

Jesus Finds His Own

John 20:1-18

Introduction: Night! What is it about the night that energizes our worst imaginations?

In the dark you cannot see what is really going on:

John 11:10 "if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

We know there is evil afoot in the darkness....The wicked prefer the night because they imagine the darkness hides them from God.

John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

Worries seem to crush us "at night." Disappointment gives way to despair at night. Anxiety seems to morph into terror at night. Most of us have spent a sleepless night watching the clock while longing for that first gleam of dawn.

But.... Light does often bring some blessed relief. David even wrote about this phenomenon, saying ...

Psalms 30:5 weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

John picks up the story just as the Sabbath darkness is giving way to dawn. But, this has not been an ordinary darkness...it was a darkness of the heart and mind.... the kind that comes with suffering and death. John tells us about Mary Magdalene, but this gloom has engulfed them all. The women who had followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb had to turn back because night was rapidly approaching. They returned to their homes where they observed a joyless and depressing Passover. They spent Friday night in shock, then the Sabbath day in grief. As Sunday dawned it is the first opportunity to do something.

Have you ever felt like you should just "do something?" "I can't sit here any longer just thinking about this." These gracious women, have been cooped up by the law and custom for 36 hours. They had cared for Christ's physical needs in life and they purposed to care for Him in His death.

Getting up in the dark usually has to have some compelling purpose. And so it was today. In a few hours they would be able to see well enough to go and take care of Christ's body properly and they wanted to start at the earliest possible time. Now let's read John's account....

John 20:1-18 Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." ³ So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; ⁵ and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*; but he did not go in. ⁶ And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*, ⁷ and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰ So the disciples went away again to their own homes. ¹¹ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 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. 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." ¹⁴ 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?" 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that* He had said these things to her.

Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. [1]: All she knows is what she sees. She certainly went to the right tomb because she had followed Joseph and Nicodemus there. She and the other women had been waiting since Friday evening to go back and properly prepare Jesus' body. John only mentions Mary while other gospel accounts mention several women? Combining all the gospels yields the following order of events:

The group of women left before dawn and were able to purchase spices along the way...even in the dark. They were on their way to the place where they had seen Joseph place the body of Jesus when an extremely violent earthquake struck. Perhaps Mary went on while the others bought the spices. For whatever reason, she was the first to arrive at the tomb. To her shock, the stone had been taken away from the entrance.

So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." [2]: Without hesitation she headed immediately to tell Peter that someone had moved the body. They are all completely unable to believe in the resurrection. This does not mean that they were phony believers. It means, that like everyone else who has ever believed in Christ, they needed help from God. Everyone

has access to the gospel, but only some believe that Christ is alive today. This is a work of God in our lives. You should never congratulate yourself for believing. You should instead give praise to God and love for revealing Himself to you.

While Mary has gone to tell Peter about the missing body.... the rest of the women arrived. They too saw the stone removed, but they went in. There an angel told them that Jesus had risen from the dead and they should go and tell the rest of His disciples. In fear and astonishment they too ran away. Meanwhile....back where the disciples were....

So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; [3,4]: So as the other women ran to tell the disciples, Peter arrived with John close on his heels. Mary was following them.

Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*; but he did not go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*, [5,6]: So we know that John could run faster than Peter, but when they got there he waited for Peter to arrive. From outside the tomb, John could only see the wrappings that had been around Christ's body. This is not a minor detail.

It is difficult to get out of these grave clothes. In fact, Lazarus would have suffocated in his had Jesus not ordered men to get him out of them.

John 11:43-44 ⁴³ When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

They would have to be cut off or torn apart because they have been cemented together with rosins and aloes into a kind of hardened case...like a body cast. The fact that Jesus' were laying right where the body had been means that the body had not been stolen. The Jews concocted this lie to explain the resurrection, but the Roman Guard and now John and Peter know it is not true. Body snatchers would have had to have taken the grave clothes or else totally destroyed them getting them off.

And the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. [7]: This detail confirms an ordered scene. Everything carefully placed just as it should have been....only the body is vanished. I don't think anyone knows for certain what was intended by the head cloth being rolled up neatly and set by itself. It may have been just laying the distance of His neck...a few inches from the body wrapping... right where the head would have been. The body and head were probably wrapped separately.

So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. [8, 9]: Although we do not know exactly how it looked we do know the impact that it had on John and then Peter. The actual scene convinced them

both that the body had not been moved or stolen. They could clearly see that the body had passed through the clothes without disturbing them. It is interesting how John puts this in Greek. He says that at that moment they did not understand the Scriptures, but they believed their own eyes. In other words....they did not manufacture a resurrection story to match what they thought the Scripture taught. It was the other way around entirely. They saw and believed. Later on they came to understand the prophecies and the things Jesus Himself had said about that moment. Here is just one example....

John 2:19-22 ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²² So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

So the disciples went away again to their own homes. [10]: These guys ran from their house to the tomb....looked in....believed that Jesus was risen and then left the tomb just as quickly as they had arrived. This explains how Mary is again alone in the Garden. The two men have abandoned her. Perhaps they didn't even notice that she followed them back to the tomb. The other women had come while she was away getting Peter and John. They are now rushing to tell the disciples and that leaves... only Mary alone.

.... Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; [11]: The garden is empty now except for Mary. She is overcome with the emotion of loss. Not only has her friend and Lord Jesus been murdered, but now someone has either stolen or moved His body and she can't even find it. Remember, the scene that Peter and John encountered was used by God to convince them...on the spot....that Jesus had simply risen from the dead. He had passed right through those grave clothes without so much as disturbing a strip of cloth. Mary has no such understanding. She still thinks someone has moved the body.

She saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. [12]: As she weeps she bends over and peaks into the tomb. Whatever is in there had certainly made an impression upon Peter and John. What she sees was not there when Peter and John were inside. They were left to form their own conclusions based on the evidence. The group of women that was here before Mary returned and now Mary herself all saw the angels and they spoke to them.

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." [13]: These two angels are described as men by Mark and Matthew. So were they men or angels? Angels appear as men all the time. We do not know....according to Hebrew if we have been visited, been ministered to or even shown hospitality to angels.

Hebrews 13:1-2 Let love of the brethren continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. [14]: This inability to believe in Christ without His

assistance saturates this passage. Now, Mary would have recognized Jesus easily. She was a faithful follower and care giver. But things have changed now. Jesus is no longer just revealed as a humble itinerate preacher. Something has changed and it has changed for everyone who comes into contact with him. From this moment forward He is revealed as God the Son in a human man. Both God and man. In fact, God said that

Romans 1:3-4 ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David, according to the flesh, ⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

The disciples have not known Him in His full glory until now. Paul upon his conversion realized that Jesus was not just a man but the God Man. His humanity was not all there was to Him ever, but it had been masked until now. That's how Paul could say.....

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

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." [15]: Mary is overcome with grief and all she can think about is finding the body of Jesus. She is of the world. She understands death and burial because that's what the world understands. She does not comprehend resurrection because it is of heaven. It is out of the realm of her senses and human understanding. It is what Scripture means when it says..."according to the flesh." We are all this way. Every human being is this way. The Gospel is hidden to us and Christ is that gospel good news.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ³ if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

I know I come back to this truth often, but only because John's Gospel does. If you understand that God has caused you to know Him then four things will be true of you:

- You will never be proud for having believed
- You will not look down on or condemn someone who has not believed

- You will learn to pray constantly for the lost
- You will increase in love for Jesus every time you hear how He has loved you.

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). [16]: Out of all His followers, Jesus chooses to appear to her first. She has not only followed she has been the first to follow. She followed for Love of Christ. She followed because she had been delivered by His Sovereign Grace from a life of slavery to demons and sin and she was now His... in life and in death. True to His claim that those who are the greatest are those who serve, Mary becomes the first human being to ever see the Risen Christ.

Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" [17]: The old King James translated this "Touch me not!" A lot of misunderstanding surrounds that translation. The NIV says "Do not hold on to me." The New American also gets the sense of the verb correct with "stop clinging to me." So what does the ascension have to do with Mary's clinging to Jesus. In just a few minutes Jesus is going to appear to the other women and they too will take hold of Him. Matthew says that.....

Matthew 28:8-9 ⁸they [the other women] left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

So what is Jesus saying? Probably this: "I am here now. You do not need to cling to me as if I were ascending back to heaven right now. Instead... go and tell My brethren I am ascending, but I am here now." There is another possibility.

When Lazarus came out of the tomb he slept in his bed that night and returned to his old life. This will not be the case with Jesus. Do not cling to me as if it is to be the same. It will never be the same with me. The fact that I am here now is because I have not yet ascended to the Father. BUT...I will.

Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her. [18]: Mary and the other women become the first gospel preachers. Yes...even before John and Peter, Mary saw and spoke with the risen Lord. He sought her out. He could have sought anyone....He chose her. The lowly, The delivered demoniac and prostitute. The invisible woman. The servant who loved the Lord with all her heart, and soul and mind and strength.

It is not our job to Be Great For God! It is sufficient that we should know Him and love Him. Be content with obscurity. Make Christ big in your life and worship.

CONCLUSION: Like Mary, you too have an unbelievable message and are an unbelievable witness? YES... I am serious about this! Why should anyone believe you? If you haven't ever asked yourself this question you probably should. Most of us remained mute most of our lives because we think we know the answers to both questions. BUT.... You would be wrong.....

Jesus chose the least likely to be believed and instructed her to proclaim a foolish message so that He could reveal Himself to men through the proclamation of this true gospel. Paul knew the Corinthians were impressed with fine words and philosophy. He could have built a mega church in Corinth to rival anything the city had ever seen....But Paul was hearing this same voice that Mary heard. It is saying...you are considered weak and foolish by the world, but you have seen Me. You have heard My voice.....

1 Corinthians 1:27 - 2:1 ²⁷God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

In this way we are just like these women. Who would ever believe us? And the answer is? No one! But God still reveals Himself to the hearers of this good news. The power of the gospel is not in us any more than it was in that band of lowly women. Like them we have been called to bear witness... to testify that.... Christ is alive and He has made us alive with Him. Christ is still calling His people today through the voices of His people. You heard Him....didn't you? Then others can and will also hear.

John 10:3-4...the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

As daylight took hold on Resurrection Sunday the only believers were simple servant women, who had expected nothing and yet received everything. They sought no honor, but received the greatest honor. They sought no wealth, but received the greatest treasure [To know the Risen Son of God]. They discovered the reality that we need to embrace and that Paul wrote about in Scripture....

2 Corinthians 4:7 ⁷ we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;