



The Grace of God Works

4/9/2023

John 20:11-18

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¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she 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 Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, '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 that he had said these things to her.

(Pastor prays)

In the early 1800s, after the Napoleonic Wars, it is said that England mastered the high seas, giving rise to the phrase "Rule Britannia." From the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, and all points in between, the British Empire was safeguarded by ships of the line. These were

impressive frigates with their majestic sails and multi-level decks across the bow. They had bronze cannons. These ships were manned by brilliant sea captains with eagle-eyed vision and a nose for war. But there was something else about these ships that you don't see right off the bat. These ships were able to be steady in the waves and upright in the worst storms. What was not apparent to the naked eye was what is underneath. Down below decks, down below the belly, you would find there something that had been loaded into the ship called ballast. Ballast was piles of rock and brick and stone loaded in the ship itself so it would drop a little lower in the water. And it was that ballast that kept those majestic ships steady.

We don't think much about what is down below the surface. We don't think much about what's down below the surface until the weather changes, until we are in the raging storm of heartbreak, the raging storm of losing somebody to death or soul-crushing anxiety. And when that sort of storm hits in your life, nobody cares how many decks you've got and how big the sails are, or how many cannons are there. Nobody cares what is up on top. That stuff doesn't matter. When the storm comes, what matters is what's inside. And if you don't have the ballast of the crucified resurrected Jesus, deep in your soul, what you're facing, I mean, let's just be honest: The societal storm that we are in right now, if you don't have the ballast of Christ, you're liable to sink to the bottom.

So what I want to do today is just take this passage and offer up the ballast of grace. I want to offer the grace and the hope that your soul needs in the person of Jesus Christ.

And it's found right here in this beautiful story in John Chapter 20. I love this passage. Let's do a little catch up.

You know, we've been going through the Gospel of Mark and we normally would just go paragraph by paragraph through a book of the Bible, and we've paused to go over here to John. So in order to understand this, we need a little context. Let's do some catching up and see if I can get us there.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ is crucified between two thieves. Chapter 20 presents Him being raised between two angels. In Chapter 19 of John, the body of Jesus is taken off the cross when He dies. The body is given to two men, one named Joseph of Arimathea. He is a rich man. He was a secret follower of Jesus. The other man is a man named Nicodemus. He came to Jesus at night. These two men take the body of Jesus and take Him to a garden tomb. They place His body inside the tomb, and have it sealed up. It's guarded by Roman soldiers. You get to Chapter 20. Jesus is dead, and at the grave, Chapter 20 has three characters. Those three characters are John the Apostle, who wrote the Gospel of John, and the man named Peter, the famous apostle, and the other character is an unlikely woman named Mary. She's called Mary Magdalene because that's where she's from, Magdala. She's the one over in Chapter 20:1. She's the one who starts this whole thing. She's the one who went to the tomb while it was still dark. She saw that the tomb was empty. She panics, she runs back and gets the men John and Peter. She told John and Peter that somebody has taken the body of Jesus. They immediately run and the way John tells it, John does it like this: Me and Peter took off running. I was younger and in better shape and I beat him there. Go read it. That's sort of what he says.

The first one there, John gets there, but stops. Peter runs inside. Both of them go in and see that there's nothing there but grave clothes. There's no body. Peter is a little more obstinate, so he doesn't get it. Verse 8 of Chapter 20 tells us it doesn't resonate with Peter. John says he believed. Even still, both of those men go home. They left Mary. Mary made her way back to the tomb.

This is where we find ourselves. The passage of joy and hope and love and grace. This is a beautiful display of how God works. So this morning, as we dwell on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, I want you to see that God works. In fact, we'll say it like this.

God Works to Balance Your Life in the Worst Weather

Let's see how God works. I'll give you a simple outline to follow. Here's the first point. Number one.

God works in grace

Ours is a religion of grace. God works in grace in verses 11-13. Notice how it opens up in verse 11. Verse 11 opens up with the phrase "but Mary"... see that phrase. "But Mary," that's a contrast. We're on the back end of a contrast. Verse 10 tells us that Peter and John went home, but not Mary. In verse 11, we see she stayed. And the miracle of this is that the resurrected Jesus is going to appear to this woman named Mary before He appears to anyone else in creation.

What do we know about Mary? Well, I told you before. She is from a town called Magdala and she could have been a woman of means. That is to say, she could have had some money. We know that she was possessed by seven demons and Jesus saved her when He cast those demons out. Church history did Mary Magdalene a disservice and had her as a woman of ill repute. There is no evidence whatsoever of that. It's not what we hear about Mary Magdalene.

We know she was possessed by seven demons, not by her own will. It was torture. Jesus saved her. From that she became a disciple of Jesus. She followed Jesus. She and other women supported the ministry. They were there helping with the ministry. She may have given financially to the ministry. She's never mentioned prominently, but she's mentioned 14 times in the gospels. Mary Magdalene, though, is an eyewitness. She saw it with her own eyes. She's an eyewitness to the crucifixion. She saw the whole thing. She stayed around long enough that she saw where they buried Jesus.

So now in verse 11, she's gone to actually finish the grueling process. The grueling task of preparing the body of Jesus for the final burial. This woman has been through so much. Now she stands outside the tomb. She's already been possessed by demons. Who knows what that was like! She stands weeping outside the tomb, weeping. You see that word? Weeping, that word

“weeping” is not the soft, polite cry where you might shed a tear and sniffle a little bit and you dab your eyes. I saw a young lady wearing a sweatshirt this week that said, “I cry a lot.” This is not like that. This kind of crying is the uncontrollable sobbing. You can’t get it together. This is the kind of crying that happened two weeks ago in Nashville Covenant School. This is the kind of crying when the pastor and his wife get the shocking news that not only has their church and school been attacked, but their nine-year-old daughter is killed. This is that kind of uncontrollable crying. Let me pause here and just say the tears, even tragic tears, even the tears that feel as if it’s never going to stop, those tears are not the end.

Mary stands there in verse 11 in the dark. Mary has been through so much. She loved Jesus. She watched Him die. She’s there when all the other men are gone with this feminine resolve, standing there at the tomb. She’s come in the dark. She’s there to do one last ministering act to her Savior. And His body is gone. Now there is panic in her heart. She saw what they did to Him at the cross. She knows what those brutal Romans are capable of, and now they’ve got His body. She has terrible thoughts of the desecration that could be going on. She stands there weeping now. In verse 12, she finally gets the courage to look inside the tomb. But when she looks inside the tomb, she sees two angels.

Join me there in verses 11-13. *“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.”* *“And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.”* *“They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’”* Let’s get the picture. Verse 12 says she looks inside and now there are two angels, one at the head of where Jesus’ body was, one at the feet. Some theologians have said that these two angels are similar to the mercy seat, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament, where there are cherubim on either side of the Mercy Seat. This is where God would speak and meet with His people. Here’s a picture. I don’t know if that’s

true or not, but maybe either way, there are the angels. It's probably still dark, at least it was in verse 1 when she ran and got John and Peter, and I'm pretty sure it's still dark now. It hadn't been that long. In the dark. Pause at in the dark. Listen: "in the dark." That's where Jesus shows Himself. That's where He works. Even though He is the light of the world, let's not forget He is also the Lord of the dark.

Even when you feel like you're groping in the darkness, listen to me: Jesus is there. Even when you feel like you don't recognize Him. This is what the angels are asking in verse 13, Why are you crying? This is not that they necessarily cared so much about Mary. They don't understand. You see, the angels know something that Mary doesn't know. They understand something Mary doesn't understand: that although Jesus died on a Roman cross, He is alive. And the angels are saying, if there ever was a day in the history of the universe *not* to cry, woman, what are you crying about? This is when the grace of God has been completed. This is when the doors of Heaven have been opened, and when the invitation has been given so that anyone who wants to go to Heaven, can go to Heaven through Jesus. It's the Gospel. It's what we believe in.

Let me pause here and just talk a moment about the Gospel. When I say "gospel," this is what I mean: God is a holy creator who created all of us in His image. He created you in the image of God. It's why you have dignity. It's why I respect you, because you have the image of God in you. That image of God in us, however, has been disfigured. It's not what it's supposed to be. It's because of sin. Sin is a crime against God. And if God is holy and just, then He will punish the crime against Him. We stand under condemnation because of our sin. And the Gospel hope is that God is not just *just*, He's also loving and kind and good. And He loves us to the degree that He sends Jesus. Jesus is the God man, the perfect man. He does what we should have done. He lived as we should have lived, loving people correctly, loving God and in perfect fellowship with Him. He was the perfect man. He was the substitute, the second Adam. He came to live in a way we should have lived, but He also

came to go to the cross. Why the cross? Because there at the cross God would put His judgment of our sin on a man, a substitute, in our place. Jesus dies on the cross taking the wrath of God for sinners. But how do we know it worked? That happened on Friday. Our passage here is about a Sunday. And the Sunday passage tells us that God raised Him from the dead. That's why the angels were saying, "why are you crying?" God has raised Him from the dead. The sacrifice has been received. It actually worked. The resurrection is the promise that the Gospel worked. The Gospel works and the Angels knew it. And it is a gospel of grace freely offered to any of you who will now turn from sin and put your faith in God. You see what God does. God works to balance your life in the worst weather. Part of that ballast is grace. God works in grace.

Let's go to the story. It picks up momentum here and verses 14, 15 and 16. Let me show you that God not only works in Grace. God works very pointedly in Christ.

God works in Christ

Join me there in the story. Let me go back a little bit. In verse 13 the angels are talking to Mary. Mary is rattling on in verse 13. She's pleading with them, "Tell me where is the body of Jesus?" Let's read it together because something happens there. I wish John would have given us more detail.

¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she 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."

So they are having this conversation back and forth. Something happened and she turned around. She saw Jesus standing there but she didn't know that it was Jesus. So they're talking. She's looking at the angels. The angels are

talking back to her and something happens. Either the angels looked up over her shoulder, or she heard a noise behind her. John Chrysostom thinks that the angels saw Jesus coming, and then she saw in their faces and she turned around. Maybe she felt His presence. Either way in verse 14 she turns around and she sees Jesus standing there behind her. She doesn't know that it's Jesus. How did she not know? Maybe it was too dark. Maybe she was crying too hard and her eyes were filled with tears. Or maybe she was just delirious.

Whatever happened, we do know that there's something that has changed. There's something that has changed with Jesus because this sort of thing happens elsewhere. You can get to the end of the Gospel of Luke and the resurrected Jesus is walking on the road to Emmaus with other disciples. They believed in Jesus yet they didn't know that it was Jesus. In Matthew 28, where we get the Great Commission, the Great Commission tells us there are people there, the disciples, worshipping Jesus, but some people doubt. They didn't think He was Jesus. Later on in John 21, when Jesus is on the bank, they're out fishing, they don't recognize Him until they hear His voice.

Here in verse 14, Mary is with the resurrected Lord and look what she thinks in verse 15. 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."* Here's her first guess. She is frantic: Sir. If you've carried Him away, tell me where He is. I'll go and get Him. How is she going to do that? She still thinks Jesus is the gardener. Just pause and think with me about the patience of Jesus with His people. When you're in the thick of it, and you don't recognize His presence, He's there. When you are totally oblivious to His presence and your life is in a panic, Jesus is there patiently getting you through to the other side. Jesus doesn't let go. Jesus doesn't walk away in frustration. Instead, He comes with patience.

Now look, this story is getting ready to take a beautiful turn as we watch God work in Christ. Join me there in the Bible. Mary sees Jesus but she does not recognize that it is Jesus. Jesus asks her the same thing that the angels had

asked except He adds a question. 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."* Whom are you seeking? There's a nuance there, a difference. She was looking for a dead body. What she needed was a home and a live Christ. You're looking for something. You're looking for something but what you need is *someone*. And that *one* is Jesus.

So Mary keeps talking. She's falling apart. In verse 15, she's prattling on to the point of hysteria. She's right at the edge of losing it. She says: just tell me where he is; I'll go and get Him. And Jesus stops the hysteria with one word. Verse 16. Isn't it beautiful? ¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, "Mary."* She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "*Rabboni!*" (which means Teacher). Mary. And then her response in Aramaic, it's a loving term, Rabboni, teacher.

Now just pause there. It was His voice. More specifically, it was *His* voice speaking *her* name. It was the voice of Jesus calling Mary's name. Remember Jesus and John in chapter 10. Remember when Jesus is talking to His detractors? There are people who didn't believe in Him. Jesus said to His detractors: you don't believe because you're not among my sheep. My sheep, they hear my voice and I know them and they follow.

It's his voice that has the power to open eyes. I mean, isn't that what happened at the tomb of Lazarus? Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus and He called out, Lazarus, come forth. It was the power of God's call that raised Lazarus from the dead. Old preachers used to say that had Jesus not mentioned the name of Lazarus, every person in the graveyard would have gotten up. The power of the call is His voice. Or maybe you remember what John wrote in Revelation Chapter 1. It's the same man who wrote the Gospel of John. He says in Revelation Chapter 1 that the voice of Jesus is like the sound of a trumpet. It's like the sound of many waters. Or Jesus Himself would say in John 5:25, Truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is here when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God. Those who hear will live. In verse 16, Mary is shaken from her hysteria. She recognizes the Lord. She does

what she's longed to do. She embraces Him. She wraps Him up. This leads to my last point. God works in grace. God works in Christ. Number 3, God works in hope.

God works in hope

We find it there in verse 17. Mary is understandably ecstatic to have Jesus back. This is not what you expected. You've gone to the cemetery, to the tomb to prepare His body for the final burial. The panic she had wasn't that Jesus was gone somewhere, that He had been raised from the dead. The panic was that they had done something with His body, something terrible. And now I mean, this is beyond anything she could think of. She has Him back.

This is not like what happened to Lazarus, though. Lazarus would be raised from the dead and he would die again. Things are not going back like they were. Let's see what it says in verses 17. Let go, Mary. Do not cling to me. I've not yet ascended to the father. But I have a message for you. Now slow down here. Slow down and hear the message that Jesus gives to Mary. What He tells her is astounding in and of itself. He didn't go right to the disciples. He gives the message to Mary. Look what He tells her to tell the disciples and then listen to everything that is embedded in verse 17, let me read it. ¹⁷ *Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* This is the message. I am ascending to my father and your father to my God and your God.

Now pause here. 108 times in the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to God as father. 71 times in the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to God as THE father. 21 times in the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to God as MY father. Not once had He ever called God the disciples father, until now. Now He tells Mary, you go and tell my brothers that I am ascending to My father and your father, to My God and your God.

You understand, right? You see that through the work of Jesus on the cross, through the work of Jesus on the cross, through His redeeming blood and His

resurrection, this is Christianity right here. Christianity is wrapped up in Jesus and His perfect life, His death on the cross, His victorious resurrection and through that a new relationship is made possible for us. For the very first time, through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, God no longer holds us in contempt. We are no longer thought of as rebels. We're no longer thought of as lawbreakers. Now in Christ, God adopts us, adopts you, as a son or a daughter. Paul says in Ephesians 1:5, that He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. Romans Chapter 8:15 says that, in Christ you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. You have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom you now can say ABBA.

This right here is the story of real hope. This is God's grace on full display at the resurrection. He gave it to Mary Magdalene. Look, this is why we worship on Sundays. This is why we baptized in the name of Jesus. This is why we have the Lord's Supper. This is why behind me is a cross. Why is that? Those things are on display because Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners. And in so doing, He satisfied the anger of God. God raised Him from the dead, and now, through Jesus, He offers his love and forgiveness and reconciliation to anybody here who will say they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God actually raised him from the dead.

If you'll do that, you are saved by God's grace alone, through your faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. That's how God works to put the ballast in your life. So that when you walk out of here and the storms rage and they get bad, you're able to be upright because the gospel. God works to balance your life in the worst weather. He works in Grace. He works in Christ. He works in hope. He works in the crucified resurrected Jesus. You come now to the crucified and resurrected in Jesus.

(Pastor prays)