

“I Have Seen the Lord!”

March 31, 2024

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When I say, “Christ has risen!” you say, “Christ has risen, indeed!”

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Ah, I feel like I've been holding my breath since Friday! I want to read a passage of Scripture that tells this story. John, the apostle, is the eyewitness. He tells it from the perspective of Mary Magdalene.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him.”

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don't know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus.

“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”

Thinking he was a gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me. Tell me where you've put him, and I will get him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have yet to return to my Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

Mary of Magdala went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

May God bless the reading of His Word.

Some amazing things happen on Easter Sundays. God does some amazing work. And as I told the children, as I promised the children, I'm going to begin with a story I think they will enjoy, and I think you will enjoy as well. But before I tell the story, I have to set the stage. There are certain things you have to understand, to understand the story. Number one, when I was 12 years old, I had an unusual pet. His name was Jack. And Jack was a 25-pound turkey. Yes, I had a turkey for a pet. And Jack, the turkey, loved me. If I was in the yard, Jack followed me around like a puppy dog. If I sat in a chair, he

would roost on the back of the chair (and you had made sure he was turned the right direction!) And every morning when he got off of the roost, he would run and stand on the carport until I went out there and petted him (which really excited my parents, because he left little presents for them.) And after I would pet him, he would go do turkey stuff. We lived at the back of a three-acre field. The driveway was about a quarter of a mile long. When the school bus would turn off of the highway and start down our road, wherever Jack was, he would run to the front door. He would greet me at the front door, and he would walk me to the school bus. And if the bus driver didn't close the door fast enough, Jack would get on the bus. Now, Jack loved me. But the truth of the matter is, Jack just loved people more than he loved other turkeys. All right, that's the first thing you need to know.

The second thing you need to know is: directly across from our home was a little, very small, Hard Shell Baptist Church. Now how many of you have ever heard the term "Hard Shell Baptists" before? It was a very, very small church. It was made out of blocks. It had a metal roof. They had no indoor plumbing at all, no air conditioning. They did have electric heaters. They also didn't believe in any type of instruments in the service. No instruments. They sang all of their songs a cappella. The result of that is those good people developed some very good voices. And they were strong singers, and we could hear them from our house at times. But the reason they were called Hard Shell is that they believed in absolute predestination. They believed if you were supposed to be at their church, you would come; and if you weren't supposed to be there, you wouldn't come. We lived in the same house for over fifty years, and we were never invited to a single event at that church. Did I say they were a small group? All right, that's the next thing you need to know.

The last thing that will make this story mean something is the little church that we actually attended. It was a Southern Baptist church. The pastor we had at that time believed in sunrise services on Easter. I don't mean early in the morning; I mean sunrise services. He would begin before sunrise; the sun would come up during the service; and we would end after sunrise. He also believed in having the sunrise service in the church cemetery. I want to tell you something: When you're leaning up against Uncle Josh's tombstone, "Up from the grave He arose" takes on a different meaning. My dad, bless his heart, believed that if you weren't thirty minutes early, you were late. Now remember, we're starting before sunrise. So, we left before early. And when Jack got up, he went to his post on the carport, but there was no sign of life. There were no lights on. There were no sounds. And he waited and he waited and he waited, and I didn't come out. But then he heard them singing at the little church, and Jack decided to investigate. And Jack went up that quarter-mile driveway, crossed the highway, went up an embankment, went up the steps of the church, and just as they finished singing the song, started gobbling and walking right down the center aisle. And then he would not leave, because he liked people. They ran him out and closed the door, but every time the preacher started to preach, he would start to gobble loudly. And they had to completely run him back to our house to have the service. Now I don't know if Jack got saved that morning, but I know he was predestined to be there. And I hope he got saved, because he didn't last long after that!

Some amazing things happen on Easter, and as we look at this story with open hearts and open minds, I pray that God will give you eyes that see and ears that hear, and something amazing will happen in your life this morning. Mary Magdalene is the main character here besides Jesus Christ. Now, Magdalene is not her last name. Mary was

from the town of Magdala. Therefore, she is called Mary Magdalene. Tradition says that Mary was a prostitute, and that Jesus delivered her from that life. But I want to tell you that that is not in Scripture; that is tradition. Scripture just tells us that Mary had led a life of sin, and that Jesus forgave her of her many sins. And because she was forgiven of many sins, she loved much. There was no one that loved Jesus more than Mary Magdalene. When he died, her world was destroyed. When he died, she was the last at the cross, and she was one of the few who actually saw him taken down and where he was buried. No one loved Jesus more than Mary. Jesus died somewhere around three o'clock, Friday afternoon. The Jewish Sabbath begins at six. It was forbidden for the Jewish people to enter a cemetery on the Sabbath. But when she could go, as soon as it was legal, if you will, for her to be there, she was at the tomb of Jesus. The Greek says it was the last watch of the night, somewhere between three in the morning and six in the morning. Mary went to the tomb to express her love and her devotion. You see, the Jewish people believed that the spirit of a dead person hovered around the body, seeking re-entrance for three days after they died. And it was important that they see and hear their loved ones during that time and know that they were loved and appreciated. And as soon as Mary could go, she went to express her love and devotion. And much to her horror, when she arrived at the tomb, the very large stone had been rolled away. The only thing that would have been going through her mind is: What could have happened to the body of Jesus? Did His enemies steal it to inflict further indignities? Or did grave robbers come and get him? She ran and told the disciples, who ran back to the tomb. They found the tomb just as Mary had said, but as they began to look more closely, things didn't add up. If it was his enemies or grave robbers, why are the clothes still here? And as they examined further, what they found was that the wrappings, (they wrapped the body in linens with spices), the wrappings were still there. And not only were they still there, they were still in their folds, as if the body of Jesus had just evaporated from inside and they had collapsed to the floor. And then there was the napkin that was over Jesus' face. Somebody had folded it up and laid it off to the side. Things just didn't add up. Did I mention that the Jewish people believed that the spirit of a dead person stayed around the body for three days? Okay. They did not wrap the face in case the spirit re-entered the body and the guy needed to call out. They just placed a napkin over it.

Time for a commercial: This is a Jewish custom. This is a clue. The resurrected Christ, the living Savior, left them a clue. If you are eating at a Jewish home and you finish your meal, you wad your napkin up and you put it in the plate. But if you have to leave the table before you're done, you fold the napkin up neatly. You put it beside your place, and that says, "I'll be right back. I'll be right back." The guys leave but Mary stays at the tomb, even though Jesus is not there, and she cries and she cries and she cries. And then she sees two angels who say, "Woman, why are you crying?" And she says, "They've taken my Lord, and I don't know where they've put him." And then Jesus comes up behind her and she sees him, but she doesn't recognize him. (I don't know why she didn't recognize him. I had a conversation with a guy for fifteen minutes one time. He said, "You know, you act like you know me." And I said, "I should. I've been your pastor for seven years!") For whatever reason, she didn't recognize him. And I see humor in this. He's behind her, and he goes, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" And one of the most beautiful sentences in all of Scripture is her reply. It's nothing but pure love responding. Presuming he was the caretaker or the gardener, she says, "Sir, if you have moved him, tell me where you have put him, and I will go get him." What is a single woman going to do with a dead man? Where is she going to put him? You see, love doesn't care. "You tell me where he's at, and I'll go get him." And

her love and her devotion were rewarded with one word. And with that one word came absolute recognition. He spoke her name, "Mary." And she turned around and said, "Teacher." And she grabbed him, and she loved him, and she hugged and hugged him until he said, "Okay, okay, stop! Now, go tell my guys what you've heard and seen." And she went and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Her great love was rewarded by being the first person to see the resurrected Christ.

Her love and devotion were rewarded. Yours will be, too. Your love and devotion to Jesus Christ will be rewarded with many such recognitions. If you have been a Christian for a while, how often have you looked back at your life and seen the hand of God at work, seen Christ alive and well and at work in your life? How often does that happen? Your life will be rewarded with many such surprises and recognitions through the years. I ask you this morning; I turn Mary's observation into a question: Have you seen the Lord lately? Have you seen Him at work in your life? God has gone to great lengths to express His love for us. God has gone to great lengths to get His family back, of which you are a part. All kinds of things can keep us from seeing Christ. But I pray this morning that you will get a glimpse of the risen Lord, alive and at work in your life, that it will make a difference, that you will experience the power of the resurrection. Amazing things happen on Easter because of Easter. I wish you could have seen the kids' faces during the Children's Moment, when I said, "Without Easter, there'd be no Christmas." That got their attention. But without Easter, there would be no New Testament as we know it. Without Easter, there would be no Christians. Without Easter, there would be no Christian church. Without Easter, we would not be here. That is the power of the resurrection. And I want you to experience that power for yourself. Know that He is alive.

Christ has risen! **Christ has risen indeed!**

Christ has risen! **Christ has risen indeed!**

Christ has risen! **Christ has risen indeed!**

Amen, and let us pray.

Gracious God, we serve a risen Savior, and we pray, God, that today that will be a reality for us, that we would feel and see and experience the living Christ, alive and well in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.