

I Have Seen the Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, it's great to see you all here this evening, and happy Easter to all of you. Well, you probably didn't get a chance to turn to the passage in the Gospel of John, so I'll give you a minute to turn to that, Gospel of John, chapter 20, verses 1 to 18, and we'll be working through that passage tonight.

Well, I hate to admit it, but I'm actually a bit partial to those makeover shows and commercials. You know, the ones where you see the amazing transformation, the before scenario, and then the after scenario, in order to convince you how fantastic whatever it is that you're watching is. So, for example, we could have the whole makeover, before and then after, or the backyard blitz, before and after.

And then, probably not all of you would be interested in this, the body makeover, day one, and then after, day 83.

[1 : 35] And then something that's sort of especially close to my heart, or more precisely my scalp, the advanced hair studio. One more.

It's not coming. It's coming. It might have to. Anyway, it's a picture of Shane Warne's scalp, followed by Shane Warne.

Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. Well, I guess, if you ask me, what attracts me is the rags to riches story of these programs. When someone gets a sort of second chance at life, whether it's something dramatic, like, you know, recovery from an illness, or something less dramatic or less important, some might say, like putting hair on your scalp.

But in all of these cases, there is the first despair, and then later joy, and there is a hope of a new beginning. Well, beginning this week, and for the next five weeks, we're going to look at the most important makeover in history.

That's right. We're going to look at the resurrection of Jesus, and the transformation that he brings, not only to the lives of his disciples at the time, but to all of us who believe in him.

[2 : 56] And what we'll be doing is looking over chapters 20 and 21 of John's Gospel. So each week, we will encounter people who come face to face with the risen Jesus, and have their lives turned around, made over.

So this week, we will be looking at Mary Magdalene. Next week, we'll be looking at the 12 disciples, minus Thomas. And then the week after, Thomas. And then in the final two weeks, we'll have a look at Peter and John's encounter with Jesus.

Well, I hope you've noticed from the Bible reading a bit earlier, how the story of Mary's encounter with Jesus is divided between the before and the after scenarios.

The before scenario is one of darkness, confusion, a lack of understanding. And then by contrast, the after scenario is one of light, of joy, belonging, and purpose.

In the before scenario, Mary and the other disciples fail to see Jesus, and they fail to understand, even though, as readers, we know that Jesus has already risen from the dead by that time.

[4 : 07] But after Jesus appears to Mary, light begins to shine, not only in her life, in the life of Mary, but in the life of the disciples as well.

So much so that by the time we get to verse 18, Mary is able to say confidently that she has seen the Lord, and that she and the disciples begin to understand what has just taken place with Jesus. So first, let us come back to verse 1 of chapter 20, where only on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

A lot must have been going on in Mary's mind. It was the day after the Sabbath, and had Jesus been alive, he would have probably been celebrating the Passover, or the festival of the Passover

with them.

Just a week before, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem, triumphant, on a donkey, to cheering crowds. But now, the disciples were in hiding, afraid that the Jews might be coming after them too, now that they had taken their leader.

[5 : 22] And so perhaps that's why Mary travels under the cover of darkness, because normally it's not normally safe for women to travel during that time of day. But I think John also mentions the darkness, not because it was physically dark, not only because it was physically dark, but because it also mirrors the spiritual darkness in the disciples, the darkness in their understanding.

And this is something John does a lot of in the gospel. For as far back as John chapter 1 verse 5, he had declared that Jesus was the light of all people.

And then he says, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And then later in the gospel, Jesus himself declares in John chapter 3 verse 19, this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

And then in verse 12 of chapter 8, he says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And then remember, when Judas set his mind to betray Jesus, on the night of the Last Supper, it was recorded that after he had received a piece of bread, Judas immediately went out, and it was night.

And so Mary and the disciples are still in the dark, confused and unable to understand what is happening. And we see this with Mary as she approaches the tomb to find that the stone had been rolled away.

[7 : 06] So in her panic, in verse 2, she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, which many people agree is the disciple John, and said to them, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they had laid him.

Of course we know that that's not what has happened to Jesus. We know that Jesus has already risen from the dead. But in her confusion, all she can think of is that not only have they taken the life of Jesus, they have now also taken his body away.

So you notice three times in this story, that's what she says. Not only did her beloved teacher die, but worse, there was now not even a single trace of him, nothing for her to hold on to, nothing with which she could console herself.

And so on hearing Mary's news, Peter, in verse 3, and the other disciple John, set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

There's a lot of running going on, isn't there? First Mary runs to the disciples, then the disciples run to the tomb. John outruns Peter, probably because he was younger, and then later as we read, we discover that Peter's the first one to rush in before John, to rush into the tomb.

[8 : 30] Yet for all this frantic activity, there's not much light being shed on the situation. Yes, Mary was right, the body was no longer there, but taken away, just doesn't seem to add up.

I mean, if that was so, then why was the linen so neatly wrapped, lying there, along with Jesus' head cloth? Well, we don't know what Peter thought, but John very honestly records his own reactions.

So in verse 8, he says, He saw and believed, for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. So John saw, and yes, John even believed, although he doesn't quite say what he believes in, but I take it to mean that he believed that Jesus rose from the dead on the basis of the evidence before him of the cloth laid in the tomb neatly.

But in a statement of great honesty, John admits that he still didn't understand. Still didn't understand why Jesus had to rise from the dead. Still didn't understand what the scripture had foretold.

None of them did. And it's a very honest revelation, isn't it? Which, if you think about it, sort of undermines those people who say that John made all this up.

[9 : 56] That somehow the disciples came up with the story of Jesus' resurrection. Because if that was their intention, I mean, why would you choose to undermine your credibility by revealing your confusion or by saying that you were confused?

Well, both Peter and John went home after that. But Mary, poor Mary, she doesn't even make it that far. She still thinks that Jesus has been taken away.

And so in her distress, she continues to weep at the tomb. And in verse 11, as she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

Well, I don't know about you, but if two angels appeared to me, I mean, it would be enough to startle me and to cause me to reassess what's actually going on.

But for Mary, even though those two angels has appeared, she doesn't seem to be shifted from her conclusion or from her hypothesis that Jesus' body had been taken away.

[11:11] And so it seems only the appearance of Jesus himself could sway her from her mindset. Yet, ironically, when Jesus does appear to her, she fails to recognize him at first.

And so thinking him to be the gardener, she asks once more where Jesus has been laid. This time, she says that, tell me where Jesus has been laid so that I can take him away.

That was the mark of her devotion. So much so that even though Jesus was dead, she still wanted the body so that she could lay hold of him.

And then we come to verse 16. Jesus calls Mary by her name. Jesus said to her, Mary. Now, I don't know whether you were listening when Adam read that verse.

Adam and I had been talking over the week as to how would Jesus have actually said those words. We agreed that definitely Jesus wasn't looking doughy-eyed into Mary and going, Mary.

[12:19] But we went, you know, was it mild surprise? Like, Mary, don't you recognize me? Or is it sort of a rebuke? Mary, it's me.

I don't know. But I tend to think maybe that how Jesus did it was very much like how my parents would have done it. You know how your parents call you and even though you're in a crowd and your back is turned, you know, Mark, and, you know, suddenly, all of a sudden, you know you've been called and you know that you've done something wrong.

Well, so I think it's a bit like that because at that very instance, Mary recognized Jesus' voice and she turns, not just physically, but metaphorically as well.

And in that single moment, there is a complete transformation in her. Her despair is swept away. Her fears are dispelled to be replaced by joy and peace and hope.

So like John, she too now sees, she too now believes. But I think actually that like John, she too probably still did not fully understand what was happening.

[13:34] You see, I think it was, it wasn't enough that Jesus appeared to her. In order for her to understand, in order for his disciples to understand, Jesus also had to give them his words.

Do you see what I'm saying? I'm saying that Jesus' appearance wasn't enough. That Jesus' words was just as important in order for Jesus, for the disciples to understand what was going on.

It was only as Jesus began to explain himself that Mary and his disciples start to understand, not just the fact of his resurrection, but its significance, why he had to rise from the dead, why the scripture had foretold that he had to rise from the dead, and what that impact now had on them.

And so this is the message that Jesus gives to Mary, not just for her, but also for his disciples.

Jesus asked Mary to go and say to them, and look with me in verse 17, go and say to them, I am ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God.

Now, I'm not sure what you might be thinking, but you could be thinking, is that it? There's not much to go on with, is it? And it's a bit cryptic.

[14:57] I mean, what did Jesus mean by, I'm ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God. But I wonder whether you noticed how deliberate Jesus was when he said, my father and your father, my God and your God.

For that, I think, is where the real significance of the message lies. Because by saying what he does, Jesus is highlighting the transformation that is now occurring for his disciples.

Maybe if I paraphrase it, it might help you to understand it a bit better. I think what Jesus is saying is, go to my brothers and say to them that I am ascending to my father who is now your father and now also my God.

Your God is now my God. God. In other words, Jesus is explaining his role as mediator between God and humanity.

How he, being both God and man, by his death and resurrection, has opened the way for humanity to be in relationship with God. But not just any relationship, but the one which he, as God's son, the very one that he, as God's son, enjoys with the Father.

[16:15] So his father is now our father. And whatever relationship that the father has with the son, we are now able to share in, in Christ.

Back in John chapter 17 in verse 21, Jesus prayed this prayer. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me.

You know, sometimes we are mistaken in believing that what we need in our lives is for God to come and give each of us a personal makeover.

You know, a private transformation to transform us a bit like how the fairy godmother does for Cinderella. To make our wishes come through. But actually, if we understand Jesus' message correctly, when Jesus rose from the dead, the amazing transformation that occurred is that we are lifted up out of our darkness, out of our confusion, out of our fruitless search for identity, for satisfaction in life, always trying to work out who we are and what we are here for.

And we are being joined with Christ, taking on Christ's identity and signing on to his mission and purpose. Because of Christ, we know exactly who we are and what we are here for.

[17:47] We are now children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, becoming part of God's master plan for this world. And how is that possible?

Well, that's the second part of Jesus' message where he says, my God and your God. Because by dying for us, Christ takes our place so that God, our God, is also his God.

Now, Jesus does not mean by this that he is no longer the eternal son of God, that he is no longer divine. But by becoming human and by taking on himself all the wrong that humanity has done, Jesus now also stands with us as one of us pleading our innocence before our God with his blood which was poured out on the cross.

I want you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 2, verse 11. It's on page 971. Because I think the writer of Hebrews says exactly the same thing, only in a more expanded form.

So Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 11. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one father. For this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.

[19:13] In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, here I am, here am I, and the children whom God has given me.

Since therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the face of death.

For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. So do you hear all the same ideas? For the one who sanctifies and the one who is sanctified are the ones who are sanctified or have one father. Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest. My father and your father.

[20:32] My God and your God. Friends, I wonder where you are tonight in this transformation. Are you standing in the before scenario or are you standing in the after scenario?

Perhaps you still have a lot of questions you need answered. Well, if that's the case, then can I encourage you to study the pages of this gospel. For it is in these gospels that the only accounts of those who actually saw Jesus are to be found.

Everything else that we read is merely second and third hand information. Only here in the gospels and in the New Testament will you find the eyewitness accounts.

And if you ask any lawyer in a court of law, it is the eyewitness accounts that carry the most weight. So come and talk to me afterwards and I'll be more than happy to talk more with you on that.

But I also want to encourage you with the example of John. You know, we live in an age of skepticism where we are constantly told that we need to understand everything before we believe.

[21:40] Every uncertainty has to be tied down. Every answer has, every question has to be answered before we will commit. And we want to apply that even to our faith.

But if you think seriously about it for a minute, that's actually pretty unrealistic, isn't it? Because I bet that's not how you live your life. Because if you did, you would never believe anything, you would never trust anything, and you would never try anything new, or open yourself up to new opportunities.

Well, John himself was honest to admit that he saw and believed, even though he did not fully understand. For him, he believed on the basis of what he saw. And in time, he saw more, he heard more, he understood more, and he believed more. And that's how I believe faith works. That's how I believe life works.

As for the rest of us, I want us to turn to Mary's reactions when she met Jesus. Her natural inclination was to reach out to touch Jesus.

[22 : 52] She wanted to hold on to him. Here was a devoted disciple, not wishing to lose her master again. Instead, do you notice what Jesus did?

Jesus actually sends her away on a mission. She actually becomes Jesus' first evangelist before any of the disciples or any of the gospel writers.

So we often react in that way, don't we? We could be moved by a wonderful worship experience or a profound sermon or whatever the intimate spiritual encounter with God is.

And we find ourselves craving for the comfort of that experience, trying to hold on to it so that we don't lose the presence of God. But hear Jesus' words to Mary, do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father.

I think what Jesus meant was that Mary didn't need to hold on to him because he was not yet ascending to the Father. He was not going to leave her yet. And in fact, as we shall see next week, Jesus is soon going to promise God's permanent presence in the person of the Holy Spirit so that we are not going to be without Jesus' presence on an ongoing basis.

[24 : 18] Now, Jesus is not rejecting our devotion for him. He wasn't rejecting Mary's devotion for him. But what he wanted to do was to redirect Mary's devotion and channel it towards fulfilling his mission.

That's what he wants to do with us so that we are focused not so much on clinging on to him as if the presence of Jesus in our life is dependent on our clinging to him, but instead so that we are focused on going to others and telling them that Jesus is alive, that his father is our father, that his God is now our God.

When your life has been transformed by Jesus' resurrection, will you do as Mary did? for she then went to the disciples and said, I have seen the Lord, and she told them all that Jesus had said to her.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that today that she