

John 20 v 1-18

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[0 : 00] John chapter 20 and we read from verse 1. This is God's word. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, they've taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him. So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there that did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed.

They still did not understand from the scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

[1 : 29] They asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realise that it was Jesus.

Woman, he said, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teach him. Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.

Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news.

I have seen the Lord, and she told them that he had said these things to her. Amen, and may God bless us. If you could turn back, please, with me to John, chapter 20.

[2 : 40] And a short prayer as we go.

Our Heavenly Father, again, we thank you for the privilege of being able to open your word and to study it. We acknowledge, Lord, as we always do, that we cannot understand and we cannot benefit from this without the help of the Holy Spirit.

And so we pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, that he would guide us in speaking and in listening and in responding to your word, that he would be our teacher, that he would stir our hearts, that our hearts would burn within us, as we read of those on the road to Emmaus, whose hearts burned within them as they heard and as they saw Jesus.

And we ask that we too would see and hear Jesus in the verses that we read. We think of the nation of Israel. We know, Lord, that as we look at Israel and your word, as we go into the New Testament, we, the Church of Christ, are the new Israel, but we still look on a nation that in large measure cannot see Jesus.

And so we pray for them as we're called to, that you would lift the veil from their eyes and we pray, Lord, that you would lift the veil from the eyes of every person here that we indeed would be able to see Jesus.

[4 : 20] We pray again for the young ones and we ask that you would bless them, open their hearts to the gospel message. We pray for the congregations around us in this village, in this island, and we ask that whatever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, that you would add your blessing and that you would build your church and we thank you that in this place we are confident that the gospel of Christ is preached in each place when your word is opened.

So add your blessing, Lord, we pray, and meet with your people. We pray for those who would desire to be with us but can't be here. As Gordon has prayed for many of them, we think of them and we ask your blessing to be upon them and we pray also for others who have opportunity to be here but have no desire and we ask, Lord, that you would draw near to them too and that they would become aware that they are in the presence of Christ.

Hear our prayers, Lord. Take away our sin. Empty us of all that would focus on ourselves and fill us with the Holy Spirit, we pray, that we may see Jesus and we ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake and amen.

In days gone by when I was a student, I used to spend a lot of time in graveyards and cemeteries and the reason for that was that I used to cut the grass over the summer periods and did graves and so I'd spend a lot of my week in graveyards and cemeteries and one thing that struck me was the sky mainly.

One thing that struck me is I could be in the most remote, obscure place and yet you were never on your own. There was always a steady stream of people who would come and who would spend time in these places.

[6 : 24] Now, why is that? I think the reason for that is that we tend to like to go to the place where we know that the bodies of those whom we have loved and been connected to have been laid.

we like to go back to these places and grieve and think and pray and just be for a while.

And John 20 begins with that scene. It's very early on Sunday morning somewhere between 3am and 6am it's still dark and what we see as we follow the text through here is we see in the shadows we see the silhouette of Mary Magdalene she's going to the grave of Jesus she's going to that tomb where his body was laid.

Now, why is she going there? Well, she's going there for the same reason that we go to the graves of those that we lose.

She's going there because she loved him. And that's our first point today as we look at this scene from the perspective of Mary Magdalene as John in large measure gives it to us that way.

[8 : 06] The first point we see here is Mary loved Jesus. And the question I want to follow up with is a personal question and it's a very probing question and it's do you love Christ?

Do you love Jesus? see that's a question as we flick forward a chapter that's a question that Jesus will probe Peter with three times he's going to ask him do you love me?

And that's a question that comes to us time and time again in scripture do we love Jesus? Not do we know about him in our heads but do we love him in our hearts?

See Christianity as I said last Sunday evening and then on Wednesday night as well it's a relationship it isn't a dry cool rigid religion it's a relationship where those who once were far away from God because of our sin are brought near through the blood of Christ we are saved from sin we are saved from hell we are saved from the wrath of God that's our just deserts because of our nature and all that we've done sometimes we focus all on that everything that we're saved from but we're saved into a relationship with God we're saved into that place where we can say I know God I know Christ and I love him so do you love

Jesus Mary did now why did she love Jesus well she loved him because of who he was and is because he does not change and she loved him because of all that he did for her see in John 20 as we look at Mary as she comes up to the tomb and as she hovers then at the opening of the tomb we find Mary broken we find her weary we find her sad but she's in her right mind she hasn't got a kind of dark fire in her eyes like she once did she's no longer terrorized by evil spirits Mary is a woman who's found peace and joy and purpose in and through

[11:17] Jesus and for those who know anything about Mary her life wasn't always that way look to Luke chapter 2 just for Luke chapter 8 for just a minute please just to keep our fingers exercised see there's a whole lot that's been written about Mary in secular literature there's a whole lot that we can even see about Mary in the cinemas I saw a film that's been advertised on TV just about Mary Magdalene I don't know anything about the film but my guess is there'll be a whole lot of nonsense in it because there's so much about Mary that is wild speculation so what do we actually know about Mary what is trustworthy what do we know because the Bible tells us about Mary well her introduction in Luke chapter 8 verse 2 is striking we'll read in from verse 1 it says after this

Jesus travelled about from one town and villas to another proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God the 12 were with them and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases Mary called Magdalene from whom seven demons had come out Mary's past was dark Mary's history was troubled in the extreme before before Christ Mark when he's speaking about this scene in chapter 16 and verse 9 he underlines the same point he tells us how Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene out of whom he had driven seven demons and what I want us to see here is simply that Mary's life before Christ was very different Mary was a woman who was locked into demonic possession she had been in the darkest possible spiritual state and yet

Jesus had taken hold of her and Jesus had taken her from that depth of darkness and brought her into his light Jesus had saved her literally from hellish torment and brought her from a position of absolute utter lostness into this close fellowship with himself and we find Mary right through the gospels as one who is walking close with Jesus one who is following him because Jesus has taken her from that awful position into having a life of abundance and so as Mary remembered all that as Mary likely day by day thought about where she had been and now where Jesus had taken her as she thought about all that

Jesus had done for her her love for him kindled more and more and more in her heart and that can be seen in the way that she followed him throughout his ministry it can be seen in the fact that she was there at the cross when everybody else had disappeared Mary was still there and then at the tomb when everyone else is gone it's Mary's silhouette that we see coming into focus Mary loved Jesus J.C.

Ryle says this of all our Lord's followers on earth none seemed to have loved him so much as Mary Magdalene none felt that they owed so much to Christ none felt so strongly that there was nothing too great to do for Christ hence as Andrew's beautifully puts it she was last at his cross and first at his grave she stayed longest there and was soonest there she could not rest until she was up to seek him she sought him while it was yet dark even before she had liked to seek him by in a word having received much she loved much and loving much she did much in order to prove the reality of her love so do you love Jesus and can your love for

[16 : 45] Jesus be seen see if the answer to that question is yes if we can honestly say that we do love Jesus then we will be found seeking him in prayer and and in his word first in the morning when it's still dark like Mary we're first up seeking Christ because we love him we want to be with him we want to see more of him we want to be in his presence and if the answer is yes we love Jesus we will be found with the same attitude as Jesus or the same attitude as Mary sort of where we're saying with our voices and in our lives nothing is too much for

Jesus we sang in the hymn Jesus all for Jesus all our ambition all our goals all our life we lay it before him because we love him we want to do things for him we want him to use us in any way that he can we love Christ no labour is grudging but each task is a task of joyful love it's an expression of our affection for him whether we're Hoovering the carpets whether we're fixing the fences whether we're leading in prayer whether we're leading in Sunday class we do it out of love for Christ we sang just a few minutes ago in garlic

I joined went to the house of God go up they said to me now here's a question that really bites in application I joined when to the house of God go up they said to me did you joy this morning did you wake up this morning with joy knowing that this is the day that has been set aside for you and I to seek Christ did our hearts kind of stall within us at the prospect of a day where we can come into his house and be in his presence and open his word and sing his praise and meet with him in prayer did we truly say I joined when to the house of God go up they said to me or did we secretly groan inwardly at the prospect of having to go to church again and when church is done it's only an hour and a bit when church is done today will you and I spend more time seeking the latest gossip on social media than we do actually seeking the

Lord I don't know what your day looks like you don't know what mine looks like how will we spend it will it actually be evident love love to be love to be with him see if we're more on facebook than we are in God's word and actually looking to be with God that's a problem that shows you and I and I speak to myself I don't speak from my height pointing my finger at everybody here I include myself every week in every bit of application in these sermons if that is a problem if that is something that's in my life in years that's a problem because that shows us that our love for Christ is not what it should be so if that's the problem what's the solution what do we need to do in order that our love for

Christ will be rekindled well Mary teaches us that we need to remember all that Jesus has done for us we need to remember that we were once lost hopeless dark depraved wretched sinners we need to remember that once we were on the road to hell and we could not put our head on a pillow at night with any sense of peace because we knew that we were not headed for heaven we need to remember that we need to remember that we were once under the power of Satan as Mary Magdalene was we need to remember Ephesians 2 that once we were dead in our transgressions and our sin with absolutely utterly no hope and then

[22 : 36] Jesus sought us and Jesus called us and Jesus showed us that he laid down his life on Calvary for us so that we could be saved and be given everlasting hope Mary never forgot all that Jesus did for her and so her love for Christ continued to burn bright and so we need to be constantly remembering all that Jesus has done for us and in a world like we're in today with so many distractions that's difficult that involves us putting down our phones and setting aside the iPad and folding over the newspaper and sweeping aside any distraction that the devil would put in our way to get us thinking of everything other than

Christ and taking time to remember Jesus taking time to remember his love which is vast as the ocean because it's only as we remember his love for us that we find our love for him deepening 1 John 4 19 says we love him because he first loved us Mary never forgot that we need to constantly remember that we need to constantly come back to that fact that God loves us if you're here this morning you need to know God loves you he loves you and I enough to tell us the truth about the darkness of our hearts and to tell us the truth about the depth of the love of Christ for us

Mary loved Jesus do you love Jesus he loves you but do you love him one more point before we move on one more point in application just before we move on to the next issue here and it's a corrective point to our thinking and our outlook of times and it's this if Jesus loved and he did and if Jesus could save Mary Marguerine who was possessed by seven demons as he did and if he could take her who was such a social write-off and put her in a place of such honour so much so that he would determine that she would be the first one that he would appear to after rising from the dead if he can do all that for her he can do that for anyone and we must not doubt that so who are the Mary

Magdalene's in your circles who are the people that seem to be write-offs as far as the whole of the culture around us is concerned these are some of the people that we need to reach out to the ones that others will write off because the Bible teaches us that very often these are the very people that Jesus has the biggest plans for and these are very often the people who show us how best to love Christ because when he saves them they don't forget readily how much he has saved them from Mary loved Jesus second point Mary looked for Jesus and what we see here is really she's the only one who seems to persist in looking for

Jesus if you're back to John 20 just let's follow the text here Mary looked for Jesus and as we step into this she's the only one who really is with any real vigour I know there are more people in the narrative other women who are with her but John doesn't tell us about them I want to focus her thoughts on John and John highlights for us that Mary really is the only one who's progressing here verse 2 she goes and she fetches Peter and John verses 3 and 4 we see Peter and John and they come racing sprinting to the tomb and they see the empty tomb verses 5 to 7 we see them as they see the folded grave clothes they take in the mystery of Jesus' absence so Mary charges off to get them and she takes them to that place where

[28 : 27] Jesus was supposed to be lying and they with their own eyes then see the mystery of everything that's going on here and then what do they do verse 10 they go back to their homes it's bizarre isn't it the disciples no these are the giants these are the men who Jesus called to be closest to him these are the ones you'd expect to have the highest concentration of faith these are the ones that Jesus said time and time again to I will die and I must rise after three days and now on the third day when Mary Magdalene comes and gets them and takes him to the place where Jesus lay and they see that he's not there they don't say hallelujah he's risen they went back to their homes because they left the potatoes in the bottom they just went back home as if nothing had ever happened maybe they were fearful maybe they were in shock we don't know we just know that they came and they saw

John tells us he believed verse 8 and they left they walked off scene they went home as if nothing had happened someone will do that here today you've come as God has drawn you and you've heard about Jesus maybe some of us have heard about Jesus his death and his resurrection not for the first time but for the thousandth time you've heard about the fact that his body did not stay in the grave his body did not see decay as it says in Psalm 16 we see that the beginnings of it in these verses that we're studying here we'll see it in greater measure next week when we study and some of you will read this hear this even believe it in your minds and then go home and get on with the rest of your day and take the potatoes off the boil mash them have the chicken put on the television once you've closed the curtains pick up the newspaper and just get on with your day as if nothing had happened and you hadn't heard this amazing news about

Jesus some will walk out the door here and not spend one more minute of the day seeking looking for Christ what we see here is that Mary did not go home the others did but Mary stays unseen her heart is breaking her head is hurting because she can't understand what's happened here Jesus is not in the tomb and verse 14 she says I don't know where they put him I don't know where he is she didn't understand what was going on but she stayed verse 11 Mary stood outside the tomb crying she lingers on waiting for answers she appears to be looking for someone because it says as she went verse 11 she bent over to look into the tomb who's she looking for she's looking for

Jesus and I think we have a picture here of someone who's praying without words someone who is so broken and so mystified she can't find words to even formulate a prayer sometimes we find ourselves in that place with a good friend of mine who was here at the induction not too long ago Donald Livingston from Wach Canaan some of you know him a great man of prayer mature man who will now be up 93 94 I think this is about seven or eight years ago and he went through a difficult couple of months in his life and a man whose prayer life was so full and so alive so vibrant he had no words to pray for about three or four weeks all he could do was sigh and say

Lord no more words but these kind of prayers are still heard because we've got the promise in scripture that the Holy Spirit the Comforter he hears our cries he hears our wails he hears our sighs he hears our groans and he crafts them into a prayer that comes to the throne of God and so what we see here is Mary before she is even able to articulate any words in prayer the answer crashes in Isaiah 65 24 says before they call I will answer while they're still speaking I will hear that seems to be what happens her cries her sobs her wails are heard and

[35 : 19] God breaks her as she wept she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus body had been one at the head and one at the foot they asked her woman why are you crying they have taken my lord away she said and I don't know where they have put him and that very often is a prayer that we do speak Lord I don't know what's going on Lord I can't understand what I'm seeing and what I'm feeling and what I'm going through I can't see you and I want to see you I'm here to see you I can't understand what's going on in the circumstances that I'm finding myself in the middle of and I want you to help me understand that's where

Mary is waiting for the Lord looking for the Lord seeking the Lord often is not done with a steady poise and dignity sometimes when we are waiting for the Lord our faith has been shaken to the limits and we're not fine reciting Bible verses and smiling serenely and saying when people ask us how are you and fine spiritually and fine Mary was not fine and sometimes we're not fine and even in prayer we're like Mary shaken struggling only just managing to hang on but we're still looking for Jesus we're not away from him we haven't turned our back but through wails and through tears and through much perplexment we're still seeking

Jesus we've got the promise in Jeremiah 29 that those who seek the Lord with all their hearts will find him like Mary did verse 14 at this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there but she did not realize that it was Jesus woman he said why are you crying who is it you're looking for thinking he was the gardener she said sir if you have carried him away tell me where you have put him and I will get him Jesus said to her Mary she turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic Rabboni which means teacher Mary loved

Jesus and Mary at this point was looking for Jesus she had watched him die she knew his body had been laid in the tomb but such was the love in her heart for him that still when everyone else is gone she's looking for Jesus are you looking for Jesus keep on looking keep on seeking him keep looking for him and

God's promise not mine is you will find him or as was the case with Mary you will realize that he has found you first Mary may you love Jesus may you look for Jesus may you left Jesus and if you want to know why we'll have a discussion about this for five minutes tonight let's pray heavenly father we thank you for your word we thank you for your love for us we thank you for the gospel reach us we pray through the power of the spirit and enable us to look and find the one who came to seek and save us and we ask this in Jesus name Amen