

A Great Gosple to Proclaim

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[0 : 00] Let us turn together to that story that we read at the beginning of chapter 20 of the Gospel according to John.

Now, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

These three days had been among the darkest days that Mary Magdalene and the other three women who were with her around the cross as Jesus died, and all the disciples of Jesus, had ever experienced.

And those three days that he lay in the grave were the longest and the most miserable days of their lives.

And that Sabbath was the darkest and the longest Sabbath day that they had ever lived or ever experienced.

[1 : 10] They had watched Joseph, Arimathea, and Nicodemus placing the body of Jesus in an empty tomb, hewn out of a rock.

They saw the stone being rolled as a door to shut the body of Jesus in and to keep anybody else out.

And then they went home as the evening shadows were lengthening, and the Passover trumpet was sounded, warning them that the Sabbath was very near.

Their hearts were filled with grief, and their hopes were dashed in pieces. In this story we meet first of all with a hopeless situation.

Now by human standards, the situation that faced the disciples, and especially Mary Magdalene, that morning was hopeless.

[2 : 33] The dark clouds of helplessness and hopelessness surrounded Mary Magdalene. As she got up early that morning before it was light, and there was a literal and a spiritual darkness all around her.

She left at home probably about three o'clock in the morning or four o'clock in the morning to be at the grave. She had been so good to her, as we can read from the scriptures.

He had cast seven demons out of her, and she loved him so much. She wanted to show her love by embalming his dead body with spices which she had bought.

And although it was still dark, yet her love for him left her unafraid. Perfect love, said John, years after this casts out fear.

So it was she loved the Saviour so much that she was not afraid to go out in the dark. Perhaps there's somebody like that here this morning with a similar situation in the spiritual sense.

[3 : 59] Someone who is in these past days has lost a sense of the loving, personal presence of Jesus on the way.

Is that you today? You used to enjoy the presence of Jesus and fellowship with him in your heart. But that is all gone.

Where is the blessedness I knew, said the hymn writer, when first I saw the Lord. For you it may be that the things are yet dark for you that once were so bright.

You feel cast down as you come into this building to worship today. For Mary Magdalene, faith and hope had gone and dwindled.

Only love remained. And it was that love that constrained her to leave home in the darkness. The fact that there were many thieves and robbers like Barabbas didn't bother her.

[5 : 19] But before Mary had reached the grave, something spectacular had taken place. The greatest event that this world has ever known had taken place.

The stone had been rolled away and the Lord Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, as he said. But for Mary Magdalene, if her heart was heavy before, it was heavier still now when she looked into the empty tomb.

She immediately thought that one of two things must have taken place. The Jews had taken the body of Jesus away and not content with all that he suffered in the crucifixion.

They were to add indignities to the crucifixion by mutilating his body. This is what she would think.

This is what she would think. Or that the grave had been robbed by grave robbers.

There were grave robbers in those days. So she didn't wait to investigate the situation any further. She went to find Peter and John.

[6 : 38] She said to them, verse 2, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

It's interesting to note that Mary knew where Peter and John were. She knew where Peter was, even though he had denied his Lord a few days before.

He was staying with John and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Now this says a lot to us about Peter.

Peter and also says a lot to us about the other disciples as well.

Peter did not stay away from the rest of the disciples because he had stumbled and he had fallen.

And neither did the other disciples give him the cold shoulder for what he had done.

Whenever we stumble and fall and who is not capable of doing that, we tend to keep away from God's people.

[7 : 51] We stay at home and we don't go to the church services anymore. And that's what we do when we stumble and when we fall in the Christian life.

And as Christians, we take a wide berth of the backslider. We kind of want to disassociate ourselves with him and avoid him as much as possible.

We cross the road when we see him coming. But that is not what we find happening here at all. And this story shows that in spite of his failure, Peter still regarded, still was regarded as a leader among the disciples.

You know, one weakness or two need not and must not blind us to the other good points that a person may have in his life.

If we were only more forgiving when a person stumbles and falls. Peter said, Because John was a younger person than Peter, he was able to run faster.

[9 : 42] That need not be so. But I wonder if the reason why John outran Peter was because Peter's denial of his Lord a few days before helped him to slow down rather than run as John did.

Somebody explained it in a quaint sort of way a while ago that I heard. He said there was a stone in Peter's shoe and he couldn't run as fast as John could.

That's just a thought. That there was a spiritual stone in his shoe that he couldn't run as fast. See, when we had backslidden, we're not very good at running, are we?

Running the Christian race for God. If you have a guilty conscience, you will not run so well as you ought.

If you've got a guilty conscience, you may come to the prayer meeting right enough, but you try to hide behind somebody else in the prayer meeting in case the minister sees you and asks you to partake in prayer.

[11 : 04] Peter, being backslidden, robs us of many joys in the Christian life. Now, although John was first at the grave, he was full of awe and reverence and he hesitated in going in.

But when Peter arrives, he goes in right away. So typical of the impulsive Peter.

They both saw quite clearly that the tomb had not been ransacked by thieves. Jesus had risen out of the grave clothes and had left them as if they were an empty cocoon.

When John saw them, he believed for the first time that Jesus had risen from the dead. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulcher and saw and believed.

Mary was first at the tomb, but John was first to believe. There are three words in the passage for the English word see.

[12 : 29] Mary saw, and the word used is blepo in Greek, meaning to look in an ordinary way, the way anybody can look.

When Peter saw the word is the orio, meaning to look critically at the linen cloths and the place where the body of Jesus had been laid.

But when John saw the word is eido, meaning that he saw and understood what had taken place and that he believed at that very moment.

Here we have the birth of faith in the heart and soul of John. And this is the way that we all need to see Jesus.

See him in such a way as to understand why he came to this earth, why he suffered and died and rose again.

[13:31] We are to see him as our saviour, taking the punishment we deserved upon himself on the cross.

We see then John seeing the linen cloths in a different way from Peter and Mary.

Perhaps if Peter's heart had not been so oppressed by his sin, he also would have basked in the sunshine of the hope of the gospel.

You see, when we're not in a right relationship with God and when we deny him, we miss out. For a time at least, and a lot of blessings that could be ours, even in this world.

A hopeless situation, humanly speaking. An unsatisfied longing, secondly. Mary Magdalene had been left far behind the two men as they ran to the grave.

[14:50] Now she had arrived there, but Peter and John, they didn't speak to her after this, as far as we know. They went home. But she was left alone.

Mary's heart was empty. And as broken as it ever was, she couldn't make sense of the empty grave.

So she stood there weeping. There are times that is all we can do too. But Mary stood without the sepulchre, weeping on her own.

The word weeping there means not just shedding tears, and some people do wipe them away. She was sobbing. Her heart was broken and she was sobbing her heart out in despair.

Peter and John did not seem to have stopped to talk to her. A little Christian fellowship there and then would have been of great value and great help to Mary Magdalene.

[16:04] But they went home. Are you seeking the Lord this morning in this service? Is there an emptiness in your heart? Then take her example and remain a little longer in the place of prayer.

The grave was empty and her world was empty. To whom could she turn to now in her grief and in her emptiness?

The story is told when Reverend George Duncan, who succeeded Tom Allen in St George's Throne Church in Glasgow when he was inducted a few days after his induction, he had a phone call from a woman at the other end of the phone.

She said, Could I speak to the Reverend Tom Allen? And Mr. Duncan replied, My dear, Tom Allen died a few months ago.

There was a moment of silence and then with heart-rending sobs he heard the voice at the other end of the line saying before the phone was put down, Oh God, who will help me now?

[17:35] And that is how Mary Magdalene felt as she looked into the empty tomb. Oh God, who will help me now? Have we not at times stood where she stood?

In a sense of looking through tear-filled eyes into the grave of maybe church ordinances or into the grave of old and precious memories and failing to find Christ there, finding Christ so far away.

And as she wept, she stood down and looked into the sepulchre. Verse 11 and 12. And seeth two angels in white sitting.

they had been at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem at the stable perhaps that they were present now at the scene that was even more wonderful than the stable in Bethlehem.

The death of Christ and the empty grave speaks of the depth of God's love for sinners. And writing later to the church, Peter wrote this, These are things that angels desire to look into.

[19:10] Jesus spoke to Mary, Why, woman, why weepest thou? And she replies, They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

the wonderful sight of two angels did nothing for her to satisfy the longing of her souls. What could angels do?

Nothing. Only Christ can satisfy for her. Notice how the personal aspect of her loss is seen in the words, They have taken away my Lord.

When she told Peter and John about the empty tomb, she said, They have taken away the Lord. But speaking here, she said, My Lord.

Here, the personal possessive pronoun is used, My Lord. My Lord. Although he was, in her estimation, dead, he was still her Lord.

[20 : 24] She was through to death and even beyond death to her Savior. You can never read this passage without feeling rebuked at the loving, loyal devotion of Mary.

He might be dead and even his body may be gone, but still he was her Lord.

An unsatisfied longing. Then we find a glorious revelation in this story. It was when she turned away from the grave that she saw Jesus standing there.

Verse 14, and when she had said this, she turned herself back and saw Jesus standing and knew not that it was Jesus.

She never expected him to be alive and therefore with the tears blinding her eyes, she did not recognize him.

[21 : 33] She had been looking for a dead Christ and at last he stands before her. She was looking for a dead body.

She never expected him to be alive. She only saw the figure and gave it a quick, careless glance, thinking he was the gardener.

Even when he spoke so kindly and so lovingly to her, she didn't recognize him. woman, why weepst thou?

Whom seekest thou? Do you recognize the voice of Jesus as he speaks to you here this morning and on other occasions as well?

Do you recognize him as addressing you in the gospel? gospel? Are we not at times indentional making the same mistake as she did?

[22 : 39] To her he was only a man, a kind, sympathetic man who knew her tears and asked for some passion she loved and lost.

Therefore, taking advantage of his kindness, she ventures to present her pathetic petition.

Verse 13, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Here is truly the language of love. She doesn't mention the name of Jesus, for she thought everyone would know what it was she was talking about.

How she thought that she could carry away the body of a fully grown man, I don't know. But love and devotion are willing to go many lengths and any lengths.

[23 : 49] Are you today, like Mary, looking for Jesus in the wrong place and facing in the wrong direction? Do you realize that he is very near to you at this very moment?

Jesus spoke her name with the old familiar intonation and emphasis, Mary, Mary.

And in verse 16 we read that she turned herself. After she had spoken to the person she thought was the gardener, she turned away from him. Have you been doing that?

Have I been doing that? Do we realize that Christ, the Christ whom we are seeking has come so near to you in the preaching of God's word?

Do you recognize that he is speaking to you at this moment in the depths of your conscience and in the depths of your soul? I wonder when the prodigal son recognized that the figure that was running towards him was his father.

[25 : 09] That day he made for the old family home again. The father saw him a great way off but did the prodigal son see the father a great way off?

I doubt it. He would not have recognized that this was his father. You can picture the prodigal son saying to himself who can this be that's coming towards me running?

An elderly man. It was never the case that an older man would run in the culture of the Jews.

Is it someone that's going to attack me and hurt me? We don't know. But when Mary heard Jesus calling her by name she at once recognized him and responded in the country tongue they both knew so well.

Rabboni. you see the intonations of Christ's voice had passed through death and his love for his people passed through death unimpaired.

[26 : 38] Nothing was changed. He was the same as he always was and that teaches us that in eternity we shall hear again the voices that spoke to us in our childhood and we shall recognize them.

Not only will we recognize each other in eternity but also those characteristics we had in this world.

The word Rabboni means teacher and the word in Greek is didaskolos and this shows how far Mary understood the facts concerning Christ.

Mary's exclamation was imperfect in that she looked for the resumption of the old bond that was there for the past three years and that is why she wanted to hang on to Jesus to cling on to him and he had to say touch me not.

We are surprised at this when we consider a few hours later that he was willing for Thomas to come and put his finger into the print of the nails to surrender.

[28 : 04] But Jesus was here saying to Mary, Mary, you are not going to cling to me like that. The old order has changed.

When Mary Magdalene clung to his feet, she was wanting to keep what she had come to learn to surrender.

She must learn to exchange the outward for the inward and to pass from the old fellowship with Jesus into a spiritual relationship with him that would last for all eternity.

Before now, Jesus could only be in one place and if Mary was fortunate enough, she could be there too with him and then he would have to go and go somewhere else.

But oh now, things are different. She can seek him in prayer and feel him as near to her in prayer as ever she felt him when he was alive in the flesh.

[29 : 18] After this, by prayer, it was possible for her and possible for all believers too, to come nearer to Christ than they were ever before.

Forty days after this, he ascended to the Father's right hand in glory. And then ten days later, the Spirit was poured out on the church.

by that same Spirit Mary Magdalene was linked to him in a fellowship that she could never have known before. Notice how he makes a difference when speaking about God and to her.

He says, my Father and your Father. God is the Father of Jesus Christ in a unique way. He is the only begotten Son of the Father.

that Mary and all other believers are sons and daughters of God by adoption, which is different.

[30 : 29] They called God their Father because of their relationship with Jesus Christ, his Son. What a glorious revelation she received.

But before she went off, there was a joyous message given to her. Mary came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had spoken those things unto her.

Here we see the very essence of the proclamation of the gospel. We see a Christian person in every age is a person who is able to say with Mary Magdalene that he had met with the risen Christ. I met with the risen Christ, you can see. He has seen the Lord. He should be able to say not only that he knows about Christ, but that he knows Christ himself, personally.

A Christian should be able to tell others not out of his own experience that Jesus Christ is alive. And that is captured by the hymn, How do you know that Christ lives?

[31 : 51] He lives within my heart. A Christian should be able to tell out of his own experience that Jesus Christ is alive.

Although the situation that Mary was in there alone with Christ was glorious and precious, she must turn her back on that.

She could not remain there. She had to be obedient to him and tell others what she had seen and what she had heard.

There were other poor souls that were very sad and downcast, who needed to hear the thrilling news that Mary had that Jesus was alive.

We must not remain selfishly, keeping the good news of the gospel to ourselves. We must go forth in obedience and tell of Jesus Christ, who has paid the price for our sins and calvary.

[33 : 01] that he died and rose again on the third day, that death and sin and the grave have been conquered and defeated, and that he opened the way of salvation for sinners, which they can come back to God.

There is no other news in the whole world as good as the gospel, the good news, the gospel, this is the gospel, and if you deny the resurrection, as some people do, then you have no gospel at all.

Paul said in Corinthians 1 and 15, verse 14, if Christ be not risen, then our preaching is vain, and our faith also is vain.

God is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

Mary went back to tell Peter and John and the other disciples what she had seen and heard. She was a different woman from the beginning of the chapter.

[34 : 25] she announced to them that Jesus was alive, and that he was going to ascend into heaven to his father, but also to their father.

We are thankful to God today for the empty tomb and the risen saviour. Jesus, when John in his later years saw on Patmos a vision, he saw Jesus, and he had the keys of hell and of death in his hand.

I wonder where this leaves you and leaves me this morning. Are we still weeping and saying with Mary Magdalene, they have taken away the Lord, my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him, where there are three places where the demons and evil men and all the powers of this world cannot take Jesus out of.

Three places that they cannot take him, they cannot take him out of the eternal covenant of God's grace. he is there at the center of it and will continue to be.

And they cannot take him from the midst of the free offer of the gospel either. And they cannot take him from being near to the heart in which God by his grace has placed at his side after himself.

[36 : 06] Christ is in these three places at least, and nobody can take him away from the covenant of grace, from the free offer of the gospel and from the heart that has been touched by God's grace to seek him as his saviour.

God's hope. A hopeless situation, an unsatisfied longing, a glorious revelation, and a joyous message.

church, we have a great gospel to proclaim. And if you're a young person here today and you're a Christian, question yourself very carefully.

Is God wanting you to stay in the job that you're in just now? Or does he want you to leave these things aside and go out and preach the gospel to those who have still to believe and still to hear about Christ?

You've done well and you've got on well in your exams and you're getting on well in your work, but what have you got to show for it at the end of it all?

[37 : 32] Question yourself then, is this what God wants me to do with my life? Not only young people, but also every one of us could be doing a lot more for the Lord than we are.

May God bless to us this word and lay it to our hearts. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the message of salvation, for the message of the empty tomb and the risen Saviour.

Lord, these teachings should not just be kept and preached when it's Easter time, it's a message for every day throughout the whole year.

Lord, help us to stand foursquare on your word for your glory. Amen. We have to leave.