

“MY LOVE PREVAILS”

“*In this life, you will have trouble*’ (John 16:33)—you will experience profound pain, devastating heartbreak, and immense loss. But I need you to know that although *‘weeping may last for the night, joy [always] comes in the morning’* (Psalm 30:5). One day, tears will give way to laughter, sorrow will give way to joy, pain will give way to comfort, and death will give way to life (Revelation 21:4). I promise to bring beauty from ashes (Isaiah 61:3). My love *always* wins out; it *cannot* fail (1 Corinthians 13:8).”

As evening drew near, Jesus’ lifeless body remained upon the cross. The Father did not deliver Him. He did not save Himself. No legion of angels came to His rescue. He was gone—taken from them before they were ready to say goodbye. Devastated, Jesus’ followers removed His broken body from the cross and held Him in their arms.

When we, like the disciples, are faced with unfathomable difficulties, the promises of God can seem a distant memory—we do not hear the declarations of victory, nor do we see those who have been placed in our path to offer reassurance. Rather than focusing on what is good and right and true, our tendency is to fix our eyes on the obstacles before us and the activity of the enemy. But He knows our ways and He will meet us in our desperation. Look up. His love prevails.

Matthew 12:20 says, “*A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory.*” What is a bruised reed and a smoking flax? What does this promise mean to you?

The Stone

Mary Magdalene followed on the heels of Joseph and Nicodemus as they carried Jesus to the tomb and placed His broken body on the slab of stone. As they washed His body the faint scent of spikenard reminded them that this day was inevitable— “*She did it for My burial*” (Matthew 26:12-13). As the stone was rolled into place, every detail remained vivid in her mind (Luke 23:55).

Read the account in Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56, and John 19:38-42.

List those who are present and note the details that are given about them. _____

Imagine Mary’s anguish. What must it have been like to witness Christ’s abuse, pain, and suffering, to handle His broken body, and watch the stone be rolled into place? _____

What impact did Jesus have upon her life? (Luke 8:2) Why might she have had a harder time letting go? _____

Where were she and the other Mary found after the others had gone? (Matthew 27:61) Why? _____

In our text, the stone represents an obstacle—a barrier, a hurdle you cannot get over, circumvent, or overcome, a difficulty that stands between you and Christ, and often leaves you feeling discouraged or defeated. What does the stone represent in your life? If it could be moved, what lies on the other side? _____

Kill, Steal, and Destroy

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples four times that He will rise again.¹ Per Matthew 17:22-23, what were they focused on? What did they fail to hear despite the reassurance they had been given? _____

Continue reading in Matthew 27:62-66.

When we forget the words of Christ, the enemy remembers. While the disciples hid in fear, Jesus' adversaries recalled His claims to rise again and began to plot and plan. What safeguards did the religious leaders and Romans put into place to prevent His claims from coming to pass? (vv.64-66) Of what were they truly afraid? _____

Even in death Jesus posed a threat. Christ's enemies sought to ensure that Christ remained in His grave, and with Him, His followers' faith. Compare the religious leaders' actions and motives to those of our Adversary. What similarities do you see? (See also Genesis 3:1-5, Matthew 13:19, John 8:44, 10:10, and 1 Peter 5:8.) _____

Why is a circumstance such as this an opportune time for the adversary to advance? _____

Read Matthew 28:11-15. What additional measures would Christ's enemies take to discredit Him? Why do you think so many accepted the report? _____

Like Christ's enemies, your adversary seeks to discredit Christ's claims, to speak lies, to instill fear, to oppose your efforts, to keep you at a distance, and to undermine your hope. His aim is to steal, kill and destroy *you*, by ultimately keeping you from God.

Do you readily recognize the adversary's activity in your life? What methods has the enemy used in an attempt to kill your hope, steal your joy, and put you out of the way—rendering you useless for the kingdom of God? _____

¹ See also Matthew 16:21, 20:19, and 26:32.

How do *you* combat the adversary's schemes? (See Ephesians 6:10-18.) _____

Assumptions

Read John 20:1-10.

Thinking back, describe the scene when Mary left Christ's tomb days earlier. (Luke 23:55) _____

What did Mary observe when she arrived? (vv.1-2) What emotions did this provoke in her? What did she assume had happened to Jesus? What action did she take in haste? (v.2) _____

What Mary observed was true, but her interpretation was false. What was she focused on? _____

Mary attributed Christ's missing body to enemy activity. Why do we often assume some injustice or wrong has been committed when our circumstances seem awry? Do you often look for the enemy before you look for the evidences of Christ's handiwork? Why? _____

What instructions are given in Philippians 4:6-9 and James 1:5 to aid us during times of heightened emotion? _____

Return to John 20. What did the disciples observe? Why was the evidence inconsistent with robbery?

What did Mary and the disciples not yet realize? (vv.9-10) _____

Continue reading in John 20, verses 11-13.

What did Mary fail to see amid her tears? (v.12) What other evidence was present to assure Mary? (vv.5-7) (Also consider what occurred in Matthew 28:1-8.) _____

Overwhelmed by what seemed wrong and out of place, Mary was unable to recall Jesus' promises, unable to see the assurances He placed in front of her. Two angels, clothed in shining white garments stood at the head and foot of where Jesus' body had lain, but she did not see.

Why do we often miss the assurances the Lord has provided? Think back over the course of your current challenge. What or who has the Lord placed in your path to assure you that His promises will prevail? _____

BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US: "MY LOVE PREVAILS"

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Look Up

Keep reading, John 20:14-18 and Mark 16:1-11.

Embarrassed by her grief, Mary turned away from the empty grave only to be asked again why she was weeping. She had desperately wanted to return the love she had been shown by caring for Christ in His death. Without answers and without closure, Mary felt lost and despairing.

At this time, what did the empty tomb represent to Mary? _____

But as she questioned His whereabouts, He stood at Mary's side. How does this statement speak to you? _____

Although Mary may not have recognized Jesus, she knew His voice (John 10:3-4). What did Christ's presence vanquish in Mary? _____

Read Psalm 73:21-26.

Jesus was alive, defeating every fear, doubt, and insecurity she had entertained. He had triumphed over the enemy and defeated death, just as He had said.

Like Mary, the entirety of your faith—your belief that God is who He claims and will do what He has promised—is contingent upon this single act.² What does the empty tomb represent to all who believe? _____

Read the following passages. Over what does God's love prevail?

Deuteronomy 20:4, Joshua 10:8, Psalm 44:5, Malachi 4:3, Luke 10:19 _____

Genesis 3:15, Colossians 2:15, 1 John 2:12-14 _____

John 3:16, Romans 8:31-37 _____

1 Corinthians 10:13 _____

1 John 4:1-6 _____

1 John 5:4-5 _____

² Consider 1 Corinthians 15:1-28, 50-58.

In John 16:33 Christ said, *“In Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* Knowing that Christ cannot be defeated and that He prevails over all, what does Christ’s declaration mean for your life? _____

In Mark 16:3-4, the women discussed who would roll away the stone. What they did not realize was that the obstacle had already been removed. Where was their focus when they discovered this? How does this speak to your heart? _____

In closing, read Isaiah 25:8-9.