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## Lesson 56

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### *Jesus' Appearance to the Women*

#### **The Scripture Lesson**

*Matthew 28:9-15*

The message of the angel to the women at the tomb was already great good news. But something even better was in store for them. For, on their way to tell the disciples what the angel had said, Jesus Himself *appeared* to them!

Yes, Jesus appeared. One moment He was *not* there, as far as they could tell, and then suddenly the next moment He *was* there. They recognized Him at once as the very same Jesus who had been crucified. And yet they could tell too that He had changed. His body, remember, had passed right through the grave clothes. It had changed, in a moment, from an earthly, physical, material body to a body that is heavenly and spiritual. His body was *glorified*. It could not even be seen by human eye, unless Jesus revealed Himself. He did that to the women. And they responded by falling down at His feet and worshipping Him. Jesus told them to bring word to His disciples; and then He most likely disappeared, just as suddenly and mysteriously as He had appeared.

Meanwhile, the soldiers had arrived in the city in order to report to the leaders of the Jews what happened in the garden. They told them about the angel and about the opening of the

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tomb. They had not *seen* Jesus come out of the grave, of course, but they believed surely that He *had*. And so did the chief priests. But still they refused to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Their hearts were hard. And not only did they themselves refuse to believe, but they decided to try to deceive the whole nation. They bribed the guards. They gave them money, for telling a lie about what happened at the tomb. The guards agreed to tell everyone that they *fell asleep*, and that, while they were sleeping, the disciples of Jesus came and stole the body.

The disciples later reported that Jesus had risen and that they had seen Him with their own eyes. At the same time, the soldiers and the chief priests claimed that the disciples had *stolen* the body and *invented* the story of the resurrection. The story of the soldiers was clearly a lie — for how could they know that the disciples stole the body if they were *sleeping*? But, whom did most of the Jews believe? They chose to believe the story of the soldiers. They did not want Jesus to rise. But Christ *did* arise. We believe it, and are thankful. For His resurrection is *our* victory.

#### ***Touch Me Not***

*John 20:11-18*

After Mary Magdalene told Peter and John

about the theft of Jesus' body, she herself headed back to the sepulcher. She was tired from having just come *from* the sepulcher, so she fell far behind Peter and John. By the time Mary reached the tomb, therefore, the two disciples had already left. So Mary learned nothing of what they may have believed about the reason for the disappearance of the body. She knew only that it was gone and that it was most likely taken by His enemies.

For a time Mary stood outside the tomb — weeping. Finally, however, she decided to look into the sepulcher; and when she did that, she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had before lain. They were dressed in white, so Mary should have been able to tell from their appearance that they were not ordinary men. But Mary did not even really notice that. So filled with grief was she that she paid little attention to details of what was happening around her. Thus, when the angels asked why she was weeping, she replied simply, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.”

At that moment Mary turned and saw behind her another Man. It was, this time, Jesus Himself — but she failed to recognize Him. With the tears in her eyes and the hurt in her soul, she did not notice that this Man looked very much like Jesus. She figured that He must be the *gardener*.

“Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?” Jesus asked. And Mary answered, “Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” She does not think to say *who* is missing; nor does she consider *how* she would carry Him away, or *where* she would bring Him. So distressed is she at the loss of her beloved Master. And so little does she look for a resurrection.

But the unexpected had happened. And when Jesus called her by her name, it suddenly dawned on Mary that the Man was not the gardener at all but her Lord Jesus Himself. A moment before, all had seemed to be lost. No more! Her Lord had returned. She fell before Him and held tightly to His feet. Now again she would be able to serve Him as she had in the past, as she loved so much

to do. Never again would she let Him go.

But Mary had failed again to understand things properly. She saw that it was Jesus who stood before her, but she did not notice that He had *changed*. Jesus must therefore teach her that things are different now. “Touch me not,” He said, “for I am not yet ascended to my Father.”

Do not think, Mary, that you are going to keep me now with you. For I have not returned to you from death. I have passed *through* death. I have been *glorified*. Never again will it be necessary, or even possible, for you to serve Me with food or shelter in the life of this world. For I have no earthly needs. I will not even stay here long, for I must ascend to My Father. And that will be better by far for Me, and for you. So, Mary, do not hold Me, in the belief that I am as I was before, and in the hope that you will keep me thus forever.

Was Mary disappointed? Perhaps she was. She was, surely, filled with happiness that Jesus had risen; but she must at the same time have wondered how things could ever be *better* than they were when she found her greatest joy in ministering to her Master's needs. Soon, however, she will know. For after Jesus ascends to His Father He will return to Mary, and to all of His people, in His Spirit. Then Mary will understand that real, lasting joy is not to be found in having Jesus on earth and being able to minister to His earthly needs. Real joy is to be found only in knowing that it is by His death, and resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of His Father that we are *saved*.

### Memory Work

#### Group A

I Corinthians 15:42a, 43b “So also is the resurrection of the dead.... It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

#### Group B

John 20:13b “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.”

## ACTIVITIES

*This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.*

### DO YOU AGREE?

*If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.*

\_\_\_ 1. When Jesus appeared to the women, and they held Him by the feet, Jesus warned them not to touch Him.

\_\_\_ 2. When the guards fled from the scene of the resurrection, they hurried directly to Pilate to report their experiences at the tomb.

\_\_\_ 3. The guards told the chief priests that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus while they slept.

\_\_\_ 4. Because the story of the soldiers was such a flimsy lie, very few of the Jewish people believed it.

\_\_\_ 5. When Mary Magdalene returned to the sepulcher, she looked into it and saw two angels sitting.

\_\_\_ 6. When Jesus asked Mary, "Whom seekest thou?" she thought He was the gardener.

\_\_\_ 7. Mary recognized Jesus when He called her by name.

\_\_\_ 8. Jesus told Mary not to touch Him because His resurrected body was spiritual and could not be touched by human hands.

\_\_\_ 9. When the women brought the Eleven the glad report that Jesus was risen and had appeared to them, the disciples rejoiced and were exceeding glad.

### QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Why were the women so eager to bring the message of the angels to the disciples? What happened on their way to the city?

2. How was Jesus' resurrection different from the resurrection of Lazarus? If Jesus' resurrection

body was *spiritual*, how was it possible for the women to see Him?

3. It seems that the women understood that Jesus was somehow different from what He was before His death. What did they do to honor Him as their Lord?

4. What did Jesus tell the women to do?

5. If the soldiers did not see Jesus come out of the tomb, why did they believe He had?

6. If the chief priests believed that Jesus had come out of the grave, why then did they not believe that He was the Son of God?

7. How did the chief priests try to keep the people from believing that Jesus had risen from the dead?

8. Soon, then, there were two stories about what had happened to the body of Jesus. Which story did most of the people believe?

9. Can you think of a reason why the chief priests tried so hard to deny the resurrection? Why are we so thankful that Jesus *did* arise?

10. What did Mary Magdalene see when she looked into the sepulcher? Why was Mary neither surprised by what she saw in the sepulcher, nor afraid because of it?

11. What did Mary think when she first saw Jesus in the garden? What did Jesus do to help her recognize Him?

12. What did Mary expect to be able to do, now that her Master had returned to her? What did Jesus say to her, to teach her that the old relationships were gone?

13. How would Jesus soon return to His people, after ascending to His Father? Do you know how that would be better for His people than if He stayed on earth as Mary had wanted Him to do?

## COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. The women who had come early Sunday morning to the sepulcher in Joseph's garden had been told by angels to go \_\_\_\_\_ and tell Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_ that He is \_\_\_\_\_ from the dead. It was evidently on their way to the city that \_\_\_\_\_ met them, saying, "All hail" (Matt. 28:7, 8).

2. The resurrected body of Jesus was different from that which was laid in the grave on Friday. It had been raised a spiritual body, which could be neither seen by human eyes nor touched by human hands, unless Jesus chose to show Himself. A *changed* body it was, therefore, but nevertheless still the *human body* of Jesus. Mary Magdalene would later recognize Him by His voice. Here the women apparently recognize Him by His face. But they must also have perceived at once the glorious change. They could tell that He had not returned to be with them as He had been with them before. And, more clearly than ever before, they saw Him as their *Lord*. They came, therefore, and held Him by the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Him (Matt. 28:9).

3. That their worship of Him was proper is evident from the fact that Jesus *accepted* it. No need was there for Him to say, "Touch me not," as He did to Mary. They do *right* to worship and adore Him, for He is the Son of God. But they need not *fear*, for He is their Savior. Jesus said therefore, "Be not \_\_\_\_\_." And then He repeats the instruction of the angel, "Go tell my \_\_\_\_\_." His disciples had shamefully forsaken Him, but He pardons the littleness of their faith. They are His brethren still (Matt. 28:10).

4. Some of the sentries, meanwhile, were by this time come into the city, and they made their way to the \_\_\_\_\_ in order to show them all the \_\_\_\_\_ that were done. The sentries had not seen the resurrection but they did feel the earthquake, and they saw what the angel did. They took it for granted, therefore, that the grave was now empty. So did the chief priests, for

they at once \_\_\_\_\_ with the elders in order to figure out some way to suppress the truth — that is, to keep people from hearing about and believing what really happened. And they decide to bribe the guards to change their story. They gave large \_\_\_\_\_ to the soldiers, and told them to tell everyone that Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_ came by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the body while the sentries \_\_\_\_\_. And, if the soldiers might be afraid that they would be punished for sleeping on guard duty, the chief priests assure them that if this come to the \_\_\_\_\_ ears, we will \_\_\_\_\_ him and \_\_\_\_\_ you (Matt. 28:11-14).

5. The soldiers took the \_\_\_\_\_ and did as they were \_\_\_\_\_. Two stories, therefore, began to circulate in the land — one a sober report, made by credible witnesses, that Jesus had risen; the other a clumsy lie. But the power of unbelief is such that it will desperately grasp at anything, no matter how flimsy, in order to satisfy itself that Jesus did not of His own power come out of the grave. It was the lying story of the guards therefore that, according to Matthew, was \_\_\_\_\_ reported among the \_\_\_\_\_ until this day (Matt. 28:15).

6. Mary Magdalene evidently decided to return to the garden after having brought to Peter and John the report of what she had seen at the sepulcher. She could not, however, keep pace with the two disciples, who had taken off on a run. She arrived therefore shortly after they left. So, having heard nothing of the announcement of the angels, or of the disciples' confidence that the body had *not* been stolen, Mary stood at the sepulcher \_\_\_\_\_. And as she wept she \_\_\_\_\_ down and looked into the sepulcher, and saw two \_\_\_\_\_ sitting, the one at the \_\_\_\_\_ and the other at the feet where the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus had lain (John 19:11, 12).

7. So grief-stricken was Mary that she was totally unmoved by the presence of these two ex-

traordinary “men” in the tomb. And when they ask her, “Woman, why \_\_\_\_\_ thou?” she merely replied, “Because \_\_\_\_\_ have taken away my \_\_\_\_\_, and I know not where they have \_\_\_\_\_ him” (John 20:13, 14).

8. On turning away from the tomb she saw \_\_\_\_\_ standing near. However, in her distraught state of mind, and with her eyes dimmed by tears, she failed to recognize Him. When therefore He asked her, “Woman, why \_\_\_\_\_ thou? whom \_\_\_\_\_ thou?” she, supposing Him to be the \_\_\_\_\_, replied, “\_\_\_\_\_, if thou have \_\_\_\_\_ Him hence, tell me where thou hast \_\_\_\_\_ Him, and I will take Him away” (John 20:14, 15).

9. Jesus then said to her, “\_\_\_\_\_.” There was no mistaking that voice. In an instant all the anguish of her soul was turned to joy. She said to Him, “\_\_\_\_\_,” which is to say, \_\_\_\_\_. Very likely she embraced Him, perhaps clinging to His feet. Certain it is that the impulse of her heart was to clasp Him to herself, never to lose Him again. The other women had somehow sensed that Jesus’ resurrection was not a return to the old relationships. Mary did not. She thought she would be able again to minister to His earthly needs as in days gone by. Mary was therefore in special need of the instruction that Jesus made the particular purpose of this appearance. “\_\_\_\_\_ me not,” He said, “for I am not yet \_\_\_\_\_ to my \_\_\_\_\_.” Do not, in other words, try to keep me at this stage of my exaltation. I arose in order to ascend, which will be better not only for Me, but also for you. For the higher, spiritual fellowship of Jesus with His people, through the Spirit, will be better than His mere physical presence could ever be (John 20:16).

10. “Go to my brethren,” Jesus continued, “and tell them that I ascend unto \_\_\_\_\_ Father, and \_\_\_\_\_ Father” (John 20:17). Thus did Jesus distinguish between His *own* and His

*people’s* relationship to God — He being the only *begotten* Son, and we being sons by *adoption*.

11. Mary Magdalene therefore went and told the \_\_\_\_\_ that she had \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord (John 20:18). The other women also reported what they had seen to the \_\_\_\_\_ (Luke 24:10). A mild rebuke that must have been for the disciples. After all of the clear instruction they had received from Jesus, they had been offended in Him. Now they must learn about the resurrection second-hand, from the women.

12. And still they were slow to believe. Mary came to them as they \_\_\_\_\_ and wept, and when they heard from her that Jesus was \_\_\_\_\_, and had been \_\_\_\_\_ of her, they \_\_\_\_\_ not (Mark 16:10, 11). And when a similar story was heard from the other women, the women’s \_\_\_\_\_ seemed to them as \_\_\_\_\_ tales, and they believed them \_\_\_\_\_ (Luke 24:10, 11).

13. The disciples could not yet understand the need for Christ’s death. And without an understanding of His death, they couldn’t make any sense out of the resurrection either. They needed the promised Comforter, which is the \_\_\_\_\_, who, Jesus had said, will \_\_\_\_\_ you all things, and bring to your \_\_\_\_\_ whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26). Then the disciples, and Mary too, would understand that what they had once set their hearts on could not profit.

#### QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Because each of the four gospel writers presents only part of the story, it is impossible to determine the precise order of events on resurrection Sunday. That’s true also of the order of the appearances. According to Mark 16:9, Jesus “appeared first to Mary Magdalene.” There is, however, question whether this means that the appearance to Mary was the first of *all* the appearances, or the first only of the three mentioned by Mark. Considering the various details of this eventful Sunday morning, as we have studied them thus far, can you show why it’s reasonable to

believe that Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene was *after* His appearance to the other women?

2. The undisturbed grave clothes prove that the nature of the resurrection was that the natural body that had been buried was raised a spiritual body. How then could Jesus be seen at all?

3. One of the attributes of God is that He is omnipresent (present everywhere at the same time). Jesus is the Son of God. It's clear, however, that, with respect to His human nature, as He walked yet among men, Jesus was not everywhere present. Did His resurrection change that? That is, did the glorification of Jesus' body affect the human nature such that Jesus could, after His resurrection (and ascension), be in more than one place at one time?

4. The sentries were too frightened even to *think* about looking into the tomb before fleeing from the garden. Nor, apparently, did the chief priests go to the sepulcher to investigate. Why, do you suppose, would they not consider it necessary to check out the story of the sentries before acting on it?

5. After Jesus raised Lazarus, the chief priests met together to decide how to counteract the effect of that miracle on the people (see John 12:9-11). It would have made no sense for them to deny that Lazarus was raised, for Lazarus could be *seen* in Bethany; so the unscrupulous leaders actually talked about *killing* Lazarus. If, now, they really believe that Jesus *arose*, why did they think that *this* time they could get away with denying that there was a resurrection?

6. Soon the people of Judea were faced with two stories — one that there were many who had seen Jesus alive after He had been crucified and buried, and the other that the soldiers insisted that the body was stolen. Why, apart from faith, would the hearers be more inclined to believe the story of the soldiers?

7. Unbelievers are not indifferent with respect to the story of the resurrection of Jesus. That is, it isn't the case that they deny it but really don't much care about it. They *hate* it. Why is that?

8. How can we account for the fact that Mary

Magdalene was not startled by the presence of two men dressed in pure white, sitting in Jesus' tomb?

9. Read Mary's answer to the "gardener" as recorded in John 20:15. How does that answer reveal her distraught state of mind?

10. Mary's action when she recognized Jesus was probably much like that of the other women, namely, a clinging to Jesus' feet. In His admonition to the two parties, therefore, Jesus was not so much correcting what they were *doing*, as He was helping them in what they were *thinking*. Think about Jesus' words to Mary ("Touch me not") and to the women ("Be not afraid"). Can you tell from Jesus' response, in each case, what must have been the thoughts of their hearts?

11. To His admonition to Mary not to touch Him, Jesus added this in explanation: "for I am not yet ascended to my Father." Jesus was helping Mary to let go of the former relationship between them. What did His *ascension* have to do with that instruction?

12. Jesus then told Mary to tell His brethren that He ascends "unto my Father and your Father." Why did Jesus not simply say "unto *our* Father"?

13. The angels at the sepulcher instructed the women to go quickly and tell Jesus' disciples that Christ had risen. Shortly thereafter Peter and John arrived ... and the angels did not appear to them. Jesus personally appears to the women and to Mary Magdalene, and tells them both to go and tell His brethren. Again, Peter and John were in very much the same places as were the women ... but Jesus did not appear to them. Why, do you suppose, did Jesus, and the angels at His direction, send the word of the resurrection through the women, rather than by a direct appearance to the men?

14. The disciples added to the shame of their unbelief by not believing the report of the women. Later in the day the disciples would believe — after seeing Jesus with their own eyes. But all would not yet be clear to them. Nor was Mary Magdalene entirely satisfied that Jesus' death and resurrection were for her *good*. Pentecost would bring a *real* change. Can you explain how it would do that?