

Easter Sunday

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[0 : 0 0] Friends, the Lord is risen. He is risen. Hallelujah. Let's pray. Jesus Christ, you are risen today.

What a wonderful truth. You're not just, it's not just that you were, it's not just that you died, it's not just that you were dead, it's not just that you did rise, but you are risen right now.

And we ask that you would be here among us by your Holy Spirit. Will you be here among us and will you increase your activity among us?

Will you speak to us? Like you spoke to Mary, will you speak in such a way that we recognize your voice? Even if we can't see you, grant us to recognize your voice now.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, excuse me. It's great that Aaron has been, has coached you a few times on the, he is risen, he is risen indeed.

[1 : 1 9] Indeed. Because, well, that's one of the oldest Christian greetings that we have. It's actually recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

Not exactly in those terms, but both Mary and several of the other disciples, on the first day that Jesus was resurrected, the first disciples that witnessed him, that saw him, immediately went back to other disciples and said, he's risen.

And originally, the people that first heard that didn't really, I mean, they thought they were crazy. But, over the course of the next couple days, the first disciples came to understand that actually Jesus had risen from the dead.

And so, from that point onward, Christians have always had this greeting, saying, the Lord has risen. He's risen indeed. Very good. And the reason why that greeting, it just never gets old.

The reason is, that greeting gets to the very root of Christianity. Because Christianity is nothing if Jesus did not rise from the dead.

[2 : 3 4] If he did not physically, literally, historically rise from the dead, then Christianity is just a cruel farce. It's just nothing. It's a wisp of the wind. But if that is true, then it means everything else in Christianity is true.

You know, historically, that reality of the resurrection of Jesus is precisely the thing that gave birth to Christianity. In the first century, in, you know, 2,000 years ago, in Palestine, in Jewish Palestine, there were a lot of people that claimed to be the Messiahs.

There were several, not a lot, but several of them over the course of the first century that claimed to be the Messiah. And whenever that happened, there was a kind of pattern that typically was repeated.

What would happen is somebody would claim to be the Messiah. They would gather a group of people around them who thought they were the Messiah. And then the Romans would come in and kill the leader.

And as soon as the Romans killed the leader, the movement dispersed instantly. And that happened again and again and again in the first century, except for one movement.

[3 : 46] Except for the Christian movement. Because at the beginning, it seemed like it was following the same pattern. Jesus started teaching. He claimed to be the Messiah.

A group of people gathered around him. The Romans came in and killed him. And everybody expected the same thing to happen for the movement just to dissipate. Just go away. But that's not what happened.

The opposite happened. Instead, the most vital and powerful and almost explosive growth of a new religious movement that the world has ever seen came right after the death of the founder.

I mean, that's just weird. And to this day, historians have been trying to explain why did the Christian movement get such traction just days, months, years after its founder was murdered by the Romans.

That's just not the way things are supposed to happen. But the explanation that every single person gave within the movement, within the Christian movement, was the same.

[4 : 50] The Lord is risen. He's risen indeed. The resurrection actually gave birth to the Christian movement. Now, tonight, what I want to do is look at the very, very first person who ever saw Jesus after the resurrection.

I want to look at the very, very first person whose life was transformed by the resurrection. It's the story of Mary Magdalene. It's the second reading. It's on page three, I think.

And as we look at this passage, what we'll see is a kind of pattern for what Jesus does in every Christian life and what Jesus has been doing for the last 2,000 years and it explains how it is that Christianity was able to grow so powerfully.

So I want to look at the story of Mary and I want to look at two aspects of the story. One, I want to look at Mary's darkness. The second thing I want to look at is Jesus' hope.

The darkness that Mary endured and the hope that the resurrection of Jesus gave her. Okay? First of all, the darkness of Mary. Okay, setting the scene a little bit, this story happens, you probably already figured out, on the first Easter Sunday.

[6 : 06] and Jesus had died on Friday. Saturday was a Sabbath so everybody stayed home but on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene got up very, very early before dawn and she went to the tomb of Jesus because she wanted to finish embalming him.

They hadn't had enough time to embalm him properly on Friday after he died and so she wanted to go finish the job and so she went to the tomb but she found that the stone was rolled away and she found that the body was missing.

Now that absolutely devastated Mary. Just devastated Mary. Let me give you a little bit of background on her. Just so you're not confused, this is not Mary the mother of Jesus.

This is Mary the disciple of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and we don't know a lot about her background but we do know that she came from an extraordinarily dark past.

Tradition says that she was a prostitute before she began following Jesus. We don't know for sure if that's right. The Bible doesn't say that. It could be true but what we do know from the Gospel of Luke is that when Jesus met Mary he cast seven demons out of her.

[7 : 31] We know that from the Gospel of Luke. Now you know we don't think a lot in terms of demons and stuff but you know my guess is that one demon is fairly bad you know but seven seven like I said we don't have a lot of detail but I think it's you know fairly clear that Mary knew what it was to walk through darkness.

that Mary had a pretty tough past. And so it makes sense that when Jesus came and healed her of these seven demons you know sometimes seven is a number of completion it's kind of a symbolic number in the ancient world and so it may have been an indication that she was just completely and totally taken captive by evil.

So it makes sense that when Jesus came and freed her from all that boy she was she was following Jesus you know I mean she was absolutely completely devoted she gave financially she gave of her time she followed Jesus I mean you know traveled with him and his disciples and her devotion led her right up to the cross you know most of the disciples left Jesus when he got arrested almost all of them did but not Mary Magdalene she was there she was there in front of the cross as Jesus bled and suffered she watched his torture she sat there and stayed with him through that whole gory wicked scene hours she wouldn't leave him and you know the reason she wouldn't leave him and the reason she was so utterly and deeply devoted to this man was that

Jesus was the only light she had ever known I mean given her background Jesus had come in and brought such a transformation to her life that she wasn't going to leave him she wasn't going to leave him even if he was suffering like this he was the only protector she had ever known and you can imagine can't you imagine can't you imagine how horrible it was for her of all the people I'm sure it was terrible for everybody that knew him but it was particularly horrible for Mary Magdalene because as she watched him die she watched her hope die with him she watched darkness just snuff out the light okay now that was Friday and this story is Sunday and so she goes to the tomb for that last little bit of comfort just to care at least give the body of Jesus a little bit of dignity but even when she goes to the tomb that little bit comforts robbed from her and so she weeps and the tears she weeps were tears of utter and complete hopelessness

I mean can you imagine what was going through her mind you know here comes the darkness again surely it's going to come back it's not okay it's not going to be okay this there's nothing okay about all of this and what if the demons come back I mean can you feel the hopelessness you know it strikes me as a remarkable remarkably human moment for for Mary you know see what you think about this it seems to me that you know we live in a world with lots and lots of beautiful things I mean did you see the mountains this morning with the snow wasn't that great beautiful I love Vancouver we live in a world with beautiful things all around us wonderful relationships give us joy give us hope but at the same time there's something about death something really awful about death if you've really dealt with death closely

[11 : 56] I think you'll know what I mean there's something about death that when we let it when we let our minds kind of think about it when we let when we're quiet and we're reflective there's something very cold and sinister and frightening about death because because we all die and almost all the beautiful things in our life at some point they die I know it's morose but it's true and there's times at which it seems like when we're low when things are dark and sometimes when we can see reality most clearly this sneaking suspicion gets into our minds and into our hearts that maybe death wins I don't know if you've ever been there but that's where Mary is you know and she doesn't need encouragement she doesn't need a she doesn't need to be inspired okay um she doesn't need a hallmark card you know

I'm not against hallmark cards but the problem is you know when we face the darkness hallmark cards you know some sort of bad poetry about the sun will come out tomorrow or something like that that doesn't cut it you know it doesn't cut it for Mary here she needs something better than that and it doesn't cut it for you it doesn't cut it for me and so in this darkness she can't even see the angels I mean if demons are bad angels have got to be great but she can't see them and she can't even recognize Jesus with her eyes nothing breaks through to her except one thing one word just one word verse 16 Jesus says Mary and she knows she knows exactly she knows that voice it changes everything she knows that voice she knows the voice because it was the voice that drove the demons out it had been the voice that had taught her so much life-giving truth it was the voice that had been the light that shined into her soul and so she turns around and she says

Rabonai which is Aramaic for teacher and master just one word just one voice changed everything for her the darkness was dispelled with light and she was filled with hope and so I want to tell you I want to talk a little bit about Jesus's hope that she gives her he gives hope in two ways he gives hope about the future and he gives hope about the present okay hope about the future hope in the present first the future um Mary was Jewish right almost almost everybody in the gospels are Jewish and uh so she was steeped in the old testament and in the old testament it talks about how um how we live in just a terribly terribly broken world but the old testament gives a promise that god is going to come and heal the brokenness that god is going to come and and and make this broken world right he's going to mend it he's going to put it back together and according to the old testament one of the indications that god's you know finally getting the job done one of the indications that that the plan is starting to be rolled out in full is when god comes and get this reverses death according to the old testament you can check ezekiel uh 37 and other places god's going to come to dead bodies and give them life he's going to take the tragedy of death and turn it inside out and according to the old testament when you see god raising dead people you know uh that he's well on his way to mending the world and and correcting the brokenness of it okay go back to mary i mean this is part of why hearing this voice was such a big deal she hears just that one word mary and she knows who it is and when she realizes the implications of that when she realizes that jesus who she knew was dead because she had been there when she realizes that jesus isn't dead anymore that he's alive that he's been brought back to the brought back from the dead physically literally then she knows she knows that god's plan is being unrolled unveiled rolled out she knows that just as certain as god took a dead body of jesus and gave it life so certain one day god's going to take this broken world her broken life our broken lives our broken families the environment and he's going to right everything that's been wrong now that's that's fairly good news isn't it i mean that's really good news about the future but it's not just about the future it's also about the present look back at the story again do you notice how odd it is that um mary mary doesn't recognize anybody with her eyes did you notice that i mean that it's the the story's almost comical if it wasn't so kind of tragic it could be comical um she sees angels doesn't recognize him she sees jesus and doesn't recognize him it's only when she's called by name it's the voice it's the voice of jesus that opens her eyes okay there's an old testament verse about this let me read it to you listen closely uh this is isaiah chapter 43 this is god speaking fear not says the lord for i have redeemed you then get this get this i have

called you by name and you are mine when you pass through the waters i will be with you and when you go through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you when you walk through fire it shall you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you for i am the lord your god and i am your savior god said in the old testament i have called you by name and you are mine and when mary heard her name you know one of the um one of the worst fears for a lot of us here that you have that we have is the fear of being alone and in particular being alone when you're going through pain and suffering and death you know we don't want to die alone we don't want to suffer alone and of course mary when she's she's there at the tomb and she's she's feeling utterly alone utterly abandoned but then jesus calls her by name he brings the promise of the old testament which she probably heard from the time she was a little girl she brings he brings it right into her reality mary and he didn't need to say any more than that because it was all implied but it's as if he was saying mary mary i'm here mary i'm back i'm back and you're not i'm not going anywhere and you're mine remember isaiah 43 when you go through the waters of suffering i'm there i'm with you they won't overwhelm you because i have overcome death and if i have overcome death then i am strong i am strong enough to go with you through anything i've called you by name see the resurrection of jesus for christians it doesn't mean that suffering stops what it does mean is that jesus has overcome everything that frightens us and he is with us right in the middle of it and if he is with us then nothing can ultimately get us and then you know that's not just for mary that day it's it's for us listen to this this is from john calvin he's a famous pastor some of you will have known of him he wrote this in mary magdalene we have an image of our own calling for the only entrance to the true knowledge of christ is when he first knows us and then intimately invites us to himself not by the ordinary voice which sounds in everybody's ears indiscriminately but by the voice which he which with which he especially calls the sheep whom the father has given him you see jesus calls to every one of us individually that's part of the ministry of the holy spirit you know we believe in god the father and the son who's jesus and the holy spirit now jesus has ascended to the father that's he mentions that in verse 17 that he's ascending to the father and when jesus ascended to the father physically ascended he sent his holy spirit down upon his people and the job of the holy spirit is to help us hear the words and the teachings and the truth about who jesus is with with our minds but also the holy spirit comes and in our hearts gives us a sense that this is for me this is for me

jesus is calling me not just everybody but me jesus promised so he said in john chapter 10 my sheep hear my voice and i know them and no one will snatch them out of my hand you see a christian is someone who has heard the voice of jesus call you by name you see when christianity started it started because jesus was risen from the dead and that gave the church such good news such good news of hope for a world that desperately needed it and so when they went out they went out knowing that jesus had called each of them individually and all of them together into this new life of hope and so they went out and they shared just like mary at the end of the passage verse 18 mary goes out and she shares the news with other people and that's how the resurrection created this explosive growth of christianity because people found hope in christ and in his resurrection and they went out they shared the news and jesus spoke to other people through his spirit they heard jesus calling their name and then they turned and told the good news to others and so on and so forth and that's where we are two thousand years later it hasn't stopped it hasn't even really slowed down all over the world the church is growing because people are hearing jesus's voice the voice of the resurrected one and so that's friends the call for us tonight you need to hear the voice and you need to share the voice and some of us here have been christians for a really long time and this is all you know you remember the first time you heard the voice you're kind of thinking about it right now and nostalgizing or whatever that's great but you need you never stop needing to hear jesus's voice again call you by name he's with you now and others of you you're not christians at all and this sounds very very odd but some of you you know you wonder maybe maybe maybe that same reality is happening and if that's true let me encourage you ask ask jesus to speak up you know speak up a little louder because as you hear his voice when you truly hear his voice call you the only response that you'll be able to have is the same one that mary had teacher and master rabboni you are my master and my teacher and i give you my life and and the second thing is we firstly we need to hear the voice secondly we need to to share the voice you know when when you have received such hope you you give it away and the wonderful thing about mary she's the very first missionary she's the very first evangelist before the apostles before the professionals got involved whatever there was mary magdalene and i'm sure that's got to be an encouragement for all of us she had a darker past than probably just about all of us here and yet she was so wonderfully used and jesus wants to use you wants to use you ask jesus to open up your eyes for opportunities for you to share how you have heard the lord's voice share what he's done in your life like mary did and you will see a wonderful thing jesus calling people to himself right in front of you and and the hope of the resurrection going yet further in this land in the city in the world it's a beautiful beautiful thing let's let's pray jesus christ

[26 : 31] you are risen today hallelujah hallelujah you are risen indeed and jesus many of us have heard your voice you have heard we have heard your voice calling our name will you keep calling our name will you call the name of those who haven't really heard you yet for whom you are just kind of a historical figure a good teacher lord you are more than that so work in our hearts that we might be a people who like mary magdalene go from darkness to great light from hopelessness and despair to great joy and great hope that's who we want to be but we're blind so you've got to do it so we look to you we listen amen