

## “MY LORD AND MY GOD!”

John 20:1–31

Key Verse: 20:28, “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

Who are you closest to? Mom? Dad? Your spouse, or children? A friend? It’s nice to be close to at least *someone*. But something may happen that reveals we’re not as close as we thought. We think if we share the same culture, history, traditions, or even the same house or bed, we’re close, right? But are we? Today we celebrate Easter. It’s all about our Lord Jesus, risen from the dead. He brings us out from under the power of death, from meaninglessness, fear, and sorrow, and gives us courage, faith, joy, and a new direction. But the message of John 20 is even deeper. The Risen Jesus draws us closer to God himself. It’s an intimacy we might never imagine we

Next, in verses 3–10 John tells the story of these two eyewitnesses, to confirm that the facts they saw were real. Look at verse 3. Peter and John go to the tomb together. During Jesus’ trial, they’d been together out in the courtyard. But Peter had denied Jesus three times and was not at his cross with John. Now these two are together again. It seems John is with Peter to support him, even though he knows his failure. John is trying to practice Jesus’ command, “Love one another.” Look at verse 4. Why is this detail here? John is a faster runner, and competitive, but getting there first might also show that John has a little more love for Jesus. The author is developing this theme for all disciples: those who feel loved by Jesus the most will end up loving him the most. Look at verse 5. John stoops to look into the tomb and sees only the linen cloths the body had been wrapped in. He does not go in, perhaps out of respect for Jesus, or for Simon Peter. True to form, Simon Peter boldly goes right in (6). Look at verse 7. He finds more evidence: the face cloth that had been on Jesus’ head. And strangely, it’s not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. This is more eyewitness evidence. Graverobbers would never do this; it looks like he rose and took off the face cloth and other cloths himself. Look at verse 8. Now John goes in, sees and believes. Believes what? He believes that Jesus is risen. But read verse 9. Like Peter, John doesn’t understand what the resurrection of Jesus means based on Scripture, how it’s part of God’s plan. He just believes the miracle that it happened. John includes this comment to encourage us to believe based not only on miraculous facts but also on God’s words. Look at verse 10. Peter and John go back to their homes. For now, their search stops here.

So the author zeroes in on Mary Magdalene (11–18). It's a unique event in the Bible, an entire eight verses. Look at verse 11a. Mary followed Peter and John back to the tomb, and now, as they leave, saying nothing to her, she stays outside his tomb, weeping. But these are not silent tears; in Greek the word "weeping" means "noisy wailing" (Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*). Why is she crying so loudly? No one is there to hear. But she just loves him this much. The other Gospels mentioned her. Jesus healed Mary Magdalene of seven demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2) and allowed her to join the other women providing for him out of their own means (Luke 8:3). Mary followed, served and witnessed all he did and said. In all the Gospels she's at the cross and at the tomb. But now, after Peter and John go home, she's here, alone, crying outside his tomb, not because her faithfulness is so great, but because she's experienced his grace so profoundly. Yes, Mary Magdalene is grieving under the power of death, like those at the death of Lazarus. But she's also grieving because of how horribly her Lord Jesus has been treated and killed. Due to her past, some probably despise her. Some see her as just an emotional woman. But out of all of his followers the Risen Jesus visits her first. His grace has already inspired so much love in her (Luke 7:47); now he gives her "grace upon grace" (John 1:16), the grace of drawing even closer to God through him.

Unlike Peter and John, Mary has not been inside the tomb yet to see the evidence. Now she stoops in to look (11b). What does she see? Not linen cloths but two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet (12). His body has not been taken away by evil men; the Holy Father has been at work here. Where the slain body of Jesus has lain and risen is the new Most Holy Place. In him, sinners encounter the Holy God personally.

The angels say to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (13a) They're not rebuking her. They're trying to help her see the reality of what's happened. But she's stuck thinking his body has been taken away, and that she has to do something about it (13b). Look at verse 14. Jesus is distinct from the angels; he's behind her, so she has to turn to see him. He's outside the tomb, not sitting, but standing, and very much alive. But Mary does not "know" or perceive who he is. He asks her the same question as the angels (15a). He's gently trying to help her come out of her grief and dutiful thinking. But he adds another profound question: "Whom are you seeking?" He's trying to help Mary know who he really is. Knowing who Jesus really is is the main focus of John's Gospel.

Look at verse 15b. Without recognizing him, what she's saying here is comical. She's guessing the tomb owner didn't want the body of Jesus there, and she's willing to

go get it and bury it someplace else. If this gardener would just show her, she's ready to do it herself. She's so devoted, and looking around the garden to see where his body might be. But it's all misguided, because Jesus is right there in front of her. Like her, if we can't see the presence of the Risen Jesus, we easily get wrapped up in the wrong concerns and pursuits. Look at verse 16a. Suddenly Jesus calls her by her name, "Mary." He knows her deeply and personally (10:3–4). Though he's suffered so much, died, risen, and now ascending, he comes in person just to visit her. Look at verse 16b. She turns and sees that he's Jesus and says, "Teacher!" She still has a limited view of Jesus.

Look at verse 17a. "Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father...'" Mary has to let go of the physical presence of Jesus. He's on his way to return to the Father. From now on, through the Holy Spirit his living presence will always be with her. Look at verse 17b. "...but go to my brothers..." not his human brothers but his disciples. In the big picture, our Risen Lord is making a woman, Mary Magdalene, the first witness of his resurrection. What does he want her to say? Read verse 17c. "...and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" It sounds simple, poetic, and like really good news for Jesus. But what does it have to do with us? Jesus applies it to us personally by saying, "my Father and your Father," and "my God and your God." For John, this is the heart of the gospel.

Just before his death, Jesus told his disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). He added, "I am going to the Father." He wasn't talking about a roadmap or a process, but about himself. Now, after death and resurrection, Jesus is ascending to the Father. He's being glorified as the Living One, the Lamb of God, our King, our Risen Lord, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As he returns to the Father's side, he will be fully glorified as he sends our Helper, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father (15:26; cf. 7:39). The Holy Spirit will convict us of sin (16:8). The Holy Spirit will help us see the glory of Jesus (16:14). The Holy Spirit will help us confess faith in Jesus as Lord (1 Cor.12:3). The Holy Spirit will make us "born of God" (1:12; 3:8b). The world neither sees nor knows him, but the Father sends the Spirit in Jesus' name, to be with us forever and give us the peace of Jesus (14:16–17,26–27). The substance of this peace is this: in Jesus, I now know God as "my" Father and "my" God. It's intimate knowledge of the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, which is eternal life (17:3). This close personal relationship with God my Father and his Son Jesus through the Holy Spirit is the essence of spiritual life. To "know" God (1:18; 14:20) is to be so close to him. Though we were once far away in our sin, Jesus, through the Spirit, draws us close, with direct

access to our Father God (Eph.2:18). Through faith in Jesus we now have boldness and access to God with confidence (Eph.3:12).

Read verse 17c again. In our Risen Lord, we come to know God as “my” Father and “my” God. He’s not just my parents’ God or my shepherd’s God, but “my” God. For God to truly be “my Father and my God” I have to know him personally and love him more than anyone else. In his high priestly prayer Jesus calls this having the Father’s “name” (17:6,26). It means knowing the Father just as Jesus knows him. It means knowing the Father’s love for Jesus, and Jesus’ love for the Father. Through Jesus, we’re invited into this fellowship that unites God the Father and God the Son. Jesus says we even share the same glory the Father has given him (17:22). As Jesus reflects the Father’s glory, we too begin to reflect God’s character, and the oneness Jesus has with the Father. We grow in his love for the Father, his trust in the Father, and his obedience to the Father. The qualities of this relationship with our Father God are what give those who believe in Jesus such strong spiritual unity. They fill us with godly love for one another. As we share this fellowship with the Father, with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3b), and with one another, we reveal his glory and make his name known in the world. Mary herself is drawn into this closer relationship. Read verse 18. After meeting the Risen Jesus, her eyes have been opened. She has peace, freedom, and a new direction. By faith she gives Jesus’ words to his disciples.

Next, the author tells briefly how Jesus commissions his disciples (19–23). It’s the evening of the same day. The disciples are together with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews. Jesus comes, stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.” He shows them his hands and his side, to prove it’s really him. They’re glad when they realize it’s Jesus. Then he says again, “Peace be with you.” Meeting our Risen Lord Jesus gives us peace in our souls. He adds, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus says 38 times that the Father sent him. Now, though his disciples are locked in a room in fear, Jesus is sending them into the world. He’s already prayed for it: “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (17:18). Now, by faith, he’s doing it. As a preview of the coming of the Holy Spirit later, he breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (22). It tells us that despite all our weaknesses and sins, if we believe in Jesus and depend on the Holy Spirit, even we can do the works Jesus did (14:12). Jesus gives these men his authority to bring people the forgiveness of sins in his name (23; cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 10:43).

And the Risen Jesus meets one more disciple (24–29). It seems almost unnecessary. But it highlights several important themes in John’s Gospel: Jesus is so

personal, and such a good shepherd for each person; believing is so important; and most of all is Thomas' confession, which is like the practical application of Jesus' message to his disciples (17c). Read verse 24. We don't know why Thomas wasn't there. But we've seen him before in John's Gospel. When Jesus was determined to go back to Judea to see Lazarus, Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (11:16). He was loyal and courageous, though a little pessimistic. When Jesus said, "And you know the way to where I am going," Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:4–5) He was inquisitive and wanted to understand, but a bit snarky. Now we see another side of him. Read verse 25. Why is Thomas so skeptical and demanding? First of all, he wasn't there when Jesus appeared and showed them his hands and side. After the trauma and disappointment of the crucifixion, Thomas has become guarded and unwilling to believe. He's a practical man who wants to see tangible evidence before believing in a bodily resurrection. He's like an analyst who wants concrete proof before accepting anyone's claim. To the others, he's being a stick-in-the-mud.

Read verse 26. Jesus makes this appearance just for Thomas. Read verse 27. Jesus shows him not just the evidence he's demanding, but how much he loves him. Jesus is so humble, so full of grace. In telling him not to disbelieve, but to believe, he's also full of truth. How does Thomas respond? Read verse 28. His confession is his deep repentance. It's also the climax of John's Gospel. Jesus who came in the flesh and dwelt among us, who suffered, died and rose again to save us from our sins, who has the wounds to prove it and who loved us to the end, really is our personal Lord and our God. Thomas shows us the ultimate end of getting close to the Risen Jesus. What is it? It's worship. Telling others, being sent into the world, being filled with the Spirit, proclaiming forgiveness—it leads us all to worship Jesus as "my Lord and my God." How does Jesus respond to his confession? Read verse 29. Jesus makes Thomas an example for all those yet to believe in him. Being a Christian is not about being one of Jesus' cronies; it's open to anyone willing to believe the evidence and testimony of those who saw the Risen Jesus, without demanding to see it themselves. Jesus says those who believe without seeing are even more blessed than his original disciples.

Read verse 28 again. May God help us repent of our doubt and draw us close to the Risen Jesus, to believe and have abundant life in his name (30–31).