

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. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, 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!”

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹ but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ “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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”

¹⁸ **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. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Jesus—Risen to Free Us

1. From uncertainty (Mary)
2. From our sins (Peter)
3. From death (John)

There are a good number of Marys in your group—so they refer to you as Mary Magdalene. That is, Mary from the town of Magdala. You followed Jesus around for a few years. When you first met him, he cast seven demons out of you. And ever since then you believed in him. So you clung to his every word. He knew the Scriptures better than anyone. And he taught with authority—not like the others. You believed that he was the long-promised Messiah. He was the one who save you and your people from oppression. You believed that he was the Son of God. In fact—you believed he was God himself who had come down from heaven in order to save you.

But then, he died. You were on Golgotha that Friday. You saw him nailed to the cross. You heard him express his agony when he was rejected by his Father. You saw him breathe his last and give up his spirit. You were there when they took your Lord’s lifeless body down from the cross. You saw how it was prepared with spices and wrapped in linen. You followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb to see the place where they laid him. And then came the Sabbath.

That was a rough Sabbath. It was one filled with confusion and doubt. “How could this happen?” you asked yourself. I thought he was the Messiah. I thought he was my Savior.” But now he’s dead.

So you aren’t sure who he was. Did he lie to you? Was he some crazy guy who tricked all of you? You’re not sure what to believe. You don’t know who to follow. And you don’t know what to do with your life. You put your life on hold to listen to and follow him. But now he’s dead—so what are you going to do?

All those thoughts were racing in your mind early on Sunday morning when you got together with a handful of other women to finish giving your teacher a proper burial. But as you approached the tomb you all remembered that there was a large rock blocking the entrance to the

tomb and you wondered what you could do with it. But then you noticed that the stone was rolled away. You assumed the worst—you ran back to tell Peter and John while the other woman stayed. You said to them, **They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!** Together you raced to the tomb. They saw and left—you stayed behind. You wondered what happened. Then a gardener came up behind you and asked you why you were crying. So you asked him where Jesus' body was—why did he take it—just tell me so I can give him a proper burial.

Mary, he said. It was a voice you recognized. Your eyes were opened. It was Jesus. He's alive? But how, you saw that he was dead—you saw him buried. There is only one explanation—he is God. You are no longer uncertain, but sure—Jesus truly is God! And so he is your Savior, your Lord—he is the long-awaited Messiah. And you know what you will do the rest of your life—you will follow him and cling to his Word!

Sometimes the Lord called you Simon, but most people call you Peter. You are one Jesus' disciples. You often speak for the whole group—and often do so without thinking. For better or worse, you are bold and brash. A few days ago you made a vow to Jesus. **Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.** Jesus warned you otherwise, but you didn't believe him. And when Jesus was arrested you defended him by cutting off someone's ear. Then you followed the mob to the house of the High Priest. Your good friend and fellow disciple, John, got you into the courtyard.

You were standing by a fire trying to get warm when people started talking to you. They asked you if you one of Jesus' disciples. You denied it. They said that you accent gives you away—but you denied it even more. Three times you denied knowing Jesus. But then the rooster crowed and Jesus looked at you. And then you remembered. You denied the Lord three times. You were ashamed of him; you didn't want to be associated with him—you were looking after your own interests instead of follow him. So you hung your head and shame. And ran away crying because of the horrible sin you had committed.

That stare, that look of disappointment was your last impression of Jesus. He had been so good for you. He taught you all about God's

Word. He never did you or anyone any wrong. And how did you treat him? Like the criminal many thought he was. Your sins weighed heavy upon you. And not just the sin of denying Jesus in the courtyard—but all the sins you have committed. How could he ever forgive you for all the wicked things you have done?

Then early on Sunday morning Mary came running and said something about Jesus body not being in the tomb. You ran to investigate. You saw the grave clothes, but not Jesus. You left confused. Jesus knew how you felt. So he told some of the women he appeared to—to tell you that he has arisen. Later that day Jesus appeared to you personally—and to all the disciples that night. Jesus was alive. He had died, but he is risen! Your lasting impression of the Lord is not that look of disappointment and disgust, but a look of joy and excitement.

Throughout the rest of his 40 days on earth Jesus explained the Scriptures once again to you and the other disciples—he took you aside and assured you of his forgiveness and love. He showed you how he had to suffer and die on the cross. And where it was prophesied that he would rise from the dead. He taught you what his death and resurrection meant. It meant that all of your sins were paid for. He took all of your sins upon himself on the cross. He suffered your eternal punishment. And he gave you his righteousness and holiness. God accepted Jesus' sacrifice and raised him from the dead. And he looks at you and doesn't see the sinner that you truly are—but he sees his pure and innocent children. And later, before the Sanhedrin—just a few months after they sentenced Jesus to death, you boldly and confidently confessed the truth. **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**

You refer to yourself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. But most people just call you John. You were one of his closest disciples. You saw things that the others didn't. You were so close to Jesus that while he was on the cross he even entrusted his mother to you. But then he died. You loved him so much and you were so close to him, but then he was no more.

You ran to the tomb with Peter when Mary Magdalene told you that they had taken Jesus' body. You got to the tomb before Peter—you

were younger and faster. You saw the grave clothes laying there—and the linen that covered his head was folded up nicely in its place. You knew then that it couldn't have been a grave robbery. Unlike Peter, you left believing. You knew and believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Jesus has power over death. You saw Jesus proved that before. Three times you saw Jesus raise three people from the dead. Death had to listen to Jesus. Jesus controlled death with just his words. And he proved it once and for all by raising himself from the dead. Jesus lives.

Eventually you will die. Overtime all your other loved ones will die too. But you aren't afraid of death. Because Jesus has defeated death through his resurrection. He removed its sting through his suffering and death on the cross. You saw Jesus ascend into heaven. But you know that soon you will see him again. Death—you not afraid of it. Because your Savior has been raised from the dead.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven he indicated that you wouldn't die like the rest of the disciples. Unlike the other disciples you weren't killed because of your faith. Instead you were exiled to the island of Patmos. You lived a long life. And the Holy Spirit inspired you to write two books and three letters. And he led you to write down some of the most comforting words in all of Scripture.

He led you to write down the comforting words of Christ, which gives others the comfort of eternal life in the face of death. Words like, **I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.** And, **Because I live, you also will live.** And **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** And while sharing with you his revelation Jesus gave you some wonderful glimpses of heaven. You saw life after death. **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or**

mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Who are you? Are you Mary, or Peter, or John? Of course, you are all of them. You have your doubts, your sins weigh you down, death frightens you. But Christ is risen—risen to free you. He truly is God and your Savior. Your sins have been paid for. And a perfect life with your resurrected Savior awaits. Amen.