

Hidden Truths Mary Magdalene Can Teach Us About Clinging to Jesus

Only a handful of women dared to visit Jesus' tomb as Easter Sunday dawned. The male disciples cowered in fear they'd be crucified next. Between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared multiple times to numerous people (Acts 1:3, 1 Cor. 15:6). Surprisingly, His first post-resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene. Expecting to anoint a corpse, she had a face-to-face encounter with her risen Savior. When she realized it really was Jesus, she clung to Him. Do you blame her?

Magdalene was not Mary's last name. It refers to Mary's home town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee's western shore. She is so designated to distinguish her from eight other women named Mary in the New Testament. Her name occurs only a dozen times in the Gospels, but as you piece the puzzle together, an inspiring three-part image emerges:

Mary's Deliverance From Demons

Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9 describe how Jesus delivered Mary from seven evil spirits. We are not told how the demons affected her life, body or behavior. Some commentators suggest she was epileptic and suffered from seizures. Others think she had a debilitating mental or physical illness. Whether those demons corrupted her mind or her morals or both is up for debate. The big question is, "Was Mary Magdalene a prostitute?" The *Talmud* (a collection of ancient Rabbinical writings) states that Magdala had a reputation for prostitution. In a sermon in 591 A.D., Pope Gregory claimed she was the unidentified, uninvited "sinner" who crashed a dinner party Jesus attended (Luke 7:37-39). That woman, believed to be a harlot, anointed Jesus'

feet with pricey perfume and washed them with tears of repentance. Simon the Pharisee, host of the dinner, objected that Jesus even allowed the tramp to touch Him. But there is no biblical proof that woman was Mary.

Others have tried to connect Mary with the adulterous woman in John 8 who was dragged before Jesus to be stoned until He intervened. That, again, is purely speculation. The Bible does not say Mary was a prostitute. It simply says she was delivered from demons and became a devout disciple. Truth be told, all Christians have been delivered from something—"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col.1:13). Maybe we weren't bound by demon possession, but we were freed from demonic oppression to some degree or another. The good news is, when Christ comes in, Satan must leave.

After her dramatic deliverance, Mary, along with other wealthy women, "supported Him with their possessions" (Luke 8;3). How did Mary become wealthy? Did she inherit it? Magdala was known for its textile industry, making fabric and dying cloth. Was she a businesswoman? Somehow, she had the means to help fund Jesus' ministry. Perhaps she bought and cooked the disciple's food, bought and/or washed their clothes or ran errands for the prophet and His pupils. The fact that she was free from family obligations indicates she was probably unmarried and childless.

Mary's Dedication to Discipleship

Though a supporting cast member, Mary comes to the forefront in the Easter narrative. While male disciples fled, Mary devotedly followed Jesus to the bitter end. Consider the degree of dedication she displayed: She was close to the cross when Jesus died (John 19:25), she participated in Jesus' burial (Matt. 27:55-61), she was the first to discover the empty tomb (John 20:1), then she ran to inform Peter and John that Jesus' body was missing (John 20:2). They, of course,

doubted her story, “their words seemed like fables to them, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11), not that she made the most credible witness given her past problems.

Bible commentator Craig Keener notes, “Ancient Jewish men did not accept women as reliable witnesses for most legal purposes, and this cultural tendency may have further moved John and Peter to look for witness of women was worth little in Judaism; that Jesus first appears to a woman would not have been fabricated and shows us how Jesus’ values differ from those of His culture.”

Why, of all people, did Jesus appear first to Mary Magdalene? One answer is simply grace. One could argue that she was least-deserving due to her track record. Jesus often sought out the downtrodden of society to express His love to. Another simple principle may apply—“Seek and you will find” (Matt. 7:7b). She was the first to the tomb, so her search was rewarded. God rewards those who diligently seek after Him (Heb. 11:6).

Mary’s Clinginess to Christ

Mary didn’t recognize Jesus at first, assuming He was the cemetery caretaker. But when Jesus called her by name, she knew His voice and threw her arms around Him. Jesus restrained her saying, “Touch me not” (John 20:17b, KJV). The Greek word translated “touch” here means, “to attach oneself to, to fasten to.” Other versions render that phrase, “Stop clinging to me” (NASB), “Do not hold onto me” (NIV). Do you blame her? She had just witnessed her Savior tortured and crucified and now He was alive. Mary must have thought, “Lord, I lost You once, I don’t ever want to lose You again. I will never let You go!”

Skeptics use this passage to insist Jesus and Mary had a scandalous, romantic, even sexual, relationship. Modern movies have made absurd claims that Mary became Jesus’ secret wife

and they had a love child together. They also exploit an excerpt from fragments of the Gospel of Phillip that claims Jesus kissed Mary often. They fail to explain that kissing was a common way of greeting among Jews (1 Cor. 16:20). Parts of that document are missing, so they gladly fill in the blanks with Hollywood hogwash. This recycled rumor was condemned as heresy by the early church fathers. The reason Mary clung to Jesus was not some sensual attraction, but a sincere gratitude for how He changed her life and pure elation that He was indeed alive again.

Mary Magdalene was almost certainly one of “the women” among the 120 disciples who received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Catholics celebrate her as a saint; Protestants consider her a heroine of faith. Tradition claims she continued to be a bold witness for Christ, leading many idol worshippers to salvation, then retiring to a life of seclusion after years of public preaching. Many other unproven legends of her abound. She was the first to proclaim the Easter message. She owed much, gave much, loved much and served much. Once inhabited and tormented by demon spirits, she was filled with and transformed by the Holy Spirit. No wonder Mary clung to Christ. We should too! {eoa}

Ben Godwin is the author of four books and pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church. His weekly telecast, The Word Workshop, airs on TV-16 and Charter Cable #10 on Mondays at 9 p.m. and Tuesdays at noon and live streams on . To read more articles, visit his website at and take advantage of his 4-book bundle for \$.