

## “New Days & New Ways”

John 20:17-18

### Introduction

Things are always changing. Some people live for change. Some devote their lives to making change happen. It's always fun to talk to people younger than yourself about how things have changed in your lifetime. Depending on how old you are, you may or may not personally remember the first time you saw or used an ipod, (most of you), cell phone, personal computer, the internet, air bags, compact discs, microwaves, fax machine, a copier (instead of a mimeograph), - or for you older ones, a color TV (or a TV at all), air conditioning, or indoor plumbing!

Change is not always easy, nor is it always for the better. Usually with new ideas and new ways there are also new temptations and new possibilities for sin. And so there are whole groups and churches who have tried to freeze time by outlawing change. But for most, and in most cases, change brings progress.

Today we are going to study a significant period of change in redemptive history. We have just come through a detail examination of the death and resurrection of Christ. That event marked a significant change for God's people. No longer would the followers of Christ relate to Jesus as they had previously done. Jesus was about to be ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. In our passage today we are going to see that our ways of relating to Christ are spiritual, not

physical. But that doesn't mean our relationship with Him is any less real or intimate. In fact, in many ways, it is more powerful. But to understand this we must learn to walk using our spiritual eyes. We must walk by faith in Him who called us.

### [John 20:11-18]

Verse 17 is a puzzling verse. *Stop clinging to Me.* Or as other translations say, *Stop holding Me* or *stop touching Me.* The word means to touch. Many have wondered why Jesus stopped Mary from expressing her deep love and affection for Him when upon understanding that He was really alive. This is especially puzzling in light of Matthew 28:9 where others *came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him* apparently without any such injunction against it. And of course later in our chapter here in John, Jesus invited Thomas to touch Him.

Some have speculated that Mary simply went too far – got a little carried away in her enthusiasm. Others suggest that Jesus only stopped her because He wanted to give her the instructions to tell others He was alive.

But the answer seems to lie more in the reality of His forthcoming ascension. Clearly Jesus makes some kind of connection to that idea. "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.*

It might help us if we review for a moment one of the really interesting aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry – that part of His work that involved the physical senses – especially touch. Certainly we understand that Jesus literally came in the flesh.

God became a man. Consequently His disciples related to Him primarily in the arena of what they could see and hear and experience. John affirmed this in His first epistle. *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also. . .* So John makes a big deal of the fact that they heard, saw and touched Jesus.

A survey of the gospels will show how big a part of Jesus' ministry involved touch. Here are a few examples of people that the Bible expressly tell us Jesus touched . . . the leper right outside of Capernaum, Peter's mother-in-law, the daughter of the synagogue official who died, the blind man near His home town, three of the disciples on the Mt. Of Transfiguration, the blind men near Jericho, a deaf man, children and infants, the dead man in Nain, the slave whose ear Peter cut off in the Garden, and the disciples feet.

But it's also interesting to note how often people touched Jesus. Right away you probably remember the story of the woman with the hemorrhage. Much is made about how she secretly came up and touched Him. But time after time we are told of crowds of people gathering to touch Him. Here's the kind of thing we read; *And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent word into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick; and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured.* That's a fascinating verse. Jesus just seemed to invite and welcome people to

come up and touch Him. Those kinds of things seemed to be common place throughout Jesus' ministry. We are specifically told about these happenings in Gennesaret, by the Sea of Galilee, and near Jerusalem. Additionally, you probably remember the story of the sinful woman who wiped His feet with her tears and hair as she kissed His feet. Mary Magdalene also anointed Him with oil to prepare Him for His coming death and she too wiped His feet with her hair.

The point of all of this is to demonstrate that Jesus' relationship with His people was very "hands on".

Jesus instructed Mary here to stop touching Him, not because He was being harsh or unkind or distant. But a new day had dawned. Things were very different now. Jesus' body was very real and physical. If ever one of His disciples doubted that He had been raised from the dead, He was happy for them to touch Him and know that He was physically alive.

And while it was still possible to touch Him and cling to Him as Mary was doing, the new way of the kingdom had been ushered in by the events of the last three days.

If you think about the days between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension, you'll notice a couple of changes. No longer were the disciples "with Him". Before they were together all the time, now Jesus made appearances, but His physical presence with them was very limited. And no longer was His body subject to the limitations of His body incarnate. He now had a resurrected body that transcended the limitations of this world. Many think He actually ascended and descended from heaven before He made His final, visible ascension to sit at the right hand of the Father.

So, here are two things that we can learn from His Words to Mary.

1. The new day and the new way is marked by His ascension into heaven. Shortly Jesus would gather His disciples so that they could watch Him ascend into the sky to take His place of victory at the right hand of the Father.

We studied the ascension not long ago in our work in the Westminster Larger Catechism. Do you remember what we learned about what Christ is doing there?

**QUESTION 53 – How was Christ exalted in his ascension?**

**ANSWER – Christ was exalted in his ascension, in that having after his resurrection often appeared unto and conversed with his apostles, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and giving them commission to preach the gospel to all nations, forty days after his resurrection, he, in our nature and as our head, triumphing over enemies, visibly went up into the highest heavens, there to receive gifts for men, to raise up our affections thither, and to prepare a place for us, where himself is and shall continue till his second coming at the end of the world.**

So here's how things have changed.

- He receives gifts for men.
  - Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8-13
- He raises up our affections.
  - Colossians 3:1-3

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

- He prepares a place for us.

- John 14:1-6
- He rules as Mediatorial King over all the earth
  - Eph. 1:20-23
- He intercedes for us.
  - Heb. 7:25 – *Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

So here, Jesus, while not giving her all the details, is certainly pointing her and others to the coming realities of His ascension. It's safe to assume at this point, the disciples first inclination upon believing the resurrection, would be to assume that Jesus was now going to set up an earthly kingdom. That He would stay here and rule from Jerusalem. In fact, at His ascension in Acts 1 that's exactly what they ask Him. *So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"*

No. They didn't understand. This was the dawning of a new day. Jesus would rule from heaven.

The second thing we can learn from His words to Mary is.

2. His relationship with us is not reduced but rather enhanced because His work of reconciling us to the Father is complete.

*I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.* Jesus makes it clear that His ascension in no way cuts us off from God. He ascends to God to bring us to Him.

Paul speaks of this change in II Corinthians 5:16. *Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ*

*according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.*

And in I Corinthians 2:9ff we are told that we now have *Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.*” For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God . . . Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, . . . For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Because Jesus has ascended into heaven, we can have an intimacy with God that is beyond sight and sound and touch. Our spirit communes with His. Romans 8 says *you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.* These are intimate words of love and nearness.

If you have ever wished that you could have lived during Jesus’ earthly ministry so that you could have seen Him and touched Him, let me encourage you today that you live in a time where you can enjoy deep fellowship with Christ. You will not see Him with your eyes until heaven, but you can know Him intimately and personally now by faith.

Mary was not put off by Jesus’ words to her. In fact she came to the disciples and made the most wonderful of all proclamations – *I have seen the Lord!*” Every time you pray, every time you meditate on the Words of Christ – if you are truly a child of God – you are beholding the Lord in a new way. Sweet fellowship with Him is your privilege as one of His children. So set your mind on the things above

and keep seeking Him with all your heart. Open  
you Bibles. Make time for prayer. Spend time with  
your Savior.