

"WHAT A RISEN SAVIOR MEANS TO YOU"

John 20:1, 11-18

"On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ¹¹ But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus' body had been lying. ¹³ They said to her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'Because they've taken away my Lord,' she told them, 'and I don't know where they've put Him.' ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 'Woman,' Jesus said to her, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, 'Sir, if you've removed Him, tell me where you've put Him, and I will take Him away.' ¹⁶ Jesus said, 'Mary.' Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, '*Rabbouni!*'—which means 'Teacher.' ¹⁷ 'Don't cling to Me,' Jesus told her, 'for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father—to My God and your God.' ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them what He had said to her."

INTRODUCTION

Jesus encourages us to have the faith in Him of "a little child," without demanding a full explanation of His plans for us before we'll agree to cooperate with Him (**Luke 18:15-17**). But sometimes God's ways of doing things seem so unexpected to us, or so far different than anything that immediately makes sense to us (**Isaiah 55:8-9**), that we can become as confused as children even as full grown adults. Little Maria came home from Sunday School on Palm Sunday and told her mom she'd learned a new song about a cross-eyed bear named Gladly. It took her mother a while before she realized Maria had been taught Fanny Crosby's classic hymn, *Keep Thou My Way*, with the lyrics, "Kept by Thy tender care, Gladly the cross I'll bear" (which a six-year-old heard as, "Gladly the cross-eyed bear"). On Easter Sunday, Dicky went to church for the first time in his life with his best friend's grandparents. After Sunday School, the grandparents asked if anyone talked to him about "meeting Jesus." "No," Dicky said, "I couldn't meet Him." "Why would you say that?" they asked. "The teacher kept telling us, "He is not here: He is risen" (**Matthew 28:5**).

Mary of Magdala in Galilee is called "Mary Magdalene" for convenience and to avoid confusing her with the other Mary's who were followers of **Jesus**; most notably His mother. Mary Magdalene had more invested emotionally and spiritually in **Jesus** than most. In **John 8:12**, **Jesus** declared, "I am the Light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." "The Light of the world" saved Mary from a dismal and terrible past. There is no Biblical reason to assume Mary's dark past consisted of prostitution. Pope Gregory the Great in the 6th century wrongly identified her as the unnamed "immoral woman" of **Luke 7:36-50** whose sins were "forgiven" by her "faith" in **Jesus** while anointing His head with perfume and washing His feet with her tears. Mary Magdalene had been gripped more wretchedly than by a life of prostitution. She'd been terrified and tormented by "seven demons" until **Jesus**, "Son of the Most High God," released her from their terror (**Luke 8:1-2, 28**). From that day on, Mary believed she had nothing to fear from darkness, so it's no wonder she bravely "came to the tomb early, while it was still dark," on the Sunday morning after **Jesus** had been crucified.

After becoming a "liberated woman" in the best sense of this phrase—liberated from Satan's control and freed from sin & self to serve **Jesus**—Mary Magdalene became one of His most devoted followers. She often accompanied His band of "Twelve" disciples while they were "traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God." She was one of "many" women helping to care for their needs and "supporting them" financially (**Luke 8:1-2**). All the disciples except John deserted **Jesus** on the day of His crucifixion. But Mary Magdalene could be found among a handful of faithful women "standing by the cross of Jesus" (**John 19:25**). She loyally watched near His gravesite as His body was "placed in a tomb" and "a stone" was "rolled" "against the entrance of the tomb" (**Mark 15:**

46-47). Unaware that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, two members of Israel's supreme religious Council (the Sanhedrin), had already reverently wrapped **Jesus'** body "in linen cloths with . . . aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews" (**Mark 15:43; John 3:1, John 19:38-40**), she "bought" and "prepared spices and perfumes," along with two other women, to perform this sacred burial rite for their slain Savior. But their efforts were interrupted until the Jewish Sabbath ended Saturday night and the arrival of "sunrise" on Sunday morning (**Mark 16:1-2; Luke 23:55-56**). This is how Mary Magdalene came to be one of the first to behold His empty tomb shortly after His Resurrection (**Matthew 28:1-6**).

For three hours of **Jesus'** Crucifixion agony, **Luke 23:44-45** describes a startling event: "It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three,⁴⁵ because the sun's light failed." This was no mere solar eclipse. An eclipse of the sun can only occur at New Moon, when the moon's face toward Earth is fully darkened and the sun's rays fall fully on the opposite side. **Jesus** was crucified at the time of the Jewish Passover (**Matthew 26:1-2**), which always occur at a time of Full Moon (April 11 this year). Besides, a full solar eclipse lasts a mere 8 minutes, not "three hours." Phlegon, a Greek historian, compiled an extensive chronology around AD 137. He wrote that in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [AD 33] there was "the greatest eclipse of the sun" when "it became night in the sixth hour of the day [noon] so that stars even appeared in the heavens." God the Father somehow blocked the sun's rays from shining while the earthly life of the Son of God was being extinguished by the evil darkness of the "sins . . . of the whole world" He took upon Himself (**I John 2:2**). **Jesus'** death also cast His followers into the deepest gloom, confused by the apparent end of their dearest dreams for a better life that seemed to die with Him. How **Jesus** responded to Mary Magdalene should give us hope when we are next confronted by heartbreak.

WHAT A RISEN SAVIOR CAN DO FOR YOU

A. The Risen Savior Will Call Your Name

Vs. 16 tells us, "Jesus said, 'Mary.'" When we experience great shock, severe loss, or a major setback, it's easy to feel for a time as though we alone have known such grief or that God has somehow forgotten us. How well does God know you; enough to call you by name? There are 100 thousand million stars just in our Milky Way galaxy, and there millions upon millions of other galaxies in the universe. Yet, **Psalms 147:4** insists, "He [God] counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them"! If the LORD God of Heaven can number and name trillions of stars, do you think He would ever lose sight of you? A man visited Palestine, modern Israel, in the 1930s. He learned shepherds would often combine their flocks for safety. When it came time for a shepherd to move on with his flock, this visitor witnessed his own sheep would respond only to his distinctive signals and voice and would soon disengage themselves from the other flocks with whom they were temporarily mingled. Or, during the night, shepherds could enter a pitch-black cave where 100 or more sheep were bedded for the evening. Just by feeling and smelling the sheep, these shepherds could identify which were theirs without ever making a mistake. When you are in times of darkness, the Risen Savior Will Call Your Name in a variety of ways to assure you of His care.

B. The Risen Savior Will Calm Your Fears

Let's reread **vss. 1, 11-13**: "On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ¹¹ But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus' body had been lying. ¹³ They said to her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'Because they've taken away my Lord,' she told them, 'and I don't know where they've put Him.'"

Mary's mind swirled with doubts and distress as she approached **Jesus'** tomb Sunday morning. The brutal finality of Christ's death, in whom she'd placed her full hopes, left her with nothing but fear for her future. The shocking disappearance of **Jesus'** body alarmed her even more. Many people's lives today are

filled with fear. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported that 50 years ago, the greatest fears of grade school children were: 1) Animals, 2) Being in a dark room, 3) High places, 4) Strangers, & 5) Loud noises. Today, the most frequent fears kids name are 1) Divorce, 2) Nuclear war, 3) Cancer, 4) Pollution, & 5) Being mugged. This reveals the fearsome world in which we all must now live. People try different coping tools to deal with their fears. Two explorers were on a jungle safari when a ferocious lion suddenly jumped in front of them. "Keep calm" the first explorer whispered. "Remember what we read in that book on wild animals? If you stand perfectly still and look the lion in the eye, he will turn and run." "Sure," replied his companion. "You've read the book, and I've read the book. But has the lion read the book?" People try different coping tools to deal with their fears—denying they exist, drugs, alarm systems—but nothing is as effective as the sensitive concern of God's agents—angels in Mary's case—who calmly assure people the Risen Savior has defeated the power of death, sin, and Satan over us and He alone is the lasting solution to their fears. **Matthew 28:5-7** (NASB) records one of the angels assured Mary, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. ⁷ Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." We can be God's agents pointing the fearful to see the reality of the Risen Savior despite their alarming circumstances.

C. The Risen Savior Will Comfort Your Sorrows

Jesus Will Call Your Name, Jesus Will Calm Your Fears, and as The Risen Savior He Will Comfort Your Sorrows. Let's reread **vss. 14-15**: "Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 'Woman,' Jesus said to her, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, 'Sir, if you've removed Him, tell me where you've put Him, and I will take Him away.'"

Mary's immediate concern, thinking someone had wrongfully carried off the body of the one she called, "my Lord," was but a symptom of her far graver sorrow: the unthinkable execution as a common murderer of the one she and thousands of others worshiped as God's promised Redeemer. Yet, everyone is faced at times with great sorrow. Our text reveals Mary's distress grew from her incomplete understanding of God's purposes. What she perceived as a reason for extreme weeping soon proved to be a reason for extreme rejoicing! First the angels and then **Jesus** Himself comforted Mary by assurances God was still in control of her world and of her life. Evil had not triumphed. Appearances are often quite deceiving! Whatever fears or sorrows may beset us, at times, we can confidently declare,

D. The Risen Savior Will Conquer Your Doubt

Vss. 16-18: "Jesus said, 'Mary.' Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, '*Rabbouni!*'—which means 'Teacher.' ¹⁷ 'Don't cling to Me,' Jesus told her, 'for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father—to My God and your God.' ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them what He had said to her." The resurrection never crossed Mary's grief stricken mind. She allowed present circumstances to shout more loudly to her than God's promises. She allowed her ideas of what *should* be God's will to close her heart to the reality of what *must* be God's will. **Luke 24:5-8** reveals the angels pointed Mary and the women with her to the Lord's promises to counter their misplaced doubts with the trust of faith. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" they asked. ⁶ "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, ⁷ saying, 'The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day'?" ⁸ And they remembered His words."

Like Mary Magdalene, many times we can become so focused and consumed with the problems of today that we lose sight of God's promises to us or lose trust in the magnificence of His care for us. Just by

revealing He remained present in her life and was not lost to her, as she'd feared, **Jesus** conquered her doubts. Her full faith in and trust in Him were restored, as revealed by **vs. 16**, "Jesus said, 'Mary.' Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, '*Rabbouni!*'—which means "Teacher.'" The usual term for "teachers" of the Bible, "Rabbi," literally means "my master," as in "master teacher." "Rabbouni" was an even more respectful term and rarely used. It literally means, "my great master." The Phillips translation may best capture the full force of this exchange between Mary Magdalene and Jesus: "Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' At this she turned right round and said to him, in Hebrew, 'Master!'"

If you have yet to call out to **Jesus Christ** as Savior to be reborn into God's eternal family, The Risen Savior Is Calling Your Name this morning. Or if you've been dealt a severe setback or you are enduring a great heartache, The Risen Savior Is Calling You to Himself by Name. If your hopes have been dashed and you have become filled with fear for your future, The Risen Savior Can Calm Your Fears. If you have suffered painful loss or hurtful disappointments, The Risen Savior Can Comfort Your Sorrow. If the darkness of your circumstances has given you doubts about God's plans or made you forgetful of His promises, The Risen Savior Can Conquer Your Doubts. These are just a few ways the Resurrected **Jesus Christ** is reaching out to us today!

CONCLUSION

Let's see if we can see ourselves in this humorous appeal of a Dallas Theological Seminary Professor, Norman Shirk, to our Risen Savior.

Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush.
Just a few smoking branches
And I would surely be ...your Moses.

Let me meet you on the water, Lord,
Just once.
It wouldn't have to be on White Rock Lake.
Just on a puddle after the annual Dallas rain
And I would surely be...your Peter.

Let me meet you on the road, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to blind me on North Central Expressway.
Just a few bright lights on the way to chapel
And I would surely be...your Paul.

Let me meet you, Lord,
Just once.
Anywhere. Anytime.
Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes
Must I always be...your Thomas?