

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

April 7, 2019

Mary Magdalene's Love

John 20:17

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you, praise you for the gift of the cross. Father, we are incapable of even beginning to come to grips with the depth of that gift. And I thank you, Lord, that you have given us a time each month to set aside and thank you and focus on what it is you've done for us on the cross, and this day is that time, Lord. And so we pray especially, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would hear, be here, that you would accompany us in a unique way, that you'd enable us to do the work that we need to do to meet you in this special place. Guide us, direct us, Lord, as we open up your word; accompany us by your Holy Spirit, we pray. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, it's the first month, the first day -- let me get that right -- first week of the month, and that's the Sunday that we set aside to focus on Christ and his cross. Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and then he celebrated the very last Passover supper which is detailed in *Matthew 26*, which says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread,*

and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Well, Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And he asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular -- just on a regular basis, and we do this each time. Sometimes folks do it once a year, sometimes they do it once every six months, we do it once a month and we are regularly remembering the Lord's table. And we do that by meditating first on what the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross; secondly, by examining ourselves, that's asking God's Holy Spirit to accompany us, to point out areas in our life where we need to be convicted of sin and then by confessing our sins and then participating in the elements. John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

We have worked our way -- it's been a couple of years now, we've

worked our way through the Gospel of John, we're at the twentieth chapter. And last time out, which was a couple of months ago, we looked at the role that women played in Jesus's death and resurrection. And we saw that in terms of loyalty, in terms of dedication, in terms of fearlessness, it was the women who remained true to Jesus while the men, almost to a man, abandoned him. And we examined some of the reasons why it was that women were so, so fiercely loyal. And we saw that it was Jesus who almost alone among his contemporaries who offered women personhood and dignity and value, and that may be why he attracted women of such intense loyalty. But we know that Jesus was offering far more than simple personhood, dignity and value. We know he was offering the kingdom of God. And although they might have come closer than the men, the women of Jesus still did not get Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Now notable among the women was Mary Magdalene. She played a unique, she played a particular role in Jesus's resurrection and she's been the victim of bad press and sloppy reporting for ages now. I mean when you think of Mary Magdalene, most people think of Mary Magdalene as sort of a reformed prostitute, the woman who anointed Jesus's feet at this dinner that was held in his honor. Well, none of that is true. None of that is what happened. In scripture there's actually two separate anointings of Jesus's feet. One takes place in Luke 7, another takes place in John 12. One was

done by a woman who had a reputation who people knew of as a sinner, the other one was done by Mary, the sister of Lazarus, which happened shortly before Jesus's death, but neither of those involved Mary Magdalene. In fact, Mary Magdalene was described as a person who had been sick in body and spirit, who had been afflicted with seven different demons; one who had been miraculously healed by Jesus. She was in fact part of the traveling advance party that would come into a town and prepare accommodations for Jesus and his disciples. And, you know, it's entirely possible that Mary Magdalene was exactly the opposite of the portrait that she's painted as of being a lower class prostitute. It's even possible she was a person of means because only women of means could afford to accompany Jesus on these journeys. Listen to Luke's description of Mary Magdalene. This is in *Luke 8*, it says: *Soon afterward he (Jesus) went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who had provided for them out of their means. These were the women who were part of Jesus's support team, and it's obvious some of them were wealthy.*

The one thing that really seems apparent in all the descriptions we have of Mary Magdalene, the one thing that's very obvious is that she deeply loved Jesus. If you look under the hood, if you look a little bit behind the scenes, it appeared that she loved him more like the damsel in distress loved Prince Charming. I mean I'm merely speculating here but it appears that Mary Magdalene was emotionally attached to Jesus, the man. Why not? I mean, you could never accuse Mary Magdalene of not aiming high in her choice of someone to love. Jesus was not only loving, caring, kind and compassionate, he was flawlessly so. I mean why wouldn't he be extraordinarily attractive on a human level to anyone? The problem is that Jesus is far more than simply an ordinary human being, and what he had to offer Mary Magdalene was more than simply a person to fall in love with. If we hone in on Mary's response to Jesus's death, we look under the hood for that, we find a person who was absolutely distraught. We find someone who appears to have lost the love of her life, but someone who still has absolutely no idea who Jesus is.

We pick up on Mary's story at *John 20:1*. It says: *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have*

taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." I can't imagine the incredible pain that Mary is in at this time. You've got to remember, she's just witnessed Jesus being brutally tortured. She's watched him being executed. She has no thought in her mind of what Jesus had spoken of over and over again, what he had warned him over and over again about his upcoming crucifixion, his death and his resurrection. None of that is in her head. She may well have been in shock and all she can think about now is Jesus's body, and all she wants at this point is to tenderly and properly prepare it for burial. And so she arrives at the tomb and she's so broken, she's so numbed by pain that she doesn't realize as she gets there that she's actually staring at a number of miracles. The very first miracle was the stone -- quote -- *"that had been taken away from the tomb."* Now again you have to remember, this is Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. This is a very wealthy man. These kind of tombs had a large, large round stone that was rolled in front of it into a groove, and it was there so that grave robbers could not get in and steal what was in there, and it required a number of people to roll the stone back. Well, the stone wasn't rolled back. The stone was lifted out of its groove and set down. In fact one of the passages describes one of the angels sitting on it. So that was the very first miracle that she saw. But the second miracle was a far greater miracle. It was the empty tomb. Mary looks into the tomb and she sees the

linen cloths lying there empty and she concludes they've stolen Jesus's body. She said, *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."* We have immense sympathy for Mary but the fact is her statement is an expression of unbelief. I mean Jesus had stated over and over again exactly what would take place. He said that after three days he would rise. Mary just refused to believe it. So she returns to the tomb, she's still thinking that Jesus's body had been stolen and her unbelief earns her two separate but loving rebukes from the angels. *John 20:13* says: *They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"* I mean the tomb is empty. Just like Jesus said, he has risen and she should have, as I said last time, she should have been doing cartwheels. *She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."*

Luke's gospel points to another question/rebuke that was asked of her by another angel in *Luke 24:5*. It says: *And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"* See, Mary's faith was still lacking. So she's looking at the best news you could ever imagine, Jesus has risen from the dead, but she sees nothing but bad news. Baker's commentary points out that Mary was preoccupied looking for a thing, looking for a body instead of a person. I wonder how many times do we find ourselves doing the

exact same thing, not looking for Jesus, the person, but for Jesus, the thing: The thing that will heal me, the thing that will give me success, the thing that will give me whatever it is I need. What we need is Jesus. Mary had so narrowed her focus because of her intense, intense grief at Jesus's death that the only thing she cared about at that moment in time was finding Jesus's body so that she could anoint it. And you know, what Mary was looking for, what would have satisfied her temporarily, what might have even given her a sense of joy was not really Jesus at all, it was his corpse. And I can't tell you how many times in my 40 years as a Christian that I've desperately sought things that wound up being nothing more than a corpse. Some thing, some idea, some desire designed to crumble, designed to decay. I confess that many a time I was bitterly disappointed that Jesus didn't give me that corpse, but he didn't because he had something far better to give, and what he had to give and what he has to give us is his living presence. Mary was so preoccupied with the Jesus that she thought was dead that she wound up being lovingly rebuked by two angels. And as we pick up on the story of Mary, we find the stakes growing imminently higher as the next person who lovingly rebukes her is Jesus himself. At this precise moment Mary is standing outside of the tomb and she's looking in. And she's looking in, she sees the angels inside, she knows that the body of Jesus is no where to be found in that tomb. She turns around and she winds up looking

directly into the face of Jesus who's now standing outside the tomb, who says, "*Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?*" *Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."* Now aside from the fact that she alone, Jesus at this point has been wrapped with spices, many, many pounds of spices and linen wrap and he's got a body, Mary says I'm going to do this on my own? That speaks to her state of mind. But Mary doesn't even get the rebuke. She doesn't recognize who this person is. And again, it doesn't tell us why she didn't recognize Jesus. We do know that after his resurrection, Jesus did cloak his identity in order to teach his followers something more about himself. I mean we remember the two who were on the road to Emmaus, his distraught followers that he walked along and engaged in conversation for quite a while, and they had no idea who they were talking to until at just the appropriate time Jesus reveals his true identity. We're going to find the same thing happens here because Jesus still has something to teach Mary. Mary Magdalene obviously loved Jesus, but it appeared she loved him in a Prince Charming sort of way. And why not? I mean he had literally rescued her in a Prince Charming sort of way from seven different demons that were inside her. So she's so distraught she either cannot or will not physically see Jesus until, it says: *Jesus said to her, "Mary."* I mean the resurrected king, the creator, the

sustainer of the universe didn't just call her by name, he called her in a way and in a tone that she instantly recognized. That's the literal outworking of what Jesus told us in *John 10:27*. He says: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* You see, it's important to understand the distinction that Jesus makes in John's gospel about his sheep. Jesus speaks positively and negatively about who is his sheep and who is not, why Mary could hear him and others could not. He says positively that only his sheep can hear and believe. He says: *"My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me."* But he also says something negative. He says this about sheep in *John 10:26*. He says: *"You do not believe because you are not among my sheep."* Notice Jesus says -- doesn't say you do not believe because the message is hard, because the cost is high or the theology is difficult to grasp, Jesus says none of that. It's far more basic. He says the reason you don't believe is because you're not one of my sheep. Mary heard his voice because she was one of his sheep. Sheep get the gospel; goats do not. That's a hard truth but it's true. As John Piper puts it: So believing is what proves you are a sheep, not the other way around. You don't believe and, thus, are turned into a sheep. John says: You don't believe because you aren't my sheep. In other words, my elect ones, my sheep that the Father has chosen will hear my voice and will follow me and that will prove that they are elect. My sheep hear my voice means my elect are

enabled by God to hear the truth, and the true shepherd when the gospel is preached.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I'd like us to just take a moment to consider the privilege, the privilege that Mary Magdalene had, and then I'd like us to ask ourselves has that privilege been extended to me? Do I hear his voice? Does the gospel make sense to me? You see, if you know you are a sinner saved by grace, you've got to know you didn't get there on your own. *Ephesians 2:8 says: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Just as the bread is being passed out, just consider the nature of this gift as you consider God's warning about taking communion. It's contained in *1 Corinthians 11:28-32*, it says this: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* You know, I give this warning each time, I tell you, I beg you, I say communion is an extremely serious

undertaking and if you enter into it in an unworthy manner, you are courting disaster. I say if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, then do not participate in communion. If you haven't by faith trusted Christ as your Savior or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just don't participate. As I often say, no one's going to think you strange. They may well think you wise.

But you know the devil has both poles taken care of all the time, this side and that side, and the opposite pole is that you're thinking, well, I have to be absolutely flawless in order to participate at the Lord's table. That's a lie from the enemy as well. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you never fail, that you never sin, that you're flawless in your behavior. Part of it means that you recognize that the salvation you have is a gift, something you have been given, something you could never earn by being good, and we repeat this quote every month and I've repeated it until everybody, I think, has it memorized, I hope, because it sums it up so well. It's Dane Ortlund saying: "In the kingdom of God the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that we understand that when we do fail, there's a reason why we

understand that we've sinned and the reason why is not because we're more clever or more insightful than anybody else, it's because God's Holy Spirit lives inside us. It's God's Holy Spirit who convicts us, who grieves us, who makes us understand that we are God's children and that we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us and we have this incredibly precious verse in *1 John 1:9* that tells us: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Being a child of the King does not mean that you are sinless and it does mean that you understand that God is on our side, that we have an advocate in heaven right now speaking on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* So it's because we have this alien righteousness, this righteousness that's not ours, it belonged to him, he gave it to us, it's ours because we have his righteousness, we are now free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you at the cost of his own blood. You know, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven, so that we could hear the voice of the shepherd. Take a moment to ponder that.

1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.

Mary hears the voice not only of her Lord but now also of her Savior. She turns around now and she instantly recognizes him. Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord" -- and that he had said these things to her.

So Jesus tells Mary not to cling to him. It's a strange thing to say and we know that he says that singularly to Mary alone because Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus met with the other women and he freely allowed them to touch him. *Matthew 28 says: And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.* So why this singular message directed at Mary, "Do not cling to me." Well again, I think it points to the possibility that Mary's relationship with Jesus was

earthbound, was limited. Jesus standing outside that tomb was far more to her than a Prince Charming. He was now her Lord and Savior. *"Do not cling to me"* may well have been Jesus challenging Mary to widen and broaden the scope of just what it meant to be a child of the kingdom of God. I think Mary was stuck in a place where she saw Jesus, she saw him clearly as Lord but not nearly so clearly as Savior and that Jesus was just trying to get her to look at a much bigger picture than she had been willing to look at. I mean he had told her, he had just told her that because of his sacrifice, because he had offered up his own perfect life on her behalf and that sacrifice had been accepted that now the debt of her sin had been fully paid, and now, so to speak, her adoption papers had been finalized. And she and the rest of the disciples and every subsequent believer going all the way backwards to Adam and forward to time now had their adoptions finalized. They were no longer just "friends" which is the term that Jesus had used before. Now they were actual adopted brothers and sisters of Christ, and because of their new status as part of the family of God, they were now co-heirs with Christ. Jesus put it this way, he says, *"Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* You know if we and Jesus both have the same father, that has to make us brothers and sisters to Jesus. And *Hebrews 2* goes on to say: *For*

he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers. See, Jesus is not only our Lord, he's not only our Savior, he's also our brother. I think that's a truth that the enemy doesn't really want us to discover. And I think he keeps us from fully grasping that truth from keeping us distracted. And in fact it's become sort of an art form.

You know there's a phenomenon that's lately become popular known as the "shiny object syndrome." You see it often in politics. And there was a recent *New York Times* article entitled "*The Politics of Distraction*." It had a good summation of what the "shiny object syndrome" is all about, it said this, it says:

"Magicians use sleight of hand, dangling a shiny object in front of their audiences to distract them from the hidden deception going on elsewhere. That increasingly popular metaphor is an apt one because the various images it conjures -- an intergalactic body glowing brighter as it moves closer to dumbfounded earthlings, a ball on a string held by a hypnotist, a mobile hung above a baby's crib -- all, to varying degrees, seize attention, whether through their novelty or through manipulation. In politics, a shiny object is the preoccupation of the moment: The 14th Amendment, or so-called birthright citizenship and anchor babies, or, inevitably,

any poll."

I just happen to think that Mary suffered from a type of shiny object syndrome. She was focused on the shiniest object she had ever seen: Jesus Christ, the man. How could you not be distracted by the flawless perfection of God in the flesh? I mean he wasn't just a knight in shining armor, he was the perfect knight in perfectly flawless armor, perfectly loving, perfectly kind, perfectly compassionate. Is it any wonder that Mary would see Jesus on only an emotional level, so much so that she couldn't see how much greater Jesus was than merely a human being, nor could she ever begin to grasp what Jesus had given her by dying in her place. But please don't think that Mary was unique in suffering from shiny object syndrome, because we, too, all suffer from the very same thing, and it keeps us as well from coming to grips with what has been given to us as children of the most high God. See, the cross divided people into two distinct groups: There were those who were sheep and those who were not. Those who belong to God received him, and those who didn't received him not.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, just take a moment and consider John's gospel in the very beginning, *John 1:11*, he says: *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the*

right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. See, that right that God is speaking of, that right became finalized at the resurrection. The sin debt that all of us owed was paid in full, we were now able to be welcomed as sons and daughters. Romans 8:15 says: But you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" And this adoption was something that God had planned for his own. He says in 2 Corinthians 6: "And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." Furthermore, it was a plan that went back before the creation of the world itself. Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us: He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

See, when Jesus told Mary to tell the others, *"I'm ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God,"* he was changing forever the relationship that they had with all of us believers. God the Father was now God my Father. I was now and forever his son and daughter. So now as believers in Christ we have full rights as sons and daughters. We're not just heirs with Christ, we are what God calls co-heirs. He says: *And if children, also heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.* See, Jesus as God is

heir to everything in all of creation but we, as co-heirs, we get to share in that creation not as some kind of a guest pass, but as co-owners with Christ by inheritance. Christ has given us the right of ownership to every single thing that he has, all that he has created. And you know, you might want to break that down and the logical question would be, okay, rights to what? Well, for one, eternal life. Jesus says in *John 10:28*: "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*"

You know, it's astounding to me on a personal level that I'm going to be 70 this year. It's amazing to me. I feel mortality creeping up on me physically, mentally, and every other way. It's grim. But you know something? I can look in a mirror and wonder how in the world do people without Christ do this? How do people who have no hope in Christ, how can they look in the mirror and not experience full panic and depression? I can't tell you what a blessing it is to look in a mirror and realize that my earthly body is just temporary and that I'm going to be getting a brand new one, one that works perfectly forever. Christ has also now made us heirs to glory. In *John 17:22*, he says: "*I have given them the glory You have given Me. May they be one as We are one.*" So another logical question, okay, what glory? What does glory look like? What does it feel like? What is it like to get glory? God

says you have no idea. Not only do you have no idea, you can't even imagine what it's going to be like. In *1 Corinthians 2:9* he says: *But as it is written: "EYE AS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."*

Our inheritance also includes authority. God's going to give us authority over angels and over the world. *1 Corinthians 6:2* says: *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 2 Timothy 2:12* says: *If the we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.* I mean we don't really begin to grasp the enormity of the privilege we have as being the bearers of the image of God until we understand that God fully expects us to rule and reign this universe with him forever. Jesus even gives us a little hint of how that might work in one of his parables. In *Luke 19* he says this, he's describing a faithful servant, he said: *"Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities."* Well in that parable, the faithful servant was the one who brought back ten, ten Minas and received ten cities to rule over and there's another faithful servant who brought back five and in like manner he

received five cities to rule over. Might I suggest that God is saying that your faithfulness as a servant down here will determine your rule and authority up there.

You know, our inheritance also includes literal treasures. *Matthew 6:20* says: *But lay up for you yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* Peter says we will receive: *An inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.* You know, we hear all the time now about these jackpots, these incredible lottery jackpots and people are winning 5- and \$600 million. And the one thing about those unfathomably huge sums of money is that every single thing they can purchase is going to perish, it's going to fade, it's going to get defiled, it's going to get rusted or stolen. All of it. God is promising us something unique about the treasures that he offers us. He says they're eternal. They will never fail; they will never fade. I mean we're so used to living in a fallen world where everything rusts and fades and corrodes that we can't even grasp what it's like to live with an inheritance like that.

But here's why a lot of the full impact of what God has done for us through Christ escapes us. I think it's because we, too, suffer from shiny object syndrome. See, God offers us eternal life.

Here's God offering us eternal life on the one hand and here's the enemy dangling above us something shiny like a car or a house or a promise of something we can actually get our hands on so that we can be easily distracted from the far greater gift that God is offering us. God offers us glory. The enemy again offers us something shiny, something temporary like a career, and we get distracted by how shiny and attractive it is. God offers us authority to rule and reign with him forever in heaven and the enemy holds out some shiny object like status or wealth. And we find ourselves moving towards what is temporary at the cost of what is eternal. We forget that God is offering us literally a treasure, a treasure that can never fail or corrupt or corrode. And we ignore that because all we can see is the shiny objects that are being dangled in front of us, whether it be health or wealth or status or career. And so we, just like Mary Magdalene, cling to a Jesus that we can manage, a knight in shining armor, if you will, somebody who will help you in the end but certainly not command your life today. Jesus wants so much more from us than the shiny objects we are so passionate about. And knowing what he knows, he tells us in *Colossians 3: Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive an inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

And you know, sometimes these shiny objects, they're not really the things that the enemy holds out but instead they're the common every day things that God has already promised us that he would take care of. And it happens to everybody, it happened to Jesus's own disciples. They were constantly worrying about food and drink and clothing and shelter. Jesus told them if they would only focus on the things that mattered, they would find that those concerns would take care of themselves. Jesus said in *Matthew 6:31*:

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

I was thinking about this verse and I was thinking back and I was thinking back to my own personal experience and I realize, you know, Janice and I raised ten children and not once in all of the years that we raised them did I ever make more than \$30,000 in a year. And I think about that. To this day I have no idea how we did that. That makes no sense. You can't do that. I don't know how you do that. Other than the fact that Jesus said our heavenly Father knew what we needed. I've got living proof you can't get

there from there. We did. That's what God promises us. I mean Jesus commanded his disciples not to get distracted from kingdom tasks by obsessing over common tasks such as food, clothing and shelter. And even went farther than that, furthermore he said, I don't even want you to worry about it. Now I just wonder how far from that standard we've come. I wonder what each of us could accomplish for the kingdom in our own lives if we simply sought God's kingdom first and foremost. You see, from Jesus's perspective this is -- it's a no-brainer. I mean we have eternal life and glory and authority and treasure and honor all awaiting us in ever-increasing amounts if we only would focus on the kingdom. And God says not only will I give you all of this stuff, but I'll take care of all the other details as well. I mean ask yourself this question: If you find yourself constantly concerned about things such as food, clothing and shelter, ask yourself, have I put the kingdom first and foremost? Does my life center around glorifying God in everything I do in advancing his kingdom or have I tried to work Christ into my life as a minor character, as a knight in shining armor who's going to rescue me in the end? God wants so much more for us than that. I mean he's our Lord, he is our Savior, and he's also our brother. He told Mary not to cling to that kind of vision that she had of who he was because it was limiting, it was narrow, it was focused, it was earthbound. I think he's trying to tell us the very same thing. *Jesus said to*

her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God."

Take a moment to ask God, ask God to examine your conscience. Ask him to convict where conviction is necessary. *1 Corinthians 11:25* says: *In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* So take and drink.

This is the part we call head, heart, and feet, where we try to just address where, where can we practically go to put our remembrance of our Savior, our Lord, our brother into some kind of practical understanding. How do we work this out in our every day lives? And I just want to encourage you by giving you a story. The thing that I try to impress upon us over and over and over again is that we have been given this incredible privilege and God didn't just give it to us to lock up and keep for ourselves. He's given it to us to give to those people outside that door. And I think a lot of things that stop people from actually doing that is fear. They're afraid I'm going to get stuck. I'm going to not have the right thing to say. I'm not going to know what to say. And I want to encourage you by a story that I heard this week.

This past week was the Gospel Coalition conference and we didn't go this year for a certain number of reasons, but I wound up listening to a number of the messages because they post them online. You can get them if you want. They're really excellent. And the conference was focused on evangelism, on basically on knowing what to say and having the courage to say it. And I just want to encourage you about this story that Tim Keller told, because he had a message that focused, among other things, on how God can use anybody in any circumstance to bring the good news. This is the story that he told.

He said many years ago there was a young man who was struggling and he was locked in a mighty, mighty battle about his faith, about his Christianity. He said one Sunday he wanted to go to church but there was this massive snowstorm, so he could only get to a little tiny primitive Methodist Church that was right around the corner from where he was. He wasn't a Methodist but he went there because there was no place else to go. And when he got there, he found out that there was maybe three people, four people that had actually straggled into the building. Even the minister couldn't make it because of the snow. And so for want of anything better to do, a lay man got up and started to preach. The man said his preaching was terrible, it was so poor, all he could do was just read a scripture and then exhort people about the scripture that he had

just read. And he said part of what he was reading was Isaiah 45. And he said he got to *Isaiah 45:22*, and he said, "*Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.*" He said he got to that text and he began explaining. He says, you don't have to even lift a finger to look. He said you don't have to be worth thousands and thousands of dollars in order to look. You don't have to have anything of value to look. You don't have to be good, you don't have to be bad, you don't have to be anything to simply look. And then he said don't look to yourselves because there's no hope there. And finally he lifted up his voice, as Keller says, he put the words of Isaiah 45 in Jesus's mouth, and he said this, he said: Look to me 'cause I'm sweating great drops of blood. He says, look to me, I'm on the cross. He says, look to me, I have died and I'm buried. Look to me, I am risen and ascended, and I'm going right to the right hand of the Father. Look to me. And again he's preaching to what, three people. So he looks out at his audience of three people and he sees the young man and he says to the young man, he goes, you look miserable. And he tells him, he says, you know what? You're going to be miserable in life and in death if you do not obey this text. At that moment, the young man realized that God was speaking specifically to him. That was the moment the gospel made sense to this man 'cause he said he would have been ready to do fifty different things in order to earn his salvation, that he was

looking, just like Mary Magdalene was, at some truncated version of who Jesus was, not a body -- I mean, not a person but a body, a thing. And he was thinking what things does he have to do in order to gain his salvation? He instantly realized he had been trying all of his life on his own to do the religious thing, to do the spiritual thing. And he realized at that exact moment what God was trying to say. He had only to look to Jesus to be saved. He said he looked and he looked and he looked at Jesus until his eyes could look no more and then he spent the rest of his life sharing that vision. That man was Charles Spurgeon. Nobody got up and nobody preached, and nobody said something that made any sense to anybody. God used that to turn that man around. I want you to think of that when you start saying this is too scary, I don't want to do it. I don't know how to do it. This guy didn't know what to do. He just stood up and started speaking, and God did the rest.

You know, we all have people in our lives. I go to the gym and I've got my shirt on, I've got the shirt says, you know, the Voice of the Martyrs shirt, I think I told you that. A guy came up to me, older man came up to me, and he said, "Tell me about this shirt." He spoke with a thick accent. I said, "Well, it's Arabic," and he instantly corrected me, he said, "No, it's Persian." I said, "Okay. Persian." And I explained to him that it was the letter N, N stands for Jesus, and that this was used by

ISIS painted on the doors, they would come in and kill the Christians. And I saw him two weeks later and he was very excited, he came up to me and he says, my friends and myself, we went on your website and we all bought the t-shirts. Now I don't know if this guy is a Christian, I don't know a thing about him. I just met him. And so we've talked a couple times. I saw him couple weeks later, he said he's going on vacation. I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "Antarctica." I said, "Are you crazy?" He said he's going to see the penguins. And so he went, went to Antarctica the last time that he possibility could and came back and I didn't see him for two or three weeks. I saw him again and I went up to him and I said, "Where have you been?" He said that his friend had had a stroke and he went out to San Diego to see him and I said, "You know, I don't even know your name," I said, "I've been praying for you. I'm praying to God for the penguin guy." I said, "So what's your name?" He said, "My name is Hasson." And I thought to myself, okay, I don't know where this is going, I have no idea. I pray all the time, I pray I would have the opportunity to share the gospel with this guy. It's the most important thing in the world to me. I want it to be to him. And I just think, I can't believe that that's not the most important thing to everybody. I mean there's a world outside those doors that are going straight to hell. So I just want to encourage you, if a guy's standing up with really nothing to say, can speak into the

heart of Charles Spurgeon and turn his life around, surely we can open up our yaps at the risk of somebody saying shut up. Just speak. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for who you are, I thank you for the gift that you've given to us, I just -- I am stunned at how precious a privilege we have. You have given us treasures that are inconceivable, unimaginable. They're waiting for us. And you've also given us the opportunity to share that gift. Father, give us opportunity, give us courage, give us a heart that wants desperately to share that gospel, for Hassan, for all the others that are out there waiting, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.