

# THE RISEN JESUS HEALS MARY MAGDALENE'S GRIEF

## (JOHN 20:11-18)

People deal with grief in different ways. Thomas needed to be alone. Some find comfort and reassurance surrounded by companionship of others. This morning we want to consider Mary Magdalene. From what I can tell, Mary is the type of person who deals with grief by staying busy, getting things done and taking care of business.

On the third day, Mary came to the tomb while it was still dark (Jn.20:1). Perhaps her mind was replaying the horrific events of the last few days making it impossible to sleep. Mark tells us that Mary was planning to anoint Jesus' body. This is one task she could take care of, so she thought. But when she arrived the stone was rolled away. She ran to Peter and John and told them that someone had taken Jesus' body away. John and Peter raced to the tomb. After seeing the embalming cocoon undisturbed, they still did not understand that Jesus had resurrected. Verse 11 says that Mary returns to the tomb overcome with sorrow and grief.

I want you to notice three things about Mary's initial encounter with the resurrected Jesus. First, Mary *missed* Jesus. Second, Mary *heard* Jesus. Third, Mary *held on* to Jesus.

### FIRST, IN HER GREAT SORROW **MARY MISSED JESUS.**

OK. We need to know more about Mary to understand her grief. Who is Mary Magdalene? Before she met Jesus, we know that her life was tortured by seven demons. It's hard to imagine what demon possession is like. But, I can't imagine a person filled with seven demons fits in real well in the social lives of others. It's easy to imagine the ridicule she endured. Mary was probably not the kind of girl your son brings home for dinner. In her presence moms would grab their small children and whisk them away. How did that feel? Imagine her sense of alienation, loneliness, confusion, and hopelessness. And yet, one day, out of His mercy and compassion, The Lord Jesus stopped and set her free from the havoc and terror these demons had caused in her life. Image her joy and relief. Because of Jesus her life would never be the same

Mary was also from Magdala, which was a resort city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was the Acapulco of Palestine, a place of both luxury and corruption. To add Magdala or Corinth to a woman's name could have suggested an immoral lifestyle. I wonder if prostitution was the only way she could survive? Was Mary Magdalene the prostitute who anointed Jesus with oil and wiped His feet with her hair? Whatever wickedness or torture her demons inflicted on her it was cruel and dehumanizing. And Jesus set her free from all of that.

As one who traveled with Jesus, she saw Him raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. She also witnessed Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. Along with the others she heard Jesus say several times that He had to die and that He would conquer death and be raised up on the third day. Jesus was so clear on this that His enemies sealed the tomb and posted an armed

guard to prevent the disciples from stealing the body. But just like all the rest of the disciples, she was filled with so much sorrow and disappointment she couldn't even imagine such a thing.

When she came to the tomb very early on Sunday morning she didn't come looking for a resurrected Jesus. She came to anoint his embalmed body. In her deep grief she missed the clues.

We understand her emotional collapse. The way He died was tortuous and terrible. His death discredited everything He said about Himself. Was He a fraud? Was He deceived? He claimed to forgive sins. Did He really have the authority to say that? He claimed to be the Messiah. However, He couldn't stop a few wicked men in a small corner of the world from their evil acts. How could he possibly be the King of Kings and Lord of the universe? Everything she believed in vaporized when Jesus was killed. And, to make matters worse someone took his body. They probably planned to make a mockery out of that as well. It was too much for her and so she just wept.

She looked into the tomb and saw two angels. When they asked her why she was weeping she didn't say, "Oh these are tears of joy, Jesus must have risen from the dead." No. She said, "They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid Him."

Although Jesus was standing there right next to her, she thought He was the gardener and tells him that if he had taken the body that she would take care of it. Until Jesus broke through her despair and doubt she was unable to even conceive of the resurrection.

What was Jesus doing with Mary? Why did Jesus prolong her grief? Here's what Jesus was doing. He was harnessing the chaos and the despair of her life. He brought Mary to the point where there was no place on this earth for her to turn. Everything and everyone had failed her. Nothing is going right. There is nothing in her ability or circumstance that can give her any hope. She can't even complete a simple thing like putting some spices on his grave clothes. She has lost all ability to control the circumstances of her life that give her meaning. She has no one to turn to, no one to give her any answers, no one to solve her problem. She has no solutions.

And you know what? She's now ready to meet the resurrected Jesus. Because she needed to know that nothing in her world was big enough to satisfy the yearnings of her heart. The resources of her world ran out! Toplady wrote,

"Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul I to the fountain fly, Wash me Savior, or I die."

The risen Jesus brings all of His sheep to this same place where all the money, sex, stuff, jobs, and success we can muster can't satisfy our deepest need. We try our best to milk eternal life out of all of them but they can't deliver. Only Jesus can. He is the ***author and the perfecter of our faith*** (Heb. 12:2). When someone authors a book He is the one who gives it birth and he is the one who gets credit for it. When nothing else could. When Jesus opened her heart to receive Him, she knew that the only explanation for her new hope was in the miracle of His resurrected grace and in no other.

The only one who can make sense out of this insane world you live in is the risen Jesus! The only one who can weave together the fabric of injustice, abuse, disappointment, failure, mental disorders and sin and harness that all for His glory and for your eternal joy is the risen Jesus. He is alive and transforming all things ultimately for His glory and the joy of His people. If you think that you can control your life you are living an illusion. Don't wear yourself out trying to be your own savior. *"Lay your deadly doings down – down at Jesus' feet. Stand alone in Him gloriously complete."* and rest in His grace.

The gospel of the resurrected Jesus had to begin with Mary. She's the best candidate to convey the grace of Jesus. Mary Magdalene was on the outside of every outside/inside category possible. She was a woman not a man, with a background of demon possession not sanity. She was a layperson, not a rabbi. In the eyes of the world she was nobody. However, the gospel of the Living Jesus meets hopeless, helpless nobodies and raises us up with a joy unspeakable. The gospel is not that you give God a perfect record, but that He gives you His perfect record. The only thing she had to offer was brokenness, grief, doubt and despair. The risen and living Jesus conquered them all.

## **SECOND: MARY HEARD HIS VOICE**

When Jesus called Mary "Woman." she didn't recognize Him. However, when He called her *by her name* everything changed. When He said, "Mary," when He called her name it was like deep calling to deep. John says that Jesus *"calls His sheep by name and He leads them out."* (10:2).

I always knew when my mother called my name. It was unmistakable. With her charming southern accent she is the only one who uses two syllables to say my name. She didn't say "Jim". She said "Gee-umm." No one said my name like my mom. And when she did there was a database of unconditional, nurturing and sacrificial love connected to that voice. Of course when she called me James Richard, I knew I was in trouble. But when she called my name there was an unmistakable love that resonated in my heart. The same thing happens now when Debby or my girls call out my name. I would recognize their voices out of any crowd. I know them and they know me. Connected to their voice is the blessing of their patience, forbearance, kindness, and love. There is a sweetness and beauty that I recognize immediately and intuitively. That's why our phone bill is what it is.

When Jesus called Mary by her name she knew that it was Jesus. He had called her by her name hundreds of times. And no one knew Mary better than Jesus. Jesus knew everything about Mary. He knew every sin, every grief, and every stupid thing she ever did and yet He loved her anyway. The first time He called her name He cast out seven demons and gave her peace. Every time Jesus spoke her name she heard grace. Do you think she ever felt worthy to be among the disciples and sharing a room with Jesus' mother Mary? When Jesus called her name she heard truth, mercy, forgiveness, encouragement, hope, joy, dignity, and love. Why is it that we are embarrassed when we forget someone's name? Aren't we worried they will sense they are not worth being remembered? When she heard Jesus say her name she heard an unconditional love found nowhere on this earth.

She did not recognize Jesus in his physical presence. But His love for her was impossible to miss when He called her name. And when He did, the scales fell off and she recognized Jesus.

Have you heard Jesus call your name? I don't mean audibly. Have you heard your name called by the holy Lord in such a way that you know you would surely die because He is so holy and righteous? Yet, in that naming, you also hear mercy. He lifts you up and forgives you by His grace? Have you heard Jesus call you by name with holiness and grace?

Beloved, He calls you by your name. He doesn't say, "*Take a number.*" He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your name. He knows everything about you. He knows the end from the beginning and yet He loves you anyway with an irrevocable and unassailable love. He knows your weaknesses; he knows your sins and vulnerabilities; he knows your insecurities, and your fears. When He calls you He knows your hopes and your dreams. And yet, He still calls us to Himself.

Beloved, don't let anyone or anything name you but Jesus and the Father. If you let your career name you it may call you successful today, but a year from now it may not. Your 401k may name you secure today, but tomorrow it may not. Your health may name you fit today, but tomorrow it may not. Your looks may call you pretty today, but tomorrow they may not. Your relationships may name you loveable or unlovable, but Jesus' love for you will never change. Jesus is the only one worthy of naming you. He knows you and will never leave you or forsake you. He knows you and says that He will lose none that the Father has given to him. He knows you and says that He has cast your sins as far as the east is from the west. God knows you and says that, "*If He did not spare His only Son will he not give you all things.*" He knows you and promises that someday He will transform our lowly bodies into glorious ones like the resurrected Jesus Christ. He knows you and, knowing you, He commits himself to you as you are. Everything God can be for you, because of the resurrection, He is for you in Jesus. He raises us up by calling our name and naming us as his own.

Don't let anything else name you. The power of His resurrection means that you know where your identity comes from and that through faith in the Lord Jesus you are God's child. He told Mary to tell the others, "*I am going to my Father and your Father my God and your God.*" This is our new identity in Christ. He is our heavenly Father and God. We are His children and the objects of his Divine embrace. When Mary heard Jesus speak her name she recognized Him and her sorrow was turned to joy. Can you hear Jesus calling your name? He is saying "Repent and Believe in Me. Be named by the Lord Jesus, our Father and God in heaven and no other." Don't let unworthy idols name you.

## **FINALLY, MARY HELD ON TO JESUS. (17)**

When she heard her name she said, "*Rabboni*" which in rabbinic literature is only used for God. And then she hugged Jesus with a death grip that said, "*I'm never letting you go again.*"

But Jesus...

"Mary don't hold on to me... Stop clinging to me. I have yet to ascend to the Father, your Father, My God and your God. And that is the way you are going to want to hold on to Me. Not in a sensory way. Not with the limits of this physical life. But you're going to want to hold on to Me by faith when I am in My Father's glory at His right hand. You're going to want to hold on to Me as I rule from heaven above every rule and authority in heaven and

earth. You're going to want to hold on to me or lay hold of Me as the Father approves of My sacrifice and as I rest seated next to Him in glory. Because this is where I am taking you. You will be with me seated in the heavenly place and hidden with Me there. To universalize that blessing in all the earth, I must ascend to the Father. I am sending the Holy Spirit to be with and in you. You can't hold on to me physically. To keep me here and to cling to my physical presence now is too small a blessing. And if you knew what this means you really wouldn't want to."

And neither should we. Let's not set the bar so low as to demand to see and touch Jesus now. Blessed are those who believe and don't see!

What makes this life with Christ and His resurrection hope possible? What makes it possible for Jesus to rise from the dead and be seated at the right hand of the Father to bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms? What makes these blessings possible is the cross of Christ. The sacrificial death of Jesus, which was absolutely inexorable, makes it all possible.

## **JOHNSTOWN, PA**

In 1889, Johnstown, PA experienced one of the worst natural disasters in our history. Johnstown sat at the end of a very long valley with steep walls rising up on either side. A huge dam at one end of the valley held back the waters of a large lake. When the dam broke eyewitnesses said that it was like a wave five times taller than this room. But here is what I found so shocking. When it hit, they reported that they couldn't see any water at all! That huge wave was filled with boulders and rocks, trees, locomotives and houses and **THEY WERE ALL ON FIRE!** As it crashed down the valley it sheared off everything in its path right at their roots. It was inexorable. There was no stopping it and no way out. It was horrific and scorching.

But beloved, that terror and that heat was only a faint reflection of the blast that was bearing down on our Lord Jesus in the garden. Because we underestimate God's holiness and His righteous hatred of sin, we have little idea of what Jesus has done for us.

And now, because He died in our place we can now hold on to Jesus forever and ever. And our lives, whatever they have been, are now hidden with Jesus. And when God looks at Jesus who sits at His right hand, He sees you and me through the love and the joy He takes in His Son. Jesus took our place. Jesus took the full brunt of judgment we deserved so that we would not have to. The fires of hell ripped through Jesus so that they would not fall on us who believe. No one has ever loved you like this.

Mary didn't know it at the time, but what she thought was the worst day of her life was the greatest day in all of human history. And what she thought she wanted more than anything else... was far less than what the Lord had for her. Beloved, the Lord's hand is never ultimately against His children.

So, don't miss this resurrected Lord and Savior. Don't let your sorrow, confusions, disappointments in life distract you from the risen Lord. Believe on the Lord Jesus and listen for Him to call your name. When He does it will resonate with awesome righteousness, grace, and mercy, It will come from heaven at the right hand of the Father

with all the authority of God Himself to claim you as His own and that forever and ever. "Go tell the others, I am going to my Father and My God, to Your Father and Your God." This is who God is for those who trust in the Lord Jesus. He is your Father and your God forever and ever. Believe, receive, trust, and rest in God the Father through Jesus the Son and live.

***"Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,  
the clouds you so much dread  
are filled with mercy and shall break  
with blessing on your head."  
- George Herbert***