

Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] It's particularly the words that Jesus asks Mary, Mary Magdalene, that we read in verse 15 that I want to spend a little time looking at with you.

This morning, verse 15, John 20, verse 15, where Jesus asks Mary two questions. Why are you weeping? And whom are you seeking?

You know, first words, first words spoken. Of course, any human development are so significant, so important.

Usually, first words of a child are very basic, the child mimicking the sound of the adult, the child hearing a particular word and trying to repeat it.

And very often, of course, these first words are written down for posterity. And if that's true in ordinary human experience, how much more the first words of Jesus, certainly the first recorded words of Jesus and their great importance.

[1 : 07] Now, we don't know what Jesus' actual first words were when he was growing up as a child, but, of course, Scripture tells us the very first recorded words of Jesus, his first words and his human nature.

And they were uttered in the form of a question. Remember the boy Jesus, age 12? He's asking his frantic mother Mary and Mary's husband Joseph.

They've been searching for him three days. Remember, they've gone to Jerusalem, to the temple. Remember, Jesus wasn't with them when they were returning back to their home. And Jesus' first recorded words are a question.

Why were you looking for me? In fact, two questions. Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? And these words that indicated that Jesus was aware, he was very much aware of who he is and his divine nature as the eternal Son of God.

But then, when we find the first recorded words of the risen Jesus, they're also in the form of a question. And this time, not to a frantic mother Mary, but to a troubled, another Mary.

[2 : 20] A troubled Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene who couldn't find the supposed still dead body of Jesus. And she's weeping. She's crying before the two angels.

She's crying before the man whom she thinks is the gardener. Of course, the man, the Lord Jesus. And Jesus asks her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?

These questions that Jesus asked Mary to bring out a response of faith in Jesus. So, if in Jesus' boyhood, he asked the question, the question to them, about being in his Father's house, to show, to reveal his divinity.

So, in his risen form, he's asking Mary Magdalene the questions to reveal his risen power. Who he is. He's come to bring life.

He's come to bring eternal hope to all who trust in him, to the trust in the risen Lord Jesus. And the question that Jesus asks Mary Magdalene, the questions that are asked, are the same questions that Jesus asks you in your time and times of anxiety, even times of doubt, times of perplexity.

[3 : 38] Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? He asks you, woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? You man, why are you weeping?

Whom are you seeking? Young man, young woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? And whether that question's asked in relation to the ongoing providences that God has given us in our current circumstances, these current difficult days that we're living through, whether it's a particular time of doubt that you have or a time of perplexity, Jesus asks these same questions to you to bring out from you where you are in your heart, where you are in your faith in him, where you are in relation to the Prince of Peace, the one who's come to bring life and life in all its fullness.

So we're going to turn to this well-known passage. I'm sure you've read it many times. Let's look at the passage again under two headings, the scolding of a Savior's love and the searching question of a Savior's heart.

So let's think of the background to these questions first of all, just so that we understand where these questions are coming from. Because as we know from Scripture, Jesus has been dead from around three o'clock on that Friday, the Friday of his crucifixion, and has been in that tomb until very early on the Sunday morning.

So Jesus was dead. He was physically dead. On the cross, he'd committed his spirit, his soul to God. But he didn't cease to be when he died and when he was buried.

[5 : 28] So between the time of his death and the time of his resurrection, yes, he's still God. His body's dead, yes. But his physical organs had ceased to function.

He's been physically dead since that Friday afternoon until very early on Sunday morning. And if you were to go to the previous chapter in John chapter 15, the author John is telling us just, yes, to bring out the truth that Jesus truly was dead.

But then when we come to chapter 20, the mood changes. And we see in chapter 20 the language of triumph. Jesus is alive.

And so to know Jesus, the risen Lord Jesus, to know who Jesus is, we need to know the risen Lord Jesus. Yes, Jesus who died for sinners, Jesus who was dead for sinners, and Jesus who was raised for sinners.

And God's shown us in his word that Jesus truly did rise from the dead. We see it by his actions. We see it in the recorded words that Jesus spoke to others, including Mary Magdalene.

[6 : 45] As we said, Jesus is asking these questions. And as he's doing so, he's showing his love. He's showing his love for this troubled believer.

And he's revealing in himself this loving heart that Jesus has, this heart that searches the hearts of men and women, the heart that searches the hearts of boys and girls.

And to bring you to that point where you'll either testify that you know and believe the Lord Jesus as your Savior, or whether you'll say, I don't know him.

So let's look then at the scolding of a Savior's love. Mary Magdalene's gone to the tomb with other women. The Sabbath, our Saturday, is over.

They've come to anoint Jesus' body with spices. Mary Magdalene had gone ahead of the other women. She came to the tomb and found the tomb empty.

[7 : 46] Peter and John also went to the tomb. They found the tomb empty. They went back, the two men went back to their homes with Mary Magdalene standing alone outside the tomb.

And she can't stop crying. She's alone. She's so fragile. It's still dark in the morning. And now she's come to this empty tomb.

And she's thinking, my Lord's body's been stolen away. And she's so confused as she's weeping. She thinks that the worst of the worst scenarios happened.

That her Lord and Savior, who's dead, she's thinking, his body must have been snatched away in the middle of the night. Two angels ask her why she's crying.

She tells them his body must have been stolen. And she's just totally bewildered. It's as if she thinks she's got no one to turn to. She's just so alone.

[8 : 46] Or she thinks she's so alone. And she's been crying. You know, when you're crying, you can't always see it clearly, even through these eyes that shed tears. And she turns around and she sees a figure of a man standing beside her.

And, of course, it's Jesus. She doesn't know at that point it's Jesus. And he asks her these two questions. Two questions that totally change her. That transform her from a fragile, broken woman to a strong follower of the Lord Jesus.

Let's think of the first question. Woman, why are you weeping? You know, when somebody asks a question, very often that question reveals more about the person who's asking the question than the person to whom that question has been asked.

You think of politics, for example. You know, we have Prime Minister's Question Time. We have First Minister's Question Time. Many questions are asked for genuine, sincere reasons.

Maybe to understand something in a better way. Maybe even to expose the failings of a particular policy. Other questions are asked for genuine reasons.

[9 : 59] But other questions are asked out of heart, out of malice, to cause pain, to undermine somebody, undermine confidence. But Jesus questions, they're not given out of any malice, and they're not even asked to gain a greater understanding of that person.

He asks, he asks his questions to reveal his grace, to reveal his love. He's asked even Mary Magdalene these questions so that she will exercise the more true faith in the Lord Jesus.

And so in seeing even this first question, let's see the grace of Jesus' character. This is the Lord Jesus. This is the risen Lord Jesus, the resurrected Lord Jesus.

This is the one whose resurrection guarantees each one who know him and love him, guarantees eternal life. Life for you who are in him by faith, including Mary Magdalene.

here's this fragile woman, this woman who's been so fragile in her faith, she'd assumed that Jesus was still dead. His body's no longer for her as she looked into the tomb, is no longer there.

[11 : 20] Her tears are real tears, they're tears of grief, tears that indicated, yes, she had loved our Lord Jesus. But these are now tears that are shed for the wrong reason.

Because she's made an assumption based on what she thinks, what she thinks is true, rather than her having trusted the words that Jesus spoke just before his crucifixion.

Jesus said that after three days I'll rise again. She would have heard Jesus speak these words. She was in the company of the other disciples. She would have heard Jesus tell of his rising from the dead three days after his death.

But rather than believe the word of Jesus, she goes by what she sees in the empty tomb. So she's making an assumption not based in faith but in sight.

That's what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. He said we walk by faith and not by sight. You know the Lord Jesus as your saviour.

[12 : 26] You trust in the unseen invisible God and you live by faith. Faith in the promise of eternal life. And of course eternal life and all that's yet to be revealed in the glory of heaven.

You don't demand that observable evidence in order to be saved. You don't argue unless I see I won't believe.

Remember what the risen Jesus said to doubting Thomas? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Mary Magdalene saw what she thought she was seeing.

No Jesus in the empty tomb, therefore no living Lord Jesus. But she hadn't exercised faith in the words of Jesus about his resurrection.

And because of her lack of faith, she was in distress. Let's bring that to ourselves for a moment. Think of the miseries that we bring upon ourselves so often when you fail to exercise that God-gifted faith to believe and to keep believing.

[13 : 37] Think of the distress that we each bring upon ourselves when we walk by sight and not by faith. You know, when we demand signs to trust and believe.

When all the time we have sufficient evidence in God's word to believe in the Lord Jesus. And if that's what you're like, if that's the condition that you're in concerning a lack of faith, a lack of trust, look, yes, look to the Lord Jesus, but look to him with eyes of faith and trust him.

Trust him for your eternal safety. Trust in the all sufficiency of God to lead you, yes, to lead you even through these times that we're living in at this moment.

Trust him that he's leading you towards that heavenly home where you will see Christ, the Lord Jesus. And in seeing him, rejoice, and your tears will have been dried up, and your soul rejoice in the glorious presence of the risen and ascended Jesus.

And you know, there'll be times in your life and my life when we have a distress in our hearts, and that distress so often caused by lack of faith, that we'll need to hear, I'll need to hear, you'll need to hear the rebuke, the scorn of a loving saviour, just as Mary Magdalene needed to hear that rebuke.

[15 : 07] But remember, it's a rebuke, it's a scolding given in love. So read elsewhere, a bruised reed, he will not break.

And this bruised reed here, Mary Magdalene, she wouldn't be broken as Jesus speaks to her, and he speaks to her in his loving compassion. He speaks to her as woman.

I know that sounds a little harsh in our language, our English language, but he's just giving her that gentle rebuke. He's showing her compassion. As if to say, oh woman, why are you weeping?

There's no need for you anymore to weep. Yes, you've shed tears for me in my death, but don't shed these tears any longer. Jesus saying to her, I'm alive.

You're not exercising the faith that you ought to have in believing my word. So weep no more. Of course, as we read in John 20, in a few second moments time, Jesus will call her by name.

[16 : 13] But before he does that, before he calls her Mary, and Mary knows, of course, this is the Lord, he asks her one more question to prepare her. For that faith in him, that strong faith in him, so that she'll turn from her distress and anguish and exercise that sure faith in Jesus.

And maybe for you, for whatever reason, whatever's troubling your heart, even in relation to the Lord Jesus, maybe some anxiety's entered your soul, maybe you have a false assumption that somehow Jesus has withdrawn his love from you, maybe you even at times doubt his love for you, well, bring to your heart, bring to your mind the assurance of God's word that he hasn't abandoned you, that he's with you always.

And even echo the words of Psalm 43 verse 5, the psalm we'll be singing at the end or hearing at the end of the service, the words that tell us to trust always, why you cast down my soul, why you in turmoil within me, hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, my salvation and my God.

And I pray that the comfort of God's word will dry your tears, and that by faith you'll look to the Lord Jesus, look to the one who has loved you with that everlasting love, so that you have that assurance that you're in him eternally.

But remember, Jesus asked a second question to Mary, he's asked her why is she weeping, and then he asked the searching question, the searching question of a saviour's heart, whom are you seeking?

[18 : 02] In other words, oh woman, oh Mary, are you looking for a dead Christ, or a risen Christ? Who are you really searching for? Well if it's a dead Christ, you're going to cry forevermore, but if it's the risen Christ, if it's the Lord Jesus who's alive, then the time for weeping's over.

So in this second question, this follow-on question, Jesus is touching Mary really at the core of her heart, and he's bringing her to see the true nature of her seeking.

Has she forgotten Jesus' words of promise, or is she going to be renewed in her faith? Is she going to be renewed in her love for Jesus? Is she going to see Jesus as the risen Lord Jesus, the one who keeps his promises of salvation for his own?

And you know that searching question of a Saviour's heart, whom are you seeking? It's still relevant to each and every one of us. Because in that question, he's probing your heart.

He's searching out your true motives, what truly you are in heart, and who you're truly seeking to bring true and full satisfaction in your life.

[19 : 22] Jesus asked Mary Magdalene, whom are you seeking? He's asking you even now that same question, whom are you seeking? Or maybe the emphasis, whom are you seeking?

Who is it that you're really seeking with all your heart and soul? Is it the living Lord Jesus who calls you to a living, loving, active relationship with him?

Or is it simply what we might call the historic Jesus? That Jesus locked in the past? Jesus who told nice stories and yes, died on the cross, but for whom you're not going to have a relationship with?

maybe you're seeking what somebody's described as a personal Jesus, not the true living Lord Jesus, but a creation of your own thinking.

You know, having faith in someone who you think is going to give you what you're looking for in love and satisfaction. You might even say a false Christ, a false Jesus, someone whom you're pinning all your hopes on for true happiness.

[20 : 32] True contentment. But that so-called personal Jesus is no Jesus at all, no Savior at all. If your heart is set on anything or anyone other than the living Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world.

And that seeking, it's all around, the seeking for satisfaction outside of the Lord Jesus. It's happening now, it's continuing to happen, and will continue to disappoint, unless you find in the Lord Jesus the true Prince of Peace, the true light and life of the world.

Back in the mid-80s, the Irish band U2 famously sang, I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For. And it was that song that emphasized a relentless searching for contentment and satisfaction, but without finding what truly and who truly satisfies.

that failing, if you like, to find the one who truly does give that absolute and complete contentment and satisfaction in life.

The world's full of people searching for happiness in the world that the world can't give, because the world is a deceiver. Even this current pandemic that we're living in and living through, certainly has brought home that truth, because what we're living through reveals the emptiness of so much that we'd assumed gives satisfaction, because you can't be truly satisfied in anything or anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 17] Only He can fully and truly satisfy you in every aspect of your life. are you truly seeking Jesus, the living, risen, ascended Lord Jesus?

Are you truly seeking the Lord Jesus, who is the eternal Son of God, the eternal Lord Jesus, who died for your sins? Are you seeking Him, the Lord Jesus, Jesus who died and rose again that third day?

Are you seeking the one who calls you to Himself, who calls you to abide in Him? Are you seeking Him to know Him, to love Him, to follow Him, to serve Him?

Is that who you're seeking with all your heart? I pray that in that seeking that you'll find the one who finds you.

That's what Jesus is doing here with Mary Magdalene, as He does for you. When He calls you by name, you'll find that when He calls you by name, that you know that in Him you have that true satisfaction that only He brings.

[23 : 31] So be assured then in your seeking the Lord Jesus, He'll be found when you seek Him with all your heart. And that's the promise that we find in God's Word.

This is the Word of Truth. That promise that's given to the Lord's people to encourage you, to seek the one who truly does give life in all its fullness.

And so I'm going to close with the words of Scripture to emphasize, to reinforce what we've been seeing even this morning, to reinforce the promise of God's Word that those who seek Him find Him.

Deuteronomy 4.29 You will seek the Lord your God and you will find Him if you search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul. God's saying through Jeremiah the prophet, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

And finally the words of Jesus Himself. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

[24 : 42] For everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and the one who knocks, it will be opened. I pray that in your seeking, you'll find the living Lord Jesus and you'll know that peace in your heart through faith in our Saviour.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise that you reveal to us your word, your word of promise, and that you show us even in our very hearts where truly we are in relation to the Lord Jesus.

May it be that in our seeking and searching that we continue to seek and search the Lord Jesus who seeks and searches our very selves.

Lord, we thank you that in that seeking and searching the Lord Jesus has found all who are his and not one is lost. May that word even itself be a comfort to those who may well be doubting, even lacking assurance.

Strengthen them, Lord, by your word of promise that you are with them always. Hear us, Lord, as we continue again before you now in praise. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

[26 : 06] Amen.