

# Mary's Cry at the Tomb

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thanks for having me and for inviting me to come speak to you all this Sunday. Whenever somebody from Scotland comes and speaks to in America, half the fun is the accent.

And I've been told that the American accent coming the other way is not quite as lovely. So I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say about that. But instead I like to look at a passage that's near and dear to my heart, which is here.

This is John 20, verses 11 through 18. And I like this passage because a lot of folks, particularly in New York, but in Edinburgh and a lot of the West, there's lots of questions about the historic Christian faith, serious questions.

We look around our lives and we see suffering, we see brokenness, we see poverty, we see disease, we see death, we see it outside in the world, we see it inside in our own hearts in our lives. When questions come up, why is there so much hurt here? Why is there so much brokenness out there? Why is there so much going on in my own life? And supposedly we live in a post-resurrection world.

[ 1 : 09 ] And then here we are, we're still crying, but we're still crying. And what I like about this passage is Mary is also in the same exact space as us, is that she's living in a post-resurrection world and yet she's actually crying.

And so we have to ask, what will heal her tears? What will heal our tears? And the answer Christianity consistently gives us over and over and over again.

What will heal the tears of the world? What will heal our own tears is transformation. And that Christianity says it happens to Mary in this text and it can actually happen to us.

You might this morning not be a believer at all and so you're just, the tears are there and the questions are there and there's no answers. Some of you have believed in Christianity intellectually for a long time and yet we're still crying because it hasn't transformed us yet.

It's more than just having head knowledge, it has to be heart knowledge as well. It's more than just reading this text. The text, there has to be some sort of experience of Jesus that happens as well. And so when I do this morning I want to look at the transformation and how it might work and I think we can look at Mary's story here and we can break it up in three headings.

[ 2 : 19 ] We're going to look at Mary crying, then she's seen and then she's going. So Mary's crying scene going. So first crying, the Greek verb to cry is the word *chaleion* which happens about eight times in the book of John.

Three times during the Lazarus sort of death scene, one time elsewhere but most of the verbs to cry happened actually in this passage here, to weep.

It's translated to weep here. Why are you weeping? Or Mary stood verse 11 weeping outside the tomb and clearly John's focusing on her crying.

Look at verse 11, it says Mary stood weeping outside the tomb and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And the first thing that's asked of her is by these angels in white, they're sitting where the body of Jesus had laid, one at the head and one at the feet.

And they said to her, woman, why are you weeping? Now I don't know about you but this is probably one of the most offensive things that you could ask somebody.

[ 3 : 29 ] There's not like a book of things not to say at funerals but if there was, you should never go up to somebody and say, why are you crying? When I first showed up here in Scotland, Neil, one of the, at Cornerstone, one of your pastors that you support.

I asked him, I said, how can you offend Scottish people? And he goes, oh, we Scots, we're not very offensive. And I said, how's Brexit going? He goes, okay, you're right.

And then I looked around at Edinburgh and I said, well, England looks really nice today. And he goes, okay, okay, okay, case in point. So what was the reason why I was offending him?

I think I was just trying to. But why were these angels, why would they say to Mary, why are you weeping? It's a pretty, it's a pretty offensive thing.

When I was in uni dating now my wife, Sarah, I used to, she would cry sometimes and I'd say, why are you crying as if that was really helpful? I now learned that 18 years after marriage, you shouldn't ask that question.

[ 4 : 32 ] So then, which makes us wonder, why are they doing it here? And then it actually gets, actually, there's an intensification because Jesus in verse 15 repeats the exact same question word for word.

He says, woman, why are you weeping? Why are you crying? And I think the reason why both these questions are here is it's trying to hyper focus our attention that Jesus is paying attention to these tears.

And this is a big deal because, you know, in some respects, this is the first time Jesus shows up after the resurrection. He doesn't say, hey, I'm back. He doesn't say, surprise, look at me.

The first thing he says is, why are you weeping? Which means that at the most momentous moment in all of human history, probably at the most important inflection point of if the resurrection is true, this is the most important thing that's ever happened in humanity.

And instead of focusing us on that, he's focusing on her tears. In New York City, I get a lot of people that, you know, we think God doesn't care about our tears seriously. And yet this text is almost screaming at us, telling us that's not true.

[ 5 : 42 ] And so I want to just stop here for a little bit because I think at this moment, what we need to see is the God that we worship is so in tune with our pain. He so cares about what we're going through that nothing else is more important to him.

He is laser focused and honing into this exact emotion and feeling and experience that she's going through, that he's going to pay attention to that more than the most momentous thing that's ever happened in life.

It'd be like something really, really, really important, like maybe the biggest thing that's ever happened in your personal life and your friend or just a loved one, you see them going through something instead of like spilling out everything that's happened to you, you focus on who they are and what they're going through.

That's exactly what we have in the God of the universe doing this here in the person of Jesus. He's thinking about her tears. He's thinking about our tears. A few chapters before this one, chapter 16 verse 33 of John, Jesus says what I think is the most uncontroversial thing that he's ever said.

Everybody wants to look at what are the controversial things that Jesus says. Well, let me give you the least. He says in four words, the world has many sorrows. It's not controversial.

[ 6 : 55 ] We pass right over that. The world has many sorrows. And we go, well, of course, we know that, but him identifying that as people, as we cry, as we struggle, why bring it up unless Christianity has an answer for those tears and has an answer for what we're going through.

Paul in the first letter to Thessalonians, chapter four verse 13, he addresses Christians who die. And as they die, he feels it's important to address this matter.

Whether you're a Christian or not here. I think when people die, we cry. Everybody does. But Paul felt it important to clarify what's happening with a Christian. And so he says this in verse 13. He says, I do not want you to be uninformed about those who die.

Okay. What is he going to inform us with? Well, he goes on. So that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who has no hope. Now, listen carefully. He's not saying don't grieve.

He's not saying don't cry. Everybody cries. We all cry. He's not saying that I don't want you to cry as if you have no hope. Okay. Why is that? Well, he goes on.

[ 8 : 01 ] For we believe that Jesus died and rose again. And so what he's saying here is he's saying if Jesus died and rose again, if the resurrection is true, then that actually transforms our tears.

It doesn't get rid of them, but it changes them through hope. Hope is like a salt into meat, right? If you leave meat just sitting out for a little bit, it'll rot, it'll go bad.

But if you put salt in it, and not just on top, right? You put salt on top, it flavors it. But if you work it into the meat, sometimes you have to pound it into the meat. Sometimes you have to slam it into, get it into the deep inner workings of the meat, and that meat will get preserved.

It won't go bad. In the same way, we need hope smashed into our tears, worked deep into what our tears are, and that'll keep us from falling apart, as I think is what Paul's saying here.

It'll keep us together, and I think this is what Jesus wants to focus in on and reveal to Mary. And so, yes, she's crying, but he's going to go into, I think, two other things that I think we need to look at here, which is both the scene and the going that I think will change and transform the tears through hope.

[ 9 : 12 ] And so instead of making us weaker and more hopeless, it can actually make us wiser and deeper. So let's look at those quickly. Grieving, but sowing hope into that grief can lead us to see.

Look at the text again. Notice she doesn't see Jesus at first. Eventually she does, but it takes time. And I think for modern people, we're in the same boat, that it'll take time for us to actually see him. The first step to see, and I think is trusting the account that you have before us, that this actually happened. There's a lot of scholarship. There's a lot of people that have gone into this text and said, no, this is lies. This is legends.

This is myth. This is not real. And this is where you all, we all have to do our homework. We have to ask ourselves, if John's number one goal is to get people to believe this account, then why would he write it this way?

Why would he put himself as the author and the main leaders of the church running around looking like they don't know what they're doing? Why would he make the, this is I think the most pivotal seminal moment in the text, which is the first eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus.

[ 10 : 23 ] And he puts a woman here as the most important witness when her eyewitness testimony at this time 2,000 years ago would have been inadmissible in a court of law. If you want people to believe you, you would pick somebody else than that.

And even more so, not just any woman, he picks Mary Magdalene, who in Luke chapter eight were told was demon possessed, which you know then in the community around, she would have been considered, her reputation would have been less than credible to other people.

So she had a soiled character. If you're writing to convince people that this is true, you don't do it this way. You don't write it where the people who knew Jesus the longest, you know, actually looked like they know the least about him.

If you want people to believe you, you say here, the tomb is empty and therefore Jesus rose from the dead. What do you see in this text? The tomb is empty and Mary says, where have you taken them?

What did you do with them? You're the gardener, you took them. I know you did something to them. You don't do that. Right? Why even place that potential possibility in the minds of the readers like ourselves?

[ 11 : 31 ] If you're trying to convince, you don't write a story like this. And I think other scholars, many scholars have said that it increases the chances that they probably weren't lying because it was written this way.

That Mary's inability to understand the evidence is actually evidence for us. And so I think we need to stop here as well because I think a lot of you sitting here go, oh, evidence. I would love some evidence.

That would actually help me in my Christian faith. If I had some evidence, if I had some real solid evidence, then I can believe. So what kind of evidence? Well, maybe an empty tomb would be nice, maybe an angel or two to talk to, some sort of supernatural paranormal activity.

I've had people in New York say that. They say, if I could just have some sort of miracle happen, then I think I could believe. Others of you would say, just let me talk to Jesus.

If Jesus could just appear and maybe in a genie smoke, and hello, I'm here to answer your questions. Some of us would say, I'd love to just talk to Jesus for a bit.

[ 12 : 32 ] And I think that would actually go a long way for my belief. But again, look at the text. Mary Magdalene has an empty tomb. She doesn't just talk to one.

She talks to two different angels. She talks to the risen Lord. She talks to Jesus. Everything that you and I would have said I would have needed, you would have needed to actually have the evidence to believe in Jesus.

And it did her no good. It wasn't enough. That kind of evidence, these are not the things that you're going to need to actually see Jesus.

It won't be enough. And I think this is important to realize. She sees Jesus and she doesn't see Jesus. Right? She's looking at Jesus and she's not really able to look at Jesus. Because I think, why? Because I think she had an idea of Jesus as an example. I think she had an idea of Jesus as a good person. She obviously loved him. But she wasn't looking for him in this way.

[13:28] So she saw him but she didn't really see him. And that's why it didn't change her crying. It didn't change her tears. That wasn't a hope that worked into her life.

If you think an example of Jesus, just Jesus is a good person. I should look like Jesus. If you think that's going to be enough for your life, it wasn't for Mary. There's a lot of people out there that think, you know what, if I just read my Bible, if I pray, if I'm a good person, I do some good deeds, then I'll go to heaven, then the world will be a better place.

That's actually bad news. Right? That can't be how it works because then that means only the good people get into heaven. And if only the good people get into heaven, well, as we know from statistics and sort of just public policy, a lot of what makes somebody good is their circumstances and what they were born into and what they were given.

Right, what we have been able to basically document is that if you're born into a family with two parents and you have money and you go to uni and you get a good job, you can become an upstanding member of society.

But that's salvation by works. That only the good people are in. If Jesus is just a teacher and he's just an example, wanting to tell you how to live and how to be good and you have to earn your way in, then that's not good news.

[14:44] It's actually exclusive news because only the people who sort of won the lottery when it comes to being a good person actually gets to be in. But if, here's the if, if he's the Son of God, if he died for our dead, if we actually are sinners but for the grace of God go I, if that's actually true, then we're saved by grace and the resurrection is just proof that it happened.

And if that's true, then Mary, notice Mary can't see Jesus on her own. Jesus has to reveal himself to her. Jesus has to speak to her. And then that's salvation by grace.

Right? It's in our text. It's not, it doesn't say salvation by grace, but you can just tell that there's no way for her to actually procure that on her own. And so it's not the evidence of Jesus. It's not the example of Jesus.

It's only the truth of seeing Jesus for who he is. And so here's my question to you this morning.

Where are you seeing Jesus right now? You're not really seeing Jesus.

Where are you looking for Jesus and you're not really looking at Jesus in your life? Right? I think a lot of us are actually there to heal our grief, to so hope into our tears, to move it into that meat.

[15:55] The first thing that Jesus brings into her life is the ability to see. Where are you, you need to see the risen king first. So where are you looking for him in the wrong places? Where are you experiencing him and not, where do you want to experience him and you're not?

So there's a little bit of introspection we have to do on the front end. Secondly, he doesn't just bring seeing, there's a going here as well. And I got to this because I started looking at this text and I started wondering, have you ever thought, why does Jesus show himself to Mary first?

Right? He's clearly risen from the dead. He's waiting around the tombs, waiting for her to show up. Why go to her first? I can think of a couple other people I would have gone to see first. Right?

If I had come back from the dead, I think I'd have gone to King Herod first and said, hey, King, remember me? You put me to death, I'm back. Something like that. Or maybe I would have gone to the Sanhedrin.

I would have gone to the body of Jewish leaders and said, hey, you thought you could get rid of me, you know, boo. You know, kind of, I'm back from the dead. There's a lot of other people I might have gone to first.

[17:02] And yet he shows up to Mary and we have to ask, why is that? And I think the answer is that he's trying to make a point, he's revealing himself to her to give her something that she needs.

When you're grieving, and maybe think about this for your own life or think about it for people you know, when you're grieving, it's really hard for you not to look at yourself. Because you can only, you can only experience, you can't get out of your own experience.

It's hard for you to care for or serve others because you're just thinking about, well, you're always me, you're thinking about that you're hurt, you're thinking about your suffering. You're sort of, you're

inwardly focused and it's really hard to get out of yourself.

And so what Jesus does is he comes into her life and there's this inevitable self-absorption. And what does he say to her? Does he say, hey, you got me back, now hold on tight and we're going to be good?

No. He doesn't do that. Look at verse 17. Verse 17, he says, do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended. Now, it's nothing about the physicality because we know just in a couple of chapters he allows Thomas to touch him, like he said, here touch.

[18:05] So there's nothing about the physicality about it. So there's something about the ethos of clinging. He says, no, don't hold on to me because why? Because I'm going to send you on a mission.

Why, what does he say in verse 17? He says, but go and tell, go to my brothers and say to them. So he's giving her a mission. So I think what's happening here, the reason why he selects Mary by picking her as the very first representative of a messenger to go speak about the resurrection is he's actually saying, it doesn't matter what status the world has given you.

It doesn't matter what the world thinks about you. It doesn't matter how low you think you are, how high you think you are, no matter where you are in this world, you've been given a mission. You've been given a purpose.

You've been given a direction to go out and to change the world. If his vision and mission is to give hope to the tears of the world, then as ambassadors and believers of his vision, of his nature, of his resurrection, then we are to go out and tell others as well.

In our ways, everybody's here is different. In our forms, everybody's different. But there's still a purpose here. We have something to live for beyond just making it and breaking it and living in this world.

[19:20] Now I could like say, okay, it's time to be done. Let's pray and send out and go. But there's a little problem now, right? Is that two problems, I think? Now that I think about it.

On one level, some of you are still suffering and it's hard to just feel like I can go out and serve because you're inwardly sort of focused. You can't get outside of yourself. Others of you are like, let's do it.

I'm going to go serve. But there's sometimes a self-salvation. There's a naive. I'm doing this because potentially I'm going to serve folks and then I'll know that I'm a good person or then God has to save me.

Then I know that I'm loved and cared for. There can be a self-salvation in there. So either way, either I can't go out and serve. I know I have this vision and mission, but I'm too hurting or you're almost naïve about it and you don't realize that you're actually doing it for the wrong motivations. What if? That's a play scenario. What if we actually felt unconditionally loved? I know that's a real hard question to ask you all because I don't know if anybody in this world has actually to each other been able to give unconditional love.

[20:32] But for a second, just imagine if you were 100% fully, actually assured of the love, not just from God, just the period, love to you from others.

You wouldn't have to earn it. You wouldn't have to get it. You wouldn't have to wring your hands daily and wonder, like, am I going to make it? Am I going to be this or that? If you felt fully loved, accepted, validated in who you really were, there'd be freedom.

Freedom to serve, freedom to move out, freedom to not just navel gaze and look down but look out. If we had that from the God of the universe, I don't think we would stay where we are.

I don't think we would stay just sort of settled. Go to Genesis 12, when God makes a people with Abraham, he says, I'm going to bless you. But the blessing's never meant to just stay there. If you read on, I'm going to bless you so that you will be a blessing to all nations.

God never brings you in without sending you back out. As soon as Mary gets her savior back, that she knows that she's infinitely fully 100% accepted and loved and cared for.

[21:43] She sent out to go and tell and do. Here's the mystery. I can't put my finger on this, but there's something about the going and the telling and the doing that actually makes you more secure about the love and the grace and care that you have from him.

I can't put my finger on it, but it's here that there's something about the sending that reminds us about the love and about the grace and about the care. It all is centered about the name, the identity.

When Jesus says to her, Mary in verse 16, there's an identity move. There's a change where she feels that love and that care that I think if we had in our own lives, it would change us as well. But the mark of being filled with this love and this care, isn't that you just say, oh, great, my life's great, and I'm going to live my life? No, there's a sending nature. There's a going nature that happens here that's sort of paradoxical.

But the more that you give up, the more you kind of get. I think C.S. Lewis talks about this once. I wrote the quote down here. He says, your real new self will not come as long as you're looking for it.

[ 22 : 50 ] If you come, it will come when you're looking for him. And he goes on to say, this is why if you want to make a good impression on somebody, the thing not to do is to try to think about making a good impression.

It's only when you stop thinking about making a good impression that you actually could make a good impression on somebody. This is why people who only want friends can never have them because they just sort of squash anybody that they latch onto.

You have to want something more than friendship. And friendship is the relationship you have with others along the way towards that thing. And so this is why he says it's only when you give yourself up that you find your real self.

It's only when you lose your life do you gain it. It's only when you go and keep nothing back that you get everything here. And that's why I think it's incredible to meditate on this.

Mary, before Jesus calls her, she's standing at the pinnacle moment in human history.

[ 23 : 49 ] When Jesus has actually triumphed over history and all she can think is that this is a travesty. She's sitting in Jesus' triumph over sin and all she can think is that he's failed. He's up and she thinks that everything is down because she can't see him.

But when her identity has changed with the simple phrase, Mary, when her identity is given to her, when her name is given, that's where the tears are transformed.

That's where the hope is moved into her heart where she can actually be different. And I think this is why at the end of the Bible, you have Revelation where it says every tear will be healed, every sadness turned into joy.

There's a healing there that converts our tears. I think we really need to compare and contrast that with what our modern world is saying. The modern secular world in New York here as well basically says you can't have that hope.

One day you're going to die and that's it. And then by the way, you'll be forgotten. Oh yeah, and by the way, the people who forgot you millions of years from now when the sun dies, they'll be forgotten too, that there is no hope. There is no greater joy.

[ 24 : 55 ] I try to tell this, I used to work with uni students. You can't say you're going to come from nothing and then when you die you go to nothing but then have something in between. That makes no logical sense. You can't say I'm coming from nothing, I'm going to go to nothing, but yet right now we have something.

That's impossible. Just follow your own logic there. All you're doing is delaying the inevitable void of nothingness that awaits us. But if the resurrection is true, if this is real, then when he says why are you crying, what he's saying is there's something that can transform your tears.

There's something that can actually, there's a salt that you can rub into your heart that will preserve you, that will change you and actually remake the tears. Not get rid of them. The hurts will be there, the sufferings will be there, but the truth of the resurrection, you can rub those in the tears of your life.

And I'm worried that you and me in this, we're not doing that. We're not rubbing this truth into every situation of our heart. For instance, are you rubbing the hope of the resurrection into the tears of your work right now?

Are you rubbing the hope of the resurrection into the tears of your relationships? Are you rubbing the hope of the resurrection into the tears of your family and the issues there and what's going on?

[ 26 : 13 ] A couple of years ago, I had a student, this is hard to talk about, I had a student, he killed himself. And a couple of weeks before that, we were on a retreat together and he won one of these games we played and there was hundreds of kids just screaming his name, just praising him.

He's gone. My cousin, a couple of months ago, she was 36 years old and she died suddenly. She left two boys behind.

My mom, my dad, my brothers, they went to the funeral. I had a preach on Sunday, so I didn't get to go. I haven't actually still haven't to this day, grieved.

How do you grieve? And I think what Paul is saying here, and I think this whole text is saying here, is saying, we do not grieve like the rest of mankind as if we have no hope.

I have hope I'm going to see that student again and there might not be 100 students around him, but there'll be 100 angels around him actually screaming his name. I have hope I'm going to see my cousin and I'm going to be able to look at her and say, I miss you and I'm so glad to see you again.

[ 27 : 19 ] Why? Because the resurrection changes our hopes. Death is real, but it loses its sting. All death can do to you and me now is bring us closer to the one who saved us and we'll be back with each other again.

That this is not, at a funeral of a Christian, it's I'll see you again. That's utterly different and it doesn't take our tears away, but anyone who does it transforms those tears.

It moves them and it allows us to then move out into the world. Mary before this encounter thought Jesus had left her and Jesus was staying right beside her.

And I wonder for you and me, how many of us in our daily lives, we think Jesus has left us and he's actually staying right beside us right now. I think there's a lot of us there.

We think God isn't there. We think he's abandoned us. Something's gone wrong and we're in this despair, but maybe we just can't see him. He's right in front of our face and he's not just using our tears.

[ 28 : 17 ] It's through our tears to bring us back to him. Where you place your tears, it shows us where our hearts are. And I guess the last question I want to ask you all is where are you placing your tears?

Where are you sowing them right now? Are you dipping them into the salts of the resurrection? Are you dipping them into the salts of something else? Are you placing them in the hope of the resurrection?

Are you placing the hopes of something else? There's so many hopes out there that you can trust in. I can guarantee you they won't work like this. They can't work like this. Place your tears and your hopes into this and it'll change your life.

You might be crying and missing Jesus today, but Jesus has called you and you can come to him because he first came to you. I know everybody in this room comes from different walks and in different places, but take inventory and ask yourself what will allow you to do this.

If you're a Christian, at least you say you're a Christian and you're quiet times or you're affectless, you have a generalized view of God, slam it into this hope of the resurrection. And if you're not a Christian, just do the introspection.

[ 29 : 22 ] Think about it. Work through it. And I promise to you, if you seek him even in the confused state, she's clearly confused. He'll still come to you. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, there's so many tears out there. And I know we don't want to think about it. We'd rather just think about breakfast or tomorrow or lunch today or the things we need to go through just to get through the next day.

And I think we might be, we might be missing you through our tears. We're seeing you without seeing you. I pray that the hope of the resurrection becomes the transformation that it really is, that if this is true, that it changes every minuscule action that we do from here on forward, that there's no way for us not to go and tell.

And there's different ways to do that. Some of us are called to do it verbally. Some of us are called to do it non-verbally, actions, hospitality, kindness, a hug, whatever it takes.

I pray that we would be, this church would be, a light in the darkness, salt in an unsalty space, a place where we can preserve what's fallen apart as we stick together, as we care for other people.

[ 30 : 38 ] Obviously, this hinges on this. And so if we're still figuring out if, can I really believe this? I pray we would do the work. We would ask the questions.

We will talk to those all over the place about this. Turn our hearts and minds towards you. We pray these things in your name. Amen.