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JOHN 20:10-18

“Missing the Point”

Dr. Ron Dunn

This morning, we'll read **verses 10-18**.

“Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. And as she wept she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken away my Lord,’ she said, ‘and I don't know where they have put Him.’ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ‘Woman,’ He said, ‘why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ 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.’ Then, Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni,’ which means ‘teacher.’ Jesus said, ‘Do not hold onto Me, for I have yet to return to the Father. Go and say 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.’ And she told them that He had said these things to her.”

I remember some years ago I was in a church and I was doing noon services. I was speaking from **Psalm 37**. And after I finished one day, a man in the church came up to me...I was expecting a compliment, I guess. I wasn't expecting what he said. He said, “You know, Preacher, you missed the whole point of that passage.” The pastor heard that and every once in awhile he writes me little note that says, “You missed the whole point.”

I guess it is easy sometimes for us to miss the whole point. As a matter of fact, that's what Mary Magdalene did when she came to the tomb and saw the empty tomb that morning...she missed the whole point. And it's interesting to realize that the first person who saw the risen Lord didn't recognize Him. Now, she had known Jesus...had seen Him on other occasions, but this morning...on this first Easter Sunday morning, she did not recognize. She looked into the tomb, supposing to find the body of Jesus there, but all she saw was angels. Interesting how the angels didn't seem to startle her, or scare her. Nor, did they cause her to stop weeping. The angels wouldn't satisfy her. Seeing the angels was not enough...she was looking for the body of her Lord, and she failed to recognize Him when she saw Him.

I think we need to pretty much put ourselves beside Mary, because she is typical of a great many of us...how we fail to see Jesus. When sometimes we're looking straight at Him we fail to see Him and we miss the whole point of that empty tomb. So, there needed to come to Mary that day as I think there needs to come to all of us a new recognition...a new revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll notice it was only when He spoke her name...and there's no way that you and I can reproduce that name... First of all, He said, “Woman, why are you weeping?” and that meant nothing to her, but then when He spoke her name... “Mary” immediately the scales fell from her eyes and she recognized that it was Jesus.

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Now, how is it that she missed the whole point of that empty tomb? Instead of seeing the empty tomb and rejoicing and singing her hallelujahs, she wept! And her grief was so great...the Greek word when it says that she wept means it was a loud and long lament. She was terribly upset and she lamented long and loud as was the custom among those Jews of that day. And she said, "Lord, where have you laid the body of my Lord...tell me and I will go and get Him." Of course, her enthusiasm got the better of her. I don't know how that little woman could have carried the body of the Lord, especially with all the spices that were on that body, but anyway, in her enthusiasm she wasn't thinking clearly. Why? Because she had missed the whole point!

I'd like to share with you this morning why sometimes we miss the whole point of the resurrection and why we fail to see Jesus as He really is. Now there are several reasons. One that has been suggested is that she couldn't see Jesus through her tears...she was so overcome with grief, so overcome with sadness that her eyes were filled with tears and she could not see Jesus through her tears. That is one suggestion. And I think it is a valid suggestion.

Sometimes it is hard for us to see Jesus when our eyes are filled with tears. Sometimes it is hard for us to see Jesus when our hearts are breaking. Sometimes when circumstances have turned against us and our life seems to be going down the tube, it's hard for us to see Jesus in all of that. And so, actually Mary did some unnecessary weeping, because she was weeping over the fact that the body of the Lord was gone...that Jesus was absent...that He was still dead and she didn't know where He was and her weeping was unnecessary.

I think there are times when our weeping, even it may be great and heavy and long, may be unnecessary. If we could see the truth through our tears we might understand that much of our grief is really unnecessary. But it is hard for people who have suddenly undergone some tragedy...it is hard for people whose life has not turned out the way they expected...it is difficult for people whose life seems to be a tangled mass of threads...it is difficult for them to see Jesus, because they become so absorbed with the tears of their life that the tears form a kind of veil through which we cannot see the Lord Jesus.

There's another reason suggested why we cannot see Jesus when He's standing right there in front of us, and that's because oftentimes we're looking in the wrong direction...we're turned in the wrong way...the Bible says that she had to turn around to see Jesus. She couldn't see Him because she was turned in the wrong direction.

And there is a sense in which many of us live our lives turned in the wrong direction...looking in some other direction to try to find peace and looking in some other direction to try to find solace...to try to find strength we look to the world and we look to the success of the world and we're looking for friends or we're looking for society or we're looking for the politician or we're looking for the sociologist or we're looking for the experts of our age to somehow make sense out of our lives and we're looking in the wrong direction. And for joy and happiness sometimes we're looking in the direction of the world. We think somehow that the world has the answer to all of our problems and we think that if we could somehow lose ourselves in the world...

When I flew up here yesterday there were two young men sitting over close to us and they were already pretty "happy." They had engaged the stewardess in conversation and I just happened to overhear it. You didn't have to eavesdrop...they were letting everybody know that they were flying from Cincinnati up here to Grand Rapids just to go to a bar. I mean, that's the only reason they were flying up here...just to go to a bar owned by their cousin, and they were going to party, you know. Well, they were expecting to have a good time and as a matter of fact they already were having a good time. I'd hate to be in their place this morning and feel their headache and all of that. But there are a lot of people who feel that if they can just somehow find their fill in the world and fill themselves with the booze of the world and the drugs of the world and all the

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pleasures of the world that they'll find whatever they're looking for, and most people can't see Jesus because they're looking in the wrong direction for Him! They'll never see Him until they turn around and stop looking in that direction. They'll never see Him until they realize they're turned the wrong way and they must turn to Him before they can ever see Him!

But, there's a third reason that I think Mary missed the whole point. A third reason why she failed to see Jesus is because she was looking for a corpse instead of a living Lord. And here again, many of us have to take our stand. She went to that tomb. If Jesus had been lying in that tomb, she would have been satisfied! Still grieving, still sad that He was dead, but she would have been satisfied! Her weeping here is not because Jesus is dead, her weeping here is because the body is missing! She has nothing tangible to hold onto! And so she's looking for the body and she says to the gardener who was really Jesus, "If you've taken Him somewhere, tell me where and I'll go get Him." In other words, "If I can just possess the corpse." "If I can just believe that there was a Jesus on this earth at one time, then I'll be happy."

Well, I want to tell you something this morning, I'm glad she didn't find what she was looking for! If she'd found what she was looking for none of us would be here this morning. There would be no resurrection! There would be no Easter! Listen...it's not always a bad thing when you don't find what you're looking for! Sometimes the best thing that could happen to you is when you fail to find what you're looking for!

I think that many of us today don't look for a living Lord. I wonder how many of you this morning came into this service and you expected to meet the living Lord. Did you come to celebrate a Jesus who used to be...a Jesus who once walked on this earth...a Jesus who once arose again, but is long gone now into heaven. I'm afraid that the trouble with much of our worship as we gather together on a Sunday morning is that we're still worshipping a dead Jesus for all practical matters. Oh, we wouldn't call Him dead, but we would say that He is far removed from us and uninvolved in the lives that we live. Actually, we're looking for a corpse instead of the living Lord.

I noticed in the paper coming up yesterday...strange things like this are always happening...down in New Orleans they're performing an investigation...I wonder if you read this in the paper...there was a Catholic church and the priest took an old wafer and he dropped it in the holy water to let kind of, you know, get soggy. He left it there for two or three days, and lo and behold, it turned to human flesh. It had turned into the body of the Lord Jesus Christ! Still looking for the wrong relationship to Jesus!

You know, there's an interesting statement that the Lord makes in this that has a lot to say to us. He says in **verse 17**, "Do not hold onto Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." The Greek idea there is "Stop clinging to Me..." It was a prohibition to stop something that was already in progress. And of course, when Mary saw her Lord, I can just imagine her falling at His feet and wrapping her arms around His feet and Jesus said, "Don't hang onto Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father."

What's He saying here? What He's saying is, "Mary, the old relationship of sense and smell and touch and sound and taste...those things no longer exist, but now there is a new relationship between us...the old relationship is gone and with this new revelation comes a new relationship." That's why Paul could say, "Henceforth, we know no man after the flesh. We know them after the Spirit." Now, folks, our relationship with Jesus Christ is not based upon finding the bones of Peter or finding shards of the Cross or finding the shroud of Turin or worshipping some Jesus who used to be...who is still on some Cross somewhere...oh no, that's the worship of Mary. No, we're looking for a corpse instead of a living Lord...

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I think sometimes when we pray if we really analyze our praying and were honest with our hearts, we'd be praying to a Lord who we don't really believe is alive and active in the affairs of our hearts today! There's a new relationship that we have with Jesus. It's no more after the flesh. It doesn't consist in things. It doesn't consist in physical and material things. It consists in a spiritual relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And it doesn't matter if you come here this morning and sit on this pew and listen to this music and worship in this physical building...if that's as far...if that's the extent to which your relationship with God goes this day, you have not worshipped! Not only do you come here in this physical place, but you come here to meet a spiritual Lord, and to meet a living Lord and I wonder this morning if you are seeing a living Lord...or if you're still just looking for some historical Jesus who used to be.

I think there's a final reason that we sometimes miss the point...and that is that we miss that God may be in the circumstances. Now, when she saw those two angels, that should have told her something. It's amazing how we miss the obvious! I tell you, when you see those two angels, that ought to tell you that God's around! I mean, wouldn't you think that? I would! I'd think God's around! Angels didn't make a bit of an impression on her. They said, "Woman, who're you looking for?" And she turned away from the angels...not fascinated with the angels...not satisfied by the angels...and then she turned to this Man whom she supposed to be the gardener, and she said, "Lord, they have taken my Lord and I know not where they've laid Him."

See, she thought the whole dilemma was between her and other people. She thought there was somebody else who had taken the Lord...it was somebody else's hand that had caused this mysterious disappearance to take place. She never considered that it was God! She never considered that it was God! The missing body of Jesus...the only explanation had to be somebody had taken Him away. It never occurred to her that Jesus Himself might have taken Himself away!

Sometimes the clouds grow dark in our life because we fail to see God in the midst of the circumstances. We fail to see God's hand as He is working in the various circumstances of our life. You need to do something, friend, in your everyday life and that is to always look for the hidden hand of God! Always look for the hidden hand of God... All Mary could see is what she thought men had done! All she could see was an empty tomb! All she could see was a missing body! If she had looked beyond and could have seen and recognized the hand of God and taken God into account, there would have never needed to be any tears shed in her life.

I wonder this morning as you look at your life and you see all the things that are happening in your life...and I'm talking about the unhappy things...the sad things...the disasters that you're going through...the difficulties that you're going through...I just wonder this morning if you've missed the whole point. Are you able to look beyond the immediate and see the hand of God? Do you not realize that the hand of God is always working? It's unseen, invisible and so you give it no account. We take all the circumstances of our life and we calculate them, but we don't put God into our calculations, and that's why there comes the grief and the tears and the heartache and the lack of hope, because we do not put God into our calculations.

The next time you sit down and you figure up all the circumstances of your life, why not include God in your calculations. It'll make the outcome a lot different!

Oh, there was a new recognition with Mary. And there was a new relationship with Jesus. And there was a new responsibility given to her. Notice what Jesus said to her, "Don't hang onto Me. Don't try to hang onto Me...but rather, go instead to My brethren and tell them I am returning to My Father and your Father and My God and your God..." and Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news – "I have seen the Lord" and she told them that He had said these things to her.

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Now, here's an interesting thing...here is Mary who is wanting to cling to Jesus! Naturally, she doesn't want to leave Jesus' presence and she's clinging to Him, and Jesus said, "Let Me go...don't cling to Me because I've not yet ascended to My Father..." There's a new relationship that we have and it's not based on the old relationship of physical touch and seeing a all of that. He said that there's going to be a new spiritual relationship. "Now, that you know that...don't cling to Me, but I want you to run and go and tell your brethren." She has a new responsibility! And that is to go and to shout the good news that Jesus Christ is risen! And to say, "I have seen the Lord!"

And if you and I get the point of the resurrection at all, it will be that we are to share with others that the Lord is risen and that we have seen the Master... "I know He's alive!" The old song says, "I know He lives because He lives in my heart." But I tell you people who come to church and worship God on Easter and they talk about the resurrected Lord and they go out and they never mention it to anybody, they've missed the whole point!

I've always thought the resurrection had to be one of the saddest days of Jesus' life. Why is that? Because not a single person was there to meet Him when He arose! I mean, He'd told them He was going to rise! Even Mary remembered the words **after** the angels had warned her. But they'd all forgotten! They didn't believe! And it says in this chapter that Peter puzzled over these things...it never occurred to him that the Lord had risen...He puzzled over these things... "What's happened? What's happened?" Can you imagine the disappointment that must have come to the Lord when He comes out of that grave on Easter Sunday morning...the greatest act of human history and there's not a single person to meet Him. WHY? Because nobody believed Him...they missed the whole point! They missed the whole point!

My prayer this morning is that we'll not miss the point of the resurrection. The point of the resurrection is that we have a new recognition of Jesus...we see Him and we have a new relationship with Him...and we have a new responsibility and that's to tell others that we have seen the Lord. Would you bow with me?

Father, we thank You for this day and we thank You that our Lord **is** alive and I pray that we would do more than just come to church and celebrate a day on the calendar. I pray that we'd hear Jesus speak **our** name, and that we would come to understand that with the risen Lord we have a new relationship with Jesus and a new responsibility. Let us not miss the whole point of the greatest thing that God ever did.

We pray in Jesus' name,

Amen