

WHO SEEKEST THOU

JOHN 20:11-16

Text: John 20:15

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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.

Introduction:

Mary Magdalene had the unique privilege of being the first person to see Jesus following His resurrection. She was the first person to whom our Lord spoke after He had overcome death.

We read in the opening verse:

John 20:1

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.

Mary discovered the empty tomb, but it had a very different effect upon her than the thought of it has upon us today. John says in verse 11:

John 20:11

¹¹ But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, *and looked* into the sepulchre,

When the Lord appears to Mary, He asks her two questions, “Woman, why weepest thou, Whom seekest thou?”

Mary Magdalene’s experience by the garden tomb speaks to us about how we deal with the grief and crises of our lives. She points us to the fact that what we see as a tragedy may prove to be the scene of the greatest victory.

Note these three things that Mary says to us today.

First she says that:

1. YOUR SORROW MAY BE MEANINGLESS

In our text, Mary Magdalene was standing just outside the newly vacated tomb of the Lord, and the Bible says that she was “weeping”.

The word “weeping” literally means to wail. It speaks of a visible brokenness.

While her emotion is touching, it is out of place. The angels seated inside the tomb asked her, “Why weepest thou?” Jesus repeated the same question just a few moments later.

She cried because she could not find His body, but if she had found His body, then she would have really had a reason to weep.

Mary reminds us that there are times we sorrow over the wrong things. We stand looking at what we believe is a tragic loss and we sorrow when we should perhaps be shouting instead. Notice a couple of reasons for Mary's meaningless sorrow. First of all:

A. She Was Worried About an Artificial Burden

The angels asked Mary, "Why weepest thou?" In verse 13, Mary answered,

John 20:13

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.

Mary wept outside the tomb because she feared that someone had stolen the body of the Lord, and moved it somewhere else. For Mary, the Lord's death had been traumatic enough, but now it was just an added tragedy to have to locate His missing body.

In reality, Mary was crying over a burden and problem that didn't actually exist. The body of Jesus had not been stolen. It had been raised to life. She had created an artificial burden over which she sorrowed.

How often is it that we spend time worrying and sorrowing over things that have not even happened? We say things like, “What if...,” or “Maybe...,” and we create artificial burdens that consume our attention and weigh down our spirits.

In Matthew 6 the Lord said:

Matthew 6:34

³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

Notice another reason for Mary’s meaningless sorrow. Notice not only that she was worried about an artificial burden, but notice also that:

B. She Was weeping Over an Actual Blessing

Mary saw the empty tomb, and blinded by her grief, she began to weep.

What Mary could not see through her tears is that the thing she was weeping about – the empty tomb – was actually the most blessed sight she had ever seen.

Could it be that there are times in our lives when we weep over things that we should be celebrating? Could it be that there is something in your life right now that you view as a tragedy, but it may actually prove to be a blessing?

The British hymn writer, William Cowper, struggled with depression and mental illness throughout much of his life. Through the darkness of his struggle, however, he was inspired to write these lines of eternal truth:

*God moves in mysterious ways,
His wonders to perform,
He plants His footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy and shall break,
In blessings on your head,*

*Judge not the Lord from feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace,
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face*

No matter what we are facing, may we learn from Mary not to weep too quickly, for our sorrow may be meaningless.

Notice a second truth we learn from Mary.

2. YOUR SPECULATION MAY BE MISTAKEN

When Mary saw the empty tomb early that Sunday morning, she instantly jumped to a conclusion regarding its meaning. She told the angels in verse 13,

John 20:13

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.

Mary looked at her situation, and she speculated about what was going on, and it turned out that her speculation could not have been further from the truth.

Likewise, there are times we look at the things going on in our lives, and we interpret them according to our limited understanding. When that happens, very often we find out later that we were mistaken.

Notice a couple of things that led to Mary's mistaken speculation. First of all, notice:

A. How She Assessed the Situation

Mary looked at the slab of stone upon which the Lord's body had been laid. Now only the grave clothes remained, and Mary could only think of one explanation.

In Mary's mind, the only possible explanation for a missing dead body is that someone had come and moved it to another location.

The reason Mary's speculation was wrong was because she had assessed her situation from a purely human perspective. She was looking through tears of discouraged doubt, and she could only think within the limits of a fallen, human world.

Very often, we view the challenges and struggles of our life the same way.

We will look at a problem, and we will say, "It looks bad." We speculate about the outcome, leaving the possibility of divine intervention, and miraculous resurrection completely off the table.

Notice not only how Mary assessed the situation, but notice also their mistaken speculation came from:

B. How She Approached the Situation

John 20:15

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.

Still, Mary believes that the empty tomb is an indication that someone has taken the body of Jesus.

Notice what she plans to do about this supposed problem. She says,

“Tell me where thou hast laid him and I’ll take him away.”

Do you see Mary’s problem. She has misjudged the whole situation, and to compound her error, she approaches the situation as if it is something she can fix.

So often, like Mary, we are completely mistaken about what we are facing, and we are equally mistaken about what needs to happen. We say, “If I could just do this,” or “I wish I had this...”

When we come to what we speculate to be a tragedy, and a crisis, it would do us all good to remember what Moses said to the Children of Israel as they stood cramped between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea.

Exodus 14:13

¹³ And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

Notice a third and final truth that we draw from Mary:

3. THE SAVIOUR MAY BE MISSED

John 20:14

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

The very One for whom Mary was searching, and the very One for whom Mary was sobbing, was the very One who stood just feet from her, and yet, the Bible says that didn't know it was Jesus.

In the midst of her crisis Mary missed the Savior. In her overwhelming sorrow, she overlooked His presence.

You know; it is possible that as we scramble to deal with our supposed problems, we can completely miss the nearness and presence of Jesus.

We are so absorbed in sorrow that we do not see Him who comes to soothe it. We often think He is the farthest when He is nearest.

Notice first of all the Saviour can be missed:

A. If You're Not Looking For His Victory

She was looking for His corpse, not the risen Savior.

It is possible that we look at the crises of our lives and we miss what God is doing because we only see gloom, despair, pain, and loss. We are not expecting God to do

a miracle, and to raise that which was dead, and bring life to our loss.

Years ago, to make room for a new hydro-electric plant, a small town in Maine was slated to be flooded when the new dam was built. The people in the town were told many months in advance in order to give them time to arrange their relocation.

During those months, all work in the town ceased. No painting was done, no repairs were made on the buildings, roads, or sidewalks. With each day, the town got shabbier, dirtier, and uglier. Before the water ever hit the town, it looked abandoned and ruined. One resident in the town explained, “Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.”

When we face the situations of our lives without hope, and without faith that God can intervene and turn the situation for His glory, we set ourselves up to completely miss the presence of the Lord in our lives.

Notice not only that your Savior may be missed if you’re not looking for His victory, but notice also further that your Savior may be missed:

B. If You’re Not Listening For His Voice or Words

John 20:16

¹⁶Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

She did eventually recognize Him, after He called her name.

It is a wonderful moment, but the truth is, He had spoken to her already. In verse 15, He had asked her, “Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?”

Had Mary gone to the garden tomb, listening for His voice, perhaps she would have immediately recognized Him the moment He first spoke to her.

Mary reminds us that in all our situations of life, it is critical that we listen carefully for the voice of the Lord.

Whenever you find yourself facing what appears to be a tragedy, open His Word, and look for Him. As you do, listen closely to what He says to you.

Close:

The hymns of Fanny Crosby are one the treasures of the church. In her lifetime, Crosby gave to us over 8,000 songs. When Fanny was only 6 weeks old, she developed a minor eye inflammation. The doctor treating her was careless, and as a result of his malpractice, Fanny became completely and permanently blind.

Rather than being bitter at the doctor who had caused the loss of her sight, Crosby once said, “If I could meet

him now, I would say, ‘Thank you’ over and over again.” Fanny felt that her blindness was actually a blessing from God that enabled her to write the songs that she did.

There are times when we assume that what we are facing is a burden, when in actuality it is a blessing. Like Mary Magdalene, who wept outside the empty tomb, we need to be reminded that not everything is what it seems.

It could be that your sorrow is meaningless, your speculation is mistaken, and through all of your worry and despair, the Savior has been missed.

It could be that if you would just turn to Him, you would find that He is closer than you believed, and that He is doing a work in your life that is quite opposite of the tragedy you suspected.