

# Mary Magdalene

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-09-12

Read from

Luke 8:1 Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, 2 and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.

## **Introduction - false legends about Mary Magdalene can be completely debunked by examining the passages that clearly speak of her (Matt 27:55-56,61; 28:1-11; Mark 15:40,47; 16:1,9; Luke 8:2,3; 24:1-12; John 19:25; 20:1,2,11-18)**

There are many false ideas that have circulated about Mary Magdalene. Some have mistakenly confused her with Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. That would be a pretty cool identification, but it is not true. A close reading of the text shows that it is impossible to identify these two women. One followed Jesus everywhere, the other stayed in Bethany. One was clearly said to be from Magdala (way up north) and the other is said to be from Bethany (way down south). Darrell Bock gives seven detailed contrasts between the two women on chronology, location, themes, and other circumstances. So if you have books that knit the two together, make a note of it. There are a lot of inaccuracies in some of the harmonizations of the Gospels. Mary of Bethany was not Mary of Magdala.

Others have mistakenly identified her with the anonymous sinner who was saved in Luke 7, and who washed the feet of Jesus with her hair. Because of that mistaken identification, there are many who believe that she was a prostitute - and ministries to prostitutes have sometimes named themselves after Mary Magdalene. If she was a prostitute, there is not the slightest hint of it in Scripture, and there is much to suggest otherwise. Again, Darrell Bock gives some helpful contrasts. But just on the surface, it would seem *very* strange for Luke to keep her anonymous in the long story of chapter 7 and then two verses later identify her by name in a different context and as having been saved from a different bondage - bondage to seven demons. I have at least a dozen scholarly books that point out that this is a slanderous identification with zero exegetical support.

Others have mistakenly thought that she was the wife of Clopas, but we've seen in a previous sermon that the proper understanding of the grammar in John 19:25 shows that Mary the wife of Clopas was a different Mary than Mary Magdalene who is also named there. The two Mary's served together, but they were not the same person.

Even blasphemous legends about Mary have been created - especially by the gnostics in later centuries. The Davinci Code amalgamated some of those gnostic legends and portrays Jesus as having secretly married Mary Magdalene and that they fathered a daughter

together. And plenty has been written that completely debunks that scurrilous charge. I won't get into those arguments.

There is plenty of neat stuff we can learn about Mary without inventing connections. And we will start with the passage I just read - Luke 8. This passage reveals several things about Mary.

### **Mary was from the town of Magdala, by the sea of Galilee (Matt. 27:56,61; 28:1; Mark 15:40,47; 16:1,9; Luke 8:2; 24:10; John 19:25; 20:1,18)**

First, by calling her Mary Magdalene, it is distinguishing her from other Marys by saying that she was the specific Mary who came from the town of Magdala. Magdalene is an identifier since there were so many Marys. This is the one and only New Testament Mary from the town of Magdala.

Well, Magdala was a small seaside town way up north near the cities of Capernaum and Tiberias. Magdala was a beautiful spot on the Northwest side the sea of Galilee. It was largely a business town occupied by Roman and Jewish merchants. Recent archaeological digs have discovered that this must have been a *very* wealthy town indeed. The synagogue ruins that they have uncovered have features that rival those of the wealthiest synagogues in the empire, with beautiful carvings, frescoes, and mosaics. I put a picture of the table support for Torah reading that may well have been one of the Torah tables that Jesus preached from - especially since Magdala was fairly close to Christ's home base of Capernaum. The houses uncovered by archaeologists appear to have been owned by rather wealthy people as well. One site said, "With the archaeological evidence found so far at Magdala it is clear the town was a wealthy Jewish town in the Lower Galilee – no other town has this kind of miqva'ot, a synagogue with mosaic floors, or a complex hydraulic system with underground water flowing through the channels."<sup>1</sup> It's biggest industry was fish, which Josephus said was of such high quality and so desirable that it supplied a good part of the dried and salted fish market at the city of Rome. That's pretty impressive that a small town in Galilee was able to break into that market. But the fact that these fish were not polluted with sewage may have made them more attractive. One site said,

Magdala was clearly an influential and prosperous city in its time, as evidenced by the elaborately decorated buildings which have been found here. Several buildings identified as mansions, most likely the homes of Magdala's wealthy merchants, are located along a street south of the synagogue. These mansions were paved with colorful and intricate mosaic floors, which can still be seen today. Another impressive feature of the city are the four mikvaot (ritual baths) which are the earliest ever discovered in the country to use ground water. The sophisticated plumbing of these mikvaot is proof that Magdala was at the forefront of regional commerce and culture in the first century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://brewminate.com/the-archaeological-excavations-at-magdala/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.magdalahotel.com/attractions>

So it sounds like Mary had a fairly privileged upbringing. Yet despite being shielded from much of the pain, poverty, and ugliness of the seamier side of life, she was not protected from demons. We will see shortly that demons can take people who are not believers any time they want to. And actually, they can influence believers too.

### **She appears to be a single woman**

The second thing that commentators have concluded from this passage is that Mary was a single woman at this point in her life. Otherwise it is inconceivable that she would be able to spend as much time with Christ and his apostles as all four Gospels present her as having done. She did not appear to have been tied down with *any* family responsibilities. This conclusion is not *absolutely* certain, but it seems *very* probable.

One objection that could be given to this conclusion is that Joanna was also able to travel with Jesus even though *she* was married. But that is not a serious objection for two reasons. First, Chuza was Herod's steward and would have had to be out of town quite a bit - including occasional trips to Rome. Second, this is the only trip that Joanna is mentioned as being part of. So the likelihood is that she was freed up to travel because he was on a long trip. And with him being gone, she would have had plenty of servants to manage household chores. So going on one trip would not have been a big sacrifice for her. In contrast, the Gospels portray Mary as constantly traveling with Jesus throughout Galilee and Judea.

So it appears that she was single. Why? We don't know. Did she never get married because of her demonism? Did a husband divorce her because of her demonism? Did her husband die? We are not told. But it appears that she was single. And it appears that there were "many" other women who accompanied Jesus on these tours. We will have more to say about that later, but at least it ought to make us realize that if the circumstances are set up properly (and we know Jesus would always do so), it can be OK for single women to minister as missionaries or in other capacities without being married. Many times single women are criticized for doing so (and in the past I have sometimes wondered about the advisability of doing so), but they are doing so under Christ's auspices here, so we need to be careful. But we are jumping ahead of our story. The main point here is that she appears to have been without a family when she first met Jesus.

### **She appears to have been a woman of prominence and wealth (Luke 8:3; 24:1; Mark 16:11)**

Third, given her home town, it should be no surprise that the third thing we can guess about Mary is that she was a woman of wealth and status. Now, we can't conclude that just from the hometown, but this is a probable conclusion people have drawn from three clues in Luke 8:2-3. The first clue is the word "substance" in verse 3 - which refers to their wealth. Each of these women had money to draw on without working at making money themselves. Only the wealthy could do that. They were either drawing on reserves during

Christ's three and a half years of ministry or they had a steady stream of passive income from somewhere.

The second clue is that these women all followed Jesus, which implies that they didn't have duties at home. This implies that they either didn't have families or they were wealthy enough to have plenty of discretionary time and to be able to hire servants to do their home jobs. To have the servants take care of things on the home front requires money.

The third clue is that only three of the women who followed Jesus are named here, and commentaries say that this may indicate their status - especially since one of the other women is known to be a woman of tremendous status - Joanna was the wife of Chuza, king Herod's steward. For Mary to be named together with Joanna and Susanna implies that all three women were women of social status and wealth.

While that wealth may have been selfishly used before she came to Christ, she used her wealth to advance Christ's kingdom once she was saved. And it is a wonderful thing to have a steady stream of passive income. Such a situation has enabled many men and women to be devoted to ministry and to fund the ministries of others. Pray that God would raise up wise millionaires and billionaires who could fund the kingdom.

### **She had been delivered from seven demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2)**

The fourth thing that we know about her is that she was delivered from the kingdom of darkness. Verse 2 says, "and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities — Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons..." All of these women were either delivered of demons or cured of illnesses (or both). And they gratefully served the Savior who had delivered them. It was their joy and passion to serve Him.

**Other names for demons are "evil spirits," fallen "angels," fallen "cherubim," fallen "seraphim," fallen "creatures," "shedhim," "seirim," "elilim," "gad," "qeter."**

There are four things that I want you to notice about the demons that had bothered her. First, Luke makes it clear that the phrase "evil spirits" is synonymous in meaning to the word "demons." Some commentaries treat demons as mental illness or some other kind of illness, and are skeptical that there are any unseen beings that actually inhabit people. But demons are evil spirits. And other Scriptures indicate that evil spirits or demons are fallen angels who are dedicated to opposing God's creation in its entirety. And just as there are messenger angels, there are messenger fallen angels. And just as there are warrior cherubim, there are viciously war-like fallen angels. And I've put some other names for demons in your outlines.

Well, anyone inhabited by a demon will begin to take on the characteristics of that demon. And this is true of societies as well. Increasingly demonized cultures either worship creation or destroy creation. Demons hate anything in creation that reminds them of God. They also hate Christians and seek to nullify their work. They also hate the image of God in

man, and try to undo logical/rational thinking and other aspects of man's image. They are real beings organized into a kingdom under Satan, and these demons are evil spirits who are at war with God.

## These demons were inside of Mary and the other women (“out of whom”)

Second, notice the phrase, “out of whom...” These demons were *inside* of Mary. Does that mean she was a demon-possessed person who thrashed around and was wild-eyed and foamed at the mouth? Not necessarily. Scripture is quite clear that some people can seem fairly normal and have demons inside of them - other than that those demons tempt them to think and act in ways that they shouldn't. Don't think a person has to be out of control, thrashing around, and cutting himself to be demonized - even though cutting is one sign of the demonic. Certainly there are lower-level demons who don't appear to be too intelligent who seem to take away all reasoning powers and just control a person completely. But *most* demons are much more clever and sophisticated (and in my third clarification I'll give some Scriptures to illustrate that). Demons can make people have the illusion that they are in control and that they are indeed thinking clearly - even though the demons have put a veil on their thinking so that they don't think like they should. These demons can tempt to anger, lying, covetousness, lust, doubt, pride, and any other sin. We aren't told what kind of demons Mary had. We aren't told whether they made her foam at the mouth, look wild eyed and thrash around like Legion did to the Gadarene demoniac, or whether her demons simply kept her from being able to do what was right. All we know is that there were demons inside of her that needed to come out. Luke 11 says that demons love to be inside of bodies and don't like wandering through dry places.

## Jesus healed them of both the demonic and of sickness (“healed”)

Third, notice that verse 2 says that these certain women had been *healed* of evil spirits *and* infirmities. We all know what it means to be healed of an infirmity or disease, but what does it mean to be healed of an evil spirit? The Greek word θεραπεύω means to heal or restore something back to what it should be. To be *healed* of an evil spirit implies that the evil spirit is making your soul and body less than what it was designed to be. You're not right when you have demons. It may be that you are not right in your mind, or you are not right in your emotions, or in your social sensibilities, or even in your body. Luke 13:10-17 shows a woman whose body had been bent over by a demon for eighteen years. Luke called it a “spirit of infirmity” because it specialized in bringing infirmity to her body. Going to a doctor would not have helped that physical infirmity at all because it was an infirmity created by a demon. She needed to have the demon cast out, and when Christ did so, she could walk uprightly. There are some infirmities that don't need medicine. They simply need demons to be cast out.

But many demons make the mind, emotions, or social sensibilities not right, and *those* need to be restored. For example, Numbers 5:14 speaks of a “spirit of jealousy” that makes a person irrationally jealous. There is no good reason for them to be jealous, but they are consumed with jealousy because of the evil spirit. Judges 9:23 speaks of “a spirit of ill will” that does

everything in its power to make people get upset with each other and divide from each other. If you can't figure out why people push you off and get irrationally upset with you, it may be demonic. It may be a spirit of ill will. Isaiah 29:10 speaks of "a spirit of deep sleep" that makes the person uninterested in the preaching of the prophets, or at least so sleepy that he can't take the message in. Yes, demons can make people drowsy. One person I knew would only get drowsy when you started talking about the Bible and spiritual things - and she was so overwhelmingly drowsy she could hardly keep her head up. She couldn't read the Bible very well. And she was a believer. But she had a spirit of deep sleep. Hosea 4:12 and 5:4 speaks of a demonic "spirit of harlotry" that constantly tempted people to cheat on their spouses. Luke 4:33 speaks of an "unclean demon" that moves people to delight in unclean things that others might normally be repulsed by. The slave girl in Acts 16:16 had a "spirit of divination." 1 John 4:6 speaks of a spirit of error that leads people into doctrinal error. In fact, 1 Timothy 4 lists some doctrines of demons. Other Scriptures speak of spirits that lead to fear, bondage, stupor, addiction, and many other sins. While our flesh is perfectly capable of ruining God's image without the help of demons, we ought not to neglect warring against the demonic if we have not been having success with changing what needs to be changed in our life. And I should point out that a deliverance ministry is not an instantaneous solution for sin. A person will still need to undo habits. It is the start of a lifetime of warring against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And without such warfare, you will quickly go back to bondage.

## Seven demons had to be cast out of her

The last thing I want you to notice about these demons is that there were seven of them inside of her. Demons seem to be able to overlap each other and overlap your own soul in terms of space. They don't seem to occupy space in the same way that we do. And it's important that all demons be cast out. Over the years I have learned that demons can be clever. When one is cast out, the others can lie low and not reveal themselves. Or they can change their names, or temporarily leave so that they can come back later. So when we have cast out one demon, we don't assume that everything is OK. We try to be systematic to determine that all possible demons that are present have been dealt with. It would be horrible to cast out five demons and think you are done, only to find that there are two more that continue to torment the person. Mark 16:9 says that Jesus cast out all seven, and this passage simply gives the result - they came out.

## Her rescue

But when they came out, she was so blessed by the change that she dedicated her life to serving Jesus. One sign that you are truly delivered is a renewed passion to serve Jesus and to grow in holiness. Without that, I'm skeptical.

In the case of the bent over woman, Jesus said that she was a true believer - a daughter of Abraham. Yet she as a true believer needed to be delivered from demons. But this here appears to have been a conversion story.

## She was “with” Jesus in some way similar to the disciples who were “with” Jesus (Luke 8:1d-2a). What does that mean?

And from that point on Mary Magdalene stuck with Jesus just like the twelve apostles did. Why the verse break was put where it was, I have no idea. Verse breaks are not inspired. Chapters were added in 1227 by Stephen Langton and verse divisions appeared in a printed Greek Bible in 1551. But the sentence begins at the end of verse 1 and says, “And the twelve were with Him, and certain women...” Both the twelve and the women were *with* Jesus. What does that mean?

## It didn’t mean that they were being mentored for the same things that the twelve were (see the contrast between the “disciples” (μαθητής) and the “women” in Matt. 28:7,8,9; John 20:18)

First of all, it does not mean that they were being trained for the same thing that the apostles were. You can be with Jesus without being an apprentice for pastoral office. Contrary to feminist assertions, Jesus clearly distinguishes the “disciples” from the “women” in Matthew 28:7,8,9 and in John 20:18. Whatever “disciples” means in those verses, the disciples were clearly distinguished from the women. In the modern usage of the term “disciples,” all of us are disciples of Christ. But in those passages μαθητής is being used in its specialized sense of apprentice. The disciples were apprentices for apostolic ministry; the women were not.

## It didn’t mean that they ministered in exactly the same way that Christ and the apostles did (see contrast between Christ and the apostles healing, casting out demons, teaching, and what the women did below).

Second, it didn’t mean that they ministered in *exactly* the same way that Christ and the apostles did. The Gospels do not give any hint that the women were involved in casting out demons, healing, teaching, and preaching. As we will see, their role was a supportive role to the ministry of Christ and the apostles. You would have to look elsewhere to prove that these women did any of those things. Women can cast out demons, but that’s not what was going on here.

## They followed Him ἀκολουθέω (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:41)

But there is a second word for disciple that is used of the women. It is ἀκολουθέω, and is translated as to follow. They were followers of Jesus. Matthew 27:55 speaks of “many women who followed Jesus from Galilee...” There are two ways you can take that word. Certainly that speaks of traveling a long ways with Jesus. Other verses speak of them traveling with Jesus in His Galilean tours, but this one speaks of them traveling with Jesus all the way down into southern Judea. So the word ἀκολουθέω means at least that they accompanied him for weeks on end. And we will point out why that is significant.

But the dictionary shows that this word ἀκολουθέω can also mean to follow as a learner, to comply with, to obey. It has a nuance of discipleship. While the apostles were learning the ropes of public ministry as apprentices/disciples, the women were learning the ropes of general Christian ministry by following and imitating Jesus where they could. Mark 15:41 uses two Greek words to indicate both physical presence with and learning the ropes. It uses the word συναναβαίνω to indicate that they traveled everywhere with Jesus and it also uses the word ἀκολουθέω to indicate being discipled in Christianity. So they were with Jesus as learners.

### **They ministered in a supportive role (διακονέω is translated as “ministering” Matt. 27:55; “ministered” Mark 15:41; “provided” Luke 8:3)**

But Luke 8:3 uses a third Greek word that is translated as “provided for.” The same word is translated as “ministering” and “ministered” in Matthew and Mark. It is the word διακονέω, which refers to setting up tables, but can also refer to any kind of supportive service. They were a support team.

### **She helped support Christ’s ministry financially (Luke 8:2-3)**

And then Luke speaks of Mary and these other women also helping Jesus out financially.

### **The above shows that she was a faithful part of the traveling ministry team (Matt. 27:55-56; Luke 8:2-3)**

Well, when you put all those concepts together, you basically have a ministry team. She was an incredibly faithful member of a ministry team that traveled all over Judea, Galilee, and even outside the country. There is no indication that she engaged in *apostolic* ministry. But it is clear she was still part of the ministry team. What would that look like?

Recently I read a book that my daughter, Elizabeth, lent to me called, *I Still Believe*. It’s an autobiography by Jeremy Camp. And I cried on almost every page because he was so real about his weaknesses and God was so real in working through his strengths, weaknesses, and sorrows. In any case, it’s a very moving story of his struggles and successes as he grew in using his musical skills to serve the Lord. I didn’t know much about his music before, but the book got me interested in listening to more of his music and has given me a new appreciation for him and his wife.

But what I was also thinking about the whole time I read the book is that Jeremy would never have developed the Jeremy Camp ministries without the ministry of his parents, his first wife, his friends, his team members, drivers, churches that encouraged him, his second wife, and all the crew that goes into making a music ministry successful. Rarely do those support people even get mentioned. And besides them, there are churches and individuals donating lots of money, effort, and time to seeing him be a success. Most of those people are not the members of the band. They are not on stage as Jesus and the apostles were, but the support teams were indispensable to Jeremy’s success. And I’m sure it was gratifying to the



countless people who sacrificed for Jeremy that it didn't go to his head, and he has maintained his humility and servant's hearts.

That's the way I see these women. They are the support team for Jeremy Camp (so to speak). These women labored tirelessly behind the scenes to make sure Jesus and His disciples had supplies, equipment, food, water, mats, and endless other things needed to keep a complex ministry tour going. Everybody marvels at how Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish, but did you ever think about where the huge baskets came from to collect the leftovers? Uh huh. It's guaranteed that people didn't carry around huge baskets in crowds - just in case there might be some leftovers. So where did they come from? Somebody had to think of that, and I doubt it was the apostles. And if you count up how many people were fed, I can guarantee you that at that late hour there wasn't enough time to let the apostles alone do the serving. There was a support team. It took additional people with administrative skills, financial acumen, foresight on what contingencies need to be planned for. There were no doubt donkeys and carts carrying all kinds of needed tents, cooking utensils, equipment and supplies for this ministry tour so that Jesus didn't have to mess around with those things. And those baskets were no doubt a part of that equipment.

Those ministry tours didn't happen on their own. They were planned and labored over by the women. Obviously there were times when the women weren't there - like the the short trips in the boats or up a mountain. But the word διακονέω literally means setting up tables, and more broadly was used for any kind of support ministry that was needed. When spices were needed to embalm the body of Christ, it was Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses who knew where to get those spices at a moment's notice - and it was a moment's notice because it was nearing the end of the day before the Sabbath when they quickly got the spices. When Mary asked the as-yet-unidentified man (whom she thought to be the gardener) where the body of Christ was taken, she was the kind of can-do person who would get His body transported to the right place. She said,

“Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

“I will take Him away.” She is that kind of a person. And all ministries need this kind of behind-the-scenes support. You can name just about any large parachurch or church ministry around the world that is successful and you will likely find that some women were there, were ministering, and were helping to support the Jeremy Camp, or the Kevin Swanson, or the RC Sproul senior. Women have been doing boatloads of work in this church behind the scenes. And though they don't want to be in the limelight (I mean, very few want the limelight Jeremy Camp gets - it's too stressful - so though they don't want to be in the limelight) I am grateful for the women and men in this church who tirelessly work behind the scenes to make sure everything runs smoothly. Do you know how much time it takes to set up equipment, purchase equipment, prepare the music, rework music so that various instruments and skill levels can play, and then the time to practice the music, prepare bulletins, etc. Most people don't think about these things. They don't realize the amount of counseling that women in this church do on their own dime. Mary Magdalene and the other women probably provided extra counselors for women when counselors were needed. Mary was one such faithful person who did it as her language of love for the Lord.

## Though many people benefited from Mary, she “ministered to Him” (Matt. 27:55)

The last point on ministry that I want to mention is that though many people benefited from Mary, and though the disciples obviously benefited from her donations and her service, Matthew 27:55 makes it clear that she was not ultimately doing this ministry for them, or for applause, or recognition, or for herself. It says that she and the other women were “ministering to Him.” She had a Christ-focus that carried her through even when there was no thanks or appreciation expressed by others. And we too can be as steadfastly faithful as Mary was if our focus is on Christ. Jeremy Camp started sliding from a Christ-centered focus at one point, and a pastor friend pulled him aside and asked, “Jeremy, who’s steering this ship - is it the Lord, or is it you?”<sup>3</sup> And Jeremy said that this faithful rebuke hit him between the eyes and made him realize that he had gradually been sliding into serving his job more than serving the Lord. Quoting his book:

My dad used to say, “We can’t get so busy doing the work of the Lord that we forget the Lord of the work.” That was me.<sup>4</sup>

Luke says that this was *not* Mary. She ministered to the Lord of the work and her love and passion for Him never waned - even in His death.

## She was courageous (John 19:25)

And speaking of His death, please turn to John 19:25. I want to highlight the courage that this woman had at the cross. You can already guess that she was courageous if she followed Jesus when he was ministering to hostile crowds. It would have taken some courage way back then. And she was already courageous when she continued to follow Jesus when all the crowds left Him at the end of John 6. But it was particularly dangerous to be identifying with Jesus when He was being crucified as a dangerous criminal. John 19, starting to read at verse 25:

John 19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” 27 Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

## She stuck by Jesus even when there was danger (John 19:25)

Verse 25 makes it clear that she stood right by the cross giving moral support to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and showing her devotion to Jesus Himself. And Mary’s sister, and Mary the wife of Clopas also gave their moral support. But this was a dangerous thing to do

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Camp, *I Still Believe* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson, 2013), p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Camp, *Ibid.*, p. 180.

because this identified you with a person that Rome was treating as a treasonous criminal. This means you are disagreeing with Rome; you are siding with Rome's enemy. They didn't care. They were right there by the cross. God's grace had wiped fear out of their hearts.

### **She stuck by Jesus even when not provided for like Christ's mother was (John 19:26-27)**

Verses 26-27 indicate that she stuck by Jesus even when she was not provided for as Christ's mother was. John was going to protect and care for Jesus' mother, but who was going to care for Mary Magdalene? Now, obviously she didn't need financial care, like Mary did. But I find it interesting that Mary Magdalene was not focused on herself and her needs. She was concerned for Jesus and she hurt for Jesus.

### **She noticed what others didn't think to notice (Mark 15:47) and she and the other Mary stay by the tomb after others leave (Matt. 27:59-61)**

Another interesting characteristic that a few authors pick up on is the fact that Mary noticed where Jesus was buried so that she could come back after the Sabbath was over. Mark 15:47 shows Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph staying by the cross while Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body down. They then followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb. Mark 15:47 says, "And Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Joseph observed where He was laid." If it hadn't been for her and the other Mary, the disciples might not have known where He was buried. They probably didn't know Joseph or Nicodemus.

But they didn't just observe and leave. Matthew 27:59-61 adds that they they were at the tomb the whole time Joseph and Nicodemus were preparing the body for burial - and they no doubt helped with that preparation of the body. And verse 61 shows that even after the two men rolled the stone over the mouth of the tomb and went away, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary kept sitting by the tomb. They must not have been satisfied with the amount of spices that Joseph and Nicodemus had brought with them because Mark 16 tells us that they came Sunday morning with a bunch more spices to do the job right. Their love for Jesus extended past His death. Burial is an act of love.

### **Mary was honored to be history's first witness to Christ's resurrection A synthesis of the order of events in Matt. 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 23:56-24; John 20:1-18**

So the text indicates that they were the last to leave the tomb and the first to visit the tomb on Sunday morning. This is the kind of dedication these women had. As soon as they left the place where Jesus was buried, they gathered spices to more fully prepare the body, but rested on the Sabbath days (plural) according to the commandment. But Sunday morning,

in the confusion and hurry and scurry of finding the body missing, hearing angels, running to tell the apostles, etc., God ordained for Mary Magdalene to be at the tomb for the first appearance of Jesus and to become the first witness to Christ's resurrection. It is kind of complicated to unravel the chronology of how it all happened, but let me try to outline it.

All four Gospels mention that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early Sunday morning. Matthew 28:1 adds that the other Mary was there - namely, Mary the mother of James and Joses. Mark adds that Salome was there. Luke adds that Joanna and "the other women with them" were present (Luke 24:10). This means that a good chunk of the ministry support team were there. Their camaraderie and support for Jesus and for each other extended beyond the time that the ministry team disbanded. They still hung out.

But let's back up an hour. John 20:1 says that Mary Magdalene started out while it was still dark - perhaps gathering the other women. Then the three synoptic gospels say the women arrived "at early dawn" (Luke 24:1) when the sun had just risen (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1). Mark and Luke mention that these women carried spices for the body (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). Mark mentions that the women wonder (as they are traveling there) who is going to help them roll the stone away (Mark 16:3). And this is where it gets tricky. There is more than one proposed chronology of how these events took place, but here is the one chronology that makes most sense to me. Let me quickly outline it for you.

1. Before dawn Jesus had already risen from the grave by passing through the walls of the tomb and had left. At this point the stone covering the tomb was still in place. Jesus didn't need it rolled away to get out. It was later rolled away so that the disciples could get in and witness the resurrection that had already taken place.
2. The women start traveling toward the tomb in the darkness as the dawn is just peaking through.
3. Before the women get there, an angel came down in front of the guards, a massive earthquake happened, the angel then rolled the stone away, and he sat on the stone. This so terrified the guards that they all fainted.
4. Having accomplished his purpose, that particular angel disappeared. The guards recover and leave to report what happened to the authorities.
5. The women then arrived and discovered that the stone had already been rolled away, and they feared the worst - that the body had been stolen.
6. Mary Magdalene runs to tell Peter, saying, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter, John, and Mary run back to the tomb, with John taking the lead, Peter following, and Mary coming closely behind.
7. But while John peered inside, Peter went past him and was first inside. Seeing the grave clothes, John and Peter appear to believe that Jesus has risen, and they then go

home.

8. But Mary stays at the tomb, with Mark 16 indicating that the other women were still at the tomb. The women enter the tomb where they see two angels.
9. John shows the two angels speaking first to Mary Magdalene, asking, "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." I find it so significant that the angels address Mary Magdalene first.
10. The rest of the women are so terrified by the presence of these angels that they fall flat on their faces - not looking. Luke says that their faces were on the ground. But Mary is pretty courageous. She does not fall down. She looks at the angels. The angels say, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6 "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (Luke), "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you.'" (Mark)
11. Mary is the first to turn around in order to obey this demand. The others were probably getting off the ground. So this means that Mary sees Jesus first, but doesn't recognize Him. Jesus addresses Mary first, saying, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" And I'll just read from John here: "15b 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)." [And to me that is such a touching display of Christ's love for her and of her devotion to Him.]
12. As soon as Mary recognized Jesus, she fell at His feet and clung to Him. It's interesting that she didn't fall before the angels, but she did fall at His feet. And she fell at his feet out of love, not fear. And Matthew adds that the other women then came over and also clung to His feet. They followed Mary's example.
13. And though other women were there, I find it fascinating that Jesus again singles out Mary Magdalene to talk to her first. Reading again from John: "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.'" Though all the women pay attention to these words, John makes it clear that Jesus primarily spoke those words to Mary Magdalene. These are all just hints and clues that I will be making conclusions from in a bit.
14. Finally, Mark, Luke and John all show that Mary Magdalene takes the lead in giving the announcement to the disciples. When they show skepticism, Luke says that all the women agreed with Mary and reported the same thing as eye witnesses. The disciples still didn't believe their word - not a good tribute to their unbelief.

Some chronologies show Mary Magdalene to be the first and only one to witness the resurrection at the first appearance, while the others leave, but it appears that all the women witnessed the first appearance of Jesus, with Mary Magdalene being especially singled out by the Lord to talk to and explain things to. For sure she is the first one who saw Him.

## Deductions from the previous Scriptures

Now, from all of those Scriptures that I have just summarized, we can deduce a number of things about Mary Magdalene.

### Mary was the natural leader of the women

First, these verses clearly demonstrate that Mary Magdalene was a natural leader among the women. She got the women together to go to the tomb. She was the first to speak, and both angels and Jesus spoke to her first. She took the lead in telling the apostles about the resurrection. All four Gospels say more about Mary Magdalene than they do the other women. So she was a leader, if not *the* leader of this ministry support team.

### Jesus was not chauvinistic

Second, Jesus didn't have the same prejudices against women that the disciples appeared to have. Despite these women constituting multiple witnesses of the resurrection, the disciples didn't believe them. But Jesus trusted the women enough to deliver His first and most important messages to the women. And we will make another comment about that in a bit.

### Jesus was comfortable around women and they found Him safe

Third, Jesus was comfortable around women and women were comfortable around Him. He was safe for women. He was approachable. Many of us men are not approachable to women, and we could learn from Jesus. The RW360 website has a very helpful article to teach us men how to be more approachable.<sup>5</sup> Anyway, Jesus treated women with respect and He honored them. We men ought to imitate Jesus, not the disciples. There was obviously a very close relationship between Mary and Jesus without it in any way becoming inappropriate. She valued His ministry and He valued her ministry. But all the women - Mary mother of James and Joses, Joanna, and "the other women" (Luke 24:10 - which I take to be a reference to the ministry team) also had a very special place in Christ's heart. It was Mary Magdalene and the other women who were favored with the privilege of being the first witnesses of the resurrection. He elevates the importance of women in the kingdom.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://rw360.org/2014/07/21/approachability-passport-real-ministry-leadership/>

## Jesus commanded women to share doctrinal truth with the apostles

Fourth, Jesus entrusted the grand message of the doctrine of the resurrection to women before He entrusted it to men. Even though they were not being prepared for apostleship or eldership, they were still entrusted with this message. And Jesus *commanded* these women to share that message with the men. Since Jesus gave the command, it is very important to understand that Jesus wants women to be able to do exactly this. We cannot discount Christ's command.

Let me make some distinctions that will become more clear when we get to the story of Priscilla. This is not the same thing as discipleship (which is better done men with men and women with women). Discipleship is a transfer of your life into the life of another person. Rather what Christ commanded her to do is simply sharing truth with one another. Lord willing, I will dig into the Greek of this in more detail when I look at Priscilla. But it is hard to escape the conclusion that women should not feel uncomfortable sharing in theological discussions with men. It happens in our homes and around our tables. It should happen.

Let me expand on that a bit. The Greek words for discipleship and teaching carry the idea of authority with it, but not the words for telling, sharing, and explaining. Priscilla and Aquila both engaged in explaining (the Greek word ἐκτίθημι - they engaged in explaining) proper doctrine with Apollos and gently disagreed with him. And *these women in the resurrection account* were explaining and disagreeing with the apostles on a most vital point of doctrine. As fellow-Bereans, women have this right. Again, we will look at this in more detail when we look at Priscilla (Lord willing), but I don't want you to miss the fact that they were commanded to explain these things to the apostles, even though Jesus knew that the apostles would disagree. This is a very important point when we are seeking to maintain a biblical balance between the extremes of feminism and hyperpatriarchy. I value the insights and feedback that women give on sermons and other forms of teaching. Husbands should value the insights that their wives give. The fact that the husband is commanded to wash his wife with the water of the Word does not mean that the wife can't be a Berean or that she can't explain a thing or two to the husbands. We should be just as comfortable relating to women theologically as Jesus was.

## The risen Jesus instructed these women unmediated by men

Fourth, unlike hyperpatriarchy-assertions, women don't need to always be mediated by their husbands. Yes, husbands should lead, and should disciple, and wash their family with the water of the word, but that does not make fathers and husbands mediators. There is only one mediator between God and man - and that is Jesus. And it doesn't do for Protestants to reject Mary as a mediatrix and then act as if all doctrine must be mediated through them. That is hyperpatriarchy. We men should be moving our children to find joy, fellowship, and learning directly from Jesus. We are not their answer; Jesus is. We need to be modeling how to go to Jesus, not modeling how to avoid Jesus by going to us. Let me illustrate with my counseling. People will sometimes tell me that I need to fix them. I tell them that I can't fix them; and if their focus is on me as their solution, there is no point in counseling. In counseling I point them to Jesus, show them how to dig God's solutions out of

the Word, and work my way out of a counseling job. Why? Because pastors are not the answer; Jesus is.

Well, in the same way, if we fathers and husbands are teaching right and leading devotions correctly, we should be pointing them to Jesus and helping our families to have a relationship with Jesus and showing them how to have personal devotions with Jesus. Jesus spoke to these women unmediated by other men. These women directly reasoned with Him. This means that the husband is not in the place of Christ - as so many hyperpatriarchalists have written and said. Yes, there is a chain of command when it comes to authority, but it is authority in the Lord. And women don't have to turn off their minds when it comes to theology. We should desire our wives and children to become skilled theologians.

### **She was physically fit (Matt. 27:55; 28:8; Mark 15:41; 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:2,15)**

I have just a few other details about Mary that may or may not be that significant, but they might help you to get a fuller picture of who she was. She was physically fit. We know this from the previous passages where Mary followed Jesus for weeks at a time. This would involve a lot of walking, standing, and lifting, and serving.

But there are also a couple passages that indicate that Mary was able to run for quite some distance. John 20 shows her running quickly all the way from the tomb to where Peter and John were and then running all the way back. If they were inside the city (which seems to be the case), then it was a long run. It was not a 100 meter dash. And then she immediately has a long run back. And for her to run fast enough on that second leg of the journey to have arrived back at the tomb shortly after Peter and John arrived shows that she was definitely in shape. She has run twice the distance they did, but is almost able to keep up anyway.

Other Scriptures show her carrying spices. Luke says that she was willing to carry Christ's body away if she could find it.

To do all of this she had to have kept her body in good shape. And in this, she is a role model to women today as well. While godliness is more profitable than physical exercise because it profits in every area of life whether physical or non-physical, Paul indicates that physical exercise still *does* profit.

### **It was because of Mary that the other disciples knew where Jesus was buried (Mark 15:47)**

I already mentioned the next point - that Mary made sure to take notice of where the body was laid so that she could let the others know later and so that she could bring spices later. What's the application? Well, she was a model in having an eye to the future. She was planning for the future. She did not allow sorrow to make her stop noticing, planning, and working. In fact, those three things help us to deal with sorrow. She no doubt picked up



that lesson (and many other lessons) from Jesus. I don't buy into Kubler Ross' five stages of grieving; nor did Mary Magdalene. Elisabeth Kubler Ross was demon possessed and her teachings have been destructive to grieving counselees. You need to throw out that concept of the five stages of grieving. It's a doctrine of demons.

## **Mary was not a loner - she was always in the company of others and especially had other women around her (Matt. 27:61; 28:1; Mark 15:40; Luke 8:2-3; 24:10)**

Next, it appears that Mary was not a loner. She was a team player. She picked this up from Jesus as well. She was always in the company of others. And specifically, she was always in the company of other women. Unlike female soldiers in the modern US military who sometimes have to tent with men, Mary was with the women. This gave a testimony of propriety where none could accuse her or Christ of anything inappropriate. It also gave division of labor, allowed various women to specialize, and gave synergy to her ministry efforts. She was a team player. And we need to learn to be team players.

## **Eight comparisons and contrasts between Peter and Mary**

But I want to end with seven comparisons and contrasts between Peter and Mary that highlight some of the remaining characteristics of Mary.

1. Both previously made a living from the fish industry, with Peter being involved in catching the fish in the same general part of the Sea of Galilee, and Mary's hometown being involved in the processing and international trade of fish. And it does seem like everyone in that town was involved in the fish industry. It wouldn't surprise me if Peter's business sold fish to the markets in Magdala. If you were writing a book on economics there are principles of societal economics that could be derived from that fact. It's fascinating how God providential oversight makes economies work together beautifully without any civil government directing them. But I don't dare get into economics this morning even though it is one of my favorite topics.
2. Second, Peter fled from Christ and denied Him, while Mary remained faithful to Christ even in the face of death and came right up to the cross - no doubt putting her arms around Mary, the mother of Jesus and bringing her comfort.
3. Third, Peter slept in the garden after being asked to watch and pray (Matt. 26:37-46; Mark 14:33-42) whereas Mary stayed in the Garden watching over the tomb and weeping without being asked to do so (John 20:11-17; Mark 16:9).
4. Fourth, Peter was a natural leader in the church, while Mary was a natural leader of the women.

5. Fifth, Mary came to the tomb without being asked while Peter came to the tomb after being prompted by Mary.
6. Sixth, Mary met the resurrected Christ in His first appearance whereas Peter met the resurrected Christ at his fourth appearance (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). But both of them met Jesus before the rest of the twelve did.
7. Seventh, Jesus questioned Peter's love three times before restoring him, whereas there was no question of Mary's love and devotion to Jesus.
8. And last, Peter is a model of restoration and how restored people can strengthen and feed the flock. Mary is a model of a person whose passion for Christ *never* subsided and who *never* had to be restored after her initial conversion. She was faithful and persevered with the same intensity of devotion. Both are wonderful models and encouragement. If you have fallen, imitate Peter who got up and followed Christ even to death. But Jude 24 says that you can imitate Mary who didn't fall. It says,  

24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling [Amen! Hallelujah! - "who is able to keep you from stumbling], and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, 25 to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

For my charge, I want to focus on a lesson from Mary's life that I haven't commented on yet – that she was "with" Jesus. In Acts 4:13 it states that the people noticed that the apostles had been with Jesus because of their boldness, the authority with which they preached, etc. Being with Jesus rubbed off on them. Well, the same was true of Mary Magdalene. Her amazing characteristics did not come out of the blue; they came from being with Jesus. So I charge you to spend time with Jesus and ask Him to change you more and more into His image. Amen.