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A New Relationship

John 20:12-18

Intro: It's hardly possible to overstate the defeated mindset of those who followed Jesus in the days immediately following the crucifixion. We discussed this at length last time in order to properly set the stage for the amazing events recorded in [ch20](#) but we cannot just say that the disciples were bummed out and then move on to the good stuff. The reality is: they were more than just bummed; more than just discouraged; more than just distraught. When Jesus died on the cross the faith of the disciples died too. They demonstrated the death of their faith by scattering back to where they had been before Jesus called them to be His disciples. In earlier days, they had given great testimonies: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Mt 16:16](#)). They had believed once, but now it was over.

No one illustrated this better than Thomas. We call him "Doubting" Thomas but the truth is, at this point, Thomas isn't a doubter, he's an out-right unbeliever! Look at what he says in [vs25](#). The way he fashions his response reflects an attitude of dogged disbelief, not just hesitation or doubt. To say, "Unless I have such-and-such, I will not..." is quite different than saying, "If I have such-and-such, I will..." His statement is a product of an obstinate determination to not believe. He's clinging to his unbelief with no expectation that his requirements for faith will ever be met.

Not only had faith died in these disciples, hope had also died. We see this in the comments of the 2 disciples who were met by the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Like the others, these 2 had expected the coming of Messiah's reign on the earth. They thought Jesus was that Messiah; so they had followed Him, seeking a place in His kingdom. But now the inconceivable had happened. Jesus had died, and their hopes had died with him. Their minds were so clouded by this disappointment; they didn't even recognize Jesus when he drew near them on the road. When Jesus asked them what they were talking about, they began to pour out their dilemma. They spoke of Jesus as being a "Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people...but we were hoping that it He who was going to redeem Israel" ([Lk 24:19b, 21a](#)). They'd hoped for a new kingdom but when Jesus died, they knew it wasn't coming.

Their faith had died and their hope had died. But there was one thing that hadn't died—their love. In spite of their cruel disillusionment and utter despair, the disciples all still loved their Master and couldn't stop thinking about Him or grieving over Him. The greatest example of this undying love is seen in our text today in the person of Mary.

11 – We will never understand the account of Jesus' appearance to Mary at the tomb unless we recognize that it was love, and only love, that brought her here. She had possessed faith once, as had the others. She had hoped. But now faith and hope were gone. Only love caused her to seek the body of Jesus and kept her close to the tomb.

We don't know if she arrived back at the tomb before Peter and John left, if they mentioned to her what they had discovered or if she arrived shortly after they had retired from the scene. All John tells us is that she returned to the tomb with her grief firmly intact. The depth of her grief may also be due to the great emphasis the Jews of that day placed on a proper burial. Any disrespect paid to a corpse was regarded with abhorrence. So, not only had she lost her Master and Teacher but His body has been removed before it could be completely prepared for burial.

This is the first record we have of Mary looking into the tomb but as she does, what does she see?

12-13 – The position of the angels at either end of the place where Jesus' body had lain reminds us of the cherubim on the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant. It's as if God were indicating that there was now a new mercy seat because Jesus had paid the price for sin and open the way for us to enter into the presence of God. Of course, all this is speculation for John merely records the fact of the angel's presence. He doesn't elaborate on the meaning of their presence; probably because the meaning was entirely lost on Mary. She was obviously not disturbed at seeing them and there's no evidence that she even recognized them as being angels. The brief conversation between them failed to dry her tears or quiet her mind. She was still determined to find the body of Jesus.

14-16 – Mary quits the conversation with the angels rather abruptly. Maybe she thought they'd be of no assistance to her task; maybe she heard a

noise behind her. Regardless of the reason, she turns from the angels in the tomb and comes face-to-face with the object of her desire and she doesn't even recognize Him. What was the problem? Sure, she was weeping but tears seldom prevent us from recognizing someone well known to us. No, there seems to be something different about the risen Jesus that He was not always recognized. We see this with the Emmaus disciples, and later when the small band of disciples went fishing in the Sea of Galilee – Jesus spoke to them from the shore but they didn't readily recognize Him as being their Master and Savior.

Jesus asks Mary the same question as the angels and she gives a similar answer. Here we see the heart of a good woman. She ask only for information as to where the body had been taken. If she could just find the location of the body, she was ready and willing to carry it back and place it in the tomb once again. Forget the fact that Jesus was bigger than her and He had over 75 lbs of spices wrapped around His corpse. That was of no consequence to her; her only thought was to find the body and return it to its proper place. Here is love, offering to do the impossible as only love can.

Here Mary must've turned her back on Jesus once again; for later, after He calls her name, she turns back to Him. She wasn't interested in the gardener. She had made her request of him in her grief and confusion. But her heart was still true to the Lord, and she turned back to the tomb where she had last seen His body. With one word, Jesus clears away her distress and resurrects both her faith and her hope!

“Mary!” This word stooped her in her tracks and compelled her to turn back and recognized her Savior and Lord. What was it about His calling her name that produced such a change in her heart? Jesus tells us Himself in [Jn 10:3](#) as He describes the office of the shepherd. As sheep know the voice of their shepherd when he calls them by name, so Mary recognized Jesus and responded joyfully, “Master!” In that moment Mary experienced her own resurrection, for she was reborn. Faith had died, but now it came leaping from its tomb. Hope had evaporated, but now it revived again around the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

17a – This verse presents both a problem and a glorious truth. The problem lies in the initial statement of Jesus to Mary. Apparently, when Mary realized that Jesus was standing before her, she fell to the ground in worship and

grasped His feet and held on to Him. Jesus responds by saying, “Do not cling to Me for I have not yet ascended to My Father...” This is the main difficulty with this passage for we know from a parallel incident in Mt that Jesus apparently allowed the other women who had been at the tomb to touch Him just a few minutes later on the same day and He didn’t forbid them. Why shouldn’t Mary touch Him? This would have been the most natural thing in the world and it seems harsh to have Jesus rebuke her or stop her act of love and adoration.

Now, there is no general consensus among commentators on how to interpret this verse. There isn’t a conservative or liberal view, scholars are just undecided. 1 view is that Jesus is here, acting as the great High Priest fulfilling the Day of Atonement. Having accomplished the sacrifice, He’s now on His way to present the sacred blood in heaven. But, Jesus had no blood to present. He presented it on the cross when He was made sin for us. The Resurrection itself was proof that the work of redemption had been completely accomplished; there was nothing left to be done. (2) Jesus is instructing Mary that she need not hold onto Him but, rather, become His messenger of new joy. (3) He merely meant: ‘There’s no need to panic; you will see me again before I ascend to My Father.’”

Which of these is accurate? Who knows! What we do know is that Mary and the other disciples still had a great deal to learn about Jesus and His new state of glory. The problem was that they still wanted to relate to Him as they had done during the years of His ministry before the cross and that was just no longer possible. Paul speaks about this new reality in [II Cor 5:16](#). To know Christ according to the flesh is to know Him as the disciples knew Him during the days of His earthly ministry – they knew Him as a man that they could hear and see and touch. But, to continue to try to relate to Jesus according to the flesh is to relate to Him as though He was still in His state of humiliation, but He’s not! Today, He’s the exalted Son of God in glory; and we must honor Him as such! When John sat with Jesus at the last supper, he leaned against His chest; but when John saw Jesus on the Isle of Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead!

Knowing Jesus according to the flesh would have been an amazing experience but it had its limitations and it didn’t guarantee anything. There were great multitudes that followed Him initially; then they deserted Him and eventually called for His crucifixion. Some today think it would be better to

know Jesus according to the flesh but it wouldn't be and Jesus knew this. Jesus said it was to our advantage that He goes away because then He could send the Helper!

To know Jesus as we do today is to know Him spiritually, by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit who reveals the Lord Jesus Christ to us as the Son of God and Savior.

This new attitude doesn't just apply to how we relate to Jesus; it applies to how we relate to the world around us. It's not by accident that Paul goes on to point this out in the very next verse in **II Cor 5:17**. Being "in Christ" doesn't just mean you're saved or forgiven – it means you have been changed into a new creation! Living as a new creation is something God works in us, using our will and choices. It is both a gift to be received and a challenge to live the life of a new creation. If Jesus is your Savior then your outlook on life should now reflect this new reality; the way to encounter and react to this world must now be different; the way you think, speak, act should be a testimony to the new life that is in your heart. If your life is exactly the same after salvation as it was before you were saved, well, that presents a problem. Either you are resisting the needed change the Holy Spirit is trying to bring into your life or you haven't really become a new creation yet. One of these is a lot worse than the other but both are easily remedied.

You might be thinking that my application of Paul's statement in **II Cor 5** is a bit of a stretch from our text in John 20:17a but that's not the case. The problem we have in v17 is not really a problem at all because the real focus of this passage is not in what Jesus tells Mary not to do but in what He tells her to do. He sends her on a mission with a message – a message that declares that Mary's relationship to Jesus (and all the other disciples) was now different.

17b – In the last century, the German historian Adolf Harnack made popular a phrase that he believed summarized Christianity – "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." The idea was that we all have one Father in God and we are all brothers and sisters in the one family of God, the human race. There are 2 fundamental errors with this idea: 1) In the Bible, the use of "Father" for God and "brother" and "sister" for people only occurs in reference to believers. God is never said to be the Father of all men, nor are all men and women said to be brothers and sisters. In fact, some people are

said to be children of their “father the devil” (Jn 8:44). Becoming a child of God is a right that is only obtained by belief in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Jn 1:11-12).

2) The relationships the Bible does speak of were only established by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our text is a case in point: for the first time following His death and resurrection, Jesus introduces these themes into His teaching. He had spoken of God as Father before, but not in this way. Before this He had never referred to His disciples as brothers at all. He had called them His servants and His friends but now, as He ushers in the new age of the church, He also ushers in a new set of relationships. Now God becomes their Father as well as His and His followers are given specific family privileges!

As we have just stated, we have a new relationship with Jesus. We are to know Him spiritually as the Son of God and our Savior. The Holy Spirit has been given to lead us to that knowledge. If you don't know Jesus as the Son of God and your Savior, then you really don't know Him at all. If you do, then the other relationships will naturally follow.

What Jesus is describing here is a relationship with God as Father that is similar to His but not identical. He is the unique Son of God, the 2nd person of the Trinity. If Jesus had merely said “our Father and our God” He would have been putting Himself on the same level as the disciples-as just a man, but He's not! We only enter into a similar relationship because of what Jesus has done for us through His atonement.

What He's talking about here is our adoption into the family of God. We're not naturally born into God's family. We're alienated from God and are born outside it as heirs of sin and death. But God is gracious; so, by Christ's death and by the application of that death to us by the Holy Spirit, God brings us back into fellowship with Himself and grants us family privileges. What privileges? Prayer (Rom 8:15) and confidence before His throne (Heb 4:16). As our Father, God will help us in our spiritual infancy, teaching us to walk spiritually and lifting us up when we fall down. He will care for us throughout our earthly life and abundantly bless us. As our Father, He will guide us in the way we should go and eventually bring us home to heaven to be with Him forever.

Not only do believers have a new relationship with Jesus as Savior and with God as Father by adoption, we also have a new relationship with each other. Before, when we were outside God's family, we were each going our own ways in opposition to each other. Now, we belong to a new family and must love each other and work together as brothers and sisters (Eph 2:19). The attitudes that should result from these new relationships don't always flow naturally or easily. All the more reason for us to grasp hold of this concept and work at these relationships.

One fellow put it this way, "You were cleansed by the same blood, regenerated by the same Spirit. You are a citizen of the same city, a slave of the same Master, a reader of the same Scriptures, a worshiper of the same God. The same presence dwells silently in you as in them. Therefore you are committed to them and they to you. They are your brothers, sisters, your fathers, mothers and children in God. Whether you like or dislike them, you belong to them. You have responsibilities toward them that must be discharged in love. As long as you live on this earth, you are in their debt. Whether they have done much or little for you, Christ has done all. He demands that your indebtedness to Him be transferred to your new family" (John White).

Membership in God's family does not mean we ignore human faults. We must be sensitive to them if we're to have any hope of reducing them and improving our family fellowship. But it does mean we can't be overly sensitive to the faults of our brothers and sisters in Christ and be critical of them. Instead, we should be committed to each other with a proper family loyalty and work to help each other live the Christian life.

Is God your Father? Are other believers your spiritual brothers and sisters? Those statements can only be true if Jesus is truly your Lord and Savior. Has He called you by name? Have you answered His call? You might say, "I've never heard Him call my name." He's calling it right now! This is your opportunity to respond to His voice. Do not disregard it, don't delay to respond to it. Answer His call today and accept Him as your Savior. 😊