

“I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!”

John 20:1-18

Key verse 20:18a

“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’”

Jesus died and was buried. It was now the third day. His disciples were in hiding for fear of the Jews. What a terrifying, sorrowful, and dark time it was for those who loved Jesus. They had just witnessed their beloved Lord die so brutally and tragically. Their hearts and spirits were broken. They had been looking forward to Jesus becoming King in Israel. They were hoping for freedom from Rome. But all their hopes died when Jesus died. God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son to die. But this is not a tragic love story. This love story does not end in death, like many famous love stories do. Rather, this is a glorious love story! This love story triumphs over death and the grave! And this love story can personally give each one of us victory over the power of death!

John chapter 20 opens with Mary Magdalene making her way to Jesus’ tomb on this dark early morning on the first day of the week. Who was Mary Magdalene? She was a woman who deeply and personally experienced Jesus’ love, mercy and grace. She was once tormented by seven evil spirits. But Jesus freed her from this demonic power. From that time on, she was forever indebted to Jesus. She devoted her whole life to Jesus and His ministry. She traveled with Jesus and His disciples from place to place, helping to support them out of her own means. Now, full of sorrow, she went to the tomb to express her love for Jesus one last time. She didn’t yet know that the sorrow and darkness of the world was about to be challenged by the greatest event in human history.

As Mary neared the tomb, she saw something surprising: the entrance stone to the tomb had been removed. She had to tell Jesus’ disciples. So she ran to Peter and John saying, **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!”** Peter and John then raced to the tomb. This footrace shows their determination to find the truth of what happened. It also shows their competitive spirit and their different characters. John was a faster runner, but more cautious and thoughtful. Peter was more impulsive, so he went straight into the tomb.

When John went into the tomb, **“He saw and believed”** (8b). What exactly did he see? He saw an empty grave. Jesus was not there! He also saw the grave

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clothes. These grave clothes were not carelessly strewn about the tomb. Nor were they lying in an unraveled heap. No! These grave clothes were lying exactly where Jesus’ body had been. Now only an empty shell remained. Likewise, the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head was still in its place, where Jesus’ head had been. These are the undeniable evidences that prove Jesus rose from the dead. John believed based on the evidence, but they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Later, we see that the disciples accepted Jesus’ resurrection based on the Scriptures. Peter quotes Psalm 16 in his Pentecost day message saying, **“Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it”** (Ac 2:31-32). So we see that Scripture is a vital part of our belief. Without Scripture, things remain unclear. But with Scripture, everything becomes clear and makes sense.

Peter and John really loved Jesus. But after seeing the empty tomb, they went back to where they were staying. Mary, on the other hand, faithfully remained. She didn’t know where to go or what to do, so she stayed there crying and crying. Jesus had been everything to her. He was the only one who could understand her completely. When she was with Jesus, she always felt loved and valued. No one else had ever made her feel that way. And now she had lost the one person in the whole world who meant so much to her. She had put all her hopes in the human Jesus but now it seemed she had lost everything. Have you ever experienced such deep sorrow?

Generally people think women are the more sorrowful ones, but men get sorrowful too. This sorrow problem is very real and very serious. We can see that in the world there are many sorrowful people. **But why are there still so many sorrowful Christians?** There could be many reasons for sorrow such as: loss of a loved one, unmet expectations for love, financial or health problems, children not growing up well spiritually, Bible students leaving, etc.

These are all very real issues and legitimate reasons to be sorrowful. And sometimes, even though we may know Jesus, it seems there is no practical solution to these problems. So, like Mary, we faithfully remain at the tomb of Jesus, crying and crying. Why is this so? It is because we need to meet the Risen Jesus personally. We can be very faithful to Jesus our whole life, but unless we meet the Risen Jesus personally, our sorrows remain. How can meeting the Risen Jesus solve our sorrow problem? Let’s look at Mary’s example.

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As Mary wept, she bent over to look into the tomb once more. She was startled to see two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, **“Woman, why are you crying?”** **“They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him,”** she said. Then she turned around and saw the Risen Jesus standing there. He asked her, **“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** Thinking Jesus was the gardener, she said, **“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”** Mary loved Jesus so much that she did not even calculate how she would carry His body. Her tear-filled eyes were so fastened on that empty grave that she did not see Jesus, the Glory of Heaven, standing beside her. In her mind, it was impossible, even for Jesus, to conquer the power of death.

Then came the revelation. Jesus said to her, **“Mary.”** It was the voice of her shepherd Jesus! Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who knows each of us by name. He is the Creator God who designed us and knit us together in our mother's womb. He knows each one of us and loves each one of us. And He calls each one of us personally, “Michael, Karen, Henry, Jennifer.” When he said Mary's name, she turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, **“Rabboni!”** which means **“Teacher.”** And then she must have taken hold of Jesus in such a way that said, “This time, I'm never letting go. I'm not going to lose you again.” But Jesus did not embrace her in return. Instead, he stopped her from holding onto his body, saying, **“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

By commissioning Mary to take this message, we can really see Jesus' deep love for her. Jesus did not want Mary to suffer from sorrow any longer. Jesus wanted to restore her joy and give her a new mission for her life. He challenged her to begin a new relationship with Him that would be spiritual and by faith. So not only was Mary the first eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection, but she was also the first missionary Jesus sent to go and share this resurrection message!

Jesus' resurrection message is so personal, yet so far-reaching. The Risen Jesus came to one sorrowful woman, Mary. But then Jesus told her to **“Go”** and share this good news. Jesus is concerned about each and every person who is suffering under the power of death. He comes to us personally and plants

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resurrection faith in our hearts. Then Jesus commissions us to go into the world and share this good news with others.

Jesus’ resurrection power is also so specific, and yet so universal. Jesus turned Mary’s sorrow into joy. Jesus’ resurrection destroys every element of sin and death! Sorrowful people become the most joyful people. Fearful people become the most courageous people. Selfish people become the most sacrificial people. The power of Jesus’ resurrection brings the dead to life and uses these frail, mortal bodies to plant resurrection faith in people’s hearts even in the most hostile conditions.

This passage reminds me of a time in my own life where I was particularly sorrowful. I often dreamed of finding perfect love. So when I met who I thought was Mr. Right, my heart was set on marrying him. I was even convinced that it was from God and I brought him to church and to Bible study. My Bible teacher challenged me to focus on studying the Bible, on teaching the Bible and on learning more of Jesus before marriage. I was excited that I could bring him to the Lord. But as time went on, a big conflict arose in my heart. He was not growing spiritually as I had hoped. I would fall asleep crying and praying night after night that it would be God’s will for me to marry him.

*Even though I knew following Jesus was the best thing to do, I could not believe that doing so would make me happier than the life I wanted for myself. But God challenged me through John 1:39 saying, **“Come, and you will see.”** God knew the conflict in my heart. God wanted to show me how blessed my life would be if I followed Jesus. So, I ended the relationship and the other person left the ministry. But my heart was still broken.*

At this critical time, the Risen Jesus met me in a dream. As we stood face to face, He looked right into my eyes. Jesus understood my pain and sorrow and He promised to be with me through it. I was completely enveloped by His love and I had peace. This encounter with the Risen Jesus began to heal my heart and restore my mission as a shepherd.

*But shortly thereafter two of my most faithful bible students left the ministry at the same time. I was very discouraged. But it was then that God gave me my life key verse, John 12:24, **“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds.”** Through this verse, God revealed to me the secret of bearing fruit and I*

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*became so thankful and joyful. Even one of the girls who left returned and grew into a **graceful shepherdess**.*

Several years later, God also led me to marry a very faithful man, Jason, and blessed us with four wonderful children. Truly, following Jesus is the most joyful and most blessed life.

So whenever we feel sorrowful, whenever we are suffering from any element of death, let us listen for the Risen Jesus calling our name. Let us allow His personal touch to heal us and transform us. And let us accept His mission to **“Go”** and tell others. Then joy and purpose from the Risen Jesus will enable us to personally and powerfully testify, **“I have seen the Lord!”**