

Magdala

The Commitment of a Woman who Put Magdala on the Map

Magdala (Migdal in Jesus' day) was a small fishing town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where everyone knew everyone else's business. Though the tiny village has great significance today, it was the commitment of one woman who put Magdala on the map.

That woman was Mary Magdalene, and we are first introduced to her in Luke 8:1-3:

8 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.

We know nothing about Mary's family, but we know Jesus cast 7 demons out of her. If a person was known to be demon-possessed, others stayed away! Mary was not popular. She wasn't married and she had no children. She was an outcast. Like many of us, she had gone through things that made her "damaged goods."



Yet, Jesus came to Migdal to heal at least three women of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary was one of them and, once demons were cast out, Jesus was the only person Mary was comfortable coming to. In fact, Mary was more comfortable with Jesus than with family and residents of her hometown. According to Luke, many showed gratitude by providing for Jesus, but Mary left everything and followed Him.

Only a chapter prior, Jesus had been confronted by a Pharisee named Simon about associating with a sinful woman, and in response, Jesus said:

"...her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." (Luke 7:47)

We don't know the origin of the 7 demons cast out of Mary. Perhaps sin was involved, or maybe not. What we do know, though, is that every person is a sin-sick wreck in need of a Savior's forgiving grace. The more we are forgiven, the more we love.

Mary was freed from tormenting demons and because of that, she loved with every fiber of her being. Mary followed Jesus literally and figuratively. She called Him Rabboni ("teacher"), Master and Lord. Jesus was the center of her life and He meant everything to her. Once a rejected outcast, Mary was now forgiven, embraced and loved.

It must have come as quite a shock for Mary to see Jesus on the cross. Her life, her dreams and her hopes seemed shattered. After all, Jesus was everything to her. She lived for Him and He was her hope

and her reason to live. Now Jesus was dead and buried, but what took place at the tomb illustrates just how committed Mary was to Jesus:

20 Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." (John 20:1-2)

Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark. Casting off fear and dread, Mary's love brought her to the tomb of Jesus early that morning. Having seen the stone rolled away and Jesus' body nowhere to be seen, she was perplexed and disturbed, and ran to inform Peter and John, who immediately went to the tomb.

3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. 5 And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. (John 10:3-10)

John outran Peter to the tomb, but stopped short of entering. However, Peter darted in and surveyed the empty tomb. Eventually John joined him, but neither fully understood, so they went home.

Not Mary! She did not turn around. She did not go home. She did not go away unknowing. She wanted answers! "What have you done with Jesus?"

11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then 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."

In a few days, you too will be forever changed as you stoop down and look into the empty tomb. But you have the benefit of history, knowing the answers Mary did not have yet. When she peered into the tomb and saw an angelic being, she did not think, "Wow! I saw angels...and talked to them!" No, not even angels are impressive to one who has come to seek out the One she loves. Mary wept because Jesus was nowhere to be found. She was distraught, even in His death, that she could not serve Him honorably, even in death.

Yet, just as He had seen her and had come to her in the midst of her greatest need in Migdal, Jesus was preparing a different kind of healing. When Mary first saw her resurrected Lord, she didn't recognize Him. But sheep who belong to the Good Shepherd know His voice.

14 Now 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?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, 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, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). (John 20:14-18)

So desperately did Mary want to take care of the body of Jesus, that she did not recognize Him. Yet, it took just a word...."Mary!" She heard her name and that's all it took. She recognized His voice!

One can only imagine how Mary desired to embrace the Good Shepherd who had called her name. Yet, this was not the time for that. In fact, Jesus said to her:

"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' "

Mary...not Peter or John or His mother...became the first to whom Jesus revealed Himself, and it was to Mary that Jesus gave the command to go tell the disciples.

Mary was a nobody, but Jesus wasn't looking for someone of status, big bank accounts or worldly success. All He cared about was love and dedication. The one who had been forgiven much now loved much and would do anything for her Master. He was everything to Mary. Today, a very moving mural of a woman touching the hem of Jesus' garment (pictured above) graces a beautiful chapel in Magdala, reminding each of us of the power of knowing Jesus as Mary did!

It was Mary who put the tiny village of Magdala on the modern-day map. Discovered in 2009, the synagogue where Jesus undoubtedly taught has now been unearthed, and the treasured site holds special significance to Christians. Yet, if not for the unloved outcast and "damaged goods," Magdala would have far less significance to us today. Because of her love and dedication to Jesus, we all know about Magdala.

Mary is the primary reason we want to know more about this town. She is also the reason we want to know more about Jesus. All it takes for us to be someone is to make ourselves nothing, so He can be everything. May we all be as dedicated, caring and sensitive to His voice as Mary. May we all live our lives with the assurance of forgiveness of our sins, and the love it produces. May our lives with Him as our Lord be a reflection of Mary Magdalene's!