

The Weeping Mary at the Sepulchre

by Samuel Rutherford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking Christ and using the means to get Him, and that a right sorrow for want of Christ is accompanied with using the means to get Him.

Scripture: Psalm 24:8, Song of Solomon 5:2, Hosea 6:2, Matthew 7:7, John 20:9, Romans 12:2, Hebrews 1:14

Topics: "Seeking Christ", "Spiritual Hunger"

Description

Samuel Rutherford preaches on the importance of seeking Christ diligently, using the example of Mary Magdalene's persistent search for Jesus after His resurrection. He emphasizes the need for believers to wait on Christ, even in times of despair, and to continue seeking Him until they find Him. Rutherford highlights the significance of spiritual hunger and desire for Christ, encouraging believers to be fervent in their pursuit of Him. He also underscores the assurance that Christ belongs to His followers, even in moments of doubt or difficulty, and the importance of trusting in His salvation despite worldly challenges.

Transcript

For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and 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. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." John 20:9-13.

[Preached upon the Monday after the fast; that is, evidently the fast August 22, 1640.]

In these passages of our Lord's Word, beloved in Him, we have first set down the earthly witnesses that came to the grave to seek our Lord after He was risen from the dead. And they be of two sorts. The first sort of them are public men in a public charge, Peter and John, the Lord's disciples; and how they sought Christ, and what speed they came in seeking Him! The second sort of persons are private persons coming to seek our Lord, Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had before cast seven devils. And good reason that such think meikle [much] of our Lord, who have gotten renewed souls, or any good thing from Him. Then we have the fruit that follows the apostles' seeking of our Lord. They go their ways home again and find Him not. Again you have the fruit of this woman's seeking of Him. She will not give over her seeking Him, albeit she cannot find Him at the first. Indeed it is a blessed thing for a poor soul to wait on still at Christ's door till they get Him, albeit they should die there, waiting for Him. And in her waiting for Him, first of all

she meets with the angels. And after she was comforted of them, telling her that He was risen from the dead, and was rebuked of them for her weeping and seeking Him there, she leaves them and goes on to seek Him. And she meets with Christ Himself, and speaks to Him, but she miskens Him [mistakes him for another] as many times the children of God are speaking to Him, and He is speaking to them again, and yet they misken Him. She supposes Him to be the gardener, and speers [asks] if he had carried Him away, and where he had laid Him that she might know where He was. And then our Lord reveals Himself unto her by a short preaching that He made as our Lord. He is evermore kent [known] by His word, and when she hears Him speak she turns herself to Him, and she being willing to embrace Him she is forbidden to do it at that time. He would not have her to think so meikle [much] of her bodily presence at that time, because there is a better presence coming when He is ascended to His Father. Only she is commanded to tell the Lord's disciples of that which she had seen, and so she is made the first preacher of Christ's rising from the dead.

First: We observe one thing in the general, that concerns the estate of our Kirk at this time. Herod and Pilate, and Jew and Gentile, they have all joined themselves together at this time to do the worst they can to Christ our Lord, and yet, when they have done all that they can, they cannot mend themselves. For now they had buried Him to hold Him down, and yet for all that that mends them not. The worst that the enemies of the Kirk can do to the Kirk is to put her to death, and yet when they think they have gotten that done, it will not do their turn when all is done. For wherever our Lord's bride be, albeit she were even in the grave, she maun [must] rise again, and in a triumph over her enemies. Let our Lord and His Kirk be where they will, He and His Kirk and cause, albeit they were dead, they maun [must] live the third day again, as Christ Himself did, according to that triumphant and glorious word which He spake (Rev. i. 17, 18): "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." When John had seen His glory, and fell down dead because he was afraid thereof, He says that to him. There is news to comfort the Kirk of God, and to comfort all those who doubt whether our Lord will tyne [lose] the battle that He has against His enemies or not. No; He will make good that word that He speaks there of Himself: "I was dead, but I am alive; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." Fra [since] a dead man cannot do the turn, He will let it be seen that a living man can do it. We need not to doubt of it, but the enemies of Christ they thought that they were rid of Him now, that He would burden them no more; but it is not so for all that yet, for He shall live when all is done, for all the ill they have done to Him. And within these few years our adversaries, they thought with themselves that long or now they should have been rid of our burden, and that this gospel should [have] been clean borne down long or now. But with their leave Christ is letting us see this day that He will not have it to be so, that He will have that gospel which they thought to bear down so far, to come to some perfection again.

So is the Kirk brought in, speaking in Hosea's prophecy (vi. 2): "After two days thou wilt revive us again, and the third day we shall live." This gospel it maun [must] live, whoever they be who are against it, for the bearing down thereof, and the end of it maun be glory to Christ, and so those who are upon His side of it.

Now, to say nothing of the race that Peter and John had in going to Christ's grave, it is said the other disciple he outran Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. John is he who is called the other disciple, and he outran Peter. As it is among the children of God, all of them have not a like speed. Some of them get a sight of Christ before others ever get a sight of Him. Christ has some into His Kirk that are old and experienced with His ways, and so they run fast in the same; and He has others also, who are His children and belong to Him, who are young ones, and cannot run so fast. But whoever they be who have the life of God in them, and so are walking on towards Him, they shall, either first or last, meet with Him without

doubt.

He which came first went into the sepulchre and saw, and he believed. He might [have] believed that Christ was risen by that which he had heard, but he believed not till he saw. Many a time had the Lord said to them that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinners, and must suffer many things of them; that He must die and be buried, but the third day He shall rise again; but notwithstanding of all that He had said, John believed not till he had seen tokens that He had risen from the dead. However it be, yet this is sure, that it is good for every one to use the means that God has appointed for attaining to the knowledge of any thing. For John got this meikle [much] good by using the means at this time and coming to the grave--that he was assured that Christ was risen. Who was there ever that made a race for Christ but get some good by their seeking after Him? Seek ye and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Zacchaeus, he had a longing desire to see Christ, and because he was low of stature, and the throng was great, he ran before the multitude, and climbed up upon a tree to see Him; and ye have heard what good come of that, as there comes aye [always] good of seeking Christ rightly: He says, "Come down, Zacchaeus, this day is salvation come to thy house." He will not fail, but He will make that word good which He has spoken Himself, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." Could we be earnest in seeking our Lord--and I am sure ye know that this is a seeking time now, and never was there more need to be seeking at the hands of God--as the Lord lives, I dare to promise it in His name, if we would seek Him we should see the salvation of the Lord. And so, albeit ill news should come unto us, let us not be discouraged for the same. But let us rest upon this, and put our confidence in the same, that our Lord is 'to be found of them who seek Him; and He has given signs thereof already unto us, and will do so hitherto if we will seek unto Him.

For as yet they knew not the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead. The rest of the disciples, they believed not these Scriptures that foretold of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Can it be possible that there can be a scholar in Christ's school that has not learned his lesson that Christ taught him? Can it be that any who has heard Christ Himself make so many preachings of His resurrection, that they believe not for all that? Aye, ye may see the proof of it here. The doctrine that arises from this it is clear, that it is not the means, nor hearing Christ as a man preach out of His own mouth, that will do the turn to bring us in to God, and to make us understand things spiritual. Preaching, indeed, is God's means that He has appointed for that end, and the way that He ordains for bringing in souls to Him. But when all is done, it is not the only means of bringing us to Him. The special thing is that which is spoken by our Saviour Himself (John iii. 8), that wind that bloweth where it listeth, and no man knoweth whence it cometh or whither it goeth. We may preach unto you until our head rive [breaks] and our breasts burst; aye, we may preach unto you until doom's day, and yet that will not do the turn unless the inward calling of the Spirit be joined therewith. For an outward sound to the ear is one thing, and Christ's loosing all knots and removing all impediments another thing. Christ says Himself while He was in the flesh (John vi. 44), "No man can come unto Me unless the Father draw him." Christ is speaking in that place to them who had the outward means, and yet He says, it is no strange thing that they come not unto Him, albeit they have the means, because they lack the Father's draught to draw them to Him. The scribes they heard Christ ofttime preach, and yet for all that they consented to the slaying of the Lord of glory (1 Cor. ii. 8).

Christ is preached there both to the Jew and to the Gentile, and yet for all that to the Jew He is a stumbling-block, and to the Grecian the preaching of Christ is foolishness. We have meikle [much] for us when the Lord's word is preached to pray to Him that He would join His Spirit and His wind with His word. Ay, all means that can be used by ourselves or by others are nothing without that be joined. It is in vain for

us to rise early and to lie down late, and to eat the bread of sorrow all the day, if the Lord give not the assistance of His Spirit to the means that we use.

And again, we may learn from this that arms of men are not the thing that will save us, if so be that the Lord Himself watch not over the camp. God keeps evermore the issue and the event of all things into His own hand. And this serves to teach us not to trust in means of any sort whether it be inward or outward matters, we should not lippen [trust] in man, nor in weapons, nor any second causes whatsoever, but only in the Lord Himself, that is the only strength of His people. And so learn to overlook second causes when you look that way, and look no lower than heaven, to Him who sits there and guides and overrules all battles in the world and all things else, and will let it be seen in the end salvation, salvation, even His salvation to all them who trust in Him.

What gars [causes] that it is not said, "They believed not Christ," but they "believed not the Scriptures" concerning this point? For there is no part of Scripture so clear as the Lord Himself when He is preaching with His own blessed mouth concerning that article of the resurrection from the dead, albeit it is true the five books of Moses and other Scriptures spake also of this article.

The reason of this is to teach us that Christ and the Scriptures they have but one tongue, and they who believe not the Scriptures they believe not Christ. It is not the sound of Christ's trumpet that many who profess to be preachers blow, but a sound from themselves and from men. This tells us what is Scripture and what is no[t] Scripture. That only is Scripture and no other that agrees with the will of the Son of God, and is according to His will revealed to us in His Word. And again, that is not Scripture, and so not to be believed or practiced, which is not according to the Word of God. And so we may see that ceremonies and inventions of men they are but a dumb Bible, and a ground that none should follow for their salvation. If we have no other ground for our faith but only this, that the Pope, or the Kirk, has said such a thing, or the great learned doctors have said it, and therefore we believe it. As the poor men yonder over in the north [Aberdeenshire was at that time the stronghold of Arminianism and Prelacy], they have been deceived by believing what grave-like men spake to them, and men who gat the name of learning. That is a blind guide to follow, and will lead us in the mire. But these that are indeed the called and the elect of God, they can discover the voice of Christ from the voice of men, and they only will follow Christ's voice, and will follow no other, whatever they be.

Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. They were oversoon tired of seeking, for they might have waited on as well as the poor woman did. But God has our seeking of Christ, and all our supernatural works of that kind, into His own hand. We believe, pray, repent, seek after Christ and His Spirit, praise, hear, read aright, &c., as long as Christ holds us by the hand, but we do it no longer. A stone that is up into the air is out of its own element, and so long as it has an impediment it will stay there. But take away the impediment that holds the stone from the ground, immediately it falls to it again. Even so is it with us. When we are employed about these spiritual duties we are out of our natural element; and if the Lord take away His hand from the strongest of His children, a woman will go beyond them in doing good duties.

Thank God for any good thing that thou hast, and that thou art kept in a good estate. They never kent [knew] Christ's help well who put man in such a tutor's hand as free-will, to be kept by it; who say that Christ has conquershed [acquired] salvation to all, and when He has conquershed [acquired] it, He puts it in the hand of free-will to be disposed of as it pleases, to keep or not to keep it. This is to make Christ a fool merchant, and not to take accompt [account] whether it be misspent or not; but Christ is not so. He

knows what shall become of all whom He has bought. You know it is evermore the happiness of the weaker to depend upon the stronger. So it is the happiness of the poor soul to depend upon Christ and upon free grace. The happiness of the ship stands in that to have a good pilot; the happiness of the lost weak sheep depends on a good shepherd to seek it in again, and to keep it from the enemies thereof; the happiness of the weak, witless orphans depends in a good, wise tutor. Even so the happiness of lost and tint [perishing] souls depend on this, to lippen [trust] to Christ and His strength for their salvation, and not to such a changing tutor as their free-will is.

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping. Here is a strange thing to think on. The Lord's own disciples they ran away from seeking of Him. One of them that had said, "If all should forsake Thee, yet shall I never forsake Thee;" and yet here is a woman more forward, and more constant in seeking Christ nor [than] he is, for all his fair profession. It is not fair words and a golden profession that will take a soul to heaven, and will make us to seek Christ rightly. We are all meikle oblist [greatly indebted] to saving grace in our seeking Christ. Here is a woman more forward in seeking Christ nor [than] all His eleven disciples are. Because she get not her errand that she was seeking, she could not get Christ, and therefore she will not leave, nor give over, but will wait on and seek Him. A soul that is in love with Christ, they never get their errand till they get Christ Himself. Ye that are seeking Christ, never give over seeking till ye meet with Him, for they shall at last meet with Him who lie at His door, seeking, as this woman did, who say, "I shall lie still at Thy door, let me die there if Thou likest, and albeit it should come to that, I shall die, or I go away and meet not with Him." Ye may know the ardent desire of a soul after Christ can be satisfied with nothing but Himself.

We use to say the thing that one longs for is the thing they maun [must] have, and no other thing will satisfy them. A man that is hungry, and longing for meat, he maun have meat, and meat only, or else he is not satisfied, albeit he get some other thing. A man that is in prison and longs to be free, nothing will satisfy him but liberty. Even so it is with this woman at this time; albeit the disciples were with her, yet nothing can comfort her till she get her lovely Lord whom she was seeking. Learn that lesson of spiritual importunity, never to give over seeking of Christ when once ye have begun to it. Blessed are they that ware [spend in this manner] their time this way, in seeking Christ.

Mary stayed there weeping for want of Him, and yet looking into the grave to see if He were there. That is a good and blessed desire, and sorrow that is accompanied with doing. That is heaven's sorrow indeed that is accompanied with doing and using the means. There are two things said of Jacob (Hos. xii. 4), that he wept and wrestled in prayer with God. What is the matter of a dumb sorrow for the want of Christ? But that is a right sorrow for want of Christ that is joined with using the means to get Him. As it is in Solomon's Song iii. 3, the spouse is wanting Christ there; she uses all means to get Him again. She goes to the watchmen, and says to them, "Watchmen, saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" She goes round about the city, and to the daughters of Jerusalem, and charges them. That proves her sorrow to be a right sorrow for the want of Christ. And ye know what sort of tears the Scripture says Christ had (Heb. v. 7). He shed tears while He was in His flesh, and withal He offered up prayers and strong cries to Him who was able to save Him, and was heard in that He feared. And that is the grief and sorrow that will only hold the feet when men are sorrowful for want of Christ, and withal use the means to get Him; and not only has a mere wish for Christ, and will not want a morning nor a night's sleep to meet with Him. That sorrow that is so is but a vain sorrow, and will do no good. What followed upon this?

She saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. What needs this guard to be here now when the Lord is risen from the dead? They stay here to

be witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and to preach the same to this woman and to the disciples. And Matthew, he has a circumstance of this preaching of the angels that John has not. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Why are ye papists, to seek Christ at the holy grave now when He is risen? You may see that the work of man's redemption it is a very glorious and a very honourable work, for the angels in all the parts thereof are appointed to attend Christ and to wait. When He is born they maun [must] speak to Joseph and His mother to flee for His safety, they foretell His birth, when they are to return with Him again they tell them, and when He was in the garden the angels are appointed to wait upon Him, to dight [wipe] the bloody sweat off His face. And now, when He is in the grave, they are set to be a guard to His blessed and glorious body, and to preach of His resurrection. When He shall come again at the last day to judge the quick and the dead, He shall come with innumerable multitudes of angels--to let us see that the work of our salvation it is a very honourable work; and the angels they wait well upon it, and upon us. Even like a loving brother, who has his brother lying sick: O but he will run many errands for him in the time of his sickness, and will make all the house ado [stirred up] to get him well and at ease. Even so do the angels to us. They run many errands for us, and O but they are glad of our welfare; and (Heb. i. 10) it is said the angels are ministering spirits for the good of the heirs of salvation. Count ye little or meikle [much] of your salvation as ye will, yet it is the angels' great task that they are employed about. They are appointed to wait on Christ, when is about the working thereof, both in His birth, in His agony, in His burial, in His ascending to heaven, and shall attend Him in His coming again to judge the quick and the dead. The Lord has them sent out to all the airts [quarters, or parts] of the world to bring in His elect ones. Woe to ye who think little of salvation, fra [since] the Lord employs such honourable messengers about the same. Alas! the work of our salvation is little thought upon by many. Twenty--a hundred thoughts will come in men's heads from morn to night, and scarce have we one thought of this great work at any time. And what think ye shall become of them who are so careless of the work of the salvation of mankind whereof the angels are so careful?

Thir [these] witnesses, they were clad in white. The angels, they have not our common country clothes, but they are like heaven in their apparel; to teach all those who are looking to be heirs of heaven to be clad like their country. The angels, they are clad with glory and with majesty, and therefore a sight of them will make a sinner to fall to the ground dead. If we think to be heirs of God in Christ, let us not be like the rest of the corrupt world. The apostle, he has a word for this (Rom. xii. 2): "Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed in the spirit of your mind." When ye are drunkards, and swearers, and break the Lord's day, as the rest of the world does, that proves you to be of the world, and not to have your affections up above. If ye would prove yourselves to be heirs of heaven, strive to be like your father, and like your country, and wear the livery of the house which is holiness; "Holiness becomes Thy house, O Lord." Mind the things that are above.

And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? This would seem to be a needless question to propose to her, for she might [have] said, "I have tint [lost] my Saviour; who can blame me to weep? Who can reprove me for it, seeing I want my Lord? But there is something in this question that is unseen, that is the reason wherefore they ask it, and this is it: "Your salvation is now finished, and the devils are cast out of you, and so what gars [makes] you weep now?" Our Lord would tell us by this, that oftentimes we weep when we have cause to rejoice. She should have said, "This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will be glad and rejoice in it." "This is a day when a decree [the final sentence of a judge] is passed in heaven in your favours, that the lost seed of Adam is redeemed; and thou also art in the decree of redemption among the rest, therefore thou should not weep." O that we could learn to accommodate our affections, and all that is in us, to God; to weep when He weeps, and to rejoice when He rejoices. And when our Lord

is without in the fields, it is not time for us then to laugh, and to rejoice, and to be feasting. It is a time matter for mourning, now when our Lord is out into the fields, and when His armies are out, and are in scarcity. And yet we trust that our Lord is keeping a day for us of this land, wherein we shall say, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it."

Whom seekest thou? This question is speered [asked] at her to make her hunger to be the greater, for the greatest hunger that any has for Christ they may, aye [always], be more hungry for Him. And so learn to rap out [quickly to throw out] all your desires and affections for Christ, not only love Him, but be sick of love for Him. That is more than ordinary love to be like to die for love of Him. And so all your desires and longing for Christ, strive to make them more, ay, till you come to that which the spouse has; "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, tell Him that I am sick of love. I charge you, as ye will answer to God, that ye tell Christ I am sick of love for want of Him," and till ye come to heaven to sing songs of Him eternally.

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." This is her apology that she uses for justifying of herself in her weeping, "Why may not I weep, who once had Christ, and now I want Him?" That is a sorrow that may be avowed before God and before the world, to be sorrowful for the want of Christ. There are some who are sorrowful, and it is a shame to hear of it, the cause thereof not being good. Sorrow for want of my bairns [children], for want of my husband; sorrow for the loss of something of the world, or giving out something for Christ, &c.; that is a shameful sorrow that cannot be avowed. But that is an honest sorrow that comes from the want of Christ. Look that ye ware [spend] all your affections that way as ye may avow them, and avow the cause of them before God and man. That is a sorrow that may be avowed that a soul has for want of Christ.

What is the matter and cause of her sorrow?

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." "He is out of my sight, and yet He is my Lord for all that; He is dead, and yet He is my Lord; for that she says, "They have taken Him away, and know not where they have laid Him," is as meikle [much] as if she doubted yet of His resurrection. And a little after she says to Christ Himself, supposing Him to be the gardener, "Sir, if thou hast borne Him away, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." "I will think Him a sweet burden to come upon my back for all the pounds weight of spices that are about Him."

The doctrine is clear. To the children of God, lost Christ is their Christ when all is done. In Cant. v. the Lord's party, the Kirk of Christ, is there sleeping in her bed, and Christ, her husband, standing at the outside of the door knocking, and she says, "I slept, but my heart waked; it is the voice of my beloved." Thy beloved, and, yet for all that, He is out of thy sight. Let the believer's Christ be where He will, yet He is theirs. If they were in hell and He up in heaven, the believer will say, "He is my Christ, albeit Christ should cast me off, and not count me to be His, yet He is mine." So does David's word as the type, and Christ's word as the antitype, testify, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He is a forsaking Lord, and yet He is their Lord when all is done. Ay, the believer will say, "He is my Lord, albeit He forsake me, and I will come to Him." Then true faith when it has the back at the wall will claim to Christ, and count Him to belong to them. And that is a very good mark of faith, that when one is setting Christ a speering [asking] on all airts [quarters], and cannot get Him for no seeking [notwithstanding seeking], yet to count Him to be their Christ. This is the thing that the devil would fain be in hands with, to make you to doubt that He is your Christ or your Lord. This was the temptation wherewith he assaulted Christ our Lord. "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple," &c. All that the devil would be at in his

temptations is to make us doubt that Christ is ours. But never give it over when all is done, but evermore take Christ for thine.

And, oh, that this land would believe this now, that He is our God, and the God of this land. Then suppose that our armies were put to the worst*** that are now out into the fields-as we trust in God it shall not be--but albeit it should be so, I say, yet seeing He is Scotland's Lord, if so be that we will wait upon Him, and trust in Him and in His salvation, it shall be found that it is not a vain thing to do so, but that He shall grant us His salvation who trust in Him. And to this Lord, &c.

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