

JESUS APPEARS TO MARY

John 20:11-18

Creating life in a laboratory, or altering it in some way has long fascinated the imagination of many people. A mad scientist created the fictional character, Frankenstein, hoping to create a life that would serve him and do his bidding. But something went haywire and Frankenstein turned out to be a monster. In modern laboratories the creation of new forms of life is allegedly becoming possible through “*genetic engineering*.” The process takes the gene for a specific characteristic out of one organism and transplants it into another for a desired change. It would supposedly revolutionize food production, diagnose and cure diseases, and alter forms of life such as giving a cat a bark and dogs hooves instead of paws.¹

The genetically engineered DNA technique developed in the early 1970s allows scientists to identify a characteristic from the DNA molecule of one species and to transplant it into another. This literally permits them to “*recombine*” genetic characteristics into hybrid forms of life unique in nature. At the time of this writing over 80 university laboratories in the U. S. are working in this new dimension in science, together with at least nine private companies.² The result has included such foods as genetically engineered rice and corn, which supposedly have greater food value or shelf life.

On the negative side, however, there are grave risks involved. This recombination process is tricky and could cause some pretty catastrophic results. If deadly and recombined organisms escaped from the lab, they could irreversibly cripple life on earth. For instance, E. coli bacteria, which are most often used by scientists, are commonly found in nearly all mammals, including man. The name E. coli probably strikes terror to your heart because it has been the source of so many deadly food poisoning outbreaks over the last few years. Yet scientists experiment with some strains they consider helpful. If an altered E. coli should escape, it would find a ready home almost any place, possibly spreading contagious, uncontrollable diseases across the land.³ There are equally disastrous results with the use of embryonic stem cells because they have a mind of their own and the best intentions can result in another Frankenstein. Even apart from that

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

possibility, there have been dangerous results from combining the genes of one food with the genes of another food.

A retired psychologist who was dying of cancer decided to have his body preserved by freezing for later revival if possible. He therefore provided \$4,200 for a steel capsule and for liquid nitrogen to keep his body frozen at 200 degrees below zero centigrade. The Cryonics Society of California helped. The body was flown to Phoenix where the professor's remains are kept in liquid-nitrogen storage. His underlying hope was that when cures for cancer are discovered, the body could be thawed out, cured, and restored to healthy life.⁴

"But although some of the lower forms of life, such as bacteria, can survive freezing and thawing, no higher animal can, and certainly not man. Not even a single major human organ can be thus preserved."⁵ But the achievement of restoring a live organ is still young and experimental. There have been some recent experiments of taking a living person's own DNA from a specific organ, growing a new organ outside the body, and then transplanting that organ into the original person, but the person has to be alive to start and to complete this prospect. "So the prospect of restoring functions to a whole lifeless body with dozens of organs and cell types is even more remote."⁶

Another story takes us to an underground storage site near Los Angeles where a dozen men and women lie in capsules that look like giant vacuum flasks. Their bodies are wrapped in tinfoil. Remove the foil and a thin layer of frost covers their faces. An icy mist of liquid nitrogen clings to each body.⁷

These people have been dead for some years. But centuries from now, attempts may be made to bring them back to life again. They chose this odd method of entombment in the hope that, at some time in the future when medical science has improved far beyond today's standards, they will be thawed from their deep-frozen state and cured of the disease that killed them. Some of the corpses have been there since 1967. They could be there for hundreds of years because, if the person died from a particular form of cancer, it could take that long before an effective cure is found.⁸ I seem to recall that Walt Disney was one of the first to commit himself to this kind of experiment.

So it seems that there are an awful lot of people who would like to go on living as long as is possible, and there are a lot of other people who would like to change their, or perhaps even their unborn children's, genetic makeup. Parents might want a child that looks like a movie star, throws a football like Tom Brady, or perhaps has the mind of an Einstein.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Some people are willing to do almost anything to be anything but what they are, and it is a crying shame that they feel that way. If they could only come to know the Savior, Jesus Christ, they would find the kind of peace in the body they have instead of looking for a body that they would probably not be satisfied with anyway. God made you special according to His very unique plan for you. He made you just the way you should be to find maximum peace and happiness with the skills He developed especially for you. You are not going to be happy if you try to change His perfect design. You might even destroy any opportunity you had for happiness by messing with the perfection of God's design and special plan for your life. Instead of looking for your identity by changing your physical appearance or by adopting certain habits and practices of the culture, you will find the most satisfaction and fulfillment in following God's ways and being the person He wants you to be. When you have found your identity in Him, you have found your true identity.

No matter how good you are to your body, God has designed it so that one day it is simply going to wear out. The mortality rate on this earth is 100% and it will continue to be 100% right up until the day Jesus returns. So you are going to die sooner or later and your days are numbered by God alone. He planned the exact year, month, day, hour, and second that you were born, and He has also planned the exact year, month, day, hour, and second you will die and there is nothing you can do about either.

Now, of course, some people take their own lives but that is just stupid. Because if you are a Christian, you are going to severely reduce the reward that God would have presented to you had you lived according to His plan until He took you home. And if you are not a Christian, you will go from misery in this life to a far worse misery in Hell for eternity.

Now if you would simply put your trust in God, when your time comes, you will immediately find yourself in Heaven. You will then take a form that we do not really know any details about, but we do know that everything in your world will be perfect beyond your wildest dreams. Then when Jesus returns, all believers throughout all of history will receive a new physical body that will be perfect in every way. You will not stand in front of the mirror wishing you had a smaller nose, or smaller ears, or a different color hair. You will not worry about having washboard abs, or being too fat, or too dumb. You will be perfect in every way and that is exactly the way you will feel about yourself.

As we return today to the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead we begin to see what it will be like to live in a new resurrected body. It is our hope and prayer that by the time we finish studying this section of John, you will rejoice in how special God has made each of you and how much more special you are going to be when you get to Heaven.

John 20:11-18 NAS:

¹¹ *But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept,*

she stooped and looked into the tomb;

¹² *and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.*

¹³ *And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."*

¹⁴ *When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.*

¹⁵ *Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."*

¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).*

¹⁷ *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.' "*

¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "**I have seen the Lord**," and that He had said these things to her.*

Mary Magdalene remained at the tomb after Peter and John left. Mary was probably hoping to get some kind of clue as to what had happened to Jesus. She then approached the opening of the tomb, **stooped down** and saw something that Peter and John had not seen only moments before. She saw **two angels**. This is the same thing that had happened to the other women who went to the tomb as we see in Luke 24:22, 23 NAS:

²² *"But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning,*

²³ *and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive.*

Ordinarily if a person had seen an angel they would be thrilled to death, but Mary matter-of-factly told them why she was weeping when they asked her, but then turned away before hearing anything about Jesus rising from the dead. Listen to the account Mark gives us of this same event.

Mark 16:1-11 NLT:

¹ *Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary the mother of James went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body.*

² *Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb.*

³ *On the way they were asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"*

⁴ *But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was*

very large, had already been rolled aside.

⁵ *When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked,*

⁶ *but the angel said, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn’t here! **He is risen from the dead!** Look, this is where they laid his body.*

⁷ *Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died.”*

⁸ *The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened. Then they briefly reported all this to Peter and his companions. Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen.*

⁹ *After Jesus rose from the dead early on Sunday morning, the first person who saw him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom he had cast out seven demons.*

¹⁰ *She went to the disciples, who were grieving and weeping, and told them what had happened.*

¹¹ *But when she told them that Jesus was alive and she had seen him, they didn’t believe her.*

The account of Mary Magdalene remaining alone in the garden resonates with Proverbs 8:17: *I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me.*” Mary loved Jesus and came to the garden early in the morning to express that love. Peter and John had gone home by the time Mary got back to the tomb, so they were not able to tell her what conclusion they had reached from the evidence they had examined. Mary still thought that Jesus was dead. This brings to mind another verse: Psalm 30:5: *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”*

When Mary looked into the tomb, she saw two men in white. Mary apparently was not at all affected by seeing these men. Maybe she did not even realize they were angels. The few words she exchanged with them apparently had no effect on her. She had one thing and one thing only on her mind, and that was to find the body of Jesus. Why did Mary turn away and not continue her conversation with the two strangers? Did she hear a sound behind her? Why then did she not recognize Jesus? It was still early and perhaps dark in that part of the garden. Her eyes may have been blinded by her tears as well. Or maybe there was another reason.⁹

All Jesus had to do was to speak her name, and Mary immediately recognized Him. I have often thought of the gentleness and love that must have sounded in His voice as He

⁹ Note also that the persons with whom Jesus talked on the Emmaus Road later that same day did not recognize Jesus either, until He broke the bread. See Luke 24:13-34, especially verses 13-16 and 30-31.

spoke Mary's name. Surely, Jesus calls all of us to Himself with that same tone of voice. John 10:3 tells us "*His sheep hear [recognize] His voice and He calls them by name.*" All Mary could say was, "*Rabboni—my Master, my Teacher.*" The Jews recognized three levels of teachers: rab (the lowest), rabbi, and rabboni (the highest).

After seeing the empty tomb, Mary first went to Peter and John, sobbing uncontrollably while informing them that someone had taken away Jesus' body. After Jesus came back to life early on Sunday, He appeared first to Mary from Magdala, from whom He had forced out seven demons. She went and told His friends, who were grieving and crying. They did not believe her when they heard that He was alive and that she had seen Him" (Mark 16:9-11). Her devotion to Jesus was unquestionable. While the disciples remained hidden from view, fearful of the soldiers, Mary boldly ventured to the graveside to make a carefully prepared anointing of her Lord's body. Unafraid of the political nonsense that had brought Jesus to His death, she boldly declared her loyalty by demanding to know the final location of Jesus' body. Her grief was real; her devotion to Jesus was genuine. Jesus rewarded her unselfish devotion by approaching her first.

Jesus asked her the same question that the angels had asked, "*Why are you weeping?*" Then He added, "*Whom are you seeking?*" Jesus knew that Mary's heart was broken and that she was confused. He did not criticize her, but lovingly revealed Himself to her.

Apparently Mary's first impulse, in her joy at seeing Jesus, was to put her arms around Him. Jesus did not rebuke the other women for holding His feet (Matthew 28:9), for this was an act of worship. Later, He did not shrink from inviting Thomas to touch Him (John 20:27).

So why did He say to Mary, "*Do not cling to Me*"? Mary needed to know that she did not have to cling to Him physically in order to know He was present with her. Later, after His Ascension to Heaven, she would have His constant presence through the Holy Spirit. At the moment, Mary needed to know that Jesus was now glorified, as is the Father in Heaven, even though He was willing to remain with His followers for a time. When Christ gently told Mary, "*I am not yet ascended,*" the meaning seems to be that she would be able to touch Jesus in some sense after His Ascension. She would be able touch Him by faith through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

So we see that the words, "*Don't cling to me,*" indicate that Mary needed to realize that Jesus' physical presence was not permanent. He explained that He had not yet ascended to the Father. Jesus' ascent to the Father would open up the new relationship of Jesus and the Father with the believer through the Holy Spirit.¹¹

¹⁰ Hughes, Robert B.; Laney, J. Carl; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 483.

¹¹ Ibid.

Another reason was that she would see Jesus again on earth because He had not yet ascended to the Father. He remained on earth for forty days after His resurrection and often appeared to the believers to teach them spiritual truth (Acts 1:1–9). Mary had no need to panic; this was not her last and final meeting with the Lord.

Mary not only spoke to Jesus in the garden, but she grasped His feet and held on to Him. This was a natural gesture: now that she had found Him, she did not want to lose Him. She and the other believers still had a great deal to learn about His new state of glory. They still wanted to relate to Him as they had done during the years of His ministry before the cross

A third reason is that Mary had a job to do—to go tell Jesus’ disciples that He was alive and would ascend to the Father. After He had explained to her that she did not need to cling to Him physically, Jesus instructed Mary to return to His brothers and give them a very important message. Although He had not yet ascended to His Father, that event would happen soon. When Jesus used the term *brothers*, He was referring to His disciples. Earlier in the Passover discourse, Jesus had said to them, “*I don’t call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. But I’ve called you friends because I’ve made known to you everything that I’ve heard from my Father*” (John 15:15). Now, risen from the grave, Jesus called them “*My brothers.*”

“*He is not ashamed to call them brethren*” (Hebrews 2:11). This meant that they shared His resurrection power and glory.

At His word, however, Mary arose and went to where the disciples were gathered and gave them the good news that she had seen Jesus alive. “*I have seen the Lord!*” Sadly, Mark reports that these believers were mourning and weeping, and that they would not believe her! (Mark 16:9–11)

When Jesus told Mary to go and tell the disciples that He had risen, He had told her to do what He would later tell the whole Church to do—to go and tell that Jesus has risen.¹²

Now that the penalty for sin had been fully paid, Jesus could tell them, “*I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*” Jesus could refer to them as brothers, for the eternal God was now fully accessible to them. They could call God their Father, just as Jesus had throughout His entire ministry with them. Although Jesus had told Mary that He had not yet returned to His Father, it was very important that the disciples knew this would happen soon.

This was the first of five appearances of Jesus on Resurrection Day:

- 1) to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9–11; John 20:11–18)

¹² Pfeiffer, Charles F.; Harrison, Everett Falconer: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, S. Jn 20:11.

- 2) to the other women (Matthew 28:9–10)
- 3) to Simon Peter (Luke 24:33–35; 1 Cor. 15:5)
- 4) to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12–13; Luke 24:13–32)
- 5) to the eleven apostles (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–25)

We would do well to love Jesus as Mary did—to search for Him and to embrace Him with grateful hearts when He comes and calls us by our name.¹³

Dr. Robert W. Dale, one of Great Britain’s leading Congregational pastors and theologians, was one day preparing an Easter sermon when a realization of the risen Lord struck him with new power.¹⁴

“Christ is alive!” he said to himself. “Alive—alive—alive!”
He paused, and then said, “Can that really be true? *Living*
as really as I myself am?”
He got up from his desk and began to walk about the study,
repeating, “Christ is living! Christ is living!”

Dr. Dale had known and believed this doctrine for years, but the reality of it overwhelmed him that day. From that time on, “the living Christ” was the theme of his preaching, and he had his congregation sing an Easter hymn every Sunday morning. “*I want my people to get hold of the glorious fact that Christ is alive, and to rejoice over it; and Sunday, you know, is the day on which Christ left the dead.*”¹⁵

So we would ask you today, along with Warren Wiersbe:

Historical faith says, “Christ lives!”
Saving faith says, “Christ lives *in me!*”
Do you have saving faith?¹⁶

¹³ *Easy-to-Read Commentary Series – John: The Word Made Flesh*, (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 585-589.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, Jn 20:11.