

John 20:11-17

Easter: an Emotional Roller Coaster

Main idea: Jesus really rose from the dead, so we ought to honor Him as the Savior and Lord of our lives.

I kind of like roller coasters, and yet, I'm kind of scared of roller coasters. I still remember the first time I took my oldest daughter on a roller coaster. Amber was about 8 or 9 years old, and she was terrified. She screamed the whole time, but as soon as it was over, she said she loved it!

I think the thing that makes roller coasters so fun is that they make you feel so alive, it's a rush, and yet, you kind of wonder if you're going to die.

You know, unless Jesus returns first, death is the universal human outcome of our lives on this earth.¹ We will all one day die. It could be as a result of a roller coaster or a medical condition or just old age. And we might be able to delay death through medical advances, but even still, compared to eternity, life is insanely short.² Therefore, it's so incredibly important that we know what happens to us after we die, because there is a heaven, and there is a hell, and hope that no one would want to experience hell even for a moment, not to mention the age to come.³

But that's not what God wants for you. In fact, that's not what God wants for anyone. Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:4 that it's God:

who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

So, to make that happen, God sent Jesus.⁴

¹ Hebrews 9:27

² James 4:14

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:14, Revelation 21:8

⁴ Romans 5:8

The resurrection of Jesus is the crucial event of Christianity, and all of history.⁵ If Jesus really did rise from the dead, we can believe what He said about Himself.⁶ We can believe what the Bible says about Him.⁷ The resurrection proves that the crucifixion did what the Bible says it does, that we really are forgiven of our sins by grace through faith. And if Jesus really rose from the dead, we ought to honor Him as the Savior and Lord of our lives.⁸

And if you think through what that means, that's both exhilarating, and terrifying.⁹ So, we're going to be on a bit of an emotional roller coaster this morning, so first, let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we're in awe of You. You're greater than all things, and yet You came down in the form of a man to die for us. For our sins. So we're ashamed that it had to come to that, and yet we're grateful that You love us that much. And now, on this Easter morning, we're reminded that not only did You die for us, but You also rose from the grave. You rose so that we can rise with You. We can rise from our old dead lives, and begin to live a new life. And that excites us, and gives us hope, but it also scares us, because we kind of like our old lives. So we pray this morning that not only would we trust in You as our Savior, but we would follow You as our Lord. In Your precious Name we pray, Amen.

Living the Christian life includes both mountains and valleys. Sometimes we're on the mountain, and we're exhilarated by hearing from God through His word, and we can see how God's transforming us through His Spirit, and we're on a spiritual high. But sometimes, we also go through valleys, and we feel the intense weight of our sin, and we cry out to God in repentance. And this is a good thing. This is part of a healthy relationship with God in which we experience both His power and grace in our lives.¹⁰

⁵ Christ crucified and risen was the plan from the beginning of time. Revelation 13:8

⁶ And if Jesus didn't really rise, we are to be most pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:19

⁷ John 5:39

⁸ Acts 4:12, Romans 10:9, 1 John 4:14

⁹ Philippians 2:12

¹⁰ Psalm 46:1, Acts 6:8

I preached earlier this morning on Peter's experience with the resurrection,¹¹ and how our experience often mirrors his experience. His experience was chaos. He was confused when he saw the empty tomb. And all day long, he didn't know what to make of it, until finally, at the end of the day, Jesus appeared to him and the other disciples, and Jesus brought calmness into his chaos.¹²

But Peter was not the first person to the empty tomb that morning. A group of women got there first. John 20:1-2.

On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!" (John 20:1-2)

So Mary Magdalene, along with several of the other women who followed Jesus during His ministry, were there first!¹³ And it says that it was the first day of the week. At that time, in Jewish culture, the first day of the week meant you started your work week.¹⁴ It wasn't a day of rest, but a day of work. So I'm sure Mary was no different. She probably had plans for the day. Like many women in those days, she likely had to go to the market to get food for the day, she had to draw up water from the well for cooking, cleaning, and bathing, and this was on top of the fact that now that Jesus had died just three days earlier, she was in mourning and probably didn't feel like doing anything. So, she would just briefly visit Jesus's tomb, anoint His body, and then be off.

¹¹ John 20:1-10

¹² John 20:19-20

¹³ Luke 24:1

¹⁴ Exodus 34:21

But then Jesus had to go and rise from the dead, and Mary's plans were ruined. She was immediately thrust back onto this emotional roller coaster. I'm sure it started for her when she first met Jesus. The book of Luke reveals that Mary Magdalene often followed Jesus during His ministry. It says:

Afterward he [Jesus] was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary, called Magdalene (seven demons had come out of her). (Luke 8:1-2)

So Mary had a huge reason to believe that Jesus was more than a mere man.¹⁵ She herself had been indwelt by demons, which tormented her spirit, and likely caused her to do and say things that she didn't want to do. But then Jesus comes along and frees her from that prison. She knew that Jesus was sent by God.

But notice that when Mary found the empty tomb, she didn't immediately rejoice. It says that she ran to tell the disciples that someone stole the body of Jesus!

And that's what we do, don't we? Apart from having faith in Christ, we tried to explain the empty tomb in ways we could understand. Maybe someone stole the body. Maybe Jesus wasn't really dead when they took Him off the cross, and after resting a few days, He just got up and walked off. But then you start thinking about these explanations, they really don't make any sense.

I mean, who would have stolen the body of Jesus? It couldn't have been the Jews, because then when rumors of the resurrection started going around, they would have simply revealed that they had Jesus's body, and all those rumors would have stopped. It couldn't have been the disciples themselves,

¹⁵ Like Peter, she had also likely declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew 16:16

because then they wouldn't have gone on to suffer and die for their faith in Jesus.¹⁶ Up until dying martyrs' deaths, they maintained that Jesus did rise from the dead, and they saw Him, and they wouldn't have died for what they knew to be a lie.

And the idea that Jesus wasn't truly dead doesn't make sense either, because He still would have been in an extreme pain, without having had any medical attention, and none of the disciples who saw Him would have thought He rose victoriously as the Son of God.¹⁷

No, the only explanation that makes sense is that Jesus really did rise from the dead.¹⁸

But Mary Magdalene wasn't thinking about any of that just yet. At this point, Mary was just miserable. Look at the beginning of verse 11.

But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. (John 20:11a)

Can you imagine what it was like for Mary? I mean, this was the woman who had had seven evil spirits in her, but Jesus cast them out of her so that she had a new life. Her whole identity was wrapped up in being known and loved by Jesus, and now the least she could do in her mind was anoint Jesus's body after His death, but now she couldn't even do that.

In fact, she was so overwhelmed by this, that she didn't even notice what was going on around her. Start reading at the end of verse 11.

As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I

¹⁶ Matthew 28:12-15

¹⁷ John 20:20

¹⁸ Luke 24:39

don't know where they've put him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away." (John 20:11b-15)

So Mary was so consumed with her sorrow and confusion that she didn't notice (or care?) that she was speaking with angels. And she didn't even notice that she was speaking with Jesus. She loved and missed Jesus, but even loving Jesus as much as she did, she didn't have a faith yet that understood why He came to earth, and how He needed to rise from the grave, and how that was really going to impact her life.

You see, it's one thing to have evil spirits cast out of her, but it's an entirely different thing, a much bigger thing to have a completely new life and purpose in life and in eternity. I'm sure Mary loved Jesus as her teacher, friend, and even Savior, who saved her from evil spirit, but I'm not sure she yet understood that she needed to trust Jesus with all of her life and self.

You see, loving Jesus is not the same as trusting in Jesus. You may say that you love Jesus, but do you trust Him with your life?

Mary went to the tomb that morning expecting to anoint Jesus's body and then be on with her life. Instead, she was now having a crisis of faith. And here's the reality when it comes to our own faith: it's never a wrong time to begin trusting in Jesus. You might think you're too old or too set in your ways, but it's never too late. Don't let today's plans get in the way of your eternal home.

Like Mary, most people put off making a decision about Jesus until He interrupts their lives. But don't put it off! Because coming to true faith in Jesus will make all the difference in your life. That's what Mary discovers next. Verse 16.

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”—which means “Teacher.” “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus told her, “since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” (John 20:16-17)

So Mary's misery turned to amazement when she realized she was talking with Jesus. She turned to Jesus and immediately embraced Him. I mean, can you imagine? She thought He was dead, but here He was, alive! She thought she had lost Him, but Jesus had found her. So, naturally, she began to rejoice! And then Jesus tells her, “Don’t cling to me.”

Now, why would Jesus say that? Well, probably because Mary was clinging to Him. When Mary saw Jesus alive and well, she celebrated and gave Jesus probably the biggest hug that she had ever given anyone in all her life! She thought Jesus was gone forever, so she grabbed Him and didn’t want to ever let Him go!

So Jesus responded that in order for God's plan to be complete, He couldn’t stay forever. He said, “Don’t cling to me,” not because He didn’t appreciate the hug, but because He couldn’t stay on the earth forever. He would next need to ascend to the Father in heaven.¹⁹ Jesus’s ministry was bigger than Mary. It included Mary, but it was bigger than Mary. It was bigger than the twelve disciples, and it was bigger than the Jews. In fact, Jesus told us how big His ministry was in Matthew 28. He said:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

¹⁹ Which is a reason to rejoice! John 14:28

So after Jesus ascended to the Father in Heaven, He sent His Spirit to live in believers so that we would preach the gospel to all the people of all the nations, so that we could all embrace Jesus as Savior and Lord because as the angel said at His birth, it's good news of great joy that shall be for all the people.²⁰

So, make Him your Lord. Follow Him. Trust Him, not just for your salvation, but for daily living. Obey Him and do what He says in the Bible to do. Love your neighbor.²¹ Love your enemy.²² Share the gospel.²³ These are not easy things. In fact, in our world today, doing these things is likely to get you crucified by the very people you thought were your friends. And yet, Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.²⁴ So don't worry what others may think of you. Just love them and follow Jesus.

But maybe you've never even begun to have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus. That comes first. Place your faith in Jesus, and be saved.²⁵

²⁰ Luke 2:10

²¹ Mark 12:31

²² Matthew 5:44

²³ Matthew 28:19-20

²⁴ Matthew 16:24

²⁵ Acts 16:31, Ephesians 2:8-9