him. They knew he was more than a man. They knew he was not mortal. They knew he was divine. They were instinctively wise. And they knew that worship was the right response.

[14 : 12] Don't be afraid, Jesus tells them, because they were full of fear and joy. That's what the account says. Go tell the men to meet me in Galilee.

Can you see how Jesus is dealing with the oppressed heart? He shows up, soothes their fear, and appoints them as witnesses and orders them to pass on the message.

This is turning oppression into liberation. The oppression is a soul-sapping experience. It can be explosive abuse or it can be long-term erosion of self-worth.

Studies show that when girls are trafficked, initially they resist. But as the abuse grows and the problem goes on for longer and longer, they start to acquiesce and even cooperate.

And some older women even become abusers. Remember I said last week that our tears, Mary's tears, over the loss of Jesus connect with everyone's tears over death itself.

[15 : 17] experiences of the feminine in oppression over the years connects with all female oppression through something which today gets labelled the collective unconscious.

When people experience, when women experience oppression, they're connecting with female oppression. and millions of women overcome this, overturn it, break the glass ceilings.

But the language itself tells us something. They shouldn't have to overcome. They shouldn't have to break a glass ceiling because there shouldn't be a glass ceiling. Until we have, until we can abandon this language, the problem's not solved.

Now I want to just tell you an ancient and modern truth for a minute. Bear with me and see if you can get your brain round it and I'll see if I can explain it. And it might be something you've heard before.

A number of years ago I did a training course and it was a six weekend training course all about how to share your faith with other people. And we had one session on women and men.

[16 : 24] There were 150 people on this training course. And the session on women and men was asking the question, do we need to speak differently to women and men to share the gospel effectively?

We divided these 150 people into women on this side and men on that side. And there were roughly 75 each. And we started to ask people certain questions like, are there some things that women can do that men can't?

And we asked the men, are there some things that men can do that women can't? Well, one of the first things that came out is the women said, we can multitask and men can't. The men said, we can read maps better than the women and we can parallel park better than they do.

The women said they were in touch with their emotions more than the men. And the women said, we collaborate more, whereas men tend to compete. And as the session went on, the tension in the room grew and grew.

And some couples in the room were clearly working out their issues in the context of this training session. And I had to calm it down a bit. But it was a fascinating session. And of course, the thing that came out is there is a difference.

[17 : 34] There's a difference between the way women approach life and the way men approach life. Now, I was thinking about this and looking back through my records and realizing that this was 30 years ago.

I can't believe it. I can't believe I would ever say I did something 30 years ago. And my thinking on the matter has, I hope, grown. It's not changed completely, but it's grown.

And the reason it's grown is this. Yes, there are things that women have as characteristics and men have as characteristics, but it's not as clear-cut as that. And I realized a deeper truth, and I believe this to be both true and biblical, or biblical and true, that these things we label feminine and masculine are labels, but you can see them in both men and women.

I have a friend who's a much better map reader than me, a woman. And I also am prepared to ask for directions if I've lost my way, something that men are not supposed to do, but I don't mind doing that.

I'm a big fan of the English women's rugby team called the Red Roses, and they are the best women's rugby team in the world, by a mile. They're quite competitive.

[18 : 51] I mean, they're fiercely competitive. If you watch scenes of rescue in war zones or in disaster zones, you will see groups of men in deep and profound collaboration.

So is it masculine or feminine? Well, science, genetics, anthropology, and theology tell us this, that in each man there is a masculine and feminine side.

And each woman there's a masculine and feminine side. So before you say, oh, you heretic, you've gone off, you've gone off message here. Go back to the book of Genesis.

There's a phrase at the beginning of the book of Genesis that says this, let us make mankind in our own image. What? Let us?

Who's the us? And if you study it, you'll get all kinds of different interpretations of that. But then it says God made mankind in the image, male and female.

[19 : 53] So quite clearly, male and female are in the image of God. But God is also revealing himself, and himself is even a difficult word to use there, as a community. We know that community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They didn't know that when they were writing Genesis, but that didn't mean it wasn't true. God shows himself to be a community of three and one. Is that so hard to understand?

I'm a father, I'm a son, and I'm a brother, but I'm one person. You may be a mother and a daughter and a sister, or any kind of thing like that.

We are all communities, and it's not just three, is it? We are all kinds of characters. So if I meet you and I say, how are you today?

I might meet you and say, who are you today? Because we're different characters, aren't we? We're a community of characters. Sometimes I'm a joker, sometimes I'm serious.

[20 : 52] Sometimes I'm in a good mood, and you would label that as a cheerful person. Sometimes I'm struggling. And these are different characters and characteristics. The image of God is a God who has so many names, so many characters.

He's a community. So, I don't have time to go into this in detail, but when someone oppresses a woman, that person is also oppressing the feminine inside of themselves.

Whether it's a man or a woman doing the oppression. You are oppressing your inner feminine side. Show me a man who oppresses women, and that man is out of touch and oppressing his feminine side.

Women can do it as well, but I'm not focusing on that so much. Men can also be oppressed, but I'm not focusing on that so much because that's not the center of this story. A man and woman who has a problem with the softer side of God probably has a problem with their own feminine side.

So, we're back to our group of women. women. They're living in a world of soul-sapping oppression. Jesus, they had seen and met, was a physically strong, red-blooded male, yet they'd seen him defend an adulterous woman.

[22 : 13] They'd seen him talk to a scandalized woman. They'd seen him defend a woman who washed him with her hair. He would not tolerate the oppression of women.

He'd raised a 13-year-old girl from the dead. He'd healed a woman who'd had 13 years of awful pain and illness. He taught them, he educated them, he respected them, he honored them.

It's one of the reasons they followed him because they saw in this person someone who didn't act like the other men in their world. They saw a man in perfect harmony with himself, the male side and the female side of himself.

So they're on their way multitasking fear and joy. Remember women are good at multitasking? They were multitasking fear and joy. And if you want to multitask fear and joy, you'll need to be in touch with the feminine side of who you are.

Fear of Jerusalem here and joy over Jesus. Fear of the dangerous situation they're in but joy over what's happening. And Jesus coming towards them is full of joy but no fear.

[23 : 23] this man coming towards this group of women is ecstatically happy, full of joy. Why? Well, the Bible tells us for the joy set before him he endured the cross.

He's been through the cross and he's now full of joy. He's overflowing with joy. It's finished. And Jesus, full of joy, meets his women and says, greetings.

It's a fun-filled moment. It is mischievous and it's subversive. It's mischievous because he's deliberately empowering these women to be witnesses which is what you weren't supposed to do in those days.

And it's subversive because he's going against what's going on in the culture. In the face of the oppressor he shows them the face of a liberator.

Greetings. That's the face of the liberator. Jesus is saying meet your liberator. Many women and many people but many women carry in their minds and their memories the face of the oppressor.

[24 : 31] But Jesus is saying look at my face. I am your liberator. Meet your liberator. Meet your feminine heart. Greetings, of course, was not just hello.

It was hello from beyond the grave. That's the difference in this moment as well. Jesus is saying greetings but he's saying it from the other side of death.

Why? Because he said look I have overcome the ultimate oppressor death itself. So not only was he showing them the face of a liberator in terms of their current life but he was saying you are liberated from death.

Can you see what's going on here? You see what's such a wonderful moment. Greetings from beyond the grave. And then there's an ironic moment or a paradoxical moment.

They bow down. But they're not bowing down under the oppression of an oppressor. They're bowing down because he's lifting them up in worship.

[25 : 37] That's the right thing to do when you meet the risen Jesus is to bow down in worship. And then he says don't be afraid. Now don't be afraid is not a suggestion. He's not saying look, could you consider not being afraid?

It's a command. Don't be afraid. You are authorized not to be afraid. You're authorized not to be afraid. It's a new command that comes into their lives.

Do not be afraid. And then he trusts them with information. Part of the repair work in their souls was he saying this information is yours.

If you have time to study it you will see that throughout the world if you give women and girls education it sets people free. There's a phrase that says if you educate a man then you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate the whole village.

And that's what Jesus is doing here. He's giving them information. He's trusting them. It's repair work. When a woman bathed him with her hair and tears he said her story will be told throughout the world whenever my story is told.

[26 : 55] Whenever the story of the resurrection is told the story of these women will be told. I hope the men apologize to them for not believing them.

There's no record of it of course because it was the men who wrote the story. But I hope they did apologize. But here is the punchline. It's true the Lord has risen and appeared to the women.

It's true the Lord has risen and appeared to the women. That's the rising heart. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus Lord Jesus we thank you that you were not interested in oppressing anyone but you were particularly interested in replacing oppression with liberation in the hearts of the women in your life and throughout history.

and we pray Lord Jesus for every woman here today that they will look into the face of a liberator a subversive mischievous fun filled person who says greetings don't be afraid you are trusted.

Lord Jesus it's difficult to understand the depth of what is needed but we know that by your spirit you will speak into our hearts today and you will lift us up even as we bow down.

[28 : 32] Pray Lord that you will help every man here to examine his heart and see what role you may have played accidentally or even deliberately in this story of oppression we pray Lord that every man here who may be oppressing his own feminine will hear your voice and turn to you as a liberator.

Lord we ask your forgiveness for the way in which we have contributed to this oppression and we ask that you will liberate us all as we look into your face and as we worship you thank you Lord that you still break stereotypes that you still are subversive that you still have no interest in oppression but only in liberation just take a moment and if you're feeling a sense of oppression whether you have in your mind's eye the face of an abuser and the Lord Jesus is saying to you from beyond the grave greetings you are trusted you no longer need to fear you are authorized not to fear and you are commissioned you are commissioned to spread good news and replace bad experiences with good news spirit of the living God we pray that you will work in all of our hearts this morning so that they may become rising hearts even in the face of the pain and suffering of the world in the name of the risen

Jesus we pray Amen to