

The Cloud of Witnesses

Mary Magdalene

Lesson 1: Mary Magdalene – Healed From Despair

Reading

Mark 1:21-39.

Healed From Despair

Mary Magdalene came from a village which was predominantly pagan. Situated at the top end of the western shores of the Sea of Galilee, Lake Tiberius, not far from Capernaum.

She had a past. She was not only demon-possessed, but the inference (7 demons) is that she was 'totally' dominated by them. Someone on the verge of insanity and not that dissimilar in condition to that of 'legion'. Her friends and family would have been despairing of her future and wanting her to leave them as quickly as possible - forever and never to come back.

No one on earth had been able to help her. Respite was nowhere to be found. Into this state of hopelessness and despondency walked Jesus, the Son of God. We don't have a record of what He said or how He commanded the demons to flee – all we know is she was healed; she, the captive, was set free, and she was made whole – and like legion returned to her right mind.

We are told what happened to legion; we are told what happened to others who were delivered of their demon possession, but not Mary. All we are told is that she was delivered of 7 demons. Maybe the deliverance was embarrassing, maybe it was humiliating – that makes no difference to the facts. Mary was delivered of demons – set free and made whole.

The one who was helpless and hopeless received healing, freedom, self-respect and a future of hope and fulfilment. No wonder she became an avid follower of Jesus. No wonder she never forgot her past and never forgot her deliverance.

Yes, she was totally changed through meeting Jesus. Whenever anyone has a dynamic encounter with Jesus Christ they are never the same again. Have you had one? If you haven't, why not ask Him for one now? If you have, never forget it and never cease to be thankful.

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Lesson 1 continued: Mary Magdalene – Healed From Despair

Mary Magdalene would say to us today...

Please don't 'write off' those who are demon-possessed. They are living in despair and need to be set free. Will you help someone like that?

Prayer

Father, I thank You that You are still able to set demon-possessed people free today. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to us so that we can demonstrate that Power on earth. Help us to find those hurting and despairing people and set them free through the power of Your Holy Spirit, I pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Additional readings

Isaiah 61:1-7; Psalm 146; 1 John 4:1-10.

Questions

Does God still drive out demons today?

Can a Christian be demon-possessed?

How do we differentiate between demon possession and physical or mental sickness?

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Lesson 2: Mary Magdalene – Gave Willingly For The Ministry Of Jesus

Reading

Luke 8:1-3.

Gave Willingly For The Ministry Of Jesus

As we saw last time, Mary was delivered of 7 demons. The change in her life was total. From being someone without a future and without hope – indeed someone without even a present – Mary became full of vitality and significance.

She was able to put her past behind her – because it had been dealt with – and move on into all that she was created for. She could grasp her destiny regardless of her past.

Understandably she was extremely grateful to Jesus for casting out the demons, however, even some who had been healed of leprosy failed to return to thank Him. Mary, on the other hand, became a devoted follower of Jesus.

Nevertheless, her devotion did not just stem from a desire for Jesus to keep on giving her all she needed. Rather it was the outflow of gratitude. Having been given so much she wanted to do all she could to thank Jesus and help Him in any way she could.

Evidently she was not poor. She may have been 'ill' but she was by no means destitute financially. With her mind now restored, she determined that not only would she follow Jesus wherever He went but she would do all she could to materially support Him and His disciples – His Ministry.

She did not see her wealth as something to hoard and protect, in case her condition changed or deteriorated. She didn't keep it for a 'rainy day' – she recognised that it had been entrusted to her and that she could now use it for the benefit of her Master.

She understood what Jesus said: *"You cannot serve God and money."* As she had decided to serve God, her money would have to serve Him too. There is no suggestion that she gave unwillingly. There is no suggestion that she did it at Jesus' request. There is no suggestion she did it to 'pay for her healing' or to appease an angry God.

Rather it was the response of a grateful heart being thrilled to be able to further the work of Jesus on earth. Having been helped, she could give so others could be helped as well.

Yes, she had to make the decision to give. She had to make the commitment to see this support continue to the very end of Jesus' ministry on earth, but it was not a hard decision to make - and once made, the fulfilment of the promise was easy.

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Lesson 2 continued: Mary Magdalene – Gave Willingly For The Ministry Of Jesus

Jesus was the reason for the gift. The blessing of others was the reward. She understood and put into practice what Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than receive."* She had received the blessing of the gift of health, now she was to receive the greater blessing of giving.

Mary Magdalene would say to us today...

There is more to following Jesus than just wanting Him to do everything for you. Jesus gives us the privilege of supporting His Kingdom through what He entrusts to us. Oh the joy I had of supporting His Ministry – you can experience that joy too – if you want to.

Prayer

Father, teach us to be grateful – to recognise that every good and perfect gift comes down to us through Your grace. Help us to realise that You entrust our finances to us so we can become part of Your answer to a dying world. Lord, show me how I can use the money I have to further the work of Your Kingdom on earth. Amen.

Additional readings

Exodus 36:1-7; 2 Samuel 24:18-25; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Questions

Why does God want our money?

Why is it so easy for us to fall into the trap of only giving grudgingly?

Why do we feel it is important to see what is done with our gifts?

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Lesson 3: Mary Magdalene – Saw Jesus Die And Where He Was Buried

Reading

Matthew 27:45-61.

Saw Jesus Die And Where He Was Buried

Mary's decision to follow Jesus would not have been all 'fun and games.' Many times I'm sure she began to wonder where it was all leading, and indeed what was she doing, being a part of it. Yes, there were many good times when people accepted His teaching, rallied around Him and treated Him like 'a star'.

However, there were times which were scary and times which were down-right dangerous. The people seemed to like Him well enough – most of the time. However, there were the religious leaders who seemed at first fascinated by His radical teaching and leadership and later started to oppose Him. It started slowly and sarcastically as they tried to discredit Him, and when that failed, the aggression became heated and vicious.

Did that deter Mary from her devotion or financial support? Apparently not. She continued through the years of opposition and into the last week of Jesus' life. She didn't turn away when Jesus appeared to 'lose the plot' in the temple – turning over the tables and setting the animals and birds free whilst chiding the sellers and moneychangers and driving them out of the temple courts with their whips.

She stuck by Him when the tide of vehement opposition rose to alarming heights. She stayed with Him through the black days of betrayal, capture and denial - the mockery of the trial, the humiliation from Herod and the flogging by Pilate.

She followed in the procession behind Jesus as He made His slow, pain-ridden and stumbling way up the hill of Golgotha – that place that looked like a skull. She watched as He was laid down on the Cross, nailed to it, lifted up and dropped into its hole.

She watched as blood poured from the crown of thorns piercing His brow and the nail holes in his ankles and wrists. She saw Him heaving up to breathe. She saw Him turn from the drink jammed in His face.

Mary heard the mocking of the soldiers; the jeering of the crowds; the accusation of the thieves dying on either side of Him, and the blasphemy of the Chief Priests and elders mocking His Father God.

She heard Him cry, "*Father, forgive them, they don't understand what they are doing.*" And "*My God, my God why are you forsaking me?*"

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Lesson 3 continued: Mary Magdalene – Saw Jesus Die And Where He Was Buried

She then heard Him cry, *"It's finished!"*

Mary watched as He died. She watched as His body was taken down from the Cross. She watched as Nicodemus and Joseph came and hurriedly removed His body, wrapped it in spices and laid it in the tomb hewn in the rock-face. She watched as the tomb was sealed with a 2-ton stone rock. She watched as everyone made their weary way home.

Mary too went home to make preparations to make sure Jesus had a proper burial...

Mary Magdalene would say to us today...

Yes, I saw my Master Jesus die, I saw where He was buried. He was treated like a criminal though He had done nothing wrong – unless living a selfless life, healing the sick and demon-possessed, and bringing hope to a hopeless world was a crime. I should have died, not Him. I shall never ever forget what He did for me.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for me. I recognise I should have died but You died in my place. Please forgive me for all that I know I have said or done that is wrong and come into my life by Your Holy Spirit to be with me forever. Thank You, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Additional readings

Isaiah 53; Hebrews 10:1-14; Romans 5:1-11.

Questions

Why did Jesus die?

Why is it so important that Jesus died?

Why is it important that Jesus was buried?

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Lesson 4: Mary Magdalene – Was The First Person To See Jesus Alive After He Rose From The Dead

Reading

John 20:1-18.

Was The First Person To See Jesus Alive After He Rose From The Dead

Two women to move a 2-ton rock? I don't think so! They didn't either, but that wasn't the purpose of the visit to the tomb. They wanted to go and give Jesus' body what they thought was a 'proper' burial. The logistics would work out for themselves – or would they?

Oh no – this crime is even greater than all the rest – how could anyone stoop so low as to raid Jesus' tomb? Couldn't He lie in peace, even in death? What kind of thug or perverse person would go so far as to steal the body of Jesus? It wasn't as though He had anything worth stealing in the tomb. No gold, silver or precious rings on His fingers. His body was only wrapped in strips of linen – there was no value in them.

Dismayed she ran back to Peter and John and told them of her desecrated find. They also went to the tomb and found the stone rolled away. But they also found the tomb wasn't empty. The linen strips were still lying there just as if they were wrapped around the body but the body had gone. Like a lifeless deflated linen cocoon. Peter and John left perplexed.

At that point, all alone and desperate, Mary allowed her full emotions to be released. She sobbed uncontrollably. Then she saw the light coming from the tomb and looked in. There were two angels inside either end of where Jesus' body had been. They asked her why she was crying. She replied that someone had raided the tomb and taken Jesus away.

It was then she turned and saw the Gardener! Of course, it was Jesus but how could she have seen Jesus? She was in horror-struck grief. No, she saw a gardener who also asked her why she was crying. Wasn't it obvious? It was to her – someone had been and stolen her Master away. *"If you know where they put Him, please don't hold out on me."*

How did Jesus respond? With a theological diatribe? With a sharp word of rebuke for her lack of faith? With a reprimand for not recognising Him? No, none of those.

He used only one word – He just spoke her name – *Mary!*

And what a word! That all embracing, doom dispelling, fear shattering, hope inducing word – *Mary!*

Have you noticed that as soon as anyone speaks your name – you know they are alive?

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Lesson 4 continued: Mary Magdalene – Was The First Person To See Jesus Alive After He Rose From The Dead

Yes, Jesus was alive and He spoke her name. Her fears were gone and life would start again, but in a whole new dimension. Every breath would have a new purpose and a sense of victory and destiny. Death and evil had been beaten and Jesus proven triumphant.

Mary Magdalene would say to us today...

I can tell you categorically that I saw Jesus right in front of me and heard Him speak to me – He called me by my name – after He had risen from the dead. It was no apparition, no ghost or spirit – it was the real Jesus. He *is* alive. He is God just as He claimed to be. You can trust Him, just as I do.

Prayer

Father, I want to thank You that the Bible is true. We can rely on it as it was written by eye-witnesses – or on the evidence of eye-witnesses – not necessarily clever people but real people with real eyes. I am so relieved that Jesus is who He claimed to be – God. I can relax because I can trust in objective evidence - the evidence of the empty cross, the empty tomb and the risen Saviour. Thank You. Amen.

Additional readings

Mark 16:9-20; 1 Corinthians 15:1-22; Revelation 1:12-18.

Questions

Why is it important that Jesus rose bodily from the dead?

Why was Mary the first to see Jesus?

Do you believe what Mary said?