

The Personal Touch of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in John chapter 20, and looking at these well-known words from verse 11.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. 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've taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they've laid him. Having said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, 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.

Jesus said unto her, Mary, and so on. Now, the scene we have before us here is an incredibly visual, graphic scene.

[1 : 0 8] It's very powerful. It's a sort of scene that I'm sure we have read over and over and over again, and yet when we read it slowly and read it carefully, we can never but be moved and affected by it.

It is just one of these very, very graphic, very powerful scenes that we have in Scripture. And it must have been an amazing incident, particularly for those who were caught up in it.

Mary, John, Peter, these people would never, ever, ever forget that morning.

They would never forget the incident and all that was tied up in it. It really is quite a remarkable incident. And in it here we see something of the glory, something of the power and the might of God.

And we see in it here the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, as we know, is at the very heart of the Christian gospel. And as Paul puts it so tellingly, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then are you still in your sins?

[2 : 2 6] And that's one of the reasons why the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been under attack over the centuries. So many people have written so much, so many people have lectured so much, and so many people have tried to, in one way or another, to disprove the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, because it is so central to the Christian faith.

People cannot deny the crucifixion of Jesus. It is such a historical fact that nobody can deny it. And nobody really is trying to deny it.

But the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so divine. It is so out of the ordinary. It is so amazing.

And yet it is what Jesus himself foretold and prophesied was going to happen, that this, which is such a key and central part of the Christian faith, has been attacked over and over.

Not just from without the church, but even from within. And the devil, of course, is behind that. Because that is, he realized that this is one of the key areas to try and attack the Christian faith.

[3 : 45] Now, from verse 11 to verse 18, we have that well-known incident where Jesus meets with Mary. But the chapter opens with Mary at the tomb very early in the morning.

In fact, as we read there, it's still dark. Well, it was still dark that we find Mary coming to the tomb. And there's no doubt whatever that it is love that propelled Mary forward to the tomb.

You remember that Mary had lived, in the earlier part of her life, she had lived a very tormented life. A very difficult life.

And she had been delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ. And the freedom and the liberty, the newness, the thrill that Mary experienced from this deliverance was such that her love for the Lord was an incredible love.

She was so devoted. She was so committed. In fact, you would almost say her love was obsessive. It was almost an obsessive love. Now, I know, I have to be careful maybe using the word obsessive, because there can be kind of darker connotations with that word.

[4 : 56] But the word obsession, it can be defined as a fixed idea. And that is certainly, if we're using that translation, that is exactly how it was in the experience of Mary.

It was just this fixed idea. And Mary really is an example to us of the kind of commitment and zeal and passion that we really should have.

And, you know, there are times when you come to the Bible and you look at these people and you say to yourself, Oh, I wish I was like that. I wish I had that kind of heart. I wish I had that kind of commitment.

Mary was so caught up that nothing would satisfy her until she found Jesus. Now, of course, when Mary comes to the tomb, she gets a real shock, because as we see, the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, and she finds that the tomb is empty.

And so she runs to Peter and to John, and she tells them, They've taken away, that's what she says, They've taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they've laid him.

[6 : 04] Now, of course, Mary, at this particular point, has not understood about the resurrection. And in those days, there were grave robbers.

And there was also, she didn't know what had happened, there was a possibility because of the hatred of the Jews, you remember, the leaders, the chief priests and the elders, they couldn't do enough to hurt, to harm, to defile Jesus.

It was like, you know, when you read about Jesus' trial, and you read about his crucifixion, it seems to be that they're venting their anger.

It seemed to have been just like a boiler ready to explode. And it has exploded. And they're giving rain to their hatred, the absolute hatred that they had for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because it tells us, for instance, in Isaiah chapter 52, just before we come into Isaiah 53, that great prophetic passage about the Lord Jesus Christ, that his visage, his face, was marred more than any...

[7 : 15] In other words, he was unrecognizable. They had so battered and pummeled and abused him, just with the absolute venom and hatred that they had.

And as we know, crucifixion was... It said those who were crucified died a thousand deaths. It was the most painful, lingering, torturous death known.

And so it wouldn't be without, I suppose, or going beyond the realms of reason, to think that it is possible that even in death, some had come to defile the body, to take it away and to do even more disservice to it.

Maybe that kind of thought was running through Mary's mind. And maybe she said, that's what they've done. Anyhow, she goes running to Peter and John to tell them what has happened.

And of course, they, in turn, they run to the grave. Now, I think we can understand by studying the word that John was the younger of the two.

[8 : 19] Certainly, he was the faster of the two. And he got there to the tomb before Peter. And when John gets there, he doesn't go in. But he stoops in and he looks in.

Peter, on the other hand, typical of Peter, comes racing up to the tomb. He doesn't stop. He goes straight in. And it's very interesting, really, when you look at personalities and you look at characters.

Because one of the great things, maybe we mentioned that this morning, when a person is converted, their personality doesn't change. Yes, the Lord will conform people to the image of Christ.

But it is according to their own personalities. And that's one of the great things about the Christian faith, is that Christians aren't cloned like one. People aren't cloned like ministers or elders, just as well.

But there is only one that we are seeking to follow, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's the beauty of the Christian faith. People's individuality, people's personality, people's character is still there and shines through.

[9 : 31] And that's what we find with Peter and John. They're so different, totally different. Peter's the impetuous. Peter's always on the run. And that's exactly what we would expect of Peter and what we'd expect of John.

John is a reflective one. And he comes and he stops. He stoops down. He looks in. And he takes stock of what's there. Peter comes bolting up behind.

You can almost see him barging John out of the way, straight into the tomb. He's got to see for himself. There we see the uniqueness and the individuality of people.

Now, when they looked in there, what they saw, and I think we've mentioned this before, they saw the grave clothes lying there. And it's particularly the head, the napkin, or the part that would be over the head of Jesus, that is probably what gives us the greatest clue to it all.

It's lying there. And the verb folded up actually can be translated to be twirled. It's got the idea of being all twirled up. And that's how the head part was.

[10 : 42] And that gives us a clue that Jesus rose up through the grave clothes. Because if we were looking at them simply being discarded, the grave clothes discarded, you would say to yourself, well, maybe Jesus took them off when he rose from the dead.

But the very fact that the head part is twirled, somebody said it's like the chrysalis, almost like where the butterfly comes out of. There it is, it's twirled as it would have been wrapped around his head.

It's still in that shape. It's still wrapped like that. But it's empty. And that would indicate to us just what is reckoned, is that Jesus, when he rose from the dead, that he rose right through the grave clothes.

Because he didn't need them again. Like Lazarus, when he was taken out, they had to take the grave clothes off him. He was incapable of dealing with these things himself.

Anyway, the picture switches from Peter and John, because Peter and John, they're there, they've taken note of what happened. But they went away. But Mary stayed where she was, and she stayed there weeping.

[11 : 57] Mary hadn't grasped what had happened. John had. Because it tells us there, then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw.

So you see what happens, the order that happens here. After Peter had gone in, we find then John, he in turn, he goes in. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed.

And what he believed really simply is saying is that all the teaching that Jesus had given beforehand, remember how Jesus was telling them what was going to happen, but they weren't getting it.

They weren't grasping it. It was like at that moment, it all came into place. It clicked. And John was saying, yes, I've got it. All these things, they came together.

And you can see John just turn away. Why did John go away? Because he knew Jesus wasn't there. He wasn't going to search for Jesus. The tomb was the place of the dead.

[13 : 01] Jesus wasn't dead. He was living. He wasn't going to look for the living amongst the dead. And so John and Peter make their way away, make their way off. But Mary stays at the tomb.

And she is blinded, as it were, blinded by love. Love, people sometimes say love is blind. And in a sense, there was an element of that here, because Mary couldn't see anything.

Beyond the fact that Jesus had been put in that tomb, he wasn't there. But where was he? He must be somewhere around here. And there's no doubt, but that Mary is all confused and perplexed.

Her heart is broken. She's crying there. And she begins to search there, just crying, looking for Jesus.

But she's looking for him in the wrong place. But you know, the wonderful thing is this, that because she's searching for Jesus, and she wants Jesus above anybody or anything else, she will find Jesus.

[14 : 09] And that's exactly what happens. Even although initially she's looking for him in the wrong place, she's looking for him amongst the dead, and he's living. But Jesus will be discovered by Mary, because Jesus always reveals himself to those who truly seek him.

But initially Mary's looking in the wrong place. And you know, there are many people like that. There are many people who begin in life to become dissatisfied with life.

They don't know what's happening. And there's an unrest to start. Maybe there's some people in here tonight like that. I don't know. All of a sudden, or maybe not all of a sudden, but gradually, life doesn't produce the kick it used to.

There's something missing. Beforehand, when you went out, and you lived life, it was like you were firing on all cylinders.

Life was good. Life was good. But life as you know it is changing. And no longer are you firing on all cylinders.

[15 : 18] Maybe not even firing on three cylinders. It's like you're misfiring, and you don't know what's wrong. The thing is, the Lord's at work. And sometimes people begin to go down different roads, and they're beginning to search here and search there.

Ultimately, they're searching for Christ, but they're not sure. If you ask them what's up, they can't tell you. Maybe you're like that tonight. You just don't know.

But you feel mixed up. You feel confused. My dear friend, I believe that that's the Lord at work in your heart. Gradually, things will become clearer, and you'll begin to understand.

But at the moment, it might be a fog. It might be confusion. You may feel blinded, just the way that Mary was at that particular time. But life isn't fulfilling the way it used to be.

And I think we must be very slow to judge as we look at people, and observe people, because sometimes, people may be an awful lot closer to the kingdom than we realize.

[16 : 27] There might be people not in here tonight. There might be people out in the streets in Stornway, and they're acting in a very strange way. And there might be people who are all mixed up, and yet they're very close to the kingdom.

Because maybe the Lord is dealing with them, and they don't know how, they don't know what. But maybe within the next month, there might be people tonight that you would write off, people that you'd say, I don't know what's happening to him.

I don't know about her. They look far away from the kingdom, and you might be even saying, there's no point in speaking to them. And they might only be a step away from the kingdom of God. You see, sometimes people act in a very strange way as the Lord is dealing with them.

But the wonderful thing is this, that those who truly seek will find, and that's just about what's to happen to Mary. And so we find that Mary, she's there, she's weeping, and as she looks into the tomb, and there she sees two angels.

She carries on weeping. And the appearance of the angels, this is what's quite remarkable about Mary. Her love for Christ is such that nothing is going to shift her.

[17 : 40] Nothing is going to put her off track. Here are these angels who caused grown men to run away, caused soldiers to run away, and here is Mary.

Is she running away? No. She's only concerned about finding Christ. I must find Jesus Christ. That's the only thing that matters to Mary.

And my dear friend, if you have that urgency in your heart tonight, and you're saying to yourself, you know, I hope that there are souls in here tonight, and that's the way they are.

That there is a hunger in their heart for Jesus. And they're saying in the depth of their heart, I must find, this has gone on long enough. It's more, it's past time for me to come to peace with God and Jesus Christ.

Well, tonight, I would urge you to go to him. Because he's here. Go to him even now, and ask him to become Lord of your life. Because if you're truly seeking, you will find.

[18 : 46] And then when we find that Mary, after speaking to the angels, and hearing what the angels have said to her, because they're saying, look, he's not here.

Why are you weeping? He's not here. He's risen. 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.

And then after speaking to them, she turns around, and she sees this man there, who she assumes is the gardener.

And of course, she doesn't recognize that it's Jesus. And in a sense, although it's a very visual, a very graphic picture, in a sense, there's almost, if you were looking at it, and I mean that in all reverence, there's almost something humorous about it.

Because here is the broken-hearted Mary, blinded by her tears, speaking to Jesus, and saying to Jesus, do you know where Jesus is?

[19 : 52] Because I must find him. And Jesus is just about to say to her, and he does so just with one word.

Now, the amazing thing here is, people will say, how did Mary not recognize Jesus? Was it the tears? But it would appear that there was some change in Jesus when he rose from the dead.

It would appear that the resurrected body has some change. It's the same body as was laid in the grave. But there is obviously a change, because you will find that in Jesus' appearances, as he appeared to his disciples and followers, there wasn't an immediate recognition.

It wasn't like straightaway, oh, there's Jesus. But there was a kind of a gradual dawning at times. It's the Lord. You remember on the shores of Galilee, they didn't recognize, and then it was John said to Peter, it's the Lord.

There was this awareness. And of course, there were differences, because the body is now fitted for living and operating in different dimensions.

[21 : 01] In other words, the body could appear and disappear, could go through walls, it was just, it obviously functioning and operating at a different level into the spirit world.

But you know, the wonderful thing is when we see Jesus resurrected and we see Jesus operating and Jesus living, having risen from the dead, this is our guarantee that what happened to him will happen to us as well.

We also, in Christ, will rise. Isn't it a beautiful thought? A wonderful thought. We've said it before, but you know, we often talk about the grave being so final.

It's not. It's temporary. It's temporary. I know the grave is a painful place. And it's one of the sore things in life when we have to bid farewell to those that we love.

And it's probably one of the most powerful moments when the turf is rolled over the grave. It's like closing it finally once and for all.

[22 : 15] But it's not. It's only a temporary resting place for the body. Because the soul that sleeps in Jesus, even the body, the body that is disintegrating, is united in a marvelous way to Christ.

The soul, the shorter catechism puts it in a beautiful way which is built upon Scripture, the souls of believers are at their death, made perfect in holiness.

we weren't and never will be in this world. But at death there is this immediate change. And the souls are made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory.

And their bodies being still united to Christ do rest in the grave till the resurrection. is not a wonderful thought.

What a comfort that is to know that even the body is united in a mysterious way. But it's a fact. And that body will rise again to be reunited with the soul.

[23 : 26] That's a great Christian hope. And that is part of what the resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about. That is our hope that just as Jesus has risen from the dead, so we will also.

And at that moment as Mary through her blinded, the tears blinding her eyes, she's speaking to the garden and she said, wait, tell me, tell me where you're and I'll take the body.

And Jesus speaks but one word and he says to her, Mary. And in that word there is instant recognition. It's personal. And that's how Jesus deals.

Jesus deals personally with us. My dear friend, if you have never discovered Jesus' personal touch, Jesus' personal voice to you, I would say to you tonight, Lord, speak into my heart.

Help me to hear beyond the words that I might be speaking but to hear the words of Christ. Help me, Lord, to hear personally so that my soul might live just in the way that Mary heard these words.

[24 : 32] Lord, speak to me personally, individually, intimately. Not one word from Jesus changed everything for Mary.

The transformation in Mary in that moment. There she is blinded by tears. Oh, where's my Lord? Mary, the transformation was extraordinary.

You could almost see her just, her face would light up. The joy. And that's why she just said straight away, Rabboni, which means teacher, master, Lord.

You're the one I want. And straight away, Jesus has to say to her, Mary, don't cling to me. Because obviously, Mary is rushing to Jesus.

It's not that Jesus is saying to her, don't, there's a translation which says, don't touch me. That's not what it is. Jesus sees that Mary wants to cling to him and never let him go.

[25 : 38] And Jesus says, that's not the way it's going to be, Mary. It's a spiritual relationship. It's not a physical one. It's spiritual.

You have me as Lord. I am going away. I am going to ascend to my Father. But the wonderful thing is, I am still with you. I will be your Lord.

The Holy Spirit will communicate me to your heart. So that what Mary was to enjoy was the same thing as you and I will enjoy. We do not have a physical relationship with Jesus, but we have a spiritual one.

And for these early disciples, it must have been very difficult. because they were used to the physical presence of Christ. Even although it was a spiritual relationship, it was physical in the sense that his presence was there with them.

But they were now going to live by faith in the sense that he would no longer be there. His physical presence would be no longer there. And this is what Jesus is having to teach Mary.

[26 : 44] It's going to be different, Mary. That's a lesson Thomas had to learn. Later on in the chapter, Thomas is saying, unless I can put my finger into the nail prints, unless I can actually touch, I won't believe.

And then, remember these beautiful words of Jesus when he revealed himself to Thomas and he said, come on Thomas, do what you were saying. Thomas didn't have to. He always said, my Lord and my God and Jesus said to him, blessed are those whom having not seen yet believe.

That's us. Jesus is talking about our time and all who would follow on who wouldn't see physically Jesus but would only see him with the eye of faith and believe in him.

And my dear friend of tonight, you are believing in Jesus, accepting Jesus, then his blessing is on you. That's what he says, blessed are those whom having not seen yet believe.

what is this incident or this experience or all these things mean to you? As we said, they were very powerful and they are powerful.

[27 : 59] They're very graphic. I hope that there's nobody in here and just looks on this as a great story, that you do believe it and say, yes, that's true, it's wonderful, and leave it at that.

this is so meaningful. It's at the very, as we said earlier, the very heartbeat of the Christian faith. And I want you tonight, if you have never made peace with God, as we were talking about this morning, peace with God, if you've never made peace with God in Jesus Christ, then tonight, this risen Christ who spoke to Mary is able tonight to speak to you and to breathe life into your soul, spiritual life.

Will you ask him now? Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray that we may hear the word of the living God in our heart.

We pray for any soul in here tonight who is still outside the kingdom. Lord, draw them in. We pray that the drawing power of Christ may indeed work in souls.

We thank thee for the word of God revealing to us how things are. We thank thee, Lord, for this great truth where we are told about the resurrection and we're told of the personal way in which Jesus deals with souls.

[29 : 38] Bless us then, we pray tonight. May we all know the personal touch of Jesus in our own heart. Take us home safely, we pray. Forgive us our sin.

For Jesus' sake, we ask it. Amen. Amen.