



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

John 20:10-18

October 22, 2006

- I. **The Root of Mary’s Misunderstanding**
- II. **The Result(s) of Mary’s Misunderstanding**
- III. **The Cure for Mary’s Misunderstanding**

I. **The Root of Mary’s Misunderstanding**

A. Lack of Scriptural Understanding

- The Old Testament speaks of the resurrected Messiah (Leviticus 23:4-14; Psalm 16:8-10; 30:3; 41:10; 118:17; Isaiah 53:10-12; Hosea 6:2) as did Jesus Himself (Matthew 12:39-40; John 2:19; 10:17-18; 12:23-25). Yet, Mary was ignorant of these truths.
- Had Mary understood the Old Testament, as well as the words of Jesus Himself, the absence of Jesus’ body would have been a source of great joy.

B. Dependence upon her [Physical] Experiences

- When we, like Mary, do not always rely upon the Scriptures as our *canon*, or our *measuring stick*, we inevitably turn to our experiences as the standard by which we judge reality.
- When we do this, truth becomes subject to what we experience: what we touch, see, and feel.
- Therefore, when Mary sees that the body of Jesus is missing, she is devastated, for she does not understand that Scripture declares that the Christ would be resurrected, indeed, Jesus declared this Himself.

- Yet, because Mary did not see the physical body of Jesus, she resorted to explain the absence ‘rationally.’ This is why she said, in Verse 2, ‘They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.’
- Therefore, since Mary allowed her experiences to lead here, she was devastated.
 - John states that, as the disciples went home [Verse 10], Mary went back to the tomb. Once she arrived there, she stood outside and wept. Verse 11 states, ‘But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping...’
 - It is evident, in Verse 13 that the reason she was weeping was because she believed that someone had stolen the corpse of Jesus.

II. The Result(s) of Mary’s Misunderstanding

A. She fails to see the hand of God in the Empty Tomb

- John states that [Verses 12-14], ‘as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb...’ Once she did, ‘she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.’
- Throughout the Scriptures, the presence of angels [*angelos*, *αγγελος*, ‘messengers’] accompanies a work of God.
- This situation is no different [for the empty tomb was truly an act of God!], yet Mary fails to understand the significance of these two angels [in white]!
- Mary even addresses the angels, saying [Verse 13], “...they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”
- Today, we are quite similar to Mary, in that, when we do not trust in the Word of God, we often fail to see the clear hand of God in the events of our lives.

B. She fails to recognize the Resurrected Christ

- Verse 14 states that ‘When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus stand there, and did not know that it was Jesus.’
- For the attentive Bible student, this scene calls to mind the disciples on the road to Emmaus who were ‘kept from recognizing’ Jesus (Luke 24:16).

- John does not say why Mary does not recognize Jesus, but some have suggested that she may have been blinded by her tears.
- Yet, this explanation seems highly implausible. It is quite likely that this scene demonstrates a fundamental theological truth: **Mary did not recognize Jesus because her understanding and expectation of Jesus was so fundamentally different that who He truly was.**

○ In other words, Mary was **seeking the corpse of her dead teacher, NOT the resurrected body of her risen, living Messiah!**

C. She lacks understanding concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ [i.e., She wishes Christ to be *like her*]

- In Verse 15, Jesus asks Mary, ‘Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’
 - In these two questions, Jesus does two things:
 - 1.) He mildly rebukes Mary, asking, ‘Why are you weeping?’ In other words, it is as though Jesus is demonstrating that Mary should not be weeping, but rejoicing, for He is Risen!
 - 2.) As D.A. Carson notes, the question ‘Whom are you seeking?’ “becomes an invitation to reflect on the kind of Messiah she was expecting, and thus to widen her horizons and to recognize that, grand as her devotion to him was, her estimate of him was still far too small.’
- The ultimate result of Mary’s misunderstanding was her failure to understand the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.
- Because Mary was ignorant of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the words of Jesus, she had no objective standard by which to understand who Jesus Christ was.
- In other words, she relied on what *she* wanted Christ to be.
- For Mary, Christ was someone who was physically with her. He was a friend, a miracle worker.
- Unfortunately, though, Mary did not see a fundamental distinction between her and Christ. In other words, for Mary, Jesus was essentially, like *her*, not **essentially** different.

- Tragically, this is the way many Christians are today. We are ignorant of the Scriptures [often willfully!], and therefore, we are ignorant of what the Scriptures say about who God is. Therefore, we create in our minds who God is, and this is the God we embrace. Unfortunately, this ‘God’ that we have created in our minds is NOT the God of the Bible.
 - This is clear when we say, ‘Well, *my* God would _____.’ Or, ‘*My* Jesus would never _____.’
 - When we make this error, we are most often guilty of failing to understand that God’s ways are higher than our ways [Isaiah 55:8].
 - As fallen humans, we want God to be like us. Many of us would rather have a God who we can manipulate and get to do what we want rather than a God who is Sovereign and all-powerful, One who does not change and is perfect and holy. We want a God that loves the way we love...is ‘fair’ the way we think ‘fair’ should be...One that we can fully understand all of the time...One whose actions make sense to us...One that we can ‘get our arms around.’
 - Yet, this is NOT the God of the Bible!
- After Jesus asks Mary the two questions, Mary, assuming that Jesus was a gardener [for she did not recognize Him], said [Verse 15], ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will taken Him away!’
- Once again, Mary wanted the corpse of Jesus.
 - As R.C.H. Lenski states, ‘Indeed, why does she weep? – when we should all have had cause to weep to all eternity if what she wept for had been given her, the dead body of her Lord!’
 - This, again, is like us today! **If we ‘received’ the God we often wanted, he would be no God at all! For he would be an all-to-human CREATURE – not the Sovereign CREATOR!**
 - In his work, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer writes, “The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men.” Tozer, then states, “The Essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him...Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous!”

- Then, Jesus said, ‘Mary!’ Immediately, Mary recognized Jesus, and said, ‘Rabboni!’
 - Certainly Mary is overwhelmed with joy as she realizes that her Master is alive.
 - Notice the powerful truth revealed here: it is not that Jesus knows Mary’s name that is so amazing, but that Mary recognizes Jesus’ voice, for the Good Shepherd ‘calls his own sheep by name...and his sheep follow him because they know His voice’ (10:3-4).
 - Mary’s sorrow is immediately turned into joy; yet, her understanding is still clouded.
 - There seems to be little doubt here that Mary sees that Jesus is no longer dead, but alive! Yet, this still is not the whole truth, for Jesus was the Resurrected Messiah, but had not yet Ascended to the Father. But, Mary did not know this.
- After Mary says, ‘Rabboni!’ Jesus says, ‘Stop clinging Me...’
 - It is likely that Mary fell on her face and grasped Him by the feet (Matthew 28:9).
 - From Mary’s perspective, she has received what she was seeking...but better! She has, not only the body of her Lord, but He is alive!
 - But, Jesus says, ‘Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father...’
 - Because of her lack of biblical understanding, Mary still has no idea that there is ‘more to the story’ than Jesus lives!

III. The ‘Cure’ for Mary’s Misunderstanding

- ❖ The cure for Mary’s misunderstanding began with the Ascension of Christ.
- R. C. Sproul correctly writes, “The significance of the Ascension is often overlooked in the modern church...Most churches...make little or no mention of the Ascension. However, the Ascension is a redemptive event of profound importance. It marks the moment of Christ's highest point of exaltation prior to His return. It is in the Ascension that Christ entered into His glory.”

- Understanding the significance of the Ascension allows us to understand the final aspect of Christ's work of Redemption, and consequently view Christ properly as **He truly is** – not just the Risen Messiah, but our Exalted King!
 - As Sproul stated, the Ascension of Jesus Christ receives little or no attention in most churches today.
 - Yet, its significance, both for Mary and for us today is profound.
- 1.) The Ascension reveals that Christ is now in heaven [and so will we be].
 - 2.) The Ascension marked the end of the Christ's work in redemption. Further, the Ascension was a *necessary* part of our salvation, just as the crucifixion and resurrection were necessary as well.
 - 3.) The Ascension led to Christ's reward for His obedient life, suffering, and death (Acts 2:34-36; Isaiah 53:12).
 - 4.) The Ascension ushered in the Coronation of Jesus Christ as the Exalted King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Philippians 2:5-11).
 - 5.) The Ascension led to Christ's sitting down at the right hand of the Father [this is often referred to as the 'session' of Christ] (Psalm 110; 1 Corinthians 15:25), with all things under His feet, as head over all things (Ephesians 1:17,22).
 - 6.) The Ascension led to the inauguration of Jesus into the high priestly work He now performs in the heavenly sanctuary (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 1:3; 7:24-25; 9:11, 24-26).
 - 7.) The Ascension ensures that Christ is our Advocate in Heaven (Hebrews 9:24; Hebrews 4:14-16).
 - 8.) The Ascension made it possible for Christ to send the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit could perform all of His work on the basis of Christ's redemptive work (Matthew 3:11; John 3:5-8; 14:16-17; 16:8-9, 12-14; 15:26-27; Romans 8:26-27; 1 Corinthians 12:13).
 - 9.) Because of the Ascension, Christ's reign is universal; no longer is He [voluntarily] 'limited' by His human nature. In other words, His presence is no longer 'localized.'
- ❖ It was, indeed, better that Christ went away (John 16:7), rather than remaining during His earthly ministry!

- With an understanding of the significance of the Ascension, one can then understand better the words of Jesus in Verse 17, ‘Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father,’
 - In other words, it is as though Jesus is saying, do not embrace me as a physical, localized Master/Teacher that you have come to know over the past couple of years, for I have not yet reached my final state of exaltation, whereby I will reign as the King of Kings from heaven.
 - Jesus was, essentially, telling Mary to not ‘cling to Him’ with her physical senses, but cling to Him by faith – for knowing Christ as the Ascended, Exalted King is far greater than knowing Him as the miracle-worker from Nazareth!
 - It is interesting that the very thing that Mary did not want [for Jesus to leave her again], was the very thing she needed to ‘cure’ her misunderstanding.

- Jesus, then, concludes by saying, ‘...but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’
 - By ‘my brethren’ there appears little doubt that He is referring to His disciples.
 - He also refers to the Father as ‘My Father and your Father’ and ‘My God and your God.’
 - In these words, it is as though Christ is establishing the truth that His relationship with the Father is different from theirs.
 - Some have suggested that these two expressions [*My Father...My God...*] reflect the two natures of Christ [*My Father* refers to His deity – He is the eternal Son of the Father; and *My God* refers to His humanity].
 - This very well may be the case, but the primary thrust seems to be that it is **only THROUGH the work of the Ascended Christ that we can claim that the Father is our Father and our God.**
 - R.H. Lightfoot wrote, ‘the disciples must never forget that, whereas His Sonship to the Father is by nature and right, theirs is only by adoption and grace, in and through Him; and therefore He speaks of ‘my Father and your Father’, not of ‘our Father.’ ‘

- Augustine wrote, 'He says not, Our Father: in one sense, therefore [from Christ's perspective], is He mine, in another sense, yours; by nature mine, by grace yours...my God, under whom I also am as man; your God, between whom and you I am mediator.'
- After this, John says that Mary went and announced to the disciples [Verse 18], 'I have seen the Lord...'
 - Her message likely had little to do with the Ascension of Christ; rather, she proclaimed that Christ is no longer dead but alive!
- ❖ Yet, as believers in the New Covenant, may we, through the power of the Holy Spirit, embrace Christ as He is revealed in all of Scripture.
- ❖ Read **Psalm 68**.