

The Lord Appears to Mary Magdalene

John 20:11-18

John 20:11-18: *“But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. 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. ¹³ 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.”

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

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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

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

¹⁷ 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.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.”

Background Notes

After Peter and John left the tomb and returned to the place where they were staying in Jerusalem, Mary lingered at the empty tomb. As she looked into the inner chamber of the tomb, she saw two angels sitting on the shelf or niche in the rock wall of the tomb where the body of the Lord had been placed.

Luke’s account tells us that these two angels appeared as men. They were not glowing with radiant light, and they didn’t have wings and halos. They appeared as men. In Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, one angel was mentioned. This is not a mistake in the Bible! Notice that Matthew and Mark didn’t say that there was **only** one angel. There were two angels, but Matthew and Mark focused on the one angel who was probably the spokesman (or shall we say, “the spokes-angel?”).

When Mary turned around, she saw the Lord standing outside the tomb, but at first she didn’t realize it was the Lord. He looked like an ordinary man - so much so that Mary mistook Him for a gardener! The Lord didn’t appear in dazzling white apparel, or with a halo, but in ordinary clothes, and probably not white. This was not the way the Lord appeared in all His post-resurrection appearances – certainly not the way He appeared to Paul on the Damascus road.

In verse 15, notice that Mary still didn’t believe that the explanation for the empty tomb was a resurrection. Thinking the Lord was a gardener, Mary said, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him

away.” She must have thought that Joseph of Arimathea had given permission to the gardener to move the Lord’s body to a different location, and she wanted to be sure the Lord was buried properly.

Then, when the Lord called her by name, Mary recognized the Lord! *“Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).”* “Rabboni” is a strengthened form of the term “Rabbi,” and Mary was essentially saying “My great teacher!”

A further background note. Notice that John felt it was necessary to add the parenthetical comment; *“(which is to say, Teacher).”* No doubt this indicates that John was writing to a much larger audience than just Jewish people. The comment, *“(which is to say, Teacher)”* would not have been needed if John was writing only to a Jewish audience who would have understood the title “Rabboni.”

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. The resurrection of Christ involves new relationships.

Verse 17: *“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.’”*

What did the Lord mean when He said, *“Do not cling to Me”*? There are a lot of different views on this statement in the various commentaries. Mary was probably not hugging the Lord - she was probably holding His feet as she knelt down before Him and worshiped Him. It’s unlikely that one suggestion for the meaning of *“Do not cling to Me”* was probably not “Don’t touch me!” - because later this chapter the Lord invited Thomas to touch Him (v27). Another unlikely suggestion is that in saying *“Do not cling to Me”* the Lord meant “Stop holding me back from ascending to Heaven.”

Possibly the meaning is, “Mary, you don’t have to cling to me. I’m not going to ascend yet. You’ll see me again before my ascension.” Another possibility for the meaning is, “Mary, you don’t have to cling to me. This is not the return that I predicted. I’m not here to stay - I haven’t ascended to my Father yet.” That might be the idea.

I believe that the main thought here is “new relationships.” That is, “Mary, don’t cling to Me, because things are different now. Relationships are not the same as they were before the resurrection. I will no longer be here bodily; I’ll be ascending to Heaven. But the Holy Spirit will be sent to comfort and guide and teach you.”

Look at verse 17 to see further information about the idea of new relationships: *“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.’”* In John 15, the Lord referred to His own disciples as **friends**. But in John 20 the Lord now referred to them as **“My brethren”**!

What a great new relationship! Brethren of Jesus Christ! Do you realize that is your position, if you're a believer? **We are His brethren!** Hebrews 2:11: "*For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.*"

Notice further that the Lord said, "*I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.*" In the new relationships, even though we are "brethren" of Christ, there still is a distinction between His relationship to the Father as the Son, and our relationship to the Father as believers. The resurrection of Christ involves new relationships.

2. The resurrection of Christ involves new responsibilities.

Mary Magdalene had the great privilege of being the first one to see our risen Lord, but then she was given a responsibility. She was to go and tell! And she obeyed immediately! Mary went and told the other disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. She had a responsibility to go and tell of the resurrection, and she obeyed.

The resurrection of Christ involves new responsibilities. Like Mary, we Christians have new responsibilities. We're responsible to tell others about the living Christ.

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential for salvation. Is there Scripture that backs up the necessity for believing in the resurrection? There certainly is! Romans 10:9: "*...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" Belief in the resurrection of Christ is essential for salvation. And we have a responsibility to teach that.

Are you fulfilling your responsibility? Am I fulfilling my responsibility? The resurrection of Christ involves new responsibilities.

When we lived in Pittsburgh, a large church that was right next to a major highway through the heart of the city placed a message on the church roof. Everyone driving by could see it. In big and bold white letters, the statement was, "**JESUS IS ALIVE!**" You couldn't miss it!

That church was fulfilling its responsibility. Are we? Now I'm not suggesting that you put a sign on your roof! But let's take our responsibility seriously – and personally. Are we going to tell someone about the resurrection this week? The resurrection of Jesus Christ involves new responsibilities.

Practical Application

Your sorrow can be turned to joy!

Mary was weeping (v11). The word used here could be translated "wailing" – an expression of heart-wrenching grief. But Mary's sorrow was turned to joy when she heard the Lord speak her name! "**Mary!**"

Notice - the Lord calls His own people by name! Speaking of the true shepherd, in John 10:3 the Lord said, "...*the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*" And verse 14 He said: "*I am the good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me...*"

What made the difference between Mary weeping in sorrow, and Mary responding in joy? It was the resurrection! The resurrection of Jesus Christ! That made all the difference! The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes the difference.

Is it possible that there is sorrow in your life right now? Your sorrow can be turned to joy! If you're not a believer, your sorrow can be turned to joy this very day if you trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and commit your life to Him. Your sorrow can be turned to joy!

Maybe you're a believer, and you're going through some hard times right now. Your sorrow can be turned to joy, too, as you appreciate the reality and the full meaning of the resurrection of Christ. Jesus is alive! He knows you personally, and He cares for you! He's preparing a permanent home for you, and He is coming back for you so you will be with Him forever! Knowing those truths can turn your sorrow into joy!

In a church where I spoke last Sunday, there was a Christian family whose teenaged daughter had just been killed in a tragic car accident. Shawna Elford was a Christian teen who was always reaching out to help others. She had stopped at the side of the road to help a motorist who had gotten into a small accident, and as she crossed the road she was struck by an oncoming car. She was in a coma for nine days, and she went Home to be with the Lord last weekend.

Last Sunday morning Shawna's parents and family were in church. I can't begin to tell you what a witness and what an encouragement her folks and family were to all of us because of their strength in Jesus Christ. Yes, of course there were tears and sorrow, but their sorrow was not like the grief and despair of those who have no hope.

What made the difference? The resurrection of Christ made all the difference! The family knows that Shawna is alive today. She's in Heaven with the Lord Jesus Himself - and they know that they will see her again!

This is no wishful thinking, folks - it's fact! And it's a solid hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ! He conquered death. The Lord Jesus is alive today, and therefore your sorrow can be turned to joy!