

THE ULTIMATE SIGN

Leader pages on pp. 132-135

THE POINT:
JESUS'S RESURRECTION
MAKES ETERNAL LIFE
POSSIBLE.

JOHN 20:1-2,11-18

¹ On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

² So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!" . . .

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¹¹ But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb.

¹² She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put him."

¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. ¹⁵ "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!"—which means "Teacher."

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¹⁷ "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

¹⁸ **Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had said to her.**

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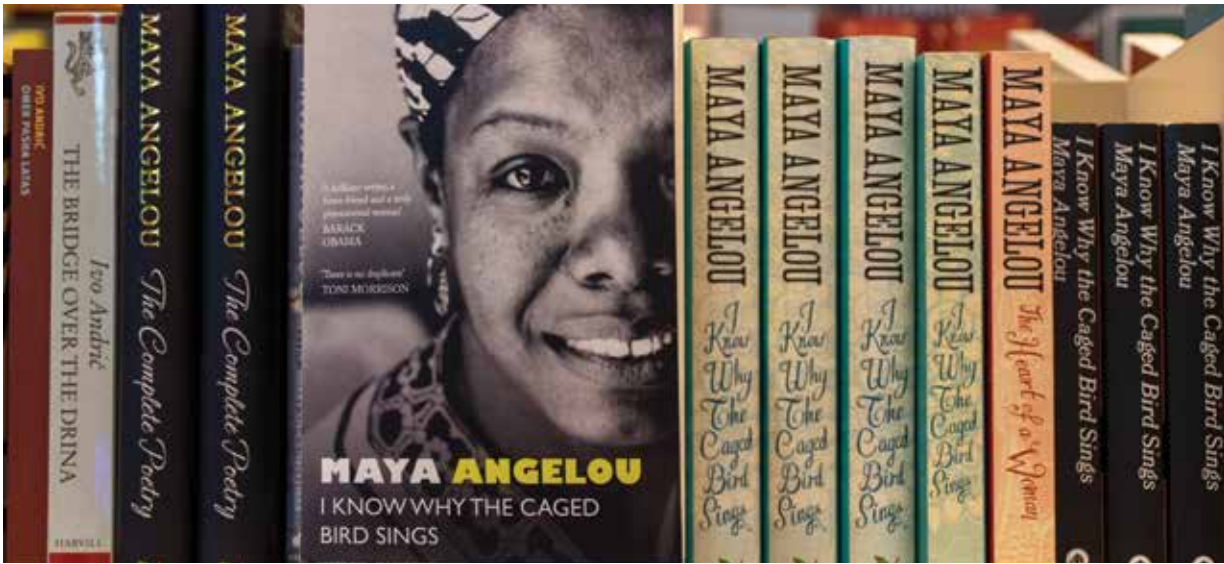
MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Rabboni (v. 16)—An Aramaic word that simply means teacher or master.

My Brothers (v. 17)—Throughout the New Testament, the phrase "brothers" or "the brothers" became a standard way of referring to the early church.

My Father...your Father (v. 17)—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's followers are frequently described as God's children. We have been brought into the family and are Jesus's coheirs (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; Titus 3:7).



WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF JESUS'S RESURRECTION ON OUR LIVES?

Celebrated African American writer, poet, and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou, found profound purpose and meaning in her life's journey. Born in 1928, Angelou faced a tumultuous childhood marked by trauma and segregation, but she transformed these experiences into a source of strength and inspiration. Her autobiographical work, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," vividly chronicles her struggle and resilience, and has touched the hearts of readers worldwide. Angelou's powerful narrative voice became a beacon for those fighting for equality and justice. Through her multifaceted career, Maya Angelou discovered and imparted a powerful sense of meaning and purpose, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to inspire and empower people around the world.

For the last several weeks, we've explored the signs of who Jesus is and proclaimed to be. Each piece is a nugget of truth that helps us further understand the power, humanity, and divinity of Jesus, all wrapped up in who He is. However, it's when we come to the resurrection that we get the punchline, meaning the ultimate purpose and sign for why Jesus came. The resurrection of Jesus inspires and empowers us to live on purpose.

Empowered by the Empty Tomb // John 20:1-2

Just three days earlier, Jesus had experienced the most excruciating death on the cross, as He voluntarily surrendered His life for the sins of the whole world. For those who witnessed that moment, it was painful and memorable, wrapped up in one event. The Messiah, Son of God, was dead. Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to tend to Jesus's body at the tomb, as was the custom of that time (v. 1). Yet upon their arrival, the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb (v. 2), and Jesus's body wasn't there. While we want to think that this was a moment of belief for Mary, she actually struggled with what she witnessed.

So much so that in haste, she went and reported what she had discovered: Jesus's body was no longer in the tomb, and she didn't know where or how it had been moved (v. 2). Her comments perhaps implied she was blaming the Romans or the Jewish leaders who were responsible for Jesus's death. Both John ("the one Jesus loved" [v. 2]), and Peter struggled to connect the dots between the empty tomb and the promise of resurrection as well.

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There are slight variances in the gospel accounts regarding the discovery of the resurrection, something skeptics have made much of. For example, while in other gospel accounts, we see that Mary was not alone in attending to Jesus's body (see Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1), John's account describes Mary alone. This isn't as much of a discarding of the other women as it is to highlight Mary's story in John's writing. It would be similar to highlighting a quarterback making a game-winning touchdown throw. We recognize the quarterback made the throw, but many others were involved in the play—the linemen who kept him safe and the receiver who caught the ball for example.

Upon Mary's report of what had happened to Jesus, Peter and John ran to confirm what she was saying, as this would have been significant news to them (John 20:3). Each person had different perspectives of this news. For Peter, he walked into the tomb and saw the clothes lying in an orderly fashion (v. 7). Then John looked in, and upon seeing the empty tomb, he believed that Jesus had arisen (v. 8), but none of them were sure of how it happened and how the Scriptures all came together (v. 9). With their lack of real understanding, the disciples returned to where the group had been meeting (v. 10).

Jesus's death on the cross is significant and affirms so many prophecies of His work in the atonement for sin. It was finished! But it is the resurrection that stands as the central message of Christianity. The truth of the resurrection has been called the capstone of Christianity. The complete gospel is this: Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose from the grave. No other system of religion can share this message or this hope. No other sign is of greater significance for the person and work of Jesus than Himself as the crucified and risen Savior and Lord.

WHAT DO YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT MARY MAGDALENE FROM THIS PASSAGE?

Enlivened by the Resurrection // John 20:11-16

After the disciples left, Mary stood at the tomb perplexed and wept over what had happened (v. 11), most likely trying to figure out what had occurred. The language would have been similar to expressions of grief over the loss of loved ones, as shown earlier in the New Testament. In some ways, Mary may have wept because she couldn't carry out her last act of love for her Master—caring for Jesus's body. Not being able to prepare the body for burial was significant in the Jewish mindset.

Upon looking into the tomb, Mary saw two angels sitting in specific positions (v. 12). While the presence of angels is recorded in each one of the gospel accounts, the messages and interactions vary



DIGGING DEEPER MARY

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a significant figure in Christianity. According to the New Testament, Mary was a young Jewish woman living in Nazareth when the angel Gabriel visited her with astounding news: she was chosen by God to bear His son. Despite the potential for social disgrace and personal hardship, Mary's response was one of remarkable faith and submission to God's will: "Be it unto me according to thy word." Throughout the Gospels, Mary's presence underscores key moments in Jesus' life, from His miraculous birth in Bethlehem to His first miracle at the wedding in Cana, and ultimately, to His crucifixion and resurrection, where she endured profound suffering yet remained steadfast. Mary's story transcends religious narratives. Across centuries, she has inspired countless works of art, music, and literature, becoming an enduring icon of maternal compassion and unwavering faith worldwide.

How does Mary's faithful submission to God's will, inspire you to faithfully serve?



as far as the audience. For Mary's account, they inquired as to why she was crying (v. 13). In other gospel accounts, it's the angels that proclaim the greatest news, "He is not here. For he has risen" (Matt. 28:6; see also Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6). This statement became a central message for the church, and even a phrase that would be shared among believers throughout the ages with the response being, "He is risen indeed!"

With great bravery at the appearance of the angels, Mary continued investigating as to what had happened to Jesus. Then she noticed someone standing behind her (John 20:14). We are given the identity of Jesus at this moment, but Mary still didn't know it was Him. Jesus asked the same question as the angels regarding why she was crying, but this time, Jesus added the question, "Who is it that you're seeking?" (v. 15) Mary must have surmised she had found the culprit of the crime: "supposing he was the gardener" (v. 15). But Mary offered a solution, saying that she would go and get the body if only he would tell her where it was.

Then Jesus uttered her name, "Mary" (v. 16). She had heard Him say her name before with the same amount of compassion and understanding. It was a friend speaking to a friend, and in her eyes a teacher talking to a student: "Rabboni!" (v. 16). This was her Lord! At this moment, Mary's sorrow turned to joy. It was a joy that wanted to embrace Him and the joy of seeing and knowing that He was alive. All that He had promised had come true.

Jesus indeed was and is the risen Christ, the Son of God!

It doesn't go unnoticed that the first person to see and believe in the resurrection was a woman, which was historic and monumental. It was from this moment that a radical affirmation of the testimonial witness of Mary (and future women) to the resurrection began to be accepted. The barrier of being a woman in the Jewish system would begin to wane among Christians. Mary's testimony would soon be accepted by many. She knew what she saw and could testify with anyone else to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was yet another affirmation of the special place God has given to women throughout church history, just as Jesus had modeled throughout His earthly ministry.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT JESUS IS ALIVE?

Evangelize the World //

John 20:17-18

Upon Mary realizing that the gardener was Jesus, in her joy she reached out to embrace Him. Jesus's telling her, "Don't cling to me" (v. 17), wasn't meant to be condemning to her or a rejection of being touched in this moment. Instead, it seemed to be more a statement to turn her direction toward what needed to happen the most at that moment. Just like sending the child to bed, Jesus needed her to do something. The uniqueness of this moment was how Mary became not only the first to see Jesus but also one of the first messengers sent to proclaim the good news to the disciples (v. 17).

There are a couple of things to notice about Mary's response in verse 18:

- **Mary went and announced Jesus's resurrection to the disciples.**
- **Mary shared a simple message, "I have seen the Lord" (v. 18).**
- **Mary didn't add or take away from the message of Jesus, as "she told them what he had said to her" (v. 18).**

Let's recap the simple truths of the gospel, which means good news, that we've been reminded of through this study about Jesus:

THE POINT: JESUS'S RESURRECTION MAKES ETERNAL LIFE POSSIBLE.

- God made the world perfect when He created it (Gen. 2:9).
- The man and the woman, upon being tempted and by their own choice, ate from the fruit of the tree (Gen. 3).
- Jesus came to earth, the Son of God born of a virgin, God wrapped in flesh, and lived a perfect life.
- Jesus died as an innocent man. He voluntarily surrendered His life on the cross, not to be an example but as the payment for our sins. He took on the wrath of God. Jesus died and arose three days after His death. The empty tomb shows us today that Jesus is alive. The purpose of God was fulfilled in Jesus's resurrection. He conquered sin and death.

Today, we are waiting for His promised return to declare the end of the rebellion against God. Those who believe in Him will live in His presence forever. There were many signs of who Jesus is and what He has done, but the resurrection of Jesus stands as the greatest sign of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

WHY MUST WE SHARE THE MESSAGE OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the first century, resurrection stories and myths held significant cultural and spiritual weight in various religious traditions. Central to Christianity was the belief in Jesus Christ's resurrection, a cornerstone of faith that signified victory over death and the promise of eternal life. Similarly, in Greco-Roman myths, deities like Adonis and Osiris experienced death and rebirth, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and the hope for renewal. These resurrection narratives transcended mere storytelling; they provided communities with frameworks to understand suffering, loss, and hope. They offered a sense of comfort and purpose, suggesting that life continues beyond physical death and that transformation is always possible. Whether interpreted literally or metaphorically, resurrection myths from the first century played a crucial role in shaping people's worldviews.

Biblical Truth: The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of everything in the life of the believer.

How was the resurrection of Jesus Christ different from other resurrection legends?

LIVE IT

How can we be more vigilant in sharing the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Our love for Jesus and the promise of eternal life should motivate us to share our faith with those around us. From fulfilling the Great Commission to helping others find faith in Jesus Christ, sharing the Gospel is indispensable to our faith. By doing so, we are doing God's work.

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- **Connect.** Discuss with others from the group reflecting upon all the barriers that Jesus took down so that you could hear the gospel message. What barriers still exist today for people and how you can be a part of taking those misconceptions down.
- **Go.** Reread Mary's message to the disciples (John 20:17-18). Take a moment to write down or memorize how to share the gospel. Begin praying about someone you can share this message with this week.
- **Worship.** Take a moment to read the prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament and how the signs point to Jesus fulfilling them completely. A good study Bible is a great place to start. Spend time in personal worship for who Jesus is.

DAILY READINGS

1. AN EMPTY TOMB // JOHN 20:13-15

Mary stands outside the tomb crying, stooping to look inside the tomb. She sees two angels sitting where Jesus's body had been lying. They ask her why she is crying. She replies that the Lord has been taken away, and she doesn't know where he is. She turns and sees Jesus standing there, but she doesn't know that it is Him. Jesus asks her the same question as the angels, adding who she seeks. She thinks he is the gardener and replies for Him to tell her where he has put Jesus so that she can take Him away. Yet, the tomb is empty. Jesus conquers death, and we have eternal life.

Because the tomb was empty, we have a full life in Christ.

2. A HOPEFUL AND SECURE FUTURE // JOHN 16:22

Jesus tells his disciples that in a little while they will no longer see him, but they do not understand what he is saying. He states that He is going to the Father and tells them they will see Him again. He then explains how they will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. He compares their sorrow to that of a woman in labor. At the time, she experiences pain, but once she gives birth, she no longer remembers the suffering because of the joy the child brings. In a like manner, he describes how the disciples will experience sorrow now, but their hearts will rejoice when they see Jesus again. And no one can take away their joy.

Have hope in a secure future filled with everlasting joy!

3. SENT FOR THIS PURPOSE // LUKE 4:43

Jesus enters Simon's house, where his mother-in-law has a high fever. Jesus rebukes the fever, and it leaves. She immediately gets up and begins to serve them. Later people bring others with various kinds of diseases to be healed. Also, demons left so many that the people began to shout, "You are the Son of God." He rebukes them, not allowing them to speak. He makes His way to a deserted

place to pray, and the people search for Jesus because they do not want Him to leave. In this verse, He lets the crowd know that it is imperative that He preach the gospel in other towns too because He was sent for this purpose. Like Jesus, we are sent for this purpose.

Seek divine opportunities to make sharing the gospel a priority.

4. FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE // 1 CORINTHIANS 9:23

Are you currently making disciples of Jesus Christ? If we were to honestly self-assess, we are likely to find our Christian walk as more self-centered than Christ-centered. A Christ-centered walk focuses on winning people to the Faith, which is done by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul explains that while he is free, he makes himself a slave to everyone as to win as many people to Christ as possible. He becomes like the Jews, like one under the law, those not under the law, and as the weak to save some. This verse highlights that he does it for the sake of the gospel, to share in its blessings.

We have a command to make disciples of all nations—it's time to go.

5. SING TO THE LORD // ISAIAH 12:5

On my desk at work, I have an 8" x 10" hot pink framed sign that reads, "Pause and Praise." This sign reminds me to include the Lord in my workday. Isaiah 12 is a song of praise the remnant of people left from Assyria will owe the Lord because his anger has turned away from them and comforted them. They will acknowledge God as their salvation, strength, and song, trusting in Him and not being afraid. This verse shows how they will give thanks to the Lord and proclaim that His name is exalted, singing to Him for the glorious things He has done for the whole world to know. We, too, should let the world know all the glorious things that He has done.

Pause and praise God for the great things He has done!