

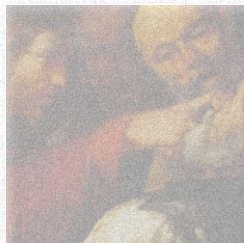


When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'"

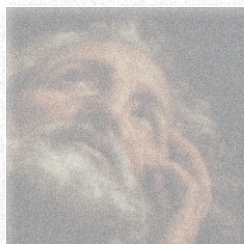
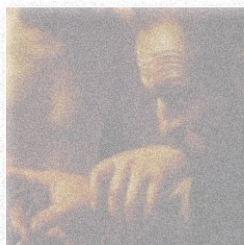
Mark 16:1-7



*"Were not
our hearts
burning...?"*



THE RETURN



16 WE INHERITED OUR BENT TOWARD SINNING from Adam, then we also inherited our unique relationship with Jesus from those who saw Him and walked with Him during those waning days of His time on earth. Few moments from His life are more intimate, more personal, than those Jesus spent with His friends during His last forty days upon this earth.

We look upon the death and resurrection of Christ as an epochal, historic moment—a turning point in God's relationship with man. We see it from the hazy distance of two millennia: a moment of great import, yet one that often takes second place to the tyranny of the immediate. We gather together and proclaim the truth of Christ's atoning

death on the cross; we gladly declare it to be both historical and doctrinal truth. We rightly worship a Savior who would sacrifice Himself for common man. Our hearts fill with gratitude and praise for one so unselfish and kind—then, come Monday morning, we get back to our *real* lives: back to the factory, the office, the housecleaning and laundry.

But at Calvary there were those who had lost a close friend. Their real lives had been taken up into the life of the one who had dripped His blood onto that Jerusalem hillside, and it was a family member, a brother, that was then sealed away inside a cold rocky grave. They all had invested their lives in this Man—who He was and what He represented. Then suddenly, He was gone.

Jesus said He would be raised, but, based on their behavior, most of His followers probably assigned that notion to one of His mysterious stories or obscure prophecies. He was gone; with their own eyes they had seen Him put away. Jesus said He would walk with them again, but surely no one could walk away from that kind of horrible death. And certainly no one could walk through stone.

Nightmare

There have been mornings I awake in a clammy sweat, pushed from my slumber by a dark nightmare in which I am left to live out my days without the companionship of my wife. On those mornings sleep vanishes, and the wrenching emotions leave me feeling sick and disoriented. It takes the entire next day for me to shake the sense of loss, to wash the nauseating aftereffects of the nightmare from my system.

For the friends and family of Jesus, that nightmare was real.

Mary from Magdala was still living her nightmare when she came to the tomb that Sunday morning so long ago. Jesus had been much more to her than a respected teacher, and His loss had brought upon her life a heartsick void that she carried along with her that sad morning. Then, heaped upon that sorrow was the strange disappearance of even the body of her Lord.

Union Restored

Life without Him. How would it be to have Jesus suddenly removed from our lives? We have walked alongside Him, heard the tender strength in His voice, accepted the wisdom from His heart. We have felt His strong arms holding us up when others have turned aside, we have felt the rush of His love passing between us. We've known His forgiveness, a mercy only He could possess. What would it be like, were all that taken away?

Those who never have married have grown accustomed to living alone. Even if they would rather be wed, their present lives move to the rhythm of being alone. They have learned, even unconsciously, to rely upon themselves for many things some of their friends receive from their mates. In contrast, those who are married—especially those of venerable span—have grown accustomed to the rhythm of depending on someone outside themselves.

For as a young man marries a virgin,
So your sons will marry you;
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So your God will rejoice over you.

Isaiah 62:5

Having never known union with Christ, unbelievers never mourn His loss, for they literally don't know what they're missing. The church, however, is the Bride of Christ. Every believer has been joined in an intimate, mystical way with the Bridegroom: the Son of God. Were He, somehow, to be taken from our lives, as He was to those who watched Him die at Calvary, it would be to experience one of life's most agonizing pains.

Imagine, then, the unbounded bliss Mary felt that morning when she heard, once again, that tender voice of her Lord. This one to whom she had given herself totally, the one in whom she had come to rely for everything, this one who had then been brutally wrenched from her life—this one, her Lord, had returned!



When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

John 20:14-17