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Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

When Joy Meets Sorrow **Pastor Ty Blackburn** **John 20:11-18** **May 8, 2016**

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 20, the twentieth chapter of John's Gospel. We'll be looking at Verse 11-18. We come this morning to a passage that introduces the first of four encounters the apostle John presents for us, four encounters with the risen Christ. Three of those will be with the disciples, and this first is with one woman, Mary Magdalene. I want you to, as we work through these passages, to note how, or to remember that I think what John is doing, in this part of his Gospel, is continuing his basic thrust. Remember his whole point, he's going to remind us in a few verses, is that he is writing these things so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. He is writing a proof of the deity of Christ. He is offering evidence of that, by God's grace, the evidence itself alone does not convert, but God works through His word, and by His Spirit, when He wills, calls the dead to life.

So John is offering these proofs to us. He has opened the book, we've noted by giving us those seven signs, those seven wonders, the seven miracles that Jesus did early in the Gospel. Beginning with the changing of the water into wine, culminating with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These seven signs were given so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then culminating with this grand sign of Jesus being lifted up, the cross, and the resurrection, and the ascension, proving that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

Throughout the book, we've also seen John interspersing along the way, eye-witness testimony. We'll have, you know, the woman at the well encounters Jesus, and then she goes off, and we hear in her own words, her voice saying to the other people in that city of Samaria, "Come and meet Him, and see a man that told me everything about myself. We have found the Christ." So she is saying Jesus is the Christ, you see? So it is like he calls witnesses forward to testify one, after another, after another. And here in this last section, what we see is he presents to us four resurrection encounters, post-resurrection encounters, four encounters with the resurrected Christ, four appearances of the resurrected Christ, and he lets us see the impact that it has upon the people who encounter Jesus. What we'll see in each time is their circumstances dramatically change.

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I remember reading, years ago, Josh McDowell's book, The Resurrection Factor. It is actually a subset of his larger book, The Evidence that Demands a Verdict, which he wrote I think in the 70s. I remember reading The Resurrection Factor, which was the first exposure I'd had, really, to the fact that, I mean really seeing a systematic proof of the historical nature of the Christian faith. That we're not following cleverly devised tales that we might think are just really nice, that it is a great story, get caught up in it. That in itself would appeal to people today, in the 21st Century, post-modernism, abandonment of truth, and ultimate reality. So it would appeal just in that, but this is not what the Bible is offering. The Bible is offering to us eyewitness testimony of historical realities, and so McDowell makes that point in the book. He lays out the evidence of the resurrection.

One of the most compelling points he makes for the evidence for the reality of Jesus' resurrection is the transformed character of His followers. You think about how Peter, and James, and John, Peter goes from denying Jesus three times to being crucified upside down for the sake of the resurrection, for the preaching of the resurrection, and it is true of all of the apostles, and all of those early disciples that had seen Him. They were never the same again. And so John basically then puts before us four encounters and says, "Look at the transforming power of the risen Christ." So keep that in mind as we go through today, and then in subsequent messages.

What I want us to look at this morning, the title of the message is 'When Joy Meets Sorrow', when, not where, there is a wonderful little, pretty good poem in that book, Streams in the Desert, *Where Sorrow and Joy Meet*, I think is the title. I'm not saying 'where', I'm saying 'when', 'When Joy Meets Sorrow'. We're going to see the transformation that happens, and when does that happen? When do you go from experiencing unrelenting sorrow to then experiencing inexpressible joy? When does that happen? That is the title of our message. Let's read John 20:11-18.

John 20:11-18 ~ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 And 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." 14 When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus *said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she *said to Him,

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“Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” 16 Jesus *said to her, “Mary!” She turned and *said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). 17 Jesus *said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene *came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and that He had said these things to her.

Let’s pray together.

Father, we come asking this morning, that You might speak to us through Your word. We thank You that Your word is perfect, that You caused the apostles to write down every jot and tittle that you wanted them to write. We praise You, oh Lord, that Your word is eternal, that as the grass withers and the flower fades, it is the word that stands forever. We come knowing, Lord, that we need Your word so desperately, so speak to us by Your Spirit. Help us, all for the glory of Your Son. We pray in His name, Amen.

‘When Joy Meets Sorrow’. To help us outline the passage this morning, we’re going to use the W’s and an H. I often find that is kind of a helpful way to observe a narrative, because you want to let the narrative flow, and get the movement, so I’m going to use that again. We’re going to do four W’s and an H, we may get all 5 W’s and an H in, we’ll see. *Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?* It’s not going to go in that order, but be looking for the W’s and an H as the markers as we move along this morning.

1) Who?

‘When Joy Meets Sorrow’ is the title, and the first question we need to ask is *Who?* Verse 11.

John 20:11 ~ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping;...

Who? or more correctly, *Whom?* To whom does Jesus first appear? What would you have expected? Isn’t it surprising that Jesus doesn’t first visibly manifest Himself to Peter? To James? To John? The first person who sees the risen Christ is Mary Magdalene. In fact, all four Gospel-writers record her importance on that first Easter morning, that first Resurrection Sunday. It is interesting that the Lord

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does this, and we don't really know why. We can only guess, but I think one thing we definitely can infer though is it reminds us again of the way that the Lord emphasizes in His Ministry His elevation of the place of women. First Century Judaism, women did not have a high place. Now, it was not because the Old Testament gave them a bum rap, it was, I think, because the Jews had imbibed too much Greek culture. Because the Old Testament, if you think about it, gives a very high place to women. I mean, if you think about all the emphasis upon the important women in the Old Testament, you know the place of women in the Old Testament. Sarah, Rebekah, Miriam, Deborah, leading the people of God in war. Hannah, Ruth, Esther, Rahab, Tamar, Abigail, the Proverbs 31 woman. I mean, it is clear in the Old Testament, the Lord, though He has created a hierarchy and authority system in His world, I mean, He places authority in our lives from the time we are children.

We come into the world with an authority structure—Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. We have government, and there is a hierarchy within marriage that the man is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the church. And that was before the fall, Paul makes that point in 1 Timothy, that the headship of man was before sin entered the world. But the Bible makes clear that though there is a functional subordination in the home, even in the church with men leading the church, not women in leadership of the church. Though there is a functional subordination, there is clearly metaphysical equality, an equality of being. There in the very first chapter, I mentioned earlier, the Lord said, “Let us make man in our image,” and so God created man in His image. In the image of God He created them, male and female, He created them. So that male and female together produces the image of God, so that there is a complimentary relationship of man and woman.

There are ways that women reflect the glory of God that a man cannot, and ought not seek to. And there are ways that a man can reflect the glory of God in just the same way, that women are not created to reflect. So the Bible teaches this metaphysical equality. This is why in Galatians Paul writes that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, neither barbarian, or Scythian, or Jew, slave nor free, all are one in Christ. Every distinction falls down at the foot of the cross, and ultimately that is a reflection of the fact that metaphysically God has made every soul to stand directly before Him. And as we walk through the Old Testament, we see the Lord affirming these things. He told Abraham, “Listen to your wife,” that's one that we often need to hear, isn't it? No, not every time, one time he listened to

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her and he didn't need to listen to her, he needed to ask the Lord about that one, but the Lord has given us one another.

Now, that said, in the 1st Century Jewish culture, we can look at this as we look back at the Rabbinic writings, the writings of the Rabbis, and the Jewish teachers, the 1st Century, and shortly thereafter, and we read things like this from the Talmud: *It is foolishness to teach Torah to your daughter. Don't waste time teaching the Scriptures to your daughter, teach them to your son.* They misread the Old Testament. Foolish misreading when Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Teach these things to your sons." It is an overly literalistic reading of the Scripture. In fact, you see this in Genesis, if they really understood Genesis 1. In the beginning God created, He said, "Let us create man in our image," and He created man in His image, and He created man, male and female, so that male and female are called 'man'. Mankind is made up of male and female. So man is the one that is named, that is why today we still, for the time being in our culture, husbands, wives take the names of their husbands, though that is quickly disappearing, isn't it? But the reason is because we are following the biblical precedent. So when he says, "Teach it to your sons," clearly it means to your daughters as well. And if you don't think so, why is Jesus commending Mary for sitting at His feet when Martha was busy tending the table? Remember that? Luke 10:38-42, "Only one thing matters, Mary has chosen the good part." She is doing what she is supposed to be doing, listening to the teaching of the word of God.

Now saying all of that, another interesting thing, the 1st Century women were not allowed to testify in court. Interesting note too, neither were shepherds. Isn't it interesting that the first people to witness the birth of Christ, and the first to witness the resurrection of Christ were not allowed to testify in court? God is just saying, He is trampling upon the foolishness of mankind, your foolish, stupid traditions. One of the things that it does though, as well, is it confirms the reliability of the New Testament because if they were spinning together a falsehood to try to deceive Jews into believing in a risen Messiah that didn't rise, you would never put together a tale that let a woman be first at the tomb. It proves this is the word of God. So that is the *Who?* Mary Magdalene.

Now we were told in Luke 8:2 that she had had seven demons cast out of her, and we see her as, Luke records in that chapter, Luke 8, that she was one of the women who followed, she was a female disciple of Jesus. Not among the twelve, not named in that sense of the twelve, but there were a number of women who followed Him wherever He went. And apparently some of them, and apparently

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Mary Magdalene was one of them, were of means, and they helped finance the ministry. We refer to that because in a minute she is going to ask the person she perceives to be the gardener, “If you’ll just tell me, I’ll take care of getting the body moved.” She apparently has the means, financially, to make something happen. So that is *Who?* or *Whom?* To whom does Jesus first appear? Mary Magdalene.

2) What?

Now, the second W is the question *What?* What is her circumstance? What we see is her circumstance is intense grief, or we could say unbearable sorrow. She is in the midst, in the throes of profound sorrow. This is emphasized by the repetition of the word ‘weep’ or ‘weeping’. Verse 11:

John 20:11 ~ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

There again, you see how, it is even emphasized in the way he says it. He could have easily said, “But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping, and so she stooped and looked into the tomb.” He wants us to know that as she continued to weep, as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She wasn’t weeping, “Okay, I’m okay now, I’m going to go look into the tomb.” She was weeping, she walks to the tomb still weeping, as she’s weeping, she looks in. Further, that is emphasized by the fact that she’s asked three questions, one by the angel, and two by Jesus, and two of those three questions are what? “Why are you weeping?” emphasizing the fact that she was weeping.

Now, this word ‘weep’ is an important word for us to understand. The verb here is a verb which speaks of violent emotion. It is the expression of physical or mental pain, physical or mental pain that becomes outwardly visible or audible. The word can mean ‘to wail’. It is not just crying, you know weeping tears and soft crying, this is the expression of great pain in the weeping. The word can be translated ‘wail’, ‘to sob’. One of the commentators writes—*What is going on is constant, unrestrained sobbing*. She is crying and her shoulders are shaking, her voice is expressing the pain and anguish in her soul, and that is the way, that is her demeanor as she stoops to look into the tomb.

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Now, it is important for us to consider why is she weeping? It seems that the pain of Friday, and the crucifixion, and seeing her Lord die in the agony of the cross, has now been added to, that burden, that unbearable burden of grief itself has now had another thing added to it. She, in coming and seeing that the tomb was empty, having gone, remember, last time we read the passage, she goes to report to Peter and John, “They’ve taken the body away.” Now she comes back. Apparently they ran ahead, she is running back a little behind them. I mean, she made, this is a round trip for her, but they have already come, seen what they saw, remember they saw the linen wrappings, and John believed. They leave and go back to their houses, and she then returns to the tomb, reflecting on what has happened, worrying about what has happened, the possibility now, and the apparent circumstance that comes to her. The only obvious conclusion to her is that grave robbers have stolen the body away. As she is coming to the tomb, that is what she thinks, that Jesus, the awful, indescribable suffering, and the wickedness that happened on Friday has now had something added to it, that they are desecrating the body of Christ, and this is something that for a 1st Century Jew was profoundly impactful.

I mean, the Jews had been taught throughout the Scriptures the importance of dealing with the dead in a right way. We mentioned earlier that they knew that you didn’t leave the body on the cross overnight. God wanted the body buried, it would desecrate the land to leave it. In fact, there is an interesting story in 1 Samuel 31, when Saul is killed, King Saul, killed by the Philistines. After he is dead, it says the Philistines went and found him, and his sons, and they chopped off his head, sent his head throughout the land of the Philistines, left the body there, and they were going to do more things probably. The implication is that they were going to do more things with it, to desecrate it, and the men of Jabesh-Gilead, in a heroic, valiant move, armed men went and recovered the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them back, and disposed of them properly. And the way the Scripture reads, that was something that God smiled upon, they did right. So she is feeling like something terrible has happened, and she is sobbing uncontrollably. So we’ve considered *Whom? What is her circumstance?* Profound sorrow, intense grief.

3) How?

The third question is now an H, *How? Who? What?* Now, *How?* How does the drama unfold? The first thing I want you to note is the repetition of the word ‘said’. The word ‘said’ occurs eight times in the passage, and one time the word

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'say'. What this tells us is this is a dialogue. Now it is interesting to note that when Peter and John came to the tomb there was no dialogue. The only dialogue in the first ten verses of Chapter 20 was when Mary reported to them in Verse 2:

John 20:2-3 ~ ...“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” 3 So Peter and the other disciple went forth,...

It describes what happened. They go forth, they run to the tomb, John gets there first, he doesn't go in, Peter looks in and sees the linen wrappings, then John looks in and believes, then they leave and go home. No conversation is recorded for it. Obviously, they talked, but God doesn't record any of that for us, but look what happens in this passage. You remember I mentioned before, I think maybe last week, but I want to remind you of this, that the speed of the narrative is something to observe. When you are looking at God retelling an event, narrating a historical event, telling the story of what happened, it is important to note the speed of the narrative. You can think of time over seconds as kind of a speed. You know like how much time elapsed, or time per word is a better way to do it. How much time per word? The first ten verses, the time is pretty, a lot of times occurring over a few words. We're told they run to the tomb, and then they go back home, and all that happens in just ten verses. In the next verses what we see is we see time slow down to real time. Whenever you have quotation marks, that is what happens because they are telling you exactly what was said. So if that is the case, think about how important that is.

If you are watching a ballgame, and they show a slow motion instant replay, why do they do that? Do you think the producer is saying, "I think it is just a good time for a slow motion instant replay."? Or, "That guy's jersey looked really cool the way it just..." No, what they do is they pick it out because it is in relation to what is important. Was the guy in bounds or out of bounds? And so they show the slow motion instant replay to focus you in on seeing that. Something of the same thing happens in narrative. God wants you to focus in on what is said. Now, all of God's word is perfect, and every word is important, but this is a way you observe carefully how He tells you what He is telling you. So what we have is a dialogue where Mary is addressed first by angels, and she replies, then by Jesus, and she replies, then Jesus speaks to her again, and she replies, and then He speaks to her again.

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Now, another thing I wanted to call your attention to is the historical present, something I mentioned last time as well. We have, of those nine times the word ‘*said*’ is used, six of them are in the historical present. Now, you don’t have a marker of this, I don’t think, unless you have a New American Standard translation. The New American Standard does you the service of putting a little asterisk, or a star, beside the words that are present tense, but translated as past tense. And that’s telling you that in the Greek, it’s a present tense verb like in Verse 12, when it says: ***and she *saw two angels in white sitting...*** What it literally says in the Greek is, “and she sees two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they say to her...” It’s translated as *said* because it’s hard in English to connote this.

John 20:13 ~ And they say to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She says to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” 14 When she had said this, she turned around...

This says, “When she had said this (past tense), she turned around (past tense) and she sees Jesus...” Do you see how the transition from past tense to present tense creates some added impact?

John 20:14 ~ When she had said this, she turned around and sees Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus says to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

Later she says to Him:

John 20:15 ~ “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” 16 Jesus says to her, “Mary!”

The historical present helps to make the movement of the vivid retelling of the narrative more powerful and impactful. John wants you to see what she saw, but apparently in this passage, he wants you to hear what she heard. That’s the emphasis six times. They say to her, the angels, and she says to them. Jesus says to her. She says to him. He wants us to focus in on what she heard.

Now, with that said, let’s look there at what she saw and heard. In Verse 12 we see the first dialogue. There are two dialogues—her and the angels and then her and Jesus. The first dialogue under *How the Drama Unfolds*.

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John 20:12 ~ and she sees two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.

I wish the New American Standard had retained its older translation. Until 1995, that word *saw* in Verse 12 would have been translated *beheld*. If you have an older NASB, that's what your translation says.

John 20:12 ~ and she beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.

Of the seven times that the word *saw* occurs, not just *said* is repeated. We noted last time that in the first 18 verses of John 20, the word *saw* is over, and over, and over. Mary saw the stone rolled away. When Peter comes, he, in Verse 5, saw the linen wrappings lying there. In Verse 6, John saw the linen wrappings lying there. So you have the *saw* over, and over, and over again. But seven times the word *saw* in English, and most of those times the word is a normal word for *seeing* the word ὁράω (horaō), but in three instances it's a different word. It's the word θεωρέω (theōreō) which would be translated *beheld* in the NASB, because it's a different word for seeing. It implies seeing, but it has a little bit different nuance of meaning. The word θεωρέω (theōreō) means to gaze, to look with interest, to look with purpose, to carefully observe. It connotes something of an element of wonder. So in Verse 5 when it says of Peter:

John 20:5 ~ and stooping and looking in, he *saw...

It actually is *he beheld the linen wrappings*, θεωρέω (theōreō). He sees them. He gazes at them with interest and careful observation, and with an element of wonder. That same word doesn't occur again until Verse 12. This is the other times the word *saw* is used, back to ὁράω (horaō). Now in Verse 11:

John 20:11 ~ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she *saw (beheld) two angels...

That's θεωρέω (theōreō), and I think the fact that he uses those words, he's going to use it again one time, when she beheld Jesus or beholds Jesus. So Peter beholds the linen wrappings and now here in Verse 12, Mary stoops in, and what does she

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do? Peter stooped in and looked, and he beholds linen wrappings. Mary stoops in, looks, and beholds two angels. Wow, this is amazing. I mean, when Peter and John had come to the tomb, the angels weren't there. They didn't appear. The linen wrappings were testimony for them. But for Mary, she gets two angels, one at the head and one at the feet. And so the idea is though she's weeping, probably tears clouding her vision, she sees two men in white that John tells us are angels. But I think there's a little bit of irony going on. She obviously is not fully cognizant of the fact that these are two angels, because what's the normal response when you see an angel, in the Bible? "Cool! An angel!" No, it's to be terrified, to be, in the King James, sore afraid. Every time an angel comes on the scene, they have to first of all say, "Don't fear," because the natural reaction in seeing an angel is fear. But apparently these men are not dressed quite as imposingly as sometimes angels are. Maybe their swords aren't drawn. They're sitting in white, but the white as the other Gospels tell us, was brilliant white. There was the evidence of Heaven about them, but Mary for some reason isn't cognizant of that. She's in kind of a stupor. Grief can do that. Unrelenting emotional pain can numb you. And so in her numbed state, she looks in and she beholds, and she's gazing at, she's pondering—she wasn't expecting to see anybody in the tomb. She knew the tomb was empty. She's just looking in and she sees two men. They ask her a question first, and they say to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Why are you sobbing uncontrollably?"

John 20:13 ~ She *said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." 14 When she had said this, she turned around...

And here we have the second dialogue. Apparently what happens is she's looking at the angels, talking to them, and she becomes aware of the presence of another person. Suddenly she knows someone else is in the room. Someone else is in the tomb. She turns around and sees Jesus, and here again it's the word *beheld*, θεωπέω (theōreō). As she looks at Him, she's pondering and studying, and she has an element of wonder about her, but she's still not perceiving. She doesn't realize it's Jesus.

Now, one of the things that we know is that when you read through the Gospel accounts, this is a common phenomenon, that when Jesus appears in His resurrected, glorified body, that they don't recognize Him, often, initially. In fact, in John 21:4 we're going to see that the disciples are fishing. Jesus is on the seashore. He calls out to them and they don't recognize it's Jesus until a little bit later. Now, part of that is probably due to the fact that His resurrected body is

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different in some ways than His physical body had been. It's a physical resurrected body, His physical pre-resurrected body. You can look at 1 Corinthians 15:35 that talks about this, and following, that our bodies are going to be different. And Paul uses the analogy, what's our resurrection body going to be like? I'm paraphrasing, of course. He says, "The best way I can describe it is take a seed, look at a seed, like a watermelon seed." He didn't say to take a watermelon seed, but I'm saying take a watermelon seed. Take a watermelon seed, plant it in the ground, water it, and watch it grow into watermelons. Now, the difference between a seed and a watermelon, that's the difference in the glory between the physical body in this realm and the resurrection body.

So Jesus' body had assumed that character, and we're not told enough to fully understand it, but they could recognize Him once He spoke. And that's interesting too. The recognition always comes at some moment when God wills it, when He opens the eyes. Remember in Luke 24 when He walks with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they don't know that it's Jesus? In fact, they have a long conversation, but when Jesus breaks bread and blesses it, their eyes are opened and they behold Him. They understand and then He disappears, because the resurrected body of Christ has properties—the body is out of the tomb. It is a physical body, and yet it's a spiritually physical body. It is a glorified body, and that's what we'll have. That's what John says in 1 John 3. We don't know what we'll be like, but we know that we'll be like Him. Our body will be like His. So she doesn't recognize Him. Possibly it's the tears as well confusing her, but even when He speaks to her:

John 20:15 ~ Jesus *said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

I love Jesus' questions. The Lord Jesus never needed to ask anyone a question. We're told a number of times He knew their thoughts. He's fully God. He's omniscient. He could draw on His omniscience whenever the Father willed Him to do, and if He asks the Father, "I want to draw on that," then He would give Him the permission to use that. He's still God but He's laid aside His prerogatives as God in the Man Christ Jesus. But He didn't need to ask a question. He could have just said to the Father, "I want to know." But He's always asking questions. If you read the Gospel accounts, you find that continually. Somebody comes and asks Him a question, and so often rather than answer their question, He'll ask them a question. Why does He ask her these questions? "Woman, why are you weeping?" He's calling attention, helping her call attention, to her uncontrollable grief, her unbearable sorrow.

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And then He focuses her heart on the second question, “Whom are you seeking?” taking the focus from herself to the Messiah that she is looking for. The Scripture says:

John 20:15 ~ 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.”

She’s still in the dark, blinded by her sorrow, blinded by her grief. She can’t deal with it. Essentially what’s happened is the angels are a testimony from God, a clear testimony that God is the one who has removed the body. Angelic messengers show up, and it’s because God is at work. They’ve been sent by the Lord. “You thought,” Mary, “when you came to the tomb, that the tomb had been robbed by vandals. The presence of the angels tells you no.” Now, I think she took in part of it, because now she’s thinking, “Okay, these guys are in here, and this guy is the gardener. I think they just moved the body to another tomb. It’s not as bad as I thought. So she’s taken in part of it, but she’s missing the obvious implications. Isn’t it amazing how hard the heart is and how dull our minds can be? We’re wrapped up in our own pain. It’s so hard when you’re in pain to think of anything outside of yourself. And so she is in such profound pain. She’s numb. She doesn’t see. That’s how the drama unfolds, and then in Verse 16 we’re going to come to the question *When?*

4) When?

And this is really the focus of where our title comes from. *When Joy Meets Sorrow*. We’ve looked at *Whom?* We’ve looked at *What?* We’ve looked at *How?* Now we come to *When?* When is her sorrow replaced with joy? When does her unbearable sorrow become unspeakable joy? When does that happen? In Verse 16:

John 20:16 ~ Jesus *said to her, “Mary!”

It was when He spoke her name. She’d heard Him say her name many times before, and when He says her name, she recognizes Him. I can’t help but think that John in his mind would have gone back to what he had recorded for us in Jesus’ words from John 10. “The sheep hear His voice and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.” He’s calling His sheep by name, and when He calls her by name, her grief is swallowed up by joy. So she expresses that joy, falling before Him.

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John 20:16 ~ She turned and *said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).

And then she’s apparently clinging to His feet, holding onto Him for dear life. The question is if we’re going to find ourselves in sorrow, how do you get out of that sorrow to joy? And where does mourning turn into dancing? When does it turn into dancing? It’s when Jesus speaks to you, when Jesus speaks personally to you, when Jesus calls you by name. Now, the fifth question I’ve got to get to very question is:

5) Where?

Where do you hear Jesus’ voice? If you need to hear Jesus’ voice in the midst of your sorrow, where do you hear it? She heard it for that limited period of time. Thomas would hear it for that limited period of time when Jesus was still manifesting Himself physically before the ascension. But after the ascension of Christ, where do you hear Jesus’ voice? You hear it in the Scriptures. So how does grief get swallowed up by joy? How does sorrow turn into unspeakable joy? It is in hearing Christ’s voice, and you hear Christ’s voice in His word, in the Scriptures. The word of God is so perfectly focused on Jesus, that if you will be in the word, you will find Jesus speaking to you and to your circumstances.

There’s this sense in which the Lord in calling her name, in making her His first appearance—like I said, we don’t know for sure why He appeared to her first. I think that it’s certainly interesting that Mary Magdalene and the other ladies were there at the cross. Only John of the disciples, that we know of, was at the cross. They were observing Him on the cross, loving Him, hurting with Him. When He’s taken down from the cross and they transport the body to the tomb, we’re told that Mary Magdalene and another Mary are still with them walking all the way to the tomb. And after they put the body in the tomb, they’re still there even outside the tomb looking, in the other Gospels. They leave, go home for the Sabbath, and early on Sunday morning they’re coming back to the tomb. Their hearts, they love their Savior so much. If you’ve been forgiven much, you love much. And she loves Him so much, and so the Lord, knowing her great grief, when you’ve loved much, you feel the pain of that loss. And so He comes to her in her circumstance, and meets her at the point of her need. And it’s when He says to her, “Mary,” He speaks right into her circumstance. I think that’s what we’re seeing here is Jesus’ desire is to meet us at the point where we need Him most.

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I think all of Scripture is basically telling us that. The names of God basically are telling you throughout the Old Testament that God is a God who has created us for Himself, and He puts us in circumstances where we see how much we need Him, and that's why they name Him different things in the Old Testament, and those are clearly from the Lord. Yahweh-Yireh, Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide. That happened when Abraham needed a sacrifice, a substitute for his son. Jehovah-Shema, the Lord is there, when they needed to know God was there. Jehovah-Shalom, the Lord is our peace. They were in times of turmoil and being attacked continually, and the Lord reveals Himself to Gideon that way. The Lord is our peace. The Lord is our righteousness. Everything that we need, God is and Jesus is. He's the bread of life, the Light of the world.

And so the greatest need of our hearts at every moment is to see Jesus Christ, to love Jesus Christ, to understand the wonder of who He is. And so we go through life in this fallen world, and we will find ourselves at times having grief come upon us, and just like for Mary, the grief of Friday is added to by the burden of the Sunday grief of thinking that the body has been desecrated. The Lord allows that kind of overwhelming grief in our lives. Why? So that we will turn to Him for comfort. And how do you find comfort? You find comfort in the word of God. You go to the Scriptures.

One of the things I think we often forget is that one of the most important ways the Lord is going to speak God's word to you in your life and in my life is through other believers telling you God's word. This is what Colossians 3:16 says. You want the word of Christ. You need the word of Christ to you personally in your grief to overcome. That's what this is saying. This is what Mary experienced. The word of Christ directly to her in her grief transformed her grief into unspeakable joy. You and I will need that. You may need that today. How does that happen? It happens through the word of God, the Bible, not through some kind of mystical ramblings by people who are putting things forward as if it came from the Lord. It's from God's word itself, but the way that He will do that, His way of doing that, so often is to do it through another human voice telling you the Scripture. It's amazing how this is true. Colossians 3:16 I mentioned:

Colossians 3:16 ~ Let the word of Christ dwell richly within you, with all wisdom and knowledge, teaching and admonishing one another...

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The word of Christ there, dwelling within you, is the plural *you* (y'all). How does the word of Christ dwell in me? It dwells in me particularly as I'm in community with other believers and I'm being taught, and I'm being admonished, and I'm teaching, and I'm admonishing. It's in community that the word of Christ, that Jesus then speaks to you, in that kind of environment. Now, it doesn't have to be. It's also when we're alone with the Lord, yes, of course, but there's this balance. Community is so important.

Isn't it amazing how God will bless you through another believer telling you what you already know? That's just profound. I find that blessing so many times. Someone will share something and we're tempted sometimes to just dismiss it. "Yeah, I already know that." That's really not wise. We should continually put ourselves under the word when somebody's sharing it. You put yourself under the word. Even though I already know that, and even though I've thought about that verse twenty times, there's something that God does when another person speaks His word and they speak it to me, that it has a power. God just has chosen to work this way.

He could have spoken out of Heaven in the beginning. He did speak out of Heaven in Exodus, and they said, "Please don't do this anymore," and He was just showing them, "You can't handle Me speaking out of Heaven, so I'm going to raise up for you a prophet," like Moses. "After I'm dead," Moses said, "God's going to raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers, and you will listen to him, and He's going to put His words in the prophet's mouth, and you will obey them." That's the pattern. God puts His word into us. He gives His word to us through other people, and He makes us dependent upon others, and He brings us together, human beings who love Jesus, He brings us together in closer and closer relationships which then model the awesome love relationships of the Trinity. That's the balance.

What do we need to turn sorrow to joy? We need the word of Christ spoken personally to us. And when will that happen? Sometimes as you're saying the Scriptures on your own, the Lord will be doing that, of course. Part of that will happen, but if you want the full blessing of God, you've got to be in community with others spending time together, serving them, even as you're hurting, serving someone else as best you can. "Lord, I feel like I've got nothing to give." Give anyway and watch the Lord multiply it. It's amazing how then you leave a time like that, maybe somebody else started sharing something about a problem, and suddenly out of nowhere the Lord just takes His word, and He like an arrow shot

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by a master archer, it finds its mark in your heart in a place you didn't even know you needed it. That is our God and that is His way. And when that happens, we are left feeling the same kind of wonder that she felt. We sense, "Lord, You have something for me personally here. You were looking at me personally in the midst of this room. I thought it was about the other people. I was feeling like I'd disconnected from You, but You were looking to me," and there's a sense in which our hearts again fall before Him and He's our Jesus, our Teacher. That is the way he intends it to be until He returns, and that is a wonderful and glorious plan. How amazing it is that God will work through people like you and me, people who are a mess, one another. We're all a mess at varying degrees over time. Hopefully if we're in Christ we're getting a little less messy each day, but we have a glorious Savior.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

Father, we thank You for the beauty of Your plan and the beauty of Your Son. We thank You that You are a God who is interested in every single molecule of the universe that You've made. You're holding it together, but particularly in those You have chosen for Yourself, You are so intimately interested. We acknowledge there's no reason, there's nothing in us. It is all of Your glory and the beauty of Your character. We pray for those that are here today who have not repented and believed in Christ, that You would open their hearts to reach out to Jesus even now, and in their hearts to sense You calling them. Lord, the Gospel goes out to all. Whosoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved. May they call upon you while You may be found. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"When Joy Meets Sorrow"

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