

## **The Gospel of John (116): The Risen King reveals Himself to Mary Magdalene**

### **Introduction:**

Let us turn to John 20, in which we will give our attention today to verses 11 through 18.

This is the second of four episodes that comprise the conclusion of this Gospel story. In the previous episode, the empty tomb of Jesus was the main idea. In this pericope we read of our Lord dispelling the grief that characterized Mary due to the crucifixion of her Master. Upon recognizing Jesus in His resurrected body, her grief turned to joy. Mary is also the first one to whom the Lord began to reveal the true nature of His relationship with His people and them with one another due to His resurrection from the dead.

When we concluded last Lord's Day, we read that the disciples returned to their homes after several strange events had occurred, which suggested that Jesus had risen from the dead. According to John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene (and others) after arriving at the tomb of Jesus early on the first day of the week, discovered the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She assumed that the body of Jesus had been stolen, which caused her much distress. She found Peter and John told them what she had seen. They then raced to the tomb where they found it as Mary had told them. The tomb was indeed empty. But when they entered the tomb, they saw the wrappings of Jesus' dead body lying where the body had been. What they saw resulted in John having "believed", which suggests that at that time John came to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. John had believed because of what he saw, even though they had not yet come to understand and believe the Holy Scriptures that foretold that the Messiah would rise from the dead (20:9). Apparently puzzled by what they had witnessed, they returned to their homes. That episode concludes with John 20:10, which reads, "Then the disciples went away again to their own homes."

But even as the details of these early witnesses of Jesus' resurrection are portrayed as ignorant regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the readers of this Gospel know otherwise. No Gospel reader would have been unformed of the essential Christian belief and affirmation that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. The empty tomb was significant. And as Mary Magdalene and Peter and John wondered about the location of the earthly body of their Master, the readers of the Gospel are keenly aware of the Christian claim, "He is risen." Here is a word about this, which is entitled "The Location of the Lord":

None of the followers of Jesus—Mary, Peter, or the Beloved Disciple (John)—grasped the full reality of the empty tomb. Mary's concerned statement regarding the location of "the Lord" was especially revealing. Yet when she speaks of the Lord she attempts to define Him by the location of His body. It has been the primary thrust of the entire Gospel from the start that the Lord *was* before He "became flesh" (1:14), for He was in the beginning with God (1:1, 2). How then could His body be misplaced or taken? How could the Lord be defined or confined by His body? Moreover, when we think of the location of the Lord, the only place that defines Him is God Himself—the Trinitarian God—for the entire Gospel message defines His location by His movement. Jesus is the one who came ("from above") and the one who goes to the Father.

The disciples, evidenced by Mary, misunderstood that this (mis)location was actually a "sign" that He was closer than He had ever been. For He had now destroyed all things separating Himself from them—even death itself—and was fully able to do what He promised them in His farewell discourse: "I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you...the world will no longer see Me but you will see Me, because I live you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in the Father and you are in Me and I am in you" (14:18-20). That day has come. It is resurrection Sunday, known henceforth as "the Lord's Day."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 836f.

And so, as these men returned to their homes, they had no comprehension of what was before them. But later that day, when evening had come, Jesus appeared to ten of the apostles who were gathered together. But first John records that the risen Lord Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. This is what we have recorded in John 20:11 through 18, which reads as follows:

But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. <sup>12</sup>And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. <sup>13</sup>Then 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.”

<sup>14</sup>Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”

<sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

We may consider this account employing the following outline:

1. Mary returned to the tomb (20:11-13)
2. Jesus revealed Himself to Mary (20:14-16)
3. Jesus instructed Mary (20:17)
4. Mary bore witness of Jesus to the disciples (20:18)

**Edward Klink** sought to give the main idea of this pericope:

The resurrected Jesus makes the tomb a place of grace not grief, declaring He has fulfilled the old covenant and established the saving power and presence of the Lord through His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Gardner has returned to reclaim His Garden.<sup>2</sup>

Let us work our way through this episode as the Lord reveals Himself to us through this first eyewitness of His resurrection.

## **I. Mary returned to the tomb (20:11-13)**

Mark recorded in His Gospel that the Lord had first appeared to Mary Magdalene. We read in Mark 16:9, “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” John has recorded the details of this appearance.

From verse 11 we may conclude that Mary Magdalene had returned to the tomb after she had reported to Peter and John what she had seen earlier—the tomb was empty. But apparently Peter and John had traveled home by this point, for Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene alone. **Verse 11** reads, “*But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb.*” Not only had Mary been full of grief because Jesus had been killed by means of crucifixion, but her grief was compounded as she contemplated *why* thieves may have taken His body and *where* they may have taken Him. Both the angels and Jesus Himself addressed her grief when they initially came into her presence.

We read that she was quite heart-broken as she stood outside the tomb. She had previously left the tomb in order to tell the disciples that the tomb was empty, but her grief had driven her back to the place that

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 837.

she knew the body of her Master had last been seen. Peter and John had gone to their homes; Mary had returned to the tomb. And even as she was weeping, she stooped down and peered into the tomb herself. Why she did so is not stated. But it does reveal the constancy of her affection toward Jesus and a measure of its intensity, that she returned to where she knew His body was no longer. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) drew this application for us:

Where there is a true love to Christ there will be a constant adherence to Him, and a resolution with purpose of heart to cleave to Him. This good woman, though she has lost Him, yet, rather than seem to desert Him, will abide by His grave for His sake, and continue in His love even when she wants (lacks) the comfort of it.

Now we know that no true Christian can lose Christ, that the believer is forever united to Him, and what God joins together, He does not will that they split asunder. But it is not an uncommon experience for a Christian to feel as though he has lost Christ or has become estranged from Him. He may feel that his Lord has departed from him and he knows not where to find Him. But when that soul weeps over his (apparent) loss, he may be assured that the Lord Himself will reappear to him, as He did to Mary as she stood at His tomb weeping.

For what specifically was she weeping? -- that His body was taken away. But her grief must have been raised by all of the events that she had witnessed of late. “She wept at the remembrance of His bitter sufferings; wept for His death, and the loss which she and her friends and the country sustained by it; wept to think of returning home without Him; wept because she did not now find His body” (Matthew Henry).

But even as Mary wept, she stooped down and peered into the tomb. This may have been the first time that she herself had made an effort to see inside the tomb. What did she hope to see, that the body had been returned? Perhaps she thought that she would see for herself His grave clothes and the napkin folded and laying where His body had been placed. But no wrappings caught her attention, for she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had formerly laid. We read in **verse 12**, “*And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.*” We read that she saw “two angels” within the tomb. One was sitting at one end of the level place where the body of Jesus had lain. The second angel was at the other end where the feet of Jesus would have been laid. They were “*in white*”, which suggests their purity and holiness. “The best of men *standing before the angels*, and compared with them, *are clothed in filthy garments* (Zech. 3:3), but angels are spotless; and glorified saints, when they come to be as the angels, shall *walk with Christ in white*” (Matthew Henry).

Often tombs of this nature were carved out of solid rock, large enough for a number of members of a single family. There was commonly stone benches or tables long enough to lay a body or recesses were carved in the walls of the tomb that were large enough to allow a body to be laid lengthwise. Here we read that these two angels were probably about 6’ apart, one where the head had been and the other angel where the feet of Jesus had laid. Why were these angels here and what purpose did they fill?

The two angels did not provide Mary any answers, but they did pose the question to her. We read in verse 13, “*Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’*” By this question they were not actually desiring information from Mary, but rather, it suggests a soft rebuke—she should not be weeping.

The question of the angels, *Why are you crying?*, is not designed to elicit information. It is gentle reproof: by this time Mary should not have been crying. Her response shows she has still not transcended the explanation to which she had earlier gravitated (v. 2).<sup>3</sup>

We might say a few words about angels in general. The Word of God teaches us that God has created two kinds of personal, everlasting beings—human beings and angels. The idea or belief that when people die they or their spirits become angels is not biblical. And certainly children that die are not transformed into angels. Angels are a distinct class of created beings, who are essentially different from humans. Angels are intelligent spirit beings, who are moral agents. Like humans, God had placed all angels through a period of probation of undetermined period of time. Many angels had fallen into sin and in their fallen condition they

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 640.

are servants of satan, manifesting themselves at times in history as demons, as they do the work of their master. Angels that persevered in holiness through their probationary period, remaining loyal and obedient to God, were confirmed in a state of holiness. They are called “holy angels” (Luke 9:26; Rev. 14:10), “ministering spirits” of God (Heb. 1:14), who serve God as messengers and executors of His will in history.

The usual Hebrew word for “angel” means simply “messenger, envoy”. In patriarchal and monarchic narratives the principle functions of such messengers are: (a) to convey the mandates of God to men; (b) to harbinge special events; (c) to protect the faithful, either individually or collectively, and execute condign punishment on their adversaries; and (d) to serve as instruments of the divine displeasure against sinners and recalcitrants within Israel itself.<sup>4</sup>

Angels are spirit beings, in that they are normally without physical bodies and are therefore invisible. But they do have the ability to appear in physical form, and in human bodies, if it is in God’s purpose for them to do so. They do not marry. They do not die. They can move about freely disappearing and reappearing.

Angels are numerous in number (cf. Matt. 26:53). John described what he saw of them in the book of Revelation: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands...” (Rev. 5:11).

God created angels to worship Him and they do so in heaven continuously. God sends them on errands of mercy and judgment. This is what is meant by Jacob’s ladder. We read of Jacob, “Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28:12). The Lord Jesus identified Himself as that ladder that bridges earth to heaven and heaven to earth. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

God sends angels to protect and preserve His elect (Heb. 1:14), the promised heirs of salvation. They may have a particular ministry to protect children (Matt. 18:10). Angels are watching and learning of God and His ways by seeing His dealings with people through history. Angels are sent to escort believers to heaven upon their death (Luke 16:22) and presumably to deliver the lost to hell upon their death. God will send forth His angels at the end of the age to escort His people to heaven.

God uses angels to execute His judgment among the nations of the world. One important role they serve is that of messenger. They are often set forth in Scripture to be delivering a message from God to His people. Interestingly here in John 20 the two angels do not communicate a message to Mary other than inquiring of her why it was that she was grieving. Perhaps they were stirring her to consider the fact that the body of Jesus had not been stolen, but that Jesus risen from the dead.

It is great error to worship angels. It is forbidden to pray to them, serve them, or show undue regard for them as though they were independent agents free to act irrespective of God directing them. The apostle wrote to the church at Colossae, where this had been a heretical teaching in that region at that time in history. He wrote:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,<sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. (Col. 2:18f)

Again, John does not provide us with a direct word of explanation or meaning of these two angels. However, this is the kind of narrative detail that is not without many efforts to discover and to propose meaning.

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<sup>4</sup> George Arthur Buttrick, **The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible**, vol. 1 (Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 129.

Augustine (4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> c), for example, suggests that their position “signified that the gospel of Christ was to be preached from head to foot, from the beginning to the end.” Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> c) suggests that two further things are also signified by the two angels: the two testaments and the two natures in Christ.

When angels are discussed, much speculation arises. The Lord’s people should focus upon the Lord, not the Lord’s angels.

**Matthew Henry** wrote of these two angels in John 20:

They sat, as it were, reposing themselves in Christ’s grave; for angels, though they needed not a restoration, were obliged to Christ for their establishment. These angels went into the grave, to teach us not to be afraid of it, nor to think that our resting in it awhile will be any prejudice to our immortality; no, matters are so ordered that the grave is not much out of our way to heaven. It intimates likewise that angels are to be employed about the saints, not only at their death, to carry their souls into Abraham’s bosom, but at the great day, *to raise their bodies* (Matt. 24:31). These angelic guards (and angels are called *watchers* [Dan. 4:23]), keeping possession of the sepulchre, when they had frightened away the guards which the enemies had set, represents Christ’s victory over the powers of darkness, routing and defeating them. Thus Michael and his angels are more than conquerors. Their sitting to face one another, one at His bed’s head, the other at His bed’s feet, denotes their care of the entire body of Christ, His mystical (i.e. His church) as well as his natural body, from head to foot; it may also remind us of the two cherubim, placed one at either end of the mercy-seat, looking one at another (Exo. 25:18). Christ crucified was the great propitiatory, at the head and feet of which were these two cherubim, not with flaming swords, to keep us from, but welcome messengers, to direct us to, the way of life.

There have been some who have sought to draw some detail in identifying these two angels at the head and feet of Jesus as signaling the two cherubim that stood on either side of the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle and later the temple. Here are the words of **Edward Klink**:

There is another option that finds sufficient warrant from the narrative. The location of the angels at each end of the place where Jesus had been lying intends to signify the two angels of the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. The narrative’s emphatic particularity of the location of the angels in relationship to the place where Jesus had been lying is remarkable in its resemblance to the instructions given to Moses regarding the ark: “Make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the end of the cover. Make one cherub at one end and the second cherub at the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends (Exod. 25:18f; cf. Exo. 37:1-9). The place between the two angels was “the place of propitiation” or “the mercy seat”, the cover of the ark that was associated with the sin offering on the Day of Atonement. It is the place where God authoritatively atones for sins. For this reason Luther’s translation of the term in Exodus 25 is a most fitting description of the place: “the throne of grace”. It is important to state that our interpretation is driven by the emphatic particularity of the narrative itself, which like elsewhere in the Gospel creates for the reader an “impression” that qualifies as such by being rooted in the deep structure of the narrative. Such impression find their impulse from macro themes in the OT and surface as a demonstrable theme in the Gospel as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

John’s Gospel had referenced angels earlier in his account. We read in John 1:51, “And He (Jesus) said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’” And then in John 12:27-29 we read, “

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify Your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”

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<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 842. Here Klink gave quite a number of pieces of evidence to support this interpretation.

<sup>29</sup>Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”

But beside those two references in John’s Gospel, we have this account of two angels speaking to Mary Magdalene. Here these two angels serve as characters within the story. They expressed concern for Mary who is weeping. But the manner that they queried her may indicate that they were implying there was no reason for her to be filled grief.

We then read her response to them, ***“She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him”*** (20:13b). She apparently knew that they were angels, but that did not settle her heart, or it would seem trouble her heart. She was already sorely troubled regarding the body of Jesus. She was so distressed that even the appearance of two angels did not settle her soul. This suggests the severity her distress. It perhaps also reveals the weakness of her faith at this stage of her life. She was grieving needlessly, although she did not realize it at the time. She failed to see things in faith, believing what Jesus had taught His followers, but which she had apparently not understood. But it also reveals the deepness of her love for her Lord.

So it is that often true Christians can be nearly overcome by sorrow so that they fail to assess matters rightly and fail to keep matters in a proper perspective and in right priority.

Those that have a true affection for Christ cannot but be in great affliction when they have lost either the comfortable tokens of His love in their souls or the comfortable opportunities of conversing with Him, and doing Him honour, in His ordinances. Mary Magdalene is not diverted from her enquiries by the surprise of the vision, nor satisfied with the honour of it; but still she harps upon the same string: *They have taken away my Lord.* A sight of angels and their smiles will not suffice without a sight of Christ and God’s smiles in Him. Nay, the sight of angels is but an opportunity of pursuing her enquiries after Christ. All creatures, the most excellent, the most dear, should be used as means, and but as means, to bring us into acquaintance with God in Christ. The angels asked her, *Why weepest thou?* I have cause enough to weep, says she, for *they have taken away my Lord,* and, like Micah, *What have I more?* Do you ask, Why I weep? *My beloved has withdrawn Himself, and is gone.*

And so there are times when even the devout Christian can be brought to the point of despair if they believe themselves to have been abandoned or deserted by their Lord. We should take to heart the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“Who among you fears the LORD?  
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?  
***Who walks in darkness  
And has no light?***  
Let him trust in the name of the LORD  
And rely upon his God. (Isa. 50:10)

## **II. Jesus revealed Himself to Mary (20:14-16)**

The angels do not respond further to her. But rather, the Lord Jesus reveals Himself to her.<sup>6</sup> We read in verse 14, ***“Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.”***

John did not tell us why it was that Mary did not know that it was Jesus. Perhaps because she was so filled with grief, still thinking that the body of Jesus had been stolen, that she was not expecting to see Jesus and did not see Him here clearly enough to recognize Him. However, there are other post resurrection appearances of Jesus to others to whom Jesus purposely prevented them from recognizing Him. This was the

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry said that the angels did not answer Mary but the Lord Jesus did so, for at one time God gave His Word to us through angels (i.e. His law), but now He does so through His Son (Heb. 2:1, 2).

case for perhaps an extended time when two disciples had left Jerusalem on that first Lord's Day, traveling home to Emmaus. Jesus joined them in the way. Here is Luke's account:

Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And they talked together of all these things which had happened. <sup>15</sup>So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. <sup>16</sup>***But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.***

Jesus spoke with these two disciples for apparently some time and some distance. They had become quite acquainted with one another through their discussion, but these two men had not yet recognized Him. But after Jesus had consented to dine with them, we read that they then identified Jesus apparently by an action that was familiar to them. We read in Luke 24:30f:

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>***Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.***

There is another rather strange reference in Mark's Gospel about some not recognizing Jesus in His resurrected body. In Mark 16:12 and 13 speaks of several resurrection appearances:

After that, ***He appeared in another form to two of them*** as they walked and went into the country. <sup>13</sup>And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.

It is most likely that this is Mark's reference to the extended account of Luke 24 that we have already referenced. But the point is this, the risen Lord Jesus purposely prevented some from identifying Him in order to further His purposes with them. But again, we do not know if Mary failed to recognize Jesus here in John 20 because Jesus had appeared in a form that she did not immediately recognize, or if due to grief and perhaps lack of clear vision of Him, she had failed at first to identify Jesus.

When Mary turned to see Jesus whom she had not yet recognized, Jesus first spoke with her. **Verse 15a** reads, "***Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?'***" These are the first recorded words of Christ after His resurrection.

Mary thought that He was the gardener. Again, it is not apparent why Jesus did not immediately reveal Himself to her, but rather, He sought to draw her out in this manner. **Verse 15b** records Mary's reaction to this "Gardener": "***She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."***" One described how Jesus had appeared to Mary:

He stood as a common person, and she looked upon Him accordingly (v. 14). She stood expecting an answer to her complaint from the angels; and either seeing the shadow, or hearing the tread, of some person behind her, she *turned herself back* from talking with the angels, and *sees Jesus Himself* standing, the very person she was looking for, and yet she *knew not that it was Jesus*. (Matthew Henry)

Here are the comments of **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) on Mary's reaction and on the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus:

Probably we are to think that Mary suddenly becomes aware of someone else near the tomb, and turns to that person with the same intent—to find out if anyone knows what happened to Jesus' body. As so often in the resurrection narratives, Jesus is not immediately recognized. The couple on the Emmaus road were 'kept from recognizing Him' (Luke 24:16), and the long ending of Mark says He appeared to them 'in a different form' (Mark 16:12); the disciples in the boat on the lake of Tiberias did not recognize the man on the shore (John 21:4); Mary *did not realize that it was Jesus*. In this instance, it is possible that Mary was blinded by tears. Taken as a whole, however, the resurrection accounts provide a

certain tension. On the one hand, Jesus' resurrection body can be touched and handled (v. 27; Luke 24:39), bears the marks of the wounds inflicted on Jesus' pre-death body (John 20:20, 25, 27), and not only cooks fish (21:9) but eats it (Luke 24:41-43). On the other hand, Jesus' resurrection body apparently rose through the grave-clothes (John 20:6-8), appears in a locked room (vs. 19, 26), and is sometimes not (at least initially) recognized. The closest we are likely to come to an explanation is 1 Corinthians 15:35ff.<sup>7</sup>

And here is 1 Corinthians 15:35-49:

<sup>35</sup>But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"  
<sup>36</sup>Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.

<sup>39</sup>All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.

<sup>40</sup>There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. <sup>41</sup>There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.

<sup>42</sup>So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

<sup>46</sup>However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. <sup>49</sup>And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Mary thought that He was the gardener, probably thinking that he may have been responsible for the removal of the body of Jesus. But then Jesus revealed Himself to Mary. We read in **verse 16**: "***Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher).***" Matthew Henry drew an application from this event:

Note, 1. Those that will be content with nothing short of a sight of Christ shall be put off with nothing less. He never said to the soul that sought Him, *Seek in vain*. "Is it Christ that thou wouldest have? Christ thou shalt have." 2. Christ, in manifesting Himself to those that seek Him, often outdoes their expectations... Mary longs to see the dead body of Christ, and complains of the loss of that, and behold she sees Him alive. Thus He does for His praying people more than they are able to ask or think.

And further he wrote:

With what liveliness of affection she gives this title to Christ. *She turned* from the angels, whom she had in her eye, to look unto Jesus. We must take off our regards from all creatures, even the brightest and best, to fix them upon Christ, from whom nothing must divert us, and with whom nothing must interfere. When *she thought it had been the gardener*, she looked another way while speaking to Him; but now that she knew the voice of Christ *she turned herself*. The soul that hears Christ's voice, and is turned to Him, calls Him, with joy and triumph, *My Master*. See with what pleasure those who love Christ speak of His authority over them. *My Master, my great Master*.

We read our Lord's words recorded in John 10 in which He spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd. He said, "the sheep hear His voice; and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. And when He

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<sup>7</sup> Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 640f.



brings out His own sheep, He goes before them; and the sheep follow Him, *for they know His voice*” (John 10:3f). Mary knew His voice, and addressed him, “Rabboni.” As one wrote,

It was said with an emphasis, and the air of kindness and freedom with which He was wont to speak to her. Now He changed His voice, and spoke like Himself, not like the gardener. Christ’s way of making Himself known to His people is by His word, His word applied to their souls, speaking to them in particular. When those whom God *knew by name* in the counsels of His love (Exo. 33:12) *are called by name* in the efficacy of His grace, then *He reveals His Son in them* as in Paul (Gal. 1:16), when Christ called to him by name, *Saul, Saul*. Christ’s *sheep know His voice* (ch. 10:4). This one word, *Mary*, was like that to the disciples in the storm, *It is I*. Then the word of Christ does us good when we put our names into the precepts and promises. “In this Christ calls to me, and speaks to me.”

We are familiar with the term rabbi, which means teacher. Rabboni is the Aramaic term, which was the common language of the common people. “It may not have been the highest Christological confession (cf. v. 28), but at this point Mary is enthralled by the restored relationship, not contemplating its theological implications.”<sup>8</sup> John provided the meaning of this word for His readers, suggesting once more that he was probably writing principally to and for Gentiles.

Let us take a moment to put ourselves in the place of Mary Magdalene. Can we imagine the surprise and joy that Mary immediately felt when she saw Jesus, whom she thought was dead, but now sees Him alive? She exemplifies what Jesus had said to His followers not long before:

Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. <sup>21</sup>A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup>Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. (John 16:20-22)

King David wrote in Psalm 34:18 these words:

The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,  
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

The Lord is nearer to us than we know when we see our need of Him and long for Him to be with us. He was not far from Mary, though Mary did not know so, as yet.

Before we pass beyond this verse, we should recognize again the theme of the Garden of Eden coming to the forefront. Mary thought that Jesus was the *Gardener*. Vida had sent me recently the comments of **Sinclair Ferguson** on this matter:

Recall what Adam was created to be: the Gardener.

Everything God made was “good”—but everything was not yet garden. God wanted Adam to exercise his dominion by expanding the garden. Having given him a garden to begin with, God was saying, “Now, Adam, I have given you a start. Now you go and do the rest.”

Adam was to “garden” the whole earth, for the glory of the heavenly Father. But he failed. Created to make the dust fruitful, he himself became part of the dust. The Garden of Eden became the wilderness of this world. But do you also remember how John’s Gospel records what happened on the morning of Jesus’ resurrection? He was “the beginning [of the new creation], the firstborn from the dead.” But Mary Magdalene did not recognize Him; instead she spoke to Him “supposing Him to be the gardener.” Well, who else would He be, at that time in the morning?

The gardener? Yes, indeed. He is the Gardener. He is the second Man, the last Adam, who is now beginning to restore the garden...

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<sup>8</sup> Carson, p. 641.

In the closing scenes of the book of Revelation, John saw the new earth coming down out of heaven. What did it look like? A garden in which the tree of life stands.

One day all this will come to pass...

But there is still a long way to go before the end; and there is much more to learn about Christ if we are to know Him fully. Already we have hints of what He will need to be: someone who speaks the truth that counters satan's lies, that is, a prophet; someone who is able to assure us that our sins are forgiven, that is, a priest; and someone who is able to subdue us and reign over us, that is, a king. And much else.

We next read that...

### III. Jesus instructed Mary (20:17)

We read in **verse 17** that

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

**Donald Carson** wrote of this verse: "This verse belongs to a handful of the most difficult passages in the New Testament."<sup>9</sup> The King James Version has resulted in a strange interpretation of our Lord's words. It records the words of Jesus to be as follows: "

"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.'" (John 20:17, KJV).

It has been commonly taught, based on this translation, that Jesus had not yet ascended into heaven in order to offer His blood as an atonement for sin. Therefore Mary, the sinner, must not touch Him lest it defile Him and His offering before it can be presented to His Father in heaven. When this idea is coupled with what is recorded in John 20:27, in which Jesus encouraged Thomas to touch Him, it is then said that between the times that Mary was not to touch Him and a week later when Jesus told Thomas to touch Him, that He must have ascended to His Father. Of course this is nonsense.

Actually it is best to understand Jesus as telling Mary to stop what she was already doing, that is, to stop clinging to Him. When Mary recognized Jesus she must have come and thrown herself at His feet and clung to His legs out of joy, but not wanting to turn loose of Him. But He told her what He was to do, namely, to ascend to His Father. Jesus taught her that she could not cling to Him as before. He was now risen and she must relate to Him accordingly. She must believe on Him as exalted, glorified, and enthroned. She could not relate to Him as she had formerly, but now she may do so in a far greater, grander manner. **John Calvin** (1509-1564) commented on our Lord's words:

The meaning of these words is, that Christ's state of resurrection would not be full and complete, until He should sit down in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Therefore Mary did wrong in satisfying herself with having nothing more than half of His resurrection, and desiring only to enjoy His presence in the world.<sup>10</sup>

But there is another quite significant matter here in what Jesus told Mary to announce to His disciples. Again Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to **My brethren** and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and **your Father**, and to My God and **your God**.'" This is the first occasion when Jesus referred to His disciples as "**My brethren**." His death and resurrection on their behalf brought His people into a new and deeper relationship with Him. He regards His disciples, meaning both male and female disciples, as His brothers and sisters. There is a new family relationship with

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 641f.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 427.

God's Son and with God the Father through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is, for those who truly believe on Him. They and they only may call themselves the children of God and the brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the Old Testament the people of Israel could refer to God as the Father of their nation, but it was not a term of address by the individual.<sup>11</sup> But now all those who are disciples of Jesus, followers of Him as their Savior and Lord, may regard themselves to be His brothers and sisters and God as their Father.

#### **IV. Mary bore witness of Jesus to the disciples (20:18)**

<sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

Earlier she had departed from Peter and John in tears—sad, confused, and despondent, as she pondered the disappearance of the body of Jesus. But now she came among the disciples with a glorious tale to tell. She had seen, spoken with, and had clung to their Master. She gave the disciples, His brethren, a faithful report, an eyewitness account. And though it came forth from her, a woman, they could not reject her testimony, but must respect and regard it as valid. How else could they explain her countenance?

“She had joy in her sight of the Master herself, and was willing to communicate of her joy, for she knew it would be good news to them. When God comforts us, it is with this design, that we may comfort others. And as she told them what she had seen, so also what she had heard; she had seen the Lord alive, of which this was a token (and a good token it was) *that He had spoken these things unto her* as a message to be delivered to them, and she delivered it faithfully.”

It would be the same as others toward them after they see and speak with their risen Savior. All would take account of the fact that they had been with Jesus

This sets the stage for our Lord's appearance to His disciples, which would take place later that first Lord's Day evening. We will address this next Lord's Day, Lord willing.

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“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’  
And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come.  
Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. (Rev. 22:17)

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<sup>11</sup> The one exception would be the inaugurated son of David as king over Israel. He was God's “son” who was to reign over Israel on behalf of God His Father (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14).