

Reading: John 20:1-18

Theme: Lessons from Mary

Her life had been shattered and turned upside down and inside out. She probably had never felt so miserable, sad or confused. To her this was the last chance she and the other women would have to anoint Jesus' body and it would be better early on, than when it became hot - as His body would already be starting to stink. It didn't matter it was dark and very early, probably there was no sleep to be had. We can only imagine what was going on in the heart and mind of Mary Magdalene and the others that first day of the week. She figures prominently in the passage we read - a glorious passage in which John draws our attention to incidents that are not included in the other Gospels, as if he's filling in additional details to give us a fuller, more complete picture of events. Let's note 4 things of many things we could note in this passage:

1. Love.

We know there were other women who went along early in the morning, but here John focuses our attention on Mary Magdalene and the other Gospels put her as prominent among the women. She was a remarkable woman. If she'd given her testimony it would be quite amazing - she'd been possessed by 7 demons and Jesus had cast them out of her, she had trusted Him as the Messiah, followed and supported His ministry.

Mary Magdalene had a deep, deep love for the Lord Jesus. It was shown in very practical ways - she was one of the last

at the cross; Mark tells us she saw where Jesus was buried and she was one of the first to be the tomb. It was no waste of time to stay and watch all the gruesome events of Jesus' death; His being taken off the cross; wrapped in cloths and laid in the tomb. She had waited until after the Sabbath had ended and she, with others, had bought spices etc to go and anoint His body before it became too putrid. She was there with other women do that, even though it was early in the morning and still dark.

Why do all this? She loved Him. He had done so much for her and her response was to love Him intensely in return. It may have been dark, frightening, costly and even dangerous to go to anoint His body, but love motivated and drove her to do such, even to the corpse of her beloved Master, the one she called "*Lord*".

John uses dark and light a lot in His gospel and writings - dark can mean ignorance, sinfulness and Mary, early on the first day of the week, was going to the tomb in the dark - for she was ignorant of the resurrection and yet her love for Jesus motivated her. What about us watching this evening, it is more or less light outside and we have the light of the resurrection, the record of Scripture of who Jesus is and what He has done for us and many of us would say we are Christians, so how is **our** love for the Lord Jesus? Do we have a love for Him and is that love shown? It is to be known by what we do for Him. Such love can cause us to do things that will take us away from our comforts, and take us out of our comfort zone.

Sadly, even in the fullest light of the resurrection, being saved from sin and Hell, we can have a low sense of love and love's obligation to the Lord Jesus and could quite easily live for self-ease and comfort alone. We need to pray to see the sinfulness and deceptiveness of sin and the wonder of God's love and grace to us. We have been forgiven much and so we should love much and express that love for our Saviour as we have opportunity.

Speaking for myself, I don't really appreciate how much He has forgiven me; else I would love Him more. Mary Magdalene knew what He done for her and she showed that love, even returning to the tomb later when others had gone so she could look for His body. Her love was not wasted, but rewarded. No one can love the Lord Jesus too much and no one has ever lost out trying to do so and showing that love in their lives. From this passage we also note:

2. Differences.

Piecing the gospel accounts together, it would seem that the other women stayed a bit longer at the tomb and it is Mary who runs off to tell Peter and John. I can imagine the disciples being quite stunned, shocked as Mary says what she and the others had seen - especially how they didn't know where they had put Jesus. Perhaps she assumed the Jewish leaders had done it, or grave robbers for the 75lbs of myrrh and aloes.

Peter and John then had an early morning run - not for fitness' sake, but out of necessity. They have to get to the tomb quickly to check things out for themselves. Here we begin to see that they were different. John outruns Peter - it could have been age, fitness or physiology and they were different in this. There were also differences in their reactions at the open tomb. John bent over and looked in at the strips of linen, but stayed outside. John seems to be the quieter, gentler, more tender, reserved and deep feeling of the 2 and he is more cautious, even timid or afraid. Peter is the opposite and he does what we'd expect Peter to do - run-up and straight in and have a good look around. We have the details of what he saw v6 & 7. Yes, Peter was hotter, impulsive and a dynamic leader type - who often acted first and thought second!

They both loved the Lord, both were disciples, both were hurting at Jesus' death and confused by the news Mary had brought. Both are recorded as behaving as we'd expect. Why are they so different and it is recorded for us? It teaches us that faith and love for the Lord Jesus does not obliterate our personalities. We are saved as we are and while many things change and we are to be conformed to the ways of God and holiness, it does not mean we all have to be the same - talk the same, dress the same, behave exactly the same, like the same things - for we are saved and loved as individuals with our own individual characteristics and quirks!

Peter and John were different and while Peter could so easily have dismissed John, or John wrote off Peter as a hot head, both their individual traits and characteristics would be used by the Lord who called them. It would be Peter who would take the lead, but here it was John who saw and believed before Peter did. They both needed to understand the Scriptures more fully, John had a belief that Jesus had risen - perhaps it was an unclear faith, but it was faith. We are not to write off people because they don't see things exactly as we see them, nor do things as we do them. Different is not necessarily wrong - there is a great blessing and hindrance in Christian freedom and we need to learn patience and tolerance in secondary matters. Peter had no right to and did not tell John off for being slow to go in; nor did John tell Peter off for failing to believe as quickly as he did. Yet both were believers and were used individually and together for Christ's glory. We can celebrate our differences in personalities and abilities and are not to be critical of them, as each one of us can prove to be better in different ways from others and can prove to be better in the end than we each give others credit for e.g. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

3. Sorrow.

Peter and John went back to their homes, but Mary Magdalene reappears at the tomb. She is really in a state of grief as she stands there outside of the tomb and sobbing. Mary's love is again seen in that she wants to find the Lord's body. Mary is a challenge to us, for she shows us that often our fears, worries and sorrows as believers are quite

misplaced due to our unbelief, ignorance and failure to remember God's word. Like Mary we can be anxious about something and there is no need to be - instead of our fears and worries being realised, they turn into a source of rich blessing and joy!

Mary stood outside the tomb crying; when she looked in, still seeking Jesus' body - tears are not to stop us seeking the things of God - she saw something she'd never expected, there were two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been. They ask her why she was crying and her sad lament is *"They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put Him."* Yes, it was a waste of tears, but the angels knew they sprang from a heart of love for her Lord. They were concerned to cause her to consider why she was crying - just because His body wasn't there as she'd expected. Would she really have been any happier if she'd found His body there and anointed it as planned?

Even the sight of angels didn't satisfy her and as she turns back around, the risen Lord Jesus was there. She is still crying and doesn't recognise Him and assumed He was the gardener. Then He asked her *"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you're looking for?"* It is not what, or whose body, but **who** are you looking for. We are to realise in our confusing sorrow that in heaven there is One who is concerned for us as an individual, as well as a group of people. In this passage we see angels, see the risen Lord Jesus and their concern is to know why she's crying! So

often our tears are misplaced and like Mary we can be anxious over things that are contrary to our fears.

Sorrow, our sorrow and grief are not to eclipse our faith. We are to see things with the eye of faith based on the word of God. If Mary had **really listened** to what the Lord Jesus had said, she would have been there on the third day to see the empty tomb and not looking for a dead body to anoint! We also need hearts and minds informed, active in faith and in the promises of God. By not knowing God's promises and viewing things in fear and not faith, we rob ourselves of many blessings and cause ourselves endless agonies of fear and sorrow. Thankfully the risen Lord doesn't leave us there and, as with Mary, He can but speak and our situations are transformed, so we see:

4. Joy.

Mary in her sorrow wants to know where the dead body of her Lord is. At that time she would have been satisfied with that! Yet the Lord Jesus had more and better for her, didn't He! Quite simply He made Himself known to her by saying her name and saying it as only He could - possibly in Aramaic "*Miriam*". Suddenly Mary's sorrow, grief and despair all evaporated, she cries out "*Rabboni*" Master/Teacher and she must've flung herself at Him and hugged Him.

Christ is often nearer His people, in our times of sorrow, than we could ever imagine and yet often we may be unaware of it. When we know He is near, what a difference

that is to our lives! Now Mary realised He was alive - at this point that was enough, but the Lord Jesus has to tell her not to cling to Him i.e. His bodily presence. He was going to be nearer to her and all believers than she could ever imagine because He was going to return/ascend to His Father and His God, but note the loud proclamation of hope - "*your Father... your God*". He was alive; yes, He had really risen from the dead, but not as Lazarus - still bound and subject to death, but as the one who had conquered death and would return, ascend to heaven in a far more glorious way than Mary's grasping hopes and arms could ever imagine. This is not just a note and experience of joy for her, but for all His disciples - now called "*brothers*". Mary was the first person to proclaim the resurrection - a role she did and the news must have confused and delighted the disciples (v18).

What a message of joy she had to proclaim. We can proclaim it with joy also - Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and has ascended to His and our Father and God. We can know this joy in our lives, even today.

Mary loved much, and so she sorrowed much, but her devotion found her seeking and finding Jesus in a way she'd not expected. We are not to be afraid to love and seek the risen Lord and do so expecting Him to draw near to us. Those who draw near to God will have Him draw near to them. May He do so and cause within us hearts that burn and rejoice at His love, life and presence.