

Darkness Defeated

John 20:1-18

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is great to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, welcome. We're glad that you would join us this Easter morning, and if you've been with us, we are taking a break from our series in the book of Daniel, so we're not going to continue with that this morning. Don't worry, we'll come back to it next week, so you have that to look forward to. But this morning, we're going to look at a resurrection passage taken out of John chapter 20. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to John 20. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs, and we project the passage on the screen. You can follow along there. And if you came here this morning and you don't own a Bible, or maybe you do have a Bible, but you don't know where it is, it's tucked away in some closet, or you just moved and you can't find the box that it's in, just take that Bible in the chair this morning. It is yours. We would love for you to have it. It is our gift to you.

But we're looking at this passage in John 20, which is focusing on the resurrection, because after all, this is Easter. It is good for us to focus our attention at least one day a year, though really we turn to the resurrection each and every Sunday, but one day of the year to focus a little bit extra attention on the resurrection, because the resurrection is historical. It actually happened. It's true. Jesus is bodily risen, and it is central to our faith. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, when he is giving a defense for the resurrection of Jesus, as well as the fact that we who trust in Jesus will one day be resurrected with Him, he says this, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins." So what the Apostle Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 15 is that if Jesus is still in the tomb, if His body is still in the grave, if He is not raised, then we have no hope. You should just go ahead and get up, leave here this morning, and never return. Go eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

But don't leave, at least not yet. Because the truth is that Jesus is miraculously and bodily resurrected. The tomb is empty. He lives! And He is risen again, and He dwells at the right hand of the Father, and one day He will return, and He will take all of us to dwell with Him forever. That is the hope of the resurrection. And so, that's why we gather. That's why we gather, not just this morning, but why we gather every Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. And so, let's go ahead and read John 20, beginning in verse 1. We're going to read through verse 18.

"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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first."

Okay, can I just pause for a second? I just want to make a comment that has nothing to do with the sermon, okay? The first thing is the disciple that Jesus loved, that's John, who's the

writer of this gospel. So John is giving a firsthand account. And did you see what he did? “Hey, Peter, I know you're the rock, you're going to be the leader of the church,” right? “Everybody's going to remember you, but everyone for all eternity will know that you're just a little bit slower.” Right? I mean, this is the ultimate flex move on John's part. It's just so great. Okay. So let's keep reading. Picking back up in verse 5.

“And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we thank you that we can come to your word. And we ask now that you would open our eyes so that we would see, that you would remove the scales from our eyes so that we would behold, and that we would cling to the truth that Jesus is risen. And so we ask that you would meet with us now, and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Darkness

So I just recently was turned on to a new TV show called *Paradise*, a friend of mine who I trust greatly recommended it to me. It's a show that is about a post-apocalyptic world. So post-apocalyptic world, right? A great apocalyptic event has occurred in the world, on the Earth, and so now it's telling the story of what happens after this. And so, in this occasion, in the world of paradise, there was this giant volcano, a super volcano that is under the Antarctic ice sheet and it has erupted. And the eruption is so large, it's so enormous that there are these great tsunamis that are destroying coastal cities. It doesn't matter if the apartment or the hotel that you're in is 20 stories tall, the tsunami just destroys it. And millions of people are dead. And ash has been thrown into the atmosphere so that the sun is completely blocked out so that at midday, the brightest time of the day, there's only clouds and darkness. In the middle of the summer, when it should be warm, it's only cold and ice because the sun cannot penetrate the thick darkness of the ash. For the people who survived, where there once was light and warmth, they're now living amongst the cold and the dark. Could you imagine that?

I mean, for whole years living in the dark, no more sun, no more warmth, no more light, darkness is all around you. That's the world of *Paradise*, but that's actually where our passage begins.

Because Jesus on Good Friday had gone to the cross and he had taken the sins of his people upon him. His blood was shed, and the wrath of God that we deserve was put on him, and he was buried in the tomb. We're told that for hours while Jesus was on the cross, that the sky went black. It went dark. That for those three hours as he hung on the cross at the brightest time of day, it was like the middle of the night. Darkness covered the land. And Sunday after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, we're told, came early to the tomb while it was still dark. She's living in the midst of darkness. The Sabbath is over, and so she returns to where the body was laid, and she doesn't wait for the sun, she doesn't wait for the warmth of the day while it was still dark. And as she came to the tomb, Mary discovers a deeper darkness. Because we read in verses 1 and 2 that "while it was still dark, she saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb, so she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'" I mean, you can hear the concern in her voice, right? You can hear the worry in what she has said, the burden in her words. "They have taken the Lord, and we do not know where he is." There's a darkness that is falling upon her. I imagine that maybe Mary is wondering, maybe it was grave robbers that came and took his body. Maybe it was his enemies to crucify him, to abuse him, to kill him. That wasn't enough, and so they want to desecrate his body. Maybe these are the things that are going through her mind, but she doesn't know.

Darkness Receding

But what she does know in this moment is that the darkness of the morning is replaced with an emotional and psychological darkness. They have taken the Lord. But darkness isn't the end of the story, because we actually start to see very quickly hints that the darkness is receding. So, I want to point something out to you in this passage, something that I've never seen before. I've read this passage countless times, and I've preached on this passage before, and yet this past week, I saw something I had never noticed before, and I want to point it out to you. And it appears in verses 1 through 10. So, four times in verses 1 through 10, we're told that someone saw something. You see that? In verse 1, Mary saw the stone rolled away. Verse 5, John saw the linen cloth. Verse 6, Peter saw the linen cloth and the face cloth. Verse 8, John saw and believed. So, four times.

Now, what's interesting about this is that these four times where we have the English word "saw," there are three different Greek words being used here. So, in verses 1 and 5, it's one Greek word. Verse 6 is a second Greek word, and verse 8 is a third Greek word. So, why the different words? You've got to wonder that, right? Why would John use three different words to convey the same idea? Right? I mean, he could have used the same Greek word all four times. So, why three different ones? Well, maybe it's stylistic, right? John knows people are going to be reading it, and it would sound redundant if you just kept using the same word, right? It's not hard to imagine maybe that's the case, because that's what I tell my kids when they're working on their essays, right? They have me edit or look at them, and one of the things I'm always telling them is don't use the same word over and over again, right? Find a new word. Be creative. Be imaginative. Expand your vocabulary. Use different words to convey the same meaning. I tell my kids that. So, maybe that's what John's doing. It's just style, right? But I actually think it's more than the style.

I had a professor in seminary who would say when you're dealing with biblical interpretation, context is king, and lexical choice is queen. So, you hear that? Context is king. Where is this book? What is the genre, all that, and lexical choice is queen. Why did they pick these words? And as we consider these Greek words that John is using, what we see is that he's actually moving us towards greater depth of understanding of what's taking place. So, the first one in verses 1 and 5, it is the most basic Greek word, and it simply means to see. So, it's a simple observation, like me saying "I see you," okay? The second Greek word in verse 6, it has the implication to observe with attention. So, Peter, when he looks in, he's actually pondering now. He's attentive. He's thinking. He's mentally investigating. And then the third Greek word in verse 9 has the connotation to see with understanding. So, do you see the progression that's taking place? That we began with they simply saw the open tomb and the burial cloths, but they were still in the dark when they saw those things. But that initial seeing gives way to Peter. He's contemplating. He's attentive. He's investigating. There's a bit of light shining into the darkness. And then we see John, he sees and he understands. And it's made abundantly clear because we're told he saw and what? Believed. "He saw and believed, for as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead." You see, prior to this moment, John didn't know what he was seeing.

But now, now I can imagine maybe the words of Jesus are rushing back into his mind, right? The words about his death and resurrection, the words that Jesus had foretold that this would happen. Maybe that's all coming back to John's mind. And so he sees and he believes the darkness of misunderstanding, the darkness of the tomb, the darkness that shadowed their minds, it is slowly receding. But what's amazing is it doesn't even stop there. Because though the darkness is receding, the climax of our passage is that the darkness is destroyed. So Peter and John, they return home and we don't know what they talked about, right? I could imagine maybe some of the things they were talking about, right? Like John, maybe he's like, you know, "I was faster and I believed first," you know? You know, no, probably not. But, but, you know, or maybe they just walked in silence, allowing what they've just observed to sink in. But they left, but Mary has left at the tomb. And she's weeping because she hasn't seen what they have. She's still surrounded by the darkness of death. She's still in the dark.

Darkness Defeated

You know, in *Paradise*, it was 689 days of darkness. Almost two years. Could you imagine that? Two years with no sun. And Annie, one of the survivors of the apocalypse, she's walking past a window in this house that she has taken refuge in. And she's walking past the window and she sees something that she hasn't seen in years. There's a small ray of light breaking through the window. And she stops and she holds her hand and the light is hitting her hand. And it's as though she doesn't know what she's looking at for a moment. And she throws open the curtains and she opens the door and she walks out on a deck. And as she does so, it's not dark anymore. And the icicles, she can hear them slowly dripping because they're melting. Because warmth has started to break through the cold. And she, she feels the warmth of the sun and she turns her face, she looks up and stares directly into the sun that she hasn't seen in over 600 days. And she feels its warmth. And she lifts her face and she laughs with joy. Because the darkness could not overcome the light. The light broke through the darkness. And that's what Mary is about to experience. Because Mary, she sees the angels and she sees Jesus, but she misidentifies him for the gardener because the darkness is still surrounding her until the light breaks through.

And how does it break through to Mary's heart? When Jesus simply says her name, "Mary," in her distress, in her sadness, in her darkness, Jesus says, "Mary." I imagine that maybe no one said her name like he did. We know from Luke, chapter 8, that Mary was the woman who had seven demons possessing her. And Jesus cast those demons out from her. And maybe, we're not told in Luke, but maybe after she was freed from the darkness of that possession, maybe the first thing she heard was Jesus say, "Mary." We don't know if that's what he said on that day, but we do know on this day when he spoke her name, there was no more darkness. There was only light. Her tears are replaced with joy. She grasps hold of him, right? We know that because Jesus says "don't hold on," right? And he's saying "don't hold on," not because Jesus in his resurrected body can't be touched or that he's going to become unholy or unclean because a human is touching his resurrected body. No, we know that it's fine to touch him because he's going to offer Thomas in the passage afterwards to touch him, right? "See my hands, touch my side." And later he's going to eat meals with his disciples. So we know that it's not that. No, he says don't touch me because he still has work to do.

And yet we get the sense from Mary that she grasps hold of him. She takes hold and is holding on so tightly almost as though to say, "I thought I lost you. I thought I would never see you again, but now I'm never going to let you go." She'd been in the dark, but now, now the light of resurrection has broken through and she can't help but cling to her savior, to hold to Jesus. The darkness has been defeated. And this joy, this hope, this light that Mary experiences on that morning isn't just for Mary because look what Jesus says in verse 17. "Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" And she goes, and we're told in verse 18 that she goes to the disciples and she announces to them, "I have seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her." What's amazing about this is that Mary, there when it says "I have seen," is the same verb of John in verse 9. The "I have seen and believed, I have seen and I know," right? And what does she tell them? She tells them everything that he said. This is an amazing and beautiful verse right here. It's beautiful because Mary, the woman who was oppressed by demons, is now the first proclaimer that Jesus lives. That is incredible.

It's also beautiful because did you hear what Jesus called his disciples? How he spoke of them? Y'all remember the disciples? Peter, James, and John, Andrew, right? All the others, right? You remember about them and what they had done and how they had lived? The disciples who abandoned Jesus when the soldiers came to arrest him. The disciples who denied Jesus when they were questioned, "are you his followers?" The disciples who fled when Jesus went to be crucified. And now what does he call them? What does he tell them? Mary, go to my, not abandoners, not cowards, not deniers. He says, "go to my brothers." Isn't that beautiful? "Go to my brothers." And friends, that is what Jesus calls all who follow him.

This morning, I don't know what y'all have done. I don't know your past. I don't know all the things that you have done in your past or your history. I don't even know what you did this morning. But I imagine for many of us, in fact, I imagine for all of us - in fact, I don't imagine, I know - that for all of us, our history, our past is filled with things that we regret. That maybe we feel guilt over, maybe we feel shame over. I know my past is that way. I'm sure yours is as well. And regardless of what we have done, do you hear what Jesus says to you? He says that for all who follow, he doesn't call us by our worst moments, but he speaks to us through his best. Because death and darkness and sin and Satan could not defeat him. And through his perfect life and death on Good Friday and resurrection on Sunday, he has defeated your sin and mine. And so he now calls us brothers and sisters.

He invites us to call his God, our God, his Father, our Father, because we are brought into the family of God. That's who we are. That if you are trusting in Christ, that is what he calls you. That is what he names you, his brother and sister. And that is the message that Mary went and proclaimed to the disciples. And that is the message we celebrate this Easter Sunday. That the darkness of sin and death has been defeated. That the bright light of resurrection has shown through that Jesus lives. And because he does, so too do all his people. Friends, the good news is that the tomb is empty. That Jesus is alive. Hallelujah. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that the tomb is empty. That Jesus has defeated death and hell and the grave. That he has taken our sin upon himself, and now he invites us into the family of God. That we would dwell with him as brothers and sisters. And so I pray, Father, that you would open our eyes. That we would see and believe. That we would take hold of our resurrected Savior and cling to him, knowing that by his work on the cross, his resurrection from the grave, we have forgiveness of sins and life with him forever. We pray all this in the matchless name of Jesus. And all God's people said together, Amen.