

GOD'S SOLUTION TO YOUR SORROW

John 20:1-18

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Easter Sunday 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Easter Sunday is the perfect day to talk about sorrow and grief, because the resurrection is God's solution.
2. I've read that grief is the leading problem facing people today.
3. Sorrow and grief are usually what you feel when you lose something very important to you. When you experience the death of someone or something that means a lot to you. We have all experienced sorrow over the past few years, especially in light of the Coronavirus. Many have lost jobs. Many have lost businesses. Many have lost loved ones. There are many kinds of losses that lead to sorrow. The death of a marriage or long term romantic relationship; the death of a dream; the death of a friendship; the death of your reputation. You may be going through a time of sorrow and grief right now. If you aren't now, then you will eventually.
4. Just recently a mother reached out to me for advice on dealing with sorrow. Her best friend had passed away, and that friend was very close to her young son – like a second mother. So this mom wanted to know how to break the news to her son, and how to comfort him. Grief can be hard to handle.
5. Another person in the church recently asked me a good question. How do you comfort someone who has lost a loved one who probably isn't going to heaven? That's a good one. Grief is tough.
6. There is a difference between the normal grieving process, and a spirit of grief. When some people experience loss or heartbreak, they go through a normal grieving process. They experience sorrow, they cry, but eventually they bounce back to a healthy, happy, productive life. But when others experience grief, they never come out of it. That's the spirit of grief. Sorrow dominates their life. The devil uses grief to keep them in depression. They can't function. Grief can ruin lives, relationships, marriages, careers, and futures.
7. The Bible gives us the hope and the help we need to face sorrow in this life in a healthy way. We're going to see that today in the Easter story.

II. TEXT: John 20:1-18

1. 1 On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!"
 - i. This story is about Mary Magdalene. Jesus cast seven demons out of her, and she became one of His closest followers. She was one of several women who followed Jesus and took care of Him. She was one of the four women who stood by the cross as Jesus was crucified.

- ii. Early Sunday morning, Mary went to the tomb, and she saw that the large stone covering the tomb's entrance had been removed. So she ran to tell Peter and John that Jesus' body had been taken – either by the Jews, the Romans, or grave robbers.
- 2. 3 At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first. 5 Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then, following him, Simon Peter also came. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. 7 The wrapping that had been on his head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself. 8 The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then also went in, saw, and believed. 9 For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.
 - i. Upon hearing about the empty tomb, Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it empty.
 - ii. They both saw the linen cloths that Christ was wrapped in just lying there. The Greek language means that the cloths were in an orderly arrangement, still in their folds, as if the body had simply evaporated out of them (Barclay). And the wrapping that was on Christ's head was folded up in a separate place.
 - iii. It was at this moment that John believed in the resurrection. He was the first to believe.
 - iv. Then Peter and John went back to the place where they were staying.
- 3. 11 But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
- 4. "Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them, "and I don't know where they've put him."
 - i. Mary stayed at the tomb weeping. The resurrection had not yet crossed her mind. She assumed that Jesus' body had been stolen.
- 5. 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that you're seeking?"
 - i. Why didn't she recognize Jesus? Probably because she was weeping. Her eyes were filled with tears.
- 6. Supposing he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where you've put him, and I will take him away."
- 7. 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."
- 8. Turning around, she said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!"—which means "Teacher."
- 9. 17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

10. 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them what he had said to her.

- i. Today we’re going to learn some lessons about handling sorrow and grief from the story of Mary Magdalene.

III. WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR SORROW

1. Realize that everyone experiences sorrow.

- i. Mary was one of His closest friends, and yet God allowed her to experience grief.
- ii. Don’t assume that God will reward your faithfulness with freedom from sorrow. The most devoted Christians in the Bible, and throughout history, experienced suffering and sorrow.
 - 1. Imagine the grief that Adam and Eve felt when they lost Eden. Imagine the sorrow they felt when one of their sons was murdered by their other son!
 - 2. Imagine the sorrow that Abraham felt when God told him to sacrifice his beloved son.
 - 3. Imagine Jacob’s sorrow when he received the news that his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal.
 - 4. David experienced great sorrow when he lost his friend Jonathan, and then his newborn son with Bathsheba, and then his son Absalom.
 - 5. Job had to experience sorrow when he lost all ten of his children and the loss of his fortune.
- iii. Don’t assume that sorrow means that God is unfaithful or unreal.
 - 1. God is not the creator of evil and suffering. If you go back to Genesis 1, the story of creation, everything God made was good. Originally there was no suffering. There was no evil.
 - 2. But when God made mankind, they were given free will. And people screwed things up. The first humans sinned, and this plunged the entire world into evil and suffering.
 - 3. There are two kinds of evil – moral and natural evil.
 - a. Moral evil is all the sin, immorality, the wickedness in the world – murder, theft, adultery, rape, racism, etc.
 - b. Natural evil includes things like floods and earthquakes diseases. Both are the result of human sin that began with Adam and Eve. But of all the suffering in the world, some have estimated that 95% is the result of moral evil. God created the world without evil and suffering, but mankind has made a mess of things.
- iv. All human beings experience sorrow. We all lose loved ones to death. We all get sick. We all have pain. We all experience rejection, failure, heartbreak, disappointment, abandonment, betrayal, etc.
- v. God never promised to keep you out of trouble. He promised to get into trouble with you. He never promised that you would not lose anyone; he promised that you would never lose Him.

vi. **John 16:33** "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."

1. What does it mean that He conquered the world?

- a. There is nothing this world can throw at you that you can't endure with His help.
- b. There is nothing this world can do to you to steal your salvation.
- c. There is nothing this world can do to you without God's permission.
- d. There is nothing this world can do to you to interfere with God's plan for your life.
- e. There is nothing this world can do to you to cause God to stop loving you.

vii. An existence without pain, sorrow, sin, and death is not possible in this life, but it is promised to Christians in the next life.

2. Let others share your burden.

- i. As soon as Mary saw the empty tomb, she ran to tell her friends.
- ii. That is the first thing we should do.
- iii. **Galatians 6:2** "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
 1. Do you know what a burden is? It is a weight that is overwhelming. A weight that is too heavy for you to carry alone. With help, yes. By yourself, no.
 2. What should we do when we see others facing a burden? We should help them carry it.
 3. What should we do when we are carrying an unbearable burden? We should ask our friends to help us.
 4. We are not made to carry our burdens by ourselves.
 5. Some people say that God will never give you more than you can handle. That's biblical. He will give you burdens, and a burden is by definition more than you can handle. Why would God do that? Because we are not made or meant to carry our burdens alone. We are meant to do life in community.
 6. Where do we find the friends to help us with our burdens? That's what the church is for. The church is a community of believers who are committed to loving Jesus, one another, and the world. The church is commanded to comfort each other.
 7. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** "Comfort the discouraged."
 8. Do you know why Christians should be involved in church? Because you need it, and you are needed. You will have burdens that you can't carry alone, and so you will need other Christians; and other Christians will have burdens that they can't carry alone, and they will need your help.

- 9. This is one of the reasons why we have a ministry called Home Group in our church. Home Group exists so that you can build closer relationships with other Christians so that when you have a burden, you already have a support group surrounding you.
- iv. As strong as Patrick Mahomes is, if he tried to play one on eleven, he would get crushed. The game is not meant to be played like that, and neither is life.
- v. When you have sorrow, don't carry it alone. Share it with others. Call someone. Visit someone. Have coffee with someone. Ask for prayer. Let God's people love you.

3. Set your mind on God's promises.

- i. Both the angels and Jesus asked Mary why she was crying. Why? Because on multiple occasions Jesus promised that He would be crucified and then rise again on third day. And now, on the third day the tomb was empty. Mary should have been rejoicing and celebrating, not weeping. Christ is risen!
- ii. But Mary was not focusing on the promise of the resurrection. She was focused on Christ's death; on his absence from her life; on the crucifixion. Mary wasn't focused on God's power to raise the dead, but on the wicked men who must have stolen His body. She wasn't looking for the risen Christ, but for the dead Christ so that she could re-bury Him.
- iii. Often the reason for our sorrow is that we have the wrong perspective. We focus on the negative and forget God's promises. We focus only on the pain and forget God's power. We focus only on the past and forget that God has a plan.
- iv. **Romans 8:28** "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."
- v. Often what appears to be the end is actually the beginning. What appears to be the end of something good, is the start of something great. What appears to be a loss is actually a gain. What appears to be a setback is actually a setup for something better.
- vi. Joseph was his father's favorite son, sure to inherit a fortune. But his jealous brothers sold him into slavery, and eventually he was wrongfully convicted of rape and sentenced to prison. Can you imagine the sorrow he felt? I'm sure he thought this was the end; he lost it all. But God was in control. This was part of God's plan. God would soon elevate Joseph to be Prime Minister of Egypt.
- vii. Moses was the prince of Egypt when he killed an Egyptian and had to flee the country. I'm sure he thought that was the end; that he lost everything. But what appeared to be a setback was only a setup. Forty years later God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery and into the Promised Land.
- viii. David was one of King Saul's inside men. Saul's greatest general. He was Israel's champion. The prophet Samuel anointed him to be the next king. But then Saul turned on him and made David public enemy number one. David spent the next few years on the run, an outlaw, living in the wilderness and

in foreign lands. I'm sure he experienced intense sorrow. He thought it was over. His dream was dead. But God was working. God was growing him. God was preparing him. And eventually Saul died, and David became king of Israel.

- ix. The Bible tells us that God is working through our sorrow. He uses difficulties to grow us and prepare us for bigger responsibilities in the future. He uses difficulties to move us where He wants us. He uses difficulties to protect us from greater harm down the road. He uses difficulties to open up new ministry opportunities. He uses difficulties to stop us from making a bad decision. He uses difficulties to keep us humble and dependent upon Him.
- x. **One author** "God loves to turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones and crucifixions into resurrections (Rick Warren)."
- xi. This is why the Bible says to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil 4:4), and to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18). We don't rejoice about everything, but in the midst of everything. We don't give thanks for all circumstances, but in all circumstances. Why? Because we know that God is moving on our behalf, for our good. We know that God is up to something. Giving thanks and praise in the midst of our sorrow helps us to keep our eyes on God's promises, even though the pain of loss is great.

4. Know that Jesus is near.

- i. While Mary was weeping, Jesus was next to her. And her eyes were so full of tears that she didn't even notice that it was Jesus when He spoke to her at first. But the moment that Mary realized that Jesus was with her, her sorrow vanished.
- ii. When you are experiencing sorrow, remember that Jesus is near. Believe it.
- iii. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven He made a promise to His disciples. This is the last verse in the gospel of Matthew. **Matthew 28:20** "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- iv. **Psalms 139:5** "Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits, even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me."
- v. Why is the thought of Christ's nearness comforting?
 - 1. It means He knows. He knows what you are going through; what people have done to you; what your problems and challenges are; what you feel like. He sees your tears and your broken heart. He knows your situation. He knows when your back is up against the wall.
- vi. There's a great song by Jeremy Camp called "He Knows." The chorus says it all:
 - He knows, He knows
 - Every hurt and every sting; He has walked the suffering
 - He knows, He knows
 - Let your burdens come undone; Lift your eyes up to the one

Who knows, He knows

1. It means He hears. He hears your prayers. **Psalm 6:8-9** "... the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea for help; the Lord accepts my prayer."
2. It means You are not alone. God has not abandoned you. He has not forgotten you. He is not neglecting you. He is not busy doing other things. He is right there with you.

5. Believe that Jesus is alive.

- i. When Jesus called Mary's name, she knew immediately it was Him, and her sorrow turned to joy.
- ii. Why? If Jesus is alive, then that changes everything.
- iii. There are many wonderful implications of the resurrection. Because Jesus rose from the grave...
 1. We know that He is God.
 2. We know that He is trustworthy.
 3. We know that can save us from sin.
 4. We know that He is worthy of worship.
- iv. Perhaps the most practical aspect of resurrection for daily living is that if Christ rose from the grave,
 1. Then He is able to help us. He couldn't do that if He was dead.
 2. No problem is too great for Him. If He could rise from the grave, then He could can do anything.
- v. Some skeptics ask, "How can you believe that God created the universe? How can you believe that God parted the Red Sea? How can you believe that Jesus did all these miracles?" The answer is simple. He rose from the grave. And if He rose from the grave, He can do anything!
- vi. Faith in the resurrection is central to dealing with sorrow.

6. Stay focused on your mission.

- i. When Mary realized that Jesus was alive, she just wanted to hug Him and be with Him, but she couldn't just stay there. He said, "Don't cling to me, but go." Jesus had a mission for her. She was to go and tell the apostles that Christ had risen.
- ii. Mary was the first to see the risen Christ, and the first witness to the resurrection. She is known in history as the first evangelist.
- iii. Grief can be good, appropriate, healing, and cleansing. There's nothing wrong with crying, with mourning, with sadness. But we can't live that way forever. Why? Because God has a mission for us. He is not done with us yet. He has placed a calling on our lives. He has work for us to do.
- iv. It is natural to take some time off when you are sad; to break away from your normal routine. But don't break for too long. God has a mission for you.
 1. He has called you to take care of your spouse, your children, your parents, your grandchildren.
 2. He has called you to contribute to the church.
 3. He has called you to witness to lost people.

4. And each of us has specific tasks. For me, I can't wallow in my grief because I have a church to lead.
- v. Here's the cool thing about staying focused on your mission. If you stay focused on your mission, then your grief will not overwhelm you. It is hard to stay sad when you are working for the Lord; when you are sharing the gospel; serving someone in need; comforting someone; teaching your kids the Bible; volunteering at church.
- vi. The devil wants to use your grief to distract you from your mission. God wants to use your mission to help you live with your grief.
- vii. When you experience loss, don't lose your mission. When you experience sorrow, don't lose sight of God's calling on your life.

7. Look forward to heaven.

- i. Throughout His ministry Jesus often talked to His followers about eternal life.
 1. "Whoever believes in me will have eternal life (Jn 3:16)."
 2. "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me, even if he dies, will live (Jn 11:25-26)."
 3. "I am going to my Father's house to prepare a place for you, and I will come again to take you there to be with me (Jn 14:1-3)."
- ii. But when Jesus died, there was no way to know if there was life after death. If there was a heaven to look forward to. There was no way to know if He was telling the truth.
- iii. But when Mary saw that Jesus was alive, she knew what it meant. His resurrection meant that there is life after death, and that she too would go to heaven when she died. She knew that all of His words and promises about life after death were true. If Christ rose, then we will rise. If Christ ascended to heaven, then we will ascend to heaven.
- iv. The thought of heaven can help you endure anything. Why?
 1. The pain you are experiencing is only temporary. In heaven it will be paradise for all eternity.
 2. The pain you are experiencing can't compare to the glory of heaven.
 - a. **Romans 8:18** "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."
 - b. What does Paul mean? Lee Strobel sheds some light on this verse. Let's say that the first day of 2022 was a horrible day. You got in a car wreck and totaled your car and broke your neck. The other car was your wife's, and she broke her hip. Now both cars are totaled. The stock market took a nose dive. Your best friend betrays and spreads rumors about you. But then, the rest of 2022 was awesome. On day two, you inherit \$50 million from a rich uncle you didn't know you had. You get promoted to that job you always wanted. The New York Times names you the person of the year. Your first child born and he is healthy and your wife insists she name him after

you. Your marriage is awesome. You take a two month vacation on the beach in Tahiti. And the rest of the year was just awesome. So the next year a guy asks you, “How was your 2022?” You’re naturally going to say, “It was great!” But wasn’t the first day of the year the worst day of your life? Yes. It was a bad day. But when you look at the year as a whole and put everything in perspective, the 364 awesome days far outweigh the one bad day. They don’t even compare.

- c. Heaven is going to be so good, that you won’t even be able to compare it to the pain and sorrow that you had on earth. You may have 72 horrible years on earth, but after you’ve had 1,000 amazing years in heaven, you will say that your existence has been awesome, even though the first 72 years were rough.
- d. There is a Christian woman who lived a life of depravation and suffering and at the end of her life she said this, “In light of heaven the worst suffering on earth – a life of the most atrocious tortures on the planet, in the light of heaven, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

IV. CONCLUSION

1. I know of one pastor who had reached the summit of pastoral success. He was a best-selling Christian author; he started a church that grew to mega-size; he was invited to speak at all the conferences; all of his peers respected him. Then it was discovered that he was having an affair. He lost his job. He lost his reputation. He lost his book deals and speaking and engagements. He lost friends. He lost his church. After about two years he lost his battle with sorrow and he took his life. That’s what I’m talking about – the spirit of grief.
2. On the flip side I know of a pastor who was also super successful. He started a church that grew to one of the top five largest in America. Then he was fired for having a drinking problem. His wife divorced him. Many of his friends abandoned him. But after a couple of years of healing, he bounced back, started a new church that is now thriving, and he is now stronger and wiser than before. That’s the goal.
3. You will experience grief and sorrow. If you are not right now, then you will.
4. But grief doesn’t have to destroy you. It doesn’t have to ruin you. It doesn’t have to dominate you. No matter what happens to you, you can bounce back. You can endure it.
5. The key is to give your grief to Jesus.
6. **1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)** “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”
7. Christ can comfort you, and strengthen you, and give you the hope of eternal life. Do you have that kind of relationship with Jesus?
8. The Bible says that God created us to have a relationship with Him. This relationship fills our hearts with peace and joy. But we have all sinned, and our sins separate us from God. But God sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, paying our penalty so

that we don't have to be punished. If we will repent of our sins and trust in Christ, God will forgive us, and Jesus will come to make His home in Your heart, and He will give you not only comfort and peace and joy, but forgiveness and eternal life.