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John 20:14-18 -- Despair Turned To Faith -- The Resurrection

We left Mary Magdalene in the depths of blind despair, so blind that she could not even begin to imagine the truth that the angels and the empty graveclothes pointed to, namely that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, just as He had said He would. So, in her deep sorrow of unbelief, she did not have the slightest inkling of "hope against hope" that could have prepared her for what she was about to experience.

Notes:

Vs. 13,14 -- *Woman, why are you weeping?* -- The angels at the tomb first tried to gently help Mary "connect the dots" in her understanding, so that the wonderful truth of Jesus' resurrection could break through the dark cloud of her confused and crushed state of mind. *Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.*-- Mary could think of nothing beyond, "Where is the body? What have they done with the body?" *When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus* -- We are not told why she did not recognize Him. She certainly was not expecting Him, and her eyes were filled with tears. She was not at all predisposed to the idea that He might appear to her. Thus, when He did come to her, she did not recognize Him.

Vs. 15 -- *Woman, why are you weeping?* -- This is the second time she had been asked this question within a few moments, yet she was unable to begin to grasp what was truly being asked her. On the face of it, the question was ridiculous. Obviously, she was at a tomb, mourning for someone who was dead. Yet, Mary was so absorbed in her own concerns, she could not even see the strangeness of being questioned about grieving at the tomb of someone you love. *Whom are you seeking?* -- This was more to the point of Mary's felt need. She wanted to know where Jesus' body was. Her answer reveals, again, her total lack of awareness that Jesus may have risen from the dead. John builds a strong case against those would try to explain away the resurrection appearances as wishful thinking. Mary was not in the least expecting, or even hoping for, the unimaginable truth that Jesus could live again. *Supposing Him to be the gardener* -- John lets us glimpse what is going on in Mary's mind, information he could only have gleaned from her as they reflected on this experience at a later time. How in the world was Mary processing this? How could she not recognize Jesus, when He was standing right there? Well, again, she was not at all, ...in any way, shape or form..., expecting Jesus, so her mind jumped to another reasonable explanation, one which may have offered a revived hope of finding the Lord's body. Maybe this is the gardener. Maybe he knows where Jesus' body is. Why did she think of a gardener? Because, the tomb was not placed in a cemetery. It was in a private garden, a rich man's garden (Jn. 19:41,42; Matt. 27:57-61). The word for "garden" implies a walled in area, where special trees and plants were arranged, planted and tended. Of course, a rich man's garden would have had someone to care for it. Jesus had been placed in Joseph's tomb because it was convenient, and it had been getting late in the day. Rather than trying to secure another spot, Joseph had graciously offered his own tomb, so Jesus was interred there. Mary could not have known if Joseph had intended this to be a permanent, or temporary arrangement. It was a family tomb, after all, and not one belonging to Jesus' family, so the possibility of the body being moved after the sabbath was not at all unthinkable. In fact, it should have been expected. She may have anticipated this and may have thought, "Oh, no! They have moved Jesus' body! They certainly didn't waste any time! Where did they bring Him? How will I find out what has been done with Him? Ah, here is someone who can tell me what is going on!" *Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.* -- Again, though I have mentioned this several times, please note that Mary was not at all thinking "resurrection". Her only concern was finding out what happened to Jesus' body.

Vs. 16 -- *Jesus said to her, "Mary!"* -- Note that after several indirect appeals to Mary, the Lord took the direct approach. Sometimes we are just not "getting it", though it would seem to others that we should. God is not unwilling to come at us more clearly and openly, at times, if that is what it will take for us to believe, ...though He will not force us. People throughout history have testified of very direct and clear encounters with God, or with revelation that was almost impossible to miss. Why does He not do this with everyone? It would seem that there

is a need for an element of uncertainty for faith to be what it is. There is a fine line between God revealing Himself in some way, and of being almost compelled to believe by the directness and power of the revelation which God could give. It is clear from history, however, that clear revelation does not necessarily produce a change in one's heart. The prophet Balaam would be a good example of this (Numbers 22-24). He had some very clear personal revelation, and, for fear of his life, was willing to go back home when invited to curse Israel. God permitted him to go, but strictly forbade him to say anything other than what He conveyed to him. In the record of those chapters, Balaam did well to carefully obey God. That was not the end of the story, however. We are disappointed to find out that later Balaam apparently caved in to greed, and, for a reward, told the enemies of Israel how to get God to be angry with Israel, so that He would turn against them. It was Balaam who suggested the plot to send the daughters of Midian to cavort with the Israelite men, in order to lead them into sin, and the displeasure of the Lord (Num. 25:1-9; 31:7,8,15,16). This story illustrates that clear revelation alone is not sufficient to change the human heart. Understanding what is true and right is not the same as believing, or trusting in, what is true and right. Furthermore, obedience that is not freely offered from a desire to please and do right toward God, will not be sustainable in the long term. In Mary's case, however, there was not a problem of stubbornness or willfulness keeping her from faith. Rather, her grief and her expectations had kept her from apprehending the truth. Jesus cut through all of that by personally revealing Himself to her. *She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher)* -- Note that the text says that "she turned". This indicates that she was not looking Jesus full in the face. This provides a partial explanation for why she did not recognize the Lord. She did not take a close look at Him. Instead, when she became aware of Him standing there, made the assumption that He was the gardener ("supposing"). Though she spoke to Him, she did not look intently at Him. "Rabboni" is a personalized form of the word "rabbi", meaning "my teacher". For John, however, it was enough to translate it as "Teacher" for His Gentile readers, although his Jewish readers would have been aware of this additional nuance.

Vs. 17 -- *Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father* -- This is a tough phrase to translate from the Greek, without some explanation. Literally, it would be rendered as, "Not (for yourself) be touching/holding fastening/clinging concerning Me, for not yet have I gone up (and stayed up) to the Father". The point of the "for yourself" part of the translation is that it is meant to convey that Mary was either intensely involved in the act of holding onto Jesus, or that the action was deeply affecting her. This may seem obvious, but Jesus was prohibiting her from doing this, for some reason. Then, the next phrase would seem to be an explanation of why she should stop holding onto Him, namely that He was here, not gone away to the Father. The encounter was meant to assure and comfort her regarding His resurrection. Her grief had been so deep that she had been missing all the signs, so Jesus came to her personally to assure her. The "stop clinging to Me" part is not meant as a word of rebuke, but of assurance. "It's OK. You can let me go. Everything is all right. I am right here. I have not left for good." *but go to My brethren and say to them, "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God"* -- In order to move Mary on, emotionally, the Lord gave her a responsibility. She needed to move beyond both the grief, and the emotional clinging of relief at being with Jesus. Neither state was productive, though very human. Jesus comforted Mary, then sent her on an errand for Him. This got the focus off of her own emotions, and the larger picture of what was going on became more clear. Thus, she became the first one to see the risen Christ, as well as the first one to testify as to His resurrection. The content of what she was to declare to the disciples is interesting. Was Jesus attempting to differentiate Himself and His relationship with God from theirs, or was He attempting to identify theirs with His? I believe the intent was the latter. Based upon what Jesus had said in 16:26,27, He saw that the disciples would have the same relationship with the Father as He had. Because of their faith in Him, the Father would love them. What Jesus is communicating to them through Mary is that the time of which He had spoken had come. Because of His death on the cross, it was now possible for them to have a relationship with the Father that they had never enjoyed before. Before the crucifixion, God "had overlooked the sins" of people (Rom. 3:25). He "winked" at them, but because they were not actually removed, there was still some distance maintained between them and God. Now, however, because Jesus had actually paid for sins, and they were truly removed, God could justly accept them and share Himself intimately with them. Now, He could be their Father, like He was Jesus' Father, and they could have the intimate relationship with God that Jesus enjoyed, i.e., they could be "one" with God, as Jesus and the Father were one, by virtue of the coming of the Spirit into their lives (17:20-22). Legally, that became their inheritance right through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Vs. 18 -- *Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her* -- Freed from grief, and refocused by Jesus' commission, she became the first Gospel witness.