

Resurrection of Joy

John 20:11-23

B. I.: The hopeless disciples despaired that all was lost, but joy and purpose burst to life when Jesus rose from the dead!

LTS: Psalm 72

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 16 Jesus made an infallible, unqualified declaration of His mission on earth. He said, “I will build my church and the gates of hades will not overpower (ESV “*prevail against*”) it (Matt. 16:18). Of course the disciples could not have understood all that Jesus meant by that statement. It wasn’t until after the resurrection that the apostles began developing the doctrine of the church. But at the very least they would have understood that Jesus was talking about gathering a body of people who would willingly follow Him. The word for “church,” Ecclesia means “to call out.” Jesus was going to build a following of “called out” ones; a group of disciples from every nation who would be used to achieve God’s mission in the world.

There was no ambiguity about Jesus’ intentions. He declared emphatically that He would build His church. How emphatic was this pronouncement! Well, so confident was Jesus that He would be successful building His church that not even hades (i.e. death, grave) could derail His plan. Now if you are one of the twelve handpicked disciples of Jesus this is an exciting prospect! After all, the man who was bold declaration had proven that He had the power to accomplish anything! He could heal the sick, walk on water, calm a raging storm, create food, and even raise the dead. More than that, if the O.T. prophet Elijah were any reflection on the power of Jesus, He would also be able to make it rain in Israel and cause there to be streams in the desert. Think about it! Jesus had the power to create a new Israel, a land “flowing with Milk and Honey” more prosperous and fruitful than mighty King Solomon had ever imagined!

Needless to say, the disciples had great expectations. Every time Jesus did something new it would have filled them with a greater sense of excitement and expectation. They knew that on the Day Jesus took over the government and expelled the Romans they (the twelve) would hold the highest offices in the land. That, no doubt, is what provoked the arguments between them about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. They were absolutely convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the prophesied King of whom it was written that the government would rest upon His shoulders. There had never been such a time of expectation in Israel. The king had arrived and the disciples were His exclusive assistants. O the wonder! O the sense of expectation and Joy! But then (John 18-19) a very dense, black cloud arose on the horizon of Redemptive history and suffocated all their hopes, dispelling all their joy. It was Passover week and their Master – the Messiah, the King – was dead.

You don't have to read between the lines very much to get distinct impression that the disciples – both men and women – are absolutely devastated by Jesus' crucifixion. In their minds everything Jesus had promised was now forfeited. When Jesus died it surely meant that He took the church with Him. The King is dead. The church is dead. Joy was dead.

As we return to John chapter 20 now, one of the themes that we discover is not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ but the resurrection of the disciple's joy.

- Joy of Resurrected Faith
- Joy of Resurrected Mission

I. The Joy of Resurrected Faith:

1. When reading this narrative as if for the first time the appearances of Jesus catch the reader completely by surprise because it had been made so clear that He was really, truly dead. His death was so obvious and universally accepted, in fact, that of all the characters mentioned in the story Not a Single One of them believes or feigns any hope that Jesus may have survived. Not one of them exhibits the slightest modicum of faith in Jesus' predictions of resurrection or in the O.T. prophecies of resurrection. So in each case when Jesus appears it is a welcome, almost unbelievable, surprise! We see this first in...

A. The Resurrection of Mary's Faith:

- 1) This is where we left off last week. Mary Magdalene is absolutely beside herself with grief. She was the one whom Jesus had rescued from the torment of seven demons (Lk. 8:2), the one who anointed Jesus' feet with the costly perfume and wiped them with her hair; she who was known best for sitting undistractedly at Jesus' feet to listen to His every word; she who courageously stood near the cross when most of His disciples fled for their lives; she who witnessed Him being nailed to a cross and heard His final cry (Jn. 19:25); she of all people appears to be most stricken with unquenchable grief. Love and loyalty to Christ she maintained in fullest measure, but the faith she once had in Him died with Him on the cross. Now all she can think about is locating His corpse to give it a proper burial. Nevertheless, she was about to experience the supreme joy of a resurrected faith in Jesus

Read Jn. 20:11-18

- 2) We should notice here that the grave clothes in the empty tomb inspired neither resurrected faith in Jesus nor resurrection joy. She was one of the few people who actually looked inside the tomb. She saw the grave clothes. She even saw the angels! And notice the question the angels asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping? The implication is, "This is a time for joy! Not for weeping!" But even that did nothing to revive Mary's faith. Not even when she turned around and saw Jesus with her very own, tear-filled eyes was her faith revived. So convinced

was she that He was dead that her eyes could not register recognition. BUT when she heard Him calling her name, with that unique tone and accent with which He has spoken to her so many, many times before – then her heart leaped with inexpressible Joy! This was the moment her faith was resurrected from the dead.

- 3) When I read this part of the story I cannot help but be reminded of Jesus' words in John 10. Jesus is revealing Himself to be the Good Shepherd. In verse 3 He says that the Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. Then in v. 27 He famously said, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me." Mary was certainly one of Jesus' "sheep." She heard her Master's voice and everything changed.

Today God doesn't speak to us with audible messages from heaven, but He does speak to us through His word. It is His word that gives rise to saving faith. It is His word that directs us, encourages us, disciplines us, and inspires us to worship Him. Mary's faith was resurrected by the same means with which her brother Lazarus was raised from the tomb... by the word of Jesus.

- 4) So many people in the church today profess to belong to Jesus and express loyalty to Him by attending church each week and giving of their time and treasure, but truth be told – they hardly know Him because they do not read His word. How can two people have any meaningful friendship or fellowship without communication? To know Him we must listen to Him. He speaks to us through the pages of His word.
- 5) Apparently Mary, upon hearing Jesus' voice and recognizing that He was alive, spontaneously stepped forward to embrace Him, but Jesus stopped her saying (17) "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." This statement is perplexing to us and John simply reports it without attempting an explanation. Much has been written about what Jesus might have meant.
- 6) Many have argued that Jesus' concern here was that Mary was clinging so as to never let Him go. She had lost Him once and she intended to never lose Him again! Jesus, however, had explained to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to leave so that He might send the H.S. And He had made it clear (16:7) that "If I do not go away the Helper will not come to you, but if I go I will send Him to you." So Jesus could not stay and enjoy unabated fellowship with His disciples. He had to ascend to His Father. Mary wanted Him to always be near, but He could not fulfill her desire. Fellowship with Him would henceforth be "in the Spirit." Relationship with Him would be in the Person of the H.S. In fact we see as early as Acts 1:2 that even before Jesus ascended "He had given commands through the H.S. to the apostles whom He had chosen.

I must say that appreciate this explanation, and certainly all of this is true and consistent with God's word. However, it still leaves me to wonder why after He forbade Mary to "cling to him" He then allowed (Matt. 28) a group of women

to cling to Him and why He invited Thomas to touch Him.

- 7) I think J.C. Ryle's thoughts on the subject are worth considering, where he says,
Let it however never be forgotten (and I desire to speak with the utmost reverence and delicacy) that when our Lord allowed the women mentioned by St. Matthew (28:9) to 'hold Him by the feet,' there were several women present together and some of them mothers and not young. When on the contrary He said to Mary Magdalene, 'Do not touch Me,' He spoke to one who in all probability was a young woman, and He and she were alone!"¹
- 8) If you are a young man who happens to be fond of a particular young lady, let this be instructive. You do not know how to relate to young women until God's word teaches you how to relate to them. The apostle Paul exhorts (Eph. 5:3) there should not even be a hint of impurity in your fellowship with a young lady. Later, the same apostle teaches young men to relate to "young women as sisters in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:2), and here is your example – none other than Jesus Himself.
- 9) Back to the narrative now, instead of allowing Mary to embrace Him, He immediately sends her on an important mission (17b), "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to My God and Your God.'" This is the first time in the Gospel record where Jesus refers to His disciples as brothers. He has referred to them as servants, disciples, and even friends, but now it is as He seeks to elevate their status even further. And we should find this remarkable in light of the fact that their most recent actions revealed hearts that were at their lowest point of unbelief, fear, and disloyalty toward Him. When He was arrested all but John abandoned Him. Peter denied him NOT once but three times with cursing and swearing. Then, instead of the disciples exercising courage enough to ask for and tend to Jesus' body that job was take up by two secret disciples who had been part of the ecclesiastical body that had Him arrested and condemned!
- 10) But it is now, of all times, that Jesus honors them and elevates them to the status of brother. In his inimitable way Spurgeon writes on this,

All the time they were true and faithful He called them friends. You would have thought that when three of them slept in the garden during His awful agony, when all forsook Him and fled and when especially Peter denied Him, the Savior would have said, 'I called your friends when you were faithful. I will now see whether I can stretch a point and call you servants.' But we see that the blacker their sin was, the stronger was His love – the more defiled they were, the more sweetly did He talk to them! He said to them, in deeds though not with words, 'Henceforth, I call you NOT friends, for a mere friend is no relation, but I call you brethren, for My Father is your Father, and My God is your God. Carry these sweet thoughts with you... that the higher the Savior gets, the more free He is in the expression of His love. And that... the farther the disciples ran away from their Master, the more lovingly did He call them back again!... Who cannot derive comfort from such

¹ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 29/67

thoughts as these?²

11) Oh beloved, I suspect there are some in this room who need such comfort this morning. In your heart you have been running from God. In your conversation with other people you appear to have it all together but deep inside your own unfaithfulness to the Lord plagues you. You feel guilty because you are guilty and you know that. But rather than running TO Christ who has completely and eternally paid for your sins you hide from Him. Can you not this moment see the mercy of Christ? Can you not apprehend the love of Christ who rather than waiting for you to repent is actually seeking, serving, and blessing you with His divine favor?

- Do you imagine that your sin is deeper than His love?
- Do you contrive that your own self-condemnation is more purifying than His blood?
- Do you think that He will receive you more willingly if you punish yourself and polish up on your own righteousness?
- Have you forgotten that He died not for the righteous but for sinners?
- Have you never read that “Where sin abounds grace much more abounds”?

12) Oh my friend, behold the awesome glory of the Love of God in Christ! Never fear that He will refuse to forgive you. Fear rather that your own heart will deceive you into thinking that His love is anything but lavishly forgiving. While you are busy condemning yourself, He stands before the Father unashamed to call you His brother – His sister. Come to Him with your failures and sin. Come to Him with your pride. Come to Him with your lust, your resentment, your unfaithfulness. Come to Him like the prodigal and you will soon discover that though you have been denying Him, His faithfulness to you has never waver and His affection for you has only grown stronger. Why? Because in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation his disciples have come to share in His sonship to the Father. We are not Son’s of God in the same way that Jesus is, but in Him we are now reckoned as sons and daughters of God, adopted Children into his family and co-heirs with Jesus Christ.

13) I believe this is something of what Peter was referring to when he later wrote (1 Pet. 1:3) that “according to His great mercy, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has caused you to be born again to a living Hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Christ’s Manifestation To Mary Magdalene*, Sermon NO. 2733, www.spurgeongems.org, (visited on 3/30/16)

14) This is what Mary Magdalene discovered afresh on that day before the empty tomb. And this is what the disciples would also soon discover when she came to them with Jesus' message. And so she went, and upon entering the house where the disciples were she announced, "I have seen the Lord!" and announced His message.

15) Mary's joy was the Joy of a Resurrected Faith. But the disciples were not ready to share in it.

16) Mark, reveals that their faith was as dead as Mary's had been. When she came to them they were all still mourning and weeping. And when she delivered Jesus' message no one believed her (Mk. 16:10-11). Soon, however, their faith would be resurrected as well.

- The Other women meet Jesus (Matt. 28:9-10)
- Two disciples on road to Emmaus (Luk. 24:13-32)
- The group of Disciples in the upper room (John 20:19-23)
- And somewhere along the way He also appears to Peter (Lk 24:34)
- In each case the sight of Jesus resurrects their faith and restores the joy. (Jesus will say, "You believe because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe).
- John 15:11 "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.
- John 16:20 "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.

17. Next week when we come back to this passage we will see...

II. The Joy of Resurrected Mission: (20:19-23)

B. I.: The hopeless disciples despaired that all was lost, but joy and purpose burst to life when Jesus rose from the dead!