



Unit .31

Easter

From Despair to Joy

Scripture



John 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. **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, but she did not know it was Jesus. **15** "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she

replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away." **16** Jesus said to her, "Mary." Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, "*Rabboni!*"—which means "Teacher." **17** "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since 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.

Intro Options



Main Point:
**Jesus' resurrection turns
our sorrow into joy.**

Option 1

Superman has one weakness—kryptonite. No matter how strong he may be, he cannot overcome it. In the Bible, Samson became weak when his hair was cut. The armies of Israel were weakened when Moses' staff was lowered. With those examples in mind, form small groups to come up with a skit where someone has a weakness that is only revealed by one thing (whatever they come up with). It could be funny and obvious, but if you want to make it more interesting, have them make it more subtle and let the group guess what the weakness is.

In John 20, Mary comes to the tomb of Jesus with despair. Despair is incredibly powerful. The sorrows of this life can be overwhelming, but there is one thing that despair cannot overcome—the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is despair's greatest weakness. When our despair comes face to face with the reality of Jesus' victory, it is defeated by hope and joy.

Option 2

Life is full of many different kinds of emotions, and the story we are going to look at today is no different. We'll see emotions like sorrow, confusion, love, and joy.

Split your students into small groups and assign one of the four words from above to each group. Each group should come up with an emoji for their specific emotion and act out an example of what that emotion might look like in a real life situation. Give them some time to prep and then to share.

In our walk with Christ, we will experience all of these emotions. We will feel sorrow and despair, be confused about what is really happening and what God is up to, experience God's love and the love of others, and ultimately rejoice because of the hope we have in Jesus. As a result of the resurrection of Jesus, the despair and sorrow are temporary, but the love and joy are forever.

TEACHING PLAN

Read John 20:11-13.



Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early Sunday morning, grieving the loss of her Lord. So many hopes and expectations came crashing down in just one weekend, and as she approached to the tomb to honor Jesus, she is faced with an unexpected scene. Not only have they crucified the One she hoped in, but they took His body away, too (John 20:13). Mary had yet to realize that Jesus had risen, though Scripture foretold this and Jesus Himself predicted it throughout His ministry (see Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:9; 20:17-19; John 2:19).



▪ Have you ever lost something or someone that you loved?

In a fallen world, life is full of loss and sorrow. Death is the final enemy to be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26). At moments like these, faith can be difficult. The doubts and questions and pains are real. We wrestle with difficult questions and struggle to make sense of life in a broken world. There's nothing ungodly or unspiritual about grieving, but Mary's grief is, to some degree, incompatible with the truth because she thinks Jesus' body has been stolen or removed.

What Mary had yet to realize was that with Jesus, death is never the final outcome. Sometimes in our grief, we can miss what God is doing. We can become so discouraged by our pain that we forget God's promise. We, so easily, lose sight of the eternal picture.

▪ When facing heartache and grief, what are some ways that we can stay anchored in the truth?

A few things can anchor us in reality when we grieve. We need to grieve in community. Fortunately, Mary had the angels there to redirect her to the truth of the resurrection. Too often, we pull back and isolate ourselves in our sorrows and hard times. We also need to remember what God has already promised and revealed. Jesus had already foretold His resurrection, but Mary wasn't calling that to mind in her moment of despair. In the moments of deepest sorrow in our lives, we must remember what God has spoken and promised.

Read John 20:14-16.



▪ Have you ever misidentified someone? If so, share.

I can think of a handful of occasions where I thought that I saw someone I knew, approached them, and called them by name, only to realize it was a different person. At our Wednesday night student service, I saw a guy walk up behind someone he thought he knew and give him a big bear hug, only to quickly realize it was someone else. Talk about embarrassing! This is a funny comparison, but it is important that we recognize Jesus in our lives.

Jesus said Mary's name. That's what it took to open her eyes to Jesus' identity and produce the joy that only He can give. In our sorrow, Jesus invites us to come to Him, "all of you who are weary and burdened" (Matt. 11:28). He has promised, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench" (Matt. 12:20). We can cast our cares upon Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:17).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
**Jesus' resurrection turns
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John 20

20:11-13. Many of the greatest believers who have come before us struggled with the pain and brokenness of the world. Joseph, Job, Stephen, Paul, and many others, suffered, lost loved ones, and faced sickness and death. Many of their lives ended in perplexing and tragic ways. And they all (even Jesus!) grieved. Job was unable to be comforted at all for a week (Job 2:13). Paul wrote as much about eternal life as anyone, and yet when his friend was near death, he said in Philippians 2:27 that if he had died, Paul would have had sorrow upon sorrow. Sorrow is real. The death of those we love is among the greatest pains. There's nothing ungodly or unspiritual about grieving. Even though we know the final outcome, we still grieve (1 Thess. 4:13).

"Job never saw why he suffered, but he saw God, and that was enough."¹

20:14-16. In order to raise Mary's countenance and bring forth resurrection faith in her, Mary had to hear Him say her name. No, it wasn't the gardener, as she first supposed, but it was the second and last Adam, the one who came to undo the thorns and thistles that the first Adam left us with.²

"At this point, Jesus revealed himself to Mary by tenderly calling her name. Amazed and delighted, she cried out, 'Rabboni,' meaning 'my teacher' (20:16). Jesus had been called 'Rabbi' (Teacher) by his disciple and others (1:38,49; 3:2), but Mary's cry indicated the personal nature of her relationship to her Lord. She stands for all the sheep who hear and respond to the voice of the good shepherd, who 'call his own sheep by name' (10:3-4)."³

In a sermon from 1878, J.C. Ryle said, "The world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It is a dark place. It is a lonely place. It is a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam in it is a friend. Friendship halves the troubles and doubles our joys."⁴

1. Tim Keller, Twitter post, April 5, 2014, 11 a.m., <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/452475905274040320>

2. Scotty Smith, "John," in *Gospel Transformation Bible: ESV* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

3. Pratap C Gine and Jacob Cherian, "John," in *South Asia Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible*, ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015).

4. J.C. Ryle, "THE BEST FRIEND!," *The Best Friend*, 1878, https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/best_friend.htm.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 40, DDG)

Christ's Exaltation

Whereas the death of Christ was the ultimate example of His humiliation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first and glorious example of Christ's exaltation. Christ was exalted when God raised Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He ascended to the Father's right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He returns. All of these aspects work together to magnify the glory and worth of Christ, resulting in the praise of the glory of His grace in rescuing sinners.

TEACHING PLAN

▪ What are some ways you have recognized Jesus' presence and comfort in the painful moments of your life?

In my own painful moments in life, I have experienced God's presence and comfort in two places—His Word and His people. God's Word is full of truth, hope, and promises that comfort our hearts in the hardest of times. God also uses His people as a source of His presence and comfort. The Holy Spirit dwells within the church, so as we bear each other's burdens and comfort one another, we experience God's presence and comfort.

Read John 20:17-18.



It's one thing to see an empty tomb; it's another to see a risen Lord. Like Mary exemplifies here, recognizing the risen Jesus should lead to being on mission for the risen Jesus. 

When Mary's sorrow turned to joy, Jesus wanted her to share that joy with others. God wants to do more than just comfort us; He wants to use us as vessels for His comfort.

Second Corinthians 1:4-5 teaches us this very thing. It says God "comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

▪ How has God used others to comfort you? How can God use you to comfort others?

In verse 18, Mary goes to report that she has "seen the Lord!" Can you hear the joy in her voice? Encountering the resurrected Jesus makes all the difference in this world of pain and brokenness. It reminds us that this is not the end and that death and sorrow will not have the final word. Gavin Ortlund tweeted, "Easter is the end of history reinserted back into the middle of history. So when we see the risen Jesus, we know what is to come."⁵

▪ When we are hurting, what are some unhealthy ways we seek comfort or try to numb our pain?

Tragically, when we are hurting, we often run to destructive habits for comfort and joy. It may be an eating disorder, cutting, drugs, pornography, the mindless absorption of TV or social media, etc. We don't want to feel the pain, so we try to numb it with things that relieve or distract it in the short term, but compound it in the long run. It is critical that we turn from those "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13).

We need to turn to God, who is the "fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13). Like the woman at the well in John 4, we fill ourselves with relationships and everything but Jesus, yet we are still thirsty. As Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again" (John 4:13). Jesus invites all who thirst to come to Him and drink and be filled (John 7:37).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
**Jesus' resurrection turns
our sorrow into joy.**

John 20

20:17-18. “When Jesus said to Mary, ‘Don’t cling to Me’ (v. 17), He was not concerned about being touched since He asked Thomas to touch Him (v. 27). Rather, He wanted Mary to realize that He was there only temporarily. His return to the Father was imminent.” ⁶

“John 20:17 is...the insistence that the resurrection is so tied to the ascension, to Jesus’ return to his Father, that if Mary can accept the one, she must be prepared to accept the implications of the other.” ⁷

“Not only have they turned away from the fountain of life and joy, but the cisterns they make can’t hold that water anyway. They’re broken. No fountain. No cistern. Therefore, no life, no lasting joy. They’re going to die. The money cistern is broken. The sex cistern is broken. The family cistern is broken. The beauty and brawn cistern is broken. The success cistern is broken. The political cistern is broken. None of them can hold the water of life and lasting happiness. And the fountain that has been forsaken could fill them.”⁸

5. Gavin Ortlund, Twitter post, April 12, 2020, 3:43 p.m., <https://twitter.com/gavinortlund/status/1249437942495371266>

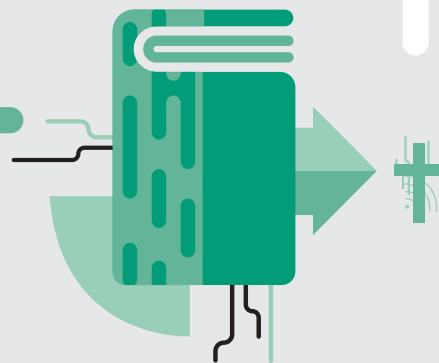
6. Tamra Hernandez, “John,” in *Study Bible for Women* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014).

7. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC))* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Reprint Edition, 1990).

8. John Piper, “The Ultimate Essence of Evil: The Majesty of God, the Triumph of Christ, and the Glory of Human Life,” *Desiring God*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-ultimate-essence-of-evil>.

(p. 42, DDG) Christ Connection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the cornerstone of the gospel, but also the source of joy and hope for all believers. Because Jesus died to pay the penalty of sin and rose again, we have good news to share with others.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



**Do you think of Jesus more as a person from history or someone who is alive today?
How might thinking of Jesus as alive and resurrected affect how you live?**

When you face painful experiences, how can you make sure they refine your faith instead of killing it?

Heart



How can Jesus' triumph over suffering bring you joy in your sorrows?

When you don't understand what God is up to, what can you do to keep trusting that God knows and loves you?

Hands



How can you tell if you are finding your joy in Jesus or seeking it somewhere else?

How can you share the comfort and joy of Jesus with others in your life?

Main Point: **Jesus' resurrection turns our sorrow into joy.**



Head

We say we believe in the resurrection, but if that is true, why are so many of us living in despair? Too often, our hope is not in Jesus, but in a pleasant life. When the storms of life come and we go through times of trial, God is able to use it to refine our faith. He is able to take what was meant for evil and turn it for good (Gen. 50:20). But if we are not anchored in the truth, if our hope is not firmly set in Jesus, then the sorrows of life steal our joy. Look to the risen Jesus and be strengthened in Him.



Heart

Joy is not the absence of pain, but the presence of Jesus. As we go through trials, we should be comforted by the fact that even Jesus suffered. He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” (Is. 53:3) yet He triumphed over suffering not by avoiding death, but by rising from it. Jesus says to you, “In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The Psalmist said, “those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy” (Ps. 126:5). Even when you don’t understand, take hold of these truths and be comforted in the joy that only comes from Jesus.

When we encounter Jesus, we will have a joy that cannot be taken. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy...you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:20, 22).



Hands

People are hurting all around us, and God wants to use us to help them move from despair to joy. Do you have eyes to see those who are hurting? Are you willing to care for them by name and minister God’s hope in a world full of darkness? If Jesus has comforted you, go and comfort others. If you have, as Mary announced, “seen the Lord,” then tell others about what Jesus has done for you.

However, we will only be able to do that if our own joy is found in Jesus. We have to turn from idols in our lives that can never deliver true and lasting joy. Don’t hope in another person, thing, or opportunity to satisfy you or numb your pain. Only Jesus can take our despair and turn it into lasting joy.