

Jesus: Seen

John 20 is the climatic chapter in John's gospel, in which all of the promises of Jesus are validated. He had told His disciples (see 16:22) that "...you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." On multiple occasions He had promised them His resurrection after three days following Calvary's crucifixion. There are four scenarios in John 20: Peter and John with the empty tomb; Jesus and Mary; Jesus and the disciples in the Upper Room; and Jesus and Thomas. Our text today looks specifically at the encounter with Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

John 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. **13** 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." **14** Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** 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." **16** Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling 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, to my God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

The primary purpose of John 20 is for John to demonstrate to all who will read this gospel that Jesus was physically raised from the dead and there were multiple reliable witnesses who saw Him. John says in his first epistle (1:1-2), "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest and we have seen it, and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the father and was made manifest to us..." But in this text with Jesus and Mary we see something profound about the relationship between the genuine believer and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. **The genuine disciples of Jesus have a profound affection for Him (v. 11a)**

Peter and John, having seen the empty tomb and the suggestive arrangement of the grave clothes, immediately flee the tomb knowing that "something's up." Verse 11 says, "but Mary stood weeping outside the tomb." She was weeping because she loved Him. She had arisen early in the morning while it was dark to take spices to apply to His dead body. She was breaking custom by going with women alone outside the city gates before the sun had arisen. All because she loved Him and wanted to express her affection for Him. Her affection came from her experience of having been delivered by Him (see Luke 8:1-3). She had been delivered of seven demons by Jesus and she knew that she owed her life to Him. Sometimes we find that our own lives are not nearly as affectionately responsive to Him. Bishop Ryle says this in his devotional commentary, "How is it that many who profess and call themselves Christians do so little for the Savior whose name they bear? How is it that many, whose grace and faith it would be uncharitable to deny, work so little, give so little, say so little, take so little pains, to promote Christ's cause, and bring glory to Christ in the world? These questions admit of only one answer. It is a low sense of debt and obligation to Christ...let us daily pray that we may see the sinfulness of sin and the amazing grace of Christ, more clearly and distinctly... then and then only, shall we understand such burning zeal as that of Mary..."

II. **Jesus has a profound affection for all of His disciples**

We notice first of all that Jesus chose Mary, an unlikely choice. Upon His resurrection, surely,

we think, He would go to one of His chief disciples, Peter or John. Jesus, however, appears first to poor forlorn Mary, whose mind cannot yet get around the idea of a physical resurrection. He first sends angels to her who simply seek to redirect her thinking by asking, "Woman, why are you weeping?" This is a good question for all of us. Why do we weep so much when we know that the Lord has good intentions for us and works all things together for our good? When Mary gives her fearful answer, Jesus Himself appears in person and asks her similarly, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She gives an answer that amazes us. Thinking that He is a gardener, she asks that He direct her to where the dead body might be so that she could care for it. Jesus then simply calls Her name, "Mary." Upon hearing her name (Cf: John 10:27-28), Mary immediately recognizes the Savior and calls out, "Rabboni!" She calls Him "Teacher," because the word of truth coming from His life and His lips means everything to her. She apparently grasps His feet, to which Jesus responds by telling her not to cling to Him because He has not yet ascended. He is saying to her that He will ascend and bring her far more joy than the privilege of grasping His feet. He will one day, through the gift of Pentecost, indwell her very heart. He then commissions her to go and tell the other disciples, which she does immediately, saying, "I have seen the Lord." What a privilege. Out of Jesus' tender love for Mary, she becomes the first eyewitness of the resurrection. Her love for Him is profound. His love for her is infinitely glorious.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Mary Magdalene love Jesus so much? How did she show it? How do people today demonstrate affection for Jesus?
2. Why is it surprising that Jesus chose Mary as the first eyewitness of His resurrection? What does this teach us about ourselves?
3. What do you notice about the way Jesus revealed Himself to Mary? What does that teach us about His stance towards us?
4. Why does Jesus tell Mary not to cling to Him? What do we sometimes wrongly "hang on to" in our Christian lives?
5. What is John's overall objective in John 20?

Going Deeper

1. How can you deepen your affection for Christ? How would your life change if you loved Him as Mary did?