

The One Who Conquered Death

John 20:11-18

Part 4

Christ told His disciples in **John 14:19**, “**After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.**” Will we as Christ’s disciples live again in the blessedness of His presence even if we die? This is what Christ told His disciples and I believe that this is something that we can count on.

Why? We can count on this promise because He Himself so powerfully manifested His complete and total mastery over death.

And it is Christ’s mastery over death that the Apostle John so wonderfully details for us in **John 19:30-20:31**. And in how many different ways does John do this?

Christ’s mastery over death in John 19:30-20:31 was manifested in three different ways.

First of all, Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His dying (John 19:30-37). We saw this in **John 19:30-37**.

Secondly, Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His burial (John 19:38-42). We saw this in **John 19:38-42**.

And thirdly, we have begun to see how Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His resurrection (John 20:1-31). Where have we begun to see this? We have begun to see this in **John 20:1-31**.

So how important is the resurrection of Christ in manifesting His mastery over death? Extremely important!

Though Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His dying and in His burial, nowhere is Christ’s mastery over death so powerfully manifested than in His resurrection.

In fact, I believe that Christ Himself inferred this when He was asked by the Pharisees to provide for them a sign to validate all that He had claimed and all that He had promised in **Matthew 12:38**. And what sign did Christ choose to highlight? He chose to highlight the resurrection!

What does this mean for us? If we, as Christ's disciples, become convinced that the resurrection of Christ actually took place, then we should be equally as convinced, based on His promise to us, that even if we die we will one day live in the blessedness of His presence.

So did Christ actually rise from the dead? This is what the Apostle John believed and he gives us a very clear glimpse into why he believed it in **John 20:1-31**.

The Apostle John in John 20:1-31 presents two different exhibits to support the fact of the resurrection. Last week we considered the first exhibit.

The first exhibit that John presented to his readers to support the resurrection was the empty tomb (John 20:1-10). We saw this last week in **John 20:1-10**.

And what was so significant in respect to John's account of the empty tomb? The presence and the positioning of the grave clothes in the empty tomb were far more consistent with a resurrection than a body snatching.

In other words, if anyone had taken the body of Christ from the tomb, whether that was Christ's disciples, the Romans soldiers or the Jews, none of them would have taken the time to unwrap the body and then have so neatly folded the face cloth.

So how do we explain the presence of the wrappings and the folded head cloth if the explanation is not a body snatching? I believe that John would want us to conclude that the best explanation would of course be that Christ did in fact rise from the dead just as Christ said He would.

John, having now laid out his preliminary evidence to support the fact of the resurrection based on what he saw when he and others entered the empty tomb, now moves on to the heart of his case, or in other words to his second exhibit. And what is it? The second exhibit that John presented to his readers to support the resurrection were eyewitness accounts (John 20:11-31).

As we consider each of these eyewitness accounts, as the Apostle John was led by the Spirit to record them for us in his gospel, I would hope that our own faith in the resurrection of Christ would be strengthened and consequently our faith in Christ's promise as well; knowing that even if we, as Christ's disciples, were to die, we will live again in the blessedness of His presence. So, what was the first eyewitness account that the apostle recorded for us?

The first eyewitness account that the Apostle John recorded for us was that of Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18).

Mary Magdalene was not anyone particularly special. She had been delivered by Christ from seven demons according to **Luke 8:2**. But Christ had delivered many people from demons. And certainly she had not risen to any particularly high status among the many followers of Christ. She was really pretty much like us, rather ordinary. But even though she was rather ordinary she, because of her love and devotion to Christ, had put herself in a position to be incredibly blessed.

And what is the encouragement to us. It is simply this. If we would simply remain faithful to our Lord, always seeking to remain as close to Him as possible, who knows how the Lord might choose to use us and who knows what kind of wonderful blessedness He might be prepared to pour out upon us.

Let us now begin our examination of this account as we find it in **John 20:11-18**. We will begin with **verse 11**. **“But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping.”**

Just prior to this we have already learned that earlier that morning Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary,” according to **Matthew 28:1**, had already approached the tomb for the purpose of anointing the body of Christ with spices. But after finding the tomb unguarded and open Mary Magdalene apparently chose to leave “the other Mary” at the tomb while she went to report what they had found to Peter and John, based on **John 20:1-10**.

So, what happened after Mary Magdalene left? This is what happened, other women who were also coming to the tomb that morning to help anoint the body of Christ arrived. And after they arrived they all, excluding Mary

Magdalene, entered the tomb and while they were in the tomb and were filled with wonderment two angels dressed clothes in what were described as “dazzling” suddenly appeared before them.

And what was the response of the women in respect to what they saw? **Luke 24:5** tells us that they were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. And once they had done this the angels then proceeded to tell them that Christ had in fact risen just as He had said He would and then instructed them to go and tell His disciples that very thing, which I am sure they all did. This is based on **Luke 23:55** to **Luke 24:1-9**.

And then what happened after these women left? According to the verses we considered last week, **John 20:1-10**, Peter and John then showed up with Mary Magdalene and confirmed her report that the tomb was in fact empty. After they confirmed her report they then returned back to their homes.

So now here we are at **verse 11**. Peter and John have returned back to their homes and here we find Mary Magdalene still hanging around at the tomb.

And not just hanging around but **“weeping.”** The Greek word for “weeping” (KLAIO) means “constant, unrestrained sobbing.”

And then what does the verse say? **“And so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb.”** This is most likely the first time that she has taken the time to actually to do this.

And what did she see when she did this? Let us now read **verse 12**. **“And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.”**

I would imagine that these angels were the same two angels that Luke had mentioned. And I would imagine that their clothing, which John describes as “white,” would have been just as “dazzling” a white as it had been when these same angels had suddenly appeared to that small group of women in **Luke 24**.

So now what will happen? Will it be a rerun of **Luke 24**? Will Mary Magdalene be terrified and bow her head to the ground? No this is not what happens at all. Rather we see a rather subdued conversation between the

angels and Mary Magdalene, a conversation that might occur between a perfect stranger and us while we are sitting on a park bench.

So if you doubt what I have just said let us now read **John 20:13**. **“And 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.’”** This exchange between these two angels and Mary Magdalene is amazingly, shockingly subdued in light of the fact that the angels’ clothing clearly, in some form or fashion, was lit up and certainly would have been amazingly bright if not in fact “dazzling.” Does it appear as if she noticed the condition of their clothing? No! It seems as if she is totally oblivious.

So how do we explain this? I believe there can be only one answer. Mary had so completely given her heart to one thought and to the deep grief it brought that all other impressions failed to register on her mind.

Listen to the words of Martin Luther on this particular text. “No man is so brave hearted but what he would be terrified if unexpectedly he should behold an angel; but she (referring to Mary Magdalene) neither sees nor hears nor inquires about anything; so completely her heart is elsewhere.” This woman is truly consumed with grief.

And because she was consumed with grief, she was not only unable to see clearly what was in front of her eyes, she was also unable to understand the deeper meaning of the question that she had just been asked by the angels when they asked her, **“Why are you weeping?”**

She should have known in light of all that she knew about Christ and what He had said, and all that she had experienced that morning and was continuing to experience that Christ’s body had not been snatched but rather had risen, but she still had not yet been able, because of her grief, to process all of this.

Did she love Jesus? Absolutely! Just the thought of Christ not being honored in the way she believed He should be honored brought her unimaginable pain. And where did that pain lead her. It led her into Christ’s tomb. Praise God!

Mary Magdalene's desire to honor and magnify Christ, even when she believed He was dead, placed her in a position to receive blessing.

So after the angels had asked, **“Mary why are you weeping,”** and after she had responded, **“Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him,”** we then read in **John 20:14**, **“When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.”** And here it is, the very first post-resurrection appearance of Christ.

And would this have happened if she had never come to the tomb in order to anoint Christ's body? No! Would it have happened if she had not remained at the tomb? Not likely! But here she is at the tomb the very first person to see our risen Lord.

We need to take this to heart. We may be rather ordinary people, but if we would above all else seek to bring honor to Christ in our lives in every possible way and do so with the same kind of passion as Mary Magdalene, who knows what kind of blessing the Lord will be prepared to pour out upon us and our families just as He did here in **John 20:14**. But unfortunately there was one small problem when Christ first appeared to her. She did not recognize Him. Amazing! Unbelievable, but that is exactly what John tells us.

Why would she not know Him? Perhaps it was because she may have been looking into the sun, perhaps it might have been because she had been crying and her tears were making it difficult for her to see, or perhaps it might have been because His new, eternal, glorified body had a little bit different look to it. But the bottom line is that we really do not know why Mary Magdalene was unable to recognize Him.

But Christ certainly recognized her. And not only had He recognized her but He had even sought her out. Not Peter, not James, not John, not any of the other apostles, but rather this one rather insignificant female disciple. And what does He say to her?

Let me now read for you **John 20:15**. **“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing Him to be the**

gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’”

After she asked this question and apparently after not receiving an immediate answer she again turned to look into Christ’s tomb. And then what happened?

Let me now read for you **John 20:16**. **“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’”** When Christ spoke Mary’s name He used the Aramaic form Miriam, which would have been used by her parents and friends to address her. As soon as she heard Christ speak her Aramaic name she immediately recognized Him. And what did she say? Let us continue to read the verse, **“She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni’ (which means teacher).”**

And as she turned what did she do? She began to cling to Him. Let us now read for you **John 20:17** and see if this is not so. **“Jesus said to her, ‘Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.’”** What an amazing verse.

Let us begin with the word clinging. The word cling (HAPTOMAI) means to attach oneself. Mary, having heard her name spoken by Christ and knowing that the person speaking to her was in fact Him, literally attached herself to Him.

And how did Christ respond to her embrace? Christ, in response to her embrace, kindly but firmly asked her to stop. It was not as if He was opposed to getting touched since we know that shortly He would be inviting Thomas to do that very thing. But rather it had to do with the mindset of Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene wanted to keep Christ with her and preserve the moment that she was now enjoying but it was not appropriate in light of His approaching ascension. And that is what I believe He meant when He said to Mary Magdalene **“For I have not yet ascended to the Father.”**

So what would be more appropriate for Mary Magdalene to be doing other than clinging to Him? Let me continue to read **John 20:17**. **“But go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”** What would have been more appropriate for

Mary, rather than clinging to Christ, was going to tell His disciples that He was going to ascend to His Father. Obviously this ascension would not be instantaneous otherwise she would not have had time to go tell them, but neither would it be postponed indefinitely. The clock was indeed ticking and Mary needed to get about doing the work of informing Christ's disciples.

Let me ask you this question. Was Mary Magdalene in a position to know whether Christ had risen or had not risen? And what would the answer have to be? Absolutely! Was she close enough to see? Yes! Was she close enough to hear Him? Yes! Was she close enough to touch Him? Yes!

Was she convinced through what she saw, heard, and touched that Jesus was in fact alive even though He had been dead? Absolutely!

May God give us the grace to understand, based on the promise of Christ and His complete mastery over death, that even if we die we will live again.