

SET FREE!

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HE'S ALIVE!

And I'm Forgiven!

John 20:1-10 (Message Bible)

1Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was moved away from the entrance. 2She ran at once to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, breathlessly panting, "They took the Master from the tomb. We don't know where they've put him."

3Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb.

4They ran, neck and neck. The other disciple got to the tomb first, outrunning Peter.

5Stooping to look in, he saw the pieces of linen cloth lying there, but he didn't go in.

6Simon Peter arrived after him, entered the tomb, observed the linen cloths lying there, 7and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself.

8Then the other disciple, the one who had gotten there first, went into the tomb, took one look at the evidence, and believed. 9No one yet knew from the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. 10The disciples then went back home.

When we read the four gospel accounts of this event, they will vary slightly in details. Why this is so, I don't know for sure. The best explanation is the one used when the events vary in detail in other stories that are told in all four gospels.

In our time, if five people see an accident, for instance, you will have five different accounts of the same event, especially if you were to ask them some years later.

We must remember that these accounts were all written several years after the events took place. Mark was believed to be written first, in the year 55 AD or later. It was written by John Mark who was the young man that accompanied Barnabas. He likely got his information from Peter's memoirs.

Matthew and Luke were written after the year 60 and John was written at a date later than 80, some 50 years after the events took place.

You'll find that the synoptic accounts, Matthew, Mark and Luke, generally agree on such details as times, places and order of events.

John, meanwhile, goes more into the depth of the people's emotions. We need not be worried about such differences, as they in no way effect the essential message of the Gospel.

One of the differences is that in the synoptic accounts, they tell of two or more women coming to the tomb that morning. Only John tells us about Mary Magdalene.

Notice that John out ran Peter - this was likely because John was a younger man than Peter. John didn't, however, go in right away, but rather stopped to absorb the moment first. Peter on the other hand, in his typical boldness, ran straight in.

One thing that struck them both, other than the fact that Jesus wasn't there, was the way that the linen burial clothes were left. In this translation we read, is said, *7 and the kerchief used to cover his head not lying with the linen cloths but separate, neatly folded by itself.*

Another translation says, *"they were still in their folds."* the Amplified says, *"wrapped round and round."*

Back then when they prepared the body for burial, they used a kind of liquid on the cloth that hardened it, like a soft cast that they wrapped around the body.

The clothes for the body were laying where the body had been and the napkin for the head, where the head had been. They did not look as if they had been taken off. Instead, they were lying in their original folds, or wrappings. It was as if the body of Jesus had simply evaporated out of them. With the folds still in tact, it was obvious that no one had stolen

the body, because they would have unwrapped it first. In this case, the soft cast was still there, in its shape, but the body was gone out of it.

The scripture says that John saw this, took one look at the evidence, and believed. Not because he remembered what Jesus had told him or what the old Scriptures had said, but rather he believed because of what he had seen. By sight, not by faith. For us today, we believe by faith, not by sight.

John 20

11But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she knelt to look into the tomb

Mary had come back to the tomb with Peter and John. After the men had seen everything, they went home.

Now Mary was left there alone, alone to deal with the questions. Alone standing. Alone weeping. Alone mourning.

Alone and confused.

What little we know of her from the Gospels, gives us an indication that she had a very profound love for Jesus.

She is here, because the story of the Resurrection is a love story.

John, the disciple who simply and modestly called himself the "disciple that Jesus loved," was the first to believe that Jesus was alive and resurrected.

Now we have Mary Magdalene a woman whose love for Jesus was very intense. Here now, she was about to be the first to see the resurrected Jesus.

In Luke 8:2 we learn that Jesus had healed her and had driven seven demons out of her. Jesus had become her

very life, her very source of existence and her very reason for living.

Now he was gone, brutally murdered and sealed in a tomb that had been guarded by Roman soldiers.

Before she had told Peter and John to come, she had already been there early in the morning. The narrative says, "while it was still dark", which would have been somewhere during the fourth watch of the night, which occurs between 3 and 6 AM.

She likely couldn't sleep that night, waiting to go and anoint the body of Jesus. She couldn't have come the day before, as it was Saturday, the weekly Sabbath. One was forbidden by the Parasitical Laws to go that far, which was more than the allowed Sabbath journey of only 1/5th of a mile. To walk any further than that was considered to be labour, and no labour was to be carried out on the Sabbath.

Now back to her grief. It was compounded now, because she was being denied the opportunity to mourn over His body - a cherished custom of the time.

Let's go back to the narrative. Mary is kneeling to look back into the tomb. She sees something.

John 20

12and saw two angels sitting there, dressed in white, one at the head, the other at the foot of where Jesus' body had been laid. 13They said to her, "Woman, why do you weep?" "They took my Master," she said, "and I don't know where they put him." 14After she said this, she turned away and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn't recognize him.

Ordinarily a vision of angels would have thrilled someone,

and here she was talking to two of them. But Mary was too overcome with the grief of the moment to feel another emotion.

The whole scene was too much for her to bear. She turned her back on it all, her eyes so filled with tears that she could barely see.

John 20

15Jesus spoke to her, "Woman, why do you weep? Who are you looking for?" She, thinking that he was the gardener, said, "Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him."

John captures this moment with such feeling and passion, that our eyes begin to water even when we read this.

Mary's whole body was now shaking with sobs. She had been robbed of the time to privately mourn over the body and now it was missing. She then turns to this man, whom she supposes to be the gardener, and in desperation, she asks, "Mister, if you took him, tell me where you put him so I can care for him."

Notice she says "him." She doesn't mention the name Jesus, her mind is so filled with Jesus, that there wasn't any other person in the world to her but Him.

Her love and passions were so strong here, that logic was totally missing when she said, "so I can care for him." How could she expect to carry him away and even if she did, where would she take him?

With tears still pouring down her face and her body racked with sobs, it seemed that she would cry for the rest of her life. She has since turned her self back to looking at the tomb, her back to the man talking to her.

When suddenly - suddenly something happened!

John 20

*16 Jesus said, "Mary."
Turning to face him, she said in
Hebrew, "Rabboni!" meaning
"Teacher!"*

Have you ever been in a very dark room, when suddenly someone opened the door, and sunlight came flooding in? It immediately captures your attention.

It was like that here. Her whole attention, her entire focus - every fiber of her being was caught up in the word she had just heard.

What was it? What was the one word that had so powerfully caught her attention? It was the sound of her name "Mary."

Have you ever been in a crowded place, like a store or in the mall, when suddenly you heard someone call out your name? I know that I have. There have been times when my wife Marilyn has called my name in a crowded room or in a store, and it suddenly catches my attention. I know that voice, the voice of the one who loves me, the one that I love with all my heart.

**For Mary, it was like a
sudden rain on a dry and
parched land.
It was life to her.**

But what was more thrilling than to hear someone calling her in this lone and empty moment of pain was the realization of *whose* voice it was that was calling out her name.

It was that voice that she had heard so often, that voice that rang with love and laughter. It was that voice that had told her the one thing that

had changed her whole life, the voice that had said the words, "your sins are forgiven."

The realization that He was alive suddenly made all that he had told her reality. If he had remained dead, then much of what he had said would have soon lost its credibility.

But He was alive! Jesus is alive!

Today, for us, the whole Gospel hinges on this one fact, the fact that Jesus is alive. That He did in fact rise from the dead on that third day, just like he said he would.

Paul put it this way:

1 Corinthians 15

12 Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you became believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as a resurrection? 13 If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. 14 And face it--if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. 15 Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ--sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection. 16 If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. 17 And if Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. 18 It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. 19 If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. 20 But the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in

a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.

The issue had arisen in the early church as to whether the dead would or even could arise again. It was a position of the Sadducees during the earthly ministry of Jesus as well.

Paul makes a blunt statement here, that if the dead are not raised, then Jesus was not raised from the dead. And if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then our faith is pointless and we have believed and are proclaiming a false teaching.

As this version says *19 If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot, or as the KJV says, "we are of all men most miserable."*

Some were thinking, "if Jesus died for our sins and bore the punishment of death for us, wasn't that enough?"

The point could then be arrived at, that Jesus only died for his own sins.

We know that isn't true - it's obvious that He died for our sins, but would that be enough?
No, it wouldn't!

By dying, Jesus accepted our sins, but by being raised again from the dead, it meant that Father God has accepted that sacrifice.

That's what has made the resurrection so important. It means that all of the sin of mankind has been forgiven. In that one prodigious act of divine love, God our Father called down through the caverns of hell's abyss and said, "You are my Son, this day have I begotten you."

The wages of sin had been paid for, the justice served, the wrath of a Holy God

satisfied. And Jesus rose up triumphantly!

On that day, Jesus stepped forth from the grave and announced:

Revelation 1:18

I'm Alive. I died, but I came to life, and my life is now forever. See these keys in my hand? They open and lock Death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates.

Ephesians 2:5-8

5He embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! 6Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

1 Corinthians 15:20

But the truth is that Christ has been raised up

Getting back to our text in John. All of this meant for Mary, as it does for us today, that her forgiveness was secured. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, then the forgiveness of her sins would have died with him and she would have been left with that guilt.

Was it any wonder that she was crying?

But now seeing him and knowing that he was alive changed her mourning into dancing. He's alive and I'm forgiven.

John 20

17Jesus said, "Don't cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." 18Mary Magdalene went, telling the news to the disciples: "I saw the Master!" And she told them everything he said to her.

I won't expand on these verses today, however there is a statement that John did not include in his account of this Resurrection morning scene.

Mark, who likely, as we said, got his notes from Peter, did include it in his account, something that the angel said:

Mark 16:7

Now--on your way. Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You'll see him there, exactly as he said."

Tell his disciples and who? Peter.

Why would he point out Peter here? Because this too was a message of forgiveness. Peter had denied the Lord three times during the trial, and now was broken with remorse and guilt over it. Now Jesus is sending him this special message, to reassure him that Jesus did not hold it against him and that he too was forgiven.

We are not designed by God to live with guilt. The need to be forgiven lies within the spirit of every person. They may not admit it or acknowledge it, but people need to know and even feel that inner sense of peace that comes from being set free from guilt.

Many people will rush to the bedside of a dying friend or relative, begging forgiveness, before that person dies. They don't want to live any longer with that guilt.

Peter did not want to live with that guilt, but if Jesus was dead, he felt he would never receive his forgiveness.

Imagine the elation that was his when he not only heard that Jesus was alive again, but

that he had been singled out by Jesus with a personal invitation to be forgiven and to meet him in Galilee.

Today Jesus has extended that personal invitation to each of us, to revel in the joy of perpetual forgiveness to receive that cleansing from guilt and sin and to live eternally in the joy of resurrection power.

**1 Corinthians 15:20
... the truth is that Christ has been raised up**

Jesus is alive and we are forever forgiven!

What a wonderful sense of peace that comes from being set free from sin and guilt.

Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you."
Gal. 5:1 MSG

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