You know if you are feeling tired this morning, you should really appreciate the crew who were here at 8:00 this morning. If I have ever been teaching and felt like I needed to inject an audience with something, I just witnessed it. I mean they were tired, but they were troopers for coming out and being a part of the early service.

I know that you guys are excited today because it is one of those days where we will just break our New Year commitments as we begin to go off the deep end. I mean we will be eating really well today, since it is Easter, and now we are hosed. It just goes awry from here on. So I hope you have a good Easter Sunday with good fellowship. And I hope that this morning you will sense something from God’s word that you can take away from the message that will be an encouragement to you.

Let me start off with a story. Several years ago, I was serving as an associate pastor in Conway, Arkansas at Celebration Church. It was a new church, and I was there on staff. I came in one Sunday morning, and I saw my bride getting a cup of coffee. So I went up behind her and began to give her a massage on her shoulders. But then she turned around, and lo and behold, it wasn’t my wife! I was horrified in that moment. What made it even worse was she was a first time guest to our church and I never saw that lady again. And you can imagine the rumors going around about not going to visit that church because the pastor gives a massage to first time guests.

And my wife still laughs about my stupidity in that moment. What took place? Well there was a mistaken identify on my behalf. I misunderstood who this individual was. I mistook her for being my wife, when in reality she was a first time guest to the church. Maybe you, in your own life, have felt misunderstood about who you are. Or maybe you have done something, not quite as drastic as being a pastor and giving a stranger a massage, but maybe you have mistaken someone’s identity before. Well, there is a character in the Scriptures known as Mary Magdalene, and she is someone whose biography has been misunderstood.

And the reason that I want to talk about Mary Magdalene today is because there is a lot we can glean from her on this Easter Sunday. We have been doing a series, and if you are a guest with us, it is part of a series called, ‘Six Men –Six Woman.’ And we are looking at twelve different biographies of key players in the Scriptures. We will be looking at the Biblical data for their lives, and we are extracting some of the details, and then we are giving applications.

So I want to give you an idea of what this morning’s journey will look like. I want us to kind of grapple with the question of who was Mary Magdalene. And I want to share with you just some of the different false ideas that have arisen around this person of Mary Magdalene. I want to kind of do an identity scrub, kind of get down to the core of
who she was. And I want us to walk through some verses together in John Chapter 20 in
the Easter story. And then I want us to imagine if we could hear Mary Magdalene’s
voice today, what would it be that she would want to say to us here in the Twenty-first
Century. And finally I want to give you six thoughts for you to leave with, before you
go home and sink into that ham dinner.

So who was Mary Magdalene? Some have said that Mary Magdalene was a
prostitute. And maybe you have heard that before, where she was identified as a
prostitute. Others have said that she is the woman that was caught in adultery in John
Chapter 8. If you have ever seen ‘The Passion of the Christ,’ put out by Mel Gibson, that
was how she was portrayed in that movie. And in the movie you see that Mary
Magdalene is brought out before Jesus, and Jesus says, “He who is without sin cast the
first stone.”

Others have said that Mary is the sinful woman referred to in Luke Chapter 7.
Interestingly enough you will remember that there is a sinful woman who would go and
she would wash Jesus’ feet with her hair in Luke Chapter 7. And you can see how some
may have made a mistake that Mary Magdalene was this particular sinful woman. But
we don’t necessarily have to take that approach, and I don’t believe that was the case.

In Chapter 8 of Luke, in the first verse, it says, “Soon afterward.” Soon
afterward what? It was soon after this event with a sinful woman anointing Jesus with
her hair. It says, “Soon afterward He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming
and bringing good news of the kingdom of God. 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.”

So in other words what ended up taking place was some have assumed, I think
falsely, that Mary Magdalene in Chapter 8 of Luke is the sinful woman of Chapter 7. But
it doesn’t say that that is the sinful woman in Chapter 8. In fact we are in another section,
we are in another stage. And this whole idea, just for our own information that I find of
interest as it relates to Mary being considered a prostitute, that didn’t even come on the
scene until Pope Gregory said as much in a sermon in 591 AD, when he made that
association.

So who then was this Mary that we are talking about? Was she a prostitute? I
would say no. Was she the woman caught in adultery? I would say no. Was she the
sinful woman of Luke 7 who anointed Jesus with her hair? I would say no. Was she the
wife of Jesus? Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene? Not some of you are thinking,
‘Okay, I am a guest. And this is where the message just really went off the tracks for me.’
Well, you may remember Dan Brown in his book, ‘The Da Vinci Code,’ and the movie, ‘The Da Vinci Code,’ depicts this whole idea that Jesus had a wife. And Brown calls it ‘the greatest cover up in history.’ It was supposedly the greatest cover up in history, because really Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. And Brown would say the whole idea is the church wanted to kind of go on a smear campaign with Mary Magdalene. And he says they painted her as a prostitute, a completely wretched lady, so that they could remove themselves and cover up this great secret that Jesus was actually married to Mary Magdalene.

And you know a lot goes on in this particular movie, or in this thriller of a book that became a New York Times bestseller. And we know that Dan Brown was influenced highly by the Renaissance artist Leonardo Da Vinci’s painting of ‘The Last Supper.’ We have a picture of Da Vinci’s painting of ‘The Last Supper’ here on the screen and you will notice that the person to Jesus’ right has the appearance of a woman. And what Brown contends is that Leonardo actually painted Mary Magdalene, and that she was Jesus’ wife in this painting. And you can see this feminine look on this person, so to speak.

Here are a few problems with that. Number one, Leonardo himself identified the twelve disciples in this painting, and he said that one was John. So we have the artist himself saying this is the disciple John. And Mary was not mentioned. Not only that, John is nowhere else in this painting, except there on Jesus’ right, the ‘one whom Jesus loved.’ And we also have to understand that John was painted in a feminine fashion by others before, throughout history. And it is not because he was necessarily thought to be feminine, it is just a fact that that was a form of painting that artists would do at times. This is 15th century, Leonardo Da Vinci, so what we would get even if this was supposed to be Mary Magdalene, it wouldn’t mean that Jesus was married to her. It would just mean that the artist was highly delusional 1500 years after the life of Jesus and absent of the historical fact.

So we step back then, and all I am trying to do at this stage is before we study Mary Magdalene, we want to know who this character is. And we need to do a little bit of a Scriptural scrub down. We need to try and do a Biblical bath. We need to go in and figure out who this individual is so that we can properly understand the story of Mary Magdalene.

Now Magdalene is not Mary’s last name. She was Mary of Magdala, and Magdala was in the southwest part of the Sea of Galilee. It was very common for people to be referred to by their city at that time. You have probably heard of Philip of Macedon. He was the father of Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was mentored
by Aristotle. So Philip of Macedon was the father of Alexander the Great, and Macedon was not Philip’s last name. He was just actually from Macedonia.

So Mary was from Magdala and she was known as Mary Magdalene. We see sometimes where this happened, but we have to be careful to not associate cities for last names in ancient literature. So Mary, this person from the southwestern portion of the Sea of Galilee there in Tiberias, who is she? I believe the Scriptures show that she was the woman in whom Jesus cast out seven evil spirits.

If we take a snapshot again in Luke Chapter 8, we get the portion of Scripture that we need to begin to build out a portrait of Mary Magdalene. After the passage on the sinful woman in Chapter 7, and who we are not saying was Mary Magdalene, we see this in Chapter 8 and verse 1. “Soon afterward,” and this indicates there was a lapse of time between the event of Chapter 7 and the event now being told in Chapter 8. “Soon afterward He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. 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.”

Now here is Mary Magdalene. She is the one who would have experienced demon possession, and now she had been freed from that. There is a difference between demon possession and oppression. Notice that it says that Jesus cast the demons OUT of her. That is to be possessed. So Mary was obviously not a believer at this stage, and only a non-believer could be possessed where demons would need to be cast out. But a believer could be oppressed. So oppression is from the outside, possession is from within.

Now in our age of enlightenment era, post-enlightenment basically now, with our scientific age of reason in our western world, it can be very awkward for us to hear stories about demons. One of the things in particular that makes it extra difficult is the way that demons have been caricatured. They have been caricatured throughout history, with even Satan being caricatured in a red suit with horns. It makes it look very cartoonish and silly, and it is almost embarrassing. But that is not the way that we are to understand what is taking place, and if we do we will feel rather petty. Rather we are to understand that there is an unseen world, and we live in a visible world. But just because we live in a visible world doesn’t mean that there isn’t an unseen world. And these evil spirits are just that – spirits that are evil.

And so they want to go against God’s agenda. They want to thwart it. And there were people, when you look at the ministry of Jesus you see that He was dealing with evil spirits. Perhaps there was a heightened season of that going on because Jesus was on the
scene in His public ministry. And there was an extra concentration of this taking place because these spirits were doing whatever they could to counter Jesus’ ministry, knowing that Jesus was coming as the Savior of the world. I think that is a plausible way to understand that.

But what we need to know is that Mary would have been miserable as someone who had been possessed. Now if you are a Christian and you have ever been oppressed, how does the evil one work? Well, there could be seasons, and maybe some of you would feel a little silly talking about it, but you know in your heart of hearts that you have had a moment or two in your life where you sensed the unseen world interrupting your present world. You have encountered the darkness.

Others of you might say you haven’t experienced it at all. And I would say, ‘Blessed are you.’ But there are some of you that would say, ‘I have no doubt that I have sensed something just evil,’ or ‘I have had a certain experience that showed me that there is something beyond the visible realm.’ Perhaps you sensed a certain encounter. Sometimes it can work this way with a believer; spirit oppression could feel like you are having strange and unexplainable emotions. The evil one could be creating extra anxieties, fears, worries, depression or doubts that are irrational for all other explanations. And you might have gone through that in your own lives.

I went through a hefty season early on as a Christian of spiritual warfare, of spiritual oppression. And I believe sometimes that can be common for a new believer who has been delivered from a past lifestyle. And mine would have been from drugs and alcohol and promiscuity. I experienced all sorts of stuff. And I couldn’t understand these weird and unexplainable emotions, and it was a bizarre season in my life. And I know there were some things that I went through that I could share and a pure rationalist would just think I was nuts.

Do you know what is crazy about some of these things that I experienced early on as a Christian? Some of the things that I went through just didn’t make sense, until many years later I would go through a season of heavy duty doubt, heavy duty struggle in my own faith, and then you know the one thing I couldn’t doubt was the unseen world. Why? It was because I had experienced so many different strange phenomenon earlier on in my life that it protected me from slipping into doubting the existence of God.

Isn’t it amazing how sometimes we are going through a horrible event in our life, and we can’t understand what is going on, but later that horrible event will be the very thing that helps you to get through even perhaps a worse event later in life? It just takes time for us to understand God’s puzzle and how He is at work in constructing our lives.
So Mary would have gone from being this woman who was demon possessed to being freed in a moment. Remember the story of Jesus calming the storm? You can almost envision Mary having a storm going on in her life that was so overwhelming that she couldn’t imagine how to find peace. And she went to Jesus and Jesus cast the storm out of her. And now, just as that sea went from a storm to being placid, Mary’s soul went from panic to placid. You know that is what Jesus can do. On a bigger practical level Jesus can take your greatest panics and make them placid, and give you peace. That is how powerful He is. And Mary experienced the power of God working in her life in just that way.

Other people in other parts of the world, say like South America, have no problem believing in an unseen world. But here in the western part of the world, perhaps the greatest strategy of the evil one is just to get you to believe he doesn’t exist. He certainly could have accomplished that here because we will often think we are too scientifically smart for any of that stuff to go on. I call that scientism – the belief that science explains everything. I believe that as Christians we should embrace science; we should be all for neuroscience. We should be all for cognitive science. We should look at the evidence.

But methodology naturalism is the starting place that assumes that it is a method that assumes naturalism is all that there is. And they won’t even think beyond that. It will assume it is not there. And do you know what I call that? I call that being close minded. We should use all the methods to detect and understand nature, but we shouldn’t just write it off that there isn’t an unseen world.

So what made Mary then so special? We have identified who she was not and now identified who she was. We said the peace that she would now obviously be experiencing was unbelievable, after Jesus delivered her from the evil spirits. But what made her special is she traveled along with Jesus in His ministry. She helped to support it. Jesus had His disciples, but He also had a caravan of women who would go along and help support these disciples in their ministry. Mary was a key witness to the surrounding events of Jesus’ crucifixion, and she stood by Him when others fled. She saw Him at His trial. While all the male disciples fled, there was Mary Magdalene. She was what you would call a ‘sticky’ disciple.

And there is something about someone who understands their deliverance, when they understand what they have been saved from, when they understand just how much they have been forgiven, and it makes them a little bit more ‘sticky.’ It makes them a little bit more attached to Jesus. And that is what God wants. Are you someone who is attached to Jesus? Are you a ‘sticky’ Christian? Do you hold on tight or do you just slide away at any given trial? Do you vanish at the drop of a hat? Those disciples did,
but not Mary Magdalene. She was made of the ‘sticky’ stuff, the loyal stuff. She was faithful through and through.

Mary was there at the crucifixion and she saw Jesus being crucified. She also was there at the empty tomb, one of the first to witness the empty tomb. She was one of the first to see the resurrected Jesus, seeing Him in His resurrected state. And another thing that made her so special was she partook in the spreading of the good news. She was a first witness for Jesus Christ in spreading the fact that He had risen. That is what made Mary special. She really held fast to Jesus.

With that in mind, I think before I share some verses with you in John Chapter 20 as it relates to Mary’s life, I think it is important for me to share this. There are four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are the first four books of the New Testament. Each of these gospels depicts Jesus in a different way. For example, the gospel of John depicts the divinity of Jesus. You have these different gospels that have key features that they are trying to show. In the gospel of Mark the key word is ‘immediately;’ it is a fast paced gospel. It is only sixteen chapters long and it moves like an action story, immediately, immediately, immediately.

You have the other gospels, such as Luke which is the longest gospel. And Luke is very detailed. Now by longest don’t get confused by chapters, content is what makes something the longest, not the amount of chapters. Luke is the longest gospel at twenty-four chapters, even though Matthew has twenty-eight chapters. And Luke’s gospel is very detailed about things. It offers a lot of detail. And when you look at the gospel’s stories, and you read these four portrayals of the story of Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb, you could be given a quick headache because you start looking at a lot of apparent contradictions.

Notice I said apparent contradictions. I believe that it can really give you a headache. I have been studying the Bible for a long time and I am working on my second doctorate. I have studied the gospels; I taught through the gospel of John for two years. I have looked at this stuff and it humbles me still when I sit there and try to look at some of it. But here is what I want to do. I want to be able to say that there are some things that are very difficult and hard to reconcile at first blush, when you are looking at some of these things.

And I think that to say that is helpful for you, because the way that I was taught was very wooden. I never heard the gospel until I was nineteen years old, and I ended up in a very, very tight fundamental Bible college, and it gave me very narrow ways of seeing things. The problem was I felt like people were so passionate about knowing their long list of what’s right, that it almost set me up to fall into a bout with doubt, because it
isn’t always that easy. And I want to be able to tell you, as I tell my own kids, and I say this to you who are parents with kids, be careful that you don’t box them in so tight that you set them up for a future crisis of faith, of making a big deal about certain things that really aren’t that big of a deal.

For example, I told Haley when she goes off to college someday, and she sits in a professor’s class, and he starts trying to point out apparent contradictions in the gospels, she doesn’t have to panic. It is not like she will have never seen those before; it is not like other scholars or Christians haven’t seen those. And we shouldn’t panic about that. We shouldn’t freak out about that. There are good answers that can be given to every one of those. It is just they can make you a little bit dizzy, and I don’t want you to panic. Know that kind of stuff is coming your way and then you won’t have to freak out. Focus on loving Jesus, know that there are some great answers out there, and if you ever get that bound up and you want some answers, just come and we will talk about it.

What that has hopefully done has freed Haley to not panic. And instead of saying, ‘There is no such thing as that. There are no contradictions,’ I could show you different things right here with these stories, that had you not thought through how it all reconciles, you could be in a tailspin really quickly. And those professors out there that our kids are going to be sitting under can do the same thing.

So I believe that when you look at these four portions of the gospels, what you can see is stuff that is dizzying. But keep in mind, unless you are called to be a New Testament scholar, then you don’t have to sit around and focus on all that, because the reality is all of us, the Atheists included, live on this borrowed scholarship of many people. And none of us knows it all. We are all trusting in the scholarship of many people because none of us know it all. But if you want to learn from some New Testament scholars, if you want to sit around and learn how all these apparent contradictions work together, then study Craig Evans, Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock or Daniel Wallace. They are New Testament scholars who can help show how this stuff comes together.

Now some of you may be wondering why we are even talking about this. Well, Bart Ehrman is a New York Times bestselling author, and a professor at Chapel Hill, and he loves just going through and pointing out all these kinds of stuff. So I think for me to be overly simplistic as a pastor, and not let you be aware of some of the issues, is doing the church a disservice. And I think it serves us well to be able to acknowledge that these things can be there, and then to say, ‘You don’t have to panic. There are smarter people out there who have been through these trials, and they have written much stuff on it, on how to square it all up.’
Now before I transition, let me share a quick story. I remember hearing a guy tell the story about this lady who was run over by a car while she was walking across the street. I think someone ran a stoplight and hit this lady, and she was rushed off to the hospital. The son of this person received a phone call saying, ‘Hey, your mom was just run over by a car. She is being rushed to the hospital. She is injured.’ So this son is obviously sweating it a little bit, thinking his mother was hit by a car. Then he gets a second phone call shortly after, saying, ‘I am sorry to tell you this, but your mom was just in a horrible car accident, and she was pronounced dead instantly.’ And now the son is thinking there is a contradiction going on here. ‘Was my mom in a car accident where she died instantly, or was my mom walking and got hit by a car and was taken to the hospital?’

The truth is both stories were actually accurate. What happened was this lady was walking across the street and she got hit by a car. The ambulance came and picked her up and began to rush her to the hospital, but then the ambulance was in an accident on the way to the hospital, and she was killed instantly. When we first heard that story we would think there had been a contradiction. And here is what I want to say. We are 2,000 years removed and we are trying to figure a lot of details out. A lot of stuff was written from an assumption standpoint, and we are just kind of speculating on things.

What we have to do is step back and realize that sometimes the gospels can look like that, and sometimes we are struggling trying to put things together. But we can trust that if we had all the context, all of the information, it would square. And there are many different instances where I have gotten things worked out for my own sanity, because I am obsessive, and I have to tweak and analyze until I understand something.

And here is what I would want to tell you lastly. We have to be very careful to not impose a 21st Century journalistic methodology on an ancient culture’s writing style. We will be set up to be disillusioned with the Scriptures if we do that. We have to be careful to not put just a perfect scientific spin on everything or we will make things wooden where they are not meant to be. Our goal as interpreters of Scripture is to get at the author’s intended meaning – what the author is seeking to communicate to us. And what different means and tools does the author use to communicate the message.

And we have to accept what was acceptable as journalistic methodology in that ancient milieu. We can’t expect that culture to know journalism, and do journalism the way we do. We are in a different time. So what we have to do is ask, ‘What type of criteria was respectable for proper journalistic methods to take place.’ And then after doing historical study I think that we can see what that type of criteria meant.
Are we okay? I hope I am not boring you guys to tears. I find this stuff very fascinating because it helps me. Many people just jump into the Bible, but I compare it with me trying to build a house with my tools. I would need to know what types of tools to use with different things I am trying to build. And sometimes when you put a Bible in the hands of a new Christian, they will start reading it, which is great. But it would be like handing me a bunch of tools, some lumber and shingles and expect me to know which tool is needed for each part of the building project. In the same way there is an approach in order to be a good Biblical carpenter.

I am going to share now some verses from John Chapter 20. And then I am going to try and hear Mary’s voice of what she would like to tell us today, and then leave you with an application. John Chapter 20 and verses 1 and 2 says, “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early.” Remember Jesus rose on the first day of the week and that is when things shifted from the Sabbath on Saturday to worship on Sunday - the resurrection, 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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

Now the first theory about the resurrection that began to go around with people, even sceptics, was the whole idea of the ‘stolen body theory.’ ‘Surely Jesus’ body must have been stolen.’ Interestingly enough, Mary said the same thing. She thought surely someone had stolen His body, and she didn’t know where they had taken it. Mary didn’t think that Jesus had risen from the grave; she just thought that His body had been stolen.

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” Verse 3: “So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together.” Can’t you just see them running at full speed, having a race to the tomb? “But the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came following him, and went into the tomb.” Isn’t that just like impulsive Peter? He doesn’t even stop but just was the first to go into the tomb.

So one disciple looks into the tomb and he sees the garments that were folded up, but then Simon Peter goes all the way into the tomb. “He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.” Verse 9, “For as yet they did not
understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.”

So Mary goes to the tomb, she sees the stone has been moved, she runs and tells the disciples to go check it out because she doesn’t know where Jesus’ body has been taken. She thinks it has been stolen. Then Peter and the other disciple run to the tomb. The other disciple gets there first, looks in and sees the linen cloths. Peter gets there and he just goes on into the tomb and he sees the folded burial cloths that would have been wrapped around Jesus’ body. And I love that little detail that tells us that Jesus rose with style. He would have made his mother proud folding his laundry. It is pretty cool when you think about this whole idea that He rises from the dead and then He folds His burial linens.

It says that the other disciple went in “And believed.” This gives us a thought that maybe Peter was still a little sceptical. Obviously Mary Magdalene was a little sceptical as she thought Jesus’ body had been stolen. And what is very interesting, folks, is this: The disciples had been told over and over again by Jesus that He was going to rise from the dead. And yet isn’t it funny that He rises from the dead and the one thing that they don’t think is, ‘Oh, He has risen from the dead.’ Instead it was, ‘Oh, someone must have stolen His body.’

I was talking with Matt Hatfield, one of our elders, the other night and he was talking about how the disciples just didn’t believe it. They kept hearing it over and over again but they just didn’t get it. And even after Jesus rose from the dead, they had to see Him before they believed it. And I started thinking even in my own life how I had been a Christian for probably about a year before I even heard that there was going to be a return of Christ. And when I heard it the first time it sounded very odd to me. It just sounded bizarre.

Now keep in mind, for you that grew up in the church, you have probably heard this all your lives, but I had never heard of Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead until I was almost twenty years old. So it was a completely different framework for me. But then I heard Jesus came and died on a cross for sins, and I wanted my sins forgiven, so I believed. And I couldn’t wait to tell others about it. But then I watched a movie done in the 80’s that was a cheesy production, and it talked about the rapture and how Jesus was going to come again. And I remember thinking it just seemed so weird. Heather and I had been dating, and she had heard about it, and then the church seemed to teach it, so I just added that to my beliefs - that Jesus was coming again.

But I listen to some people sometimes and it is crazy, because they may have read something like ‘The Left Behind Series,’ and they are just utterly dogmatic. It is going to
be pre-trib, Jesus is coming at the beginning, and then the tribulation happens. And I am thinking, it is just not that easy. You don’t read one book and have the whole thing wrapped up. There are other ways to see things. And what timing Jesus is coming at doesn’t make a big difference to me, whether He is going to come at the beginning, the mid, or the end of the tribulation. I just want to agree that He is going to come again. And let’s be gracious with some of these timing things.

By the way, the 19th century preacher, John Darby, who lived from 1800 to 1882, had the view that influenced the ‘Left Behind Series,’ and that became a predominant view. So if you didn’t even live before the 19th century, you wouldn’t even have been championing that particular view. But we have been so influenced by certain things, and cultural values, that we make it the biggest thing, and we can lose sight of the resurrection and the fact that He is coming again.

I can relate to the disciples, as it relates to His coming again. He IS coming again. I don’t know what the timing will be, but it is an exciting thought that He came once and He is coming again. But at times I will find myself thinking that it is all hard to imagine. I am just being very vulnerable with you, and you may not feel this way at all. For me I believe it by faith, but it is just hard for me to grasp where or when He will be coming again. And when, all of a sudden, we are just going to be with Jesus in the clouds. It is just hard for me.

Now some of you are thinking I should not be saying that, but here is the deal. I believe that I experience the same thing that the disciples experienced. Jesus told them over and over and over again that He was going to rise from the dead. And I believe when Jesus comes again, there are going to be many people like me, that believe what He said but just couldn’t understand how that would all work. We know the disciples struggled with that, they didn’t get it. So why is it hard to understand that sometimes we don’t get it all either.

Mary Magdalene thought His body had been stolen. Thomas said he had to touch his side in order to believe. Don’t you love it that you might have questions or doubts in your faith and God understands that some of those things can be difficult? I don’t know about you but I find that an incredible relief. It doesn’t mean that God is pleased with those who don’t have questions or doubts because Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” So if you are not one that has questions or doubts that is an extra blessing. But if you are a doubting Thomas God will still love you and care for you. We just need to take our doubts and go to Him, and doubt toward faith. Just put it all in His hands.
Let’s continue reading in verses 11 through 13. “*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body had been, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’*” She still hasn’t believed in the resurrection yet. And I get it; it is hard to understand this stuff.

Verses 14 through 18, “*Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary’. She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (Which means Teacher.) Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’ – and that He had said these things to her.”

This is a pretty cool story. Mary encounters Jesus, then goes and spreads the good news. And now perhaps what would Mary want to say to us today? Well, I think first of all Mary would say, ‘*No matter how much bondage you have in your life, know that Jesus can deliver you.*’ She had been totally wrapped up in bondage. She was demon possessed. And she became a ‘sticky’ follower because Jesus freed her. Where do you feel in bondage this morning? Will you look to Jesus and ask Him to be your deliverer?

I remember listening to Raul Ries on the radio back in California shortly after I became a Christian. He had grown up in a rough home and struggled with anger and bitterness. He joined the Marines and came back from the Vietnam War filled with rage. He was married and he had decided he was going to kill his wife when she came home that day. Then he would have a fight with the police and finally shoot himself with a shotgun. But he turned on the TV, and there was Billy Graham doing a crusade. And Raul Ries’ heart began to melt with gospel shaped love.

And in that moment he ended up giving his life to Jesus Christ after listening to Billy Graham preach the gospel. And his storm became placid. His wife came home and she saw her husband down on his knees surrendering in commitment to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And he would go on to start a church, have a great radio ministry and be used in powerful ways to share that Jesus Christ can deliver you. If you know the truth then the truth will make you free.
Secondly, I think that Mary would want to say this: ‘When others misunderstand you, remember that your true identity is who you are in Christ.’ Maybe it was not in Mary’s time, but later she would be misunderstood. She was later labeled a simple woman, a prostitute, an adulterer, and even married to Jesus. Have you ever been deeply misunderstood? Have you ever longed to be understood? Have you ever longed to be known for who you are at your core? Maybe you feel that in your marriage sometimes; you just don’t feel understood. And you want to be known for who you are at your core. Maybe you feel as though you are mistaken. Maybe you feel that with your parents or with your kids, or even your boss. ‘Why don’t they get me? Why don’t they understand me?’ Or maybe you don’t understand yourself. When we believe on Jesus we have the identity of Christ. He is our identity. We are clothed with Him and His righteousness. And by properly understanding our identity it can help our emotions a great deal.

Thirdly, I think Mary would say, ‘It is often those who have been delivered from the most amount of baggage that become Jesus’ most loyal followers.’ I was in Saddleback Church twenty years ago with Rick Warren and it was the first church I was ever a member of. I didn’t have a clue as to how to pick a church back then. But I showed up there and they were meeting in a tent at that time. Then when I started getting clean and sober I would go to their Celebrate Recovery meetings. They would have Friday night meetings with a cook out and you could get a twelve step chicken sandwich, a serenity sausage dog, or a denial burger. It was great to get together and fellowship with others who were struggling to get clean. Rick would say on different occasions that his most committed crew in the entire church was the Celebrate Recovery people. And that made sense. Why? Because they take their addictions, and God frees them, and then they get addicted to Jesus. And the great thing for an addict is you can never get bored of Jesus. There is always more to find out about Him.

Fourth, I think Mary Magdalene would want to say, ‘When others flee from Jesus, stay near and remember He will never leave you nor forsake you.’ We are living in a culture that is being pressed, people are going to challenge your beliefs, they are going to make you feel silly for them, and I want to encourage you by telling you that you have a choice to make. We can be like the disciples that flee, or we can be like Mary Magdalene that stuck. We should want to be ‘sticky’ followers of Jesus.

Fifth, I think Mary Magdalene would say, ‘If you are going to believe in the resurrection, you first have to come near. Come check out the evidence in the empty tomb.’ The empty tomb is an invitation to come near, to come and see. It is an invitation to the sinful. It is an invitation to the adulterer. It is an invitation to the prostitute. It is an invitation to the drug addict. It is an invitation to the tax collector. Matthew was a tax
collector and that job was considered very evil in that age. No matter what you have ever done the empty tomb says, ‘Come near, come take a look.’

The resurrection has great unbelievable historical evidence, historical evidence. How else can you explain these followers who could hardly follow Jesus in His earthy ministry, but then after He rose from the dead, all except John, according to church tradition would go die a martyr’s death? It was because they saw Jesus!

Finally, while the good news of the resurrection is personal; it is designed to be spread. This Easter day go tell someone in need of Jesus that He has risen. Mary became a contagious carrier of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I want to share with you today that if you don’t know Jesus in a personal way, believe that He loves you, that He came and died on a cross for our sins, and that three days later He rose from the grave. That is the good news, that He can forgive whatever it is in your life, and He can transform you. He can give you something here today that is something far greater than a full stomach, and that is a new heart, a new identity and a brand new hope. Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for this message this morning. I pray that you will help anyone here today that doesn’t know you to say this in the quietness of their heart: Jesus, thank you for what Easter represents – the death, burial and most importantly your resurrection on my behalf. Please forgive me for my sins. I turn to you and I ask you by faith to be my Lord and to be my Savior. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.