

December 17th, 2017
 THE DAY THAT DEATH DIED
 John 20:1-18

John begins our text this morning as do the other three gospels¹ pointing to the fact that the resurrection of Jesus Christ took place (v.1) “on the first day of the week.” They don’t point out that this is three days later in fulfillment of Scripture, although it’s implied, but they all take pains to bring our attention to this first day of the week. This is significant. Consider for a moment the origin of the 7 day week. There is no naturalistic explanation for it. But not so with our other measurements. Our year is based on how long it takes the earth to travel around the sun. Our month is based on the waxing and waning of the moon cycles. Our day is based the rotation of the earth. But there is nothing in nature that explains the 7 day week. In fact the non-christian 1911 version of the Encyclopedia Britannica surprisingly says this: “Those who reject the [Scriptural explanation²] will be at a loss, as . . . to assign [the week] to an origin having much semblance of probability.”³

Where does the week come from? Pure Divine fiat. God created everything in six days. It was on this sixth day that man was created—His Divine image bearer—and the crown of His creation. However the pinnacle of the creation week is not man, but God. That is why God created the seventh day. **Genesis 2:1** says “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. [2] And on the seventh day *God finished his work that he had done*, and he rested on the seventh day from *all his work that he had done*. [3] So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it *God rested from all his work that he had done* in creation.” Three times Moses stresses that God finished all his work that he had done. And then God rested. Why? It wasn’t because He was tired.

¹ Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1

² original: “Mosaic recital”

³http://books.google.com/books?id=r3syvcP9UmlC&pg=PA988&lpg=PA988&dq=Encyclopedia+Britannica+Those+who+reject+the+Mosaic+recital+will+be+at+a+loss,+as+.+.+.+to+assign+it+to+an+origin+having+much+semblance+of+probability.&source=bl&ots=-PMS21wKi8&sig=Ily_wb_IUXDw8-shQMhmsG1BEMA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=TgkvVMXQAszcoATAhLACw&ved=0CByQ6AEwAA#

The Infinite never gets tired. **Psalm 121:4** “Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” No God created the seventh day in order to behold His great glory in everything that He had made. The seventh day was created so that we could put our hands over our mouths and say “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory,” (**Psalm 115:3**) That’s the very definition of rest and refreshment—the tasting and seeing of God’s glory. Nothing is better than this: not sex, not food, not wealth, not fame, not a great job or a great family. Because all those things were created in the first six days. All of those things are mere lenses to see through to the fountain of all joy itself, namely the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The seventh day exists to remind us of that—that we are not ultimate, but that God is.

Under the old covenant, Israel was to rest on the seventh day to commemorate God’s glory in creation—we see this in the 4th commandment (**Exodus 20:8-11**). But under the new covenant something cataclysmic has taken place that has surpassed creation and thus has forever altered our 7 day week. This *something* is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The day that death died. This is why the church meets on the first day of the week as opposed to the seventh.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a greater display of glory than creation itself, and in fact is the greatest display of glory that God ever has or ever will accomplish. **First**, because in the resurrection Jesus Christ was vindicated. That is, He was shown to be the sinless Son of God. The Puritan Thomas Boston said “If he had remained in the grave, it had been reasonable to believe him only an ordinary person.”⁴ But death could not hold Christ, because Jesus was no ordinary person. **Acts 2:24** “God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” **Secondly**, because only in the resurrection of Jesus Christ are God’s people justified. **Romans 4:25** says He “...was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” You have no righteousness to stand before a holy

⁴ cited from Mark Jones’ *Knowing Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), pg. 161

God if Jesus didn't rise from the dead. This is why John Knox called the resurrection "The chief article of our faith."⁵ This is not to undermine what Jesus accomplished on the cross. The resurrection assumes that Jesus died. If He didn't die, He doesn't need to be raised. But it is to say that if all that Jesus *did* was die on the cross, nobody could be saved. **1 Corinthians 15:17** "... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

It is those two things *mainly*—the vindication of the Son of God and the justification of sinners—that explain the 7 day week. And nothing else does. In other words the answer to the question "Why do we have the seven day week?" is *the gospel*. God fashioned the week to point to His greatest glory—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In our passage today, the main *human* character that we are going to see is Mary Magdalene. And she in so many ways is going to represent the church. She is inconsolable. She is hysterical. The body of the Lord is missing and she doesn't know where it is. She suffered from unbelief. She loved the Lord dearly but she didn't believe what He said about His resurrection. He said in **Luke 9:22** "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on *the third day be raised*." She didn't believe Jesus would be raised. None of the disciples did. You too often suffer from this same kind of unbelief. You love the Lord Jesus but you doubt what His kind heart has promised. For some this has made you inconsolable or hysterical like Mary because your grief has chased away all memory of faith. Like what Frodo said to Sam when all seemed lost as they stood before the fiery mountain and the great eye hunted them down like prey.

"No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me. I am naked in the dark, Sam, and there is nothing, no veil between me and the wheel of fire. I can see it with my waking eyes, and all else fades."⁶

⁵ *ibid*, pg. 162

⁶ Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/frodo> accessed December 16, 2017

And that is when Jesus arrives on the scene in our story. Not when His people show themselves to be strong enough or brave enough or obedient enough to follow Him. But when they have lost all hope; when they have been swallowed up in unbelief; when they are naked in the dark. He then appears in His glorious resurrected body and says one word “Mary.” And everything changes forever. Beloved, Jesus Christ Himself calling your name through His Word this morning. “Loved one. All is well. Today is the day that death has died forever.”

The Big Idea...

The day that Jesus rose from the dead is the day that death died forever, so hope in Him and you too will be raised up

- ☆ The Fact of the Resurrection
- ☆ The Felicity of the Resurrection

I. The Fact of the Resurrection

The discrepancies between John and the Synoptics

Let's consider v.1 “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.” When it comes to harmonizing John's account with the other gospels, it is very difficult. I spent a good deal of the week attempting to do so. The other gospels report that multiple people were with Mary (John reports her by herself); and that it wasn't dark like John reports in v.1, but that “the sun had risen” (**Mark 16:2**). Additionally, Mary runs back to tell Peter and John in v.2 “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him,” not mentioning any angels. Yet the other gospels record that angels were there and told Mary and the others Jesus had risen

(**Luke 24:6**) and instructed them to tell the disciples.⁷ Luke mentions that Peter returned to the tomb, but John mentions that it was Peter and “the one whom Jesus loved,” —namely the apostle John himself.

At the end of the day I agree with scholar D.A. Carson who said “It is quite uncertain how this report is to be reconciled with those in the Synoptics.”⁸ There are multiple possible scenarios and explanations for some of these differences. Perhaps there were two groups that went to the tomb—Mary by herself when it was still dark, and then the others joined her at dawn. Perhaps there were two appearances of angels—one after Mary left to tell the disciples; and the other when she returned. The problem is never what we don’t know, the problem is always what we do know. As Mark Twain once said: “It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.”⁹ The uncertainty of the exact details does not alter the undeniable fact that the tomb was empty.¹⁰

On Mary Magdalene

Now Mary traveled to the tomb while it was still dark, exposing herself to danger by lurking criminals and grave robbers. She did so in order to embalm Jesus’ body with spices (**Luke 24:1**). But that’s only the surface reason. She dearly loved Christ. It was Jesus that cast seven demons out of her (**Luke 8:2**). She loved Him more than her own safety and comfort. Oh believer do you long for Christ like this? She had never forgot, like so many Christians do today, the great deliverance that Jesus wrought for her. It wasn’t the disciples who were at the tomb, it was this woman whose very life was Jesus of Nazareth.

⁷ Mark’s gospel says they didn’t say anything—Mark 16:8

⁸ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 635

⁹ Source: www.brainyquote.com/quotes/mark_twain_153875 accessed December 16, 2017

¹⁰ Calvin said “In short, we ought to believe that the doctrine of Scripture is so full and complete in every respect that whatever is defective in our faith ought justly to be attributed to ignorance of the Scriptures.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 253

When she saw that the stone had been removed (v.1), the stone that had been sealed with a Roman seal and guarded by Roman soldiers (**Matt. 27:62ff**) she ran back to report this to Peter and John (v.2)

On Peter and John

Up to this point the disciples were all hiding away like cowards. Looking ahead to v.19, it says “the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews.” **Mark 16:9** says that they were mourning and weeping. How could they even call themselves men any longer? Shame and betrayal were now the scarlet letters they wore, and they saw no way of ever blotting them out. In their eyes, it was not only the end of a revolution with the death of Jesus, but they had just experienced, collectively, the greatest failures of their lives. No other sin that they ever committed could be compared to their abandoning their best friend and Rabbi Jesus in his most desperate hour.

And this explains their response when Mary shows up with the news. They run as fast as they can to the tomb (v.3) “Maybe there is still hope” they think to themselves, but too afraid to say it out loud. John, being younger of the two beats Peter to the tomb (v.4) And then we read in v.5 “And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. [6] Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, [7] and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.”

The evidence of the resurrection

One of the helpful principles of interpretation is to ask yourself “What is being emphasized in this particular passage?” Here in v.5-7 we see John our author taking pains to emphasize these linen cloths—three times mentioned. The body was gone but the cloths remained. Now neither a friend nor an enemy would have done this.¹¹ No friend would have stripped Jesus of his burial

¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 251

cloths and taken his body, and no enemy or grave robber would have left the valuable linen and spices behind.

Two more things to note here. **First**, Jesus did not need any help removing these cloths. If you remember the account of Jesus raising Lazarus' **John 11**, Jesus told those around him to "Unbind him, and let him go" (v.44). The resurrected Christ did not receive any help, but passed right through His grave cloths.¹² And therefore **secondly**, the stone being rolled away from the tomb, was not for Jesus' sake, so that somehow He could escape. In v.19 Jesus is going to come into the very room where the disciples were hiding though all the doors were locked. No the stone was rolled away so that Peter and John could enter and see for themselves that Jesus had risen.

John is carefully offering evidence for the most important article of our faith. And he does so by admitting his guilt and ignorance. Before this point John did not believe, though Jesus had repeatedly prophesied his resurrection (**Matthew 12:38-40; John 2:18-22; etc**) But now in v.8 we read "Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first [John], also went in, and he saw and *believed*;" What did he believe? He believed, that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead.¹³

And this fact is the hinge upon which all of humanity's eternity turns. Those who deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be saved. This is not my private truth. There is no such thing as *private truth*. Nobody says foolish things like "Oh that gravity thing—that's just your truth." This truth of the resurrection shapes the calendar of the world. Every Sunday is an invincible

¹² "As a whole...the resurrection accounts provide a certain tension. On the one hand, Jesus' resurrection body can be touched and handled (v.27; Lk. 24:39), bears the marks of the wounds inflicted on Jesus' pre-death body (Jn. 20:20, 25, 27), and not only cooks fish (21:9) but eats it (Lk. 24:41-43). On the other hand, Jesus' resurrection body apparently rose through the grave clothes (Jn. 20:6-8), appears in a locked room (vv. 19-26), and is sometimes not (at least initially) recognized. The closet we are likely to come to an explanation is 1 Cor. 15:35ff." D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 641

¹³ Every so-called theory against the resurrection: the swoon theory, the hallucination theory, the wrong tomb theory, the theory that Jesus was never buried, the theory that the disciples stole the body—all point to one crucial fact that the enemies of Christianity have to admit: Jesus' body was never found. Because He has risen.

reminder that Jesus rose from the dead. Every Sunday is an invincible reminder that one day all people will rise from the dead, and the great separation of all mankind will take place.¹⁴ Jesus said in John 5:28-29 “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” When Jesus rose from the dead, He turned every graveyard into a resurrection field. The difference between those who are raised to life and those who are raised death is what you do with the resurrection of Christ. **Romans 10:9** says “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and *believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead*, you will be saved.” As C.S. Lewis once said “...strictly speaking [this] is the only thing worth a moment’s consideration.”¹⁵

¹⁴ “...consider first of all that there are but two kings in this world, each having a kingdom: the kingdoms of Christ and of the devil, which are mortal enemies to each other. A third kingdom does not exist. Every person upon earth is either a subject of the King of Jesus or of the devil, the prince of darkness. No matter who you are individually, you are truly a subject of one of these two kingdoms. You are neither neutral nor a subject of both kingdoms simultaneously. Therefore, to which kingdom do you presently belong?” Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 56

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Over and again in the gospels, our Lord constantly sets only two paths before us: You are either wheat or you are a tare (Matthew 13:24-30), you are either a sheep or you are a goat (Matthew 24:31-46), you are either a child of God or you are of your father the devil (John 8:42-44), you are either a branch that bears fruit or one that is thrown into the fire (John 15:1-2), you either belong to the church or you belong to the synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9). On that Great and Final Day, King Jesus will separate these two kingdoms *forever*. Bringing the one into everlasting, ever increasing glory with Him, and sending the other to unending destruction in the lake of fire. That is ultimate reality. And there is no other. If you have not been united to Christ by a lively faith, you belong to the kingdom of darkness.

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (New York, NY.,: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1960), pg. 155

II. The Felicity of the Resurrection

The weeping unbelief of Mary

Look at v.10-11 “Then the disciples went back to their homes. [11] But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.” Peter and John had run to the tomb, probably not Mary. The question is, why *was* Mary weeping? The angels and Jesus are going to ask here the same question. That she couldn’t find Jesus’ body is the surface answer to her grief. **The deeper answer is that she did not believe what Jesus had said about his resurrection.** Jesus’ predictions about His resurrection were common knowledge. Even the enemies of Christ remembered, which is why the chief priests asked for the tomb to be sealed. They said to Pilate in **Matthew 27:63** “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Everybody remembered, nobody believed. That is why she wept. She didn’t count Him faithful who promised.

Dear congregation this is the cause of *nearly*¹⁶ all your grief. Much of your grief is caused by unbelief. And this unbelief calls into question all of God’s attributes.

Unbelief says God is not **omnipresent**—that He is not present to save.

Unbelief says God is not **infinite**—that He can’t satisfy your deepest longings.

Unbelief says God is not **eternal**—because by saying “God must act now” you are imprisoning Him to the invention of time.

Unbelief says God is not **immutable**—that He is a flighty and fickle God.

Unbelief says God is not **all-wise**—because it imagines you have a better plan.

Unbeliefs says God is not **omnipotent**—that He needs help to accomplish his purposes.

¹⁶ I say nearly because there are many things that grieve the faithful that aren’t the result of unbelief—the death of a loved one, the betrayal of a friend, etc. These events can cause much grief. Yet even in these gut-wrenching circumstances, we can be given over to excessive grief if we don’t let the promises of Christ temper our affections. Even with those worst of all circumstances, we are not to “grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). The promises of Christ ultimately allow us to be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10).

Unbelief says God is not **holy**—because He is not worthy of your trust.
 Unbelief says God is not **just**—because it declares His plan is wrong
 Unbelief says God is not **good**—because it accuses Him of not working all things your for your joy in Him
 Unbelief says that God is not **truth**—because it says that His promises are lies

That's why Mary was weeping. She wept because she didn't believe His promise. Beloved have you forgotten the promises of Christ? Is not He who promised faithful? Has He not sealed all His promises to you in His own blood? Are you more righteous than He? If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, will not He the Holy God perform what He has promised to you His children? (Matt. 7:11)¹⁷

The angels rebuke her

This grief that Mary had was so excessive, that she was not shocked when she saw the angels in the tomb. Her desperation crowded out any fear or wonder she should of had in the presence of these angelic beings. Picking up halfway through v.11 "...as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. [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. [13] They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"¹⁸ Now this was a gentle rebuke. When Jesus was on the road to Emmaus with those two disciples, He called them "foolish...slow of heart" (**Luke 24:25**) because they didn't believe that Jesus had rose from the

¹⁷ The LORD says of all that have been united to Him by a lively faith: **Psalm 89:34** "No, I will not break my covenant; I will not take back a single word I said." This is the NLT, but I believe it is a faithful rendering. The ESV says "I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips." And the context of this verse is God's promise to never remove His steadfast love to all that belong to the covenant (cf. v.29-33)

¹⁸ "The question of the angels, *why are you crying?*, is not designed to elicit information. It is a gentle reproof: by this time Mary should not have been crying. Her response shows she has still not transcended the explanation to which she had earlier gravitated (v.2)." D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 640

dead. Now Mary repeats the answer she gave to Peter and John in v.13 “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

Jesus appears!

Look at v.14 “Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.” The identity of Jesus was hidden from her at this point, but not His presence. He says to her in v.15 “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Here are the resurrected Jesus’ first words that John records. And they are filled with a Divine mixture of correction and compassion. Underneath these questions Jesus is asking a deeper question: “What kind of Savior were you expecting? One that doesn’t keep His promises? One that abandons His people?” But Mary is too far gone. Too deep in unbelief for her to drink in the hope that Jesus is offering. Continuing in v.15 “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.”

Effectual calling

And then she hears one word that instantly changed everything. Jesus says in v.16 “Mary.” Anyone who has been born again has heard something similar. I don’t mean with your physical ears, I mean that inward heart call that comes from the chief Shepherd. “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name...and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (**John 10:3-4**) Mary in an instant hears her Pastor’s voice. v.16 “She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).” Dear congregation this is a picture of effectual calling. The only reason why anyone ever believes the gospel is because the Holy Spirit of God calls them by name, and overcomes all their rebellion, and irresistibly draws them to love and embrace Jesus Christ. This precedes faith, *because* it causes faith. This doctrine seems always to be out of vogue in the modern world. The modern world likes the idea of a god whom they can control, a god whom rewards them based on their own merit, or their

own free will. The modern world loves a gospel in which they can contribute to their own salvation. But in this lively picture of Mary we see that unless Jesus calls you by name, personally, you will never see Him. She was blind to the Savior standing right in front of her, until Jesus opened her eyes with His call. And therefore the cry of your heart should be as the Puritan Robert Rollock has said “Lord, love me, that I may love thee; Lord, know me, that I may know thee.”¹⁹

“Don’t cling to Me”

After Mary called out Rabboni or Teacher, it appears that she immediately clung to Him. The reason being is because Jesus says in **v.17** “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father;” D.A. Carson says “this verse belongs to a handful of the most difficult passages in the New Testament.”²⁰ One reason is because there are some immediate seemingly conflicting reports. In at least three other post resurrection appearances Jesus had no issue with His disciples touching Him and in fact at times invited it. He says in **Luke 24:39** “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” In **Matthew 28:9** we read that the women who saw Him “came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.” And then in **John 20:27**, He tells Thomas “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

So then why did Jesus say for Mary not to cling to Him? I’ll give you what I think it means, and you can test the Scripture for yourself. When Jesus says “Do not cling to me,” I don’t think He is talking about a mere physical embrace. That seems certain because of the other three post-resurrection

¹⁹ Source: [http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Rollock,%20Robert/Selected%20Works%20of%20Robert%20Rollock%20\(vol.1\).pdf](http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Rollock,%20Robert/Selected%20Works%20of%20Robert%20Rollock%20(vol.1).pdf) Accessed December 16, 2017

²⁰ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 641-642

appearances in which physical embrace explicitly happened.²¹ I believe what Jesus is saying is “Don’t cling to me *like that*.” I believe Mary was clinging to Jesus in *worldly way*, meaning she was depending too much on His physical bodily presence.²² And Jesus read her heart. Holding onto Jesus was not the issue. The issue was where her heart was. She was treating Jesus like He was her own “jealously guarded private dream-come-true.”²³ ‘Mary, don’t cling to me like that, *for* I haven’t left yet’ — (“for I have not yet ascended to the Father”).

“Go to my brothers”

I think this idea is supported by what Jesus tells her to do. Picking halfway up through v.17 “but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” So the connection seems to imply “Mary I’m not your own personal private Jesus, go and tell my brothers about me.” Now three things to pick up on here.

First, Jesus tells Mary “go to my *brothers*.” This is a turning point in John. Up till now the most intimate name Jesus called the disciples was friends (**John 15:15**²⁴) But here Jesus calls them *brothers*. What is significant about **brothers**? They have the same Father. The first thing that Jesus wants His disciples to know is that they are now His *brothers*. After all they did to Him! After they abandoned Him, after Peter temporarily apostatized, after His best friends showed themselves as unfriendly and cowardly as they could be, Jesus says “go to my brothers.” Dear believer, Jesus wants you to know that you are His brother, His sister. **Romans 8:15** “For you did not receive the spirit of

²¹ I don’t believe that between this statement to Mary, and when He allows the others to touch Him that He ascended to Heaven and then back again. I believe the ascension that He is speaking about in this verse is 40 days from now.

²² Just as Peter and John didn’t understand that the resurrection must take place (**v.9**), so Mary didn’t understand what was going to follow His resurrection, namely His ascension.

²³ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 644

²⁴ “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends,”

slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” You have the shared privileges of Sonship with Jesus Himself. That’s why Jesus uses those pronouns “*my* Father and *your* Father” Not because you have held up your end of the bargain. You haven’t. But Jesus held up His end. Jesus doesn’t look to what you you have merited, He looks to what He has merited, from His resurrection—and He gives it to you freely.

Secondly, Jesus tells Mary to say to them, ‘I am *ascending*.’ We know Jesus didn’t officially ascend for another 40 days (**Acts 1:3**). And Jesus is going to appear three more times in John’s gospel alone.²⁵ So what does He mean? I believe His is preparing them for His departure. He doesn’t want them to get the idea that things are going back to the way they were. What follows resurrection is ascension, and He is in the process of leaving.²⁶

Thirdly, Jesus tells Mary to tell them ‘I am ascending *to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God*.’ Now why is this inclusion important? Because Jesus wants them to know that He is not ascending for His own private end, but that ultimately His departure is for their happiness.²⁷ Jesus is confirming what He already told us in **John 14:3** “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” Beloved, this present world order is not your final home. Your everlasting destiny is to be with Jesus is. He is with your Father and your God right now preparing a place for you.

That’s the news that Mary brought home from the tomb. **v.18** says “Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.” She went to the tomb weeping, and she

²⁵ John 20:19; 20:26; 21:1

²⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 645

²⁷ Additionally Jesus said in John 16:7 “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

came away rejoicing. Everything changed the day that Jesus rose from the dead. This was the day that death died.

Application

Our Doctrine and our Delight: Jesus was raised for our justification

After Peter and John saw the empty tomb, and the grave clothes left behind, John *then* believed, v. 9 immediately says “**for** as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he *must* rise from the dead.” John only at that moment believed in the resurrection, because he and all the other disciples did not yet understand that Jesus *had* to rise from the dead. John is making a logical argument here. He said Jesus “*must* rise from the dead.” It couldn’t have happened any other way. And I believe that this is a huge deficiency in the gospel that is so often shared. I know that I share in this deficiency. Dear congregation, “the resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reported in the book of Acts.”²⁸ After Jesus ascended to Heaven, and commissioned the disciples to preach, what did they preach? The resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, there is no good news. That’s why Paul says in 1 **Corinthians 15:14** that if Christ didn’t rise, then preaching is in vain, and our faith is in vain.

I want to focus on two main reasons for this. The **first reason** Jesus had to rise from the dead was in order to vindicate His own righteousness. When Jesus went to the cross, He was damned. He was cursed. He was at that moment the most vile object in the universe because all our sins rested upon Him, and He was punished for it. As one Puritan said, Jesus was the greatest sinner *by imputation*. If Jesus didn’t rise, that would be the standing charge against the obedient Son of God. But that would be the greatest lie ever conceived. Jesus rose from the dead to be vindicated. This is why 1 **Timothy 3:16** says “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was

²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (New York, NY.: Macmillian Publishing Co., 1960), pg. 143

manifested in the flesh [that's His incarnation]; vindicated by the Spirit [that's His resurrection]."

The **second reason** Jesus had to rise from the death was so that we could be justified. So many true born again Christians live in defeat on a regular basis because they miss what justification is. What is justification? It is double imputation. Double imputation means that "God attributes your sins and guilt to Christ while he attributes Christ's righteousness and innocence to you."²⁹ Most people understand that first part. Jesus died on the cross for my sin. So all my sins are taken away.

It's the second part of double imputation that we don't often get. God attributes Christ's righteousness and innocence to you. Oh to get this is to be the freest human being on the planet. Your righteousness is wholly *passive*. Passive means "not acting." Your righteousness comes entirely from Jesus Christ acting and obeying on your behalf. Burn that phrase into your heart—*passive righteousness*. That's what Luther called it. Passive righteousness. You already believe your punishment is passive. You believe that Jesus was punished for you so that you don't have to be punished. You weren't the actor in your punishment. Jesus was. You were passive. Won't you believe that your righteousness is passive too?

One author puts it like this: "If your spiritual bank account was overdrawn 30 billion dollars and Jesus paid off all your creditors by taking your sins on his shoulders, you would have no debt whatsoever. Tremendous...But God does one better: now that your financial situation has been brought to a zero bottom line, your heavenly Father deposits into your account all the money in the world by taking the perfect, sinless life of greatness that Jesus lived, and credits it to your account. This money will never run out, nor will it suffer risk in the market or in an economic recession: your account is eternally full of all the righteousness you ever need. You don't have to look any longer for ways to earn

²⁹ R.W. Glenn, *Crucifying Morality: The Gospel of the Beattitudes*, (Wapwallopen, PA.,: Shepherd Press, 2013), pg. 63

credits with God because your bank account is already filled to overflowing with the perfectly righteous life of your Savior, Jesus Christ.”³⁰

That is the double imputation of justification.³¹ And this justification was established when Jesus rose from the dead. **Romans 4:25** says that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses *and* raised for our justification.” The resurrection proved that God was fully satisfied with the payment that Jesus offered for the sins of His people. His resurrection proved that the final penny has been paid. His resurrection proved that He was obedient in everything the Father commanded. And therefore, that all of your passive righteous has been fully and completely earned. That is why the resurrection was necessary.

Our Duty: Believe what Christ has promised

The main fault of Peter, John and Mary in this passage was their unbelief. They loved Jesus, but they didn’t trust what He said or what the Scriptures said. So our duty is to believe what Christ has promised.

Dear unbeliever, consider what your unbelief says. You are calling God a liar. “Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son” (1 **John 5:10**) Belief is not this kind of nonsense that you hear about in pop culture, where you have this inner sincerity, or this inner passion, or this inner confidence in yourself. No one has faith by having faith in their faith or by trusting in the strength of their faith, but by looking to Christ. Looking to Christ is faith.³² Jesus has promised that if you look to Him, hope in Him, surrender to Him, depend upon Him, that you will never be put to shamed. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (**John 5:24**)

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ WSC Q. 33. What is justification? A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

³² Joel Beeke *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006) pg. 394

Dear believer, Jesus has made you His brother, His sister. He has made His Father, your Father, and His God, your God. If you want to really honor Christ, if you want to really do something great, if you really want to please Jesus, then simply trust Him. The Puritan Robert Rollock said “Thou honourest thy God in believing and depending on his promise, for thou canst not do him greater honor than to believe his promise.”³³ How do you really please God? How will God smile upon your face? By trusting His promise. By trusting that the day Jesus rose from the dead, is the day that death died. So that you can say with the Apostle: “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (**Romans 8:34**)

³³ Source: [http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Rollock,%20Robert/Selected%20Works%20of%20Robert%20Rollock%20\(vol.1\).pdf](http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Rollock,%20Robert/Selected%20Works%20of%20Robert%20Rollock%20(vol.1).pdf) accessed December 17, 2017