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Rethinking The Women Who Came to The Lord's Tomb

Introduction

I first saw Jean Mahaffey at an Easter Bible conference in 1965 in Belfast. I immediately was struck with her but it would be approximately 9 months before she would go out with me (I had to ask her three times). We got married February 1st 1969. That was the beginning of a relationship of 53 years 10 months and 10 days, or 19,671 days. Then, at 3:03 A.M. on December 30th 2022 my wife exited this earthly scene.

Over the following days I was in a state of numbness, shock, mechanically moving, whatever way one wants to describe it. I functioned. I had known Jean was dying for I sat with her throughout the days and nights as her gasping for air was becoming fainter. Then it stopped, and at that moment I became a widower.

On the day before the funeral our whole family went to see “mum” for the last time. When I was led into the little room where Jean was in the casket, it was factual. Then, at the moment I looked in that casket and saw my Jean, something happened. This was real. At that moment all the grief and deep love I had for her, like a volcano burst forth in deep uncontrollable wails. Like the waves of an ocean, waves of deep grief and wailing overcame me. I did not care about protocol, this was my Jean, I put my arms around her shoulders and I lifted her in my arms, I stroked her hair and laid her down again, then went over the same thing again, kissing her as I had done so often in life. This was different, there was no response, just a dreadful coldness. The next day my wife Jean was buried. It was undoubtedly the darkest day of my life.

If It Happened To Me

I tell all this because of thoughts which came to my mind on a following Sunday when, for the first time, put myself in the shoes of the women who came to the tomb of the Lord. How would I have felt, what would my reaction be if I went three days after my wife was buried and saw the soil all taken out of the grave and looking into it I see the casket lid removed and her body gone. It would have been a moment of agonizing, tumultuous confusing emotions. I thought, how must they have felt seeing the stone rolled away, “what has happened?”, for they did not know the earthquake had moved the stone. Then, going into the tomb and seeing the grave clothes but no body, to hear the words, “He is risen” and then to see Him standing there! It would be moments and minutes filled with grief stricken confusion, then a state of shock, and then relief when He spoke.

The Results of The Resurrection of The Lord

One result was they never got to do that which they were willing and ready to do. They had come to embalm the body of the Lord. That was a stupendous activity of love. A body three days after death without embalming had begun to bloat, the colour has changed, possibly bubbles come from nostrils and there is a distinct smell. It is not a job for the fainthearted or squeamish, yet such was their love for the Lord they came to embalm the body. With diligence and without a doubt, with teary eyes they gathered the needed items. Having wrapped all together they came to the sepulchre. I expect there was very little talk on the way to the site. They were not intent on seeing the sepulchre, the purpose was to go into the tomb with a combined heart of love and wrap it. Then they learnt that the Lord had risen! That which they had gathered was not needed, Jesus was alive. How their hearts must have rejoiced when the glorious truth dawned on them. Jesus is not dead, Jesus is not in the tomb, Jesus has risen from among the dead ones.

- a) What an encouragement this is for many of the people of God. There is a work they are willing to do and ready to do but never get doing it. David knew what this was like. He had the plans and the abilities and the materials to build the house of the Lord, but was stopped by God. Ezekiel knew this experience. He was of a priestly family and would have been a priest. For years it seems he had done his apprenticeship when he was taken from the temple into Babylon. What a sad day he must have thought. Perhaps wondering why was he so far from what He was trained to do for God? God took his training and showed him a superior temple and revealed to Him the glory of the Lord. He wrote of it and taught why God must punish sin, but never attended to the work he apprenticed to do. The question that comes is will they or will they not receive a reward for their intentions?

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- b) My thought is that God appreciates every iota of work or meditation that exalts His Son and there will be a reward for them. Paul in 1 Corinthians 4 informed the saints at Corinth, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). The Lord knew the motivation of these women and at the Judgment Seat they will have praise from God.

It is interesting to observe that God always works from the night to the morning. In Genesis one it reads, "And the evening and morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5). David wrote, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa. 30:5). When the truth of the Lord's resurrection began to dawn and its full magnificence filled their hearts, they could not contain the excitement. Jesus was alive. They ran to the place where the disciples were gathered.

Peter and John ran to the sepulchre. Then that evening the Lord stood in their midst. Nothing like this had ever been seen before and never would again. The man so cruelly crucified three days ago now stood before them, eating and speaking to them. This was no hallucination, it was real. Years later the Lord appeared to John on the Island of Patmos and what a sight that was. Consider:

- a) His authority (Rev. 1:11)
- b) His centrality (Rev. 1:13)
- c) His clothing (Rev. 1:13)
- d) His voice (Rev. 1:15)
- e) His gloriousness (Rev. 1:16)
- f) His exhortation (Rev. 1:17b-18) - "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Conclusion

On this cold rainy winter's day I visited the grave of my Jean. Because He lives my Jean is living in the fullness of eternal bliss, free from every confusion of mind and worship the Lord as she was never able to on earth. I have learnt that any enlightenment one gets of the Lord will fill the heart with immensity of joy, a sense of contrition, and a fulness of wonder. How blest to be able to say, this is my Beloved and this is my friend.

. . . . *Rowan Jennings*