

November 14/15, 2020

Why Are You Weeping?

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 20:1-31

Pastor Bryan Clark

According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, if our story this morning is not true, we as Christians are a pitiful, hopeless people. So, we want to talk about it. If you have a Bible turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 20, and we'll begin in verse 1:

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. 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." 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; and 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 line *there*, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 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. So the disciples went away to their own homes. *(NASB, John 20:1-10)

Each of the four Gospel writers writes about the resurrection from a different perspective. John's perspective is quite unique, in that he focuses on four people—Mary Magdalene, John, Peter, and Thomas. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb early in the morning. The day before had been a Sabbath—restricted travel, restricted activity—first thing now, Sunday morning. So when the Jews factored days, basically, if an event included any part of the day, it was considered a day. So, Jesus was in the tomb before sundown on Friday. That was the whole point. So that would be Friday, Saturday, Sunday—"on the third day, He rose from the dead." Mary Magdalene gets to the tomb, and she sees that the stone has been rolled away. She then runs back to Peter and John and they hear what she says—whoever the "they" is—she says, "They have taken Him." Probably she's referring to the religious leaders. Peter and John then run to the tomb. John is younger, apparently faster, and gets to the tomb first. He stoops down and looks in. Most of those tombs would have had doorways about three feet high. So they're really getting down and stooping to see in. John sees the grave clothes—the linen wrappings—but he doesn't go in. True to their personalities, John stays outside; Peter gets there and immediately goes right in. Peter sees the linen wrappings and describes them, basically with the idea that the wrapping around Jesus' body was still there, as if His body was in it. Only His body wasn't. Once you take the wrap and all the spices, this would become kind of a cocoon. The face cloth then is separate. Some of the texts say *folded* or *bound*; probably the best translation would be *wound*. It carries the idea that what was wound around Jesus head was still sitting there. John then goes in and immediately, when he sees the linen clothes—the grave clothes—the text says **he saw, and he believed.**

So it's very interesting to think about this. John, as the writer, is reflecting that in that moment, there was no alternative. If it was robbers, they would have taken the linen and the spices. That's where the value was. There's no value in a body. If it was the chief priests, they would have taken everything. There's just no human explanation for how the body gets out of the wrappings like that other than Jesus, somehow, some way, has been resurrected. And that's what John is reflecting. The evidence was clear; **he saw, and he believed**. John goes on to say, *at this point they still didn't understand the story*. They didn't understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead. The disciples weren't expecting this; they weren't counting it down. They weren't hanging around the tomb. This was the last thing they expected to happen. And that's what John is reflecting. It's only after the resurrection and their time with the resurrected Jesus, that they put all the pieces together and understood the story. The first time the story is actually reflected would be Acts 2—fifty days later, the day of Pentecost—when Peter delivers his sermon and puts the whole story together. Verse 11:

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 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. 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.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. 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.” (Vs. 11-15)

So now Mary is back to the tomb. You have to appreciate the fact that this is an utterly broken woman. She loved Jesus! Probably for the first time in her life, she had experienced hope. She had experienced a message and a person that gave her hope in life. But now she has seen this person whom she so loved, be scourged, be tortured, and be executed. He has been put in the tomb, and now she believes someone has even taken the body. It's grief, upon grief, upon grief, and in this moment, she is utterly broken. She stoops down—I'm going to guess down on her knees—to see in that low door of the tomb. And there she sees two angels.

Now consistently through the Scripture, when angels appear, they appear as humans. They don't appear as little angels with wings fluttering in the tomb; they just look like people. There's no reason why Mary wouldn't just assume these are people. The angel says to her, “**Why are you weeping?**” That may seem like a rather insensitive question, but it is a critical question. Mary is weeping because she believes something to be true that isn't true. And as soon as she learns the truth, the truth is going to set her free. So that's the nature of the question, “Why are you weeping?” Mary says because she believes somebody has come and taken the body away.

At this point, Jesus—the resurrected Jesus—shows up. Now it's not at all difficult to understand why she didn't recognize Him. Imagine that she's on her knees, looking into the tomb, and it's likely Jesus just shows up behind her. She could easily recognize that it's a person. Jesus probably had his headdress on, but in her grief and brokenness, she's not going to turn around and stare into His face. She just knows someone is there. She assumes him to be the gardener, and in one sense, that's true. We'll come back to that.

So Jesus asked the critical question, “**Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**” Again, Mary believes something that isn't true. That's why she's weeping, but she's about to learn the truth that will turn her weeping into joy. You hear the loyalty and the commitment of Mary when she says if he's the gardener and has taken the body somewhere, just tell her where the body is; she'll go get it, and she'll do something with it. To which then Jesus responds, verse 16:

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). 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.’” Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and *that* He had said these things to her. (Vs. 16-18)

Now one note is that if you were fabricating a story in first century Jewish life, the last person you would identify as the initial witness to the resurrected Christ would have been a woman. Women in this culture were not even allowed to testify in a court of law. The only reason John records it that way is because that's the way it happened, and it's a beautiful statement of Jesus' value for Mary Magdalene. So Jesus speaks her name, “**Mary!**” Jesus had said before, “*My sheep hear My voice, and they know Me.*” So Mary hears His voice, realizes it's Jesus, and I'm going to imagine, whirls around and grabs Him, probably by the legs. When Jesus says, “**Stop clinging to Me,**” some of the translations have, “Don't touch Me,” which is certainly incorrect. The word means *to grasp* or *to cling*. Mary realized it was Jesus, and she hung on. What Jesus is saying is, “Mary, it's not necessary to do that; I'm not ascending right now.” In other words, “I'm going to be here for a little while longer, but I am ascending, so you need to go to the disciples, and you need to give them this message.

Now the message is very interesting. This is the first time Jesus has referred to them as **brethren**. It was unimaginable to use that kind of language for God in the old covenant. Jesus is saying, “Something radical has changed, and we're family. I am about to descend to My Father, who is your Father, to My God, who is your God.” Yes, something absolutely radical has changed.

Do you remember in chapter 17 where Jesus was talking about the unity between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and He's praying that the disciples will be one, as the Trinity is one. We talked in that passage that forever the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have existed together in perfect harmony, loving and celebrating one another, as perichoresis, what some refer to as the *Dance of God*. The text goes on to say because the Spirit of God dwells within a believer, the Trinity isn't just an example of unity, but rather that we have been invited into the dance, to share in this dance with God. That's ultimately what we were created for. But for that to be possible, sin would have to be paid for, and death would have to be conquered. So, in this moment, what Jesus is saying to Mary is essentially, “I need you to go to the disciples and tell them, “It's time to dance.” So Mary rushes to the disciples. Verse 19:

So when it was evening, on that day, the first day...

(Notice in verse 1, this is Sunday, but it's referred to as the first day. Then again, in verse 19, there's a reason for that, which we'll get to in just a moment. This is now, by our calculations, Sunday evening.)

So...on that day, the first *day* of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace *be* with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Vs. 19-20)

So at this point, the disciples are petrified. They're fearful the Jews are going to come knocking. Jesus' body is missing, so they assume they're coming for them. They're somewhere—some people think it's the Upper Room again—where the doors are shut and locked, when suddenly Jesus appears! Did He walk through the walls? Did He walk through the door? Did He just appear? The text isn't specific, but there are several things to learn in this text.

First of all, Jesus' resurrected body is the closest we get to some sort of prototype of what we will be like after the resurrection. When we die, we don't become an angel. We don't float through the universe as some body-less spirit. It is actually “this body” that is resurrected...that is changed... that is with me forever. Jesus shows the marks on His hands and His side. It's His literal, physical, resurrected body. It's interesting that Jesus just shows up; His body is the same, but different. It's hard to know exactly what that means. We've talked before that maybe heaven isn't so much some place way out there somewhere, but it's more like a *realm*. I've referred to it at times like a *frequency*—and you have this sense in the text, that Jesus now, in His resurrected body, belongs in a different realm, but has come to visit the disciples in this room. It's almost like the frequency was changed, and Jesus shows up. So, Jesus appears to them; He shows them His scars, and they rejoice. Verse 21:

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained.” (Vs. 21-23)

Jesus promised the disciples in the Upper Room peace—shalom—everything's going to be okay. But it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross and defeat death, in order to fulfill that promise. So here's the resurrected Jesus now saying, “**Peace**, shalom, everything's going to be okay. Mission is accomplished.”

Jesus gives them their commission. Much like the Great Commission in Matthew, “This is what I need you to do.” They're not going to ascend with Jesus; they have a job to do; Jesus has already told them that. In verse 22, when it said **He breathed**, technically it's not *breathed on them*. It's He breathed; the idea is that He exhaled—exhaled His breath—and gave them the Spirit. In both the Hebrew language and the Greek language, the word for Spirit, and the word for breath is the exact same word. So, to be empowered with this new life, to fulfill their calling, Jesus filled them with His breath, His very Spirit, to accomplish the mission.

The mission was to go declare the message of the gospel. It is not saying that there is some sort of a clergy class that forgives sins or chooses not to forgive sins. That would be contrary to everything Jesus has taught, and contrary to everything we're taught in the rest of the New Testament. The mission was to continue to declare the message that Jesus has been declaring—that if you believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, your sins are forgiven. If you choose not to believe, your sins are retained.

Every single one of us, as believers, has a mission. We can't forgive sins; we can't make anyone believe. Our mission is to simply tell the truth. This is what Jesus said, *"If you believe, your sins are forgiven. If you choose not to believe, your sins remain."* Verse 24:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (Vs. 24-25)

Now I think we're way too hard on Thomas. All Thomas was asking for was to see the same thing the others had seen. In John chapter 11, when Jesus was headed to Jerusalem, things in Jerusalem had become extremely dangerous. It's Thomas that says, "Let us go and die with Him." Thomas may not have been the most optimistic in the bunch, but he was fiercely loyal. Imagine the PTSD these guys have experienced since the Upper Room. It would have been absolutely horrible! They've been scattered somewhere. Thomas wasn't with them at the first appearance of Jesus. He just is asking to see what they saw. Verse 26:

After eight days...

(which in the Jewish way of factoring is a week later. So this is the following Sunday.)
...His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace *be* with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed." (Vs. 26-29)

So a week later, the disciples are once again hunkered down somewhere. The door is locked, and once again Jesus shows up. He turns to Thomas and He essentially repeats exactly what Thomas has asked for. It's a good reminder that even though Jesus wasn't physically there when Thomas said it, He heard every word. And so he says to Thomas, "Look at My hands, My side, and believe." Thomas then responds with the strongest declaration of who Jesus is in the entire Gospel. As a matter of fact, this is the climax of the Gospel of John! Thomas figures it out, and he declares, **"My Lord, and my God."** What he was saying is, "I get it. You are the long-awaited Messiah; You are actually God in the flesh."

This circles us all the way back to the beginning of the Gospel of John. The Gospel starts with a reminder that the Son of God—the Creator of the universe—took on human flesh to be the Savior of the world. It's come all the way back around and Thomas gets it. "I get it. You're the Messiah, You're my Savior, and You are God!" Jesus says, "Blessed are those who do not see it like Thomas saw it but still believe"—referring to us—our decision to believe the eye-witness testimony of the crucified and risen Christ.

These eleven men would give their lives for the sake of the gospel. They would preach a message of the resurrected Christ. They would be flogged, they would be beaten, they would be imprisoned, and they would be executed for the cause of Christ, and not one of them would recant. Not one of

them would change their story, because they were absolutely convinced they had seen the resurrected Christ.

In Jerusalem, the place where Jesus was crucified, the place where the tomb sat, the message of a resurrected Savior would spread like wildfire. In Jerusalem alone, many of the priests and the Pharisees would come to believe in Jesus. In a couple of months' time, the church had over ten thousand believers, because the evidence for a resurrected Savior was so overwhelmingly true. John closes his gospel with words we've repeated many times:

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name......that we would believe, as Thomas believed, "*My Lord and my God.*"
(Vs. 30-31)

John has been the master of little hints, little double meanings, little foreshadowings of the bigger story that's happening. So, as I close, let me just connect a few of these dots. John starts his Gospel with a reminder that, "In the beginning, God created." We know in Genesis 1 and 2 that God created, and that He created Adam and Eve in His image, with the capacity to know Him in a real and intimate way—with the capacity to dance with Him. We are told in Genesis chapter 2, verse 7, that what defined life was that Adam was filled with the very breath of God—*God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life*. God placed Adam and Eve in a garden paradise, and then God rested.

But Adam and Eve sinned against God, and that sin separated them from God. They spiritually died and began a process of physical death. As a result of that, they were escorted out of the garden—paradise lost. But literally, before you can turn the page in Genesis, God makes a promise that through the seed of a woman, a human, He would do what was necessary to bring life back out of death. So, for thousands of years, the world waited for God to fulfill His promise.

God ushered in the old covenant through Moses, where the promise was foreshadowed. It was pictured; it was celebrated for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years. Jesus, in the Upper Room, would take the cup and say, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." In other words, Jesus had come to be the fulfillment of the old covenant, which was fading away—mission accomplished. It had pointed to the Messiah.

But Jesus' death, burial and resurrection would usher in a new covenant. For that to happen, sin must be paid for. Jesus didn't just die; Jesus paid for sin, He took the wrath of God upon Himself. At the end of His time on the cross, He Himself uttered the words, "It is finished." The mission was accomplished, and with that, He died. But the promise was: If it truly paid for sin, then He would conquer death, which was the result of sin. So, on the third day, He rose again, as promised.

The language John uses is very strategic. The story starts in chapter 20, **On the first day** (the first day of what?), the first day *following Sabbath*, the first day *of new creation*, the first day *of the new covenant*. The story started in Genesis in a garden. And the story of new creation starts again, in a garden. And Jesus, in a sense, is the gardener!

Jesus defines life as being filled with the very breath of Jesus. Jesus is saying, “Promise fulfilled; mission accomplished,” as He ushers in the first day of the new creation. As of that moment, everything has changed.

We have every reason to believe this morning that if we believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, our sins are forgiven. And no matter what this world throws at me, my future is glorious, and I have every reason for hope.

We might listen for the words of Jesus this morning when He says to some of us, “Why are you weeping...why are you weeping? What is it you don't know? What is it you don't understand? What is it you don't believe? Because the truth is, I've paid for sin. I've offered you life. Your future is glorious, and there is every reason for hope.”

This is a crazy mixed- up world, and it can throw anything it wants at me, but I know my sins are forgiven. I know my future is glorious. I know the truth, and the truth has set me free!

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that Jesus has fulfilled the promise and offers salvation to anyone who is willing to believe. Lord, our anguish has been turned to joy. Our weeping has been turned to rejoicing. Our future is glorious. We celebrate that, this morning, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Fall 2020 // WEEK 10

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // November 14/15, 2020

Why Are You Weeping? // John 20:1-31

Introduction

In chapter 20, John gives us eyewitness testimony from those who experienced Jesus *after* His resurrection – Mary Magdalene, a group of His disciples, and Thomas. The death, burial, and now the resurrection complete Jesus' journey to the cross. There's much for us to consider as we affirm our belief this week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. We began this study in John back on September 8, 2019! Share a significant life event that's shaped your view of God over that time.

2. How have you benefited from being part of a Life Group this session?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to open your thoughts to believe the Truth
 - b. For awareness of scripture as relevant to your life today
 - c. For unity and growth in your group

 - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 20 to the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) In chapter 19, John made sure we understood that he was an eyewitness to the death and burial of Jesus. Why might it also be important for him to give us these accounts of Jesus' resurrection in chapter 20?

- 2) Mary Magdalene didn't immediately recognize Jesus and even thought He was the gardener (vs. 14-15). What might have caused her confusion?

Mary didn't see Jesus for who He really was until she heard His voice. Read John 10:26-28 and discuss how this relates to Mary's belief in her risen Lord.

Seeing how Jesus responded to Mary's pain and questioning, how might you expect Him to meet you in times of grief? Share, if you have your own experience.

- 3) When Jesus appeared to His disciples as they huddled in fear, He spoke peace to their troubled hearts and affirmed the role He'd given them in His Kingdom. Look up the following references and write down the instructions Jesus gave His followers in each instance:

John 17:18

Matthew 10:7-8

Luke 9:1-2

Jesus was consistent in sending his followers into the world to care for others and tell them about Himself. Have you been challenged by Jesus to step out of fear and into serving His Kingdom in recent weeks? If so, please share with your group. If not, how can you serve Him in this way this week?

4) One of the things we notice about Thomas is that he was honest about his doubts and processed them with others who believed. If you have doubts at times, how do you handle those doubts? Discuss them with close friends? Talk to God about them? Would you be willing to share how that looks in your life?

5) John has given us evidence from prophetic and eyewitness accounts to make a case for why we should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

a. So, what difference has it made in your life?

b. If you believe in Jesus, can you briefly describe your reasons?

c. Was there a point that you noticed your doubt change to belief?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

A significant part of creating unity with God and one another is being open and honest with our lives. Praying with a group of people may be a new experience for you, or it may be familiar. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone participates in sharing this time before God together. Here are a couple of suggestions of how you can pray together as a group.

1. Take a moment or two to consider what John means when he says, “by believing you may have life in His name.” As thoughts of how Jesus brings life, redemption, and grace come to mind, take turns speaking them in simple sentence prayers, “Jesus, thank you for being _____.” or “Lord, I praise you for _____.”
2. This is a group prayer time where each person in the group will pray. Before you start, tell everyone that if someone is not comfortable praying out loud in the group setting, they can pray privately and say “Amen” when they are finished. That will let the next person know it is their turn to pray. The group leader will start the prayer time.

If you would like to learn more about opportunities to witness or participate in God’s kingdom in Lincoln and around the world, contact outreach@lincolnberean.org or checkout this Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnbereanlocal