

The Resurrection to Eternal Life

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Date: 19 September 2004

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, I pray that these words may be your words and that we will all hear them. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. I don't know about you, but if after my death my name was dragged through the mud, I do not think I would be happy.

And this is precisely what has happened with Mary of Magdala, Mary Magdalene. Magdala was a fishing town approximately midway between Tiberias and Capernaum.

She's called Mary Magdalene in the way that Jesus is called Jesus the Nazarene. But rather sadly, this woman has received such a bad press throughout several thousand years of history that her name is not a good name in human opinion.

Indeed, our word Magdalene, which is a negative word, derives from Magdalene. This is the third and last of our little mini-series on the Gospel of John.

[1 : 1 7] And today I want to focus on what happened at the tomb, according to the passage that we just read. I'm thinking first of all about that Friday afternoon late, when the body of Jesus had been taken from the cross and when he was buried.

And I'm thinking also of the Sunday morning, when he rose from the dead. A situation in which Mary of Magdala is indeed very prominent.

So let's look first of all, and I'd be grateful if you could turn up that particular passage from John chapter 19, which is on page 108.

On the Friday afternoon, it was now evident that Jesus was dead, and the two criminals crucified with him were also dead.

And in the minds of the authorities, these three bodies would have been taken and thrown into an unmarked pit at some distance from the city, a place where criminals were buried after their execution.

[2 : 3 3] The twelve disciples of Jesus, of course, are nowhere to be seen. So it falls to two other men, who will take responsibility for decently disposing of the body of Jesus.

One of them is a man named Joseph, apparently a wealthy estate owner from a city called Arimathea in the area of Judea, not too far distant from Jerusalem.

According to Luke's account, Joseph of Arimathea was one of the few voices raised at the trial of Jesus the previous night. And here he is requesting the body of Jesus to be put in a family tomb, which has recently been excavated near the place of the execution.

Nicodemus is likewise eminent. We meet Nicodemus in chapter 3, who came to speak with Jesus secretly at night. In John chapter 7, we meet Nicodemus again as one who once again stood up for Jesus in terms of due process, which was not being invoked at that time.

He comes bringing spices to embalm the body and linen cloths to wrap the body in and a linen napkin for the head of our Lord.

[4 : 04] These were both highly eminent men. Nicodemus came from a very distinguished family of Jewish aristocrats. I guess these were not men used to, shall we say, menial work that would have been done by servants or slaves.

But here they are, physically taking the body of Jesus, anointing it, and wrapping it, and taking it to the place of burial.

Of course, they were religious men as well. And the handling of a corpse was not something that was permitted in that religion. John's very description of these two men, brief as it is, indicates the evangelist John's honouring of these two men, which indicates as well, most likely, that they were deeply honoured within the early church.

We come now to the Sunday morning. Mary is obviously deeply concerned to know that all things have been done decently in regard to the interment of the Lord.

And she and other women come early to the place of the tomb, and to their horror, they find that the rolling stone has been removed from the tomb, and the tomb is unsealed.

[5 : 26] It does not appear that they investigated what was inside the tomb, but they immediately jumped to the conclusion that the body had been taken and dumped, presumably, in that unmarked grave at some distance away.

And doubtless, the thoughts in her mind, and the minds of those with her, was that they would never know where he was buried.

Can you imagine your circumstances if a loved one who had passed on whose body was treated in that way, and you would never know where he or she was laid to rest.

So Mary and the other women rushed to the disciples. They have taken the body of the Lord, she says, and we do not know where they have laid him.

And of course her fear is that they perhaps will never know where they have laid him. Peter and John, the author of the gospel, run to the tomb.

[6 : 29] John the younger outruns Peter, and deferentially waits for Peter's arrival. And they look inside and the body indeed is gone.

But the thing that leaps out of the text and that obviously leapt into their minds when they looked inside was the presence of these grave cloths and the napkin.

The text absolutely labours this particular point. Clearly therefore the body had not been stolen. Human hands had not taken this body.

For had the body been stolen who would have unwrapped it? Here are five major wounds in the body of this man. Bloodied.

Messy. So had the body been stolen it would not have been unwrapped beforehand. The disciples do not believe in the resurrection at this point.

[7 : 36] The text tells us that. So we can only conjecture that perhaps they thought that somehow Jesus had been taken straight from that situation to heaven alongside the Father.

But they are clearly mystified as they return to their homes. I think we ought to take very great note of this detail about the grave cloths.

This is clear evidence that human hands have not removed the body of Jesus from the tomb. The cloths are silent witness to the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus.

Meanwhile Mary is herself back at the tomb apparently still thinking that the body of Jesus had been taken and further dishonoured.

Mary of Magdala is a group belongs to a group of wealthy women according to Luke's Gospel chapter 8 who financially provided for the ministry of Jesus and the disciples.

[8 : 46] The text in that particular passage in Luke 8 suggests that she is a wealthy well-connected woman. We do not know her age.

It is often assumed with no reason at all that she was young but we do not know. She may have been a middle-aged or older person. That passage in Luke tells us that she was one from whom seven spirits had been cast out but no further details are given.

I want to mention three ways in which this woman's white name has been dragged through the mud over 2,000 years. First of all in the second century the Gnostic movement which was a mystical movement sort of connected with Christianity but not true to it which believed that there was no physical reality about the incarnation or the resurrection of Jesus.

It was please do not misunderstand me it was radically feminist radically is the operative word. It was strongly opposed the male leadership of the apostles and it made Mary of Magdalene someone who had seen the resurrection which they didn't believe happened but in some way a resurrection they threw up Mary as a kind of icon or symbol of someone who was against Peter and against the male apostles.

Clearly that is a silly idea since Mary is so deeply honoured in a gospel written by John the closest of close friends to Peter.

[10 : 33] She is honoured along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who stood by Jesus in circumstances that the other disciples did not and who are deeply concerned that the body of Christ which had been so humiliated in death would not be humiliated in burial.

The second occasion in which Mary was dishonoured in history was in 591 AD by Pope Gregory the Pope who gave us the Gregorian calendar.

He preached a sermon in that year which has come down to us in which he quite wrongly identified Mary of Magdala with the sinner of Luke chapter 7 the woman who was a sinner who may well have been a prostitute.

Clearly though the Pope declared that Mary was that prostitute that woman in Luke chapter 7 anointed Jesus' body with ointments clearly she enticed men with anointing her own body as well he said he said that she was one from whom seven spirits had been cast out therefore she had all seven of the seven deadly sins she was as bad as bad could be therefore what the Pope did was in fact very bad exegesis of texts there is no reason in the world to connect Mary of Magdala with the sinner woman of Luke chapter 7 and indeed no reason in the world to connect Mary of Magdalene with Mary of Bethany whom we meet in John chapter 12 very quietly in 1969 the Roman Catholic Church issued a statement which exonerated Mary Magdalene from this calumny thirdly and more recently the Da Vinci

Code by Dan Brown piggybacking on a book written a few years earlier called Holy Grail Holy Gospel said that Jesus and Mary were sexually intimate no evidence of course for this at all they had a child it is alleged his name was Sarah after Jesus died in Palestine not raised from the dead of course Mary and Sarah migrated to France so metaphorically Mary according to this is the Holy Grail in quotes that is the chalice and this child is the Holy Blood hence the title of that book upon which Dan Brown depends so much Holy Grail Holy Blood and would you believe it it's hard to believe but millions now do that this child Sarah married into a French dynasty which in turn assumed the kingship of the throne of France well this is incredible fiction pure fiction we might say impure fiction but millions believe it rather what comes out of the documents from the era namely the gospel of

[13 : 47] John is that this is a woman not to be calumniated not someone whose name should be dragged through the mud as it has been for two thousand years but a woman to be honoured she was among those who unlike the disciples stood with Jesus in his agony of crucifixion she was one unlike the disciples but like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who cared profoundly that Jesus receive a decent burial in a place where that place of burial would be known thirdly she is honoured because she this woman receives the greatest of great honours that could have ever occurred namely she is the first human being to whom the risen Christ appeared not to the disciples but to this woman was given the honour of the one to whom the Lord appeared further she is commissioned by Jesus to go and tell the disciples

I go to my father and your father she is rightly being called the apostle to the apostles well so much for my attempt to rehabilitate Mary of Magdalene but Mary would have me say that there is a far more serious and profound message in this scripture than what I have said about her it is of course focused on Christ that he really did die that he truly had been buried and that he truly had been raised alive from the dead the body was gone from the tomb the grave cloths are still there the body has not been removed by human hands he appears alive to Mary and later that day to the other disciples and for some days afterwards he speaks with them he eats with them he is touched physically by them the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead is as much a fact of history as the tragic events of the day of 9-11 the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith without which there would be no Christian faith the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the hope of the human race it tells us that evil the evil of Judas the evil of Caiaphas the evil of Pilate does not prevail it tells us that even in the midst of evil surrounding us that the ethical life is worth living because we are on the side of God who raised his son from death a death which was brought about by evil the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead tells us that it is good to live a good life a righteous life an upright life an ethical life notwithstanding the evils that are around us the resurrection of

Jesus Christ from the dead tells us that Jesus really did bear our sins as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 the resurrection of Jesus is the proof and the confirmation of the atonement the resurrection of the dead tells us that while we mourn the loss of loved ones that their lives are hid with Christ in God and when Christ who is our life appears they will appear with him in glory but the love of a man and a woman or children and parents in this life has not been for nothing to be separated forever by death death is the enemy of friendship and love but Christ has defeated that enemy and so I will see my Anita again and my

Anita will see me again because we both belong to the Lord Jesus what a great spur that should be for us to bring the gospel to our family and friends if they do not yet know the Lord the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the great symbol that this mucked up world is not the end of the story that God will tell the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the end from the dead is the beginning of what the end will be the first fruits of the resurrection harvest eye has not seen nor heard nor has entered the heart of man the good things that God has prepared for those who love him so we are born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

[19 : 13] I am the resurrection and the life says the Lord those who believe in me though they die yet shall they live and those who live and believe in me will never die Amen and no can by an an an Waiting allemaal in