

# Easter Sunday 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us pray before we enter into the Lord's Word this morning. Father, eyes to see, ears to hear, minds to understand.

This is what we ask this morning. Lord, we pray that we would hear your Word, that it would go deep in our hearts, that it would change our lives.

Lord, we thank you that the resurrection is a reality and that we celebrate it today, not in some kind of symbolic way or that resurrection is an archetype of just bettering ourselves, but that you truly and literally rose from the grave.

Lord, may this truth affect our lives from this day forth and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Friends, what are you hoping for?

What does your heart long for? What is the thing that you most need? Whether or not you are right in that assessment, maybe you need something else even greater.

[ 1 : 11 ] But what is the thing that your heart longs for? The resurrection is this bold, bold statement that everything that you are longing for, everything that you are hoping for, is found in the resurrection.

But things that seem too good to be true quite often are. Are they not? I'm sure many of you, like me, have gotten scam calls a ton.

I don't know how they get my phone number. I don't know how Nigerian princes get my email. I haven't given it out. But whenever I get some kind of scam email that's promising me the world, tens of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It's too good to be true. I don't believe it. The resurrection promises even greater things than that. It promises eternal life.

And joy that is unspeakable. Bodies that are incorruptible. A life that goes on forever with no tears, with no hunger, with no disease, with no pain.

[ 2 : 35 ] In high school, we had a really gullible friend. We still have him in our lives. He's less gullible now. But he would fall for everything. We'd roll our eyes. We'd make fun of him today, even though, like I said, he's not gullible anymore.

But we're not gullible people, are we? Come on. The promises of the resurrection, again, they're too good to be true. Gullible people believe them. The people of the Bible, it seems that they take the resurrection at face value.

But the people of the Bible weren't gullible either. They struggled with supernatural claims. They didn't believe everything that Jesus said.

So when we look at John chapter 20, we see Mary Magdalene, who was a companion of Jesus, a part of his entourage, heard him teach and speak and do miracles, and she was witness to a lot of things.

One of the things, that he would rise again after three days being buried. And we'll see here that Mary does not believe him.

[ 3 : 54 ] At least her actions betray her, if she says she does. We'll look at John chapter 20, and we'll specifically look at the claim of the resurrection that all of our hopes and longings are found fulfilled in that.

And no matter how gullible it seems somebody needs to be to believe it, that it is the only hope we truly have. So we'll look at three things in this brief narrative that helps us to understand the beauty and the joy of the resurrection and how it is the very thing we long for.

The first thing is the importance of truth. If Jesus didn't rise from the grave, if this is a bit of a sham, then there's no point in putting our faith and hope in something that didn't really happen.

The second is that the resurrection is the biggest picture of the gift of grace from God to us. And finally, that the resurrection beckons us to live a life of faith.

The importance of truth, the gift of grace, the life of faith. If you have a Bible, please turn with me to John chapter 20, and we'll be looking at verses 11 to 18.

[ 5 : 19 ] There's some Bibles at the back. If you forgot your Bible, you don't have one, no problem, grab one. You're not going to interrupt me. So at any time, you can grab a Bible at the back. Well, we'll jump into it, the importance of truth.

Mary, like other characters in the Gospel, does not recognize the Messiah. Sometimes it seems that Jesus is interacting with certain people, and they don't know it's him.

The two companions on the road to Emmaus, they don't recognize Jesus. And in this situation, we have a similar example. However, it would seem that Mary, like the others that don't recognize Jesus, seemed to not recognize him for a deeper reason.

There's something remarkably different about Jesus. Something different about his resurrected body. Something that was unfamiliar to them. Jesus rose from the grave, fully human, not some ethereal being or ghost or angelic character, but a man who was like us, but also unlike us.

Talks, the Apostle Paul will talk about how we will rise from the grave like Christ in bodies that are imperishable, not subject to death and decay any longer.

[ 6 : 52 ] So, on one hand, it's no wonder that Mary didn't recognize Jesus. Something was different. We're not exactly told what. This isn't just Jesus disguised himself, he put on a wig, or he dressed up like an actual gardener in the case of the narrative.

There's something different about him. However, she also had a failure to recognize him because of a deep-seated problem. She was looking for the wrong Jesus.

Look with me, verses 11 to 15 here. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. By the way, just before we continue on, the narrative before this is Mary Magdalene has come to the tomb, maybe she's come with others, the other gospel accounts have multiple women coming, likely to prepare his body more fully for burial, and she sees that the stone is rolled away.

She tells the disciples Peter and John come, they look inside the tomb, they see that Jesus is no longer there, and then they take off back home despondent.

Mary stays, and this is where we pick it up. So we'll start in verse 11 now. Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

[ 8 : 22 ] 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.

We'll continue on verse 15. 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.

And we'll pause there. Like I mentioned at the beginning, Mary would have heard Jesus repeatedly teach that the Son of Man, the Son of David, me, I have to go to the cross.

I have to die, I will suffer, I will be handed over, I will be buried, but on the third day I will rise again. She had heard that not just once, multiple times.

In fact, Jesus, although in other circumstances he would talk in parables, that's kind of like a coded story in a way, when it came to his passion, his death, his burial, his resurrection, he spoke plainly.

[ 9 : 45 ] In one case, he spoke so plainly that Simon Peter, one of his inner circle friends, rebuked him for saying such a thing. There is no ambiguity in the way Jesus proclaimed his death and resurrection.

So that's why in a sense it's somewhat perplexing to consider Mary's complete grief at the empty tomb. It would seem that she should be actually more grieved if the tomb was full.

Because then Jesus would not have risen from the grave, he would have been a false teacher, she would have followed him in vain. But instead she sees an empty tomb and her immediate thought isn't he rose from the grave.

It is, the tomb was robbed. Maybe it was the religious leaders, they took the body to desecrate it, to dishonor Jesus. Maybe it was the Roman soldiers who decided that he ought not to have a fantastic funeral in a borrowed grave but should be tossed in a mass grave.

I mean, we're not given the reason, but it's very clear that Mary, her immediate reaction reaction is just absolute grief. The body has been stolen.

[11:02] Huge, huge, huge, huge, huge problem. Mary loved Jesus. That is clear. She loved him very much.

However, we see that her reaction speaks not to her lack of love of Jesus but that she made little of Jesus.

Jesus. She saw Jesus do all of these things but in the end when Jesus was killed upon the cross she made much of his humanity and almost nothing of his divinity.

Jesus, a fantastic teacher, I loved him, I will follow him to the end but clearly he's just a man. The tomb is empty not because he rose from the grave but because somebody robbed the grave of his body.

Whether we are believers in Jesus or spiritualists or agnostics or maybe we have somebody struggling with atheism or maybe not struggling has embraced it.

[12:10] We are not different from Mary. Why? Because we all desire and look for and search out a savior whether that's someone or something to fix our problems and to make life better for us.

We look for saviors. It's just the way we're wired. But we want a savior to fix our external problems not our internal problems.

We need help with our job our neighbors my difficult sibling my incompetent boss my difficult children my cold spouse my lack of money my lack of opportunity my lack of a spouse them that there it's all external our problems are all external and we need somebody to help us we need the problem to go away so that we can live our best life because okay maybe we can do a bit of self-improvement but really we're fine we're okay we're nice we're good there's nothing inherently broken in us the problem is out there not in here but that's not the case if we're honest about our shortcomings if we're honest about our lack of tact our lack of kindness our lack of grace our lack of love our the way we immediately assume somebody has ill motives toward us never giving them the benefit of the doubt always assuming that they're conspiring against me don't they see how hard I work why are they picking on me we flatter ourselves to think that our sins are not great we think theirs are great but mine are excusable just a problem again just needing a little tweak when have you ever thought that your motives were sinister you excuse them away and I think what this does is it helps us to understand again if we're honest with ourselves that we want salvation on our terms devoid of a savior if that savior causes us to change let alone submit to him or her or it for if a savior saves then undoubtedly that savior has a claim upon our lives and the thought of someone laying a claim upon our lives is unimaginable we are the captain of our own ship to have somebody else me submit to them completely unacceptable so what do we do even as christians especially as christians we can dismiss jesus for his burden seems intolerable and what we end up doing is we fashion jesus into the savior that we that we want we fail to recognize him because we're too busy flattering ourselves and we can't truly recognize him because our deep need our deep need and for salvation it's downplayed mary doesn't recognize jesus because she is looking for a jesus that doesn't exist she's looking for her friend her master the one that she loves so dearly she is not looking for god the son of god who took upon flesh who said that he would die for her sins and the sins of many that would be buried and on the third day rise again to new life she's not looking for that jesus she's looking for the jesus that cast out the demons from her that made her well that healed her and gave her dignity which is wonderful and fantastic and incredible but that wasn't all of who jesus was that's the jesus she was looking for but that jesus was not who jesus truly was this jesus is not dead his body had not been stolen he is alive so it's it's an important lesson for us we must know jesus on his terms and that must be rooted in the truth

with all of the implications of that reality either he is the risen savior who defeated sin evil and death and not just defeated sin evil and death but made a mockery mocking sin mocking satan mocking evil mocking death or jesus is truly the greatest charlatan that has ever lived that he has duped billions of people over two millennia but it's either or it's either or jesus is the savior according to the truth that he truly did rise from the grave or friends we are here for no good reason maybe some good baking after a good chat but that's it do you like the idea of jesus that he is some kind of archetype of a godly man who did good deeds and was a good example of how to show mercy and forgiveness i'll try to be like jesus i'll try to emulate jesus he is he might have even been the greatest person that ever walked the earth fantastic he's a great guy but this passage tells us something different about who jesus is you see before jesus reveals himself he asks mary who are you

seeking which is in a sense a double question is it not there's an obvious question who are you seeking but there's a deeper heart question that he is asking her and he's putting forward that to us this morning who are you seeking which savior are you after is it the Jesus that's according to the scriptures that has laid his life down for you really truly physically not just figuratively died for your sins that that rose again to new life that promises that you too will rise again to new life if you put your faith and hope in him is this the Jesus you're after the Jesus that will have a claim upon your life or are you looking for something else who are you seeking what are you truly after what do you think will answer your deepest longings solve your greatest problems both inside and outside who will be or what will be your hope in difficult times your identity your purpose how will you have true forgiveness reconciliation with with with broken relationships clarity in the face of confusion who are you seeking it's a question he is asking us this morning is the one you are seeking the real Jesus the real savior or is it a pretender and if you're having trouble with believing the supernatural claims of the gospels let alone that Jesus literally was dead and three days later he rose consider that if this was a conspiracy to create this story of the risen Jesus you would not have Mary Magdalene be the first witness there is no chance that she would be the first witness there's actually really there's a number of different proofs so to speak but two in particular that's one that I just mentioned but also Peter and John they are the leaders of the church afterwards and they are shown to be cowardly they in lacking of faith Jesus rose they look they're downcast they go back to their homes they're despondent I mentioned Mary Mary she was a woman in a patriarchal first century society a shame and honor society she did not have a strong testimony at all you don't have a woman testifying on the same level as a man you need multiple women or maybe women aren't believed at all they're seen as lesser weaker untrustworthy not in terms of they're gonna spill every secret but their testimony is not sure it's not right I'm just saying that's the way it is I'm not making a statement at you ladies it's the way it is in in the first century so therefore you don't have the first witness of the empty tomb to be a woman you just don't and you don't have a woman let alone one like Mary who was on the fringe of society again I mentioned before that she had she was a troubled woman she the this the gospels say that she was full of demons that Jesus casted demons out restored her life she was a troubled person and no doubt her reputation followed her to some degree or another even if she was in her right mind she was walking with Jesus she had dignity from him and the inner circle maybe but maybe the people on the street saw her and snickered and whispered and gossiped about this woman who was crazy who was on the fringes untrustworthy the way that Mary is described is in the gospels is the same as the Garrison demoniac was described now if you know about the Garrison demoniac I think it's Mark chapter six he is also demon possessed out of his mind he is chained up in a graveyard outside of the city because he is wreaking havoc on people he's cutting himself he's screaming he's a giant mess and Mary is described as this in in in very similar language you don't have this person testifying that the grave is empty if you want the message to go forward you don't and yet this is exactly what we see this leads us to our second point for if this account is true that Mary is the one who is the first to see the risen Christ and to testify about his resurrection that speaks to the incredible gift of grace that is extended to all who would but believe in Jesus as we return to the narrative we see Mary is the lone person who sticks around the grave Peter and John are back home she is in utter grief and even though she sees two angelic beings she's still overcome with grief you think an angel there's something incredibly different and spectacular about the angels her grief is still burdening her overwhelming her and then Jesus appears look with me at verse 14 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 I will take him away Mary is searching for Jesus's body she's desperate to see him she is bold she's up front with her search she's putting social taboos aside she in a in a very real way does not care what other people think about her if she does not as much as she wants to see Jesus graveyard is an unclean place she is a woman she's alone there's like levels to this social taboo that she is that she is breaking here so she sees

[ 24 : 38 ] this gardener and she first her first thought is that the gardener would know whether the gardener has taken the body away or not she supposes that even if the gardener could tell her where the body is that she could somehow carry this corpse by herself back into the grave this woman is desperate to see Jesus and what do we see here in verse 16 Jesus said to her Mary the gardener asks the gardener that asks who are you seeking is the one that she sought and we can

read this jesus said to her mary she turned and said to him mary rabboni i think what we miss is that there is such deep tenderness in jesus saying her name jesus cuts through the grief he cuts through the searching he cuts through all the noise and speaks directly to her soul mary and how does she reply rabboni it's like a rabbi is the term for teacher but what's here rabboni it's like my dear teacher it's a sign of affection and love it's like her longing has been fulfilled her soul is quickened her eyes are opened she could have searched until her dying day but what's interesting here is that it wasn't until jesus revealed himself to her that she saw him it's very important for us to consider some of us have spent long season searching for truth whether we've known that we are searching for a savior or not we've been searching for something we've been searching maybe for jesus but it hasn't been until he has revealed himself to us that our spiritual eyes have been opened and we understand who he truly is the bible calls this grace it is a kind and loving gift from god that he chooses to bestow upon us nothing that we have done i mean mary is she is open to see jesus but it is jesus who breaks through all of the noise and reveals himself to her mary searched for jesus but jesus wasn't under any obligation to reveal himself to her was he and yet he spoke to her grief stricken soul he alleviated her pain gladdened her heart because he loved her mary and she turns and she sees her savior jesus understands our deep need to be comforted in grief and to have our fears relieved he's compassionate with us is he not he knows we are slow to comprehend slow to recognize his voice slow to have the truth of his resurrection sink deep and take root into our hearts but praise god that he is quick to restore we are slow he is quick he is quick to pardon he is quick to meet us in our grief and confusion he's quick to repay our stumbling little baby confused faith with mercy and grace kindness and love christ calls mary mary doesn't call jesus she doesn't say teacher and then jesus says mary i'm here he says mary and she says teacher jesus is the one who calls her and his call is unmistakable he's not merely calling her name but calling her out of brokenness her misunderstanding her confusion he is calling her into a deeper and truer

relationship with his resurrected self he is helping her to understand who he truly is but it's not just with mary look with me at verse 17 we'll read the whole verse we're going to focus on the second half of the verse but this is what it says jesus said to her 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 jesus gives grace also to the disciples notice that he doesn't say to mary listen you have been faithful to me you love me you might have been looking for the wrong person you mistaken me for a gardener but here i am mary but those disciples send them back to me i have i have to have a word with them those betrayers those cowards where were they in my time of need judgment and punishment await them send them to me right now no he doesn't say that he says go to my brothers brothers go to my family they're no longer disciples they're my brothers because of his resurrection and their union with him they will know and be with god as father it says here i am ascending to my father and your father to my god and your god that's his message to his disciples to the cowards that left him and they are cowards we'd probably be cowards too i'm sure of it that's what he says to them again we see the grace of jesus as he calls the disciples out of their shame restoring them giving them salvation through his death and resurrection again the call of jesus is unmistakable you betray somebody you've really hurt somebody in your life and you know you've hurt them i have i have hurt people most closest to me and i have seen how my words have brought tears and there is such guilt even when forgiveness is extended i feel terrible and it seems that only time can at least help the memory to disappear the shame that they must have felt the embarrassment the cowardice that that now mark who they are that that's who they are now they're cowards have mary come up to them jesus is risen and he says that he will ascend and he calls you brother he says that you share his father and that you are going to be with him for eternity dispelling any cowardice dispelling any shame that is grace salvation is always a gift of god's grace but we take hold of it by faith we embrace god's grace and then live out this life according to god's standards and this leads to our third point that the resurrection that saves us that is our deepest hope the grace that god gives us based on the truth of the resurrection it means that we have to live a life worthy of that calling a life of faith two points here the first is that obedience is very important for the reality of the for the reality of the believer jesus tells mary to bear witness to the resurrection she is not to keep silent she is not to go on living her life she is to testify to proclaim to share she has a job to do and it's a job of joy but nevertheless she is now an agent a citizen of heaven the life of faith we are to live is an obedient life we are no

longer our own we have been purchased by the most precious blood of the sinless slave savior  
jesus the messiah go  
jesus commands to which mary went she obeyed we must obey jesus he  
calls us to live as citizens of his kingdom we have a master now but not as a as an earthly master  
who demands much and gives little we have a master who gives complete new life but also  
demands all the life touched by grace is the life marked by obedience the second point it's related to  
the first what happens when we're not obedient what happens when we we encounter the risen lord  
it's we put our hope and trust in jesus our faith wanes our obedience is shaky we don't trust we look  
at that savior over there or we put our hope in that thing or this goal that we have becomes this  
ultimate prize that we must win and all of a sudden priorities start to shift what happens when that  
happens look with me again at verse 17 jesus said to her mary do not cling to me for i have not yet  
ascended to the father mary in her excitement clings to jesus and you have this picture of her  
bearing her face in his garments tears and saliva it's just she is overcome she is she doesn't care  
what she looks like she's excited that jesus is there and jesus says to her to stop and that's the  
question why why would jesus want her to stop it's not that jesus is like like don't touch me these  
are new garments uh he doesn't say that and especially if we consider that other people touch jesus  
and he appeared for weeks before he ascended and even thomas stuck his finger in his side so it's  
not that jesus didn't want to be touched after he rose from the grave so why is he saying don't cling  
to me other translations say don't touch me but really it don't cling to me and the reason why is right  
after he says it for i have not ascended to the father jesus was not resurrected in his incorruptible  
body in order to keep the status quo see lazarus if you remember the story was raised from the  
grave but lazarus was raised from the grave and was just like you and i and he eventually died he  
died twice that's tough but jesus rises from the grave in an incorruptible body never to die again and  
a part of that resurrection was that he would not just rise from the grave as the first fruits the proof  
that we too will rise from the grave but that a part of this new life is him ascending into heaven and  
as he ascends into heaven he is seated at the right hand of god the father forever making  
intercession for us which is to say that we need intercession that we will live out this this faith  
imperfectly not with fantastic obedience but with shaky obedience and valley seasons where we we  
don't trust the lord in the ways that we should we don't obey the lord our faith seems to be shaky he  
is at the right hand of god the father in forever interceding for us the ascension is is is critical but  
also with jesus ascending he sends his holy spirit down so that the holy spirit indwells in us giving  
us the power to obey and  
reminding us that jesus is actually much closer to us than mary so when jesus says don't cling to  
me i still have to be ascended to my father in heaven he's saying that listen you think i'm close now  
i've risen from the grave you're here you're touching me you think i'm close now just wait till the holy  
spirit is poured out i've often thought if only i could see jesus i could endure anything i could power  
through this frustration jesus he's seems distant i want him to be really close and all of a sudden i  
start having this imagination that i need jesus in the flesh but this is telling us that actually jesus in  
the flesh is not so close as having his very spirit indwelling in us and that takes faith to believe and  
the faith that he will actually give us and help us to believe but that is why jesus has to ascend the  
ascended jesus reminds us that the life of faith is fraught with failure and sin but that he offers more  
and more and more in great of grace and forgiveness and love friends as we wrap things up who  
are you looking for are you looking for the risen christ who has conquered death and sin and evil the  
devil your fears forever more offering new life if you would put your faith and trust in him uniting with  
him promised new life in the presence of god for eternity or are you looking for a different kind of  
jesus that will let you coast that will let you continue on in the status quo that will not cause  
reputational harm jesus calls us to a life of faith because he has poured out this gift of grace to us  
because he truly rose from the grave friends this is what easter is about this is the hope we have let  
us be enamored with this risen christ and by faith let us walk in the power that he is giving us let's  
pray so let you know