

A Grave Situation

PRESENTED TO:
Ekklesia : April 12th
Pastor David W. McCowan



Part 1 Scripture Reading

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. (Mark 16:9)



Scripture Reading

- ▶ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still **dark**,
 - **Mary Magdalene** went to the tomb and saw that the **stone** had been removed from the entrance. (John 20:1)
- ▶ So she came running to **Simon Peter** and the **other disciple** (John), the **one** Jesus loved, and said,
 - “They have taken the **Lord** out of the tomb, and
 - we don’t know where they have put him!” (John 20:2)

Scripture Reading

- ▶ So **Peter** and the **other disciple** started for the **tomb**. (John 20:3)
- ▶ Both were running, but the **other disciple** outran **Peter** and reached the **tomb** first. (John 20:4)
- ▶ He bent over and looked in at the **strips of linen** lying there but did not go in. (John 20:5)
- ▶ Then **Simon Peter**, who was behind him, arrived and went into the **tomb**. (John 20:6a)
- ▶ He saw the **strips of linen** lying there and the **burial cloth** around Jesus’ head. (John 20:6b)

Scripture Reading

- ▶ The **cloth** was folded up by itself, separate from the **linen**. (John 20:7)
- ▶ Finally, the **other disciple**, who had reached the **tomb** first, went inside. (John 20:8a)
- ▶ He saw and believed. (John 20:8b)
- ▶ (They still did not understand from **Scripture** that **Jesus** had to rise from the dead.) (John 20:9)

Scripture Reading

- ▶ Then, the **disciples** returned to their homes (John 20:10), but
 - **Mary** stood outside the **tomb** crying.
- ▶ As she wept,
 - she bent over to look into the **tomb** (John 20:11) and
 - saw two **white angels** seated where Jesus' body had been,
 - **one** at the head and the **other** at the foot. (John 20:12)

Scripture Reading

- ▶ They asked her,
 - **“Woman, why are you crying?”**
- ▶ “They have taken my **Lord** away,” she said, “and I don't know where they have put him.” (John 20:13)
- ▶ At this,
 - she turned around and saw **Jesus** standing there
 - but did not realize it was Jesus. (John 20:14)

Scripture Reading

- ▶ **“Woman,**” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” (John 20:15a)
- ▶ Thinking he was the **gardener**, she said,
 - “Sir, if **you** have carried him away,
 - tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” (John 20:15b)
- ▶ Jesus said to her, **“Mary.”** (John 20:16a)
- ▶ She turned toward him and cried out in **Aramaic**, **“Rabboni!”** (which means Teacher). (John 20:16b)

Scripture Reading

- ▶ **Jesus** said,
 - “Do **not hold** on to me, for I have not yet **returned** to the Father. (John 20:17a)
 - Go instead to my **brothers** and tell them,
 - ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father,
 - to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17b)
- ▶ **Mary Magdalene** went to the **disciples** with the news:
 - “I have **seen** the **Lord!**” (John 20:18a)
 - And she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20:18b)

Part 2

Introduction



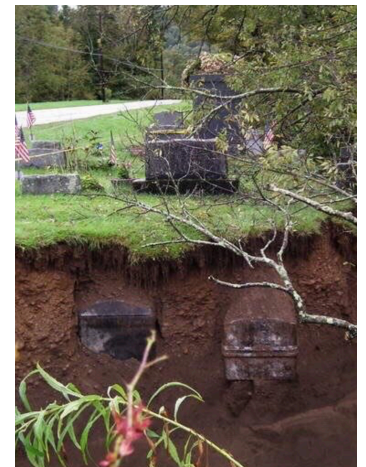
Introduction

- ▶ Imagine the **shock** of visiting a **loved one's** grave only to find evidence that
 - the **grave** has been tampered with and
 - the **body** is nowhere to be seen.
- ▶ This is essentially **Mary's situation** in the opening verses of our text, and it was also the experience of **Sherene Johnson**.



Introduction

- ▶ **Ten members** of the Johnson family are buried in **Brighton Cemetery in Alabama**.
- ▶ The town gets a lot of rain, and it is not unusual for the **cemetery** to be completely underwater.
- ▶ This is a problem because when **graves** are submerged, especially those on hillsides,
 - the deluge can raise the **dead**, and
 - send them **floating away**.



Introduction

- ▶ After a particularly **heavy rainfall**,
 - **Johnson** went to the **cemetery** with flowers to remember her **sister's** birthday.
 - She noticed several of her family members' **headstones** had been "rearranged" by the flooding.
 - She had to pay someone about \$75 per grave to reset the **stones** in concrete again.
- ▶ Others are not so fortunate.
- ▶ The **bodies** either go missing or need to be reburied.



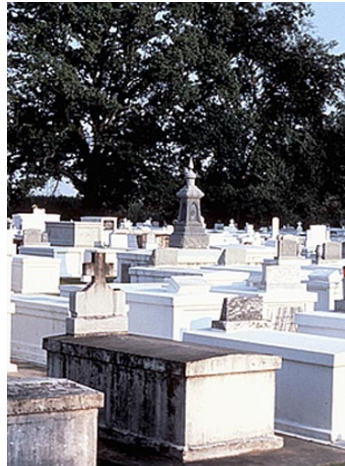
Introduction

- ▶ One **observer**, commenting on this increasingly common phenomenon, says that "**air pockets**" trapped inside above-ground vaults make them more likely to float.
- ▶ **Metal caskets**, sometimes called self-sealers, have **rubber gaskets**, and when funeral homes close them, they create an **airtight compartment** and **buoyancy**.
- ▶ If soils become saturated or if there is enough water for a long period of time, **caskets** will float.



Introduction

- ▶ When Sally and I lived in **Louisiana**, we noticed that most graves were above ground.
- ▶ The reason for this is that the **water table** is very high in that area.
- ▶ To prevent losing a **buried relative**, **vaults** are placed above ground to avoid creating empty graves.
- ▶ How strange it would be to visit a **cemetery** and find all the graves empty or to see **Aunt Susan's** casket floating down the **bayou**.



Part 3

Assumptions & Expectations



Expectations

- ▶ When **Mary Magdalene** went to the **tomb** and saw that the **stone** had been removed from the entrance, she had **expectations**.
- ▶ However, when they saw the **body missing**, all their assumptions and expectations were challenged.
- ▶ The **anguish** she and the other woman felt must have been a **deep**, searing wound in her **soul**.



Expectations

- ▶ Picture **her** standing before the **open tomb** in the **dim light** of early morning, her breath catching as the **reality** sinks in:
 - **Jesus' body is gone**, the one she'd come to anoint with spices.
- ▶ The Gospel of John tells us **she** wept and that weeping reveals a **heart torn open**—grief sharpened by confusion and a sense of violation.
- ▶ She'd already endured the **agony**
 - of watching him **die** on the cross,
 - her teacher **brutalized**, and now this final act of **care**,
 - This **last connection** to him has been **stolen away**.



Expectations

- ▶ According to John's gospel, **Mary Magdalene**, in her grief, runs to tell **Jesus' disciples** that **Jesus' body** is **missing**.
- ▶ They run to the **tomb** to look for themselves;
 - They only find strips of linen and Jesus' burial cloth.



Expectations

- ▶ By the way, who would **steal** or move a **body** and leave the **burial clothes** neatly folded?
- ▶ This is why it is written, in verse 8, that **John saw** and **believed**.
- ▶ Together with **Peter**, they went home, leaving **Mary** and perhaps the **other women** all **crying** at the **tomb**.



Part 4

Passion Predictions



Passion Predictions

- ▶ I don't know if you know this, but Jesus explicitly told his disciples about his impending crucifixion and resurrection on three distinct occasions in the Gospels.
- ▶ The **First Prediction** was **Peter's confession** of Jesus as the Messiah.
 - From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must
 - go to **Jerusalem** and **suffer** many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law and
 - that he must be **killed** and
 - on the third day, be **raised** to life. (Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, and Luke 9:22)

Passion Predictions

- ▶ The **Second Prediction** was after the Transfiguration.
 - When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The **Son of Man** is going to be **delivered** into the hands of men. They will **kill** him, and on the **third day**, he will be **raised to life**. (Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:31, Luke 9:44,
- ▶ The **Third Prediction** happens as Jesus approaches Jerusalem for the final time.
 - Now, Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be **delivered** over to the **chief priests** and the **teachers of the law**. They will condemn him to **death** and will hand him over to the **Gentiles** to be **mocked, flogged, and crucified**. On the **third day**, he will be **raised to life!**' (Matthew 20:17-19, Mark 10:33-34, Luke 18:31-33)

Why the Lack of Understanding

- ▶ It's attributed to a **mix** of **human limitations**, **spiritual blindness**, and the **unexpected nature** of Jesus' mission.
- ▶ **Key Reasons**
 - Preconceived Expectations of the Messiah.
 - **Peter** rebukes Jesus, saying, "**Never, Lord!** This shall never happen to you!"—indicating a rejection of the idea that the Messiah would die, let alone be crucified, a shameful death reserved for criminals. (Matthew 16:21-22)
 - Spiritual Dullness or Lack of Understanding.
 - But they did not understand what this meant. It was **hidden**, so they did not grasp it and were afraid to ask him about it. (Luke 9:45)

Why the Lack of Understanding

- Predictions Were Veiled until After the Resurrection
 - At first, his **disciples** did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was **glorified** did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done them to him. (John 12:16)
- Overwhelmed Emotions
 - ... the **disciples** were filled with **grief**. (Matthew 17:23)
- Human Nature and Hindsight
 - The **disciples'** fleeing at Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:50) and their initial disbelief at the resurrection reports (Mark 16:11) reflect a **natural tendency** to doubt or forget what doesn't fit their immediate reality—until **hindsight** clarifies it.

Part 5

Hope Beyond the Grave!



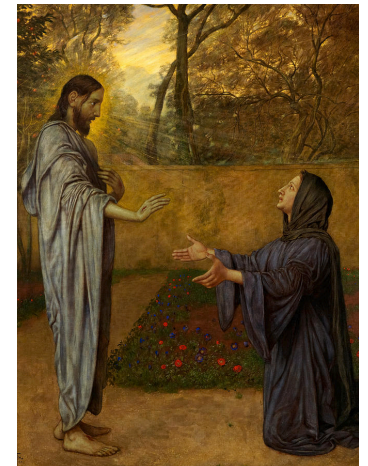
Hope Realized

- ▶ Still weeping and filled with all kinds of **anxiety** and gnawing **uncertainty** and **dread**, **Mary** brings herself to look into the tomb one more time.
- ▶ This time, **she** can't believe her eyes:
 - **two white angels** are seated where Jesus once lay.
 - They ask her why she is crying.
- ▶ Perhaps **blinded** by grief, sadness, and sorrow, Mary doesn't realize she's talking with **angels** and lets her **emotions** do all the thinking.



Hope Realized

- ▶ She's just spoken to the **angels**,
 - yet her anguish lingers, and then she turns—there's a **figure** she assumes is the gardener.
- ▶ Her voice trembles as she pleads,
 - “Sir, if **you** have carried him away, tell me where you have put him” (John 20:15).
- ▶ Then he says her name—“**Mary**,” and instantly, her **heart** must have lurched, stopped, and raced with a wild, dawning **recognition**.



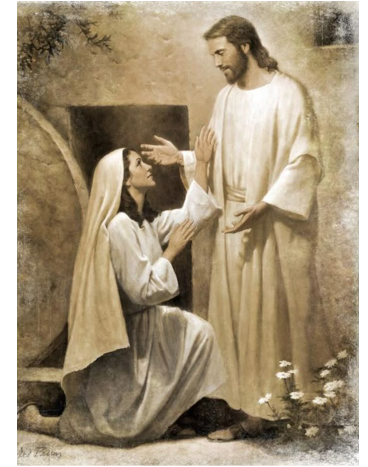
Hope Realized

- ▶ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "**Rabboni!**" (John 20:16b)
- ▶ Her heart, once a vessel of **sorrow**, now pulses with radiant **joy**.
- ▶ It's a personal, intimate reunion that marks her as the **first** to witness the impossible made true.
- ▶ She is swirling with adoration, gratitude, and sheer amazement as she gazes at her **living Lord**.



Hope Realized

- ▶ Filled with **Joy** and not wanting to let **Jesus** go, **Mary** holds on to Jesus.
- ▶ According to Matthew, the **other women** approached him, clasped his feet, and worshiped him. (Matthew 28:9)
- ▶ But **Jesus** gave them this command,
 - Go instead to my brothers and tell them,
 - 'I am returning to my **Father** and your **Father**, to my **God** and your **God**.'
- ▶ **Mary Magdalene** went to the **disciples** with the news:
 - "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:17-18)



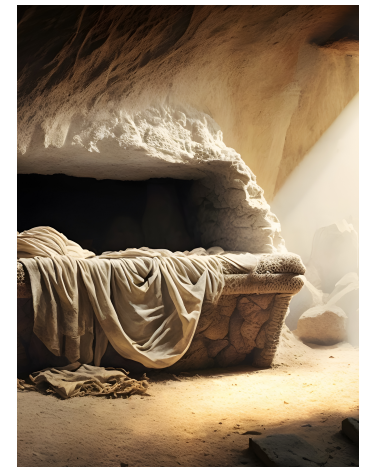
Part 5

Conclusion



Conclusion

- ▶ So, the **empty tomb**, while initially a source of **distress**, becomes the ultimate symbol of **hope**.
- ▶ In a **world** filled with ...
 - uncertainty and disruption,
 - floating tombs, fake news, delayed flights, floods, wildfires,
 - children who kill children, poverty, and disease,
 - the resurrection of **Jesus Christ** provides **hope** that change and redemption are possible.



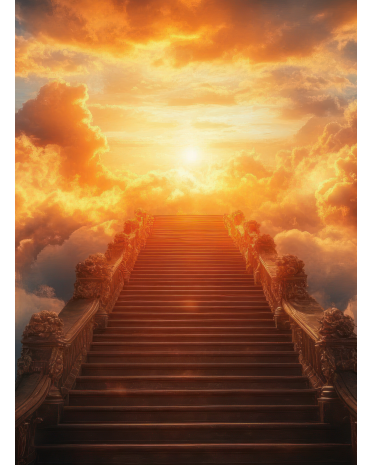
Conclusion

- ▶ In 1 Corinthians 15:20, the **Apostle Paul** writes that,
 - “But in fact, **Christ** has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who have died.”
- ▶ The resurrection of **Jesus** is not just a **spiritual** or **symbolic** event; it is the **physical proof** of God’s victory over death.
- ▶ “**First fruits**” means that **Jesus’** resurrection is the **first** of many.
- ▶ Because **he** was raised from the dead, we, too, have the **promise** of resurrection.
- ▶ Thus, a **victory over death**.



Conclusion

- ▶ For **believers**, **death** is not the end of the **story**.
- ▶ This transformative **hope** gives us a new perspective on life and death.
- ▶ When we are faced with **grief** and **loss**, the **resurrection** reminds us that **death** does not have the final word.
- ▶ The **resurrection** also gives us **hope** for the present.
- ▶ The **hope of the resurrection** isn’t only for the **future**;
 - it is a **hope** that impacts how we live today.



Conclusion

- ▶ Many of us don’t feel **hopeful**.
- ▶ Our **lives** are littered with bad choices, bad people, brokenness, and loss.
- ▶ In other **words**,
 - God has us where he wants us!
- ▶ When the weight of the **past** drags us down, and we feel that our **current struggles** are **insurmountable**,
- ▶ **Jesus** shows up as he did to **Mary**!
- ▶ The **resurrection** tells us that nothing is beyond **God’s power** to redeem.



Conclusion

- ▶ The **resurrection** of Jesus, therefore, reminds us that **death** has been defeated, that **God’s power** is more significant than our darkest moments, and that **new life** is always possible.
- ▶ The **hope** of the resurrection is for all who believe, and it **transforms** how we see the world and how we live our lives.
- ▶ On this **Easter Sunday**, as we celebrate the resurrection of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, let us remember that Jesus is likely to turn up when we least expect him.
- ▶ And **keep in mind** that our **lives** are journeys toward understanding and that there is **hope** for both the now and the hereafter.



Conclusion

- ▶ When we face **grave situations**, the **empty tomb** reminds us of an **important truth**, one that is revisited in the chorus of Bill Gaither's well-known worship song:
 - Because he lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because he lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know he holds the future,
And life is worth living, just because he lives.
- ▶ The **same person** who predicted his **death** and **resurrection** also predicts the **resurrection** of all **those** who follow and worship **him** in spirit and truth.
- ▶ May we **live** in the **hope** of the **resurrection** today and always.