

The Gospel of John

The First Eye Witness of the Resurrection

John 20:11-17

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing in the Gospel of John. We have arrived at the eye witnesses of the resurrection. The key person in our passage this morning is Mary Magdalene. **Mary Magdalene** was a woman who traveled with Jesus as one of his followers. Magdalene is not her last name. It is a designation added to her name to tell where she was from. The name "Mary Magdalene" is mentioned **twelve times** in the gospels and she is mentioned, as in our text, as just Mary several times as well. Mary's name designation suggests that she came from the town of Magdala, a fishing town on the west central shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is approximately 118 miles North of Jerusalem. This is about the same distance as going from Greenwood to Columbia.

Mary Magdalene as one of the women who traveled with Jesus during His ministry.

Luke 8:1-3 (NASB)

8 Soon afterward, Jesus *began* going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, ² and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

From this passage we learn that seven demons had been driven out of her. She was also giving financial support to Jesus out of her private means. This suggests that she was probably wealthy. We are also told that seven demons had been driven out of her. Mark also confirms that it is the same Mary Magdalene from our passage this morning.

Mark 16:9 (NASB)

⁹ [[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

John refers to her as only Mary in verse 11, but in verses 1 and 18, she is further identified as Mary Magdalene.

The combined narrative from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tells us that Mary Magdalene was present at the mock trial of Jesus; she heard Pontius Pilate pronounce the death sentence; and she saw Jesus beaten and humiliated by the crowd. She was one of the women who stood near Jesus during the crucifixion to try to comfort Him thus being a witness to the crucifixion of Jesus and was present at his burial. **She also has the unique distinction of being the first to witness the empty tomb and the**

first to see Jesus after His resurrection. Although this is the last mention of her in the Bible, she was probably among the 120 people in the upper room, after the ascension of Jesus, who gathered with the apostles to await the promised coming of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ All these were continually devoting themselves with one mind to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

The scriptures tell us of about ten appearances that Jesus made after His resurrection. There may have been, and probably were, many more. He appeared to Mary Magdalene. He appeared to the other women. He appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He appeared to Peter, appeared to John, appeared to the ten without Thomas, then the ten with Thomas. He appeared to seven of the apostles on the shore of Galilee, then to 500 brethren, probably on a mountain in Galilee. Acts 1 says He was with them for 40 days teaching things concerning the kingdom, and a final appearance in Acts 1 before He ascended into heaven. This was a **massive** eyewitness testimony.

Note that all of His appearances were to believers. He made no appearances to nonbelievers, with one later exception. There was one unbeliever to whom He appeared after His resurrection, and that was the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, and He stopped Saul in his tracks – and you know the story. He is the only unbeliever that our Lord ever appeared to.

His normal method of reaching the lost and convincing them of His resurrection was not by making appearances. The way He is going to proclaim the saving gospel is through the preaching of that gospel by the apostles and those who follow them: the preachers throughout redemptive history.

John tells us how ineffective the miracles were to the crowd in Jerusalem.

John 12:37 (NASB)

³⁷ But though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet they were not believing in Him.*

And Jesus Himself told us that even a resurrection from the dead would not persuade many of the Jews.

Luke 16:31 (NASB)

³¹ But he said to him, *‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’*”

There was proof of that. Not too long before His own death He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and everybody knew about it. And He had raised a couple of other people that are recorded in the gospels, and maybe more that are not recorded. It would draw a curious crowd for a short time, but many of them hung around just to see the show.

Peter, John, and the women have now seen the empty tomb but the scriptures say that they still did not fully believe. There was not an eagerness on their part to believe in a resurrection. They thought Jesus was going to setup an eternal earthly kingdom. When Jesus died, all of their expectations were shattered. Jesus did not intend to keep making appearances until the end of the age. He determined that He would make some appearances for a 40-day period, and the eyewitnesses would write what they had seen

and heard so they, as well as others, preach the resurrection from the eyewitness accounts. And by the preaching of that gospel and faith in that gospel, the Holy Spirit would bring all believers into His kingdom.

Now let us look at our text this morning.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 20:11-17 (NASB)

¹¹ But Mary was standing outside the tomb, weeping; so as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb; ¹² and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ And they *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She *said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they put Him.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing *there*, and *yet* she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Thinking that He was the gardener, she *said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you put Him, and I will take Him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus *said to her, “Mary!” She turned and *said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus *said to her, “Stop clinging 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, and My God and your God.’”

Prayer

BODY:

I. THE EMPTY TOMB.

Mary Magdalene is the first to arrive at the tomb on Sunday morning. Verse 1 tells us that she came early to the tomb while “**it was still dark**”. It was light enough that she “saw **the stone already removed from the tomb.**” Verse 2 tells us that she knew from her first early morning visit that the tomb was empty. Let's read those verses again.

John 20:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Now on the first *day* of the week (That was Sunday morning) Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and *saw the stone *already* removed from the tomb. ² So she *ran and *came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, (Who was John) and *said to them, “They have **taken** the Lord from the tomb, and **we do not know where they have put Him.**”

So we have our first eyewitness account of an empty tomb. The stone was rolled away and Mary had discovered that the body of Jesus was not there. I want to emphasize that the stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let the witnesses in. A resurrected Jesus does not need the stone to be removed. He did not need the door to be opened that night when He showed up with the apostles. He came right through the door.

She arrives. She sees the stone taken away from the tomb. She fears the worst! She is assuming that Jesus is still dead and she knows that the body is missing. So she runs to Peter and John and tells them that they, whoever "they" were, – “**have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him.**”

Does it strike you that her shock here is clear **evidence** that they had not planned to steal the body of Jesus? She does not expect a resurrection. She is not part of a plot to fake a

resurrection. They would never do that and then go out and preach and die as martyrs for something that they had faked.

In the meantime, while Mary is running to Peter and John, the other women arrive and the angels appear to them. It seems as though Mary has left before the angels appear. So she runs to Peter and John and tells them what she has seen. They in turn also run to the tomb. John makes sure we know that he outran Peter. And they also confirm that the tomb is empty.

Then Mary also returns to the tomb. Look at verses 11 and 12 to see what happens next.

II. THE APPEARANCE OF TWO ANGELS.

John 20:11-12 (NASB)

¹¹ But Mary was standing outside the tomb, weeping; so as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb; ¹² and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.

She went there initially to make sure that everything is okay. She has a little conversation with some women who were with her that maybe somebody would roll the stone so they could put some more spices on the body of Jesus to minimize the stench of decay. But she arrives there first and finds the tomb is empty. Now she has arrived back at the tomb and is weeping. She is weeping because the body of Jesus is not there.

Her tears are the tears of a broken heart. She does not understand what has happened. So she looks in and she sees two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been lying.”

By the way, the presence of angels is proof positive that the body had not been removed from the tomb by human hands, but rather that heaven had a vital interest in the resurrection of Christ. She looks in and there is the place where the body had been and there were an angel on each end.

John 20:13 (NASB)

¹³ And they *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She *said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they put Him.”

Mary was trying to process something she never, ever expected to occur. Again, there is no perception that there had been a resurrection. Even though Jesus had said He would rise, they just could not believe it. She is sobbing the tears of unbelief, and she thinks that they – whoever they are – “have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have laid Him.”

Jesus is dead and His body is gone and she does not even have the opportunity to put more spices on His body.

Before the angels apparently could say anything in response, listen to verse 14.

III. THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF JESUS.

John 20:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing *there*, and *yet* she did not know that it was Jesus.

She lingered at the tomb hoping to find Him dead. Jesus lingered at the tomb waiting to show Himself alive.

Mark tells us that Mary Magdalene was the first person that he appeared to.

Mark 16:9 (NASB)

⁹ [[Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

John 20:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Jesus *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Thinking that He was the gardener, she *said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you put Him, and I will take Him away.”

These are the first words spoken by Jesus after His resurrection, and they are to Mary Magdalene. And He says the same thing the angel said exactly: “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” And she thinks to herself, “Hmm, this must be the gardener.”

“So she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you’ve carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’” She is sure He is dead, and somebody has taken the body. She thinks Jesus is the gardener.

And, oh, by the way, every time Jesus appeared after His resurrection He had to identify Himself, because He was in a different form. He had a glorious resurrection body. And while there would have been familiar elements to that body, this was not the body that went to the cross, this was an eternal resurrection body that would never die and never be decayed. He glorified body did not look like the body they knew. So Mary did not recognize Him.

Then Jesus continues...

John 20:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Jesus *said to her, “Mary!” She turned and *said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).

When Mary heard Him call her by name she recognized it immediately. All He said was, “Mary!”

Do you remember what our Lord said in another context back in the 10th chapter of John. This is a wonderful illustration of that.

John 10:27 (NASB 1995)

²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

She knew that voice. She knew the way He said her name. Can you imagine the shock? At one moment you are weeping and are more sorrowful than you had ever been in your entire life and in the next moment you experience your most exhilarating explosive joy ever! The one thought she has in her mind is, “I don’t want to lose Him again.”

So what does she do? She takes hold of His feet and holds on tightly. She was holding on and did not want to ever let Him go away again.

John 20:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ Jesus *said to her, “Stop clinging 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, and My God and your God.”

Mary is holding on for dear life and Jesus tells her to “**Stop clinging to Me.**”

Why? Because “I have not yet ascended to the Father. I have to ascend to heaven.” His statement was not for her to “Just let go of Me now.” He is saying. “Mary, I can’t stay here, because the plan is for Me to ascend to heaven and go back to My Father.”

He had promised them that when He returned to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ and He will dwell in you which will be much better. You will have all that I am in you, and all the resources of heaven will reside in you: all the peace, all the joy, and all the power.

CONCLUSION:.

So let’s put it together. The tomb is empty. The women testify to an empty tomb. The soldiers testify to an empty tomb. Peter and John testify to an empty tomb. The folded grave clothes testify to an empty tomb. The angels testify to an empty tomb. The Sanhedrin testifies to an empty tomb, and comes up with a ridiculous concoction to explain it away. No one *ever* denied the empty tomb - no one.

So why did John give so much evidence concerning the resurrection of Christ?

The resurrection is the event by which God validates the sacrifice of Christ. All those animal sacrifices for all those centuries could never take away sin; but the one sacrifice of Christ removes sin once for all time to everyone who believes. The veil in the temple ripped when Jesus died on the cross, indicating that we now had direct access to God. God was not longer going to live in a temple and the animal sacrificial system would cease at that point. Christ was the complete and acceptable offering.

If Christ had not risen, then He would have been a liar and a fraud. The Jewish leaders would have been correct in their assessment that Jesus was a blasphemer, claiming to be God.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 (NASB)

¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

He is Lord!