

# The Surprising Honor Jesus Gave Just One Woman

In honor of March being Women's History Month, I am sharing a life-altering experience I had in 1991. This experience opened my eyes in a new way as to how God wants to use women in these last days when He is pouring out His Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17).

During a ministry tour in the northeast, Sue and I stopped at a hotel for the night. After Sue went to bed, I sat cross-legged on the floor with my Bible in front of me, intending to pray over a meeting in which I would be speaking later that week.

However, to my surprise, my mind began to be flooded with thoughts of Mary Magdalene and how Jesus appeared to her first after His resurrection. It was being emphasized to my mind that this was no chance appearance but that He purposely appeared to her first to make a very important statement.

I also saw, for the first time, that in this encounter with Jesus, Mary received the first apostolic commission from the risen Lord. The word "apostle" literally means "one who is sent," and this apostolic commission came in His words to her, "Go and tell my brothers" (Matt. 28:10).

As I sat in the floor with these thoughts of Mary Magdalene flooding my mind and heart, I knew it was from the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, I asked, *Why am I thinking this? It has nothing to do with my life at this time.*

Two days later, I found out why, when I was invited, for the first time, to speak in a women's conference along with Sue. I had my message, of which the following is the essence.

## **A Woman Was the First**

During the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared to different disciples at various times, and on one occasion appeared to over 500 of His followers at once (1 Cor. 15:3-8). The Gospel writers, however, are very explicit in noting that it was Mary Magdalene to whom He appeared first after His resurrection.

The importance which the Gospel writers attach to this fact indicate that it was no accidental occurrence, but that Jesus purposely appeared first to Mary Magdalene and instructed her to go and tell his male disciples that He was alive.

This raises the question as to why Jesus did not tell the Twelve Himself that He was alive? He was in His resurrection body and could have stood in their midst at the speed of thought. Why does He require that they receive the message of His resurrection from this woman with a dubious past?

### **Why Mary? Why Not Peter or John?**

It is obvious that, in appearing first to Mary, Jesus was challenging the biased thinking of His male disciples toward His female disciples. We must remember that neither Jewish nor Roman courts of law would allow the testimony of a woman as evidence. The ingrained cultural prejudice toward women was also expressed in a liturgical prayer that Jewish men prayed that included thanks to God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave or a woman.

By appearing first to Mary Magdalene Jesus was cutting through all the disdain and prejudice of his male disciples toward his female disciples. He showed his approval and respect for Mary, and all women, by sending her as the first herald to preach and bear witness to the most important event of human history.

### **The First Apostolic Commission from the Risen Lord**

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene He gave her certain, specific instructions. Matthew 28:10 records His words to Mary: "Go and tell my brothers ..." In other words, He sent her on a specific mission defined by the words, "Go and tell."

Interestingly, the New Testament word "apostle" literally means "one who is sent" or "a sent one." Mary, therefore, was a "sent one" and as such received the first apostolic commission from the Lord after His resurrection. It was not a "women's ministry" to which she was called, for Jesus instructed to "go and tell my brethren." She was sent with a message to the male apostles; and this is why, throughout history, Mary has often been called "the apostle to the apostles."

### **The Resurrection Ushered in a New Era of Freedom**

By appearing first to Mary Magdalene and giving her an apostolic commission, Jesus was saying that His death and resurrection had ushered in a new era of freedom for all of humanity. He was saying that in Him the walls of separation and exclusion between the races and the sexes had been removed. Paul echoes this in his letter to the Galatians, saying that in Christ "There is neither Jew nor Greek ... there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28).

"But," some will ask, "what about Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:12 for women to be silent?"

First of all, anything that Paul said must be interpreted and understood in the light of what Jesus said and did, not the other way around. Jesus is Lord; not Paul! Secondly, a doctrine should not be formulated without giving equal consideration to the many Scriptures that show women functioning in leadership roles.

Finally, it is more than likely that the restrictions of these two verses are related to local, cultural situations and are not universal edicts pertaining to the whole Church (See my

book, *Paul, Women and Church*). These restrictions are, rather, on the same level as Paul's instructions concerning the wearing of veils in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and his admonitions for believers to greet one another with a holy kiss (a handshake or hug will do just fine in most cases).

## **Ministry in the New Testament Is Based on Gifts**

In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Paul pictures the church as a body made up of many members. Each time he shares this concept it is in the context of spiritual gifts. This is because it is the possession of a spiritual gift that gives each member of the body its particular function or ministry.

The authority to minister is thus rooted in one's possession of a divine call or gift. Ordination is simply the church's recognition of that gift. When John Wesley was asked why he gave recognition to women preachers, he replied, "Because God owns them in the conversion of sinners, and who am I that I should withstand God."

Much of the church has refused to recognize the gifts of its female members and has, thereby, violated Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 not to quench the Spirit. As a result of this disobedience, many gifts have lain dormant while millions have perished without Christ and the church has languished in defeat.

## **It's Time for Action**

It is time for action! It is time to rise up! You don't have to be weighted down with all the bureaucratic, religious politics of the modern church to obey God. You don't need a title, an office or a position. You don't need someone's covering or alignment. Like Mary, you only need to hear the voice of the risen Lord sending you on a mission to "go and tell." {eo}

*This article originally appeared at .*

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