

A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN LORD

20 Early on the first [day] of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she ran 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. ³So Peter and the other disciple headed for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵Crouching down and looking into [the tomb], he saw the [strips of] linen cloth lying [there]; but he did not enter. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He, too, saw the [strips of] linen cloths lying [there], ⁷as well as the face cloth that had been around [Jesus'] head. [The face cloth] was not lying with the [strips of] linen, it was folded up and lying by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also entered. He saw and believed. ⁹They still did not understand the Scripture, [which taught] that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰So the disciples went back to their own home.

¹¹But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. ¹²She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had lain, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She replied, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. ¹⁴After she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing [there], but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking? Assuming that he was the caretaker, she said to him, Sir, if you have removed him [from this place], tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. ¹⁶Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned [toward him] and said in Hebrew, Rabboni, which means, Teacher. ¹⁷[Then] Jesus said to her, Do not touch me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples, I have seen the Lord; and she reported what he had said to her. (Jn. 20:1-18)

Introduction

"I will celebrate nativity, for it has its place in history. Sure, He came to set His people free, but what is that to me?"

Can you identify with those lyrics? You have heard about the man, Jesus of Nazareth. You are acquainted with the facts surrounding His life. But all this is dead and ancient history to you and has little or no bearing upon your life.

"Ever since I could remember, I had believed that a man named Jesus had died on a cross a long time ago, had been buried, rose from the dead, and had gone to heaven. This is what I had been taught." (POWER, 12/26/82, p. 3)

Can you identify with that testimony? You have been taught about the man, Jesus of Nazareth. You are acquainted with the facts surrounding His life. But as far as you are concerned, He belongs to another realm and you have no contact with Him.

In the passage of Scripture presently before us, we meet a woman who had been acquainted with this man, Jesus of Nazareth, but now, as far as she could tell, He was dead and gone. As we shall come to see, this dear woman entertained a number of misconceptions about Jesus that were corrected by means of a personal encounter with the risen Lord Himself.

If you entertain misconceptions about Jesus, however “orthodox” they may be, like Mary, you need to have those misconceptions corrected by means of a personal encounter with the risen Lord Himself.

I. If You Only Revere a “Dead Jesus,” You Need to Encounter the Risen Lord Himself

On that first Easter morning, Mary, in company with the other women, did not go to the empty tomb to greet the risen Jesus. On the contrary, they went with the intention of anointing His dead corpse: *“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body”* (Mk. 16:1.)

They had seen the place where Joseph and Nicodemus had buried Jesus; now, as soon as the Sabbath was over, they come with spices in order to anoint the body. As they make their way to the garden tomb their chief concern was the huge stone that had been rolled in front of the entrance way. It was a massive stone, they knew that they could not budge it, and they wondered who would help them.

Thus it was that Mary—together with the other women—made their way to the garden tomb with the express purpose of anointing Jesus’ dead body. They did not come to greet the risen Lord; they came to revere a “dead Jesus.”

Many people entertain the same misconception of Jesus today: they only revere a “dead Jesus.”

There is an incredibly detailed reproduction of a dead man in an old cathedral in Tampico, Mexico. It rests just inside the main door in a glass coffin. Dark red blood drips from the forehead, the hands, the back, and the feet. A gaping wound slants across one side of the torso. The mouth hangs slack and partly open. “Another dead Christ,” Rev. Boonstra, an evangelist and pastor serving in Mexico, says quietly as we stand before it. “That’s how too many people in Latin America picture the Lord of the Universe.” (*SOUNDINGS*, Sept. ’82, p. 6.)

When topic of Good Friday comes up, man from South Philadelphia reverently speaks about the day they “laid our Lord to rest,” having no conception of the resurrection and the fact that our Lord Jesus is indeed the living Lord of glory.

In more “orthodox” terms, you may confess Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into heaven, but for all practical purposes He may still be as good as dead to you. Perhaps you assert that Jesus’ resurrection is a historical fact, but view it only as an event that belongs to ancient history. Perhaps you view Jesus’ ascension into heaven as a departure from this present world to some distant, unknown place that has no contact with this present world and no bearing upon your life.

If you only revere a “dead Jesus,” you need to encounter the risen Lord Himself. In 2 Corinthians 5:16 the Apostle Paul speaks of no longer knowing Christ *“from a worldly point of view, though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”* At one time Paul was only acquainted with the natural, earthly dimension of Christ’s life and identity, and his conception of Christ was only based upon his own human perception and evaluation. But this conception of Christ was woefully inadequate and false. Such a conception of Christ can never do justice to who He really is and can never bring you into a personal relationship with Him, one in which you minister your love and worship to Him and He ministers His salvation to you.

Something more was needed for Paul, something supernatural had to happen, and it did:

As [Paul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ⁵Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. ... ¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, Brother Saul, the LORD—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. (Acts 9:3-5, 17-18)

Paul had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ and came to see Him for who He really is: the living Lord of glory and the Savior sent by God. The fact that Paul physically received his sight, (after having been blinded by the encounter with the Lord of glory,) and that “scales” fell from off his eyes, symbolically testified to the fact that he had become spiritually enlightened by God to see Christ and entrust his life to Him. This was the same thing that happened to Peter, although in a far less dramatic and overtly supernatural way:

Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (Matt. 16:16-17)

If you are to truly know Jesus for who He really is, the same thing must happen to you that happened to Paul and to Peter. It need not be as dramatic as was the case with Paul, (note, there was nothing physically dramatic about Peter's enlightenment as it is reported in Matthew 16:16-17,) but it is just as necessary.

II. If You Only Mourn a "Lost Jesus," You Need to Encounter the Risen Lord Himself

Very early that first Easter Sunday morning, Mary and the other women made their way to the tomb. When they entered the garden and drew near to the tomb, to their surprise they discovered that the massive stone had been removed from the entrance way; the tomb stood open and empty, the body of Jesus was gone!

Upon seeing this condition of the tomb, Mary immediately left the other women and hurried back to the city to inform Peter and John. What is the report she brings them? She says to them, *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him"* (Jn. 20:2b.)

Mary apparently followed Peter and John back to the empty tomb; after their departure she continued to linger at the gravesite.

Mary is unaware of what evidence for the resurrection was to be found within the empty tomb, and unaware of the other women's encounter with the risen Lord, as reported in Matthew 28:5-9,

The angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you. ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, took hold of his feet and worshiped him. (Matt. 28:5-9)

So it is that she is found weeping—she is mourning a "lost Jesus."

Many people entertain the same misconception of Jesus today: they mourn a "lost Jesus." They regret they did not live back in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, so that they could have known Him and had fellowship with Him. They regret that Jesus has departed into heaven, a mysterious realm they view as being far removed and totally unconnected to this present world. Thus they mourn a "lost Jesus" who belongs to ancient history and who now resides in a distant, inaccessible heavenly realm; a "lost Jesus" with whom they have no personal contact and no personal communion.

If you only mourn a "lost Jesus," you need to encounter the risen Lord Himself.

In John 14:19a Jesus assures His disciples that they shall have an abiding fellowship and communion with Him. He begins by saying, *“after a little while, the world will no longer see me.”* That is to say, following the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the world would no longer observe Jesus of Nazareth walking among them as He had done in the years of His earthly ministry. But He then goes on to assure His disciples, *“you will see me;”* literally, *“you continue to see me.”* By using the Greek present tense, (which may be translated, *“you continue to see me,”*) Jesus is emphasizing the fact that there would be no cessation of fellowship between Himself and His disciples following His resurrection and ascension. In the case of Mohammed, and all the other religious leaders of the world, the relationship between himself and his followers was permanently severed at the time of his death. But such is not the case with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples: there continues to be communion and fellowship, because Jesus is the risen, living Lord of glory.

In John 14:19b Jesus informs His disciples that they shall participate in His resurrection life: *“Because I live, you shall live also.”* Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus was physically living with His disciples. Following His resurrection and ascension, His disciples would spiritually live in Him; note Colossians 3:3b-4, where the Apostle Paul defines the believer’s relationship with Christ in the following terms: *“your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, [who is] our life [i.e.; Christ is the source of our new spiritual life], shall be revealed, then you also shall be revealed with him in glory.”*

Because Jesus is alive—resurrected from the dead—you can call upon Him and He will hear you, you can entrust yourself to Him and He will receive you into His own resurrection life; as the Apostle John testifies,

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify about it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 Jn. 1:2-3)

III. If You Only Recognize an “Earthly Jesus,” You Need to Encounter the Risen Lord Himself

As stated previously, Mary apparently followed Peter and John back to the tomb; after their departure, she continued to linger at the entranceway of the now empty tomb. Standing there in her grief, Mary is determined that she shall have a look for herself inside the empty tomb. As she peers into the tomb she sees the two angels. But as they reveal themselves to Mary the angels do not appear in their heavenly brilliance; rather, they appear as ordinary men. The angels ask Mary, *“Woman, why are you weeping?”* Mary responds with the same words she had previously reported to Peter and John: *“Because they have taken away my Lord; and I do not know where they have laid him”* (vs. 13b.) With this

exchange of words, and having seen for herself that the body was no longer in the tomb, Mary turns away.

But in turning around she finds herself in the very presence of Jesus, although she does not recognize that it is Him. Her last memory of Jesus was of Him in His battered, bloodied, crucified condition. She assumes that He is still dead and her mind is clouded over with grief.

Jesus' questions (verse 15a) further serve to conceal His identity; so quite naturally, Mary assumes that He is the caretaker. Thus she says to Him, *"If you have removed him from this place, tell me where you have laid him."* No doubt moved by her loving commitment to Him even in His death, Jesus now reveals His true identity to her by tenderly speaking her name, *"Mary."* Upon hearing the tender call of her name, she recognizes the voice, and cries out, *"Rabboni!"* But as she reaches out to embrace Jesus she is met by the sharp command, *"Do not touch me!"*

Mary's response, *"Rabboni,"* which means, "Teacher," seems to indicate that to her mind all has been restored to the way it was prior to the crucifixion—she only recognizes an "earthly Jesus."

Many people entertain the same misconception of Jesus today: they only recognize an "earthly Jesus." They may only view Jesus as "a close friend" who barely, if at all, transcends beyond the human level—someone with whom to share your troubles, someone to call upon when you need help. They fail to appreciate the fact that Jesus is the Lord of glory—and He must be recognized and worshiped as such. Compare Jesus' command to Mary, *"Do not touch me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father,"* with Moses' encounter with the LORD at the burning bush:

When the LORD saw that [Moses] had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, Moses! Moses! And Moses said, Here I am. ⁵Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. (Ex. 3:4-5)

If you only recognize an "earthly Jesus," you need to encounter the risen Lord Himself. You must come to appreciate the fact that Jesus is far more than an intimate, human friend; Jesus is the divine ascended, transcendent Lord of glory. He does not belong to this present world; His position is at the right hand of God, participating in the divine and eternal glory of God the Father. Your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ must be characterized by a sacred and reverent love, never treating Him who is sacred as though He were common, and thereby profaning His name. In Christ Jesus there is divine communion and closeness, but there must never be irreverent familiarity.

But at the same time, you must also appreciate the fact that through faith in this divine Savior you are brought into a far more intimate relationship with God than you could ever have conceived. Notice how, in referring to His disciples, Jesus for the first time speaks of them as *“my brothers;”* previously He had spoken of them as *“servants”* and *“friends.”* In John 15:15 He had declared to them, *“I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”* But now, following His resurrection, He refers to them as *“brothers.”*

What is the message Mary is to convey to Jesus’ *“brothers”*? He instructs her to inform them, *“I am ascending to My Father and your Father.”* Through your faith in Jesus, you become an adopted child of God, entering into the same relationship with God the Father that the divine Son of God Himself enjoys—the relationship of sonship. Furthermore, Jesus instructs Mary to inform His disciples that He is ascending to *“My God and your God.”* Amazing as it is, the Son of God, even when He has returned to His divine glory, still identifies Himself with His people: His Father, whom His people know as their God, He amazingly identifies as His God—because throughout eternity the eternal Son of God shall continue to retain His incarnate identity as the Word become flesh.

Conclusion

If you find that you are entertaining such misconceptions of Jesus as those entertained by Mary, then, like Mary, you need to have those misconceptions corrected by means of a personal encounter with the risen Lord Himself.

How do you have such an encounter with the risen Lord? You simply call upon Him and ask Him to make Himself known to you, receiving Him as He has revealed Himself in Bible.

This is the sure promise He makes to those who seek Him: *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you, declares the LORD”* (Jer. 29:13-14a.)