

April 24, 2011 – Resurrection Day

ESCAPING CAGES (Based on a sermon by Bob Broadbooks)

John 20:1-18

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. **2** She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

**3** Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. **4** They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. **6** Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, **7** while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. **8** Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— **9** for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. **10** Then they went home.

**11** Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. **12** She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. **13** "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

**14** She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. **15** "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

**16** "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

**17** "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

**18** Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

Houston Holloway, a former slave from Georgia said, as he recalled the moment slavery ended, "I felt like a bird out of a cage. Amen. Amen. Amen. I could hardly ask to feel any better than I did on that day." When you escape a cage, that's exactly how you feel—free—free as a bird.

Once a man came across a little boy with a bird cage.

Man: what do you have there?

Boy: cage of wild birds

Man: Wild birds? Where did you get them?

Boy: In that field over there, I like to catch 'em and put them in this cage

Man: What do you do with them?

Boy: I like to play with them?

Man: Play with them? How?

Boy: Sometimes I take a stick and poke at 'em thru the cage; or shake the cage real hard.

Man: What do you do when you're done with them?

Boy: I feed 'em to my cat.

Man: You feed them to your cat?

Boy: Yeah, my cat really likes to eat wild birds.

Man: Tell you what, I'll buy those birds from you?

Boy: You want to buy these birds?

Man: Yes, I'll give you \$5 for them.

Boy: \$10

Man: Okay, \$10

Boy: \$20

Man: Okay, \$20, that's everything I have.

The boy sold the birds, and as soon as the boy left, the man, opened the cage and set them all free.

This is a picture of what Jesus does for us. The enemy had us in cages, poking at us and shaking us up. Then the devil says to the Lord:

Devil: You love these humans don't you?

JC: Yes, I do

Devil: Your willing to buy them.

JC: Yes.

Devil: It will cost you everything you know.

JC: I know.

Devil: It will cost you your tears

JC: I know

Devil: It will cost you your blood

JC: I know

Devil: It will cost you your life!

JC: I know

Devil: Some will not even care what you've done for them, yet you are still willing to die for them?

JC: I AM!

Mary Magdalene struggled with her own cages. She had been a woman of great sin until she met Jesus. He had released her from that cage and she felt a deep love for His grace. Long after everyone else had left the hill of Calvary, Mary lingered. Heartbroken she was the last one to leave the scene of His crucifixion. She felt constrained to stand there with Him until Joseph and Nicodemus took His body for burial preparation. She had been released from the cage of sin's guilt but now her Savior was dead and the new cage of gloom was oppressive.

With reddened eyes and tear-stained cheeks, she made her way to the tomb in the darkness of early Sunday morning. We find the determination of this woman to be fascinating. Even in her sorrow, she is undeterred to care for her Savior. When she arrives, shockingly she discovers the stone is removed from the entrance. The body is gone. She runs back to town and declares to Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (vs. 2).

The three of them run back to the tomb and discover it is true. The grave clothes are neatly folded and the body is gone. Peter and John return home. But not Mary! She wants to find out the truth of the situation.

She is standing outside the tomb crying and she looks inside once again. She sees two angels in white. To them she repeats her issue, "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him" (vs. 13). She isn't done with her question. She sees who she thinks is the gardener and she asks him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (vs. 15). Three times she says the same thing. This woman is determined. She is going to find her Jesus! She is pushing forward even though she is captured in a cage of sorrow and gloom.

Some don't have that strength. Cages come and they are too much to bear. The cage closes in and the prisoner stops dreaming of escape.

I was interested to read about how to survive if you get trapped in a cage with a lion. I am not certain how you would make your way into such a tight spot but just in case it ever happens, I decided to read the article. It said you should stay calm and not run. Oh sure, that would be my natural reaction. Next you should start screaming as loud as possible. Now that sounds like sound advice. I think that one is doable. The article said

nothing about praying like your life depended on it, but that would be my strong recommendation!

You may be struggling with some devastating cages in your life. Have you been battling a difficult illness that has sapped both your strength and your courage? The doctor leaned across his desk recently and mentioned a terrible word like cancer or heart problem or liver disease. You felt the cage tightening around your life, didn't you?

Maybe your cage is living in the past. You made a horrible mistake a few years ago and you can't seem to forgive yourself. The guilt and shame just keep growing.

Perhaps your dreams just didn't work out. You had so many plans and ambitions. You were going to make a difference with your life, but the circumstances stopped you in your hopeful tracks. You really wanted a child but somehow, the birth never came. You dreamed of raising strong, healthy, contributing children but it just didn't happen.

Maybe your cage is some sinful behavior that you have become trapped in. You know it is wrong; that it is harming you and your family, but you can't seem to give it up.

Perhaps you like Mary have lost a loved one and the sorrow has become overwhelming. Or maybe you have lost your independence, lost your way, or lost your children. Either way, it's a cage.

Whatever your cage, I have wonderful news for you today. You can be released! Like Mary, you can determine that you are not going to rest until you find your answer. Her answer came as she listened to her name being whispered. The Gardener said, "Mary" (vs. 16). I imagine she stopped breathing for a moment. She recognized His voice and knew immediately that Her Savior was alive. In that instant, her cage door swung wildly and widely open. The gloom and darkness in her heart and mind burst into brilliant light. She was released!

Oh, friend, just listen for your name. Look into His face. Wait before His presence. He is able to help you escape your cage. He may not necessarily free your body, but if you let Him, He will free your mind and soul. He can do this because in a moment 2,000 years ago, Jesus escaped His own cage.....the cage of death. And since that time, He has moved from house to house and from heart to heart all over this universe releasing the captives.

If you will let our resurrected Lord do this for you, like Mary, you will escape your cage, race unashamedly with the good news, and declare, "I have seen the Lord" (vs. 18)!