

## The King of Kings

John 20:1-18

Consider the difference in Mary's life from *Friday evening to Sunday morning*. The lights went out - literally - from noon until three pm Friday. In the middle of the day, when the sun would have been at its height, all light was blotted out. **The sun in the sky was covered in darkness as the Son of God was covered in sin.**

That darkness continued, metaphorically, over the weekend. Look at verse 1:

**“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.” John 20:1**

The detail about the darkness conveys *Mary's urgency* to anoint the body of Jesus - as soon as it was allowed by Jewish Law to avoid breaking the Sabbath. But the darkness was also *symbolic of the condition of the disciples* - they were in the darkness of their **confusion and despair**. They still believed that their Savior and Teacher was dead. They believed HE remained in the clutches of darkness and death - and therefore they were gripped by this fear themselves. Mary herself was coming to the tomb to anoint a DEAD BODY. She too was still in the dark.

Who was **Mary Magdalene**? There is a lot of bad information out there. Let's focus on what the Bible says. This Mary is mentioned twelve times in the gospel accounts. She is named in all four gospels with the modifier "Magdalene" referring to her home region of **Magdala**, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The longest description of her is found in Luke 8:

**“And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out... and many others, who provided for them out of their means.” Luke 8:1-3**

Mary was one of the first people to experience *the life-changing ministry of Jesus*. She had been possessed by **seven demons**. That could mean it took seven different exorcisms to heal her or - more likely - that the demonic control over her was complete. Until Jesus. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God - which meant good news for the desperate, recovery of sight for the blind, healing for the sick and freedom for those controlled by demons.

Mary is listed not only as one delivered by Jesus from demons but also as *one who supported Jesus* and the disciples financially. So she probably came from a prominent family and had significant financial resources that she gladly contributed to the common purse.

**Mary Magdalene was NOT the sister of Martha**, nor is she the former prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her hair. Those are two different Marys, maybe three. (Mary was a very common name back then.) And one more qualification - **Mary Magdalene was not in a romantic relationship with Jesus**. In spite of the very shoddy historical work of Dan Brown and the Da Vinci Code, Jesus did not have a thing for Mary. There was no secret romance, certainly no secret marriage.

So why is Mary so prominently highlighted in the gospel accounts? Why was she the first person to see the risen Christ? **Precisely because she was NOBODY**. It is details like this - a little known woman being the first witness to the resurrection - that give the gospel accounts the ring of truth. Had it been Peter who was first to find the stone rolled away we might be suspicious of later editors doctoring the facts to provide greater credibility. But **a woman** - whose testimony was not even valid in court back then - is not a witness that anyone would have invented. The only reason all four gospel accounts mention Mary among the first witnesses is ***because that is how it happened!***

**Jesus changed everything for Mary**. She was wealthy but was totally controlled by demons until Jesus set her free. Then she was not only able to think clearly again but she had a whole new purpose for her life - using her resources to help Jesus and His Kingdom. Jesus changed her life completely. But then Jesus died. And from Friday afternoon through Sunday morning, darkness descended for Mary. Until Jesus said her name.

Blinded by her grief - and, I'm sure, confused by His healthy appearance - she didn't recognize Jesus right in front of her, thinking he was the gardener.

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

**"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)." John 20:16**

In that moment when Jesus said her name, **the darkness disappeared**. Her confusion became clarity, her despair became delight and her scrambling was refocused into purposeful service. Let's look at each of these **three transformations** in turn. The resurrection changed everything for Mary. And it changes everything for us as well.

***You may be walking in darkness today***. You may feel confused about what is happening in the world and in your life. You may be discouraged and struggling with despair. You may be scrambling and wondering what God's purpose is for you. When you meet the Risen Jesus - when you hear Him speak your name - it changes everything. Here is the first transformation:

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

1. Confusion → **Clarity**

“We do not know where they have laid him.’ ...They did not understand the Scripture... She did not know that it was Jesus.” John 20:2,9,14

**After the crucifixion, all of the disciples were confused.** If you rewind to the three times Jesus predicted that he would suffer and die - even when He said it very clearly and explained why it was necessary - still the disciples were confused about it and Peter overtly tried to persuade Jesus NOT to move forward with that plan.

Mary came to the tomb **looking for a DEAD BODY** to anoint for burial. She was confused about the whole situation. Even when Peter and John saw the empty tomb, verse nine makes it clear that they still did not realize that Jesus was SUPPOSED to die so that He could rise. The repetition in this passage is people running this way and that, expressing their confusion. “We don’t know... they did not understand... I don’t know...” Look at verse 9.

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

#### 1. Confusion → **Clarity**

“[John] went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” John 20:8-9

That word “must” is important. **Jesus HAD TO die and He HAD TO rise** from the dead. It was necessary in the eternal plan of God. After the crucifixion, over the weekend and even there by the empty tomb, still they did not understand “that he must rise from the dead.” But this is what Jesus told them three times when he explained the plan.

“I have to suffer and die for you. **That’s the plan.** That’s how it has to be. Then on the third day I will rise from the dead.” He said it very clearly on three different occasions, but they simply could not understand why or how.

Doesn’t that encourage you? **It’s ok not to understand everything.** It’s unavoidable that we will not understand all that God is doing in our lives and in the world. And we don’t have to. We just have to trust in the God who DOES understand and DOES have a plan.

And here is the place to focus - the resurrection of Jesus. When we focus our hearts and minds on this centerpiece moment of God’s work of salvation, the little things regain their proper place as little things and God’s overall plan becomes clear.

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

#### 1. Confusion → **Clarity**

“She did not know that it was Jesus... Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’” John 20:14,16

Even when He was standing right in front of her she didn't get it. She didn't recognize Him. Until He said her name. Then she fell at His feet and grabbed onto Him. Then she ran to the other disciples as the first messenger of the gospel, **"I have seen the Lord!"**

In their confusion, they thought:

- **Jesus had failed.** But His death was not a failure, it was our salvation!
- They thought Jesus was still dead. But Jesus went THROUGH death so He could defeat sin and death forever!
- They thought Jesus was gone forever - but by dealing with sin through His death and resurrection Jesus ensured that He could be with His disciples FOREVER!

**The resurrection makes it all clear!** Jesus is alive! Jesus is victorious! Jesus is with us! Our confusion about the little challenges and struggles in life is transformed into a clarity about what is most important. Jesus is alive. Jesus is victorious. Sin has been paid for. Death has been defeated! Jesus is with us, right now and forever! Here is the second transformation:

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

#### **2. Despair → Delight**

**"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?'" John 20:15**

Mary was blinded by grief. The Rabbi, the Teacher, the leader she loved was dead. He was gone. **The darkness of grief had overwhelmed her.** And on top of everything else, she now believed someone had stolen the body - so she couldn't even give his dead body the honor it deserved in burial.

Notice Jesus' question: **"Whom are you seeking?"** Whatever grief we are going through today, this is an important question for all of us to hear from the Lord. "Whom are YOU seeking" right now? Are you looking for Jesus? Like Mary, do you think Jesus is gone - that He has abandoned you?

How many of us can sincerely say that **we are seeking Jesus with all of our hearts?** We are so quickly distracted, so easily led away to seek other things, even in our grief. Loss is one of the great revealers of what's really happening in our hearts. If you want to know what your heart loves most - imagine losing it.

- If you lose something **important to you**, you will be sad.
- If you lose something **ULTIMATE in your life**, you will be devastated.

When you face the death of a spouse or a child or other close family member or friend, it will be painful. There is no way around the heartbreak of death. But Christians should not grieve like

those who have no hope. Our grief should be colored by our knowledge that death is not the end, but only the beginning. For Christian believers, there is a reunion coming one day!

***Grief and loss will always be sad.*** But they need not be devastating in the light of the resurrection. The resurrection changes everything - most of all, GRIEF.

- Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know WE will rise from the dead!
- Because Jesus rose from the dead, we know we will see our loved ones who belong to Jesus - we will all be together one day!
- Because Jesus rose from the dead, we are still sad in the face of death but we have peace because death is a defeated enemy!

*“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future. And life is worth the living just because He lives.”*

Let me recommend THAT song instead of the popular new Disney song from Frozen 2. It's catchy and light - maybe you've heard it? It's called **Lost in the Woods**.

## *Lost in the Woods*



Who am I, if I'm not your  
guy?

Where am I, if we're not  
together forever?

Now I know you're my  
true north, 'cause I am  
lost in the woods

Up is down, day is night,  
when you're not there

## *Lost in the Woods*



Oh, you're my only  
landmark, so I'm lost in the  
woods

Wondering if you still care  
But I'll wait for a sign that  
I'm your path

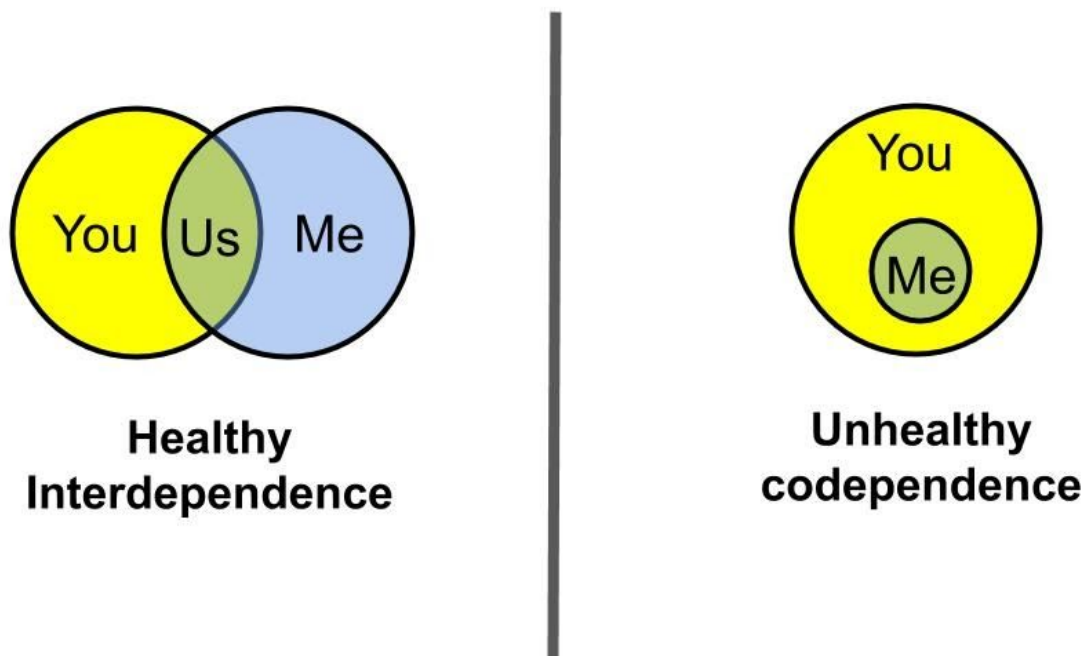
'Cause you are mine  
Until then, I'm lost in the  
woods

Look at the phrases here. WHO AM I, if I'm not your guy? Christoff, are you saying you have no identity apart from Anna? Where am I, if we're not together? You have no direction, no purpose, without this woman? "You're my true north... You're me ONLY LANDMARK."

Now I realize this is an artistic expression. And I am not embarrassed to say that I like Christoff and Sven and especially Olaf. But I call this **the co-dependence song**. The idolatry song. I'm

nothing without you. It means ***that relationship has become the ultimate thing in your life.*** You have no identity, no purpose, no will to live apart from that person. Codependence. The only one you should sing this song about is JESUS, ok? Then it's ok. He is our true North. He is our only landmark. Not some girl; not some guy! Got it?

Here is what codependence looks like:



In a **healthy relationship** you have your identity, I have mine, and together we have a meaningful connection. In an **unhealthy relationship** my whole identity is subsumed under you. I am defined and controlled by that single relationship. ***That is the essence of idolatry.*** To say, “without you, I’m lost in the woods,” is to say I am nothing without you. You are my everything.

Again, the only One we should say that about is Jesus. Not anyone else on this planet. Not anyTHING else in this world.

***I’ve seen many people walk through seasons of grief and loss.*** Some funerals fit the “normal” pattern of kids burying their parents or grandparents; wives burying husbands... The most heart-wrenching funerals are for young children. There is no cry of anguish like that of a mother who has just lost her baby.

I did a funeral for a four year old boy in Kentucky. Crib death. No explanation. He just didn’t wake up one day. It was the grandson of a regular member of our church. But other than Grampa, none of the family were believers. So the grief was overwhelming. And they didn’t have a clear understanding of the gospel so they didn’t have a real hope of seeing this boy again.

That was a hard funeral. We tried to point everyone to Jesus, for He is the only hope in the face of that kind of tragic loss. But their grief and pain was overwhelming. They were devastated.

In contrast, I delivered the news to a mom of the death of her 30 year old son in a hunting accident - he was shot by his own brother. Devastating news. Anguish. Crushing.

But this family knew Jesus. I went to that house with five believers who had been in small group with this couple for 30 years. They entered a season of deep and agonizing grief, but it was a grief colored by hope. They knew they would see their son again. It drew the family together.

The resurrection changes how we grieve!

Here's the point. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Look at what happened when Jesus said Mary's name.

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

#### **2. Despair → Delight**

**“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned and said to him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’” John 20:16**

Mary thought her beloved Teacher was dead. Suddenly he was speaking to her. Her despair was immediately replaced by delight. Her darkness driven out by the light of His living presence. Her anguish became joy.

***That is what the Risen Jesus does.*** He takes even our most difficult losses and shines the light of His Risen Life on them. He says to you,

*“That pain is not the end of the story. Resurrection is coming. That loss does not define you - my death-conquering power does. That grief does not make you who you are because that person did not make you who you are. I am your hope. I am your life. And I am here.”*

***Mary came to the tomb to anoint a dead body. She ran from the tomb to announce the good news*** - Jesus is alive! “I have seen the Lord!” Her whole life was transformed in that moment that she met the Risen Jesus.

***Have you had YOUR MOMENT with the Risen Christ?*** Has He spoken into your despair? Has the light of His victory shone into the darkness of your grief? Jesus is right here, right now. He is right in front of you, saying your name.

His resurrection changes our confusion into clarity, our despair into delight and third, it transforms our:



## **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

### 3. Scrambling → **Service**

“So she ran and went to Simon Peter... Both of them were running... the disciples went back home...” John 20:2,4,10

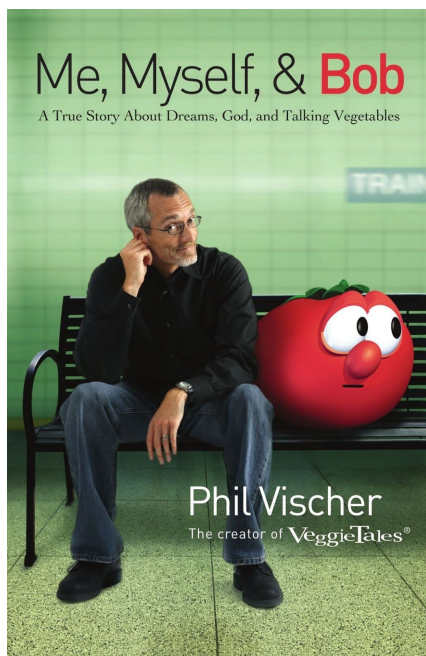
There is ***a lot of running*** in the first part of this chapter. It’s a funny note that John outran Peter. I honestly have no idea why he put that in there. Maybe he was impressed with Peter’s boldness to just go right into the tomb and he wanted to balance that by saying, “Hey, I *was* the faster runner. Just sayin’.”

What is clear is that there is ***a lot of movement without a lot of direction***. They are running here and there but are unclear where to go or what to do. They are scrambling.

This is often how we are in life. We don’t know what to do or where to go, so ***we just scramble***. We run from one commitment to the next, from one activity to the next.

***Experiencing God*** has been a helpful study to address this. The Biblical pattern is to seek God first - to set our hearts and minds upon Him in a devoted relationship - to WAIT on the Lord and listen for His guidance.

Phil Vischer, the creator of Veggie Tales, tells his story in the engaging book, ***Me, Myself and Bob***.



In the early '90s, after dropping out of college, he and Mike Nawrocki set out to change the world for Jesus through Christian media. “Where’s God when I’m Scared?” - the first Veggie Tales show - was ground-breaking as the first 30 minute digital production ever. They literally spent three days rendering it one frame at a time by dragging an image from one computer across to a separate monitor. Phil, Mike and Phil’s wife (who voiced Junior Asparagus) took turns.

Through the mid-'90s ***Veggie Tales became a major sensation***. I remember being in college and seeing groups of girls gathered to watch something and being like, “A cartoon? What is this about? Well, college girls are here, so it must be awesome.” And it was.

Veggie Tales exploded. In a short period of time, Phil was “successful.” The natural thing to do was to expand. ***So Veggie Tales grew. And grew. And grew.*** In the book Phil describes the process as he handed over decision-making to a secular marketing

team. These business advisors promised major returns from aggressive marketing and the slick updated production of shows like 3-2-1 Penguins and the epic Jonah film.

**Unfortunately, things did not work out as the business models said.** The Veggie Tales shows were profitable because they were very low cost to produce. The Penguins and Jonah movie were vastly more expensive to produce and the marketing couldn't bring in enough sales to compensate. They quickly realized that everything depended on Jonah being a blockbuster hit - and... it wasn't.

So in a matter of just a couple of years, the roaring **success of Veggie Tales collapsed into financial ruin.** And in the middle of that, a distributor sued Veggie Tales over a technicality in a promotion and sales contract. Phil found himself sitting in court as the judge ruled \$15 million against him in a wildly unjust ruling (that was later reversed). All of this forced Phil to sell Big Idea Media to HIT Entertainment. Bob the Tomato was purchased by Barney the Dinosaur. It was over.

Phil wrestled with **the death of his "Big Idea" for Jesus.** Why would God take away this ministry that was FOR HIM? In time, what Phil learned, and expressed in the book - was that it wasn't a Veggie Tales issue - it was a Phil Vischer issue. The company had become his identity, his everything, his "only landmark." He lost track of his ultimate purpose and God showed him it wasn't about him.

The key takeaway for Phil, as he went on to found Jellyfish Labs, was to **WAIT ON THE LORD** - not rush ahead. Jellyfish are not known for their rapid movements. In fact, they cannot move apart from the currents of the ocean. Phil realized he was trying to function like a shark - racing about here and there, when God meant for us to be jellyfish - resting in the current of His love and direction.



All of that happened back in 2003. Since then we know Phil has created **What's in the Bible** (which is all available on Right Now Media and you should all watch it whether you are 5 years old or 100 years old - it's amazing!) and numerous other fun, meaningful resources.

[https://world.wng.org/2011/09/its\\_not\\_about\\_the\\_dream](https://world.wng.org/2011/09/its_not_about_the_dream)

Toward the end of his leadership at Big Idea, **Phil was scrambling.** He had lost his sense of connection with the guidance and power and purpose of God. Oh, can we all relate to that?

Mary and Peter and John certainly could. As they raced here and there, to the tomb, back to their hiding place. They were scrambling. They didn't know which way was up. They just wanted to do something. So they ran.

But when they met Jesus - when they saw the Risen Christ - **everything changed**. Their scrambling was transformed into service.

### **The Resurrection Changes Everything**

#### **3. Scrambling → Service**

“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so am I sending you.’” John 20:21

**Jesus speaks PEACE into our confusion**, our despair and our scrambling. If you find yourself running this way and that - busy, active, constantly on the move - hear this word from Jesus. “Peace.” Maybe this virus has been a huge blessing if only to SLOW US DOWN - to force us to really pause and consider the need for all of this activity.

Our culture is all about ***noise and hurry and movement and action***. Silence and solitude, quiet and reflection are long lost arts. But the only way to hear from the Lord is to WAIT on the Lord - to be still before Him and remember that He is God and we are not - He has the plan; He sees the big picture.

Jesus not only speaks peace to us - **He speaks PURPOSE to us**. “As the Father has sent me, even so am I sending you.” He turns our scrambling into service. He transforms the mundane tasks of work - whether at home or in the workplace - into forms of worship and service to HIM.

***Everything we do should be an act of worship*** - a gift of devotion back to the Lord. We do not work for human bosses, we live for an audience of ONE. Everything we do - at home and at work - should be to bless other people. In that way, all of your work matters! Starting next week we will begin a series called *God and the Rest of the Week*. The closing weeks of that will speak into why your work matters.

Preview: ***your work matters because it is one of the primary ways that God loves and blesses people***. How does God provide food for everyone? Through farmers, and truck drivers, food distributors and grocery stores! How does God provide housing? Through architects and builders, plumbers and electricians. God loves and blesses everyone on this planet through the little daily tasks He enables people to do. Work is one of God's greatest gifts both to the worker and to those of us who benefit from their work.

**The resurrection changes everything** - including how we do our jobs. Because Jesus LIVES - your work has purpose. What you do tomorrow and the rest of the week has vital importance to the Risen Savior. He is with you, through His Spirit, to guide you to do your best for HIS GLORY - to bless people and serve them humbly, gracefully, consistently.

The resurrection changes everything.

- It transforms our ***confusion into clarity***. If Jesus only died we would all rightly be confused and lost in darkness. But because He lives, we know it's all true! He is the Son of God! He is the Savior!
- The resurrection changes our ***despair into delight***. We no longer need to fear death. Yes, death is still sad - it is painful to lose a loved one - but it should not devastate us because we know death is not the end. Jesus has defeated death - and we will see our loved ones in the Lord again one day!
- And the resurrection changes our ***scrambling into service***. We don't need to fill our days with activity just to stay distracted. We can fill our days with meaningful work and service to the Risen Lord who has sent us out to represent Him with all that we do and say.

Let's pray to that end!