

Weeping at the Grave of Jesus

A sermon preached by Dr M J Hyde at Galeed Chapel Brighton, on Friday evening, 15th March, 2019, at a baptising service

‘Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.’ John 20:15-16

We have come to a baptising, the place of which the hymnwriter said, in our opening hymn,

View the rite with understanding,
Jesus’ grave before you lies. (J Fawcett)

This was the place where Mary came, very early on the morning of the first day of the week. She came seeking her Lord. It is the place where the Lord’s people have to come to. They have to walk the same path that Jesus has trod: ‘Buried with him in baptism.’ (Colossians 2:12) As we die in him, we also receive the life which comes alone from him. We rise again with him, partakers of the life which is in him, and which is in him for all his people. — By nature we are dying sinners, but through him we receive eternal life.

We have come to the ordinance which sets before us the work of conversion. This is the ordinance which is walked through after the new-birth. Just as circumcision was administered after natural birth, so the ordinance of the New Testament is administered to those who are born into the covenant of grace by new-birth, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This ordinance sets before us the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, in regeneration. It sets before us the source of our regeneration —

Every grace and every favour,
Comes to us through Jesus’ blood. (J Hart)

Regeneration comes to us through his death, through his resurrection (and through all that follows on from that: his ascension into glory, and now his continual intercession for us). It sets before us what takes place in regeneration — a separation, a bringing out from the dead and a making alive again. It is a

separation from the hateful ways of sin, and the implanting of that new life, the heart of flesh which trembles at the approach of sin. It is a separation which is made in the lives of the Lord's people, because if we are regenerate it must be seen in our lives. There will be, in a greater or a lesser measure, separation. Although we do not believe in 'progressive sanctification', we have to prove that we do not leave everything sinful overnight — it is a gradual process. As the Lord teaches us and convinces us of sin, of righteousness and of judgement, and as we find more of the precious love of Christ shed abroad in our souls, on the one hand this weans us and separates us from all temporal things, from all the things which are of the flesh, and all the things that spring forth from sin, and on the other hand he draws us to himself so that we would find in him life, and so that our joy and chief delight on earth would be the prospect of glory to come.

We read of the water of separation in the Word of God, 'All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' (1 Corinthians 10:1-2) The Israelites were separated from the land of Egypt and from the people of Egypt, and were brought out to be a people to the Lord — the Lord's people — and he promised to be a God to them. So this ordinance sets before us the separation of souls to Christ.

We must say this evening, baptism is not essential to salvation. But what a solemn thing it is as the ordinance which God has appointed! It is the way Jesus went. If we have been brought by the Holy Spirit to rely only on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ — if we are reliant only on his grace for help in time and hope for eternity to come — can any forbid water? What reason is there for not being baptised? What doth hinder us? Why is there holding back?

True, we have to mourn over the fact that we are poor disciples. — Left to ourselves we follow afar off. But it is a solemn thing if we keep ourselves afar off, and if we are content to be afar off, failing to walk the way that Jesus went. He is our example. Remember this. His example is joined to the gospel: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' But the gospel doesn't end there, it continues: 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Matthew 11:28-30) 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me,' and this is the way that Jesus went. If we want to be true disciples we must follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes.

We have before us this evening the grave of Jesus. As the Lord would help in coming to the text, I want to notice four things.

I. How Mary came to the grave of Jesus. How do the Lord's people have to come to the pool? How did Mary come? She came weeping.

II. The question that Jesus asked her at the grave. This is the same question that the church asks each one who comes weeping, desiring to pass through the waters of baptism. 'Whom seekest thou?'

III. Why Mary had come to the grave. Why has Rachel come to the waters of baptism this evening? Why are the Lord's people brought to walk in the ways of his commandments? Because Jesus called her personally, 'Mary.'

IV. The response of those who have come to the grave of Jesus and how they go on their way: 'Rabboni; which is to say, Master.' They are disciples.

Only thou our leader be,
And we still will follow thee. (J Cennick)

I. Firstly, how did Mary come to the grave?

Mary came weeping. Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, she came weeping. We know she came weeping because Jesus asked her this question, 'Woman, why weepst thou?'

Why was Mary weeping? Well, we may say she mourned an absent Saviour. She mourned an absent Christ. She had enjoyed the presence of Christ. She had enjoyed communion with him. Now she had come to the grave, not only expecting to find his dead body, but also hoping to worship there, and desiring to anoint his body, and adore his corpse. But she comes and finds that not only is her Lord dead, but her Lord is not there. His body has gone. But it would be superficial to say that is the reason why Mary was found weeping.

The real reason, — the root reason, — why Mary was weeping was because she loved the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That was why she wept. She wept because she loved the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore she felt his absence painfully. She desired to see him again. She wanted to know him.

This is the sign of grace in the souls of the Lord's people. They are brought to this place where they weep over Jesus Christ. They weep for Jesus Christ. Samuel Medley says,

Dear Lord, may I a mourner be,
Over my sins and after thee.

And Samuel Medley goes on to make it clear that he expects his mourning days to be all his days spent here on earth. And as the Lord's people enter into glory I believe they weep over Jesus. We read that in heaven, the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall wipe all tears from off their faces. (Revelation 7:17) Why are there tears on the faces of the Lord's people as they enter glory? It is because of the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Yet the Lord says to his people in glory, 'Why weepest thou?' And he wipes their tears from off their faces.

Have you known what it is to weep, not in sorrow, but to weep in love? In my work I have sometimes seen it, (and to start with I could not understand it), that when a newborn baby is given to the mother and father for the first time, on occasions their first response — unexpectedly — is to weep. The tears roll down their cheeks! Why? Because of the love they feel to that helpless baby. A bonding takes place in the moment of birth. The first time their eyes fall on their baby, they cannot refrain from weeping. It is not weeping in sorrow! They are not sorrowing over the baby! It is weeping in love to their baby, and weeping in joy towards their baby, and weeping in thankfulness for their baby. In a little measure, that is what the Lord's people are brought to when the love of Christ is shed abroad in our souls — we weep.

We weep over his love. Dying love, condescending love, divine love. The God who is love condescended to come into this world. — 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' (John 1:14) This is a mystery the angels desire to look into. They cannot understand this. And a sinner saved by grace cannot understand it either. We end up lost in wonder, love and praise, that God — almighty God — should be found contracted to a span. Why should he take flesh?

Almighty God sighed human breath,
The Lord of life experienced death. (J. Hart)

Why? For love. 'All for love's sake became he man.' (Frank Houghton) We could understand it if he had become man for the righteous, or for the wise and the noble. But he did not come into this world to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. He was a friend of publicans and sinners. The apostle goes furthest when he says, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.' (1 Timothy 1:15)

That makes a sinner weep! When we feel ourselves to be the chief of sinners and the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of Christ in the soul of the chief of sinners. We love him! We cannot help loving him. We see him in that great manifestation of love, 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were

yet sinners, Christ died for us.’ (Romans 5:8) That is what breaks the hearts of sinners and makes them mourn and weep after Jesus — that he loved them when they were without strength, rebels from God, ungodly. While we were sinners Christ died for us. He gave himself a sacrifice for sin, a ransom for many. He laid down his life lovingly, willingly, freely. This sacrifice was freely given! The precious love of Jesus Christ. The love of God made known to us.

Then as we prove his love, we find that his love remains with us. Jesus Christ doesn’t only love us at the moment when his love is first shed abroad in our souls, but we prove his love as he watches over us in our backsliding, our forgetfulness of him, in our cold-heartedness, in our small thoughts of him, in our unbelief. Despite all this his love remains the same. It is undiminished, unchanging, unceasing, eternal love. Jesus, ‘having loved his own which were in the world, loved them unto the end.’ (John 13:1)

Mary had been made to know to that love. She had been a partaker of that love. That love was seen in its fullness of in humiliation of Jesus Christ. At the grave of Lazarus, ‘Jesus wept.’ Jesus weeping over a dead sinner! Jesus weeping in love.

So fair a face bedewed with tears,
What beauty e’en in grief appears!
He wept, he bled, he died for you;
What more, ye saints, could Jesus do? (B Beddome)

That was where Mary was brought very early on the morning of the first day of the week. As she came to the tomb weeping, why did she come? Because she loved him! You know, as we find naturally that absence makes the heart grow fonder, so sometimes we realise the depth of our love to Jesus as we experience the withdrawing of his face and we mourn over an absent God. We have to come looking for him as the spouse did in the Song of Solomon. ‘Tell me where my beloved is; tell me where he has gone.’ ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’

It was love that had brought Mary to the grave. The manifestation of that love is seen in the detail that she came early. Love cannot wait for time. Mary’s love was ardent. She had to come, she had to find him. She had to seek him: she desired him. The Lord’s people find the same thing when the love of Christ is shed abroad in their souls and it draws forth their love to him. ‘We love him, because he first loved us.’ (1 John 4:19) He causes us to urgently seek after him, to desire him above everything else. It brings us here: ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.’ (Psalm 73:25)

I ask you this evening, friends, are you weeping over Jesus? Are you mourning after him? Is he your all? Is he your only hope in time? Is he your only hope for eternity to come? You might not be able to say with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God.' (v 28) Your desire might be that you would know more of the assurance that springs from that love. But is that love what you need? In your estimation, is Jesus the only source of all that is good? Is he the only one for you? Do you know that if you are separated from him, you must lie down and die? Are you convinced of this fact:

If ever my poor soul be saved,
'Tis Christ must be the way. (D Herbert)

Outside of Christ there is no hope for you. Apart from Christ you have no help. Do you acknowledge that nothing in this world can do you any good? Do you realise that your works of self-righteousness can never save you? Do you find that everything is dull, every tune is tuneless, everything is dark without him?

Dark and cheerless is the morn,
Unaccompanied by thee. (C Wesley)

Is that your realisation this evening? Do you long for the light? You know, friend, if you are there, convinced of the fact that there is only one who can do you any good — Jesus Christ — then that means that you are weeping after him. It is a blessed place to be. And love will not let you go. What a blessing that is! The eternal love of Jesus Christ can never be turned away from his people, and therefore love cannot let his people go.

Whom once he loves he never leaves,
But loves him to the end. (J Hart)

If his love has sent forth the Spirit into your soul, to teach you of your need — that you are a sinner destined for hell — and that there is only one way of salvation — Jesus Christ and him crucified — and if his love has caused you to realise there is no help outside of Christ, then I tell you that his love can never let you go. Go on weeping. Weep after that precious love of Jesus this evening. Weep after Jesus Christ. Desire that you might know him, that you might see him and that you might hold him. That is how the Lord's people come. They come, as love moves them, so that they would find their all in him.

'Woman, why weepest thou?' This was how Mary came to the tomb. This is how the Lord's people come to the waters of baptism. 'Woman, why weepest

thou?’ It may not be outward tears. Many may be able to weep outwardly with no movement in the heart. But this weeping is summed up in the Psalms. A broken heart and a contrite spirit is the sacrifice he will not despise (Psalm 34:18, cf. 51:17). What kind of broken heartedness? Is this a heart broken by the law’s loud thunder? No!

But a sense of blood-brought pardon
Soon dissolves a heart of stone. (J Hart)

It is the heart that is granted a sight of Christ and his atonement which is broken to shivers. Then we are brought to the place where we can only cry,

My hope, my only hope’s in thee;
O God, be merciful to me! (S. Medley)

II. In the second place, we must come to notice the question that Jesus put to Mary, ‘Whom seekest thou?’

This is the only question that the church puts to those desiring to pass through the ordinance of baptism. ‘Whom seekest thou?’ The gospel phrases it in several different ways. ‘What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?’ (Matthew 22:42) ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?’ (John 21:15) ‘Whom seekest thou?’ This is the only test God gives us. As John Newton says,

What think you of Christ? is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.

We cannot walk through the waters of baptism all the while we are seeking Christ on the one hand and the world on the other. While we are holding Christ with the one hand and our own works of righteousness and what pleases the flesh and puffs up self with the other hand. We cannot come here with a divided heart. We have to come here single heartedly, looking to Jesus and to Jesus alone. We have to go unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, and leaving everything else behind. That is what grace brings us to. That is what the operations of the Holy Spirit bring us to. It is irresistible. Bunyan’s Christian had to be brought out of the City of Destruction. Lot had to be led out of Sodom. And the Lord’s people are separated by free and sovereign grace and brought to the place where they renounce self.

Have you come there? Dear soul this evening, are you there? Have you had to leave self? When the law of God is first brought home to us the first thing we do is turn to self. We will try a little harder. We will work a bit more at keeping the law. We hope then that all will be well. But as the Holy Spirit continues to teach us, he brings us to see that all our righteousness are as filthy rags and he brings us to realise and mourn that,

The more I strove against [sin's] power,
I sinned and stumbled but the more; (J Cennick)

It brings us to confess that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. From head to foot, there are only wounds, bruises and putrefying sores. It is a painful thing to leave self, because by nature we are self-lovers. We desire our own glory. We don't like to be dependent. We don't want to give up our all. But that is where we must come to and that is where grace brings us to. — And what a blessing that it is all of grace! I am certain of this tonight, that if all I had to preach was legality and the law, I would have no hope in the first place, because I know that despite all the terrors of the law, of myself I cannot keep the law, of myself I cannot bring forth one work of righteousness, and therefore I would have no hope. But salvation is all of grace! That is what the Spirit brings us to see.

What is the source of grace? What is grace? 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.' (2 Corinthians 8:9) That is grace, the grace by which we are saved. As we are brought to realise our need of grace — that except for free and sovereign grace, we will be lost and lost for ever — it brings us to leave all and follow him. 'Whom seekest thou?'

Are you there this evening, dear soul? Have you been brought to the end of self? It is a painful thing. It is hard to be brought to an end of your natural religion, — your phariseism, the traditions you have been brought up with. It is hard to be taught that all your chapel going and all your reading of the Word of God will never save you. All your dead forms in prayer can never save you. Pharisaic separation from the things of the world will never save you. You have to come to realise that there is only one way of salvation and only one who can do your soul good — Jesus Christ and him crucified. 'Whom seekest thou?'

But then there has to be separation from the world. There has to be a coming away from things of this time state. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' (Matthew 6:24) The Lord's people are taught this by grace. How are they taught it? They come to see that this world can do them no good. It can bring them no real joy.

As they pursue the pleasures of this world and the things which are passing away, these things all cry out, 'He is not here!' Therefore they have to seek him. 'Whom seekest thou?' They start to seek Jesus in his house, in the Word, in the assemblies of his saints, in prayer, in the prayer meeting. They cry out after him; they mourn for him; they long for him. 'Whom seekest thou?' Have you been led this way? Have you been brought to realise that nothing can do you any good in this world? But as a sense of the love of Jesus Christ shines in our hearts — as we are brought here, seeking Jesus Christ and him crucified — then we are enabled to keep the things of this world in their right place.

It is solemn — we have to leave our families, our husband or wife, our parents, our children, for the sake of the cross. Some have had to do so quite literally. The cross has brought division between loved ones. There is the pain of natural separation. Some have literally given up everyone to follow Jesus. But even with those who are blessed with godly partners in life, who possess grace, true religion is personal. It comes down to: 'How stands, my soul, the case with *thee*?' And that separates. We have to go to Jesus alone. It is a blessed thing when the Lord brings two people together and works in them concurrently. But when the one receives forgiveness that does not mean that the other is also forgiven. They each need the personal revelation of the grace of Jesus Christ themselves. True religion is a lonely path. It is a separation from everything else. We must look to Jesus alone.

It is a path we never walk of ourselves. It is a path we will never venture in by nature. But he giveth more grace. He gives invincible grace. He gives saving grace. He calls. He says, 'Come unto me.' 'Arise and follow me.' And why do we go? We go as he sheds abroad his love in our souls. Then we desire him, run after him, seek after him. Have you been brought to do this by grace? Perhaps you are mourning over the fact that you don't feel this as much as you would like to. Perhaps you are mourning over the fact that once you thought you could leave everything and follow him, but now the world and the things of the world seem to be laying hold on you again. May this question be a word in season to you this evening, 'Whom seekest thou?' What is it that can do your soul any good? The only thing that will last beyond this time state and into eternity to come is Jesus Christ and him crucified. Come then and cry with the Psalmist, 'Quicken thou me!' 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy Word.' (Psalm 119:25) Where do we find that quickening? In the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only place we can come to for it — to Jesus Christ and him crucified. 'Whom seekest thou?'

III. In the third place I wanted to come to this: the reason why Mary came to the grave.

We have already seen that Mary was weeping after Jesus. That is how she came, but why did she come? Why was she weeping, why did she love Jesus? Well, the answer is found in the word that Jesus spoke to her, ‘Mary.’

Why are we ever saved by grace? Why are we ever brought in time to desire after Jesus? Why do we ever come to feel our need of him? I will tell you what the reason is. It is found in Isaiah, ‘But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.’ (Isaiah 43:1) The Lord said unto her, ‘Mary!’ ‘I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.’ This was why Mary came.

Mary had not chosen him. By nature we will never choose Jesus. We will never desire him. As we are born we only have the lowest opinion of him. ‘He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.’ (Isaiah 53:2) By nature we never see any beauty in Christ. We never feel any need of him. We are only brought here by grace. Grace teaches us to love the Lord Jesus, it makes us feel our need of him, and causes us to desire after him. Why do we receive grace? We receive grace because he has formed us in eternity past. ‘This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.’ (Isaiah 43:21) They were elected by sovereign love. They were chosen in love. There we have to leave the question. We cannot understand why when we look at ourselves. Why did the Lord choose us above everybody else? Why was I made to hear his voice? Why me, why such a wretch as I? There is nothing to separate us by birth from all the sinners in this world, but we are separated by the electing love of God. Eternal love. Distinguishing love. We are loved with an everlasting love.

As that love was set on us, he separated us by that love to himself. He formed us to shew forth his praise. So in time, our covenant Head, our Saviour, the Son, had to come into this world, ‘The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,’ so that he would suffer, bleed and die, to redeem us to himself. He gave his life for his sheep. He paid the penalty which was due to us as sinners. ‘The wages of sin is death.’ (Romans 6:23) ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die.’ (Ezekiel 18:4) But here is — Jesus Christ — standing in the room of sinners, in the place of his people, and in their place he suffers the punishment that was due to them. He lays down his life. He gives his life a ransom. He pays the price that the law demanded. He has redeemed us. He has bought us — we are not our own, we are bought with a price. So we are separated by electing love and separated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are separated from the world in the same way as the Children

of Israel were set apart from everyone else in Egypt in the night of the Passover — separated by the sheltering blood of Jesus. Separated from death unto life. ‘I have redeemed thee.’

‘I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.’ He comes and calls his people by their name. Charles Wesley calls it the ‘new, best name of love.’ What is that name? We read about it in Isaiah: ‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.’ (Isaiah 62:4) That is what it is to be called by the name of Jesus. That is what is contained in this precious word that Jesus spoke to this dear woman at his graveside, ‘Mary.’

What was Jesus saying? He was saying, ‘Poor sinner, I delight in you. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I loved you in eternity past. I loved you such that I laid down my life for you. I love you now. My heart — the heart of the tender High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of your infirmities — is moved for you. I see you weeping. I draw near in compassion and have mercy upon you.’ — ‘He said unto her, Mary.’ — ‘Mary, you are not alone. As you have come to my grave this morning and found me not there, you may feel forsaken and alone, and hear the lion roar, but lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. You are no longer forsaken, but you are married, made one with me. And you shall be one with me for an eternity to come. Once in me, in me for ever. That is the nature of my redeeming. This is the nature of my saving work. I have loved you with an everlasting love, “I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.”’

How do we know that he has called us by this name? How do we know that we are his? Look again at this word, ‘Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.’ (Jeremiah 31:3) If the Lord loves us, he draws us. What was the evidence that Mary was one of the Lord’s on that first day of the week? It was that she had to go to Jesus, and she came to him weeping. That is the evidence that we are the Lord’s. The Lord draws us — and he will not let us go. His drawing at times may feel to be only line upon line, line upon line; precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little. We may sometimes mourn over the fact that we feel we follow him so far off. We are such poor disciples. But we cannot turn back! And even if we do turn back and backslide, yet his love cannot give up on us, he must draw us again.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,

And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home rejoicing brought me. (H Baker)

So he must draw. And we find that he draws us daily. He brings us daily to the place where we have to leave all and follow him. Daily we have to confess, ‘Yes, Lord, I have been looking to my self-righteousness. Again I have been settling down on something base, instead of trusting sovereign grace.’ We have to come and confess our sins. ‘Lord, despite thy love to me, I am still a sinner. I still have a body of sin and death.’ We have to mourn over it and cry out,

O crucify this self, that I
No more, but Christ in me, may live;
Bid all my vile affections die,
Nor let one hateful lust survive.
In all things nothing may I see,
Nothing desire, or seek, but thee.’ (G
Tersteegen)

This confession and this desire to live more to his honour and glory are the drawings of Jesus Christ. They come from the influence of his love. They come from the working of the Holy Spirit. — They are the fruit of the death of Jesus Christ. And however faint these desires may be, remember this:

Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
’Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek;
His Spirit will cherish the life he first gave;
You never shall perish if Jesus can save. (J Hart)

Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ As he draws us and makes us leave all and follow him, and as he brings us to the place where we have to say,

I could from all things parted me,
But never, never, Lord, from thee, (S Medley)

that is him saying to us in our soul, ‘Mary.’

‘I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.’ That is the only reason why we come to the grave of Jesus. It is the only reason we desire him. It is the only reason we follow after him. It is the only reason we are kept. It is the only reason we are brought day by day to seek after him. If it was not for the fact that his love cannot let us go — for many waters cannot drown love — we

would fall away and be lost. But his love keeps us. It holds us. It will not let us go. It is drawing us. At last it will bring us to himself, so that where Jesus is, there we may be.

IV. In the final place, how did Mary leave the grave?

How do the Lord's people have to leave the waters of baptism? There is only one way we can leave them, if we have rightly entered in to them. — If we are coming weeping, seeking Jesus and Jesus alone, and have been brought to renounce everything to follow him, and confess we have nothing, but our all is bound up in the Lamb — then there is only one way we can leave. How is that? 'She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.'

Why is this? Because as we have to leave ourselves, our friends, our old natural religion, and the things of this world, there is only one who can be our leader. We are brought to realise that we cannot serve God and mammon. We are made willing — willing to follow Jesus and to walk in his ways. Why? Because of his love. Because we see his love. We realise this is no hard taskmaster. This is not a second law. This is Jesus Christ. This is Jesus, who so tenderly says, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' (Matthew 11:28-29)

'She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.' This is the voice of discipleship. It is a mark of grace. We may not always feel we have got this mark. Sometimes we have to say,

Nor leave me till I say,
'Father, thy will be done.' (J Hart)

But you know, where there is grace there is the confession, 'Jesus is Lord!' We own him as our Prophet, Priest and King. We own him as Wisdom, Wisdom itself, as it is set before us in Proverbs — the one who does all things well. We own him as the one who knows the end from the beginning. The one who is too wise to err, and too good to be unkind. The one who does everything in love. When he calls us to walk through dark paths, yet we find, 'Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' (Psalm 23:4) How do they comfort us? Because they are the evidences of the Shepherd, the tokens of a loving Shepherd who careth for his sheep, a Shepherd who loves his sheep sufficiently that he lays down his life for them. As we see these evidences, grace brings us to say, 'Rabboni,' 'Master.'

Reign o'er us as King, accomplish thy will,
And powerfully bring us forth from all ill;
Till, falling before thee, we laud thy loved name,
Ascribing the glory to God and the Lamb. (J Hart)

You see, there is a sense in which we have to be brought to say, 'Rabboni,' in order to come to the waters of baptism. All the while old nature is at work, all the while our proud heart has the upper hand, all the while we do not view the ordinance rightly, we will stay away. But things change when the Lord brings us to see 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' (John 1:29) That precious one! John Baptist said of him, 'Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.' Yet he comes, very God, to be baptised by John in Jordan. John says, 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' But Jesus says, 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' 'Then he suffered him.' (Matthew 3:14-15) And as we see this is the way the Master went, we must go that way too as he brings us to say, 'Rabboni!' For is the servant greater than his Lord?

Jesus brings us to follow him. Friends, the grave is only the beginning. Mary had to go up from Jesus' grave and live a life of discipleship. When the Lord's people come to this ordinance then they have to go on their way. They have to live a life of discipleship too. We need so often to come back to this same place and say, 'Rabboni.' To say, 'Lord, as thou didst make me willing in the day of thy power to be baptised, as thou didst make me submissive then, as thou didst give me to see that thou art my Lord and my God, my master, and thou didst make me willing to own thee as my all before men, so give me that same spirit now.' We need to pray, 'Whatever mountains may be before me, whatever darkness, difficulty, separation, trouble, bring me to that place where I can truly say, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.' We need to be brought to sing with John Cennick,

Lord, submissive make us go,
Gladly leaving all below;
Only thou our Leader be,
And we still will follow thee.

You see, friends, that is the point. When we can say, 'Rabboni,' and own him as our master, we will desire to walk in his ways, to see him every day. We will want him to be our teacher, for to watch over us, and lead us. We will desire to walk, as the apostle exhorts, 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.' (Hebrews 12:2)

And where is Jesus today? He is not here, he is risen! ‘Why seek ye the living among the dead?’ (Luke 24:5) If you seek an end in baptism, you won’t find it. There is another side to baptism — a coming out of the water — and we have to follow the Lamb. We have to follow on in the way he has gone, and follow on throughout this life, daily crying, ‘Jesus! reveal thyself to me. Keep me looking unto thee. Don’t leave me for a moment lest I should look away and see the wind and the waves boisterous, and begin to sink. But reveal thyself to me so that I may see thee and follow thy track and walk after thee, so that at last I would be where thou art.’ That is the cry of a disciple! That is the end of discipleship — that were he is, there we may be.

If we are always seeking Jesus behind us, we will never find him. Mary was seeking the body of Jesus on this earth. It was not to be found. It was not found in the grave where she expected it to be. Is the Lord teaching someone here this evening that he is not where they think he is, not where they expected him to be? He is not in the outward form of worship. He is not to be found confined to any special place of past blessing. He has gone to glory. ‘I go away.’ ‘I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.’ (John 14:2-3) If you are seeking Jesus this evening, where will you find him? Seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ever living to make intercession for us. That is where we have to look.

If we are enabled by grace to look to him, we will get safe at last. The only way we will persevere is to keep looking to him, saying daily, ‘Rabboni,’ ‘Master.’ Lose sight of him and we fall a prey to sin, backsliding, temptation, coldness, idolatry. We begin to think again we have some strength in ourselves. But as he draws us back to him by shedding abroad his love again in our hearts, it brings us to love him, and we come to seek him again with renewed strength and vigour. ‘Rabboni; which is to say, Master.’

‘Master!’ This is how we must leave the pool. Is there anyone who thinks that when we come to the waters of baptism, once we pass through them we can go on our own way and do what we like? That now we are a member of the church we can walk how we want to walk? — This is completely wrong! Some people think that is the doctrine we preach, that the believer can sin so that grace may abound. God forbid! If we are enabled to say by grace with Mary, ‘Rabboni! Master!’ we will not sin lightly. Why not? Because we will remember that our sins cost him wounds and blood and smart — humiliation. His love to us, and the reciprocation

of our love to him, will constrain us to walk in ways pleasing to him. This is what will keep us in the way. The only thing that will preserve us.

Are you praying this evening, 'Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not?' (Psalm 17:5) Friends, if you feel you are falling there is only one thing that will set you right again. What is it? Another sight of Jesus, so that you would be taught again to cry, 'Rabboni, Master!' and to own him again as your all. What a blessing it is that he hears the cries of his people! He heard the cry of Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink into the stormy sea. Peter cried, 'Lord, save me!' 'And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him.' (Matthew 14:30-31) The sea was at peace, there was calm round about, and they were immediately at land. Jesus hears the cries of his people when they confess, 'I have tried to be my own master.' Or in the words of Isaiah, 'O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us.' (26:13) But when his people come to confess that at the throne of grace, and cry, 'But Lord, be my leader, be my master, be my all,' he hears that cry and puts forth his hand to save. He reveals himself with power and brings us again to say, 'Rabboni; that is to say, Master.'

Now, in closing, where does our text find you this evening?

Is there anyone here who is weeping over Jesus, yet holding back from putting him on by open profession? Are there any who mourn after him? Any who desire him? Any who realise that there is no hope for them in anything else but in Jesus Christ and unless they find mercy in Jesus Christ they must be lost for ever? If this describes you, if you are weeping over him this evening, then I ask you, — why are you not at his grave? This is an ordinance for weepers, for mourners. The Lord calls for public profession, not secret discipleship. We fail to give him the glory due to his name by our silence. May the Lord bring you to the place where you cannot hold back, but you must seek him early in the morning on the first day of the week.

Rachel, this evening as you have been brought here to the grave of Jesus, you have to confess there is only one way you have come here — as he has redeemed you with that everlasting love and has called you by your name, and as he has led you here and brought you here. You wouldn't have come here of yourself. You have testified to that. Your witness is that it is alone of free and sovereign grace. May the Lord grant you the answer of a good conscience. May he keep you. As you go on your way this evening, may you be able to say to him, 'Rabboni; which is to say, Master.'

Then there are those who have walked through the waters of baptism in the past, yet you are now cold and indifferent again, following him afar off. May you be stirred up again this evening to mark how the Lord's people leave these waters, saying, 'Rabboni.' 'Master.' May it stir us up to seek him, to seek again that power that cometh alone from him, so that we would find a renewed separation from the things of time and self, and renewed union and communion with him, and a renewed desire which can only be satisfied by him. O that he would warm us again! Is there a soul here who has to say,

My heart with weeds is overgrown,
And oft is lifeless as a stone,
Nor careth for thy ways;
Yet, Lord, this Gentile heart inspire
With holy love and heavenly fire,
And it will sing thy praise. (J Berridge)

This heart will say, 'Rabboni.' 'Master.' Friends, don't leave the throne of grace until he brings you to that place, but come and cry,

Nor leave me till I say,
'Father, thy will be done.' (J Hart)

Finally, friends, is there anyone here this evening who is indifferent to these things? You are not concerned. You think these things are strange. You cannot understand why the Lord's people pass through baptism. You cannot understand when they speak about giving up all and following Jesus. You think that his ways are narrow ways, and you see the broad ways of the world — as the place where you desire to find your joys. — Remember, death is ahead of us. The grave before us lies! The waters of baptism display a solemn separation. They separate the Lord's people out of this world. The separation is not perfect in this world, but a day is coming when the sheep will finally be separated from the goats. There will be a final separation. Unless we are brought weeping to the grave of Jesus this side of our grave, we will go down into the blackness of darkness for ever. But the Word of God speaks to those who are like this. 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' (Isaiah 55:6-7) He is the only way of salvation and without him you must perish. May the Holy Spirit convince you of that fact this evening and bring you to see the solemnity of

the separation that the waters of baptism make. May he make you tremble at the thought of the final separation and so to be made to consider,

...Can I bear the piercing thought:
What if my name should be left out,
When [God] for [his] shalt call?

(Lady Huntingdon's Collection)

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.'

Amen.