

John 20:1-31

It was over, and the Pharisees had won. Jesus' disciples were meeting together behind closed doors while the battered, lifeless body of their leader lay in a stone-cold tomb.

Soon His teachings would be forgotten, only remaining as a cherished memory in the hearts of His disillusioned followers. Yes, Satan had realized his age-old ambition of destroying the Son of God.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

And then, in the midst of that awful night, the earth began to quake as an angel descended from heaven and rolled back the stone.

It was the first day of a new week, and the first day of a new age.

John 20:1 **"The first day of the week cometh
Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet
dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the
stone taken away from the sepulchre."**

Who was this lady stumbling through the
darkness?

Let me hasten to say, this wasn't Mary, the
sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Nor was she the sinful woman who had washed
Jesus' feet with her tears and anointed
them with precious ointment.

No, this was Mary Magdalene out of whom
Jesus had cast seven demons, and had
changed her life forever.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

On that particular morning, Mary was headed
for the tombs, and she was quite alone.

According to the Gospel of Mark, she had started her journey in the company of **"Mary the mother of James, and Salome."**

Perhaps in her enthusiasm she had run ahead of the rest, or possibly they had gotten separated in the darkness.

Undaunted, Mary carried on, in spite of the night sounds around her, and the eerie shadows that hung about the cemetery.

No, there were no demons driving her on now, only an intense desire to minister to her Lord.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Let's leave Mary for a moment, and turn our attention to some other women.

Mark 16:2-3 **"And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.**

3: And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"

Obviously, there were no men in their company.

Any man would have considered this trip a fool's errand.

After all, the stone had been sealed by Rome, and you don't mess with that.

But women, bless them, think differently.

Oh, I'm not suggesting they don't think logically.

They simply don't allow logic to overrule the dictates of their heart.

However, as they got nearer to their destination, it finally dawned on them that they wouldn't be able to get in --

- **"Who shall roll us away the stone?"**

Surely there would be some man around
somewhere who could help them.

Mark 16:4 **"And when they looked, they saw
that the stone was rolled away: for it
was very great."**

Yes, that morning the ladies had it right.
*Just follow the dictates of your heart, and
the Lord will take care of the
circumstances.*

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Well, we better get back to Mary.

I'm sure she was relieved when she saw the
stone standing beside the opening.

But the moment she looked inside, her heart
sank.

Someone had stolen away her beloved Lord!
And it was anyone's guess where the body
might be now, and in what condition.

John 20:2 **"Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him."**

The disciples should have known better than to accept her explanation.

After all, Jesus had repeatedly told them He must die and rise from the dead.

Remember Matthew 16:21 --- **"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."**

Apparently, they had closed their minds to His words.

So, faced with the awful possibility that He had been stolen away, they ran to the sepulcher to check it out.

V 3-5 **"Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.**

4: So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

5: And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in."

Apparently John was the younger, or at least a little faster on his feet, but he hesitated at the entrance.

No, John wasn't as bold as Peter.

V 6-7 **"Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,**

7: And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."

No one in their right mind would even consider breaking a Roman seal.

So it would only be reasonable to assume that the Romans themselves had removed the body.

Maybe they wanted to have proof on hand in case someone started a rumour about Jesus being raised from the dead.

Or perhaps the Pharisees had persuaded them to intern the body in a more common grave.

Whatever the case, it certainly appeared that Rome was responsible for this desecration.

But why would the Romans unwrap the body?

And if they had, how would they be able put the grave clothes back together so perfectly with no body inside?

Don't forget, Joseph and Nicodemus had wound the body **"in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury."**

And why was **"the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself"?**

It almost appeared that Jesus had risen right through the grave clothes, and then carefully folded the napkin and put it in a place by itself.

Why would He do that?

Well, I can't really answer that question, but I must say it makes an interesting

picture of the church in this present
Age of Grace.

Yes, the Church of Jesus Christ, which is
His spiritual body, has been left down
here to fulfill the great commission.
Meanwhile, the head of the church is **"in a
place by"** Himself, until He returns for
His bride.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 8-9 **"Then went in also that other
disciple, which came first to the
sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.
9: For as yet they knew not the
scripture, that he must rise again from
the dead."**

If the disciples **"knew not the scripture,
that he must rise again from the dead,"**
what exactly did John believe?

Did he look at the unusual condition of the grave clothes and believe Jesus had actually risen from the dead, or did he continue to believe Mary's explanation? I don't think he really knew what to believe.

Wouldn't it have been better if he had just believed Jesus' words in the first place?

V 10 **"Then the disciples went away again unto their own home."**

But Mary couldn't leave.

No, she --- **"stood without at the sepulchre weeping."**

The word that is translated **"weeping"** in V 11 is the same word that is used of Mary of Bethany when she met Jesus near her brother's tomb.

The word means "to wail."

And I think her cry went right up to the throne-room of heaven.

Psalm 51:17 says --- **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."**

And God didn't **"despise"** Mary's cry, and neither did His Son.

Immediately, two angels were sent to the sepulcher.

V 11-14 "--- and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,
12: And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13: And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord,

and I know not where they have laid him.

14: And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus."

Yes, even Jesus was there.

V 15 **"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."**

As you will remember, Joseph and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus' body in about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes.

So, combined with his own weight, Mary had offered to lift approximately 280 pounds.

I wonder if she ever thought about that?
I don't suppose she did.

Once again, Mary wouldn't let her loving
heart be hampered by circumstances.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I wonder why Mary didn't recognize Jesus?
Were her eyes *holden* like the disciples on
the road to Emmaus?

Or was it simply the fact that her tears had
clouded her vision?

And what about us?

Have our sorrows so blinded our vision that
we don't recognize Jesus?

Have the cares of this world made us
oblivious to the fact that He is
standing right beside us, and wants to
help?

After all, He has assured us "**I will never
leave thee, nor forsake thee.**"

And Psalm 34-18 says, **"The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 16 **"Jesus saith unto her, Mary."**

There was only one person in the world who could say her name like that.

In fact, there is only one person in the world who can say your name like that.

Yes, **"he calleth his own sheep by name,"** and **"they know his voice."**

V 16-17 **"--- She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.**

17: Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto

them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

It's all right, Mary. I've come to dry your tears, but I can't stay much longer.

You see, the words "**Touch me not**" are more in the sense of "do not cling to Me."

No doubt Mary's first reaction would have been to hold Jesus there forever and never let Him go.

But Jesus could only stay for a moment.

And yet, just a little later on the same morning, He placed no such restriction on the other women.

We see that in Matthew 28:9 "**And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.**"

So what was the difference?

Well, the answer is found in Jesus' own words --- **"for I am not yet ascended to my Father."**

And herein I find something very wonderful. Not everyone will agree with me, but here's how I see it.

As you will remember, during Old Testament times, the high priest was required to go into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement.

This yearly practice was particularly important in the national life of Israel, and it also foreshadowed a much more important event in the life of all mankind.

Hebrews 9:11-12 throws more light on the subject --- **"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by**

a greater and more perfect tabernacle,
not made with hands, that is to say,
not of this building;

**12: Neither by the blood of goats and
calves, but by his own blood he entered
in once into the holy place, having
obtained eternal redemption for us."**

So, I am convinced that while Jesus was on
His way to present Himself before God
on our day of atonement, Mary's
despairing cry reached heaven.

Would she be ignored? Oh no!

Even at a time like this, God had set aside
a few moments in His timetable to calm
her fears and dispel her tears. *I'm
here Mary, so you needn't despair.*

Aren't God's priorities wonderful?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

♪♪ Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth and song;
As the burdens press, and the cares
distress,
And the way grows weary and long?
O yes, He cares; I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights
dreary,
I know my Savior cares."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 18 **"Mary Magdalene came and told the
disciples that she had seen the Lord,
and that he had spoken these things
unto her."**

Not only was she the herald of good news,
but she had a message to deliver ---
**"Go to my brethren, and say unto them,
I ascend unto my Father, and your
Father; and to my God, and your God."**

Actually, this is the first time that Jesus
called His disciples brethren.

He had called them friends in the upper room, but not brothers.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

However, now, because His work of salvation was completed, He could call them brothers, and there was no **"if ye do whatsoever I command you"** added on.

Actually, He could have called them deserters.

To a man, they had run away in His time of trouble. But He called them brothers.

No rebuke, and no qualifying conditions.

They were His brothers; not on the basis of their performance, but on the basis of His accomplished work.

And because they were His brothers, He could call His Father their Father.

Of course, Jesus is the only begotten Son.

But the only begotten Son had brought us
into His family and made us His
brothers.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

But He also said, "**I ascend unto my Father.**"
If the news of His resurrection had
rekindled any hopes of a kingdom, these
words put them out.

No, there would be no kingdom in their
lifetime, and there would be no
physical relationship with Jesus on the
old basis --- "**I ascend unto my
Father.**"

It was God's plan, and it was the best plan.
As Jesus had already told them --- "**It is
expedient for you that I go away: for
if I go not away, the Comforter will
not come unto you.**"

And not only that, but He would begin His intercessory work on their behalf the moment He reached heaven.

Hebrews 7:25 **"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Mary's message had brought a ray of hope in the midst of sorrow.

But for a few others in Jerusalem, this would be a day they'd rather forget.

I am sure the Sanhedrin was shocked when they heard the news that Joseph and Nicodemus had defected to the other side.

And certainly the soldiers' tale about angels and an empty tomb was very disconcerting.

It was even necessary to bribe them in order
to change their story.

Would their troubles never end?!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Meanwhile, Pilate had some concerns of his
own.

First of all, the official seal of Rome had
been broken.

That was a direct challenge to his
authority.

Secondly, his guards had come up with a
ridiculous story to explain that event.

He didn't believe it for a moment.

No, there was more to this than met the eye.

Was Jesus actually a God?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

And in spite of Mary's good news, it must
have been an anxious time for the
disciples.

Maybe they had already heard the story that the guards were circulating around. If Pilate believed that, they were in deep trouble.

And who knows what the Sanhedrin had in mind.

No wonder they were meeting behind closed doors.

And then, after a very trying day, two of Jesus' followers returned from Emmaus with a glowing report --- **"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."**

That was very encouraging, but why hadn't He appeared to them?

V 19-20 **"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews,**

came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20: And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

I should think they would be!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

In last week's lesson we were shocked by the brutal treatment Jesus had received at the hands of the soldiers even before His crucifixion.

In fact, Isaiah 52:14 says "--- **his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.**"

But now, as He stood before His disciples, there seems to be no trace of the awful damage that had been done to His face.

However, He could still point to the wounds
He had received on the cross.

Why did they remain when everything else had
been healed?

Well, first of all, I think they have been
left there for benefit of the Church of
Jesus Christ.

Yes, the marks in Jesus' hands are a
continual reminder to every blood-
bought believer that He was "**lifted up**"
on a cross for their sake.

Also, His wounded side has great
significance for the child of God.

As you will remember, when Jesus finished
His work of salvation, His Heavenly
Father rent the veil of the temple from
the top to the bottom.

That curtain had always separated the Holy place (or sanctuary) from the Holiest of all.

Day after day, the Old Testament priests had faithfully performed their duties in the sanctuary, but they were never permitted to enter the Holiest of all.

Hebrews 9:8 **"The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing."**

And then, suddenly, the way into the Holiest of all was thrown open, signifying a change in heaven itself.

Not only had Jesus' sacrifice redeemed precious souls, but it had provided **"a new and living way"** into God's presence.

And we should take full advantage of that way.

Hebrews 10:19-22 **"Having therefore,**

brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20: By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; (Did you get that?) that is to say, his flesh;

21: And having an high priest over the house of God;

22: Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

And there is a second reason for this wound
in His side.

It is a mark of identification.

When Jesus appears to redeem God's Chosen
People from certain destruction at the
hands of their enemies, Israel will
suddenly recognize their Messiah.

And in that very moment, they will look at
His wounded side, and realize it was
their very own Messiah that their
fathers crucified many years ago.

Zechariah 12:10 "--- **and they shall look
upon me whom they have pierced, and
they shall mourn for him, as one
mourneth for his only son, and shall be
in bitterness for him, as one that is
in bitterness for his firstborn."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Returning to John 20:21-23 **"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.**

22: And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

These few verses have generated a lot of controversy over the years.

What is clear is the fact that Jesus immediately gave His disciples their life's commission --- **"as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."**

And once again, He would be sending them
**"forth as sheep in the midst of
wolves."**

But He wouldn't be sending them forth
powerless.

Immediately, after He gave them their
commission, "--- **he breathed on them,
and saith unto them, Receive ye the
Holy Ghost."**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

As we all know, the Church of Jesus Christ
hadn't been born yet, nor had it
received the gift of the Holy Spirit.
All of that was to happen on the Day of
Pentecost.

Nevertheless, when Jesus gave these men
their life's commission, He also gave
them the power they needed to fulfill
that command --- **"he breathed on them,**

and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

The word translated "**breathed**" in this verse is the same word that is used in Genesis 2:7 --- "**And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.**"

In both cases it was the breath of God, and in both cases it would produce new life.

Yes, the disciples were to go forth with a message of life.

Mankind could accept it or reject it, but in doing so, they would accept or reject the Son of God.

And depending upon their decision, their sins would be remitted or retained ---

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3:36

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

V 24 "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."

We don't know why Thomas wasn't there.

Maybe he thought it was too dangerous to be in their company.

Or, maybe he didn't want to be around Peter.

That man had been so boastful about his loyalty to Jesus, but it had all been talk.

Of course, I don't really know why Thomas stayed away.

But I do know he missed a grand opportunity
to be with Jesus.

And you know what?

If we forsake the **"assembling of ourselves
together,"** we will miss a grand
opportunity to be with Jesus.

Isn't that right?

Didn't He promise --- **"where two or three
are gathered together in my name, there
am I in the midst of them"?**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

John 20:25-28 **"The other disciples therefore
said unto him, We have seen the Lord.
But he said unto them, Except I shall
see in his hands the print of the
nails, and put my finger into the print
of the nails, and thrust my hand into
his side, I will not believe.
26: And after eight days again his**

disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27: Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28: And Thomas answered and said unto him, **My Lord and my God.**"

I'd rather not dwell on Thomas's doubt.

His *belief* is much more significant than his unbelief.

The moment he saw Jesus, he said --- **"My Lord and my God."**

Did you get that --- **"and my God"**?

That's the message of the Gospel of John, isn't it?

Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, and Thomas recognized it immediately.

V 29 **"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."**

That's us, isn't it?

That's every believer who has accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour, without actually seeing Him.

That's every believer who has accepted the testimony of the Holy Spirit as it is found in the Word of God.

And by the way, that's why the Holy Spirit directed John to write this book.

V 30-31 **"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 31: But these are written, that ye**

might believe that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God; and that believing ye
might have life through his name."