

## MARY MAGDALENE

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. 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," John 20:1, 2.

John's purpose in his narrative of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only to establish the fact, but also to depict the gradual growth of faith in it among the disciples.

The two main incidents in this passage, the visit of Peter and John to the tomb and the appearance of the Lord to Mary, give the dawning of faith before sight and the rapturous faith born of sight. In the remainder of the chapter are two more instances of faith following vision, and the teaching of the whole is summed up in Christ's Words to the doubter, "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

First we see the open sepulchre and the bewildered alarm it excited. The act of resurrection took place before sunrise. "At midnight" probably the "bridegroom came." It was fitting that He who was to scatter darkness of the grave should rise while darkness covered the Earth, and that no eye should behold "how" that dead was "raised up." The earthquake and the descent of angels and the rolling away of the stone were after the tomb was empty.

John's note of the time seems somewhat earlier than that of the other Gospels, but is not so much so as to require the supposition that Mary preceded the other women. She appears alone here, because the reason for mentioning her at all is to explain how Peter and John knew of the empty tomb, and she alone had been the informant. In these eastern lands "as it began to dawn," "very early at the rising of the sun," and "while it was yet

dark," are times very near each other, and Mary may have reached the sepulchre a little before the others.

Her own words, "we know not," show that she had spoken with others who had seen the empty grave. We must therefore suppose that she had with the others come to it, seen that the sacred corpse was gone and their spices useless, exchanged hurried words of alarm and bewilderment, and then had hastened away before the appearance of the angels.

The impulse to tell the leaders of the forlorn band the news, which she thinks to be so bad, was womanly and natural. It was not hope, but wonder and sorrow that quickened her steps as she ran through the still morning to find them. Whether they were in one house or not is uncertain, but, at all events, Peter's denial had not cut him off from his brethren, and the two who were so constantly associated before, afterwards were not far apart that morning. The disciple who had stood by the cross to almost the last had an open heart, and probably an open house for the "denier." "Restore such as one, considering thyself."

Mary had seen the empty tomb, and springs to the conclusion that "they," some unknown persons, have taken away the dead body, which, with clinging love that tries to ignore death, still calls Him "the Lord." Possibly she may have thought that the resting place in Joseph's new sepulchre was only meant for temporary shelter, verse 15.

At all events, the corpse was gone and the fact suggested not hope to her. HOW OFTEN DO WE, IN LIKE MANNER, MISINTERPRET AS DARK WHAT IS REALLY PREGNANT WITH LIGHT, AND BLINDLY ATTRIBUTE TO "THEM" WHAT JESUS CHRIST HAS ACTUALLY DONE.

A tone of mind thus remote from anticipation of the great fact is a precious proof of

the historical Truth of the resurrection, for here was no soil in which hallucinations would spring, and such people would not have believed Him risen unless they had seen Him living.

The next thing we see in this scene connected with Mary, is the first appearance of the Lord, and the revelation of the new form of intercourse. Nothing had been said of Mary's return to the tomb, but how could she stay away? The disciples might go, but she lingered, woman-like, to indulge in the bitter-sweet of tears. Eyes so filled are more apt to see angels. No wonder that these calm watchers, in their garb of purity and joy, had not been seen by the two men. The laws of such appearance are not those of ordinary optics. Spiritual susceptibility and need determine who shall see angels, and who shall see but the empty tomb.

Wonder and adoration held these bright forms there. They had hovered over the cradle and stood by the shepherds at Bethlehem, but they bowed in yet more awestruck reverence at the grave, and death revealed to them a deeper depth of Divine love.

Surely that touch in her unmoved answer, as if speaking to men, is beyond the reach of art. She says, "My Lord," now, and "I know not," but otherwise repeats her former words, unmoved by any hope caught from John. "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 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," John 20:11-13. She repeated the same statement that she made to the disciples. She is unswerved in her pronouncement.

HER CLINGING LOVE NEEDED MORE THAN AN EMPTY GRAVE AND FOLDED CLOTHES AND WAITING ANGELS TO STAY ITS TEARS. Nothing would satisfy her

but the Lord Himself and so she turns indifferently and wearily away from the interruption of the question to plunge again into her sorrows. It is possible she turned herself because she saw in the angels the looks that they saw Jesus Christ suddenly appearing behind her, but her not knowing might account for her absorbing grief.

One who had looked at white-robed angels, and saw nothing extraordinary, would give but a careless glance at the approaching figure, and might well fail to recognize Him, but probably, as in the case of the two travelers to Emmaus, her "eyes were holden," and the cause of no recognition was not so much a change in Jesus Christ as an operation on her.

"And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 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," John 20:14, 15. (And she is right in a way. He hath taken Him away.)

It is noteworthy, that His voice, which was immediately to reveal Him, at first suggested nothing to her. And even His gentle gracious question, with the significant addition to the angels words, in "Whom seekest thou?" which indicated His knowledge that her tears fell for some person dear and lost, only made her think of Him as being "the gardener," and therefore probably concerned in the removal of the body. If He were so, He would be friendly, and so she ventured her pathetic petition, which does not name Jesus, so full in her mind of the One, that she thinks everybody must know whom she means, and which is overrated in her own strength in saying, "I will take Him away."

The first Words of the Lord Jesus Christ risen are still on His lips to everyone's heart. **He seeks our confidences and would have us to tell Him the occasions of our tears. He would have us recognize that all our griefs and all our desires point to the one**

**Person, Himself, as the one real Object of our seeking, whom finding, we need weep no more.** He dries all tears, He wipes away all tears. "Whom seekest thou?"

Verse 16 tells us that Mary turned herself to see Him when He next spoke, so that at the close of her first answer to Him, she must have once more resumed her gaze into the tomb, as if she despaired of the newcomer giving the help she had asked.

Who can say anything about the transcendent recognition, in which all the stooping love of the risen Lord is smelted into one word, and the burst of rapture, awe, astonishment, and devotion pours itself through the narrow channel of one other? If this narrative is the work of some anonymous author late in the second century, he is indeed a "great unknown," and has managed to imagine one of the two or three most pathetic situations in literature. Surely it is more reasonable to suppose him no obscure genius, but a well known recorder of what he had seen, and knew for fact.

Verse 16, "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." Christ's calling by name ever reveals His loving presence. **We may be sure that He knows us by name, and we should reply by the same swift cry of absolute submission** as sprang from Mary's lips, "Rabboni, Master," is the fit answer to His call of Mary. He says "Mary," and she says "Master." But Mary's exclamation was imperfect in that it expressed the resumption of no more than an old bond, and her gladness needed enlightenment. Things were not to be as they had been.

Christ's "Mary," had indeed assured her of His faithful remembrance and of her present place in His love, BUT WHEN SHE CLUNG TO HIS FEET, SHE WAS THINKING AND SEEKING TO KEEP WHAT SHE HAD TO LEARN TO GIVE UP. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ, who invited the touch which was to establish faith and banish doubt, as in Luke 24:39, John 20:27, bids her

unclasp her hands, and gently instills the ending of the blessed past by opening to her the superior joys of the begun future. **His Words contain for us all the very heart of our possible relation to Him, and teach us that we need envy none who companied with Him here.**

His ascension to the Father is the condition of our truest approach to Him. His prohibition encloses a permission. "Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended," implying "Where I am, you may." This is literally, "Stop clinging to Me," trying to prevent Him as it were from going to the Father.

The ascended Christ is still our Brother. Neither the mystery of death nor the impending mystery of dominion broke the tie. Again, the resurrection is the beginning of the ascension, and is only then rightly understood when it is considered as the first upward step to the throne. "I ascend," not "I have risen," and will soon leave you, as if the ascension only began 40 days after Mt. Olivet. It is already in progress.

Once more the ascended Christ, our Brother still, and capable of the touch of reverent love, is yet separated from us by the character, even while united to us by the fact of His filial and dependent relation to God the Father. He cannot say, "Our Father," as if standing on the common human ground. **He is "Son" as we are not, and we are "sons" through Him, and can only call God our Father because He is Christ's.**

Such were the immortal hopes and new thoughts which Mary hastened from the presence of her recovered Lord to bring to the disciples and to us. Fragrant thoughts but partially understood, they were like half-opened blossoms from the tree of life planted in the midst of that garden, to bloom unfading, and ever disclosing new beauty in believers' hearts till the end of time.

Thank you, Mary, for telling us of the empty tomb. And the departure of the Lord, and His resurrection and ascension. The ascended Gardener.