

All Signs Point to Jesus

Session 8

Evangelism Session

April 20, 2025

### The Ultimate Sign

**The Point:** Jesus's resurrection makes eternal life possible.

**Session Passage:** John 20:1-2, 11-18

#### John 20:1-2

**Connection to the Point.** The tomb in which Jesus was buried was found empty.

**The first day of the week** (v. 1). Since the first century AD, Christians have gathered together on Sundays for corporate worship. The reason that we come together on Sundays is right here in this text. We gather on Sundays to commemorate that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on *the first day of the week*. There is no command in Scripture to meet on Sundays, but church history tells us that meeting together on Sundays for worship and remembrance started very early and continues to be the normative practice for churches around the world and in many different cultures.

**Mary Magdalene** (v. 1). Mary Magdalene is a well-known figure in the New Testament. She shares her name with Mary the mother of Jesus who in turn derives her name from Miriam, the sister of Moses. *Magdalene* is probably not a surname but an indication of her hometown—Magdala. Along with the woman at the well in John 4, because of this story, Mary Magdalene has been called the first Christian evangelist. At least one New Testament scholar believes that Mary Magdalene and Mary the sister of Lazarus are the same person, and that this same woman is the one whose story Luke tells in Luke 7:36-50. The other Gospel writers mentioned other women who came to the tomb with Mary Magdalene—Salome and Mary the mother of James (Mark 16:1). John did not mention the other women. This exclusion does not mean that John was incorrect or even unaware of the other women with Mary Magdalene. It simply means that John did not include them in his telling of the story. John himself wrote, “there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25). In other words, John, as well as all the other Gospel writers, and all writers in general, are selective in what they write about. An account without every detail is not an inaccurate or errant account. It is simply a focused account.

**Early, . . . while it was still dark** (v. 1). The Jewish Sabbath ended on Saturday at sundown. By telling us that these women went when *it was still dark*, John was stressing that the women were going as *early* as possible. Jewish law and custom prohibited them from working on the Sabbath. Going to the grave overnight on Saturday night would not have been wise or safe.

**The stone** (v. 1). Tombs in the ancient Near East were often small, dug-out caves with a bench on which the body would be laid. A large stone was then rolled in front of the opening to the cave to prevent predators from mutilating the body. The stone was large and difficult, but not impossible, to move. It would be moved when people wanted to access the tomb in order to care for the dead body. The Gospel of Mark includes a dialogue between Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James discussing

who would roll the stone away from the tomb on their behalf (Mark 16:3). But the stone had already **been removed from the tomb**.

**Went running** (v. 2). Running would have been an undignified act for a woman in the first century. Mary was not worried about cultural norms and taboos. Instead, she responded out of passion and love for her Lord.

**Simon Peter, and . . . the other disciple** (v. 2). Mary Magdalene rushed to tell about the moved stone and missing body to Peter and another disciple. The phrase **the one Jesus loved** is John's preferred description of himself. While this self-description may sound arrogant to modern readers, John was actually being genuinely humble. If John had called himself "the disciple who loved Jesus," he would have been bringing attention to himself. Instead, by referring to himself as the one whom Jesus loved, John was expressing how he was the recipient in the relationship. Jesus is the initiator—not John. Elsewhere John reported that Jesus said, "I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you" (15:15-16a). Jesus has a genuine relationship with His followers. Additionally, Jesus is still greater. He is primary. Jesus has called us friends, but we are not friends with Jesus in the same way we are friends with one another. Jesus remains the primary in the relationship. Being His friend is complex and always depends on God's inclination to reveal Himself to us.

### **John 20:11-16**

**Connection to the Point.** Jesus revealed Himself as alive.

**Context.** Upon hearing Mary Magdalene's news, Peter and John ran to the tomb. John ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first. However, he hesitated at the entrance of the tomb and did not go into the cave where Jesus's body had been laid. Peter acted like Peter normally acted—brashly and with a great deal of passion. He went into the cave where Jesus's body had been placed on Friday and found no body. He only found burial clothes—including the wrapping that had been used to cover Jesus's head. Curiously, the head covering was not with the rest of the clothes but had been carefully folded and laid in a separate place. After that, John entered the tomb and saw everything Peter had seen. The Bible says that John "believed" (v. 8), but it is unclear what he believed. Did he believe Jesus had risen from the dead? Did he believe Mary's assertion that someone had taken Jesus's body and put it somewhere they didn't know about?

**Crying** (v. 11). The Greek word here conveys deep sorrow. She was not merely letting a tear run down her cheek. She was weeping and sobbing with the kind of emotional display that only comes from deep grief and genuine heart ache.

**Two angels** (v. 12). The Gospel accounts differ on the number of angels, but we should not be worried about this, since they do not contradict one another. The Gospel accounts are complementary and supplementary. Many attempts have been made to harmonize the various Gospel accounts, but the

differences give us four unique perspectives on the same events. John and Luke seem to have focused on how many messengers from God were present, whereas Matthew and Luke seem to have thought in terms of the one who took the lead in communicating the message. All differences in the various Gospels indicate that John and the other evangelists are more concerned in pointing readers to consider and think intensely rather than in pleasing people who are only seeking to poke holes in the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus.

**She did not know it was Jesus** (v. 14). Jesus's post-resurrection body showed both continuity and discontinuity from His pre-resurrection body. In fact, in the verses immediately following this event, Jesus would demonstrate both realities. Late the same day, Jesus was able to enter a locked room thus demonstrating discontinuity with His pre-resurrection body (v. 19). On the other hand, when Jesus appeared, first to a group of disciples and later to Thomas who had been missing at the first appearance, He still bore the marks of crucifixion and thus demonstrated continuity (vv. 20,24-27).

**Seeking** (v. 15). The Greek word indicates an intense activity and not simply casually looking. From Genesis 3 onward, God has sought out sinners to save them from themselves and their own sin. After the fall in Genesis 3, God came to the man and the woman in a perfect garden that He created out of nothing and in which He had placed them. Now, the perfectly righteous Son of God appeared to Mary Magdalene at a garden tomb where He had been raised from the dead. Jesus was the firstborn from among the dead (Col 1:18), and His appearance to Mary was the first of several appearances to His followers over forty days. The irony here is that while Mary is said to be seeking for someone, Jesus is the One who comes "to seek and to save the which was lost" (Luke 19:10). In just a few more verses, Jesus would send out His followers in the same way that He was sent by the Father (John 20:21). The mission of the church is an extension of Jesus's mission—to seek and save the lost.

**The gardener** (v. 15). Jesus's post-resurrection body apparently looked like an ordinary human body. It was so ordinary that Mary could not distinguish Him from a gardener. In this setting, a gardener's job would have included ensuring that the garden tombs were well-kept. Gardeners also would have made sure grave robbers, vandals, and crooks did not disturb the tombs.

**Rabboni** (v. 16). As the text indicates, this is an Aramaic word that simply means teacher or master. It is related to the word that contemporary Jews use for their teachers—*rabbi*. Jesus was unlike any other rabbi before or since. Rabbis were not prophets. They were not apostles. They did not receive revelation from God. Instead, they were merely teachers and preachers of God's Word. By contrast, Jesus does not merely reveal God in the same way as other prophets and apostles. Instead, He is the Word. He is the Prophet. He is the One Sent (which is the meaning of "apostle") by God.

### **John 20:17-18**

**Connection to the Point.** The message of the resurrected Christ is to be shared with others.

**Don't cling to me** (v. 17). Jesus's earthly mission was not yet complete. However, Jesus was not concerned Mary would prevent Him from completing His mission. He would complete the work the

Father had sent Him to do. Mary was acting in an understandable way, however. She thought she had lost Jesus once, and she did not want to lose Him again. However, Mary did not need to worry about Jesus leaving her. She would be brought into His kingdom forever. Furthermore, Jesus had more work to do after His earthly ministry was complete—including sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). According to Jesus’s own testimony, the work He would do in sending the Holy Spirit would be for the benefit of His followers, because the One whom Jesus would send would “convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:7-8).

**Not yet ascended** (v. 17). Jesus’s ascension is an often-neglected aspect of His work. By ascending to the Father, Jesus verified His work on earth was complete. Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father indicates two important truths. First, the right hand is a place of honor. Second, He is seated because His work is completed. The ascension established Jesus’s unique position as the anticipated successor to King David who would reign not merely for an extremely long time but forever. Another reason the ascension is vital is because it was a prerequisite to Jesus’s later works. Jesus continued to work after His ascension. These works are His sitting at the right hand of God, His sending the Spirit at Pentecost, His intercession on behalf of His people, and His second coming. The sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son at Pentecost is a foreshadowing of Jesus’s second coming—when He will consummate His kingdom. In the second coming, Jesus’s followers will experience the most complete manifestation of the mercy, grace, beauty, and power of God anyone has ever experienced.

**My brothers** (v. 17). Throughout the New Testament, the phrase “brothers” or “the brothers” became a standard way of referring to the early church. Older English translations sometimes translate the phrase “the brethren.” We can see the same phrase at the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:30 (translated “believers”). Again, we see it in Acts 15:6-7 and 22 (translated “believers”). The Greek phrase does not exclusively refer to males, including both women and men, and often refers to the whole church. We can see it throughout Paul’s letters as he addressed various churches (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 1:11 [translated “brothers and sisters” in each case]). The theme of “the brethren” is central to John’s letters. John stresses that love for the brethren is a key indicator of someone truly being a Christian and that hating the brethren is proof someone is outside of Christ’s saving work (1 John 2:9-11).

**My Father, and your Father** (v. 17). Just as Jesus used familial language to discuss His relationship with the disciples, He continued to use familial language to describe His disciples’ relationship to God. Jesus is the unique Son of God. No one else is like Him. However, Jesus’s followers are frequently described as God’s children as well as the sons and daughters of God throughout the New Testament (John 1:12; 2 Cor. 6:18; 1 John 3:1). Christians today also share this familial relationship to God. We have been brought into the family and are Jesus’s coheirs (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; Titus 3:7). We are to be a family community whose love for one another would distinguish them from the watching world. The church is a community of people who have been saved by the work of Christ and are an imperfect picture of what the kingdom of God will be like after Christ returns.

**My God, and your God** (v. 17). There is only one God, so Jesus was clearly not trying to distinguish which God He was talking about as if there are multiple gods. Instead, Jesus assured Mary Magdalene that her

faith had made her a citizen in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is open to those who will put their faith and hope in Jesus. By belonging to Jesus, they belong to God the Father. In his first letter, John would go on to assure Christians that belonging to the Son means belonging to the Father. He would also teach that those who do not recognize Jesus as God in the flesh are outside of salvation and instead are still in the darkness of sin and death (1 John 5:10-13).