

Introduction: Most of the time it is difficult to discern what God is doing. This is because He is hiding inside of the ordinary beauty that is still left in His fallen creation. Most people take this ordinary beauty for granted as nothing more than background for their busy lives. They spend their time pursuing the desires of their own hearts, without regard for God. *** But, to children, beauty is never ordinary. Every day they are discovering things that amaze them because they take nothing for granted. They have not been exposed to the adult world where people chase after what they think they need; but, in reality, they only want. This is one of many reasons Jesus said: Whoever may not receive The Kingdom of God as a child, in no way may enter into it (Luke 18:15-17). *** As adults, we must always thank God that there are times when He goes beyond His ordinary beauty and everyday little life giving and life changing miracles. *** An excellent example of this is what God did the moment Messiah Jesus died on The Cross. Jews could not imagine Messiah dying. They were stunned and numb. But, God immediately did four astounding miracles. The fourth was beyond anything they could ever imagine. *** On the first day of the week after Jesus was buried in a tomb, God did a subtly surprising work in Mary Magdalene. He had previously delivered her from her desperate life of being tormented by seven demons. She faithfully followed Jesus until she saw Him die. She could not stop her devotion to Him, even after she saw Him die. She got up early after her Sabbath-rest day to visit His body and do what she could do. When she saw His body missing from the mysteriously opened tomb, she was overwhelmed and wept. *** Jesus revealed Himself to her when He called her by name. He then appointed this formerly despised woman to be His first witness to His male apostles. This may be less amazing and jarring than an earthquake and people raised from the dead; but, in both the Roman and Jewish cultures, it was unthinkable for a woman to be a witness. *** Let's now carefully follow this Mary from The Cross to the risen Jesus.

I. After Jesus died, amazing things happened, including many saints rising, Roman soldiers being made greatly afraid, and their leader calling Jesus God's Son; many women, including Mary Magdalene, watched this from afar. (Matthew 20:50-56)

- A. God did four amazing things after Jesus died, the last being many dead saints rising; Roman soldiers feared greatly, and their commander said: Truly, Son of God, he was being. (Verses 50-54)

Death of God: In His humanity, Jesus died when His spirit left His body. This triggered four powerful events done by God. The first and last were astounding. Matthew writes: Look! (Verses 50-51a)

1. The curtain of the Temple was torn in two from above to below. (Verse 51b)

Torn from above: The only one who could tear the curtain to The Holy Place from above is God. This conclusion is verified by the verb being in the passive voice, the first of seven times in this passage.

2. And the earth quaked. (Verse 51c)

3. And the rocks were split. (Verse 51d)

Earth and rocks: God did both of these things. The noun form of the verb 'quake' is 'seismos' in Greek, the root of the English word 'seismic'.

4. Graves were opened, and many bodies of the holy men who had fallen asleep (died – 1 Kings 2:10) were raised up; and, having come out of their graves after His rising, they went into the holy city and were made visible to many. (Verses 52-53)

Three steps: The word for grave means 'memorial', they were opened by God; then 'saints' who had died were raised after Jesus rose; and they went into the city 'made visible': alive!

Jesus' death opened the way for life

5. But the centurion and those with him guarding Jesus, having seen the earthquake and the things having happened, were made afraid – greatly! (Verses 54a-b)

Great fear: These 'acts of God' convinced the Roman commander of one hundred men, and the men with him at Jesus' crucifixion, God's weakness is stronger than the strongest men (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

6. He said, 'Truly, Son of God this one was being'. (Verse 54c)

True Son of God: To this non-Jewish soldier, the miracles he saw at Jesus' death convinced him of the true divinity of Jesus.

Application: We all must ask God to do miracles in tragedies to open the eyes of those in power to see the great power of Messiah, even in His Death.

- B. Many women, including Mary Magdalene, who had followed Jesus, ministering to Him, watched from afar. (Verses 55-56)

1. But many women were being there, from afar off, watching ... (Verse 55a)

Many women: They were not too close because of the soldiers, and because they were women.

2. ... who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him. (Verse 55b)

Ministry: We heard earlier in Luke's gospel (last week) women had supported Him financially. Luke devotes almost ten chapters to Jesus' journey (9:52-19:26), so they had many opportunities to minister to Him on His eventful teaching journey of ninety miles.

3. In these was being: Mary, the Magdalene; and, Mary of James (Jacob) and Joseph the mother; and, the mother of Zebedee's sons. (Verse 56)

Mary the Magdalene: Mary was identified with Magdala (tower), five miles south of Capernaum on the western shore of Galilee. It did not exist until about 150 BC.

Two mothers: The first Mary was the mother of the apostle James (the lesser, Mark 15:40).

The second mother was the mother of James (the greater) and John (Mark 4:21).

II. Mary Magdalene comes to Jesus' tomb on the first day to find it empty; when she is left alone, she weeps until Jesus calls her by name and commissions her to go to His brothers. (John 20:1-2, 10-18)

- A. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb of Jesus early on the first day of the week, found it empty and ran to tell Peter and John. (Verses 1-2, 10)

1. But, the first [day] of the week, Mary Magdalene is coming early, still being dark, to the tomb; and, she is seeing the stone had been taken away from the tomb. (Verse 1)

Early morning: At sunset, the seventh (Sabbath) day was over. Pre-dawn could be considered early on the eighth day – the number of new beginnings.

Stone taken away: She observed the large stone that was placed over the entrance of the tomb (we get ‘memorial’ from the Greek word) had somehow been taken away!

2. Then she is running and she is coming to Simon Peter, and the other disciple whom Jesus was loving; and, she is saying to them: They have taken away The Lord from the tomb, and not we had known where they laid Him. (*Verse 2*)

Goes to Peter and John: Distressed, she goes to Peter and John to tell them the body of The Lord is no longer in the tomb. She assumes people stole His body.

3. ... then they [Peter and John] went away again to them [the other disciples]. (*Verse 10*)

Disciples leave Mary: As they had looked into the tomb, Peter saw grave clothes neatly folded, and John saw and believed; but, they did not yet know from Scripture He must rise (verses 3-9). Then they left Mary alone.

- B. As Mary weeps alone, two angels in the tomb ask her why she weeps; she turns to see Jesus, but does not know Him until He calls her by name and sends her to His brothers to tell them. (*Verses 11-18*)

1. But, Mary had stood near the tomb, outside weeping; then, as she was weeping, she bent over [and looked] into the tomb. (*Verse 11*)

Mary weeping: Mary is weeping, out of concern for Jesus, as she stood outside the tomb, near it, for a long time. Finally, she bent over to look into it, as did Peter and John.

2. She is seeing two angels (messengers) in white sitting: one at the head and one at the feet, where it was laying, the body of Jesus; they are indeed saying to her: Woman, why thou are weeping? She is saying to them: because they have taken away my Lord, and not I have known where they lay Him. (*Verses 12-13*)

Two angels: Two spiritual messenger beings visibly appear to Mary.

The question: With conviction, they ask her why she is weeping.

She answers: She responds she is convinced people have stolen her Lord’s body, and she has not known where they laid it down.

3. These having spoken, she was turned back around, and she is seeing Jesus (who) had stood; and, not she had known it is being Jesus. (*Verse 14*)

Turns: She was somehow moved to turn around to look back from the tomb. She sees Jesus who had been standing behind her!

Jesus let Mary be the first witness of His resurrection

Not know: But, at this time, she is not able to recognize Him as her Lord.

4. Jesus is indeed saying to her: Woman! Why are thou weeping? Whom are thou seeking? (*Verse 15a*)

Jesus questions: Jesus asks her what the angels asked her, and also asks her who she is seeking, knowing she is seeking Him. She has not yet believed what she is seeing, as John had.

Jesus let Mary be the first witness of His resurrection

5. She, supposing He is the keeper of the garden, is saying to him: Sir! If thou removed Him, thou must tell me where thou have put Him; and I, Him, I will take away. (*Verse 15b*)

Mary wants His body: Not realizing who this man is, she wants him to give her Jesus’ body so she will do what is right with it.

6. He is saying to her, Jesus: Mary! She, having been herself turned, is saying to Him in Hebrew: Rabboni (which is being said: Teacher!) (*Verse 16*)

Jesus calls her by name: Jesus finally calls Mary by her name.

She calls Him ‘Teacher’: John translates ‘Rabboni’ into Greek as ‘did-as’-ka-leh’, teacher in English.

Jesus let Mary be the first witness of His resurrection

Application: We must learn from Mary to never make assumptions about God in our grief and so miss what God is doing when it seems that He is not with us in our grief.

7. Jesus is saying to her: Not of Me, thou must be taking hold, because not yet I have been ascended to The Father; but, thou must be going to My brothers, and thou must be saying to them: I am ascending to My Father and the Father of y’all. (*Verse 17*)

Jesus cautions Mary: Jesus tells Mary that she cannot continue to hold Him.

Jesus sends Mary: This is because He is sending her, as the first to see Him alive, to His apostle brothers with a message.

8. Mary, the Magdalene, is coming and she is telling the disciples that she had seen The Lord (alive) and these things He said to her. (*Verse 18*)

She goes and tells: This woman, formerly possessed by seven demons, is not a credible witness to either Jews or Romans, has been specially charged by Jesus to be the first to witness to His resurrection.

Application: We must learn to believe God will open our eyes to see miracles in tragedies because Jesus Christ overcame Death. Mary’s experience from Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday gives us hope.

Jesus let Mary be the first witness of His resurrection

Conclusion: God did four miracles as Jesus died including the raising of saints who went to the holy city after Jesus was raised. This brought great fear to the Roman guards so their leader called Jesus God’s Son. Mary Magdalene was there with other women who ministered to Jesus, watching all this. On the day after Sabbath, Mary came to His tomb to find it empty. She wept alone before turning to Jesus, but she does not recognize Him until He calls her by name. Then she calls Him ‘Teacher’ and He commands her to tell His brothers. She obeys and tells His disciples what she saw and heard from Jesus.

Jesus let Mary be the first witness of His resurrection