

John 20: 1-16; “The Living Risen Christ, Searched For and Found”,
An Easter Sunday Morning Sermon,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 23rd, 2008.

Do you believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead? In order to your becoming a Christian and really living the Christian life, you must believe that Jesus, who was “marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men,” was on the 3rd day, raised from the dead. He was raised in glory and honor and power. In Romans chapter 10, when the Apostle Paul explains the gospel, he says in verse 10 that, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” For with the heart man believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made. Have you believed in the resurrection of our blessed Lord?

The living, risen Christ reveals Himself to those whom God has chosen, at His appointed time of conversion. It is something that every seeking sinner comes to believe with his whole heart. And although it is true that God is sovereign in this matter of Christ revealing Himself to those who search for Him, it is imperative that we understand that we are to search for Him with all of our hearts. I am not simply talking about those who wish to come to know the Lord, now. I am also referring to those who may have been believers for many years. There are many times in the life of a Christian when he feels as if Christ is not with him, that Christ has left him or that he has lost Him. It is not as though Christ can be actually lost, or salvation lost, by a true believer. But the sense of His presence and blessing may have been lost. He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” and yet many people can testify that there have been times of struggle in their lives, concerning whether Christ were theirs or not, and times of struggle in their souls when they say, as the Shulamite did in The Song of Solomon 3: 1, 2, “By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. I will arise and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love. I sought him, but I did not find Him.” This is of great concern to the one who would find salvation, and it is also of great concern to the true believer who has lost his assurance of salvation, or the sense of God’s presence and blessing in his life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is important for a number of reasons, but none more important than this. A true Christian must have Christ with him to live the Christian life.

The resurrection power of Christ is that which raises us up from our death in sin, to newness of spiritual life. We, as true believers, are raised up with Christ in the regeneration of our hearts, in the new birth, and then we are given Christ’s Spirit as a gift in order that we may be taught and led into all the truth. Christ purchased this for us at the cross, but it is applied to our hearts by His resurrection power, coming to us directly from Christ Himself by means of His Spirit. This must be, and is, a personal experience of our living Lord. We will fail to enter the

Christian life, we will fail to live the Christian life without finding Him in this way. So the question is, “How should believers, as well as those who have not yet come to know Christ; search for the living risen Lord? Well, I believe that this passage gives us a number of indications of what we must do when we are serious about finding the living risen Christ.

1. The 1st is this. We must begin looking for Him even when it is dark.
(Verse 1)

It was the disciples that loved the Lord Jesus dearly, that were up early on the 1st day of the week. Mary Magdalene was up early that day. And while it was still dark, she went with Johanna, and Mary the mother of James, and some other women to the tomb. They intended to bring the spices that they had prepared. When they came to the tomb Mary saw that the stone had been rolled away. Here in this gospel, we see how John focuses his attention on the experience of Mary Magdalene alone, so that we might see how personal this experience of the risen Lord is to be to us, when we see what it was like for her. The moment that she saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb, she ran and came to Simon Peter and John and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” The text says that it was still dark when she came to the tomb. It was because she did not stay at the tomb a moment longer, that she missed the angel’s message to the other women, which must have taken place just a few minutes later. The angel said to the other women, “He is not here, for He is risen.” (Matthew 28: 6) “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” I take it that Mary missed these words that the angels spoke to the other women when she ran back, and that is why she was so concerned and so mournful about what had happened to Jesus’ body.

Mary was in the earthly darkness before the dawn when she came to the tomb that morning early, and she was in the dark spiritually as well because she did not stop to stay, and think about it, as she would later do. Instead she ran back to tell her concerns to Peter and John. This is how many of us are, both before and after we come to know the Lord. We want to find Christ, and we want to find salvation in Him, but we do not believe that He is risen; we do not understand that. And we would rather run to other people who are more spiritual than we are, spiritual leaders, to tell them that we cannot find him. We want to do something, as Mary did, to serve Christ, out of love to him, but we are looking for His dead body. We forget the things that He has said, and the promises that He has made. If Mary had stayed a little bit longer, if she would not have jumped to conclusions so quickly, and then all would have become clear to her. This is how we are ourselves. We need to go to the Bible ourselves for our answers, we need to look into the promises and meditate on them. We need to pray and seek and ask for the Lord to reveal Himself to us in and through those Scriptures. But we do not. Instead we run to church leaders, and different churches in order to get answers as to why we cannot find Christ and why we can’t even find the dead body of our Savior in our

hearts, because evil men have stolen it away! The women that stayed and listened had heard these words; "Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again?'" (Luke 24: 6, 7, and 8) And it says that they did remember His words. But Mary was not there to hear this. It was good that she was seeking her Savior, even when she was in the dark. And she would find Him a little later, but we should take note of this lesson that the Lord would have us to learn. Let us not jump to conclusions about His death and His resurrection, and how we become Christians, and how we can experience His nearness and His presence, and how we can learn to serve Him. He has many things which we must seek Him directly for. We will find Him by faith. We must wait a little longer and not rush to the conclusion that His dead body has been stolen or that we will not be able to find Him for ourselves. We must learn to trust and ponder what He has done, and what He has said while we wait. Spiritual men like pastors, or in this case Apostles, cannot give us Christ, they can't even produce the body. They do preach to us His Word. But the Living Lord must come to our souls Himself, and reveal Himself to us personally in His resurrection power, to our hearts. This He does by His Spirit through the Scriptures. "Who among you fears the Lord?" "Who obeys the voice of His Servant?" "Who walks in darkness and has no light?" "Let him trust in the Lord and rely upon His God." (Isaiah 50: 10)

Now, 2ndly- If we are serious about finding the living risen Christ, we must run to the empty tomb. (Verses 2-4)

There was a lot of running taking place on that resurrection morning. Mary ran to Peter and John to tell them that Jesus' body was missing. Their houses must have been located closely together. She ran out of love to Jesus, and she ran fearing the worst, when actually it was the best of tidings. She was running away when she should have been running toward, the tomb. But it is good to tell those in spiritual authority over us, those things that concern us most. She told Peter first, and then she went to John and told him, and as they were going together to the tomb it says in verse 3, that suddenly, they both realized that it was a great enough matter that they should run. And it says that they both ran together, and that John outran Peter and came to the tomb first. Their running in this instance shows how important, how essential it was for them to know what the truth was about Jesus' body at that time. They ran together. It is a good thing, this holy competition, to see who could get to the tomb first. John was the first one to the tomb. But Peter was the first one in. John would defer to Peter in this. When believers are investigating matters related to truth, they should always be zealous in a loving way. After all, it is the most important of considerations; whether Jesus is dead or alive. They knew that they need not let pride enter into their holy running to hinder their relationship with each other or to lead them to draw rash conclusions. But they should both strive to get to the truth as quickly as possible. Theirs was an eagerness to see and to find out, in both of them, what had

happened to the body of their Lord. The truth of what they saw stopped them and it came to them with great force, as it must us this morning as well. Jesus' body was not there as Mary had said, but what was truly amazing was that it did not look at all like He had been stolen. It looked like something much more wonderful and incredible had happened. You and I must run to the tomb as well, to look intently and see. We must not run away quickly thinking that someone had stolen His body. Better to run toward the empty tomb, rather than away from it. We have nothing to fear from what we will find there.

And this leads me to say, 3rdly, that if we are serious about finding Jesus we must be willing to draw the right conclusions, by faith. (Verses 5-10)

John, it says in verse 5, stooped down and looked in, and saw the linen cloths lying there. He saw the handkerchief, the face cloth, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Are you thinking what the disciples were thinking at that time? Are you willing to draw the right conclusions, by faith? These grave clothes that Jesus was buried in, were the linen strips that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea bound Jesus' body with after they had gained permission from Pilate. He had been stripped of his other clothes before He was crucified. Why would grave robbers want to remove them and carry away a bloody, mangled and lacerated corpse away in their arms? And there it is; plain as can be. There are the linen cloths, lying in a deflated position where Jesus had been laid, but no Jesus! And there is the handkerchief. It was not cast aside, but it was folded together in a place by itself! These were signs of order, not chaos. These were signs of a dramatic change bringing life and power, not signs of desecration and robbery. All that these disciples had to do was to walk in, and it was very evident. But they had not come there expecting this! Verse 9 says, "For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." But they had been told, you say, over and over again. Just so! But their minds and their hearts had not taken it in, and they had not been given the grace to know and to realize this in the way that they did now! John came in, following Peter it says, and he saw, and he believed. In Luke 24: 12 it says, "But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened." He had not yet seen Jesus risen, but I think he believed. Are you willing to draw the right conclusions about these things? Are you willing to look the evidence right in the face this morning and draw the right conclusion and believe? It says in verse 10, "Then the disciples went away again to their own homes." They were so amazed that they thought it would be good to go home and think about it for awhile.

4. Now lastly, if we are serious about finding the living risen Christ, we will be surprised by the power and glory of His resurrection. (Verses 11-16)

The other disciples went away again to their own homes, but it says that, "Mary stood outside by the tomb." And, it says, "...as she wept she stooped down and

looked into the tomb.” “And she saw two angels in white, sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.” Mary is in such anguish of spirit, and weeping so hard, that the angels ask her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” And she says to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” Now notice here, with me, how great is the love of Mary Magdalene for her Lord Jesus. Her love for her Lord is so great that her emotions have overcome her faith. Mary doesn’t even seem to understand that these are angels in the tomb as she stoops down to look into it. They are sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet of where the body of Jesus had lain. They are dressed in white, the emblem of perfect purity. Immediately they address her. “Woman, why are you weeping?” Mary doesn’t see the spiritual picture which I would have you to see this morning. This is the only place in the entire Bible, as Arthur Pink says, where angels are sitting. He says in his commentary, “The fact that they were sitting in the place where the body of Jesus had lain” was God’s witness unto the rest which was secured by and proceeds from the finished work of Jesus Christ. Who can doubt that the Holy Spirit would have us link up this verse with Exodus 25: 17-19?” “And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold... and you shall make two cherubims of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat.” And then in verse 25, “And there I will meet with you , and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim...”

Here, the place where Jesus lay, is the place of mercy for every mourning sinner! Here, the place where Jesus lay, is comfort for every bleeding and longing heart! Here is the place where Jesus will meet with sorrowing sinners and agonizing saints. Here is where Mary’s love is poured out in her tears when she cannot understand. Here is Mary’s faith eclipsed by her strong feelings of love for her Lord. It is because they have taken away her Lord, she thinks, and she does not know where they have laid Him. Now she turns away from these angels and sees Jesus standing there. She does not know that it is Him. She will do anything to find Him. He says to her the same thing that the angels said to her, “Woman why are you weeping?” She thinks Him a gardener. She shows the strength of her love in the statement that follows. “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” How can one woman carry the body of Jesus away? But Mary would do it, even when it seemed impossible. Jesus had cast 7 demons out of her. She could carry His body away, she thinks!

“Mary!” How can her name, spoken to her by Jesus, convey so much meaning, so much significance to us? Jesus says her name with an exclamation mark behind it. “Mary!” But this is how it is when Jesus revealed Himself to the first person, after His resurrection. He overcame all of her fears and established her faith with one word; her name. And the meaning can be just as great in your heart, as if Jesus had revealed Himself to you; as He did for Mary that morning. Look up and see that Jesus is Alive! And He is your Jesus, your Savior, and your Lord! And you shall one day see Him face to face. And He shall speak your name some

day in the Eternal State. But if we believe in Jesus and come to saving faith in Him, He has already spoken it in relation to our hearts, in relation to our salvation. We ask, "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation." And He is there!