

Condescension & Ascension (Jn. 20:10-18)

1. Clear

- a. Defining Terms: “Condescension” is more often used as a negative term but it is defined as: voluntary assumption of equality with a person regarded as inferior. Jesus condescended to the lowest regions of earth (Eph. 4:8-9) and humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross (Phil. 2:8) coming to His own yet rejected and yet making those who believe in His name, children of God (Jn. 1:11-12). Note the two verses outline John’s Account. “Many have pointed out that the words ‘his own did not receive him’ (1:11) could be placarded over the first twelve chapters of this book, but over chs. 13–21 we might raise the banner, ‘*Yet to all who received him ...*’. Another way of describing these people is to say that they *believed in his name*. The ‘name’ is more than a label; it is the character of the person, or even the person himself.”¹
- b. Among other things this passage describes both Jesus’ condescension to secure for Himself and the Father a family of whom will be His brothers and sister. And after achieving the feat of all feats and defeating all universal enemies of truth, righteousness, beauty, design, life, and God Himself – Jesus takes the time to tend to Mary’s fear, doubt, and sorrow.
- c. What seemed so defeated, dark, and doubtful would suddenly turn to elation, wonder, and faith. Richard Phillips offers this illustration in his commentary on this passage: “During England’s war with Napoleon Bonaparte, the people of London anxiously awaited news from the battlefields of Europe. On one occasion, a British admiral attempted to convey news of a victory by the Duke of Wellington during his Peninsula campaign. Using a semaphore system, the admiral transmitted his first word: “Wellington.” The next word soon followed: “defeated.” At this moment, fog enshrouded the signals so that no more could be seen. In this form, the news reached London: “Wellington defeated!” It took several hours for the fog to lift, allowing the rest of the signal to be sent. There on the mast could now be seen the final letters of its message from the war: “the enemy.” How this changed everything: “Wellington defeated the enemy!” When this new message was quickly spread, the nation’s gloom was replaced with a great joy.”¹²

2. Fear (10-14)

- a. It is apparent that fear, doubt, chaos, and even despair are often times (if not always) the prelude to faith. A belief without being tested cannot be trusted. And a faith that is aimed at an indispensable need must be tested. But doubt in the reality of a vital provision is demeaning and despairing.
- b. Bruce Milne wrote: “Mary was weeping at the time, a burdened woman. This was primarily due to being bereaved of one she loved dearly. She may also conceivably have harboured a lingering sense of betrayal. Somehow the hopes which Jesus had built within her had not been realized. In addition we can also probably identify a strand of fear. Luke 8:2 reports that Mary was a woman ‘from whom seven demons had come out’. With Jesus gone, what assurance was there of her being able to keep these devils at bay in the future?”³
- c. Milne added: “The scene then shifts back to Mary, alone by the tomb after the others have left. She is weeping (11). The loss of the body is the final indignity, the last straw; even her mourning for Jesus is violated. It is not hard to imagine the enormous emotional strain which the last few days had placed on Mary, not least the anguish of having looked on at Calvary.

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 125). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

¹ Supplement to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (London: Archibald, Constable & Co., 1824), 6:650.

² Phillips, R. D. (2014). *John* (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.; 1st ed., Vol. 2, p. 645). P&R Publishing.

³ Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 295–296). InterVarsity Press.

Her tears were more than understandable. ¶ Deciding to look once more into the tomb she sees two angelic figures, *seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot* (12) 'The place of Jesus' death was between two thieves, the place of his burial was between two angels.'³ They ask her about her tears. *Woman, why are you crying?* (13). From the perspective of heaven nothing is more incongruous than tears at the empty tomb of Jesus. If there is one place in space and one moment in time when tears are least appropriate, it is at the empty tomb of Jesus on Easter morning! Mary repeats her concern at the disappearance of *my Lord*. It is significant that the devotion of her heart prevents her referring to a 'body'. He is still 'her Lord.'⁴

- d. D. A. Carson commented: "The first (*why are you crying?*) becomes mild rebuke; the second (*Who is it you are looking for?*) becomes an invitation to reflect on the kind of Messiah she was expecting, and thus to widen her horizons and to recognize that, grand as her devotion to him was, her estimate of him was still far too small."⁵
 - e. There is a contrast in vv. 8 and 11-13 viz. John saw what was not there and believed while Mary saw two radiant angels and still insisted that someone had removed Jesus corpse. Re: "glistening" "shinning" apparel: "797. ἄστράπτω *astráptō*; ...lightning. To lighten, flash or shine as lightning (Luke 17:24; 24:4 [cf. Matt. 28:3...])."⁶
 - f. But as we'll see with Thomas soon, Jesus tenderly provides for what our undeveloped faith lacks and needs. Ps. 34:18.
 - g. The Good Shepherd called His sheep by name and she immediately recognized who He was.
 - h. The One whom she initially assumed was the gardener – and who is the ultimate Gardener – had brought forth new life in the garden of tombs. And similar to calling Lazarus forth out of the tomb, He called Mary away from the tomb from which He arose – thus fulfilling His earlier declaration to Martha (Jn. 11:25-26).
 - i. Immediately, she recognized His voice Jn. 10:3-4, 27. This Shepherd came to call His sheep unto himself. This Gardener, came to plant, till, cultivate, and harvest His New Creation (NC). The Word who created all things by His Spirit brings forth NC from the darkness and void of the tomb. This new and "Last Adam" brings forth life from death. Read 1 Cor. 15:45-49. The last Adam has defeated the tempter, sin, evil, hell, and death. He turned shame to glory, brought new life from His death, took the curse of sin's thorns/thistles to cultivate a paradise. Furthermore, He is the sacrifice who offered Himself in the Holy of Holies the Perfect and slain Passover Lamb who was laid on the slab by which the two angels stood on either side as pictured and typified in the Ark of the Covenant which resided in the Holy of Holies with its sculpted cherubim mounted on each side.
3. Hear (15-16)
- a. Before calling Mary by name, Jesus had echoed the angels' rhetorical inquiries. In fact, John redundantly records that she turned to Jesus (vv. 14 & 16). This twice turning (or double take) is not uncommon and others who saw the resurrected Jesus, did not initially recognize Him either.
 - b. I find it interesting that Martha's faith recorded in 11:21-27 parallels Mary's here. It's not that they have the wrong object of faith just an incomplete understanding of it.

³ W. Temple, p. 361.

⁴ Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 290–291). InterVarsity Press.

⁵ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 641). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

⁶ Zodhiates, S. (2000). In *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

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- c. As noted above, it was when He called her by name, when she immediately turned (for the second time) and recognized Him. It is interesting that Scripture teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word of God.
 - d. Because faith is the avenue by which we are saved [Eph. 2:8] and because John emphasized such throughout his account and describes progressive aspects of faith here; let us consider a body of faith:
 - i. Faith's Revelation (16) "Rabboni!" Jesus the Object
 - ii. [Faith's Illumination (Eph. 1:13-14) Holy Spirit the Agent]
 - iii. Faith's Conviction (16) Mary's spirit
 - iv. Faith's Action (18) Mary's obedience
 - v. Faith's Progression: is seen in the lives of the Disciples and us! The object (Jesus) becomes clearer as revelation is further considered. The Spirit further illuminates our minds and thus our conviction becomes deeper thus producing a courage and obedience that becomes purer.
 - e. We don't neglect study, reading, meditation, listening and merely listen for a still small voice – which is not taught in Scripture. Rather, we are to look more to the Word of God: more frequently, more intently, and more earnestly; to hear from God.
4. Near (17-18)
- a. Apparently, Mary embraced Jesus (more likely at His feet than a bold hug) and He instructs her to not cling to Him then and to rather go inform "My brethren" that "I am ascending to My Father and your Father and to My God and your God."
 - b. There is a new relationship Jesus has forged w/ regard to His people which is a near family where He is their fellow brother yet still distinguished as elevated and exalted King hence the message of His ascending.
 - c. His ascending is seen here as a process of sorts where in a sense He has been exalted, such being linked with His resurrection and even burial. Yet, He would be with them for forty days till His definitive ascension which was also accompanied by two angels. It should not bewilder us that using such language encompasses a period of time either retroactive and/or proactive e.g. 17:4 where present includes future and the same event effects the past viz. entry into the NC for OT saints.
 - d. What's more, a more precise parallel may be found in 10:18 where Jesus used the present tense "I lay My life down for My sheep." It is obvious that said even would happen in the near future not at the time of His speaking. Nevertheless, as in 17:4, Jesus had resolved to such and trusted the Father for provisions such as timing etc.
 - e. Furthermore, Heb. 9:11-12a regards Jesus' self-sacrifice as an ascension, for only the sinless High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies. And only the King of Glory who has clean hands and a pure heart could ascend the hill of the LORD (Ps. 24:3-4). This reveals the paradox of how Jesus both distinguished Himself unto singular exaltation whilst bringing us near to Him (Eph. 2:13) and indeed adopting us into His family (Jn. 1:12; Ro. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2). →
 - f. In fact, His departing ascension paradoxically bringing us near is succinctly stated in Ro. 10:6-8 where we see these realities of faith, ascension, hearing, and nearness converge in Christ. And more precisely, our union of brotherhood with Him is explicitly stated in Heb. 2:10-12 cf. Ps. 22:22. How profound.
 - g. Jesus' resurrection (inseparably linked to His descending, working, sacrificing, and dying) draws all of His sheep near.

- h. This explains the curious syntax of “do not hold to Me.” He has already brought Mary nearer than she could imagine and has secured a perfect spiritual literal family, albeit He will have to ascend and thus leave them/us with His Spirit. But not just yet Mary, I have not yet ascended for I will tarry with you for forty days so let go of clinging to me for now and tell the others. →
- i. However, it may be a bit more in depth than just that. The faith of Mary and the others would in fact deepen with further revelation/instruction from Him and further develop after His physical departure. Paraphrase: do not cling merely to what you can see and touch for I am going to depart but I will dwell with you through My Spirit and be among My family and they in Me, albeit in a different manner.
- j. In a very real sense, we have already been raised with Him as we have been buried to sin, baptized into Him, and raised with Him (Ro. 6:3-4 & Eph. 2:6). I was spiritually dead and with no real hope of purpose, peace, nor preservation but now I’m alive to God having been given a new heart and His Spirit and with Him the assurance of eternal life, a mission for His Kingdom, and a peace incomprehensible by the world.
- k. As usual, N. T. Wright artfully summed up this passage with biblical knowledge and insight: “Now all that has changed. Feel the force of verse 17: ‘Go and say to *my brothers*, I am going up to my father *and your father*, to my God *and your God*.’ ¶Something has altered, decisively. Something has been achieved. A new relationship has sprung to life like a sudden spring flower. The disciples are welcomed into a new world: a world where they can know God the way Jesus knew God, where they can be intimate children with their father. ¶They can be, in other words, true Israelites at last. Israel’s calling was to be God’s son, God’s firstborn (Exodus 4:22). Israel struggled with that vocation. The idea survives in various Old Testament writings and in subsequent Jewish thought, but there was a sense that if Israel really was God’s child an estrangement had taken place. When Jesus told the story of a son who went off in disgrace into a far country, his hearers knew what he was talking about (Luke 15:11–32). But now Jesus has broken through the **exile**, has made a way back from the ultimate far country, death itself. A way back to the father’s house. And everyone who follows Jesus is welcome there in his name, as a beloved son or daughter.”⁷

Further Study

Harmonizing the Accounts

“Despite superficial differences between the record of the four Gospels, it is possible to reconstruct a probable sequence of events on that Sunday morning. Around dawn, Jesus was raised from the dead, accompanied by an earthquake and the coming of angels, so that Pilate’s guards fled in terror (Matt. 28:2–4). Later, a group of faithful women set out for the tomb. Seeing the stone rolled away, Mary Magdalene fled for the male disciples while the other women entered the tomb and heard the angels’ news of the resurrection (John 20:1–2; Mark 16:2–5; Matt. 28:5–6). Summoned by Mary Magdalene, John and Peter raced to the open tomb. Entering in, they saw the graveclothes left behind and returned to their houses (John 20:3–10). Mary Magdalene returned to the grave after the men had departed. There, “Mary stood weeping outside the tomb” (20:11).”⁸

⁷ Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21* (p. 145). Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁸ Phillips, R. D. (2014). *John* (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.; 1st ed., Vol. 2, pp. 635–636). P&R Publishing.