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Well we finally have arrived at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we begin to study this narrative, I want you to remember that John wrote so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ. Thus, the information he chooses to include about the events of this day are very unique and specific to the relationships and the specific understanding that he thinks is necessary for our belief. Thus, it is not a comprehensive narrative but a strategic narrative.

### *John 20:1*

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

The first day of the week would be the end of the Sabbath or Sunday morning. It's as if Mary was up and just waiting for the Sabbath to be over so she could come to the tomb. Now we know from the other gospels that there were other women with Mary who came to the tomb, but John chooses to focus our attention exclusively on Mary Magdalene. This made me wonder why in world John would focus our attention only on her. Clearly she was a key player in Jesus' ministry. He had delivered her from 7-demons and from that time she faithfully followed Jesus and was one of the women who supported Jesus' ministry from her own private means (*Luke 8:3*). But still the question begs a specific answer.

There has been so much conjecture about this woman and her identity. Arguments have been made that she was the same woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus, or that she the sinful woman who had anointed Jesus feet (*Mark 7:37*), and still others say she was the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman of *Mark 7:26*. There are some plausible arguments for each of these conjectures but really

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there are many more arguments why those are just fanciful ideas of those who are stretching to find an answer. We really have no idea if she was or was not one of those other women but we do know that each of the gospel writers always tend to designate her from any of the other women in the crowd of followers by including “Magdalene” in each reference.

So I am not going to try and conjecture about who she is but I do want us to focus on the fact that she was there and perhaps the reason that John included only her name, and not the names of the others, is because she was very famous and familiar in the community as one who had been delivered from a very serious case of demonization (which is also how Mark identified her: “Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons” (*Mark 16:9*)).

You see, her case was not just the normal case of someone who was exhibiting signs of mental, emotional and spiritual disease that normally accompanies demoniacs—the despair, deep depression, divided consciousness, anger, isolation, and inexplicable erratic behavior. But her case was over the edge radical and extreme. I also find it interesting that we are told that she was delivered from “seven” demons. This might just indicate that this woman was under the complete domination of these evil spirits with no element of self will remaining in her consciousness. Yet, Jesus completely healed her and restored to her life. This is obviously why she was so in love with Him and followed Him everywhere, and was even there at the cross and now at the tomb.

But the point is that she was obviously some kind of wonder, a celebrity of sorts; and unlike the others who were there at the tomb, her tale was well known. Therefore, if anyone wanted to verify the story of the resurrection, she would probably be very easy to find; they could just come and talk to her. Remember, John wrote so that we might believe.

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Just imagine living in that day and coming and talking to this woman in order to verify the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. She would first tell you of how she was delivered from raw evil and she might even bring you to others, family members and friends, who could validate the story. She would probably tell you other stories about the power of God and the miracles that Jesus worked as He traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem. I can imagine that once you were awed and taken with the power of Jesus Christ and the veracity of this woman's testimony, she would begin to tell you about her encounters with the risen Lord. She would tell you what she saw—the stone was rolled away!

***John 20:2***

So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

Now clearly Mary was not ready for what she had seen. She was fully expecting the stone to be in place and the body to be tucked safely inside the tomb; but the stone had already been rolled away. She probably was taken back at first not sure what had happened; but I can see her all of a sudden getting her courage together and running up to the tomb and looking to see if He was there. But His body was gone; Jesus was nowhere to be found! The tomb was empty! She freaked and in panic ran to tell the boys (Peter and John).

What we will find is that no one, including Mary, expected Jesus to rise from the dead. It did not matter all that He had said and taught, or all that He had done prior to His death—including raising Lazarus from the dead. Their worldview, their

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mental and emotional framework, had no place to deal with the fact that Jesus was given the power and the authority to take His life back again after having freely given it up (*John 10:18*). To them they could only fixate on the image that was burned into their hearts—that of Jesus’ torn up, mutilated, shredded, and bloodied body. Keep in mind, their mental framework did not even have room for their Lord being arrested and killed. To them the pieces did not fit.

Therefore, they could not even conceive that it was possible for Jesus to shed His body of flesh and literally do away with it and rise to new life in a new body that was physical and yet at the same time spiritual or supernatural. Mary thought that the Jews or the Romans must be responsible: “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid Him.” She fully expected that if she could find where “they” put him, he would still be lying dead.

Notice, however, that even though John focuses our attention on Mary, we know from her account that there were other people with her. She said: “we” do not know where they have laid Him. So I just have to make mention of the fact that John’s account is in no way at odds with any of the other accounts of these events. Just because he chooses to focus us on certain details and facts does not mean that the other details and facts put forward by the other gospel writers did not happen exactly as was written.

### *John 20:3-10*

So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him,

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and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

The first part of the account is pretty funny. It seems as if John is totally trying to get under Peter's skin (which is odd since John's account was probably written right before or after Peter had died). He could have just said that he arrived first, but he had to point out that he could run faster. It seems by this and some other stuff that occurs in the last chapter of John that these two always had this underlying competitive thing going on; and now even in their old age John seems to be engaged in this jovial rivalry. But John got the last laugh and permanently "one-upped" Peter by penning it in his gospel so that for all time everyone would know that John was the one who ran faster to the tomb in order to see what had happened to Jesus.

I think John makes the point that both he and Peter had to stoop down to look into the tomb so that we would know how intentional they had to be in all of this. Again, John includes these little details so we might believe. So let's think about this. Have you ever walked into a room and because you are not required to focus on anything specific you miss all sorts of detail, including people who might be sitting or standing right in front of you. For example, the other night, I was sitting still in the middle of a room and Andrea walked right by me and did not even notice me sitting there. She was obviously looking for me, but she thought I must have been out and about and was not looking down expecting to see me sitting

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right in front of her. But if for some reason she had been forced to adjust her focus and look down, I am confident she would have seen me.

This might be why John included this detail. They were both forced to adjust their perspective and look into this little 6x9' tomb, which would indicate that they would have been very intentional in their actions and they would have been forced to focus and would not have missed something obvious like Jesus' body lying there. It's possible that in her panic Mary might have missed it; but there is no way they would have missed something like that. The fact is there was no body!

John was the first one to stoop down and looked into the tomb. John saw the linen wrapping lying there; but there was no body. Peter then went into the tomb and saw both the linen wrappings and separately the face-cloth, which had been on Jesus' face, rolled up and set aside in a place by itself. This detail is too specific—"rolled up." This indicates that they were intently looking at everything in order to understand what might have happened.

Then John also entered the tomb and in this little space they would have missed no detail but would have observed everything. And if your thinking that it still might have been too dark to see, since John told us that Mary had come while it was still dark, by this time the sun would have been up and shining. Remember, she left to go to the tomb while it was dark but very close to sunrise. The women would have had to wait until the Sabbath was technically over to start their journey. They also traveled in a group and therefore could only go as fast as the slowest person. And according to *Luke 24:1*, they were also carrying the spices that they had prepared in order to treat the body, which would have also slowed their pace. My point is that by the time they made it to the tomb, which would not have been a quick sprint as they were not in any hurry (they obviously did not think He was going anywhere), and Mary had gone back again to get the boys each

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from their own homes, and then the boys were able to get their stuff together and run to the tomb, it is more than likely that the morning darkness had entirely lifted.

Besides, John said that he “saw and believed.” There is no question that he and Peter were able to see everything in that little 6x9 space and His testimony, as he has asserted, is true. And if anyone had any doubts, they were easily able to find the celebrity, Mary, and ask her for themselves. But despite what anyone might want to think, there was no body in that tomb, just the wrappings!

I want you to notice something very significant that you might otherwise miss. Even though there was this underlying competition with Peter, John is still unabashed in revealing the fact that both he and Peter had not believed and were simply not expecting Jesus to have risen from the dead. There was no hyperbole or one-upmanship in his account. There were no fanciful tales or prideful self-dealing. John did not use this as an opportunity to exalt himself and make it seem as if Peter was weak in faith. No; this is raw honesty. This is actually one of the reasons we can be convinced that John’s testimony is true; he simply told the truth even if it was personally embarrassing and humiliating. This is not the way legends are written and this is not the way most of history was written. Most writers of history love to embellish and paint their heroes as these unbelievable men. But John just tells us the simple raw facts.

You would think that these two, of all the disciples, should have known and should have expected that Jesus would not be in the tomb. You think they would have just told Mary to go away and rolled over in bed to catch a few extra z’s. But they did not understand the scriptures and, prior to this moment in time, they did not believe. But now they saw and the evidence was enough to convince them of the truth—Jesus had risen. They believed and went again each to their own homes.

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This point about their going to their own homes is also important. They were clearly satisfied by the evidence. The stone had been rolled away, the linen garments were there, and the face-cloth had been carefully rolled up and placed at a different spot (not something that someone would bother to do if they were moving the body to a different location). It was suddenly all so clear and that is why Peter and John were not out looking for Jesus' body nor do we find them confronting the Jews or the Romans asking what they had done with the body. Rather, they believed; thus, they were able to go to their own homes and just wait for whatever was going to happen next. It's as if the peace of God just settled on them and they left. There was simply no reason to hang around an empty tomb.

By the way, the scripture that John was probably referring to which they did not know was *Psalm 16:10* which says: "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." It was all a part of the Father's plan and it was all communicated to us before anything ever happened so that we would know the truth and believe. Jesus' body was not going to be lying there in the grave decaying nor would His soul become resident with those who died before Him. Rather, the Father's Holy One would be raised by the power of the Holy Spirit to new life. And, by the way, *Psalm 16:10* was written 1,000 years before Jesus died.

Do you realize that if the Jews or the Romans could have produced Jesus' dead body that Christianity would have never existed? There would have been nothing to follow. It is the fact of Jesus' physical death and physical resurrection that gives us our entire belief system. They just needed to produce the body and we would have nothing! And we know from *Matthew 27:62-65* that the Jews were extremely paranoid about the body. They remembered that Jesus said he would rise after 3 days (something the disciples obviously did not remember) and so they went to



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Pilate and asked him to both seal the tomb with a Roman seal (meaning that if anyone opened it they would be killed) and post a guard to ensure the safety of the tomb. And this is exactly what happened. We are told that Pilate gave them a guard and told them to secure the tomb as best as possible. Even with all these precautions the body went missing. It was not there; in fact, it was nowhere.

Neither the Jews nor the Romans, who both tried to attack the veracity of the resurrection story, were ever able to produce the dead body. If you think about it, if someone found a way to overpower these Roman guards (who by Roman law would have lost their lives if Jesus escaped, so they would not have gone down easily), break the seal, then roll away the stone, and carry the body away, that it would have been a pretty easy trail to find. After all, it would have taken a small army to have overpowered the Roman guard. Then consider that Jerusalem and the surrounding areas were quite small—this was not a big community. Thus, successfully hiding a body would have been very hard. And guess what, even after the news that the body was not there, neither the Jews nor the Romans ever initiated a search for the body. They knew; yes, it is obvious that they knew He has risen and could not be found. It has been over 2,000 years and still no body has been found and it never will. Jesus had risen!

### ***John 20:11-13***

But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

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Peter and John must have been so overcome by their experience that they just left and did nothing to help the others. I am sure they were awestruck and even speechless. But Mary was still there standing outside the tomb weeping. She then also stooped down and looked in the tomb double checking everything still perplexed by the empty tomb. Again, John wants us to focus on the same intentional act that both he and Peter had done. She stooped to look in just to make sure that Jesus was not in there; but instead of an empty tomb, she saw two angels sitting very strategically in the tomb, one at the head and one at the feet of where Jesus' body had been lying. Again, John gives us this detail so we will pay attention and believe. I believe this is a picture of the Ark of the Covenant and the two angels on either end of the mercy seat. But since the work had been finished they are now sitting down and relaxing—they no longer need to cover.

The mercy seat was basically the lid of the ark which contained the tablets of the law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. The mercy seat was an Old Testament symbol pointing forward to Jesus and how by His sacrifice the power of the law to condemn us guilty of sin would be nullified thereby making the way for the Father to freely talk to us—in the same way that it was from above the mercy seat that God spoke to Moses. This is so cool; the two angels just chilling on either side of where Jesus laid. Wow!

Now John tells us that these angels were in white because I believe that he wanted us to know that if they were visible before both he and Peter would not have missed it. Two angels in white in that little 6x9 space would not have been easily missed; but for some reason the angels made themselves visible only for Mary.

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They angels said to Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping?" as if there was simply no reason at all for her, or any of the women, to be sad. But she still did not get it, she still did not understand, she still did not believe. She was looking for Jesus and wanted to know where he was, where "they" had taken Him; she did not know and she desperately wanted to find out. She was in such a panic that she engaged in a discussion with the angels as if they were just Tom and Joe from next door. But then the One who is Himself mercy appears and shows great mercy and compassion towards His precious child who so desperately was longing for Him.

### ***John 20:14-17***

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and 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 Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

So Mary is outside of the tomb; she never entered. She had stooped down to see inside and actually talked to the angels, but then she turned around as if to look to see if she could find any clues as to what might have happened to the body. Suddenly, there was this man standing there. She had no idea who He was as obviously Jesus was in His new body and it was healthy and whole and not torn-up and destroyed. And even if He had looked somewhat like His old self, her mind

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was fixated on finding the mutilated body and was not ready to see the resurrected Jesus. It simply was not in her personal frame of reference. She asked if He had moved the body, and if so to please let her know where so she could carry it away.

I find it interesting that this woman who was delivered from the supernatural was now unable to even see or understand the supernatural; even though it was all happening right in front of her eyes (the empty tomb, the angels and the resurrected Jesus). This gives us a pretty good idea of the power of emotions. They can be marvelous and an amazing gift to us as we encounter one another and God, but they can also be our worst enemy. They have the power, when they are not linked to the truth, to distort our perception of reality and cause us to even be blind to God as He literally stands right in front of our faces. Mary does not even seem too moved by the fact that she was in the presence of angels, she is just fixated on what her emotions have been telling her—you love Him and you must find the body. You love Him and you must find the body. You love Him you must find the body. She had a one tract mind and nothing was going to distract her efforts at finding Jesus.

Isn't that how we so often tend to walk through this life? Jesus told us that He and the Father are always with us and that they love us; yet we often walk around as if God is nowhere to be found (as if He is still dead) or as if He has either forgotten us or simply does not care about us. All of us must learn to not let our emotions drive our reality; we simply can't! We must let what we know to be true about God's character and nature, and what we know to be true from the Word of God, to form our reality. We cannot prioritize in our minds what we feel or even what we perceive to be true based on the laws of this physical world. We are supernatural beings and we belong to a supernatural God. That is our reality. He

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loves us and is always with us and we must remember this truth and let this truth silence the cries and the tears of our often misplaced emotions.

With that said, let's get back to the story. The first time Jesus spoke to Mary he said, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Jesus knew what was happening, He did not have to ask her to find out what she was feeling or going through. But He wanted and needed her attention. He wanted her to turn and face Him. He wanted her, for the last time, to emote and express her pain. Then notice that despite the fact that she was entirely out of control He did not chastise or correct her; He just did the loveliest and most precious thing, He called out her name. I can imagine that with all tenderness in His voice He looked at her and just gently uttered, "Mary."

Mary maybe had been blinded and misled by her emotions, she might have even been totally out of control based on her wrong belief about her reality and her present circumstances, but she knew His voice and she knew how He talked to her. Instantly she recognized the sound of His voice and she turned to Him and said "my Master" or "my Teacher."

John tells us that she "turned" to Him in order to emphasize how out of control she was being. She was in a panic and though this man was talking, her eyes were probably darting back and forth still looking for any sign of where they might have taken the body. But now she not only heard His voice, she finally saw that the one talking to her was the One she loved more than anything in this world—the very one she had been looking for that entire time.

Jesus was right there and He was there for her. Suddenly her panic, her turmoil, and her desperation all instantly melted and she just fell on Him and clinged to Him because to her He was the most precious person she had ever met. He had

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loved her when no one loved her. He had healed her when others could do nothing for her, and she loved Him with her entire heart, mind, and soul.

I want us to let this scene just sink into our hearts, our mind, and soul. Remember, that when you are out of control and panicking, Jesus is standing right there with you and He is calling your name. He wants to bring ease to your desperate condition. He wants you to know that He loves you and is there for you. I encourage you to learn what His voice sounds like in your life. Learn it and know it and never let the sound of His voice fade in your heart and mind. It will become the most beautiful sound you ever hear. And take courage, even if you are a total wreck, His voice can and will penetrate all your confusion, all your doubt, and all your' turning about. He is our merciful One and in His love, as with Mary, He will make sure you hear your name and if you chose to turn to Him and cling to Him you will find rest.

I always thought that it was a bit weird and cold that Jesus told her: "Stop clinging to Me." The Greek literally says, "Don't attach yourself to me." But understand why. Jesus says, "for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Do you see? He was not being harsh and He was not being insensitive to Mary who had obviously just went through the ordeal of her life watching her Master be beaten, torn up, and crucified. Rather, I believe that Jesus was making her a promise. I believe he was saying something so beautiful that it would penetrate her soul and satisfy her deepest longing. He was saying that He will soon be ascending to His Father and when she joins Him in that place she will be able to cling to Him and be attached to Him for all eternity. However, now is not the time, here is not the place; but, don't worry, there will be a time and it will be in the perfect place—with the Father. But now is the time to do the work of the Father where we must cling to Him in a new way; not physically mind you, but cling to Him with our

entire heart, mind, and soul. That is the only way the Father's work will get done in and through our lives. We will get to spend eternity clinging to the One we love; but we get to spend this life practicing. This reminds me of our admonition in John 15 and our promise in John 12.

***John 15:4-5***

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

***John 14:12***

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

Now is the time to bear fruit and fulfill the assignments which the Father has given to us. Therefore, after assuring Mary that she will be able to attach herself to Him for all eternity, Jesus gives Mary her first assignment from the Father: "but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Mary was chosen, she was selected, and she was handpicked by the Father to go and proclaim this message of unbelievable earth shattering truth to the disciples. Jesus' Father is our Father. His' God is our God.

The one who is the mercy seat has provided the way for us to return to the garden, so to speak, and be redeemed to the Father. Everything has been made

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new. Jesus' death and resurrection has provided us everything we need for life and godliness and nothing has been withheld (*2 Peter 1:3*). We can look to the One who is above all things and call Him our Father and call Him our God with full assurance that we are His. This is so beautiful. For those of us who have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are truly part of a new family—His family.

I also find the first part of His first message to be very intriguing. Jesus did not say, "I am alive." He did not say, "I did it." He did not say, "Don't worry it does not hurt anymore." He did not say, "Go and save the world" or "whatever you do don't sin." No, in His first message to His disciples, post resurrection, Jesus merely says, "I ascend." He wanted us to know that everything was being restored to its proper place. In His new body He would soon go and sit down at the right hand of His Father and His God (which are one in the same) and assume His rightful position of power and authority. Soon He would no longer be living on the earth but in the heavens and He will once again reign supreme and always be about our business—always because He ascended to our Father and our God.

### ***John 20:18***

Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

After this encounter with Jesus, Mary put aside her wrong belief, she set aside her out of control emotions, and she submitted her will to the will of Her Master. She went and announced to the disciples that not only had she seen Jesus but she relayed all the things He told her. Do you understand the implication of this for you and me? It does not matter how messed up we are or how out of control our



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emotions and our perceptions of reality are, when Jesus speaks we can follow. We are able! We can choose to lay it all aside and cling to Him. We can be about His business and forget all our ridiculous stuff.

I personally have found this to be so true. When I am willing to listen and believe, I am not hindered or restrained by my circumstances and I have the power and ability to subdue my emotions to the truth. Jesus is my Lord; He is supreme and everything is in His hands. Thus, I can focus on what He has assigned me to do trusting that it is His job to take care of the rest. It's a beautiful place and its where we experience His joy and His rest. You should try it!

There is one final point I would like to make before we close and it is a point about the unsuspecting and crazy mercy of our Father and our God. Mary lived in a society where her worth was considered to be slightly above that of a cow. Her testimony was not even allowed in a court of law as women could not be relied upon to speak truth. Yet, it was a woman to which Jesus first chose to appear and speak. It was to a woman that He entrusted the privilege of testifying to His resurrection. It was to a woman that He gave His first instructions or orders. It was a woman who was to carry the message that He was alive and would ascend to His Father.

Again, this is a powerful statement on the veracity of John's testimony and the truth of this gospel. You would think that if John wanted those in that upside down sexist society to have even a remote chance of believing in Jesus' resurrection that he would have changed the story to read that Jesus chose a man, perhaps either Peter or John, to be the lucky ones to have first encountered the risen Lord. It would have been more politically correct and would have been much easier to have found a following. But no; Jesus had chose Mary—a woman—and John therefore conveys the story exactly as it happened. Jesus had mercy and bestowed great

honor and worth on one who, in the eyes of the world, was worth little to nothing. He is mercy is crazy and I love the way He extravagantly displayed it to, of all people, this woman named Mary.

Oh, and for those who tend to get caught up in legalism, notice that Jesus had also chose a woman to preach the gospel of Jesus' resurrection to a group of men. She literally taught them the Word of God as it was delivered first hand to her. Yes, Jesus chose a woman to take His word and proclaim it, announce it, and preach it to a group of men. You see things are never quite as we tend to want to make them. Jesus always seems to do things upside down, inside out, and backwards from the way those in religion like things done. That is why Jesus is so amazing and beautiful. I just wish we would all learn and apply these beautiful truths.

Let's Pray.