

The Resurrection & The New Focus of Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Turn back now to the Gospel of John and to chapter number 20 and reading at verse 15. John chapter 20 at verse 15. 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. Jesus said to her Mary. She turned and said to him, Narameg Rabonai which means teacher and so on. The signposts in life are really important. Of course coming here today was for me was coming to a familiar place but if I'm coming from Stornoway to Carlaway as a visitor as a tourist then I'm dependent on signposts.

I'm dependent on road numbers to get me to my destination and when we read the Bible from the very beginning of the Bible we have signposts by God given to us through the prophets that point us to key places, to key individuals and to key events and we can summarize the Old Testament today by simply thinking of the way in which God has signposted the birth of Jesus, the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus from the very beginning of the word of God itself. And we are here today because everything converges, comes together in the very Person of Jesus Christ.

He is everything and God was saying through the Old Testament he will be everything and today we worship him on Easter Sunday because he is everything and he is everything especially with regard to God's purposes and plans to save you and to me and to save this lost world and the only way that God could do that was by sending a son to be our Savior. The only way he could do that was by raising a son from the dead and giving to us a hope that death is defeated, that sin has been overcome, that we have hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that's what the gospel is about and here we have the account of the resurrection of Jesus and we look at them today reminding yourselves that as far as God is concerned these events are of supreme importance and God wants you and me also to recognize them as important for ourselves because in them alone do we have personal salvation. And I'm looking at this passage today I want us to think of the resurrection of Jesus and the new focus of faith. I want to think first of all of the distress that we see in this passage as we read it there is distress laced through the first part of the chapter and the distress is there because of the devotion of Mary Magdalene. She loved the Lord Jesus. We read in the Gospel of Luke and in chapter number eight where Jesus going around the countryside he is healing people from their diseases, he is raising people from the dead, he is setting them free from evil spirits, he is doing a powerful work and because of that powerful work people are gathering around the Lord Jesus they recognize him to be someone special and here is Mary Magdalene and she is Mary Magdalene that we understand in Mark chapter 16 is the one from whom he had cast seven demons. It's pretty obvious why Mary Magdalene was devoted to Jesus. He had changed her life, he had transformed her, he had set her free and we read in that chapter in Luke chapter 8 we see the way in which she with other women followed Jesus and the disciples and provided for them.

Not only was she devoted to Jesus, she served Jesus, she gave herself to Jesus, she has a special relationship with Jesus and our interest today in the story of the resurrection of Jesus we play it comes because we have our own reasons for being devoted to Jesus because we can ourselves go back to moments in time when God made Jesus special to us and these moments, these times, these events will be different for all of us but because of these events Jesus is special, we are devoted to him, we want to serve Jesus and this Mary Magdalene who is devoted to Jesus we find that devotion expressed in the death of Jesus and at the cross of Jesus where we read in the earlier chapter that he was crucified between two others where we read that he said he was thirsty to fulfill what the Bible had said he has another signpost sound number 34 going on to speak about the way in which a bone of his will not be broken looking to him whom they have purged, all of these signposts here are people watching Jesus dying and in Jesus own self-consciousness he understands the signposts and all of these things are now fulfilled in him and then it is finished and when we look at verse 25 in chapter 19 we see there that there are women standing by the cross we see there that there is the mother of Jesus what a day that was for her we see there that there was mother sister Mary the wife of Clopas and we see also that standing by the cross was Mary Magdalene what a day it was for them

Good Friday the first Good Friday and the mother of Jesus is there and Mary Magdalene she is there and in the aftermath that there is Joseph of Arimathea does anybody care about Jesus on Good Friday on the cross does anybody care about him and there comes Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who was a secret disciple they came and they asked for the body of Jesus and they anointed the body of Jesus and they wrapped the body of Jesus in the linen and they laid him in the tomb and Mary could see all of that God's care through Joseph and through Nicodemus and the body of Jesus is in the tomb and here is Mary's devotion on the first day of the week where else can she go he is no longer on the cross he is no longer fulfilling his ministry around her she can no longer serve him she goes to the tomb she goes to look for his body at least if she finds his body she she can show her devotion to him but she comes there and the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty and in verse number 11 read that Mary stood weeping outside the tomb she was inconsolable it was the prison she lived most in the world wasn't where she could give expression to her love for him and there was that sense of distress and of grief and nothing was going to console Mary as she stood or sat at the tomb of Jesus they are having lost everything the pressure who was everything to her was now lost to her and imagine her confusion her hopes so much fixed in him the certainty of her salvation wasn't him her future was with them and all of that was now up in the air and it was up in the air because Jesus was gone but she failed to realize to remember the words of the Lord Jesus to his disciples the day will come when the world will rejoice because I'll be dead you shall be sorrowful that's true that's what is happening to you but the day will come when your sorrow will be taken away we read the story of others on the road to Emmaus and they are reflecting as Mary was we thought this was the person who was going to redeem Israel that whole redemption that whole salvation has been lost to them as far as they can understand in their own heads the distress perhaps today on Easter Sunday you have your own reason for shedding at here because Jesus is not where you want him to be in your life perhaps Jesus is not where he used to be in your life and you have your own tearful heart you have your own grief and your sorrow because he's not there and we read something like that to be gracious 77 has God forgotten to be gracious

[10 : 53] distress because Jesus is not where we expect him to be because Jesus doesn't fit into our understanding and our thinking and if we don't have that distress at all today then perhaps the first thing we should do is to ask God to help us to understand that it is the most distressing place to be in not to have Jesus where he should be and not to have Jesus as our Savior as the living powerful force that he is the distress secondly we want to think of the development and the development we see the first step and that is the appearance of angels look when I see angels in the Bible they tell me two things at least they have come from God and they have come with a message from God and here is Mary and she's looking into the tomb and there are these two angels in white and they are there one at where the head of Jesus was and where his feet were and just as the presence of God was found in the Old Testament in the Tabernacle and the Temple here are the representatives of God the messengers of God exactly where the body of Jesus was as if in the very first place to first marry to think of what's actually happened why would the angels be one at the head and one of the feet to focus yes on where the body of Jesus was but where the body of Jesus is no longer and as if forcing her to look at at that empty place where she expected to see Jesus then the angels ask her woman why are you weeping think about what you're doing why on earth are you in such distress it's a kind of gentle rebuke to her do you not understand what's happening here and the wonderful thing about Mary's response is that what she says shows her lasting devotion to Jesus but it is a devotion that fails to understand what has exactly happened what does she say they have taken away the Lord and I don't know where they have laid him is that what she said they have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him there is that sense in verse 13 of Jesus being harsh and with faith it cannot help but but continue to work even in the darkest moments here she is in complete distress but yet Jesus is my lord and I don't know where they have laid him they have captured her attention they have given her the opportunity to to articulate her faith and they have brought her to the place where she needs to start thinking of what has really taken place and when we follow the development they were preparing the way for Jesus himself

that's what the angels were doing that's they were messengers of God the presence of God the message from heaven preparing for Jesus that's how God works in her own lives things happen events people messages Bible texts all of these things preparing us for the presence of Jesus herself and we see the the high point of the development when she turns around and that turning around is remarkable in so many ways simply first of all because so often the Jesus that we're looking for is behind us we're looking in the wrong place we're expecting the wrong things because our knowledge our understanding is so small our faith is so small we're looking in the wrong direction and here she is here in verse number 14 having said this she turned around she recognized that there was someone behind her they're turning around and in the Old Testament is what God was telling his people to do to do God was commanding them to to turn around and come to him and here in this symbolic way that that does is that the message of the angels that persuaded her to to simply look behind her and give expression to her her grief and her sorrow she did not know that it was Jesus and so often when we hear what the reader Bibles when we hear the message of Jesus preached so often he is so close to us and yet we don't recognize it and we come to worship God seeking to to know Jesus and to to meet with Jesus and we go away troubled and Jesus was there but we didn't recognize him it's such a failing of our faith that that can happen so often to us and leave us journeying on in life in distress and the only thing that's going to change that is that Jesus takes the initiative 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 she has turned around to look at him she still does not recognize him and yes it is a theme of of the resurrection stories that that Jesus withheld as it were him being recognized for his own purposes but here she is she turns around she thinks he's the gardener she's addressing my Lord she's addressing the person that she is completely devoted to but she does not recognize that it is him and only when he mentions her name that he draws from her the devotion that she had the love that there was in her heart her faith in his name Jesus said to her Mary he mentioned her name personally yes to recognize for her to recognize who he was and also to show us was the case where

names were used certainly in the Old Testament at least the spoke of authority the spoke of possession when we name our children they are they are our children they are our boys and our girls and here is as Jesus conveying all of these things that he knows her intimately that he has authority over her and that she belongs to him and as a feature reciprocating her devotion to him they have taken away my Lord and in the way that Jesus addresses her we could justifiably say that he was saying what conveyed the message my Mary she belonged to him and that was the trigger that that was the very thing that that caused her to to awaken out of her darkness and to emerge from her darkness and come to the understanding of the importance of the resurrection of Jesus

Rabboni she recognized him teacher master Lord it's all in in in that her response to him in that that moment of that encounter there is my Lord there is my Mary there is my teacher there is my master it's all embraced in that encounter and that's how Jesus so mercifully works that he speaks to us so passionately that there may be a room full of people but when Jesus speaks to us it's as if it's just me and him it's all so passionate and that's the the hinge that changes her her whole experience to come to understand the importance of the resurrection of Jesus and to move us as it moved her from the smallness of her faith to the full maturity of faith and interestingly when we ask the question what is the smallness of faith the smallness of faith is looking to Jesus on the cross and you might say that that's great faith it is faith indeed it is faith indeed here she was she had been at the cross she had been at the tomb all her her her energy was given to following Jesus all of her hopes were in him her faith was taken up with what he had said and taken up with his death that's a wonderful beginning of faith that we look to that we look to Jesus the one who was wounded and pierced for us it's the beginning of faith but one of the things that we learn from here is that mature faith looks at Jesus on the cross and looks away to Jesus on the throne and that's what makes faith complete that's what makes my faith that's what gives me the security that belongs to my faith and at a practical level why is that the case without the resurrection of Jesus I don't know whether something better without the resurrection of Jesus I don't know that sin has been conquered whether the resurrection of Jesus I don't know that death has been conquered and I can look to Jesus on the cross dying to take away the penalty of my sin and even believing that I can be burdened with a sense of my lack of freedom and a sense of the the power of sin in my life and a sense of the the fear of death but when the picture that God has given to me in the good news of the Bible when it's complete and my faith takes it all in and I hear about Jesus walking with Mary and walking with the disciples having been raised from the dead then I know that death is defeated that the power of sin has been broken and I know that Jesus says to them in

John chapter 6 that that because I live you shall live also the development Paul says in Romans chapter 10 if you believe in your heart that if you confess with the mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead then you shall be saved and so often the lack of assurance and the insecurity that we have as the children of God is simply because we don't allow our faith to take in all of the facts about Jesus all of the truth about Jesus but the journey that he was on and the destination that he reached and the place that he now occupies the development don't let your faith stop at the cross it has to take you there but don't let your faith stop there make sure your faith takes you to the resurrection and to the freedom that that gives to you and then the newness of the resurrection it gives that the brightness of of the beauty as we see the beauty of this day it is it kind of lifts our hearts to think of the new heavens and the new earth into which Jesus will lead us at last the development and finally we can't think of the direction what does Jesus say to her what does she want to do well not surprisingly she wants to hold on to Jesus she has lost him once before and she doesn't want that to happen again and we see that from the words of Jesus in verse 17 do not cling to me she was laying hold of him she was embracing him there was that sense of of making a conscious effort to fasten herself to him in such a way as to to take him to be with her and I guess that's that's natural but as beautiful as it is and as much as it is a reflection of her devotion it is something that she has to learn that the situation has so changed and such is the development that Jesus will no longer be with her here in this world do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father to go to my brother and say to them I am ascending to my Father and your Father to my God and your God do not cling to me don't hinder me from carrying on on my journey

[27 : 00] I've said to the disciples in John chapter 16 it is to your advantage that I go away if you hold on to me here as you want to do then you lose the advantage but if you let me go and I go on these steps going to my father and your father then the advantage will all be yours and what are the advantages the advantage first of all that Jesus will send the comforter the helper the Holy Spirit to dwell with you and how's that an advantage because Jesus promised that this very helper comforter Holy Spirit will be a teacher that he will be a leader into the word into the truth of the Bible and especially that he will take the things that belong to me and show them to you in other words you have to learn to live by faith based on the words that I have spoken and not on my physical presence and as you wait on the words that I have spoken the Spirit the comforter will help you will guide you will help you to remember even and will show you things that belong to me it is to your advantage and we have that advantage today because we have this account of of Easter Sunday we have the account of the words of Jesus it's to our advantage that Jesus has gone to be in heaven and that he sits on God's throne because God by His Spirit is reminding us what Jesus said God by His Spirit is leading us into the word of God and God by His Spirit is showing us the truth about Jesus about His birth about His death about His resurrection about His ascension about His glorification about His place and throne at God's right hand and also to complete the advantage I'm going to my father and your father go and tell them

I'm going to my father and your father what does that mean it means that there is the great advantage that because Jesus has gone to be with the father his own father that he has done so in order to ensure that we go to be with his father and our own father in that eternal rest of God that's the direction for our own minds and our own hearts today let's think of everything that Jesus is saying to Mary let's receive that in our own hearts let's see the advantage of of the way in which God raised Jesus and glorified Jesus and let's go to my brothers and say to them pass the message on it's not we're not to jealously guard those in our own hearts we have to pass the message on to to all the folks around us in life and our homes and our families and our communities and our workplaces wherever we encounter others we have to pass the message on and sometimes all we need to say to them not just to look to Jesus but to remember that looking to Jesus has two elements look to Jesus on the cross and look to Jesus on the throne and then believe in these two facts and all of the signposts of the Bible and all of the promises of the word of God they will be yours and may God help us today to have that new focus for our own faith and to discover the freedom that is ours because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and go on rejoicing that there was good Friday that there is Easter Sunday and that annually as long as we're here in this world we can mark these special occasions and do so because they are significant to God and we pray also significant in our own living and our own lives here in this world may God bless his word with bow heads and prayer