

HW014 Enthroned at God's Right Hand

For forty days, the resurrected Jesus appeared to his followers. He gathered them to himself, showed them that he had conquered death, explained his ministry to them, and prepared them for the mission that lay ahead. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene at the tomb. She thought he was the gardener! "Sir, if you have moved his body, please tell me and I will take his body away and give him a secure resting place."

Mary thought Jesus was still dead. Despite the words of angelic messengers, Mary thought his body had been stolen in the night or moved to another place. She still did not grasp what the angels had said to her and the other women, "He is not here. He has risen. Why are you seeking the living one among the dead?" She was so distraught by the events on the morning of the third day that she couldn't see straight until she heard his voice, "Mary," and when she wiped the tears from her eyes and looked fully into the face of the one standing before her, she saw him – it was Jesus. He was alive.

He appeared to the other women who had come to the tomb. He appeared to Peter, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the apostles twice – once without Thomas and once with Thomas where he told Thomas to examine the scars on his hands, feet, and side and that is when Thomas bowed before him and said, "My Lord and my God."

Now that he had gathered his little band of followers in Jerusalem and shown them he was alive, it was time to meet with them in Galilee for he had told them that after he was raised he would go before them into Galilee. And in Galilee, there was someone in Nazareth he wanted to see.

[At 3:02 I play 008547728-quiet-faith-wp-03-alt2-reflect. I repeated it several times so that it lasted for 7:25] The little family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in Nazareth of Galilee did not remain little. There had been six other children in the family – four boys and two girls. They had grown up with Jesus, attended synagogue services with him and entered adult life one by one, marrying and having families of their own. But Jesus always remained single and special. Sometimes Mary would give them hints at Jesus being special, but they never understood why and when he entered his ministry, they thought he had lost his mind. Once they went to get him and bring him home! But over time they could not deny the miracle-working power of Jesus and that something special was happening in Israel through him. But as they watched his ministry expand, they also noticed that the religious authorities were not happy with him.

"He is going to get himself into trouble!" they worried. "The priests and the Pharisees don't like his message and what he is doing. He needs to be careful." And one day, their worst fears came to pass – they heard the news – Jesus had gone to Jerusalem, confronted the authorities in the Temple and was arrested and executed on a cross. The family members mourned the loss of their brother and none more than James who was closest in age to Jesus.

Two weeks had passed since they heard the dreadful news. They had made plans to go to Jerusalem to talk to his followers and to their mother, Mary who had accompanied him on his final journey to

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the city of David, but then they were surprised when one day Mary returned home with John, the beloved disciple of Jesus.

The brothers and sisters wept when they saw them walking toward their home. They went to them, to share in their sorrow, and to comfort their mother, but they were astonished at her countenance. Mary and John were happily talking, laughing, and smiling. Their faces were radiant with joy as if they had just come from a wedding feast or the coronation of a king.

“Children, greetings to you all! It is so good to see you again.”

“Mother, it is wonderful to see you also, and you too John but why are you so ... so happy? We heard the dreadful news about Jesus. We feared for you.”

John said, “James, Joses, Jude, all of you – we have the most wonderful news to share with you. Jesus is alive! Jesus has risen from the dead! What he told us all along, even here in Galilee was true. He said he would go to Jerusalem and die at the hands of wicked people but on the third day he would rise.”

The children looked to Mary who said, “Yes, it is true. Jesus is alive. He has risen from the dead!”

The children looked at each other and didn’t know what to say. Risen from the dead? How could Jesus rise from the dead? The resurrection of God’s people would not occur until the last day of heaven and earth and then all of God’s people would rise from the dead.

“Mother, John, please come into my house. It has been a long journey for you, and I know your heart must be filled with grief and longing for your son.” And James led them all to his home and listened as Mary and John recounted all that had happened in Jerusalem in Jesus’ final days and what had happened on the third day after his death.

They listened with horror and grief as they heard about Jesus’ crucifixion, but they noticed that Mary and John were not in grief. Their faces continued to beam, and they continued to say that Jesus had come back to life on the third day, but like many others, James and his brothers and sisters doubted and could not yet believe.

“These have been extraordinary days for you. But now it is time to rest,” James said. And they all went to their homes to rest for the night. John stayed with James and Mary went to the home of one of the daughters. John and Mary were filled with joy and peace. But the other children were confused and anxious. They did not know what to think of the story that Jesus had risen from the dead, until Jesus appeared.

“James,” the voice said. James awoke with a start. He heard the voice again. It sounded like it was coming from outside his home. “James, come with me.” And James arose and went outside into the beautiful springtime night. Down the road was a man who was beckoning him, “James, follow me.” And the man turned and walked out of the village of Nazareth.

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James' heart was pounding within him. Was this a dream? He approached the man carefully and said, "Who are you? What do you want with me? I don't know if I want to follow you any further outside the safety of our village."

And the person with a small laugh said, "That is what you have always said, James – you don't know if you want to follow me." Then, Jesus pulled the robe back from his face and revealed himself to his brother. "What Mary and John have said to you and the others is true. I am alive! I have risen from the dead. I am the Messiah."

Jesus came to him and embraced him warmly. "It is finished James – all the doubting, all the fears, all the concerns. It is now in the past and gone. And you will become one of my greatest followers and teachers in Jerusalem. You must tell the others. I will see you again before I go to my Father. But for now, go home and rest. In the morning tell the others what you have seen and prepare them to see me again here in Galilee." Jesus walked away and vanished from his sight. But when James went home, he didn't wait until the morning, he awakened the others. He went to all their homes and said, "It is true! Jesus is alive! He is the Messiah of Israel."

In another part of Galilee several of Jesus' disciples were gathered together. John had left Mary with her family who were all rejoicing over the resurrection of Jesus. John was once again with his brother and with Peter and Thomas and a few of the other disciples. They had not seen Jesus for many days and one evening Peter said, "Let's go fishing."

"Fishing?" Thomas said. "Why do you want to go fishing? Shouldn't you prepare yourself to see Jesus? I thought you were done with fishing!"

"For old times' sake, everyone. Let's go fishing again. Besides, Jesus appeared to us once before when we were fishing. Maybe he'll do it again!"

The disciples were soon happily gathering their nets into their boat at the Sea of Galilee. Memories flooded their minds – and all night long they talked about many things – the miracle of the great catch of fish, the storm on the Sea of Galilee that nearly killed them, Jesus' power over the storm, the time when Jesus walked on water and Peter walked on water with him, the demon possessed man on the eastern shores the lake, and the day when Jesus fed 5000 hungry men with a few loaves and fish.

Hour after hour passed. The men repeatedly put their nets into the lake and every time they pulled up the net, there was nothing. Then, just as the sun was rising, and the men exhausted, they started their journey back to the shore and saw someone standing on the beach who cupped his hands to his mouth and said,

"Children, you do not have any fish, do you?"

And one of them yelled back, "No, sir, not tonight. No fish tonight."

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And the man on the shore said again, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some!”

The men looked at each other. They had heard that before. They threw their net out one more time and when they drew it up it was filled with fish! John said, “Peter, it is the Lord!” But Peter was already diving into the water and swimming with all his might to the shore while the others pulled the haul of fish into the boat. When Peter got to the shore there was Jesus, a small charcoal fire going with a small cooking pan on the fire and fish in the pan!

“Peter, go get some of the fish you have just caught and let’s eat together!”

And so, Peter went back to help his fellow-disciples draw the net onto the shore. They were surprised the net did not break with so many fish – 153 in one catch!

“Come, let’s have breakfast!” Jesus said. And that morning they ate with Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.”

They talked about so many things. Jesus listened to them with joy and taught them many things and reminded of many things they had forgotten.

“Do you remember what I said to you at the beginning? Peter, you and Andrew and James and John were cleaning your nets. You had worked hard all night and caught nothing and you were preparing to go home and rest when I told you to go back out on the lake and fish with me. Do you remember what happened?”

“Yes, Lord – the same thing that happened just now. I thought you were foolish to tell us to go out during the daylight to fish but we obeyed and we brought in our greatest catch. That’s how we knew it was you when you told us just now to do the same thing and when our nets filled with fish.”

“Yes. Do you remember what I said to you then?”

“Yes, Lord, you said, that if we follow you, you would make us become fishers of men. I also remember feeling so unworthy in your presence. I told you to depart me because I was a sinful man.”

“But did I tell you to depart from me Peter?”

“No, master, you told me then to follow you. I want to follow you now.”

“Peter, do you love me? Do you have a heart of strong commitment to me?”

Peter looked away. He had declared his loyalty to Jesus once before and failed miserably. Should he declare his commitment to him again?

“Yes Lord, you know the special place you have in my heart. You know the kind of love I have for you.”

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“Peter, my people are like little lambs. I want you to tend to my lambs. But I must ask you again, do you love me with a heart of full commitment?”

“Lord, you know the kind of love I have for you. You know my deep affection for you. You know the special place in my heart for you.”

“Yes Peter, and I want you to shepherd my sheep. But Peter, I must ask you, do you have that deep affection for me? Do I really have a special place in your heart for me?”

And when Peter heard Jesus ask him a third time, grief filled his heart for Jesus had gone to the deepest place of his heart, the place of his deepest affection, that special place in his heart for Jesus and was questioning him there. Peter thought on the night when he loudly proclaimed his full commitment to Jesus. He thought on his bold words when he said he would be willing to die for Jesus, and he thought on his terrible failure in the courtyard when he three times denied that he even knew Jesus.

And now here he was again with Jesus and the other disciples and talking with him about love and loyalty and commitment. But this time it was different. This time he knew beyond a doubt who Jesus was. Jesus had gone through the worst. Jesus had endured death and had conquered. Jesus was alive and whole and Lord of all and Peter stood up and with a smile and confident heart said,

“Jesus, Master, you know all things. You are Lord of all things. You know that this time you have the deepest part of my heart. You know that I love you. You know that nothing can remove you from my heart this time!”

And Jesus stood up with him and said, “Yes, Peter, I do know that, and you know it now also. Tend my sheep.”

“Peter, truly, truly I say to you, when you were a younger man you did as you liked. You dressed yourself and went wherever you pleased. But one day, when you become an old man, others will dress you and they will take you to a place where you will not want to go. But in this new time of temptation and in your suffering and in your death, you will glorify me.”

Peter felt a huge burden lift from his shoulders. When he first met and talked with Jesus on that resurrection day, he had felt so ashamed of his failures. Jesus had forgiven him and reinstated him to his place with the other apostles. But Peter wondered what would happen if he would ever face the temptation to deny Jesus again. But now Jesus had assured him that he would be faithful even to death and that he would lead Jesus’ people.

“Thank you, Lord, and Lord, what about this man? What about John? What will happen to him?” And Jesus replied, “Peter, what is that to you. You just follow me. If I want John to live until I come again, that is between me and him, but you follow me.”

For many more days Jesus met with the disciples. One time in Galilee he appeared to more than 500 in one gathering! It was like a reunion as people traded stories and listened to Jesus. People he had

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healed, people he had fed, people he had taught, sinners he had forgiven. They were privileged to see the resurrected, glorified Jesus. These were glorious occasions. Jesus would sit for hours with his followers and would explain to them the things about the kingdom of God. For hours, they would go through the great stories of their people and Jesus would explain how all the Scriptures pointed to him.

“The story of Abraham,” Jesus said, “what was the main point of the covenant that God made with Abraham?”

“That he would have a son, a miracle son, who was Isaac.”

“Yes, that is true,” Jesus said “but was it only about his son Isaac? Was it not about a greater son who would come because Isaac died as did his son Jacob and Jacob’s twelve sons. They all died. But I have risen from the dead! I am the true son of Abraham. When God told Abraham that he would have a miracle son, Abraham, by faith looked ahead and saw me. The reason why God promised Abraham a son was so that all the families of the nations could be blessed. Isn’t that what the covenant said? ‘In you Abraham, all the families of the earth will be blessed.’ God loves all people and wants to bless the whole world. God loves all the sons of Adam.”

Jesus continued. “Our people, Israel, why did God choose them? It was so that they might be a light to the nations of the world that live in darkness. They are awaiting the light of God’s people. You are now the light of the world and I will be sending you to shine upon them that they might turn from their darkness and embrace me.”

Matthew asked, “Lord, what about David? God promised that one of David’s sons would sit on the throne and rule over the world? Are you that son of David?”

“I am. I am the Son of David as well as the Son of Abraham. I am the king of Israel and I will soon be enthroned at God’s right hand from which I will reign over heaven and earth. All the promises to David are fulfilled in me. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. I told you about many of these things when I was with you before I died but you did not understand. And I say to you now, all that is written in the Law of Moses, in the Psalms, and in the Prophets is fulfilled in me. They wrote that the Messiah would suffer and rise on the third day. I have suffered and now I have entered my glory.

“They wrote this also. They said that this good news would be preached in all the world, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in all the nations, starting from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of this, and I will send my Spirit upon you. You are to go back to Jerusalem and there you will remain until you are clothed with power from heaven.”

Forty days had now passed since Jesus rose. He had appeared to his people and taught them. He also prepared them for the mission that was before them. They were all back in Bethany. Then, they walked to the Mount of Olives and Jesus said, “I told you many things about the Spirit of God. John, my forerunner, my prophet talked about him. He baptized in water but I am the one who will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. It will not be many days from now. Go back to Jerusalem and wait for the promise.”

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“Lord, when you send the Spirit, will this be the time that we reign in Israel? Will this be the time when the kingdom is restored to us?”

And Jesus replied, “That is not for you to know! You do not need to know how all these details will work out. Only the Father needs to know these things. But there is one thing you can know. When I send my Spirit upon you, you will receive power. You will have power like you have never known, and it will be power to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and even to the most remote place on earth. Be my witnesses. Make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them. Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you, and I will be with you to the end of the age!”

[At 24:16 I play 007909238-glory-building-orchestral. I play it until 26:43. I laid down six tracks with the song beginning again every 20 seconds on different tracks giving it a bigger sound.] As Jesus said these words he lifted his arms in blessing. The disciples looked on in amazement. Heaven opened before them. A bright light shone around Jesus. He rose in their sight and they could hear glorious sounds and words of indescribable praise coming from heaven. It seemed as if all of heaven was worshipping him and then Jesus was parted from them.

Jesus turned his gaze away from his disciples and lifted his eyes to the throne of God. A brilliant rainbow light of joy beckoned him to come and take his place at God’s right hand. Jesus looked around. All angels bowed before him. There was Gabriel, his faithful servant, the one who announced to old Zacharias that he would have a son and the one who announced to Mary that she would be with child. There was Michael who fought valiantly for his people throughout the ages.

All the saints of old knelt before him – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, the prophets, John his forerunner and men and women from the first man Adam – Abel, Seth, Noah, countless men and women bowed in worship before the one who had emptied himself and become one of them, yet without sin. They bowed in worship to the one who had obeyed all the way to the cross. And they watched as Jesus, the God-man, the Lamb who was slain for their sins approached the throne of God. And then they erupted in praise giving glory to the one who sits on the throne and glory to the Lamb who had been slain and risen!” Again and again, they repeated their praise to their Creator and Redeemer.

And then the Father stood up and the saints fell silent as he said, “Welcome my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Be enthroned at my right hand. Reign over heaven. Reign over earth, and I will make all of your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

The disciples were still looking into the sky. They watched with amazement as Jesus parted from them. They heard the music of heaven for a few moments more and then the door was shut. They saw no more but they continued to look hoping for one more glimpse of their beloved master who had loved them to the end, who had suffered more than any other for their sins and for the sins of the whole world, and who had risen from the dead on the third day. They strained for one more sight of the One who was Lord of heaven and earth but the door was shut for now. Blue sky and birds flying overhead was all they saw in the brilliant light of God’s new day.

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Then, two men stood beside them and said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing and looking into the sky? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven but he will come again in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven.” And then they disappeared.

The disciples looked at each other. They embraced. Some wept, and they walked the road to Jerusalem to wait for the Spirit of God.