



# *I Have Seen*

Jesus is the resurrected Savior.

## JOHN 20:1-18

When our mother uses our first name, we usually stop in our tracks. We know better than to ignore that call. The same thing is true when our boss uses our first name, especially if they're doing so to congratulate or recognize our work. Hearing our first name changes the relationship. When Mary heard her name called by the One she thought to be the gardener—it changed everything.

**How does using first names in a business setting impact interactions between people with different roles?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## JOHN 20:1-18

Skeptics who mock divine creation and divine incarnation also discredit the resurrection of Jesus. Their problem lies in the implication of the resurrection. If Jesus died and rose again, He was exactly who He claimed to be—God the Son, the Messiah, the Savior.

Scripture gives solid evidence for Jesus’s resurrection. If the first witnesses of Christ’s resurrection were trying to prove preconceived ideas, one might legitimately question their accounts. However, Mary, Peter, and John were not expecting to find an empty tomb. Mary went to the tomb early in the morning of the third day after Jesus’s crucifixion. Other Gospel accounts relate that she went with several women to anoint Jesus’s dead body with spices appropriate for burial (Mark 16:1). They even worried about how they could get past the stone and guards that stood between them and their Lord’s body. When Mary found the tomb vacated, she ran to tell the disciples what she had seen. The other women also recounted their experience (Luke 24:1-10).

Most of the disciples remained in hiding for fear of the Jews. They didn’t believe the women and discounted their report as idle tales (Luke 24:11). Peter and John ran to the tomb to see what happened. John arrived first but was hesitant to enter the tomb. Peter did not wait but immediately went inside. Even when looking into the open grave, they did not fully understand what they saw.

Mary must have followed the two disciples since she remained by the tomb after they went back to Jerusalem. Two angels questioned her about her crying. She thought someone had stolen Jesus’s body. Only when Mary encountered the living Christ did she finally realize that He had risen from the dead. Returning to the disciples, she had exciting news. No longer did she merely report seeing an empty tomb; she had met the risen Lord!

**As you read John 20:1-18, look for moments of faith. What role did faith play in the responses of the people in this account?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## EXAMINE (JOHN 20:1-10)

<sup>1</sup> On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, “They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him!” <sup>3</sup> At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. <sup>7</sup> The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. <sup>8</sup> The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. <sup>9</sup> For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

### VERSES 1-4

Although the other Gospel writers stated that other women also came to the tomb that morning, John focused on •**Mary Magdalene** (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1). Only John states it was **still dark** when she came to the tomb. Together, these accounts paint a picture of the women leaving Jerusalem together; *Mary Magdalene*, though, evidently moved faster and arrived first. When Mary arrived, she saw **the stone** had been rolled away.

Despite popular misconceptions, Scripture gives no indication that Mary Magdalene had ever been a prostitute. Luke 7 tells of a prostitute who washed the feet of Jesus with her hair; chapter 8 separately introduces Mary Magdalene (v. 2). Martha’s sister, Mary, later anointed the Lord’s feet with perfume (John 12:1-8). Although the stories describe different events that occurred at separate occasions, people have merged them together.

We know several things about Mary Magdalene. First, she was from Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of the Sea

of Galilee. Recent archaeological finds indicate Magdala had a large and faithful Jewish population. Second, Jesus exorcised seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). Third, she became a faithful follower of Jesus. Fourth, she was present at the crucifixion. Fifth, she saw where Jesus was buried (Mark 15:40,47).

Seeing the removed stone, Mary's first thought was someone had taken the Lord's body. Tomb robbery was such a problem that Emperor Claudius (ruled AD 41-54) issued a decree of capital punishment for anyone who robbed a tomb or stole a body. Upon hearing about the empty tomb, chief priests instructed the soldiers who guarded the tomb to report that the disciples had stolen the body (Matt. 28:11-15).

Mary ran to find **Simon Peter** and John, the **one Jesus loved**. Mary's running was not surprising. John's readers would be amazed, however, by the men running, since men in first-century culture almost never ran. (See Luke 15:20.) The Book of Revelation uses the same Greek word to describe horses running or rushing into battle (Rev. 9:9). Mary Magdalene, and later *Simon Peter* and John, did some vigorous running. Although John **outran Peter** and arrived at the tomb first, he waited outside.

### How can we help others investigate the truth of the resurrection?

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#### VERSES 5-10

When John arrived at the tomb, he stooped down and looked inside without entering. Simon Peter, true to his impetuous nature, arrived at the tomb and entered immediately. The fact the grave clothes were still in the tomb indicated there had been no robbery. A robber would not have taken the time nor gone to the effort of unwrapping the body and folding pieces of cloth. Additionally, funerary cloth and spices would have been expensive. If the grave had been robbed, those items would have been stolen.

After Peter arrived and entered the tomb, John **also went in**. The fact that two men had seen the tomb empty would render their testimony as reliable and legally admissible (Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

Writing decades after the events of that Easter morning, John explained that when he went in the tomb and **saw** the funeral wrappings, he **believed**. What, though, did he believe? These burial wrappings convinced John that Jesus had been raised from the dead—He was resurrected. Only later did John and Peter **understand** the fuller meaning of Old Testament **Scripture** that spoke of the Messiah’s resurrection (maybe Ps. 16:10; Isa. 53:10-12).

Peter and John **returned to the place where they were staying**. Luke’s Gospel says of Peter, “So he went away, amazed at what had happened” (Luke 24:12).

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.*

Create a two-column chart to compare the experience of Peter and John with that of Mary. Analyze John 20:1-18 and record your ideas about how they approached the empty tomb, noting these elements: motivations, expectations, emotions expressed, and reactions.


**QUESTIONS** (JOHN 20:11-13)

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus’s body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “Because they’ve taken away my Lord,” she told them, “and I don’t know where they’ve put him.”

**VERSES 11-13**

Mary evidently remained outside the tomb as Peter and John entered. Or maybe she arrived while they were inside or even after they had left. If she arrived while they were still there, what might they have

said to her? Did they describe the placement of the linen cloths? Did they share their impressions with her? Scripture does not say.

Questions had to be swirling through Mary's mind. What had happened before she first arrived at the tomb? Who would have moved the stone? Had someone stolen the body? Had the guards not seen what had happened? Would the Jews look for someone to accuse? Where was the body? What should she do next?

Overcome with pain, grief, and confusion, Mary wept. Four times these verses state Mary wept (vv. 11,13,15). She was not silently weeping; the Greek term described wailing because of profound loss or anguish. Perhaps for the first time, ***she stooped to look into the tomb.***

Mary saw ***two angels in white.*** John described them as sitting at either end of the burial stone on which the Lord's body had been lying. The angels' presence meant God's holy and powerful presence had enveloped the site. Each Gospel account mentions the angels' clothing (Matt. 28:2-3; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4). Shimmering *white* garments signified these visitors had come from heavenly realms.

That Mary did not recognize the beings as angels indicates they had taken human form (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4). This was not uncommon. The prophet Daniel reported that while he was praying, "Gabriel, *the man* I had seen in the first vision, reached me in my extreme weariness" (Dan. 9:21, emphasis added).

The angels asked Mary why she was crying. The question was likely a gentle rebuke. Mary, though, was still thinking the same thing she had conveyed to the disciples earlier—someone had ***taken away*** the body of Jesus and she did not know where the body was. Nothing she had seen or experienced had altered her thinking . . . yet.

**What questions and preconceived beliefs get in the way of believing the resurrection?**

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## **WITNESS** (JOHN 20:14-18)

<sup>14</sup> **Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.** <sup>15</sup> **"Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried**

him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary." Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!"—which means "Teacher." <sup>17</sup> "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had said to her.

### VERSES 14-15

When Mary turned around, she did not recognize Jesus. Still in the emotional fog of the morning, she looked through tear-filled eyes. Additionally, she was not expecting to see Jesus alive. She had last seen Him as a corpse that had been beaten, bruised, bloodied, and bound in grave linens.

Jesus asked Mary two questions. The first was identical to the angels' (v. 13). The second, though, directed Mary's attention away from herself and onto Him. Mary supposed the One speaking to her was **the gardener**. Seeing a gardener this early would not be unexpected. Any grave robbers would have already fled, and mourners would come later in the day.

She returned to her earlier concern about the body's location. Mary had come with the intention of properly preparing the body for burial; she was committed to fulfill that task.

***That Jesus first appeared and identified Himself to a woman was significant.***

### VERSES 16-18

Jesus called Mary by name. In that instant, everything changed. Astonishment replaced anguish, delight replaced despair, and hope replaced heartache. He spoke one word, **Mary**. She responded with one word, **Rabboni**, which translates affectionately as "my Teacher."

That Jesus first appeared and identified Himself to a woman was significant. Women in the first century were not allowed to testify in legal matters. Their testimony was considered unreliable. What Jesus did in this moment was both significant and in keeping with what He had done throughout His ministry.



For three-plus years, Jesus lifted up those who were marginalized and outcast. He touched a leper (Matt. 8:2-3). He honored the poor (Luke 21:1-4). He spoke to a Samaritan woman with a tarnished moral reputation—and even entered a theological conversation with her (John 4:1-30). He fulfilled His mission of preaching the good news to the poor, proclaiming deliverance to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, and setting free the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

Jesus had previously referred to His disciples as servants and friends (John 15:15). Here, for the first recorded time, Jesus called them **my brothers**. His death had changed their relationship. Through Christ’s redemptive work, God adopts us as sons and daughters (see Rom. 8:14-15; Eph. 1:5; Heb. 2:11).

Jesus further emphasized the inclusiveness of this new intimate relationship by saying He was **ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God**. The relationship Jesus had with God, His Father, was not restricted to His disciples, His *brothers*—Mary Magdalene was part of the family as well.

Jesus gave Mary two imperatives: **go** and **tell**. She was obedient; she **went** and **told**. This woman, out of whom Jesus had exorcised seven demons, was the first to see the risen Christ, the first to hear His voice, the first to touch Him, and the first to be commissioned to share the news of His resurrection. She announced, **I have seen the Lord!** That one sentence changed everything.

**How does Jesus reveal Himself today as the resurrected Savior?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE:** *God the Son*

He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. (See John 20:27-28; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.)



# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can challenge others to examine the truth of the empty tomb.
- People can take their questions to God.
- Believers can tell others about Jesus.

**Discuss as a group the elements of the resurrection account that cause the greatest amazement. How can the group remind each other in the days and weeks ahead about the wonder of the resurrection? How should the wonder of the resurrection impact how the Bible study group functions?**

**For many, one of the most effective methods of leading people to Christ is to simply tell about your experience with Him. That was what Mary Magdalene did. Who do you know that might be receptive to hearing about your experience with Jesus? Pray for the Lord to use you to tell others about Him.**

## PRAYER NEEDS