

LIFE GROUP GUIDE

The Gospel of John - Your Sorrow Will Turn To Joy

John 20:11-18



10.16.2023

SCRIPTURE:

John 20:11-18

SERMON NOTES:

On the night before Jesus died, He gathered in the Upper Room with His disciples to eat the Passover meal and celebrate the first Lord's Supper, and to give final instructions to His followers.

Despite the disciples' frequent lack of understanding, one thing they understood very clearly from Jesus' instructions was that their Teacher was leaving soon. The man they followed and committed their lives to would soon be gone. And not only gone but He will die upon the cross. This made them very sad.

But Jesus promised future joy. Listen to John 16.

20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

Notice Jesus didn't say, you will be grieved but then you will be joyful as if one comes after the other. He said your sorrow will turn into joy. Sorrow will be transformed into joy. Just like when a woman gives birth to a child. She suffers during the birthing process, but when she receives her baby, her sorrow is turned into joy. She looks back and says all that suffering was worth it to receive my child.

And that's how it will be when we see our Lord face to face. We will look back on this life of suffering and say all the suffering was worth it if it brought me here. I think about that often with my mother. From early childhood to 18 years old, she lived in a physically and verbally abusive home. At age 19, she gave birth to her first child only to watch him die the very next day. For the next 22 years, she had a good life with my father and our family, but at age 41 she was diagnosed with stage 4 brain and lung cancer. She died at 47.

From a human perspective, it sounds like a sad life, but I believe when she got to Heaven and saw Jesus face to face, all of her sorrow turned into joy. She said all of that suffering I now count as joy if it brought me here with you.

Christians, Jesus will turn your greatest sorrow in joy.

That's the message from our passage in John 20.

Last week, we looked at verses 1-10 (the empty tomb). Mary Magdalene arrived at Jesus' tomb early in the morning because she wanted to finish the burial process. When she arrived, Mary noticed that the stone had been rolled away. Presuming Jesus' body had been taken, she ran to the disciples to inform them that somebody had stolen the body of Jesus. Peter and John ran to the tomb (John arrived first) and find things just as Mary said. The stone was rolled away. Jesus' graves clothes were there, but His body was gone. The disciples, then, leave and go home. At some point, Mary must have returned. Maybe with the disciples. Maybe at a different point. Either way, it's still early Sunday morning and Mary is back at the tomb of Jesus by herself. She's sad and in distress because she believes her Lord is dead and now His body has been stolen. But Mary's sorrow will soon turn in joy.

VS 11 -- *But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.*

Mary thinks Jesus is dead. She is not expecting a resurrection. None of Jesus' disciples expected a resurrection despite the fact that He repeatedly told them He would be killed and rise from the dead.

So, why is she here? Mary is distraught. First, she was grieving the loss of her beloved teacher; now she is grieving because she believes His body has been stolen.

She's back here now because she's investigating and trying to figure out where Jesus' body is so she can give Him a proper re-burial. That's why it says, "as she wept she stooped down to look into the tomb." Earlier she assumed Jesus' body was gone because the stone was rolled away. But now she needs to see for herself.

I've been in an ancient Jewish tomb like this in Jerusalem. You really have to get in there and bend down if you're going to get a good look at it. Mary wants to see with her own two eyes that Jesus is gone.

Mary loves Jesus. She's never known a love like His. And she's never loved anyone like the Lord. I am convinced love is the mark of genuine faith. It's not just about getting your theology right. Mary's theology is wrong at this point. She doesn't believe in the resurrection. And it's not just about getting your life right. Mary is acting irrationally in her distress. Yet, we know her faith is genuine because of one crucial factor - love.

Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? I am not asking if you're a Christian or if you believe the Bible or in the Trinity or the death, burial, and resurrection. All those things are important, but here's the crux of the matter - do you love Jesus?

Mary did. That's why she's searching for Jesus. But when she looks into the tomb, she finds something else.

VS 12 -- *“And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.”*

These ancient tombs usually had a bench area for the deceased to rest. When Mary peaks her head inside, she doesn't see Jesus, but she does see two angels dressed in white. They're sitting where the body of Jesus laid—one at the head and one at the feet.

I am inclined to believe that Mary doesn't recognize them as angels, but thinks they are mere men. The reason I believe that is because 1) if she thought they were angels, she would have been stunned. In the Bible, when people see angels, it's a terrifying experience. 2) Mark's gospel says when the women approached the tomb, “they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe.” Mary sees angels disguised as men sitting in the tomb of Jesus.

What is the significance of angels in this story? Honestly, the narrative would move forward smoothly without them, but they are here for a reason. We know angels are ministers of God who perform His will. We also know that when angels appear in the Bible, they signify that God is at work.

Listen to why D.A. Carson thinks the angels are here, *“John's point is that this empty tomb cannot be explained by appealing to grave robbers; this is nothing other than the invasion of God's power.”*

Another writer says something similar. *“Although the [Gospel] accounts are not identical, the point of the [Angelic] visitors is the same. The tomb was no longer in the hands of humans; it was at that stage enveloped in the mystery of God!”*

God has raised His Son from the dead, and the angels are confirmation that this is so.

Which means, this is a moment of rejoicing, not weeping. That's why the angels say to Mary in verse 13, *“Woman, why are you weeping?”*

VS 13 -- *They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”*

This is a mild rebuke from the heavenly guests. They're not seeking information. They're saying, why are you weeping? This is a moment for rejoicing. Jesus is alive!

Does that minister to your heart this morning? If you have lost a loved one, can you hear the angels say, *“Don't weep. Jesus is alive, and that means there is hope for today.”*

But Mary still believes Jesus is dead. She answers the angels, *“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”* She’s still not expecting a resurrection. She thinks Jesus' body has been taken by the authorities or grave robbers. For all she knows, the religious leaders have taken Jesus’ body to desecrate it and throw it away in the trash heap.

All she wants is the opportunity to give Him a proper reburial.

But Mary’s attention is about to be diverted from the angels to another visitor.

VS 14 -- *Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

We really lose the power and force of this passage because of our familiarity with it. This is the first appearance of the resurrected Christ. Imagine reading this for the first time. As you read John’s gospel, you fall in love with this amazing Jesus character, but then He’s killed, and it looks like it’s all over. And now here He is standing and alive again. This is an amazing moment.

This is why the sorrow of the cross is turned into joy. Jesus is alive. And remember, it’s not just that we go from sorrow to joy. But our sorrow is turned into joy. Because Jesus is alive, His suffering is now something we rejoice in. We sing about the power and glory of the cross. God has transformed the most painful event in human history into the most joyful event in human history. If He can do that with the death of Jesus, imagine what He will do with your suffering.

Now, we have to ask this question: Why didn’t Mary recognize Jesus? Did she not get a good look at Him? Were her eyes too blurry from the tears? Was it because the last time she saw Jesus He was battered and bloody? Or did her unbelief hinder her from realizing it was Him?

Your mind is not expecting to see someone you think is dead. I remember a couple years ago, I visited a man in the hospital from our recovery ministry. He had hernia surgery, but when he went in, they found out he also had liver failure. He looked awful. I was sure he was going to die. After that I didn’t hear any more about him. I was sure he probably died. But then one day, he walked into church on Sunday morning, and I was shocked. That can’t be him! Maybe that’s why Mary doesn’t recognize Jesus. She’s not expecting Him to be alive.

Or there could be something more going on. Later in John’s gospel, and over in Luke’s account, people didn’t immediately recognize Jesus after He was raised from the dead. Some speculate it was because He was now in His resurrection body. It’s the same body, but He has been restored. He now has a glorified body.

I think Paul sheds some light on this in 1st Corinthians 15:35-49

35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies... VS 42 What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Jesus was killed and was sown (buried) in a natural body, but now He has been raised in a spiritual body. Notice, he didn't say raised as a spirit but a spiritual BODY. It's possible that Mary doesn't immediately recognize Jesus because He is in a new spiritual body.

When we die, our body will be sown (buried into the ground), and it will decay, but our spirits will go to be with the Lord in Heaven. But when the Lord Jesus returns, He will raise the dead. And just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we too will be raised from the grave, and our spirits will be reunited with our new glorified body.

What an incredible hope we have, church! Have you buried a loved one? If they're in Christ, they will be raised from the grave. Do you fear death? Don't! In Christ, you can look forward to the resurrection.

Back to our passage.

VS 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, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” in case you're thrown off by Jesus calling her “Woman” don't be. It was a term of endearment in their day. It's like Ma'am. Not “Hey woman!” Jesus is being tender with Mary. That's obvious in His line of questioning. Why are you crying? Who are you looking for? Like the angels, Jesus isn't looking for information. He's helping Mary along in her grieving process.

15b “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.” Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener. It's not a bad assumption. Jesus's tomb was in a garden; who else would be here this early on a Sunday but the caretaker? Maybe the authorities told him to take Jesus' body and carry Him away. Mary's just desperate to find her Lord. She's overwhelmed with sorrow.

But her sorrow is about to turn to joy.

VS 16 -- Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

Mary may not have immediately recognized Jesus' face, but she knew His voice. He calls her by name, and she knows, "This is not the gardener. This is my Lord!"

Do you remember in John 10, Jesus said, *"I am the Good Shepherd."* 3 *"To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."* 14 *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."*

Jesus calls Mary by her name, and she knows, "That's no stranger. That's the voice of my shepherd. This is my Lord." Jesus' sheep know His voice. I love that.

Do you know what else I love about this verse? Jesus opened Mary's eyes with His word. At first, she didn't recognize Him. But when He spoke her name, it's like the scales fell off her eyes and she knew it was Him.

Is that not the testimony of every believer? We were like Mary and didn't recognize Jesus. Mary thought he was the gardener. Maybe you thought He was a good teacher or some abstract religious figure. But then He spoke His word to your heart and your eyes were opened to His beauty and truth. We were blinded by our sin, but Jesus removed the veil and now He calls us by name.

It's not just Mary He calls by name. Jesus calls all His sheep by name. Christianity at its core is about having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We actually get to know God and God knows us and calls us by name.

In this relationship, we should cling to Christ.

VS 17 -- Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Apparently, once Mary realized that this is Jesus, she grabbed hold of Him. She probably fell to the ground and grabbed His feet (c.f. Matthew 28:9). She lost Him before. She is not losing Him again. So, she holds on to Him.

But Jesus says, don't do that. Don't cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. This is one of the most complex verses in John's gospel, and commentators are all over the place with it.

If we're going to begin to understand verse 17, we must know what the ascension is. Jesus said don't cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the father. 40 days after Jesus' resurrection, He went back to Heaven. Luke 24 records the ascension as does Acts 1. The ascension is significant because 1) Jesus is glorified. 2) He is enthroned. 3) He is crowned as King and given all authority. 4) He pours out His Spirit. 5) He establishes His Church 6) It's in His ascended state that He becomes our great high priest.

Now, how does this help us understand verse 17? Look back at what Jesus says. Do not cling to me FOR I have not yet ascended to the Father.” The usage of the word “for” implies two things. 1) You can’t cling to me now because I am not staying here like this. You can’t hold onto me physically like this anymore. 2) The second implication is this, and this is the most important one. Don’t cling to me now, but when I ascend you should cling to me. The reason Jesus gives as to why Mary should not cling to Him is because He hasn’t yet ascended, which suggests that once He ascends, we should cling to Him.

If my daughter wanted to sit on my lap, and I could say to her, “Don’t sit on my lap for I have not yet taken my keys out of my pocket” she would know that means, once daddy takes his keys out of his pocket, I can sit on his lap. He’s not telling me I can’t sit on his lap. He’s saying, not yet. Let me get into a better position and then you can sit on my lap. That’s what Jesus is saying to Mary. Don’t cling to me now. Let me ascend first, and then I want you to cling to me.

This is massively important for the church today. We can’t cling to Jesus’ feet. But we are to cling to Him by faith. He’s given us His Spirit and His Word and His Church, through these means of grace, we are to draw near to His throne and cling to our Savior.

This is the essence of the Christian life. Every day, we should be like Mary and fall on our knees so we can cling to the feet of Jesus. We Christians are needy people. Unbelievers aren’t needy. They’re self-sufficient. But we are needy people. Every day, we need His help if we’re going to have joy and peace in this world. We need His grace if we’re going to be faithful and please the Father. We need His Spirit if we are going to be fruitful and productive for His Kingdom. And to receive any of that, we have to cling to Jesus as if our lives depend on it, because they do. Jesus said, apart from me you can do nothing.

So, Mary will need to cling to Christ but not now. Right now, He has a mission for her. *“go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* This is the first time in John’s gospel that the disciples have been called brothers. Jesus called them friends and servants. But here He calls them brothers.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has forever changed God’s relationship to His people. Jews did not call God their Father. Christians are children of God and brothers with Jesus.

In fact, the language is even deeper than that. We are not only God’s children. We share the same status as Jesus. *‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’*” The relationship I have with the Father is now yours. God views you as one of His sons just as Jesus is His Son.

This is good news. It’s so good we need to share it with others.

VS 18 -- *Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.”*

Even though she didn't want to leave Him, Mary obeys Jesus and goes to tell the disciples that their Lord is alive. She spoke with Him face to face.

Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus guarantees that your greatest pain and suffering will turn into joy. When we enter into eternity, all of our hardships will have been worth it.

But what about today? How can I make it until that day? Cling to Christ. Hold onto Jesus until that great and awesome day when our Lord turns our sorrow into everlasting joy.

- **REVIEW:**
- Read John 20:11-18
- Why is Mary distraught in verse 11?
- What is the significance of angels being in the tomb in verse 12?
- Why didn't Mary recognize Jesus in verse 14?
- **REFLECT:**
 - Why does Mary recognize Jesus after he calls her name? How does this give the believer hope?
 - What does Jesus mean that Mary shouldn't cling to Him since He hasn't ascended? What does that mean for believers?
- **RESPOND:**
 - How does the story of Jesus turn our sorrow to joy both in the present and for eternity?
 - Why should this passage motivate us to tell others about the resurrection of Jesus?
- **MEDITATE:**
 - John 20:17 - *Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*
- **MEMORIZE:**
 - 1 Peter 1:8-9 - *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*
- **PRAYER:**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - Director of Technical Production - **John Hogan**
 - Ministry - **Students**
 - **Pray for our long-term families on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks

- **Pray for our mid-term sent ones on the field:**
 - Kaesi
- **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG):** Dombki Baloch in Pakistan



- **Population in country:** 129,000
- **Global population:** 129,000
- **Christian Adherent:** 0.00%
- **Evangelical:** 0.00%
- **Primary Religion:** Islam
- **Primary Language:** Balochi, Southern
- **Summary:** The Dombki Baloch are part of a much larger population of Baloch who came to their homeland in the 12th century. Their name, “Baloch,” is shrouded in controversy. Some say it means “nomad” while others claim that it is an old Persian word meaning “the cock's crest.” Their history is just as mysterious. Some have traced their origins to Nimrod, son of Cush (Noah's grandson).
- **Prayer Focus:** Pray for the Lord to thrust out his chosen workers to the Dombki Baloch. Pray for the Holy Spirit to move in Baloch hearts, preparing them to receive their king. Pray for Dombki Baloch disciples to make more disciples. Pray for the Lord to bless the Dombki Baloch with adequate rain so they can see the goodness, love and power of the true God of Heaven.
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