

## Mark 16:9-18

<sup>9</sup> Now when *He* rose early on the first *day* of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. <sup>10</sup> She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. <sup>12</sup> After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. <sup>13</sup> And they went and told *it* to the rest, *but* they did not believe them either. <sup>14</sup> Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. <sup>15</sup> And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup> He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup> And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Do you know how old the oldest copy of sections of the New Testament writing is? Copies of sections of the Greek New Testament were found dating 25 to 50 years after the original writing would have been signed. There are over 5000 ancient portions or whole documents of the Greek New Testament in existence. When we add to that number the ancient copies of **translations** of the New Testament into Latin and Ethiopic, the ancient manuscripts increase to nearly 25000 copies. Then if you add ancient authors who quoted the New Testament in their documents, you have 32,000 more evidences to the authenticity of scripture.

Now, how does that compare to other ancient documents that our modern textbooks and scholars trust as authoritative sources? Well, Homer's Iliad has 643 ancient copies. Herodotus's History has eight manuscripts with the oldest being dated 1300 years after the original was written. Caesar's Gallic Wars has 10 manuscripts, the earliest being 1000 years after it was written. The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides only has eight copies, all dating more than 1300 years after the original.

Does it strike you as odd that people blithely speak of the Bible as a book that is just like any other book? They act like there is no evidence at all that it is remarkable or trustworthy. Yet they will take all these other books as the gospel truth, even though they only contain a fraction of the verifiable evidences of authenticity that the Bible has.

If you are ever in a conversation with someone about the authenticity of the Bible, don't allow their challenges to ride if you have the chance. Ask them if they really want to see the evidence about the validity of the Bible. Then if they do, do

your homework and present it to them. Our culture has been fed a pile of nonsense in soundbites about the fallibility and unreliability of scripture. And most people have no idea that what they think can be **proven** to be **life threateningly** wrong. Challenge it when you have the chance.

Now, you might wonder why I bring this up in our text. It is because of this. When later copies of the Bible are compared to the earliest copies, the earliest copies do not include verses 9-20. The scholars are pretty sure that these verses were added later, probably in 200 AD, and probably by some well intending foolish people who wanted this gospel to end more like the other gospels. The beauty of the **history of scripture** is that we have other documents to compare our current translations to. We can know which passages are rock solid and which are questionable. And normally the translations do us the wonderful service of noting which passage is which. We are not left in a position of blind faith on the passages of scripture. We can know with a great degree of confidence which are **completely verifiable** and which are **questionable additions**. And remember, our position is not that every translation is without error. We believe that the signed originals were without error.

So, what should we do with our current passage? I would like to use it as a springboard to the story surrounding the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Then we will look at all of the more **verifiable texts** for the details of what happened. We may mention what Mark says, but we will not elaborate on any teaching that **Mark gives** in this section that **other Gospels do not verify**. So snake handling and poison drinking will probably not be added to our services. I would like to approach it this way because this is my first in depth study of a Gospel. And the Gospels are the lens piece through which all of the rest of scripture should be viewed through. So I would like to take the gospel story through to its completion. That should then help all of our other studies. So to begin let's look at When Peter and John see the empty tomb.

John 20:3-10 and Luke 24:2

### **John 20:3-10**

<sup>3</sup> Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb.

<sup>4</sup> So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying *there*; yet he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying *there*, <sup>7</sup> and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

## Luke 24:2

<sup>2</sup> **But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.**

Mary Magdalene had seen that the tomb was empty so she ran to tell Simon, and probably John, that the tomb was empty. She told them that someone had taken the body and the women did not know where.

That is what Peter and John are responding to.

So Peter and John don't waste any time. They both ran to the tomb. But evidently John was a faster runner than Peter. I doubt that was a fact that Peter focused on much.

Now when John gets there he looks in. He would have had to stoop down as the door to the tomb would not be very high. John looks in and gives a reporters eye view of what he saw. John saw the cloths lying there. John just looks in. He doesn't **go in**. But naturally Peter doesn't just look in. Peter **barges in**. Caution was never Peter's strong suit. John just saw the cloths lying there. But now Peter sees the cloth that was around Christ's head lying in different place than the rest of the cloths. John notes that it was folded. It is likely Peter would have said, "hey John, come look at this." So John goes in after Peter.

And notice what verse 8 says. John saw the situation inside the tomb and he believed. Remember, they had not heard that Christ had raised from the dead yet. But they saw this evidence and they believed. I am assuming that this means that Christ resurrected. But it dawned on me after this study that they could have believed that the body was taken at this point. We don't know for sure. But if they believed Christ resurrected, we need to ask why this scene would have convinced them? Why did the evidence convince them of anything?

Well **first**, a grave robber would have taken the cloth and the body. It would make the body easier to bear. And the spices may have been what they would be after.

**Second**, if they had unwrapped the body, they certainly would not take care to situate the cloth in an orderly fashion. Stuff would have been strewn everywhere. But it wasn't.

**Third**, note that the cloths lying there orderly also stands as evidence against the story that the religious leaders **came up with to hide** the truth.

Now there is a nice story on the internet that says that it was a Jewish custom for a master to fold his napkin and it meant he was coming back. So that is what the folded head cloth was intended to convey, so the story goes. This appears to be something that someone made up. There seems to be no historical evidence of such a custom.

It is very likely that what Peter and John saw was the cloths lying as if Christ had simply vanished from inside of them. That is probably the explanation that was immediately the most plausible. Maybe it is the way that the linens were

wrapped. Maybe it would have been very difficult to recreate the wrapping without a body in the middle.

Also, why the head scarf somewhere else? Well, I think it would be like evidence at the site of a suicide. If you find the gun at a different place from the body you would know that a dead body could not do that. I think the scarf was moved by Christ to let the disciples know that a dead body did not do this. Christ was alive again and this was the evidence he left to show them it was true. And the fact that it was folded or rolled shows that it was done in an orderly fashion by someone with forethought. They could have grasped from this that **not only** did Christ raise from the dead **but that He could also function** in the world we accept as reality. Christ is more than just spiritually raised from the dead. He has physically risen from the dead.

<sup>9</sup> **For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.** <sup>10</sup> **Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.**

Peter and John knew what Christ said. It was in there somewhere. But they didn't understand from the Old Testament that this had to happen. Christ **had to** raise from the dead. So they had **to see evidence** of Christ's resurrection. They did not simply believe what scripture said. Christ said that the ones who believe **because of scripture** are actually more blessed than the ones **who see** and believe. We are the ones who believe as a result of scripture and the result of faith.

Then what did the disciples do? They went home.

Isn't that often what happens when we come face to face with the most profound of truths? We go home. That can be where the truth **is ignored and dies**. Or that can be the place where the truth **takes a hold of our lives**. We decide that every Sunday. We decide that every time we have a spiritual conversation with someone. What will we do with **today's truth** when we go home?

We need to realize that if we want to be what we have always been, all we need to do is to keep doing what we have always done. Change happens when we commit before God to doing things differently. Change happens when we add something different in the list of things that we will not leave undone in a day. Most of the significant changes that happen to us are going to happen after we go home.

OK

Let's go to the next event.

Jesus shows up. John and Peter are pretty sure at this point that Jesus is alive. The women have been told by an angel that Christ is alive. But no one has seen Him yet. But here He comes.

**John 20:11-18**

<sup>11</sup> **But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped**

down *and looked* into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. <sup>13</sup> Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." <sup>14</sup>

Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* He had spoken these things to her.

This again is Mary Magdalene. She had come to the tomb. The tomb was empty. She evidently left the scene before the angels had spoken to the rest of the ladies. So Mary Magdalene had told John and Peter that Jesus was gone. Peter and John entered the tomb, saw the evidence, were convinced of something, probably the resurrection, and left. Now Mary gets back to the tomb. She evidently did not talk to John and Peter in passing. By the time she gets there, Peter and John are gone and there are no angels.

Have you ever felt like all hope is lost? Have you felt like you are alone in your misery, even though you have been actively sharing the truth with others? Have you ever wanted company in your distress, but evidently you need to face it alone? That is Mary in our text. She is probably emotionally worn out at this point. We find her bawling outside Christ's tomb. But even in this state of turmoil, she must have had a little curiosity. I can't help thinking here that she displays a womanly attribute. It is distress and curiosity woven tightly together. Maybe men are like this too, but I don't think as much. She had emotions that she needed to express but at the same time, she must have been thinking, "I wonder what is inside here."

So she bends down and looks in.

<sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. <sup>13</sup> Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

I don't think she realized these guys were angels. I don't know what it is about angels but it is clear in scripture that they can go incognito. Sometimes there is no doubt to onlookers that they are angels. We will find that the other women knew immediately that these guys were angels, mostly because they were

glowing. That would be a good clue. But sometimes angels don't display that they are angels. So some of them must look identical to humans. Except I doubt they have belly buttons.

So these two angels are just sitting at the head and foot of the slab that Christ laid on. Now these two angels speak. Isn't it good to know that they know our language and can use it? Here are spiritual beings who undoubtedly use a different language where they come from. I wonder if they have to actually learn our languages.

Anyway they communicate.

They ask, "Woman why are you weeping?" Maybe it was confounding to them that she should be weeping. **They** probably heard everything Christ said **too**.

They knew what He had promised. Maybe they were genuinely curious why Mary would be weeping just because Christ had done what He said over and over that He would do. Or maybe they were setting the scene for Christ.

Now I love Mary's response.

There is beauty in this woman's honesty.

First, she knows what is bothering her.

Second, she can state it clearly.

If we went no further I think we would have an application point. In our relationships it would be sweet if we dealt with such clarity in our discussions and disagreements. I am not going to single out women here but I really really want to.

She is upset because she doesn't know where Jesus body is.

<sup>14</sup> **Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus.** <sup>15</sup> **Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."**

We don't know why people can't recognize Jesus after the resurrection and then sometimes they can. I suspect that Jesus controls how people see Him and He does that with a purpose.

So all Mary knew is that there is some guy standing there. Mary does the normal routine of figuring out who would have a reason to be there. The gardener would be a natural choice.

Now this man asks her the same question she has just been asked. Except Jesus asks, "**Whom** are you seeking?" Now, how would a gardener know she was seeking someone unless Mary thought that maybe he had overheard his last discussion? That is probably what happened.

So Mary doesn't bother to answer the question. She assumes the gardener already knows about the body in the tomb. He is the most likely person to have

moved the body. He may actually have some authority in this arena. So, rather than playing games with this man, she jumps right to the heart of things. Did you take Him? If you did, I want to know where you put Him. And I will get Him and put Him somewhere that He will be cared for.

I don't think there is anything kind in Mary's voice here. I think she is responding in cynicism and suspicion. She evidently is no stranger to this kind of behavior. She responds effectively against it. It is almost like she is saying, I assume you took Christ's body. I assume you did not do it with the best of motives. But I don't want to get into any of that. Just hand Him over and I will be out of your way. This is not a bad response to have in the world. It is often called for. But it is not called for when you are talking to Christ or someone truly representing Him. Now, I would have liked to see Mary take Christ's body away. She was expressing good and loyal sentiment, but in actuality it is probably going to be men that would need to move Christ's body to another location.

<sup>16</sup> **Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).**

Maybe it was the way Christ spoke her name. Maybe it was the way Mary really looked at Christ now. Maybe the first indication was that this stranger knew her name. He could not just be a stranger. Whatever it was, Mary saw Jesus and knew Him. And at that point it is nearly impossible to contemplate what must have gone on in her heart. Here is Mary being cynical and pragmatic, accusing a man of stealing Christ's body, only to discover that all the reasons she thought she needed the cynicism disappeared. She went from **assuming the worst to experiencing the best.**

Have you ever had that happen to you? Maybe you read the worst motives into something that someone did to you. Maybe you thought the person betrayed you or was unfaithful to you. Only to realize that the person was actually doing their best to love you, to look out for your best interest. It might be embarrassing, but isn't it oh so sweet to know that the source of loving you is still alive? Isn't it sweet, in times like that, to know that you are free to hope for the best again? Isn't it good to know that there is a lover of your soul who is still present in your life?

Mary responds in all honesty. All the hostility and suspicion are abandoned. She looks at Christ, recognizes Him for who He is and calls out to Him in a title of honor and reverence. Even though her hopes were abashed and **He was the cause**, she does not refer to any of that. She simply and wholeheartedly resumes the proper relationship with her Lord. She calls Him very reverentially, my teacher.

What an excellent example to follow. We do not always respond to our Lord the best. We don't always trust Him in the circumstances of our lives. We sometimes

ignore Him or undermine His work in our lives. But when we come to our senses and see that Christ is working out the best for us, how blessed we are when we quickly submit and call Christ teacher.

And even better, when we really mean it. When we really mean that we are trusting Christ to teach us how to live our lives, how to right our wrongs, how to obey instead of disobeying. What a blessing it is when we truly regard Christ as the teacher who we will obey and follow, whom we will give up all competing interests. That is the state of Mary Magdalene this morning.

Is that how you follow Christ? Where do you not trust Christ as your teacher? Where will you not do what He says?

Now let's look at what comes next. Let me ask, who of us would not cling to Christ at this point? Oh maybe us guys wouldn't be real touchy feely. But who would not want to settle back into a relationship of being with Christ, of enjoying His physical presence and comradery. But look what Christ says.

<sup>17</sup> **Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'**

Some people make some big metaphysical points here about Christ's risen body. I don't think that is the point. It isn't like touching Christ's risen body is going to mess something up. I think the point is that Christ is trying to wean people of a physical dependency. They have to get used to the idea of Christ no longer being present.

Let me ask you this. Which would you prefer? Having Christ with you physically, even though you would know that He would only have influence over you and those in your vicinity, or having Christ with you spiritually and having Him influence the whole globe through His people and His Spirit? That is the problem. Everyone would prefer His physical presence. I certainly would. But we can't cling to that. Those who had it had to let it go. They had to be weaned from His physical presence. And none of them wanted to see it go.

So Christ told them not to cling to Him.

And then immediately He gave Mary a mission. Often that is exactly what we need when we hear something we really would prefer not to deal with.

**go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'**

Christ sent Mary with a message. Tell my followers this. This is what they need to know. They don't need my physical presence at this moment. What they need to know is that I am going to go up to be with My Father. And not only is He my Father, He is also the disciple's Father. And not only is He My God, He is the disciples' God as well.



This would be encouraging. In fact it is the first encouragement they have heard. The disciples, no matter what they have been guilty of in the last three days, are still believers. They still are sons of the Father. They are still worshippers of the true God.

<sup>18</sup> **Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.**

Mary again serves as a wonderful example. She does exactly what she is told. Oh how the Lord must long for this: people who will do the simple things they are told to do. Oh to be like Mary Magdalene.

We will find as we continue our story that the disciples thought she was nuts. They thought she and the other women were making this all up. Their testimony of the truth was received much like **ours is** in an unbelieving world. But we need to give it anyway, simply because that is what Christ told us to do.

We have touched on several applications this morning, but I think one of the most useful would be for us each to **come up with a plan** to make sure that truth isn't lost on us when we go home. Everything else that is important to us we plan around. We **make sure** that it happens. But somehow we think that **the most important things in life** will just happen to us. It is like we are supposed to just wake up more spiritual and more knowledgeable about the Bible. What we will find is that we will rarely **have more of God** than what **we plan to have**. We vote with our minutes what is important to us. We need to seek before we will find. What plans do we have in place to ensure that truth isn't wasted on us? What plans should we have?