

A summary of John 20:1-18

- 1. Do we love Jesus not only as our God but also as our brother? (John 19:25; 20:17; Matthew 27:61).** Mary Magdalene loved the Lord very much, and she sought Him. However, what kind of love was this? John 19:25 tells us that at the cross, when Jesus was being crucified, there were four women and one man (Mary, the mother of Jesus, Salome (the sister of Jesus' mother in the Gospel of Mark, and also the mother of James and John), Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene (three Marys), and John, who would have been a cousin of Jesus. The mother of Jesus and her sister Salome, as well as the apostle John, were both close relatives of Jesus. Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas were the only non-relatives who remained at the cross, when all the brothers (except John, the writer of the gospel in question) had run away. This indicates that Mary Magdalene loved Jesus just as Jesus' three relatives (His mother, aunt and cousin) loved Him. In Matthew 27:61, Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene remained at the tomb after Jesus was buried. Early on the day of resurrection, Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. Mark 16:1 adds Salome (Jesus' aunt) as the third sister to visit the tomb (two relatives and one non-relative). All of these facts may indicate that the only non-relative to love Jesus in such an intimate and desperate way was Mary Magdalene. How do we love the Lord? The love of closest relatives is considered in human terms as the most lasting love. Even the Bible recognizes brotherly love in such a way (Proverbs 18:24). Do we love the Lord in such a way? Are we intimate with Him? Do we speak to Him, and does He speak to us? Can we testify to what the Lord has spoken to us? As we will see later, Mary Magdalene had such a testimony.
- 2. In addition to loving the Lord, we also must have the Lord's speaking and leading (John 20:2,18).** The first thing that Mary did was to run to Peter and John to tell them what she thought had happened to Jesus. That was commendable. We need such a heart and an exercise. This is a proof that she loved the Lord dearly. What is a test of our love for the Lord? We run to the saints (the brothers and sisters). We run to our companions. We run to the church gatherings. We run to fellowship with the saints. To run means that we mean business, that we are eager, not passive. Do we have such a heart on Lord's day morning, to run to the bread breaking gathering to remember the Lord by praising Him with the brothers and sisters? That is the positive side. At the same time, Mary conveyed a "wrong" message, according to her concept, and not according to the Lord's speaking or revelation to her. She concluded that "they" (perhaps referring to the soldiers or chief priests, but the Bible does not say) had taken her Lord away. This may be our case. Do we love the Lord? Perhaps. But we may speak nonsense and convey a wrong message. We need to grow. Mary remained at the tomb until the Lord appeared to her and spoke to her (v.18). If we love the Lord, we must have the Lord's speaking and His leading. Otherwise we may give others the wrong message that may not help them, even though we ourselves love the Lord and follow Him. Therefore, we need two turns, which brings us to our next point.
- 3. We need two turns (John 20:14,16).** During Mary's vigil at the tomb of Jesus, her first encounter was with two angels who spoke to her (v.13). They asked her why she was weeping, and she gave the same answer she gave to Peter and John earlier. As soon as she said that, she turned and saw Jesus but did not recognize Him (v.14). When she turned, she saw Jesus physically, but did not know it was Him. This may be a physical turn. For example, we may come to the Lord's Table gathering, and see many brothers and sisters and hear a lot of speaking, even from the Bible, and testimonies. The brothers and sisters and their speaking may be "angels" whom God sends to serve those who are to be saved (Hebrews 1:14). Brothers and sisters may even come up to us to ask us how we are doing, if we need any help (humanly), just as the angels asked Mary why she

was weeping. These are the angels to help us to know the Lord. Yet we may see them and hear them, but not yet recognize the Lord. Yes, we have a turn, but it is still physical. We need a second turn. The second turn is when we hear the Lord's speaking to us, just as the Lord spoke to Mary (vv.15-17). At this point, her spirit and her heart turned, and it was then that she recognized Jesus. What caused her to turn? Jesus' speaking. With us also, it is not that we decide to turn on our own, but that we hear the Lord's speaking. The Lord wants to speak to us, but our heart must be pure. If our heart is pure, He will, through His mercy and grace, speak to us so we can hear Him. This may cause us to turn.

4. **Jesus reveals Himself to weaker ones, not the strong ones (1 Peter 3:7).** 1 Peter 3:7 refers to sisters as weaker vessels. But in John 20, Jesus shows Himself to a sister and not to the brothers. This is not to differentiate between brothers and sisters, but rather between weaker and so-called strong ones. Peter and John, perhaps representing the "stronger" brothers, both ran to the tomb when they heard Mary's report that the tomb was empty, and both went into the tomb. John even believed (v.8). However, both of them went home. They did not take the next step, and consequently, they lacked the Lord's revelation and speaking. Mary, however, despite her lack of knowledge and wrong message, remained, and the Lord appeared to her. In the church life, many times, the Lord will appear to the weaker ones, the younger ones, the new believers, who will have a genuine testimony. We cannot despise the younger ones. We need to pay attention to their speaking. Indeed, we need to pay attention to everyone's speaking (both the young and the mature), but often the "mature" ones fail, and the Lord speaks through the "weaker" ones.
5. **The Lord calls the weaker ones by name, even as He called Mary by her name (v.16).** How touching that one of the first words spoken by the Lord after His resurrection was "Mary," a direct address by name. He called the weaker one's name, not a stronger one. "Mary" was one of the first words after resurrection. This is very encouraging. This means that the Lord may speak even to me, if I consider myself to be a weaker one! Sometimes, we tend to look down at ourselves, or minimize our portion or function in the church life. For example, we may come to the bread breaking gathering to remember the Lord, but with the thought: "Who am I to praise the Lord? What can I say? I don't know the Bible. I don't know how to pray. Let other saints who are more "skillful" and knowledgeable praise and thank the Lord!" Indeed, we are weak. But we can still praise and thank the Lord, according to our level of life and growth. Consider Mary again. She did not know much, and she had an inaccurate message. Yet she was bold to declare three times (to Peter and John, to the two angels, and even to Jesus Himself!) her plaintive message of what they had done with Jesus' body. Eventually, her persistence, and her pure heart, brought in the Lord's presence and His speaking. It is the same with us. We need to join the corporate prayers, praise and thank the Lord in the church gatherings, serve, preach the gospel, and even offer the financial grace offering. The Lord will appear to us. Never say "I cannot do this or that." The Lord will appear to us.
6. **Ironically, people may believe a wrong message, but few may believe the true message (v.2,18).** Ironically, Peter and John believed Mary's inaccurate message and came running to the tomb. However, when she testified to the other disciples what she had heard, she was met with incredulity and unbelief (Luke 24:11). This is the church life! How many believe the true report, or how many of us live according to what we believe? This is an incentive to us to preach the gospel again and again. The more we preach the gospel and sow the seeds of life, the more some will believe. Yet many may not believe. This should not discourage us, but rather cause us to persevere.