International Bible Study Commentary
Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible
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John 20:11-18 Commentary
New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(John 20:11) But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

Early in the morning, Mary had gone with some other women to the tomb, where they found the stone door had been rolled away. Then, Mary went to Peter and John and told them her conclusion: Jesus' body had been removed from the tomb. Mary must have gone back with Peter and John to the tomb. Finding the tomb empty as Mary had told them, Peter and John returned to their homes believing what Mary had said. They had seen the empty

tomb with their own eyes. Perhaps they took the burial wrappings with them as evidence that they had found the wrappings, but Jesus' body was definitely gone. Probably, the disciples and the early church cherished and carefully kept the shroud that had covered Jesus' body. Mary stayed behind in the garden outside the tomb and continued to weep. Whereas Peter and John had entered the tomb, Mary had not. In deep grief, probably to verify for herself that Jesus' body really was gone from the tomb and hoping it was still there, Mary finally looked into the tomb. But Jesus' body was not there.

(John 20:12) 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.

As the sky brightened and the early morning gradually turned into day, Mary looked once again into the tomb, probably because of her anxiety and desire to verify once again that it was empty. Moreover, she could hardly believe (and perhaps did not really want to believe) that the precious body of the Lord she loved was gone. When she looked inside, she saw two angels sitting in the tomb. These angels had entered the tomb without needing to pass through the door or perhaps they had been their earlier and had chosen not to reveal themselves to Peter and John. They were divine messengers. They were seated on either side where Jesus' body had lain, but not directly on the place where Jesus' body had lain.

(John 20:13) 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."

The two angels asked Mary a question that implied that if she had believed in Jesus' resurrection from the dead; then, there was no need for her to be weeping. If she had understood, believed, and remembered what Jesus had taught from the scriptures about His resurrection; then, she should have been rejoicing to find the tomb empty. Of course, she would probably have still felt deep personal loss because of His absence. Instead, she told the angels what she had told Peter and John. She still thought Jesus' dead body had been taken away by others. Mary could not conceive of Jesus walking out of the tomb as Lazarus had done. Since His body was gone, the only reasonable conclusion had to be that someone had removed His body. Since she had seen Jesus die and had helped bury Him, she knew that Jesus could not have been healed. He could not have rolled the stone away from the door. His body had to be lying someplace and she wanted to find His body and bury Him once again with a respectful burial. Mary had no expectation of seeing Jesus alive again. She only wanted to find His body.

(John 20:14) When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.

Mary had been weeping bitterly over her loss and having turned from staring into the tomb she now faced the rising sun. When she saw Jesus, she was unable to recognize Him. She did not expect to see Jesus alive, and she could barely see through the tears glistening in her eyes in the early morning sunlight. Her first thought was probably wondering if the person she saw had anything to do with the disappearance of Jesus' body. There might have been some fear or anxiety that the person she saw was an enemy of Jesus and His disciples.

(John 20:15) 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."

Something in His tone of voice reassured Mary as He asked her the exact same question that the angels had asked her. Because of her preconception that Jesus was dead and her belief that His body could only have been removed from the tomb by others, she supposed the one who tended the garden spoke to her to comfort her and perhaps give her information about the empty tomb she stood beside. Jewish tradition and natural human feelings would be reasons enough for her to be weeping beside the tomb, just as Jesus and the others had wept at Lazarus' grave before Jesus called Lazarus out of his tomb. Mary insisted that she wanted to properly care for the body of the Lord she loved. The angels and Jesus asked her a

question that implied she had no real reason to be weeping, for Jesus had risen from the dead as He had foretold her and all His disciples. But Mary thought they really did not know why she was weeping, and without thinking of how she would do it, she offered to take Jesus' body from where it was laid.

The sinful fall of Adam and Eve had been in a garden and John made clear that the salvation of believers in Jesus took place in a garden where Jesus died and rose again. In the first garden, Satan had tempted Eve not to believe what God had said, so she disobeyed God. Then, Eve tempted Adam to sin as she did and eat the forbidden fruit, and he did. In this garden, Mary would believe in Jesus and do what He told her. Mary would obey Jesus and go to Jesus' disciples and tell them to believe the good news that Jesus was alive, and that Jesus had called them "His brothers" (which would have encouraged those who had fled in fear from the garden when Jesus was arrested). Only God could have planned for Jesus to die and rise again in a garden to save us from our sins. The Bible speaks of what Adam did to the human race when he sinned in a garden and what Jesus did for the human race when He died and rose again in a garden. Because of Jesus sacrificial death and resurrection, "if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Speaking of the resurrection to eternal life for all believers in Jesus, made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49,

"Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven."

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

Mary did not recognize Jesus until He called her by name. Jesus had said that His sheep knew His voice and they would recognize His voice and follow (obey) Him (see John 10:27). There must have always been a special bond of tenderness between Jesus and all His followers, especially when He called them by name. Jesus came from heaven to earth as the Good Shepherd who knew all His sheep by name, and Mary was one of His sheep. Grieving and weeping, Mary did not recognize His voice in His questions until He called her by name. Imagine how special to hear Jesus call you by name! In absolute amazement, Mary used a divine title of respect for her beloved Teacher when she discovered that Jesus was the Person who spoke to her. Moreover, from Jewish literature outside the Bible, we know that the title "Rabbouni" for a teacher was a divine title reserved only for God as the

Divine Teacher. The Jews called their human teachers "Rabbi." The divine title "Rabbouni" is used only here in the Bible, and the title was used by a person who saw Jesus alive after He had been dead and buried. (See especially the accompanying **International Bible Lesson**, ***His Family Know His Voice*** based on John 20:11-18).

(John 20:17) 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.'"

Jesus' words partially explain the reason He saw Mary in the morning and His disciples in the evening. Before seeing His disciples, the Son of God had to fulfill a responsibility to His Father, to God the Father. To Jesus and all who follow Him, our duty to God comes first. What Jesus did for His disciples would make an eternal difference to them and us. In John 20:11-18, John reported that Jesus met Mary in the morning in the garden. Then, in John 20:19-23, John reported that Jesus met His disciples in the evening. With His appearance to His disciples in the evening, Jesus affirmed Mary's account of His resurrection. His delay in appearing to them would give His followers time to think, talk, and pray together about Jesus' death, what it meant, and what they had learned from Mary. They had learned from Mary that Jesus' Father and God was also the Father and God of Mary and all His disciples and followers, which made His

disciples “His brothers” and Mary “His sister.” This is the first time that Jesus called His disciples “His brothers;” something He could not do until He died for their sins and rose again. True believers in Jesus have the same Father and God. All disciples of Jesus are His brothers and sisters by adoption. In Romans 8:15, Paul wrote, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” In Ephesians 1:5-7, Paul explained of the Father and the Son, “He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”

Though the Bible does not tell us, we can surmise that Jesus wanted to see His Father in heaven to formally and officially report that He had faithfully finished His work of redemption. In the Kingdom of God, with all the heavenly powers and principalities in attendance, Jesus, the Son of God, reported to God the Father, the Lord of hosts, the King of glory, that by His death and resurrection He had completed His redeeming work. He had defeated Satan and had saved from sin, from fear of death, and from the power of Satan all who would believe in Him. We can think of the heavenly court as described in the Book of Job, where Satan and the heavenly beings appeared before God (see Job 1:6). Having completely defeated Satan, Jesus

could appear before God and the angels and report that He had said and done exactly what God intended. Furthermore, remember the words of Job, who foretold His future resurrection from the dead. Jesus made Job's resurrection possible by His death and resurrection from the dead. In Job 19:25-26, Job said, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God." Jesus is Job's Redeemer and the Redeemer of all who entrust their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

(John 20:18) Mary Magdalene *came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

Mary was the first person to share the Good News (the Gospel) with others when she went and spoke to Jesus' disciples, who after His death and resurrection were now "His brothers and sisters." She shared the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead and she had seen Him. She told them the Good News that Jesus was still the Lord—the living Lord—and He had good reasons for not seeing them yet, for He was ascending to His Father and their Father, to His God and their God. Now, they were all one Family: "brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus." In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, the Apostle Paul summarized the Good News: "Now I would remind you, *brothers and sisters*, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you

are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures." Paul and John give good reasons to believe the Bible is true—the first step in saving faith.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. After Peter and John returned home, why do you think Mary Magdalene remained weeping at Jesus' tomb?

2. Why do you think Mary was unafraid when she saw the two angels dressed in white inside Jesus' tomb?

3. Why do you think Mary did not recognize Jesus but thought he was the gardener? When did she recognize Him?

4. How did Mary address Jesus? Why do you think the title she used was important to her, and is important to all believers in Jesus?

5. What reason did Jesus give her for not allowing her to hold on to Him?

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