

The Empty Tomb & Rising Hope

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Date: 13 August 2017

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[0:00] I find myself week after week being encouraged by the singing here, especially when we're singing about our Savior and what He accomplished for us in the cross.

He gives power to us through His Spirit and through His Word. And He gives that to us. He invites us in. He welcomes us to participate in fellowship with Him that will lead us to power.

Well, this morning as we are making our way, continue to make our way through the Gospel of John, we come to this next narrative, this next event in the series, in the story.

Last week we saw that the empty tomb leads to rising faith. However inadequate it is in the moment, it's still faith that God begins to initiate in the hearts of His people.

And this morning we're going to see that the empty tomb leads to rising hope. Do you need hope this morning? Are there difficulties in your life? Are there pressures that are weighing down on you today?

[1:31] Are there sins in your life that would lead you to lose hope in the wonder of Christ's ability to meet you where you are and to help to move you to the place where you want to be?

Maybe you're tired just for yourself in knowing the sin in your life and you're just frustrated with yourself.

And if you're frustrated with yourself, how could God ever love you when you can't even love yourself? Is there hope for you today? I want you to know through this story, the story of Mary, there is hope for you today.

I think one of the difficulties in coming to this story is that any of us who've grown up in the church, we're reminded of the great heroes of the faith.

We love the children's stories that we get in Awana, we get in Sunday school, we get in church time, and now we have on our little phone apps, and any of you who watch Veggie Tales with your kids and Bible stories, just the accessibility of the Bible stories, and it's a wonderful thing.

[2:48] But the common theme that comes to light in all of these stories are men and women of extraordinary faith, men and women who seem to have it all together, men and women who are doing the amazing in the power of God, men and women who never seem to falter, men and women who just shine in moments of darkness and difficulty.

We think of the story of Noah and his boys in building the ark. Great story of faith. Or we think about the story of Abraham and his willingness to offer his son Isaac.

We think about the story of Joseph and his brothers, and there he is being elevated to the second position in all of the land of Egypt. Or the story of David and Goliath.

Or the story of Daniel and his friends facing the lions and facing the fire, the fiery furnace. Those are the stories that come to the forefront.

And maybe it's not necessarily because our teachers have done a bad job at trying to develop the scene of the scripture for us and help us see the good and the bad.

[4:10] But as children, what we grab onto are the heroes of the faith that never seem to falter. And so we carry these concepts with us.

And we begin to wonder, if we're not like David, or if we're not like Abraham, then is there really hope for me?

Is it really worth me trying to run this race because I always seem to fall flat on my face? Is there any hope?

And so we import into the rest of the scripture these ideas that we have as children. And we begin to wonder, if there really is any intersection points in the word that it can really deal with the issues of life.

Can it really meet me where I'm at? Can it really help me overcome the crisis that I face? And I want you to know this morning that one of the joys of verse-by-verse teaching is we come not only to the mountain peaks of the scripture, but we also hit the valleys.

[5:26] And this morning we'll get a chance to look at some valleys for this woman, Mary Magdalene. Enter her story and see how Christ met her where she was.

And as we look at the story of Mary, we can see Mary was a real person. Mary can identify with me. I can identify with Mary.

And because of what Christ accomplished in her life, Christ can do the same for me. There is hope this morning because of the empty tomb.

So if you need hope today, this is the story for you. So look with me, if you would, at John chapter 20. Let's pray before we start because I have way too many notes, as you probably are very familiar with at this point.

And so that we can move through this, we just need the help of the Lord so I can ignore the things that are secondary and focus on the things that are really primary today. So let me pray for us.

[6:40] Lord, as we look into your word, we want to meet with you. We don't want just an intellectual, scholastic, information dump.

This morning we want to meet Jesus. We know you make yourself available to us. You say, come, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for your soul.

Lord, this morning there are those today who need refreshment. There are those this morning who need rest for their soul.

They're weary. They're hurting. Their emotions are raw. They're struggling. They're wondering if there's any hope today. And Lord, I pray that through the teaching of the scripture, they could know. As we come face to face with Mary's story, there is hope. Not hope in personal discipline. Not hope in pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps.

[7:48] Not hope in putting our own pieces together, but hope in surrendering the brokenness of our life to the handiwork of our almighty Savior, who can put those pieces together, and who can create wholeness and life out of death and brokenness.

So meet with us today through your word. Minister to us as only you can. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. John 20, verse 11.

I want to read just the opening phrase so that we can begin to understand where Mary was. And I want you to recognize, as we look at Mary's life, we're going to look at some progression of her life. First, we're going to look at her former condition. I want to spend some time there looking at her former condition. And let me begin with just this opening phrase in John 20, verse 11.

It says, But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. Now, if you were not with us last week, let me catch you up to where we are in the story.

[9:09] Mary came early with a number of her friends, and she comes the day after the Sabbath in order to anoint the body of Christ. He had been dead now for, this is the third morning.

And she comes with her friends to do honor to Christ's body, to anoint it with spices, to prepare it in the way it should be prepared. And upon coming to the tomb, she recognizes along with her friends that the tomb is actually open.

The stone that had been there to kind of keep out any grave robbers had been actually rolled back, and the body was no longer there. And to Mary's dismay, she takes off and runs for where she knows the disciples are.

She meets John and Peter, and they come running to the tomb. They inspect it for themselves. They see that in actuality, Mary is right. The tomb is open.

The grave clothes are lying there. They're not torn. They're not ripped. There's no apparent mishandling of the body. And they see the face cloth that's actually in a different spot, and they realize that something significant has taken place.

[10:22] And at this point, Peter and John, recognizing there was really nothing else they could do, turn around and head back to their own homes, to the places where they were staying.

After all, what could they do? They couldn't appeal to Pilate because Pilate was the one who actually put Jesus on the cross. They couldn't report to the Jewish authorities because the Jewish authorities were just as happy about Jesus' death as Pilate was.

Who else could they appeal to? So they turn around and they walk back to the places where they've been staying. But Mary now finds her way back to the tomb.

And there's no indication that Mary has actually crossed paths again with Peter and John to hear their report. But here she is. She's standing outside the tomb, perhaps longing to have that feeling of closeness that she could have, knowing the place where Jesus had been and hoping that just being in proximity with where he was, there would be a sense of that fellowship that she so greatly longed to have.

We find Mary weeping here at the very front of verse 11. And then in the next phrase, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb.

[11:53] Now when the gospel writer is using this word, weep, he doesn't mean that there were just some tears in her eyes. But it is meant to express anguish and lament, this loud wailing that was so typical during that day.

Every form of external emotional response that she could have, she was putting on display. She was, in a sense, out of control. Overcome by her grief.

So much so that as we'll look into this passage, we'll see that the question of the angels to Mary is, Woman, why are you weeping? And then of Christ, who she thinks is the gardener, asks the same question, Woman, why are you weeping?

This continuing emotional response of grief continues to cloud her thinking and to cloud her understanding. And she is overcome by grief.

But why? Why would Mary be so gripped by sorrow? And I think a look at her former condition will help give us a sense of why this was so significant for her.

[13:11] I want to look first at her bondage. I want you to recognize where Mary came from. So we can appreciate a little bit why this was so significant for her.

Her bondage. And much of what I am going to take in this particular section is from John MacArthur's book, Twelve Extraordinary Women. I would commend it to you.

It is a great character sketch. And I would just encourage you to pick it up. It provides just some fullness of history and the breadth of Scripture that it helps to bring to bear in the lives of individuals we find in the Word.

But we find from Mark chapter 16, verse 9, and Luke chapter 8, verse 2, we'll go there in a moment, but we find that Mary was not just a disciple of Christ, but Mary had formerly been inhabited by seven demons.

It was significant for her. She was a woman under bondage. And her name, Mary Magdalene, is not because that was her surname, like Andrew Scheer.

[14:23] Scheer is my surname. But just to distinguish her from so many of the other Marys that we find in close vicinity in this narrative. Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary, the mother of James.

Mary, the mother of Joseph, the lesser. And so many other Marys that are part of this. Mary of Bethany. It was to distinguish her as an individual. And she's often placed at the front of the line in describing her because she was a prominent figure in this band of women disciples.

This band of followers. If I can have the next slide here, you can see where Magdalene was. Maybe it's not as clear as I'd like it to be, but you can see it's about three miles north of Tiberias and about five miles south of Capernaum.

Right there on the Sea of Galilee. And you would know that Jesus spent the bulk of his first two years of ministry in Galilee right in this area. Crisscrossing his way across this region.

Spending time in the synagogues. Teaching by the Sea of Galilee. Ministering there right on the lake itself. And participating and going to people's homes.

[15:38] Eating meals with them. Healing entire villages of people of their infirmities. But especially in this particular region, healing multitudes of those who were demon-possessed.

Mary Magdalene being one of those women. This sort of happened early on in Jesus' ministry. So why don't you keep your finger here in John chapter 20.

And I want to turn back to Luke chapter 8 for a moment. And I want to look at this together. together. In Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3. Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3.

It says, Soon afterward, he went on through the cities and villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve who were with him and also some of the women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities.

Mary called Magdalene from whom seven demons had gone out. There her name pops up in this list at the very onset of Jesus' ministry in Galilee because of his ministry of healing individuals and casting out demons.

[16 : 52] Well, the Bible says a little about those who were who were under bondage to demons. We get a taste of what they experienced. there was a sense of infliction.

There was loneliness as they were driven outside of the community. They were set apart and isolated from everyone they had previously loved.

There's only a couple of accounts in the scripture of devoted family members that stayed true to those who were demon-possessed. But the rest of the occurrences they were driven from society because of their inability to control themselves.

They were a menace to community. They would have been in perpetual agony always friendless. There was a sense of restlessness in their heart and life the inability to escape the bondage that they were in.

They were joyless because everything for them had become darkness. And they were hopeless because every earthly remedy was insufficient and inadequate to deal with their deepest condition.

[18 : 15] Christ had delivered her from all of that and Luke and Mark give us some understanding of the fact that Jesus had done this to demonstrate that he has power.

power to conquer power to deliver. One of the really interesting facts as you look at Jesus' healing of those who were demon-possessed through the gospel narrative you would find that there is never an instance in which demon-possessed individuals came to Jesus to be delivered.

They were either brought to Jesus or he went to them and on certain occasions Jesus showed up and the demons were actually surprised and horrified at his presence.

But the evil spirits never voluntarily entered the presence of Christ. They always distanced themselves from him and his authority and from the truth.

Any of the comfort that Jesus might have provided these individuals, demons made sure that they never had contact to him or anyone who would minister comfort to them.

[19 : 30] But we also find in the scripture that their deliverance, when Jesus delivered them from demons, it was always instantaneous and it was always complete.

Such was Mary's plight and such was Mary's deliverance. No wonder why she was gripped with grief in this moment.

And there's no wonder why Mary's bondage led her to devotion. That's what we'll find next, her devotion to Christ. We find examples of her devotion in a number of instances, but here in Luke chapter 8, as you're already there, look down now to verse 3.

What did these women do? It says that many others who provided for them out of their own means. Now, Mary Magdalene was probably a widow or she was a single lady.

There's no indication from the scripture that she was young. She was likely old, maybe had inherited some property. Likely her parents were no longer around so she didn't have that obligation to them and could travel along with Jesus.

[20 : 44] We find that here in Luke chapter 8 at the end of verse 1. it says, and the twelve were with him and also some women. So, the disciples were spending time with Jesus and right along with them was this company of women who were following close by Jesus and financing his ministry.

Supporting him in the work, making sure that all their needs were met. Making sure that Jesus could do what he had come to do and that was to proclaim the kingdom and not have to worry about the earthly things like food and lodging and those kinds of things.

Mary and all of these other ladies were helping to finance Jesus' ministry. They were also devoted to him in coming to Jerusalem during this Passover week.

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 27. We can see that in that account. Matthew chapter 27 beginning in verse 55.

It says, this is the scene of the cross. It says, there were also many women there looking on from a distance who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

[22 : 19] Here they were coming with the company of Jesus and all of his followers, parading from Galilee, now coming to Jerusalem, ministering to him through the week and his disciples. They were devoted followers of Christ.

And we see their devotion to the very end. They were among those who were at the cross. Those Mary Magdalene, we find that she was at least one of the individuals who was there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, standing at the foot of the cross.

But as time wore on and as the difficulties and cruelty and abuse to Christ continued, we find that they're moving now to the back, maybe elbowed to the back and looking on from a distance. The gruesome scene, the brutality that Jesus was experiencing caused them to shrink back. But they're still there watching because they could not bear to leave.

They remained until the bitter end, watching the full story of Jesus play out before their eyes. And once Jesus died, they were of the few disciples, the few followers of Christ who actually followed secretly Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus as they escorted the body of Jesus to this tomb.

[23:40] Had it not been for Mary, the disciples likely would not have known where Jesus was buried. There she is, her devotion to the end, recognizing and loving her Savior.

She was a woman of devotion. One of the great truths we see from Mary's life is that there are no barriers to the power of God's ability to work in your life.

Whatever baggage you bring to this service today, whatever your history, whatever your sins, whatever your failures, whatever they are, they cannot outdo Mary.

Hallelujah! You have never been demonized, not just by one, but by seven demons. repentance.

And if there was hope for Mary through the power of Christ, there is hope for you today.

What a wonderful truth that we find from her life. And just as the deliverance of Mary's bondage led to devotion for her, it is the kind of devotion that should also be true in your own life.

[24:58] If you've experienced the deliverance of Christ, Christ, reminded of the verse in Romans chapter 5, verse 20, where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more.

Grace desires to show up in your life regardless of where you've been. But, in a way, Mary is in bondage again.

Having been bound by demons before, now we find that there's a sense of bondage that trickles into blindness. We find that here in verses 12 to 15.

Mary's current blindness, or Mary's immediate blindness might be another way to put it. That's point number two, Joey, if you can help me with that. Mary's current blindness.

Let me read verses 12 to 15. We're back in John chapter 20. Here's what it says, beginning in verse 12.

[26:01] And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, woman, why are you weeping?

She said to them, they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.

Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

Mary has an encounter with two individuals, an encounter first with angels that we'll see here in a moment, and then an encounter with Christ.

Neither encounter, at least in the present condition, was able to do for Mary what she needed. Even an announcement from an angel was unable to lead her to faith.

[27:08] So if you are here this morning and you say, if I only had an angel show up in my life, then everything would be different. Mary would give testimony to you today that an angel will not cut it.

And as a matter of fact, without Jesus' intervention in Mary's life, even Jesus himself would not cut it. Mary needed Jesus to open her eyes to faith.

We'll see that in a second. But let me look for a moment here, her encounter with angels. She's overcome by grief, and she looks into the tomb.

she knew that Jesus had been there before. Like many of us who have lost a loved one, and we can remember where they sat, and often times when we go to visit their home, we'll sit in the place where they sat, we'll look out the window that they looked out of, we'll read their Bible and see their notes, and anything that we can do to have that sense of intimacy and closeness.

I think that maybe a little bit of what Mary is doing here. She wants to be near her Lord, and this is the nearest she can be. So she goes to the place where Jesus had been, and she looks in and she sees the angels who are sitting there, and they ask her the question, why are you weeping?

[28:37] Now, I don't know if you are as amazed that I am at what comes next. there is something that is missing.

Like, I would expect Mary looks in and startled by the angels all of a sudden in this tomb, right? Or she looks in and she's like perplexed or startled or in amazement or wonder.

But you don't read those words there. And I don't think you read those words there because Mary has already had an encounter with angels earlier in the day.

We find that from Matthew and Mark and Luke. She already saw the angels and they already spoke to her. That's what got them all lit up so they would run back to the disciples to tell them what had just happened.

But for some reason, Mary is going through these mountain peak experiences in valleys of faith and no faith and hope and confusion are playing ping pong with her emotions at this point.

[29 : 53] And when you read the account you're like how can this happen? How is this possible? She couldn't possibly have seen the angels before because it was clear she was a person who believed before.

But now all of a sudden she's like oblivious. but if we're honest with ourselves we understand, right?

Like there are moments in your life where you are on the mountaintop and you believe in God and nothing can shake your faith and it seems like almost just like a week or two later there is the deep dark valleys and crisis of faith and you wonder where God is.

You ever been there? That's what's happening to Mary. She looks into this tomb and she's staring at a gift of God's grace and she misses it.

The grace gift of these angels who are sitting there. How often do we miss the gifts of grace in moments of crisis because we are blinded by grief.

[31 : 10] We're blinded by our own condition, by our own circumstances and we miss the fact that God has us there so that we can encounter him.

That's why God introduces difficulties in your life and hardship is so that you can meet him there.

But we miss it because we allow the adversity of our life to just drown out any of the grace that God has available to us in those moments.

And that's the case for Mary. She sees the angels likely in blazing white. But she doesn't really see them.

She doesn't really get it. It's not going to help her blindness at this point, her blindness of faith. she has an encounter with Christ which should have sealed the deal.

Notice again this account, Jesus, she turns around, she's face to face with Jesus. He speaks to her, he asks her the same question, woman, why are you weeping?

[32 : 29] Jesus, she sees him, she speaks to him, and she misses him in this moment. Think of this.

Her personal experience of deliverance, years of observing the power of God, working through the handiwork of Christ.

She heard his words and watched his life and through this week saw the unfolding promises of Christ show up in his crucifixion, in being handed over to the Jews and Gentiles, and in now this empty tomb, and she misses it.

She hears the announcement of the angels, she even speaks with Jesus, and she misses faith. in this moment.

What will it take for Mary? Well, it'll take for her the same thing it will take for you. The same thing that it will take for every one of us.

[33 : 40] Jesus must open our eyes. You may not just meet Jesus, you have to encounter him. You have to see him for who he is.

Jesus wants that for you today. And now two times we see the compassion of heaven. The compassion of heaven on those who mourn.

And the words of Christ should echo in our minds. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Mary's pure heart has led her to the tomb. Mary is a seeker. She's gone to the tomb and she sees God. He shows up for her.

There is no direct rebuke. There is no condescending glare. There is no disapproval. There is only compassion. We do not have a high priest who cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities.

[35 : 00] He can sympathize. Can you understand the highs and lows of faith? Have you been there? Are you there today?

those mountaintops and valleys of life? You feel frazzled? You feel raw? You feel discouraged and in despair today?

I think of the story of Job's life. He did so well at the beginning. The Lord gives. The Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And then just a few chapters later, Job says, I hate my life. Why did you bring me out of the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me and as though I had not been carried from the womb to the grave. That would have been better, says Job. But there is hope. Angel announcements are not going to save you. It's only what we see next in this account that will bring deliverance to your life.

[36 : 09] It will bring hope to you. Mary's continuing hope. That's what we find next. Mary's continuing hope. I want us to see and look briefly just in the next few moments her awakening and her assignment.

Her awakening and her assignment. Notice here, beginning in verse 16. Jesus said to her, Mary, she turned and said to him in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher.

What was it about that word? It was her name. Spoken in the way that she had always remembered Jesus speaking her name.

There was familiarity in the name. it harkens back to what Jesus had told the scribes in John chapter 10.

He says, he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

[37 : 28] He goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.

Jesus knew her name and Mary in a flash of recollection recalls Jesus her savior.

There he is. Life in clarity erases the doubt and blindness of grief of her life. There is an awakening in her heart.

Her eyes are open now to faith. As Jesus would do for his disciples on the road to Emmaus. As Jesus would do for his disciples in the upper room. Jesus does for Mary.

And with the word blindness turns to sight. It's amazing to consider Mary is the first to see the resurrected savior.

[38 : 35] That's significant. And it was significant that Jesus was only clear about his the fact that he was Yahweh to a woman in Samaria to reinforce that whatever stigma the culture places on you Christ wants to raise you up.

he'll give you significance through himself. He reaffirms himself to women who are the lowest parts of that society.

He shows up to them. He affirms them. He speaks to them. Some of the most significant statements in all of scripture Jesus gives are given to women.

Astounding how Christ deliberately affirms the significance of people. And when she sees him she worships.

We find that in the account of Matthew. It says she falls at his feet. Actually it says they fall at his feet meaning that there were other women who were part of this.

[39 : 49] That Mary was probably not alone in this encounter but with the other women fall at Jesus' feet and she worships and she's clinging to him I'm not going to let you go you're not going to leave me again.

So Jesus now has to give her an assignment. Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the father but go to my brothers and say to them I am ascending to my father and your father to my God and your God.

Now that seems but Jesus is trying to help Mary understand that the immediate physical temporary form of Christ is not what she should be giving hope to but the eternal future enduring presence of Christ in heaven.

I'm going to ascend and you're going to be there too Mary put your hope in that not in my personal physical presence with you now. Set your hope on the future.

my resurrection has changed everything for you. And tell my brothers the news. They're no longer slaves.

[41 : 05] They're no longer friends. They're brothers. They're part of the family because of what Christ accomplished on the cross for them. To my God and your God.

To my father and your father. Now there's intimacy. The veil has been torn. The entrance into the holy of holies has been open for all who come in faith to him.

They can now have a personal direct relationship with Christ and with God the father through salvation. And Mary could be the conduit of that message.

Interesting. Jesus was going to show up to these disciples in just a few hours from this occasion and yet he still sends Mary on this mission to share the gospel.

Those who follow Christ will do what Jesus did. Those who follow Christ will say what Jesus says. They will give testimony to the works of God in their life.

[42:10] And they will have enduring devotion that will continue on. Not just for the moment but enduring through life. We see Mary in Acts chapter 1 with the company of believers praying in the upper room.

It says all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women and that women is this company that we see here at the cross. There they are.

They're bearing the message. But let's not assume that just because you hear the word it's going to lead you to faith.

The scribes and the Pharisees heard the word. As a matter of fact the scribes and the Pharisees probably knew clearer and better than the disciples what Jesus had said he would do.

And so they could put that down They said Pilate put a guard around the tomb so no one robs his grave and so Pilate does that and then when they hear that Jesus is no longer there they buy off the guards and say spread the news that Jesus body has been stolen don't assume that just because you have access to the word just because you've heard the message that you are a person of faith you're a person of faith if you're a person who has surrendered your life to Christ and seeks to follow him in devotion is that true of your life today if it is there is hope for you today hope that overcomes any of the baggage that you might bring to the table there is hope for you in Christ through faith let's pray Lord we praise you this morning that there is hope because of the empty tomb there is hope because of

[44:09] Christ conquering death and sin rising from the dead giving us hope of forgiveness and fellowship with the father in a future in heaven in life with you today a new assignment for us as we seek to proclaim the glories of Christ Lord may we be faithful help us even in this moment as we think in these moments of the things that bombard us from day to day distract us from the main mission seek to distract us from the objectives that you've set before us and as Satan is whispering in our ear all of the reasons why we're disqualified for this amazing assignment Lord help us to remember that there is cleansing and forgiveness with you there is hope in Christ today we thank you for that in

Jesus name amen