

The Risen Savior's Heart-Work in Mary Magdalene-1 sermonaudio.com

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Here, congregation, in a former century when the people of the United Kingdom lined the shores to try to glean a sight or a word of the results of the battle in which Wellington was fighting on their behalf, the ships appeared on the horizon and the people read through the fog and the mist the sign, the banner, "Wellington defeated," and the word of sorrow was passed around, throughout the land people wept but when the fog lifted, the full banner was read, "Wellington defeated the enemy." Well, so it is on Easter morning. On Good Friday the message seemed to be, "Jesus Christ defeated," but on Easter morning the whole banner is read, the mist is cleared away, and the message is made plain, "Jesus Christ defeated the enemy."

With God's help, we want to consider that message with you this morning from John 20:11-16, and I will read again at this time only verses 15 and 16.

15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

With God's help our theme this morning is "The Risen Savior's Heart-Work in Mary Magdalene." The risen Savior's heart-work in Mary Magdalene. We'll see that in three thoughts: first in the sorrow of her heart; second, by his revelation to her heart; and third, through the conquering of her heart. The risen Savior's heart-work in Mary Magdalene: we'll see that work in the sorrow of her heart by his revelation to her heart and through the conquering of her heart.

It was so hard for the women who loved the Lord Jesus as their only hope and Savior to join with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to embalm him, to lay him in the sepulcher. The sorrow overwhelmed them. Their Messiah was dead. That was so hard to believe, the God who saved Daniel and his three friends from the burning fiery furnace, why didn't he bring Jesus down from the cross? And yet these women missed the whole point. With all of their love and all of their sorrow, they didn't understand the eternal plan of God, they didn't see what we can see so clearly after the completion of the sacred Scriptures and our Catechism says it so simply and beautifully when it asks the question,

"Why did he have to die?" And it answers, "Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no other wise than by the death of the Son of God." But for these women, death was a great mystery. It was a stumbling stone. The cross was confusing and it seemed to crush their hope and their faith but not their love.

So early Easter morning, we see them going to the garden of Joseph while it was yet dark. Unknown to them the Son of righteousness had already risen from the dead and they're going, however, to embalm him, to seek to find some comfort somehow in a dead Jesus, to be somehow near his dead body and find that they might perform some act of service for him. Well, maybe some of you feel like that this morning. Sometimes believers also still today experience great sorrow. It seems that God is so far away, that things go so contrary to our understanding, that there are so many crosses, so many stumbling stones in our lives that we can't make sense of and sometimes we lose grip on our faith and on our hope, and yet you know that deep down you cannot lose your love. Many waters of affliction cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. So though there are times where you seem overwhelmed, times we can't see through the darkness, times we can't get beyond the fear that we are defeated and all is disastrous, times when the temptations of hell are so strong that we lose the grip of our faith and our hope, yet even in those times is it not true that we cannot lose our love, that we can still say with Simon Peter, "Thou knowest all things, Lord. Thou knowest that though I don't understand, though knowest that I love thee."

Well, Mary Magdalene went to the sepulcher with the other women early Easter morning in the same frame of mind and as she drew near to the sepulcher with the other women, they saw that the stone was removed, the great stone, and right away the thought enters into their mind that someone has stolen the body of Jesus, and Mary in particular has that thought so she runs right away, she breaks company with the other women and she goes to tell Peter and John that someone has stolen the body of Jesus. The stone is rolled away. We read in verse 2, "Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him."

Well, Mary is not aware, of course, boys and girls, that Jesus is risen and so she returns to the sepulcher and following Peter and John and when she gets back to the sepulcher it's possible that Peter and John had already left or were soon about to leave, but Mary comes back and there she stands by herself, we read in verse 11, she stands without the sepulcher weeping. Literally in the Greek, she weeps aloud and it's in a constant unrestrained sense of an unrestrained weeping. It's the term that is used with respect to those who are lamenting with howls, mourning the dead. Mary's soul is filled, you see, with heart-rending sorrow. She feels so alone in the world. She misses her stolen Savior. As if it were not enough that he died but now the enemies have stolen him away. She can't even perform her last remnant of love, her last token of bestowal of affection upon the Lord Jesus. It seems that everything is gone, everything is taken from her.

You see, Mary was one of Jesus' most wonderful disciples. She loved him perhaps as no one else loved him. She was delivered from so much. We meet Mary for the first time in

Luke 7. She lived a former life of sin. She was filled with seven devils, the Bible says, seven devils, boys and girls. She was under the power of evil. Some people thought that she was a harlot but we don't know that. Other people thought that she lived in all kinds of wretchedness. We don't know what it was, however, all we know is that Magdala, the city where she was from, was known to be a slum, a place of great immorality, and that Mary somehow participated in that, whatever form that took is irrelevant, but she was under the power of Satan in a peculiar manner. But Jesus entered her life, Jesus stopped her, Jesus convicted her of sin, Jesus snatched her from the cruel grasp of Satan as a brand from the burning. He found her lying in her own blood and he stopped her and said in the hour of his love, "Live, and again I say unto you, live." You see, Mary never would have sought after Christ herself. It was only pure grace, sovereign grace, glorious grace, and with one word Jesus cast out the devils with his word of power. So Mary is recorded on the pages of Scripture as a notable example for us that there are no hopeless cases. There is no hopeless case in this church building this morning. There is no one who has sinned too much, no one who has sinned too long, no heart too hard for the Lord to break. The whole life of Mary is a testimony that this is a faithful saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even chief sinners.

Jesus had delivered Mary from the muck of sin and so it's no wonder that she followed him wherever he went, that she became one of his most faithful and devoted disciples. She witnessed his miracles. She heard his preaching. She believed in the whole doctrine of his kingdom. She believed he was the Son of God and now this glorious King, this intimate Savior, this beautiful high priest to whom she felt grateful with her entire being, he who had the highest place in her life, he who was her life, is taken away. Now she can't even find his dead body. What sorrow fills her heart. You see, Mary was used to ministering to Jesus as well as he ministering to her. She was, tradition tells us, a rich woman from Magdala and the Bible says, Luke 8:3, that she ministered to him of her substance. She was a great support to Jesus, not just emotionally and spiritually but also financially. From a servant of sin she'd become a servant of God.

So she was the one who truly cleaved to Christ by true faith thus we're not surprised, are we, that she was among the last at his cross and among the first at his sepulcher, but now she stands alone weeping. Now she experiences what Samuel Rutherford said that missing Christ is the true Christian's most bitter ingredient to drink in his cup of sorrow. Oh, what thoughts must have run through her mind, how dear he had been to her, how much nearness they had had, how she loved his countenance, but now riddle after riddle, mystery after mystery overwhelms her.

Do you understand something of that too experientially, my friend? The sorrow. Not just the joy of finding Jesus but also the sorrow of missing Jesus? God's people know such times. They know struggles, they know agonies to try to lay hold of Christ and they cannot find him and what a sorrow that is, what a trial that is. So often we know where we have to be, we know what we have to do, we can say with that same Samuel Rutherford, "I want to be a burr that sticks to a cloth like that in my relationship with Jesus." I want to cling to him but how to cling to him, how to hold him, how to go to him in every trial. Oh, I often find that I know it so well but I can't get there, I can't cling to

him, and the devil then comes and says, doesn't he, "If you were born again, if Christ died for you, if he rose for you, you wouldn't be in such darkness like this. You wouldn't have such complaints like this. You wouldn't be so unable to lay hold of the Savior like this. You'd have more joy. You'd have more light. You'd have more answers. You'd have fewer riddles."

Oh, then we know what it means to stand without. She stood outside weeping yet she couldn't leave. She couldn't leave the sepulcher. She stood. She stood without weeping. The Greek word here for "stood" is a powerful word, it's the word of a guard, a station at a post. It's the word used for keeping vigil. She keeps vigil even when Jesus' body is missing. She just can't leave the place. Faith cannot turn back, as it were, of the Lord. She can't go back home. Her love is so great, actually her love here is shown to be superior to that of the disciples. To the grave she came before them. From the grave she went to tell them. To the grave she followed them. At the grave she remains behind them.

She stands without weeping and you know what it's like when you're very sad about something, boys and girls. You don't know what to do and you finally just try something, well, that's what this woman does. You read that at the end of verse 11, "as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre." It was like, well, kind of a desperate look, kind of a hopeless look. "Is there any possibility? Is it really empty? Is my Lord really gone? Is he really an absent Savior? How can it be?"

But surprise, as she looks, suddenly she sees two angels, one at the head and one at the feet of the body where he had lain, two angels who have come down from heaven to roll away the stone and what is remarkable here is that wherever else in the Bible you see angels visiting people, the people are very afraid but of Mary we don't read of any fear. We don't even read that she was surprised. Was it, perhaps, that she was totally absorbed with the disappearance of the body of Christ that even the appearance of angels could not take her mind off of this fear?

Well, that's possible but also it shows the ignorance of Mary. Jesus had said, "After three days I will rise again." Mary should have been weeping if she had found his body there. The empty tomb and the angels sitting within it should have brought back to her mind the words that Christ had spoken, "Oh, Mary, don't you see? He is risen. He is alive. Death is conquered. The grave has lost its sting, has lost its victory. It's turned into a resting place. Judgment and justice are satisfied. The curse of the law is buried in the grave. Guilt is paid. Mary, don't you understand everything is resolved. The Father's amen is upon all the work of his Son. Eternal life is secured. The head of Satan is bruised fatally. Mary, the Savior lives."

But Mary is blind to all this, blind to all that the prophets have spoken, blind to the words that Jesus has spoken and so the angels very lovingly, gently, with mild rebuke say to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Why in the face of this great victory, why are you weeping? Has the Lord's teaching about his resurrection been entirely in vain? Are you not troubled by your slowness to believe?" Yes, that was no doubt tucked into their question but I

think primarily their question here is to move Mary to unburden her soul. They ask her in sincerity, "Why are you weeping? Pour out your heart, tell us all."

And Mary does that in verse 13, "And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." You see, she couldn't live without Jesus. She unburdens herself. She must have him. And at that moment when she confesses her dire need, Jesus also comes as a physician. On the battlefield will first help the soldier who's wounds are the deepest, so Christ resurrected from the dead makes his first of 10 scripturally recorded revelations, appearances, to Mary Magdalene.

He comes to her who cannot do without him. He comes to the mourning soul. He comes to those who miss him. He comes to those who cannot live without him still today. And as Mary stands there, suddenly, you know how that is, boys and girls, she's got her back turned to Jesus but suddenly she feels the presence of someone and she turns around and she sees someone standing there and she says, as it were, or rather Jesus says, verse 15, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" Mary doesn't recognize Jesus. She doesn't recognize him in his glorified exalted body. She doesn't recognize him perhaps partly also because of her profound sorrow. She can hardly focus on this stranger whom she assumes is a gardener. Her eyes are holden the Bible tells us, like the men of Emmaus, that she doesn't recognize the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary experiences like Samuel Rutherford again said, "If Christ be but three days away, we often have to begin at A, B, C again." Three days ago she recognized him. Was his glorified body that different? Well, the miracle of it, the wonder of it, and her own sorrow all helped keep her eyes holden, but now for the third time she unbosoms herself. She says to the gardener, she said first to Peter and John back in verse 2 and then to the angels in verse 13, but now to Jesus in verse 15, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

Did you notice her language? Him. Him. Him. She never mentions his name. She assumes that the gardener knows. There's only one real "him" in the world and that is Jesus. It's like a young lady who's in love with a young man and she can't help but speak about him and she speaks about him often and she doesn't even mention his name. It's, well, to her he's the only young man in the whole world and so she says, "He. Him. His." She's filled with one person. So is Mary. She's filled. It's the language of love, you see. She's filled with Jesus. "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Well, that's what happens when our whole heart is caught up with Jesus. Then we can say, "Whom have I, Lord, in heaven but thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. Thou art the only one. Thou art the all and in all." Then Christ becomes everything.

Well, when Mary unbosoms her heart, the gardener, yes, the heavenly gardener who cares for each of his plantings as his own vine, pauses. There is no immediate answer to her urgent request and what a moment that must have been for Mary. The gardener seemed to have no answer as well. Peter and John had no answer. The angels seemed to

have no answer. Now the gardener has no answer. Three unbosomings of her heart and no answer and so Mary turns back from the gardener and she turns back again to face the empty sepulcher.

How do we know that? Well, we know that because verse 14 says that she turned herself to Christ and we read again in verse 16 that she turned herself to Christ. So most conservative Reformed scholars feel that she had turned her back away from Christ again. There was a pause. There was a lingering in Jesus' answer, and Jesus allowed Mary to turn back to the empty sepulcher before he spoke to her. She had lessons to learn. The old Puritan, George Hutchinson, says this, "Saints may turn their back even on a present Christ while he is not discerned."

And yet there are deeper lessons. There is deeper symbolism here. Mary must end in the grave, figuratively speaking, with all that is of self. Mary Magdalene must descend with Jesus, as it were, into the grave to die with Christ, but there in the grave the Lord no longer lays and hence all communion ceases and if communion with Christ ceases then all is cut off for her. There is nowhere else to go. There's nothing left. Darkness. Despair. So Mary feels not only that she must die with Christ but she must die without Christ. She had sought him and not found him. She must end in the grave. There's no future but the grave.

Everything is cut off and yet man's extremity is God's opportunity, and so with her back turned to Jesus, the heavenly gardener speaks but one word, the glorious word. The greater Joseph can no longer refrain himself from making himself known to his sister and so he says, "Mary. Mary." The first time he called her woman, but now it's personal, it's intimate and it's beautiful. You know, the name Mary is a compound of two Hebrew words. Mar is the word to be exalted, to be lifted up, but Yah, mar Yah, Mary's a contraction of those two words is, of course, Jehovah or Yahweh, the special name of God, and so the name Mary means exalted of the Lord, exalted of the Lord. And Jesus speaks her name, "Mary. I will exalt you. You who see nothing but grave and death and no future and sin, I have cast seven devils out of you, I will come, I will exalt you." Oh, it's a word of compassion. It's a word of sovereign grace. It's a word of priestly tenderness. It's a word of kingly power. It's a word of love. It's a word of omniscience. "I know your heart, Mary." It's a word of renewed forgiveness, a word of fresh comfort, a word full of grace. "Mary," exalted of the Lord.

Seven devils possessed her. Seven, symbolic of fullness. But now she was the first to whom Christ reveals himself. She becomes filled with super-abounding grace. It's a word of wonderful familiarity and authority pronounced by the resurrected King of kings to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth. It's a word of divine revelation, divine disclosure. Well, we often say, don't we, when God comes and visits his people, when he reveals himself to them through the lattice of his word, he brings everything with him. Well, he brings everything to Mary in this one word, "Mary." She suddenly realizes, doesn't she, that he's the surety, he's the victor, he who was dead for her is alive for her.

"Mary." Oh, from winter to summer, from Marah to Elam, her soul is exalted in a moment. Jesus had called her name so many times. "Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene." But now as exalted Lord, he just says, "Mary." Magdalene can now be buried. Magdalene, a city of sin, a city of immorality is not mentioned. It's just Mary, exalted of the Lord. Oh, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to poor sinners like us, congregation. He wipes away our sin. He exalts us through his own exaltation. He who humbleth himself shall be exalted. He appoints to them that mourn in Zion, he gives to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

"Mary." It's as if Jesus says, "Mary, I won't remind you of your past anymore. It's cast behind my back into the sea of eternal forgetfulness. I have died for you and I have been raised for your justification. Now you are just Mary. The Father is satisfied, Mary, with what I have done for you. You may yet be bothered by your past sins at various seasons of your life but I will not bother you again with them. The grave which looks so hopeless to you, your sins, Mary, are buried there." Oh, that one word, Mary. "Mary, you had wanted to take possession of a dead Savior but now the living Savior takes possession of you with but one word. Now it's not your spices, Mary, to serve me. Now it's not you serving me of your substance but now it's me, Mary, serving you with sovereign grace, Mary, from beginning to end. My suffering. My dying. My resurrection. My revelation to your soul."

It is the Lord. Mary can say with John, "It is the Lord. It is the voice of my Beloved. He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. It is the heavenly Gardener speaking to his vine." Oh, the power, the love, the faithfulness, the majesty in this one word. The scales fall from Mary's eyes. She turns to Jesus. She says, "Rabboni. Rabboni. Master. Teacher." Oh, the sheep follow him for they hear and they know his voice. Mary is conquered with one word. She recognizes Jesus. Her heart goes out to him. Sorrow is turned to joy. She experiences, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, saith the Lord, but with great mercies will I gather thee." And when she cries out, "Rabboni," her whole heart is conquered by Jesus. She who descended into the grave is found of Jesus and Jesus exalted her and conquered her and when we are conquered, Easter becomes Easter.

"Rabboni." Rabboni is a form of rabbi, rab, rabbi, rabbon, rabboni. It's an exalted form confessing "my teacher, my master, my lord." It's used only two times in the New Testament, the other time was with Bartimaeus. "Lord, Rabboni, that I might receive my sight." There translated "Lord," here it's left untranslated. "Rabboni. Master. Teacher. Lord who possesses me." And the beauty here is that it's written in a Greek form called the caritative which can literally be translated as "my dear master." It's a term of intimacy, of close fellowship. It's a term that resonates with the heart of every child of God sitting here this morning, I believe, because it means that my entire heart, my entire mind, my reason, my will, my conscience, my affections, my strength, my life, is conquered, lovingly conquered and I surrender all, Lord, to thee.

"Rabboni." It's a word of surrender. It's a word of adoration and it's a word of prayer. Oh, that thou wouldst be my Rabboni forever. It's the word of willing servitude. In the Greek the doulos, the servant who's willing to have his ear bored and attached to the master's

post, and the servant declares, "I desire to be thy servant forever. Don't give me freedom from thee, Lord. I am thy servant bound yet free, thy handmaid's son whose shackles thou hast broken." That's the confession of the soul when Easter becomes Easter and we find our life through a dying Jesus but we also find our death through a living Jesus so that we die to our own possession, we die to our own righteousness and we live unto the Lord. Here Easter becomes Easter. Mary can say, "My only comfort in life and death is that I belong not to myself but to my faithful Master Rabboni, Jesus Christ, who suffered for me and paid for all my sins with his precious blood."

So a one word revelation is responded to with a one word confession of surrender, a one word confession of adoration, a one word petition. As Lord's Day 12 puts it so beautifully, he is our chief prophet and teacher, our only high priest, our eternal King. That's what Mary experiences here. Christ becomes everything. Christ becomes the amen of all God's promises. He becomes her peace that passes all understanding. Oh, it is fulfilled for her, "Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing. Thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness. Rabboni."

Dear children of God, are you acting the part of conquered servants? Are you living your life as one who belongs to your Master? Do you realize that the large stone at the tomb of Jesus and you have many large stones, maybe special large stones at this point of your life, that large stone is but a pebble compared to the Rock of Ages within and he can break all open as the greater sense of it, for all power is given to him in heaven and on earth and perform wonders for you? Your Lord has never made one mistake for you or with you. You made 10,000 against him but he's resurrected, he calls you by name, sinner, he draws you to himself, he wipes away your sin, he throws away your bad history through his good salvation, and he lives for you, and he will never never desert you. Will you not cry out this morning in the midst of all your fear, in the midst of all your concerns, in the midst of all your stones, in the midst of all impossibilities, "Rabboni. Take my heart, take my hands, take my eyes and take my feet and let them be consecrated holy for thee. Thou art my Master."

Oh, lay down the weapons, dear believer, and come at his feet in humility, in singleness of eye by true living faith and unconditionally surrender to your Lord. Say to him, "Rabboni." But to you, my dear unconverted friend, there is both a word of encouragement and a word of warning here in our text. The word of encouragement certainly is seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, but the word of warning is if you do not surrender to this Almighty Lord, this resurrected Lord here below, you will surrender one day when it is too late, for this resurrection is a sure pledge of the future resurrection when every man, every woman, every boy, every girl, shall stand before the Lord. And to you, dear seeking souls in our midst, oh, may God grant you in the words of one old divine, to complain and fret and make haste and long and hunger for Christ and don't leave him alone until you find him. And may it be the experience of every one of us as the poet has put it, "No help in self I find, and yet have sought it well. The native treasure of my mind, is sin and death and hell. To Christ for help I fly, a friend of sinners lost. A refuge sweet and sure and high, for there is all my trust." Amen.