

## First To Mary Magdalene

The appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ to His friends, followers and disciples on His resurrection day are very important. There were five in all. The Saviour appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to the other women, that is Mary, Salome, Joanna and at least one more. Later Peter was visited by the Lord, though none of the gospel writers directly mention this event. The Lord then met two of His followers on the road to Emmaus. Finally, late in the evening the Saviour appeared to the eleven, 'and them that were with them', though Thomas was absent.

### **Five and five**

It would be forty days until the Lord ascended to heaven. In the coming weeks five more encounters would be granted which means half of the Lord's post-resurrection appearances occurred on this first day. The other appearances were a visit one week later to the disciples, Thomas being present, and a meeting with seven disciples at the sea of Galilee. There was also an appearance to a large gathering of above 500 brethren recorded by Paul, and a visit with James, the Lord's half-brother. Finally, the Lord appeared again to His disciples at Jerusalem before leading them out to the Mount of Olives where He ascended into heaven.

### **A day of wonder**

Our attention in our service will be on the resurrection day appearances mentioned here in Mark's gospel. Each throws light on the day's great wonder of Christ's rising from the dead, while reinforcing the truth of the event itself. We shall give attention to three key aspects. First, the astonishment of all the Lord's followers to the resurrection, second, their collective unbelief, third, how necessary it was for the Lord to suffer and enter into His glory.

### **A suitable, personal help**

We shall see, too, how the Lord's visit to Mary comforted His grieving friend. We shall note the strength given to the other women when their courage failed, and the individual help granted to Peter when he was so downcast. We shall note and, I trust, admire the insights granted to the two on the road to Emmaus, and then later how the Lord inspired His disciples to rise from their despair and to preach the gospel of forgiveness and grace.

### **A continuing need**

These lessons will provide us with practical encouragement for the challenges of our own lives. Most of us, like Mary Magdalene, know what it is to grieve and mourn the loss of a loved one. Many of us, like the group of women, have felt the paralysing effect of doubt and fear. Some of us, like Peter, know the bitterness of losing our testimony and compromising our witness by open sin, or the loss of confidence that comes when faith is stretched to breaking point. All of us know, to our shame, how much we need to be motivated and inspired to keep close to the Lord.

### **A visit from the Lord**

In all these situations, and others like them, there is no greater blessing can be experienced by a child of God than to have the Lord Jesus Christ draw near, come visit, and in condescending mercy supply such comfort and grace as only His intimate presence can bring. It was true for these crushed and confused followers of Christ, and it is true for you and me. The absence of the Saviour brought these souls to the end of their tether, and potentially their profession. How were they to get back on their feet? How could they recover their strength and confidence? Only by divine restoration of their faith, and a bountiful supply of grace.

### **Yes, please!**

Let our prayer for each other and for ourselves be that the Lord will visit us tomorrow in the ministry of His Word with the gift of His felt presence. May He meet us, and appear to us by the apprehension of faith, as frequently in the gospel as He knows we have need of His comfort, grace and mercy.

Amen

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