

Sermon Series: *Easter*



Mary, Why Are You Weeping?

I Have Seen the Lord

John 20:1-18 (ESV)

¹ 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. ² 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." ³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon

Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she 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, "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 Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).¹⁷ 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."¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

The First Day of the Week

The fact of the resurrection has far reaching consequences, even down to this very day. The fact of the resurrection shapes the very structure of your life—even today—whether you know it or not. This passage points out one of those ways.

John 20:1 (ESV)

¹ *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.

The Jewish understanding of the week ended with the sabbath, which is Saturday, the seventh and final day of the week. The first day of the week is Sunday. Jews gathered for corporate worship on the seventh day, on Saturday. Jews down to this very day gather for corporate worship on Saturday. Jesus was¹ a Jew and so were all of his followers. The first Christians—followers of Jesus—were Jews. So what changed?

Why did the Jews who believed that Jesus was God's chosen messiah start meeting for worship on Sunday rather than Saturday?² What would have caused Jews, who knew the Ten Commandments—the fourth of which says that the seventh day was to be a day of sabbath rest—to move their chosen day of worship from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week? What would be so significant to bring about such a massive change in their way of life?

¹ And still is.

² Actually, they met on both days.

Why did the Jewish followers of Christ begin meeting for worship on the first day of the week rather than the last day of the week? Why have all subsequent Christians gathered for worship on Sunday, rather than Saturday? Why are you here for worship today rather than yesterday?

The answer to all of these questions is the fact of the resurrection. The resurrection changed everything. Jesus rose from the dead on the **first day of the week**, on Sunday. And ever since that first glorious, life-changing morning, all Christians have been gathering for worship on the first day of the week, which is Sunday. You are here today—on Sunday, not Saturday—because this is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. The reality of the resurrection shapes the structure of your weekly routine. Every time Sunday rolls around, it is a weekly reminder to us of the reality of the resurrection.

The First Year of Your Life

I'll give you one more example of how the fact of the resurrection still shapes your life, even if you aren't aware of it. The beginning of your life is marked by the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Your entrance into this world is marked by the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? When someone asks you in what year you were born, your answer is shaped by the fact of the resurrection.

If you were to ask me when I was born, I would tell you that I was born in 1968. I entered this world in the year one thousand, nine hundred and sixty eight. If you spend just a moment thinking about that, you can't help but wonder, "One thousand nine hundred and sixty eight years from what?"

Why are the years numbered as they are? This year is the year 2017. There have certainly been a lot more years in this world than that, so what happened two thousand and seventeen years ago that caused this entire planet to start counting years in a particular way? What sort of event would influence the way the entire globe counts years?

The answer is of course, the resurrection of Jesus. This year is the two thousand and seventeenth year from the time of Christ. Something so dramatic happened in the life of Jesus of Nazareth that a statistically significant number of people began numbering the years from the time that Jesus lived. Yes, the numbering began at the time he was thought to have been born, but the significance of his birth was only manifested because of the reality of his resurrection.

Yes, he is noteworthy because of the miracles he performed and the authority with which he taught, but all of those facts only have enduring power and effect in light of the reality of the resurrection. Jesus is the first person, who was given the power by God, to return to life from the dead.

Historians and academicians my attempt to remove written reference to Jesus by instead of referring to the years Before Christ not as B.C. but as B.C.E. (Before Contemporary Era), and the years after Christ not as A.D. (*Anno Domini* "the year of our Lord"), but as C.E. (Contemporary Era), but the numbering still remains and the question still stands. Two thousand seventeen years from what?

The fact of the resurrection of Jesus still shapes our lives whether we believe it or not. The reality of Jesus of Nazareth is a reality from which we cannot escape. I stand here before you this morning two thousand and seventeen years from the time that Jesus of Nazareth walked on this earth and so rocked this world that the people living at the time began orienting the sequence of their lives in reference to him. And the primary reason this happened is because of the reality of the resurrection.

How Do We Know the Resurrection Really Happened?

How do we know the resurrection really happened? We believe the resurrection really happened the same way we believe that the chemical attack on the Syrians really happened—we trust eye witness reports. I was not in Syria last week, but people who were reported what they saw, and what they saw were people dying as a result of chemical weapons. I was not in Jerusalem the morning Jesus rose from the dead, but people who were reported what they saw, and what they saw was, first an empty tomb and then a risen, living and breathing Jesus, who still bore the scars of the wounds that had previously killed him.

I believe one of the most significant ways we know the resurrection is real is because of the eyewitness testimonies. In the passage read to us this morning, we find that eyewitness testimony.

I believe the report of Jesus' resurrection that has been handed down to us through the centuries. I believe what Rachele read to us a few moments ago actually happened. I believe the resurrection of the Jesus from the dead is a historical fact. This passage this morning gives me three reasons to believe this.

1) The Response of the Disciples

I believe that Jesus bodily rose from the dead because of the response of the disciples. They respond to the news of the resurrection much like we would expect anyone to respond to news that someone had been raised from the dead. They initially don't believe it. Let me read this one more time.

John 20:1-10 (ESV)

¹ 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. ² 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.”³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.

The disciples initial response is very much as I expect I would have responded—with disbelief. They don’t believe what they hear Mary saying. Mary told them the tomb was empty and Jesus’ body was gone. But they don’t believe her. If they had believed her, then they would not have made the trip to the tomb. But they don’t believe her and so they have to run to the tomb and see for themselves.

This is amazing, because Jesus had three times predicted his resurrection from the dead prior to even arriving at Jerusalem,³ but the disciples never fully understood what he meant. And now, after the resurrection has happened, they still don’t believe it. Even hearing the testimony of Mary and seeing for themselves, they just **went back to their homes**. They did not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Luke tells us that Mary’s words seemed to them like an fairy tale and they did not believe her.⁴

Isn’t this exactly what you would expect if you heard that someone had been raised from the dead, even if the guy had predicted it? The Bible reflects the truth. The skeptical humanity of the disciples has not been glossed over. The lack of faith of the disciples is repeatedly on display. We see it in many places again and again and again. So the testimony of these unfolding events has the ring of truth. Their first response to this incredible news is not instantaneous acceptance, but rather faithless disbelief. This makes sense to me. But this story does not end here. There’s more to come.

The Description of the Tomb

The second reason I believe Jesus bodily rose from the dead is because of the description of the tomb. The resurrection makes sense in light of how the disciples found the tomb.

John 20:3-7 (ESV)

³So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the

³ Mt. 16:21; 17:22; 20:19.

⁴ Lk. 24:11.

tomb first. ⁵And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

Mary had reported to Peter and the other disciple (presumably John),

John 20:2 (ESV)

"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

The Tomb of Jesus

The tomb in which Jesus was laid was a new tomb⁵ that had been cut out of stone.⁶ First century tombs were made with niches cut out of the rock for the body to be laid on while the soft tissue decomposed. Jesus' tomb would have looked something like this.



Mary's first assumption is not that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but rather that some unknown person had taken his body. However, what the disciples describe inside the tomb does not easily fit with that understanding, for if you were stealing a corpse, you certainly would not remove the linen it was wrapped in. Who wants to touch the cold, decaying flesh of a corpse? Why would anyone unwrap a dead body?

Notice the detail of the face cloth that had covered Jesus' head. That too is left behind. John reports that it had been **folded up** and put **in a place by itself**. If one was robbing a grave, you move quickly. You certainly would not take off the grave clothes, much less spend the time to fold them up and stack them neatly about the room. This evidence certainly does not point to the body being stolen. It points to something else. The two disciples are uncertain about what to make of this. So they leave and **go back to their homes**, not doubt pondering the whole way home.

But Mary does not leave.

⁵ John 19:41.

⁶ Luke 23:53.

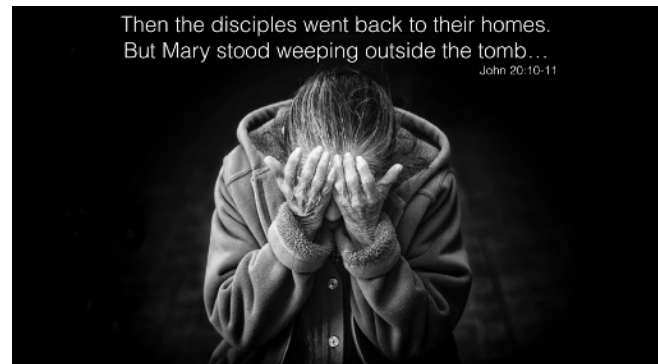
Mary's Testimony

This leads me to the third reason why I believe Jesus bodily rose from the grave. I believe it because of Mary's testimony.

John 20:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb...

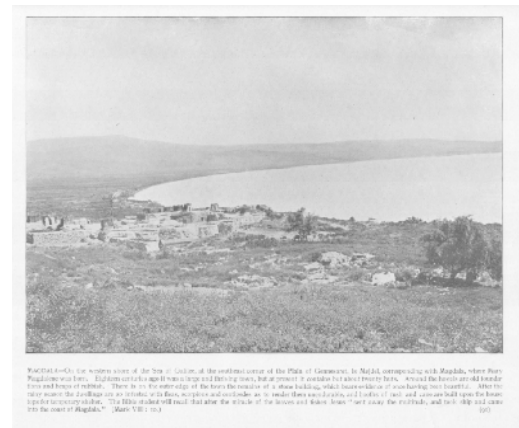
Peter and John are confused, but the tomb is empty. So they go home. But Mary is not like them. She is different. This was the last place she had seen Jesus.⁷ She had been watching as Joseph of Aramathea and Nicodemus laid Jesus' body in this tomb. She didn't know where in the world the body of Jesus was laying now, but she couldn't bring herself to leave. So she stood there, outside the tomb, weeping.



Who Is Mary Magdalene?

Who is this Mary? She is Mary Magdalene, so named most likely because she came from the town of Magdala, located on the western shore of the sea of Galilee. This is a photo of the town taken in 1894.

She was among the earliest followers of Jesus. She appears not long after Jesus began his ministry. She began following him after he set her free from seven demons (Luke 8:2). She had great reason to follow him. He had given her freedom. Imagine what life must have been like being possessed by seven demons. What sort of nightmareish life had she led before Jesus delivered her? She financially supported Jesus' ministry⁸ and she followed him to the very end. She was there at his crucifixion,⁹ she was watching when they buried him and here she is there weeping outside his tomb on the third day after his death.



She lingers. Where is she to go? She had come to put spices on Jesus' decaying body. She was filled with grief. Her eyes were overflowing with tears. All her hopes were turned upside down. Jesus was dead. Now what would she do? Where would she go? As she thought about all these things, through tear-filled eyes, she stooped down to look into the tomb.

⁷ Luke 23:49.

⁸ Luke 8:3.

⁹ John 19:25.

Maybe she wanted to look one more time at the empty linen clothes that had been wrapped around Jesus' body. But **the tomb was not empty!**

John 20:11-13 (ESV)

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

This may be the only time in the whole of Scripture where someone sees an angel and we are not told that they were utterly terrified, and Mary sees two! Perhaps she is completely numb with grief. She's already suffered from the fact that Jesus had been crucified and on top of that pain is added the indescribable fact that now someone has stolen his body. The angels ask a question to which they undoubtedly know the answer.

John 20:13 (ESV)

"Woman, why are you weeping?"

They're not seeking information. They're gently trying to open her eyes. She answers,

John 20:13 (ESV)

¹³ She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

She's looking at two angels, and yet she has no clue that Jesus has been resurrected. There is physical evidence right in front of her—the empty grave clothes, along with supernatural evidence—two angels, and she still can't see the truth. She still needs help. After saying this, evidently she turns to walk out of the tomb. These angels are no help. They're not telling her where Jesus' body is. So it's time to go. Tears still flowing, she turns to leave.

John 20:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she 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, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

She hears the same question again, "Woman, why are you weeping?" When phrases are repeated in Scripture, God is trying to get our attention. Mary is asked the same question twice, but this second time it's asked by another person, whom she assumed to be the gardener, because it's impossible for her to imagine it could be anyone else so early in the morning. She answers the question.

The only explanation in Mary's mind for the fact of the empty tomb is that someone has stolen his body. Jesus' dead body is laying in some hidden place and she can't get to him. She doesn't see the answer to her question standing right in front of her. She is seeking Jesus and he has found her, yet she doesn't know it. Her grief has blinded the eyes of her faith. The veil of her sorrow is so dark that she cannot see the glory of God in the face of Christ standing before her. But Jesus is about to do what only Jesus can do. He's about to speak a word and let the light of all God's glory come flooding in.

John 20:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, "Mary."*

Jesus called her name. Then she knew. She heard a voice that had called her name before, and she recognized it. "**Mary.**" Just as Lazarus heard Jesus call his name and then he saw Jesus' face, so Mary heard Jesus call her name, and then she saw truly who was standing in front of her. This was not the gardener. This was Jesus!

John 20:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ *She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).*

Don't Cling to Me

What would you do if you saw standing before you the man who had changed your life, whom you had watched die, and be buried, and yet now was standing, talking, and calling your name? Wouldn't you quickly wipe the tears from your eyes and the grab hold of him and never let go? Wouldn't you want to reach out and touch him and make sure you weren't dreaming?

John 20:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ *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."*

By saying, "*Do not cling to me,*" Jesus was not reprimanding her. He was giving her assurance that he would be around for a while. He hadn't yet vanished away into heaven. He would see her again. There would be time to talk later. He had something for her to do. He wanted her to go tell the disciples, his "brothers," that he was alive.

John 20:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."*

It is amazing that Mary is the first person to see Jesus resurrected. The reason is because in the first century a woman's testimony was not allowed in court.¹⁰ If someone were making this

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 636.

story up, this would not help you sell your lie. God delights to choose the lowly things in this world to shame those who are wise in their own eyes and prevent arrogant boasting.¹¹

Jesus chose to reveal himself first to Mary. Then he sent *her* to be the one to tell the disciples that he was alive. When she arrived, the tears were gone.

Mary is weeping no more. Her once hopeless face is now filled with joy.

She had just hugged the man who had freed her from seven demons.

She had just touch her Lord who had been dead and buried!

She had just seen Jesus who was now alive! ***She has seen the Lord!***



Her joy was unbounded! Jesus is still risen, and so our joy should be unbounded.

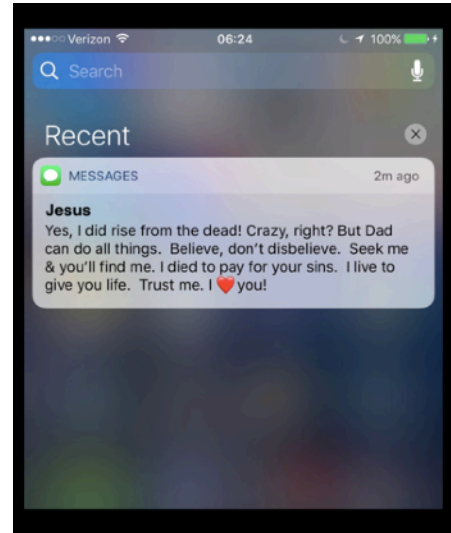
PLAY VIDEO: He Is Still Risen



¹¹ 1 Cor. 1:27-29.

Check your phone. You may have a message.

If Jesus were to send you a text message today, I think it might say something like this.



Conclusion

We worship on Sundays because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday.

The entire globe counts years from the time of Jesus.

Yes, it's difficult to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But this is what those who were there say happened.

Something massive happened to transform doubting disciples into bold bearers of the gospel which has turned this world upside down.

For Mary, this day began with weeping. But twice she was asked the question, "Mary, why are you weeping?" God was trying to get her attention. He was trying to help her see. For Mary this day ended in rejoicing—because she had seen Jesus.

Can you see you? Do you see him looking at you? Do you hear him calling your name, calling you back to him? Calling you to him for the first time? Don't ignore him. Come to him.

If you're wondering what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, then you need only to look at Mary. It means clinging to Jesus. It means you want to be with him more than be anyplace else. It means you let go of everything else so that you can wrap both arms around him. Being a Christian means Jesus is your greatest treasure.