



“Revived at the Empty Grave”

John 12: 11 - 18

April 12, 2020

On this Easter Sunday morning, I would like for us to take a trip back together to the empty grave of Jesus Christ. Please join me in John Chapter 20, where we will see the risen Lord on that very morning of His resurrection.

The title of this morning’s message is *Revived at the Empty Tomb*, and we will see that it was not just Christ who had an experience of revitalization on that first Easter morning. It is my prayer that we would have renewal in our faith as we look into the Word today.

A careful reading of the New Testament indicates that Christ made no less than ten resurrection appearances in the forty days following His emergence from the grave and death. This morning we are going to look at the first of those ten resurrection appearances. As we do, we will see how the Lord Jesus transformed a woman’s life for the second time. Jesus had already applied His power and grace to her once. And He did it again, cranking it up a notch. I would understand that Jesus even increased the volume of this woman’s faith.

I think that this story has great encouragement for those of us, even those of us who follow Jesus Christ and know what it is to have moments or even seasons of discouragement or disappointments or disillusionment or confusion or hardship.

Sometimes even as followers of Christ our hearts can become heavy. Praise God that Jesus has grace. Not only does He have grace to forgive us of our sin as we enter into a relationship with Him, but He also has grace for us in the midst of the challenges of life and He gives us His sustaining grace again and again and again and again.

The woman that is here in this story, she is called Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John. Elsewhere in the New Testament in Luke Chapter 8 and Verse 2, we read that seven demons were cast out of her earlier by the power of the Messiah. We don’t know the details of how the demons afflicted Mary, but we can be sure that this woman had a tormented life and that her wounds ran deep. One day Christ found her and Christ redeemed her. He delivered her and she followed Him with a love that could not be held back.

Then came what was, in her eyes, the great tragedy and travesty of His crucifixion. His death broke her heart. This woman had such boldness and love in her heart for the Lord Jesus Christ that she even followed Him to the foot of the cross. Mary was one of the few that was there when Jesus died.

Now we see on this third day early in the morning that Mary was among the women who went to the tomb of Jesus. Understand they were not expecting a resurrection. They went to honor the body of the Lord, to anoint Him, to give His memory their love in that way. However, arriving to the tomb, they found that the stone had been rolled away. Again, this was a great mystery to be solved for them. It put perplexity in their hearts because they were not expecting the resurrection. They came and saw the tomb was open.

Several of the women continued to the tomb, but as we put the picture together, it seems that Mary ran off. She went to tell the disciples that somebody had tampered with the tomb of Jesus. The other women had gone to the tomb and were gone. We read earlier today that James and John, they went to the tomb and now they have gone.

Now we are left with Mary Magdalene, and she was crushed. She was there in her sorrow, but there is Jesus! Let's see how this story unfolds before us in John Chapter 20 and Verses 11 through 18:

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³They 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." ¹⁴Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus 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." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus 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.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

Men and women, boys and girls, brothers, and sisters, here we have the account of the first appearance of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Here He was appearing to a person that was dear to His heart.

Here in this text we have a picture of beautiful and powerful transformation set before our very eyes. In the first verse when it says that she was weeping, the Greek word that is used indicates that this was not just a quiet and polite and gentle kind of weeping.

The Greek word used here is a very strong word. We can understand that Mary was there sobbing. It was the kind of sobbing that comes with sorrow that cannot be held in. Mary had reached her breaking point with all that was happening.

Here Mary was confused and hurt and broken. She had no expectation of the Lord's resurrection. Then she said that somebody messed with the grave. To her that was a huge insult, and she was broken.

I wonder how many of you know what it is to have the circumstances of life that are difficult and it brings the sense of anger and sorrow that just grips you by the throat. Maybe it is some injustice or anxiety or hardship, and it is crushing you on the inside. This is what Mary was experiencing here.

But Mary had an experience with the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ at that tomb. Jesus gave her a series of experiences that changed her life once again. He already changed her life once, but there was the additional experience that He gave to her. It is a beautiful thing.

Mary began weeping with tears of brokenness and sorrow. I picture her shedding tears from beginning to end, but somewhere along the way the nature of those tears must have changed from sorrow to unrestrained joy, because there was Christ risen from the grave.

Here in John Chapter 20, I realize that Mary was in a very unique situation. I don't expect that any of us are going to have the experience that she had, the way that she had it. This was an event that could only occur once at the empty grave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, there is perspective in this text for us that and that is that the Lord intends to come with His power for our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:4:

⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope.

From his vantage point, Paul was looking back to the Old Testament Scriptures. We here in the day that we are living in, we can look to the Old Testament and to the New Testament. Understand, that this historical account comes with the power of God to put hope in the heart that is broken, to raise it up in faith because we serve a Risen Savior.

I want for us to look at this text and see three revitalizing and reviving experiences that Jesus gave to Mary Magdalene. I pray that these things come with great power for each one of us. First, I want for us to notice in this story that we have read that Jesus provided for Mary:

1. A Display of Holiness (11-12)

Jesus displayed holiness at the empty tomb. I would imagine that there in that moment, Mary did not perceive the fullness of what she was seeing with her own eyes. But I can just imagine her in the years that followed that event laying in her bed at night and reflecting back at what she saw and the glorious vision that was laid before her very eyes.

In the empty tomb we see this display of holiness. Verses 11 and 12 once again:

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

Here was a woman that had been afflicted by demons and, by the command of King Jesus, she was being ministered to by angels. Let us remember who Jesus is. He is the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

The angelic realm is under His command. He decides where they go and what they do. Jesus decides when they remain concealed and when they appear to human eyes. You can believe that He was in charge and orchestrated that moment for His dear one, Mary.

Here we see that these angels appeared as they typically do in the pages of Scripture. They appeared in human form. They were dressed in gleaming white garments that would represent purity and holiness before the Lord.

John was very careful to tell us how they were positioned. At the bench where the body of Jesus had been laid, there was one angel sitting at the foot and there was another one sitting at the head in a glorious display.

All the Sunday school graduates among us might remember that there was a place in the Jewish Temple that was at the very heart of Jewish worship in the Old Testament. It was the inner sanctum. It was the most holy place—the Holy of Holies. There at the inner part of the Jerusalem Temple in that most holy place, there was the Ark of the Covenant. The lid of the Ark was called The Mercy Seat. There on either side of the Mercy Seat, were two golden cherubim. They were engravings of angels that covered the Ark as a display of holiness.

Now here in the empty tomb we have a similar display. Sitting on the bench where the body of the Messiah had been placed were two gleaming white angels. It would seem to me that this display just took the concept of the Mercy Seat and raised it up an octave, because that is where the body of the Lamb of God was laid.

The One who went to the cross; the One to whom all of the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. The Great Sacrifice for human sin and iniquity, there He was and there was a display of holiness that was given to Mary. It is recorded for all of us to see.

When we face those times of discouragement or any kind of spiritual malaise, we need to look at pictures like this and ask the Lord to empower them in our hearts and help us understand deep within that, by God's grace, those who are in Christ have been brought into a Kingdom of holiness and light. There in the presence of the Lord were these angelic beings declaring His glory and His power and His holiness at all times.

With all the knowledge that we have of what Christ has done for us in our lives, I wonder if an angel might ask us, *Why are you weeping? Why are you flagging and lagging? Be encouraged. Christ came to die for your sins. Christ is risen from the grave, and Christ has brought you into a Kingdom of unspeakable joy and wonder and power and majesty.*

There is this display of holiness here at the empty grave. What a powerful picture. As we look at a picture like this and think about Easter and the Good Friday that preceded it, we need to understand something. We need to understand that sin is serious. We need to understand that there is a darkness inside of each one of us human beings.

That inner darkness leads to so many different manifestations of sin in our lives. We rebel against the will of the Lord. We have done this every day. We live in a society that minimizes the whole concept of sin, iniquity, violating the Law of the Lord. It is not that big of a thing in the eyes of most people.

However, we must understand that our lives are lived before a God of holiness and righteousness. And all sin offends His justice. We stand condemned because of our sin, but such was His grace, such was His love, that He provided a solution.

Christ came into the world. He was nailed to the cross and on that cross, He bore our sins. He took the judgment that our sins deserve, that those who look to Him in humility and repentance and faith and say that they need to be forgiven of their sin, they are cleansed and forgiven. They too, like these angels, are covered in garments of white in the sight the Lord. They are covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our deliverance. Jesus is our salvation.

We celebrate Easter Sunday, but let's never forget that it was preceded by Good Friday, when Jesus died for our sin Jesus is the one and only hope that you have for eternal salvation. He is a hope that is more than sufficient for you. Jesus came to save you. You can turn to Him in faith and you will be forgiven today. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is Heaven and there Hell. Heaven is a place of mercy. Hell is a place of justice, where people get what they deserve. Praise God, Jesus experienced Hell on the cross where He died for His people. Let's be reminded of that as we see this display of holiness that was there in the empty grave.

That is one astonishing experience that was given to Mary. We continue and we see that there was another revitalizing experience. In addition to the display of holiness, we also see that there was:

2. A Show of Grace (14-16)

Grace just poured out on the life of Mary Magdalene. Understand, not only does Jesus have grace for sin and iniquity, but He also has grace for pain and despair.

I am reminded quickly of another story in the pages of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul, writing in 2 Corinthians Chapter 12, spoke of a thorn that he in his flesh. He was speaking of some kind malady or pain. Perhaps it was something physical. Some suggest it might have been relational or emotional, but there was something that was painful to him in an ongoing way.

Paul prayed three times, three seasons of prayer, that this would be removed and the answer the Jesus gave to him in the midst of the hardship was, Paul:

⁹My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness my grace is sufficient for you. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Jesus has grace not only for our sin, but also for our frailties. We see this grace here in this story as well. First, it is given by the angels as they ministered to Mary and then by Jesus, even better still. Look at Verse 13. Mary was weeping, sobbing at the tomb and:

¹³They 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.”

I read this and I don't what her manner her demeanor was but for some reason, I just struggle to see her as this dainty little flower at this moment. Mary was a woman who had been through some hard things. She had a rough life, and somehow I just picture her just raw and frustrated that somebody had tampered with the grave of her beloved.

She responded, *Why am I weeping? Because I am hurt and because I am crushed and because I am perplexed and because I am confused and because I am devastated and because I am hurting on the inside, and I don't know where they have taken the body of my Lord!* She had all this going on inside of her. She just poured it out.

At that point, something caused Mary to turn around I wonder if she saw the gaze of those two angels that were ministering to her shift to someone standing behind her. Mary turned around. She was not expecting Jesus, but there He was. Look at what happened. Verse 14:

¹⁴Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

I just imagine that He was smiling at this point. He knew full well who she was seeking. Verse 15:

¹⁵Jesus 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.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

Not Italian, but Aramaic Rabboni. Some say that Rabboni with the *i* on the end might have been Italian for teaching, but it say that it was Aramaic for Teacher.

Then at that point, Mary clued in to what was happening. There is a big exclamation point at the end of Rabboni. From what happened next in the story, we know that she gripped on to Jesus at this point. She heard her name spoken and she recognized that wonderful voice.

Some of the authors who write books on the New Testament and the Gospel of John, they say that Mary just clasped right around His feet I don't know. I picture her just going on for a full-on bear hug. One way or the other, Mary latched on.

However, brothers and sisters, look here and behold the Risen Lord. His body had been pulverized by the scourging. He had been nailed to a cross His body died. In the grave it remained into the third day.

Now, behold, King Jesus, He is back from death. He is there in His glorified resurrection body. Here is Jesus. Here is the King of kings. Here is the Lord of lords. The Alpha and the Omega. The First and the Last. The Beginning and the End. The Bright and Morning Star The Rock of ages. The Lord of all. Here is the King.

Here is Jesus back from death and His first order of business was not to approach Pilate or the many Roman guards who had lampooned Him so savagely. No! His first order of business was not to go seek out the Sadducees and the Pharisees. No!

His first order of business was to approach a dear one whom He loved, that was crushed in spirit, to lift her heart and to renew her hope. How consistent this is with what we read in Psalm 34:18:

**¹⁸The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.**

And how this corresponds to what we read in Psalm 147 and Verses 2 and 3:

**²The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
³He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.**

As I was contemplating this portion of Scripture and thinking about His ministry to Mary whom He loved, a series of faces began appearing in my heart and in my mind. I started seeing brothers and sisters, people that are experiencing hardship and deep pain of different sources.

Some with cancer. Some with different functions of the body that are declining, and there is physical need. It brings discouragement I think about people in the midst of bereavement. People experiencing the challenges of life in different ways.

It has been my prayer that you would know that Mary Magdalene is not the only name that Jesus is very, very familiar with. As we read in John Chapter 10, Jesus Himself declared that He knows His sheep and He calls them by name.

I pray that on this Resurrection Sunday, you would have a sense of the knowledge of the presence of the Lord; of Him holding you up, close by you, keeping you together; seeing you through the trials that you are experiencing; lifting up your heart in faith that whatever comes in this world, through faith in the Messiah, you are brought into an Everlasting Kingdom and into His resurrection.

And though the body declines through this life, the lot in the future of the Christian is resurrection. That we will be a part of an eternal Kingdom of joy forever and ever and ever. Jesus is with us, close by every step of the way by the presence of His Spirit.

I pray that He would be powerful in your life with His compassion and love in ways that you will come to understand that He has been seeing you through, with you every step of the way. He is our merciful, powerful, risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Even as we experience things that may threaten to shake us to the core, Jesus is going to hold on to us and He is going to see us through and He is going to bring us safely into His Everlasting Kingdom. He is an ever-present help in trouble. This story of Mary Magdalene shows that Jesus knows us intimately and He cares I pray that this is something that will encourage your heart on this Resurrection Sunday.

When we go through the trials of life and Jesus sees us through, He is adding substance to our lives. There is a tenderness that comes to us in a Christ-likeness that is formed in us that He is going to use for His glory and the good of the people around us.

That leads us to the final revitalizing experience that Jesus gave to Mary at the empty grave. Finally, we see that there was:

3. A Call to Action (17-18)

Not only was there a display of holiness, not only was there the show of grace, but a call to action. Verse 17:

¹⁷Jesus 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.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Mary was clinging to Jesus and Jesus told her there was no need to cling to Him. Now I'm not the biggest Star Trek fan. I'm not really a trekkie, but I think somewhere in the story of Star Trek there is a species called Klingon. And Jesus was saying to Mary, No need to cling. Don't cling on.

First of all because He was going to have that forty day period, where He would appear to His disciples in a repeated way. Even more, we were entering into a new phase where her and our communion with the Lord would not depend on His bodily presence.

Soon He would be pouring out His Spirit. His Spirit would be with Mary and be in Mary The Comforter, the Counselor, the Paraclete. In the Greek, the Spirit of Jesus is called the Paraclete. Parasites take things away Paracletes give life. The Holy Spirit would come and He would empower her and all of His church for ministry. We see this here in this text. Jesus told Mary to go.

Something we need to understand as followers of the Risen Lord is that private, one on one devotional time with the Lord is not the sum total of the Christian life. It is an essential and vital aspect of the Christian life. We need daily to dwell in the presence of the Lord and have those quiet times with Jesus, where we pour out our hearts to Him and take His words into us.

But it is the not sum total of the Christian life, because Christians are to be active and engaged in the work of the Lord. The revitalized Christian life involves serving the Lord, going where He sends and having that sense of His purpose filling our lives. And what a gracious mission Jesus gave to Mary on that day.

He said to her, *Go and tell My brothers that I am ascending. The moment is coming where I am going to be raised up gloriously into the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven at My Father's right hand. Go and tell my brothers I am ascending to My Father and their Father, to My God and their God.*

What gracious words coming forth the heart of the Messiah to those men who just less than three days earlier had made such big promises that they would never flee away from Him. But they all did. They all scattered, even Peter denied Him three times and Jesus said, *Go to my brothers.*

J.C. Ryle I think captures the essence this so beautifully:

“It was but three days before when they had all forsaken Him shamefully and fled. Yet, this merciful Master as if all were forgiven and forgotten, speaks to Mary. His first thought is to bring back the wanderers, to bind up the wounds of their consciousnesses, to reanimate their courage, to restore them to their former place. This was indeed a love that passes knowledge, to trust deserters and to show confidence in backsliders was a compassion which man can hardly understand.”

By His grace, He was going to be pulling those men back into His presence and charging them with the purposes of His Kingdom as well.

Brothers and sisters, we read this story of the Lord's encounter with Mary at the empty grave, and what I want for us to take in and know is that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is how He deals with His beloved.

Brothers and sisters, wherever you are today, I pray that the Spirit of Jesus is speaking into your heart. If you are here this morning and it is coming to your knowledge that you have not yet entered into a relationship with Christ, it is my prayer that your heart would believe.

There is a God He has created you. You are made in His image. But like the rest of us, you have sinned You have fallen short of His glory, like me, over and over again, you have done this purposefully. We have all sinned.

There is forgiveness. There is new life. There is eternal life that is found in Jesus Christ. Trust in Him. The Bible says that if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar. We are liars and we make Him out to be a liar But if we confess our sins, He is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Put your trust in Jesus today.

If you are watching and listening to this broadcast, and have the knowledge of Jesus in your life, but you have been distanced from Him, it is time for your life to experience renewal in the Lord. I pray that you would have the sense of renewed communion and intimacy with Christ and that you would be obedient to His purposes for you because in that obedience, there is not greater joy.

For those of you who are walking with the Lord, I pray that He will continue to empower you as you contemplate the glories of His Kingdom.

If you would like encouragement in any way, you are on YouTube right now, so if you look at the first comment, you will see a series of email addresses. These are people who would love to come along side of you and to pray with you. We won't be able to sit down over coffee now, but we can talk over the phone or we can go on Zoom and talk about the things of the Lord. We would love to do that with you.

Many blessings upon you. Please join me in a word of prayer, and then we will sing the praise of the Lord so more.