

# A Prized Relationship

by Ian Murray

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*Jesus' first resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene marks the beginning of a new relationship between Him and His disciples, one that comes through Calvary and the resurrection.*

**Duration:** 34:57

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, John 20:1-2, John 20:11-12, John 20:17-18, Galatians 2:20, James 1:17

**Topics:** "Faith In God", "Love For Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of valuing and utilizing our relationship with God. He mentions the story of Jacob serving seven years for the love of Rachel, highlighting the devotion and love that should be directed towards Christ. The preacher also discusses the danger of forgetting our first love for God and encourages the congregation to maintain a deep love and devotion to Him. He reminds them of the comforting words of Jesus, who taught them to pray to their heavenly Father and trust in His provision. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for a strong love for Christ and a firm faith in Him.

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## Transcript

Let us turn to the Word of God, and hear it in the Gospel of John, chapter 20, and we shall read from the first verse. 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. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together, and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed.

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again, unto their own home. 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. 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. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came, and told the disciples, that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Let us look at this passage of Scripture this morning, and particularly these closing words in the passage. We have here the record of the first resurrection appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the first word and message which he spoke after his resurrection. He appeared first unto Mary Magdalene, and unto Mary was committed the duty of carrying this glorious word to the disciples, which is reported in the 17th verse.

Go unto them, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God. The opening verses of the chapter, as you see, record for us the events of that morning as they unfolded. How this little band of women went early in the morning.

Here we are told specifically of Mary Magdalene. We know from the other Gospels that there were other women who went with her. How as they walked, they spoke of how that stone could possibly be rolled away.

How they hoped to pay this last tribute of respect to the dead body of the Saviour. Then coming to the tomb, they find it not closed, but the stone rolled aside. Mary, as we read here in John's Gospel, fled back into Jerusalem to summon the help of the disciples.

Surely enemies had been to the tomb of Christ. They have taken away my Lord, she said, and I know not where they have laid him. Then we have this graphic description of Simon Peter and John himself, no doubt the apostle who does not name himself, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

These two men rushing back with Mary or at least Mary following them, arriving at the tomb, the first not venturing to enter in, and then John enters and sees the clothes laid neatly in their respective places and we read of John that he saw and believed, but evidently not so with Simon Peter and certainly not so with Mary Magdalene. And the two men, the two apostles, turn about and return to Jerusalem and Mary Magdalene is left alone in verse 11 at the empty sepulcher. But, that is after the disciples went away again unto their own home, but Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping.

And the word weeping is expressive of the overwhelming grief and sorrow which then afflicted her. Weeping, it was unrestrained and loud sobbing. She stands there knowing not where else to go, the last place where her Lord was seen and she stands there in the profoundest grief.

And let us think for a moment what is the reason for this grief. There was a time when Mary Magdalene had sorrow of a very different kind. She came from that little village of Magdala on the coast of Galilee and the Scriptures tell us that at that period of her life before she became a Christian, not only did she walk according to the course of this world, but she was trodden down by spiritual powers of evil.

She was the one, you remember, out of whom Jesus cast seven devils. And from the time then that she came to know Christ, the one purpose of her living was to follow Him, to be His disciple. She did not wish that He should be out of her sight.

And when Jesus had last turned to go down to Jerusalem, she also went. And she was there with that little band of noble women who stood at the cross beholding the Savior's last sufferings. And she also was there when they took His body to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea on that Friday night.

And here again we find her on this Sunday morning, the first among the first who came to the tomb and coming in order that she might have some comfort and some solace, not from communion indeed with Christ, which she expected not, but at least she could do some final honor to His dead corpse. And certainly the corpse of Christ was more valuable to her than the whole world. And now when that very body has been removed, the utmost depth of her grief is the realization as it came to her then that she had no more contact and no more communion with Jesus Christ.

And what then is the feature which stands out most in Mary Magdalene? It is of course her love and her devotion to Him. It was love that led to that grief. It was love which had led her there to that tomb on this morning and love which kept her like a statue there when there seemed to be no purpose of staying.

She stood without at the sepulcher weeping. And then we have this beautiful account of how these two angels appear to her standing or appearing where the body of Jesus had lain and speaking to her these words, Woman, why weepest thou? And she, so absorbed in her grief, unable to realize that these are no enemies of Christ, how can she say when she sees such angelic messengers that they have taken away my Lord? But she makes no such reason. And then at length when she sees through her tears the very figure of Christ, again she is so absorbed in her grief that she knows not that it is Jesus.

And there is this absorbing power in true love. We weep, do we not? There in the Pentateuch that Jacob served seven years for the love which he had for Rachel and received to him but a few days. And when men and women are brought to love Christ, he receives a place in their attention which becomes supreme and the power of spiritual love is a power which ought to absorb our hearts.

It is one of the heaviest charges which God brings against His people sometimes that they have forgotten their first love, that they do not seek Him as once they did. You remember how God says through Jeremiah to the people, I remember thee, the love of thine espouses when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Speaking of the devotion of Israel in that early period of their history when they wholly followed after God and they were absorbed in devotion to Him.

It is that same kind of love and devotion to Christ which is seen here in Mary Magdalene. She loved the Savior and therefore she wept and refused to be comforted. And it is that love to the person of Christ which is here rewarded by the first resurrection appearance of Jesus.

Recognizing Him not, telling Him that if He knew where the body of Christ was, let Him make the information known and she would carry Him away. Then at once in verse 16, Jesus saith unto her, Mary,

and she saith unto Him, Rabboni, that is to say, my Master, my Lord. And she throws herself, it would seem, at His feet to hold Him and to worship Him.

We have then these words that Jesus now speaks to her. His first resurrection words. And His words fall into two parts.

In the first place, you notice that He has a personal instruction and direction to her. Touch me not. And then He has a duty which she is to perform.

She is to go to His brethren and deliver to them a message. Now, let us look firstly at the statement, the command, Touch me not. And there is at first sight some difficulty in the interpretation of these words.

Because our Lord here forbids what elsewhere He permits and indeed what else where He commands. We read in Matthew's Gospel, for example, that on the same morning when the other band of women, when Mary having become separated from them, they go back into Jerusalem. And as they went back, they met with Jesus and we read that as they met Him, they came, worshipped and held Him by the feet.

And our Lord did not forbid them. And then in the case of Thomas, you recall, not only was Thomas to touch Christ, but he was commanded to do so. Reach hither, said Jesus, thy hand and thrust it into my side.

Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands. And Thomas did so. But here with Mary Magdalene, she is specifically forbidden.

Touch me not, said Jesus. And then the reason why she is not to touch Jesus seems to increase the mystery. Because Jesus says, touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father.

That is to say, Mary's touching of Jesus must wait and must wait till He is ascended to the Father. But how can she touch Him when He is at the right hand of the majesty of God on high? How can she touch Him then and not touch Him now when He stands before her? Now, I believe that the explanation for this difficulty lies entirely in Mary Magdalene's attitude at this moment. She did not need to be assured that it was indeed the risen Christ.

She knew Him. She did not need, like Thomas, to see and to feel the wounds in His side to be persuaded it was Jesus. She did not have that need.

On the contrary, her assurance and her recognition were so complete that evidently she throws herself before Him in worship and she seems to assume that all the former enjoyment of Christ's bodily presence was once more restored to them, as in those days when they would sit with Him around the table and when John would rest his head on Christ's bosom and others would anoint his head and others His feet. And the bodily presence of Christ was the very center of their living and the joy of their lives. And now Christ was restored to them.

And what more was needed, she thought, than that Jesus should remain with them in His humanity. But no, says our Lord, touch me not, for and then He goes on with these amazing words which are to show her that the old mode of fellowship, the old means of communion with Christ, these were not to be renewed. Instead, something higher and more glorious was to be given.

He had not risen from the dead to carry with them upon earth. They must not be addicted to His bodily presence, who had risen rather because, as He says, I have not yet ascended, that is His purpose. He is to enter heaven itself in our nature as our forerunner to prepare a place for us, to be our representative and our advocate at the right hand of God and there from that presence to send upon us His Holy Spirit so that we might be the temples of the living God until at last when the days of our earthly pilgrimage are over, we might be with Him and then behold His glory.

He had more to do. He is saying to her, I am not yet finished with my work. I have to ascend and then when I ascend, you will have communion with me.

You will touch me, touch me indeed not with the earthly hand but with the bonds of faith and by my Spirit. Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended, but when I am ascended, then indeed you will have communion with me, more valuable and more precious even than that which was known in the days of my earthly ministry. I believe that that is the explanation of our Lord's words to Mary.

And before we pass from those simple words, touch me not, let us just note that these words show to us that devotion to Christ is no safeguard against error. Here was one who, as we saw, was full of passionate devotion to the person of her Saviour and yet she needs this word of correction and instruction, touch me not. It is a great mistake to think that if we do but feel love to Christ in our hearts, then that is really all that is needed.

We may be sincere in our love to Christ and yet there may be great areas of ignorance and misunderstanding in which we need the teaching of Christ and the instruction of the Word of God. And I feel and I believe in these days that love to Christ and a well-grounded faith, these two things bound together are our chief need. We might say something more also on these words touch me not, but I think that perhaps time prevents it if you look at the book which has been brought to your attention this morning by Dr. Morton Smith.

You will find there a chapter on the worship of God and in that chapter Dr. Smith indicates how where there is true spiritual worship certain things exist and when worship becomes carnal, then other things are introduced and he takes up the question that we spoke of in the Institute this week on pictures of Christ and that sort of thing. Now there is a principle here and it is in our text. Touch me not.

Do not be addicted to the bodily and the external. You who are to be my people are to know me by the Spirit. And the great protestant reformation you might say in a word was a recovery of the meaning of this word touch me not through those long dark middle ages.

What was there in the church? There was endless manufacturing of statues and pictures and images and cribs and Easter celebrations and with all these bodily representations of Christ there was deadness and death because they had forgotten these three simple words touch me not for I am not yet ascended. The reformation with the outpouring of the Spirit of God renewed to the church the knowledge that our communion with Christ is not by the visual, is not by the touch of the hand or the sight of the eye but by the power and the illumination of the Spirit of God sent down from heaven. Now finally let's just comment for a few moments on this first resurrection message.

One of the protestant reformers has this nice statement. He says sin came into the world by Eve, a woman. Yet God in mercy ordered things so that of a woman Christ was born.

To a woman Christ first appeared after he rose from the dead and a woman was the first to carry the news of his resurrection. And the news that she carried is the message that we have in verse 17. Go to my brethren and say unto them I ascend unto my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.

There are two things here that we must look at before we close. Firstly notice the title which is given here to the disciples by our Lord. Go he says, go to my brethren.

And he is here using his resurrection as the seal, as the pledge of a new relationship. He had risen from the dead not in his own name only, but in ours. And on the basis of that resurrection he would have affirmed to the disciples that this relationship exists.

Go to my brethren. Now do you recall in the Gospels where our Lord addresses the disciples as brethren? I do not think you will be able to do that because the truth is that although he spoke to them as friends, he spoke to them as little children, he spoke to them as servants, he did not give them the title of brethren. That is not how he spoke to them.

This is the first time in the Gospel record that he gives them this specific title. The title which comes so gloriously into its full exposition in the Epistles. Go to my brethren.

It is true on one occasion in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus turned about him in a great multitude of people and he said, Whosoever will do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother. But that was not using the word as a title. It was using it to show that the bonds of spiritual relationship transcend all other and those bonds require obedience to God.

But here it is a specific title. And the question then ought to be asked, why does Jesus use this word now and not before? Were the disciples in some more advanced position of grace now? On the contrary, their condition was at its lowest ebb. Had they not fled from the high priest's palace in the case of Peter, denied Jesus with oaths, were in their depths of unbelief and doubt and fear and yet it is to them at this time that Jesus says, go to my brethren.

The truth is this, that sonship, sonship, comes through Calvary and through Calvary alone. And it was therefore in the purpose of God necessary that Christ should suffer and that He should die. And that the exposition of the merits and the benefits of His death should more largely await His resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

And this is the first and the greatest of all benefits of the atonement linked only with the second about which we must now speak. But the first and the highest, we have a new relationship. We are sons of God.

Go, said Jesus, to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father and my God and your God. That is to say that Jesus' relationship to the Father is now ours. He is our Father and He is our God because Jesus, by His death and rising again, is one with His people.

And let us never forget that, my friends, in our lowest ebb of spiritual life. If we truly love Him, if we have faith in the Redeemer, our relationship stands not upon our obedience or upon what we can do or have done, but it stands upon the foundation of Christ's own obedience unto death. Therefore He says, go to my brethren and say unto them, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, says the Apostle, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself to the praise of the glory of His grace.

There is here then a new relationship and linked with this new relationship there is finally this new inheritance. The Gospels and the epistles in many, many places speak of the inheritance which belongs to the Christian. By the resurrection of Jesus Christ, says Peter, we have been begotten again unto a lively hope, to an inheritance, to a possession incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away.

The resurrection of Christ, the knowledge that He has triumphed over sin in our name, that is our pledge that there is an inheritance for us. And what is that inheritance? Well, it includes many things. It even includes, says Paul, writing to the Corinthians, the fact that the saints shall judge the world.

How sinful and how carnal for Christians to take pride in men. Why, says Paul, don't you realize that whether Paul or Apollos or the world or life or death, all things are yours and ye are Christ's. It is the vastness of the Christian's inheritance by grace.

He that spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things? And yet all these other verses which speak of the inheritance of the Christian cannot put that inheritance more comprehensively than it is put in these words. The inheritance of the Christian, as spoken of here by Jesus, is that he has God for his God and the Father for his Father. Go unto them and say unto them, and this is the message, My Father, your Father, my God and your God.

That is to say that all that is in God of his wisdom and grace and power and sufficiency, that will be mine according to my needs. He is my Father. He will be my God in life and in death.

Even when I lay in the tomb, when body and soul are separated, then he will still be my God, my Father and my God. And there is no higher basis of assurance given to us than this simple truth. When the disciples were fearful, wondering how at last they could possibly reach that kingdom of light and glory, you remember the Saviour's words to them, It is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.

That is the Father's pleasure. And when they feared that they knew so little about Heaven that it was a region to them unknown, why, said Jesus, it is my Father's house. That is how you are to think of it.

And when we say we don't know how to pray and we find prayer difficult as we do, well then, said Jesus, remember when you pray, say, Our Father, who art in Heaven. And when you are fearful and wondering how your needs will be met and what the morrow will bring, then, said Jesus, remember that your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. Know that you have God as your God and the Father as your Father and then there is nothing else that you need to know.

When one of the Scottish martyrs died on the scaffold, before he died, he stood and sang the words of Psalm 103 in the medical version, Such pity as a father has unto his children, dear, like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear. And then he was hung. One of the recorders of that event said that the spirit of James Renwick fled homewards on the words, Such pity as a father has.

We have a Father in Heaven and He is our God and Redeemer. And the application of this, my Christian friends, is that we who are God's people are to prize and to use our relationship. And if we are brethren to the Redeemer, then what obligations lie upon us that Christ should be seen in us? I knew an old Christian pastor who encouraged me a great deal in the early days of my ministry.

He was then at the very end of his own and waiting his home call. And in the last days of his life, whenever I visited him, he would always quote to me the same verse of a hymn. I think he probably didn't recall that he did this every time I went.

But I never wearied of it because it so much exemplified his uppermost concerns. And the last time I saw him, he quoted it again. The words were these, Christ Jesus hath triumphed o'er Satan and death and now praise His name, I am free.

And though to the Father's right hand He hath gone, can others see Jesus in me? When he came to that last line, tears would begin to run down his face. And though to the Father's right hand He hath gone, He hath offended to the Father and to His God and our God, but can others see Jesus in me? That is the concern and the prayer of the Christian. If we love Him, if we have come to His tomb, if we know Him in His resurrection power, then may His Spirit live in us so that others may know that we belong to Christ and that Christ is ours.

Let us pray. O God, our Father in Heaven, Thou knowest our great weakness, our need and our frailty. We pray Thee that by the grace of Thy Spirit Thou would strengthen us in the inward man.

Reveal to us more of Thyself. Teach us more deeply in Thy Word. And quicken within our hearts true love to Thy great name.

And do Thou deliver us from all our fears and unbelief. May we know by the power of Thine own arm what it is to live in Thy strength. Hear our cry and accept our praise as we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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