

# Death to Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is John's account of the resurrection, and we're just going to briefly look at two things this morning. We're going to look at the place of the resurrection first, and then the gardener of the resurrection.

So first, the place of the resurrection. If you look down at verse 8, the other disciple who had reached the tomb is John, the writer of this gospel.

And Peter and John had run out to the tomb on Sunday morning to see, and they got there, and John goes down, he stoopes down, he looks in, he sees the cloths folded up, and it says here in verse 8 that he believed.

And he believed, and he and Peter left and went back to talk about what had happened to the other disciples. But Mary is left here in verse 11, weeping, standing there weeping outside the tomb.

And the word, the original Greek word that underlies this English translation here, weeping, it's a deep guttural, gutt level type cry.

[ 1 : 08 ] It's not just a mere tear, it's she's weeping. And why is the question?

And we don't get the answer exactly until verse 13. She had seven demons removed from her in Luke chapter 8, that's how she met Jesus.

And she was also wealthy probably we think, she was a patron, she's called Mary Magdalene because she's from Magdala, which is a wealthier city and it's likely that she had helped feed the disciples while they were doing ministry.

She was a patron, had traveled with Jesus, she had been there and seen almost the whole of his entire ministry and heard everything he had said, but now she's at the tomb and she's gutt, bowel level weeping.

And she says why in verse 13, when the angels come, they ask her, why are you weeping? And she says to them, they've taken away my Lord and I do not know where they've put him.

[ 2 : 08 ] And what she means by that is that she thinks that Jesus' body has been stolen. She's talking about grave robbery. And grave robbery was a really big deal in the first century, it was really common.

Ten years after the resurrection, the emperor Claudius, the emperor of Rome would pronounce that if you are caught as a grave robber, that's a capital offense, you would be killed for it.

So it's a really big deal, really common in the first century and that's what she thinks has happened. John and Peter see it and they believe it and Mary sees it and she says his body's stolen.

And so we have an antithesis between two encounters with the resurrection. On the one hand they see and in faith they believe John remembered what Mary had said, what Jesus had said.

The son of man must be lifted up and in three days he will rise again. John remembered and he believed it and Mary is left there. Even after having traveled with Jesus for three years, having seven demons removed from her, she thinks his body was stolen.

[ 3 : 14 ] And she's crying because it's deep dishonor to him, to his memory. And her response is a response that's been around the two responses since this moment, the response of faith, of seeing and believing and the response that says his body was just stolen.

This second response that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, that his body was stolen from the tomb by grave robbers and that's what accounts for the tremendous growth of Christianity in the first century.

That's something that even came to be common in some church context in the 20th century even. I mean, one commentator puts it this way, having renounced physical resurrection as impossible, the resurrection has now become in the 20th century for many theologians something here and now entering into a new dimension of existence, being set free from the past and from guilt and from care and being made open to one's fellow man.

And in other words, what they're saying is even in theology, even in some churches, even in the academic view of the scriptures, there are many, even now, even today, even in the modern era that have said that the resurrection is not physical, it's the transformation of one's inner life.

It's not physical and material, it's psychological, it's being resurrected from the inside out, it's being open to one's fellow man, right? It's something that merely happens on the inside and I just want to say in this first point, the place of the resurrection very simply, that the main point of this passage is really clear and it comes out, you'll see it, the thrust of the whole passage which is the thrust of the entire Bible as we saw just a second ago in the kids' talk, it comes out really clearly in verse nine, John stoopes down, he sees the cloths folded there, he believes in verse nine, but he did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus Christ must rise from the dead, that he must rise from the dead.

[ 5 : 26 ] And what that's talking about is the Old Testament, that from the very beginning, the whole point has always been this moment, that Jesus Christ must rise from the dead, you can think of Psalm 16, Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 37, son of man, can these dry bones live again?

Can they be raised up? The whole point, it was always that the son of God, this man must rise from the dead, and the main point of the passage, just simply, the first point is this, without Jesus Christ, this man in the first century, walk out of the tomb in a human body physically resurrected from the dead, died and risen to life, without that Christianity is just a mere religion, is a mere religion just like anything else, just like anything else.

And that's exactly Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 15, when he says, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then my preaching is in vain, and not only that, but your faith is in vain, is futile, and you are not forgiven from your sins.

And so the point, the whole point is that if this man did not physically, if the resurrection isn't physical, then Christianity is meaningless, then we're not forgiven of our sins, it's the central point of history and the central thrust of the Bible, and the main point of this passage is that Jesus Christ must have risen from the dead.

We put it at the beginning of the bulletin and Tim Keller has a nice quote asking this question that the first question for all of us is, did Jesus walk out of the grave in the first century?

[ 7 : 09 ] And that's the question that we all have to deal with, and we all have to face, and he says this, if Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept everything else he said.

And if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of the rest of it? If Jesus Christ didn't walk out of the grave on Sunday morning, then why worry about the other questions and answers and difficulties of the Bible?

You don't have to worry about any of the rest of it if he didn't walk out of the grave. The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching, but whether or not he rose from the dead.

And right after this event, there were 500 witnesses of his body alive. The message had changed even the Emperor of Rome's household within 20 years.

The men who saw it, the women who saw it, they would give their life up as martyrs to proclaim the truth that this man did defeat death.

[ 8 : 11 ] They saw something worth giving their life for, and that's something that they saw, well, it's the hope that death, death is not the end for humanity, but there's hope of life.

And it's in this man who walked out of the grave on Sunday morning. Secondly, and finally, the gardener of the resurrection.

So we're just going to look at the second half of this passage for just a few more minutes. John, the theme, the motif of misunderstanding in the Gospel of John is really common, and it happens here again.

You'll remember if you've ever read the Gospel of John, in John chapter 3, when Jesus says to Nicodemus, you've got to be born again, and Nicodemus says, what's an adult man to do?

How can he be born from his mother? Again, that makes no sense to him. It's misunderstanding, right? He doesn't get what Jesus is saying, and it's really common throughout the book of John and it happens again here.

[ 9 : 15 ] And Mary, just like John, she sees the empty tomb, she sees the cloths, she knew what Jesus had taught, but she's left here in disbelief saying that his body was stolen.

And what happens is three questions. The angels show up and ask her the first question, woman, why are you weeping?

And this is a, it's harder to see in English, but this is a mild rebuke. It's a rebuke, but it's pastoral. Woman, why are you weeping?

And we know this because it intensifies, because then she sees the gardener in the next verse, and he asks her the same two questions. Woman, why are you weeping?

Whom is it that you seek? Whom are you seeking? And like misunderstanding, this idea of seeking is really common throughout the book of John as well.

[ 10 : 16 ] Jesus often uses the question, whom are you seeking? Several times in the book to confront people who are struggling or wrestling with his identity. In chapter one, he confronts these two disciples.

He sees these two disciples and he asks them the question, whom is it that you seek? And then he says, come and follow me. And then, more importantly, in chapter 18, before his death in the Garden of Gethsemane, prison guards, soldiers come to arrest him and he says to them, who is it that you're seeking?

And they say, Jesus, the Christ. And he says, I am. And they fall down on their faces in worship. And he has to tell the prison guards that have come to arrest him to get up off the ground and do their duty and take him in.

And he had asked them the question, whom are you seeking? And as soon as they hear his voice, they're forced to do nothing else but fall on their face in worship, you see. They couldn't see him for who he really is.

And here, Mary, this is a comedy. John is saying, the resurrected son of God is standing right in front of her and it says that she thinks he's the gardener, the one who takes care of the plots where he's buried.

[ 11 : 37 ] She supposes him to be the gardener. She had seven demons removed by this man and she had followed him, his whole ministry, for three years and listened to everything he said and heard him talk about what he must do.

And she finally sees him, risen from the whole point and she thinks that he's the gardener. She can't see.

She can't see who he is. In John's point, it's impossible to see the resurrection.

It's impossible to see this man for who he really is with frail human eyes. Nobody can see. Mary couldn't see.

The Bible teaches us that human sight is too frail. It's impossible with our sinful eyes to see who this man really is, even when he's standing right in front of us.

[ 12 : 37 ] In other words, John Calvin puts it this way, all of us humans live in a world to which our minds are blind and where our hearts do not trust the truth.

In the face of death, we humans live not in reality, but in unreality. In other words, Calvin is saying that because of sin and because of the fact that we all face death, that we see death as the true end of humanity.

That's the only thing standing out in front of us. We feel it. We know it. It comes up from our bones. We can feel it even now. We see death as reality, as truth, as what's really standing in front of us.

And that's exactly what Mary was blinded by in this passage. She's living in unreality and the unreality that supposes that death is the true end of this world.

She can't see the truth. She can't see the life that is standing right in front of her. She's blind to it. In John chapter one, Jesus Christ, this man, John says, is the logos, the word of power, the one by whom the world came into being.

[ 13 : 50 ] The one through whom God, the Father, created the entire world. And in Colossians, we learn that he is the one who speaks at every moment and the world is upheld by the word of his power.

This is the Creator of God, this man. And that's what the Bible says. And it's his voice, his speech that upholds the world at every single moment from its very foundations at every single moment.

And it was his speech, his speech, his voice. That when the prison guards, the soldiers came and said, we're here to take away you, the criminal, to take you and kill you, it was simply him saying, I am.

That changed their entire being. They were forced down onto the ground to worship him, the one that they came to kill, to murder. It's his voice. That's it.

The power of the word, the logos himself, who upholds the foundations of the earth at all moments, he speaks. And here we see that Mary is completely blind.

[ 15 : 00 ] She can't see who he truly is. She was there in John chapter 10. She was sitting at his feet when he was teaching in John chapter 10.

And in John chapter 10, he taught her and the rest of his disciples, he said, my sheep, hear my voice, and they come to me when I call them.

My sheep, my sheep, I say their name. They hear my voice, and when I call to them, they come to me. And in the midst of complete blindness and unbelief, Mary accusing the resurrected Savior right in front of her face of being dead.

He does one thing. That's one. Did you see it? Verse 16, he looks up at her and he says, Mary, he just says her name.

And that's it. She wakes up. Unbelief gone. The scales taken off of her eyes. Her heart opened.

[ 16 : 13 ] He just, my sheep, hear my voice. And when I call their name, they come to me. Mary, Mary.

The incarnation, Jesus Christ, the God-man, come into the world. Is light come into darkness? When Jesus Christ became a human being and came into this world, he pronounced, God pronounced us that the world is not what it should be, that we are not what we should be.

And at the resurrection, God looks up at us and says, your name here, I will not leave it so.

I will not let you remain in this domain of death. I will come and I will rescue you and I will lift you up. He will not have it so.

He would not have it so. And so he pronounces the unreality that all of us live in, the domain of death, into a domain of life and light.

[ 17 : 24 ] And he does it by just saying your name, you see. So look up at the gardener, the gardener of the resurrection.

And he will say your name. And the end of your life will not be death but life. That's the promise.

Now let me just close with this. When Mary saw the gardener on that Sunday morning, she was only half wrong.

She was only half wrong. You know, Old Testament scholars, if you've paid attention to the book of Genesis, you know that from the very beginning, Genesis 1 and 2, when God creates the world, that he creates a garden and that he looks a lot like a gardener in Genesis 1 and 2, he cultivates, he raises up the plants from the ground, he creates humanity out of the dust of the earth, cultivating them just like we cultivate our plants today.

He looks like the gardener, we learned from John 1 already, that this man, Jesus Christ, is that God that was there at the very beginning. She wasn't wrong.

[ 18 : 42 ] He was the gardener, the first gardener, the gardener of creation that cultivated the world into being. If you look and read about the temple that God commanded to be constructed in the Old Testament, you'll know that the temple was decorated in the form of a garden, that all the pillars had flowers and trees engraving onto them, that even the furniture in the temple was to look like a garden.

The candles looked like living trees, for example. Why? Because God has always come down to this earth and made his home on this planet in a garden.

He's always done that, from the Garden of Eden to the temple to the final city of God in Revelation, which looks like a garden, a tree in the middle with a river.

But in the middle of that, at the crucifixion, the day after he was betrayed at Gethsemane, John is the only gospel writer who mentions the fact that when Jesus was being crucified, they nailed him up on a tree just outside of a garden.

John just passes by that in his account of the crucifixion, that it was just outside of a garden plot that Jesus Christ was crucified.

[ 20 : 02 ] Why? Why do you think he mentions it? When the first Adam sinned and sin entered the world, humanity was excluded from the Garden of God.

The place of his presence. When Jesus Christ the second Adam came into this world, he chose at the crucifixion to be excluded from the Garden of God so that we might be embraced.

And that's exactly what happens in this passage at the very end. The only thing that Mary can do when she sees the gardener of the true garden, the gates of the garden opened back up into the Garden of Eden for her.

She hugs him from exclusion to embrace. She hugs him. And that hug is God's pronouncement to all of us that in the resurrection he loves you and he wants to hug you physically because he's resurrected and he's a human being.

He wants to hug you and that's what he will do in the coming resurrection and the end of history. He will hug you. But he says here, just to close, don't cling to me.

[ 21 : 19 ] My work is not done. I am going up to my father to complete this task. This is the beginning of the resurrection power but it is not the end. He continues to work and that means that this resurrection is God's act of affirming the created order, the physical created order that we live in and he's saying I'm going up and I'm not finished redeeming it.

Calling my people, calling the church, renewing the creation and that means just simply this, that he's leaving us with an invitation here.

It's an invitation for you to see the resurrection as a reality, to see it as the ordering point of all of history, to see that resurrection is your hope, not death.

And to embrace, come under, submit, obey the life of resurrection even now. And what's the life of resurrection? It's resurrecting your heart. It's killing sin.

It's seeing yourself in the light of the mission of God. It's moving from self-centeredness to self-forgetfulness. These are all little moments of prophecy of what the resurrection life will be.

[ 22 : 33 ] And this is an invitation even now, even in a physical resurrection you don't yet see to live a life of resurrection, to be resurrected from the dead. In your heart now, looking forward to physical resurrection in the future, the angels, the angels, the angels, they beckon you now.

The angels in the garden here, they beckon you. At the beginning of time when Adam and Eve sinned, the angels took flaming swords and they guarded the gate to the Garden of Eden so that none might enter, no human might enter.

But in this second garden in the middle of history, the angels are beckoning you, come in, stoop down, look inside the tomb, see the cloth where he lay.

Come and see. The garden does not closed off to you any longer. Death has died, death has died in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And that's an invitation to faith, to hope, and to love. Let's pray. Father, we ask, Lord, that you would give us eyes to see, that you would give us hope, and something more than 80, 90, 100 years, that we would know that there is an ultimate death of death in the death of Christ.

[ 24 : 12 ] Give some of us faith for the first time today. Give some of us renewed faith and change. We ask now, do it by the power of your Holy Spirit in Christ's name. Amen.