

## **Sunday School Lesson February 14, 2021**

*Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.*

*Lesson for February 14, 2021, "Mary Magdalene: A Faithful Disciple"*

*Background Scripture Mark 15:40; 16:1-9; Luke 8:1-3 and John 20:10-18*

*Mary Magdalene is one of the most prominent females in the New Testament, appearing in all four Gospels as a devoted follower of Jesus. When Mary met Jesus, he cast out seven demons from her. Mary was also honored as one of the first persons to receive the news of Jesus' resurrection.*

*From the text section, Stepping into the Word – God acts in our lives and the in the world. We see it. We are called to testify to it.*

*Jesus show himself to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection and asks her to testify to the male disciples that he will soon ascend to his Father. In a culture in which women could not be witnesses in court, this command from Jesus to Mary is shocking. Jesus trusts her to report what she has seen and heard. He trust her to be a faithful and accurate witness. He honors her with this commission.*

*Demons are evil spiritual beings (Matthew 8:16; 12:43-45) who are enemies of God and have certain power over people (James 2:19; Revelation 16:14). They belong to the number of fallen angels that "kept not their first estate" (Jude 6). Demonic possession is mentioned quite often in the New Testament, with a variety of effects such as muteness (Luke 11:14) and epilepsy (Mark 9:17). The Gospel records clearly show that Christ distinguished between ordinary sickness and demon possession. Jesus generally healed sick people by the laying on of hands or anointing. The demon-possessed were delivered when the spirits were commanded to depart (see Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:13; Acts 8:7). Sometimes multiple spirits possess a single person, such as the legion of demons who possessed the man in Gennesaret or Mary of Magdala.*

*Some traditions have historically advanced the idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, more recent Biblical scholars have debunked that claim because Scripture does not support it. In Luke 8:2, we learn that Mary Magdalene was a woman from whom seven demons had gone out and she was a close follower and friend of Jesus. In Mark 15:40, we learn that when Jesus was crucified, Mary was among the group of women who looked on from a distance. When the Sabbath was over, she was also one of the three*

women who brought spices to anoint Jesus' body. Mary's consistent presence with Jesus and His appearance to her after His Resurrection points to the value Jesus placed on the contributions of women to the spread of the Gospel.

Jesus' earthly ministry would not have been possible without the support of disciples and friends who traveled with Him as He proclaimed the Gospel. Jesus did not travel with only His disciples. A group of women also accompanied Jesus. Each of the women who traveled with Jesus had been cured of evil spirits or diseases. Mary was from the town of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Joanna also traveled with them. She was the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza. Her faithfulness to Jesus possibly indicates her opposition to Herod's rule. Luke also records Joanna as being one of the women (along with Mary Magdalene) who first discovered Jesus' tomb was empty (Luke 24:10). Another woman named Susanna also traveled with them. The women who traveled with Jesus and the disciples provided resources such as food and other support for the group.

The women who traveled with Jesus supported Him in life and death. Each of the Gospels presents slightly different details of Jesus' death and resurrection, but the account is brief in the Gospel of Mark which was the earliest of the four Gospels written. Mark does not indicate that the disciples remained at the foot of Jesus' Cross, but he does note that there were women who looked on from a distance (Mark 15:40). These women included Mary Magdalene. Crucifixion was meant to be a humiliating and shameful execution. People would not normally associate themselves with such a person. Crucifixion also demonstrated the total power of the Roman Empire. People who were crucified served as an example to Roman citizens of what happens when one crosses Rome. These women associated themselves with someone who was a threat to the Empire, Jesus. Though they are not right at the feet of the Cross, where John records himself and Jesus' mother, they do not fully desert their master as the other disciples did. These three women stay with their Master through His death and are the first to come planning to anoint His body on the morning of His resurrection. When was the last time you supported someone or something until the end even knowing that you would not receive the result for which you had hoped and prayed?

Mary is the first to find the empty tomb. She then alerts the Apostles (John 20:1-2). When Peter and John went to Jesus' empty tomb, they thought that someone had taken His body. The two returned home. Like Peter and John, Mary feared that someone had taken the body also, but she was unwilling to leave the tomb without trying to determine where the thieves placed Him. Mary remained at the tomb only because of her devotion to

*Jesus. Mary's grief prevented her from immediately recognizing Jesus when He appeared to her in His resurrected body. When Mary finally recognized Him, she knew Jesus because of the distinct way He spoke to her. The miraculous had happened and Mary was the first of Jesus' friends to bear witness to the fact that Jesus had risen with all power in His hands. Mary could not wait to share the Good News.*

*Mary Magdalene's example to us as individuals is two-fold. First, she reminds us to allow God to transform our lives. Second, she shows us what it means to be a faithful follower and friend. In a world where so much seems temporary and fleeting, Mary teaches the contemporary reader to stay plugged into our relationship with Jesus. Mary's example to our churches is not to be hasty and walk away from the empty tomb. Today's churches often find that they are bombarded with statistics of how people in younger generations are less likely to attend church. These statistics sometimes lead us to change or dilute our message to suit changing times. Mary reminds the church to remain steadfast. There is yet hope.*

*When Mary Magdalene met Jesus, she was set free from seven demons. From that day forward, her life was forever changed. Mary became a devoted believer and traveled with Jesus and the disciples as they ministered throughout Galilee and Judea.*

*Out of her own wealth, Mary helped care for Jesus and the needs of his disciples. She was deeply devoted to Jesus and stayed with him at the foot of the cross during his crucifixion when others fled in fear. She and other women bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus and appeared at his tomb in all four Gospels.*

*Mary Magdalene was honored by Jesus as the first person he appeared to after his resurrection. Because Mary Magdalene was charged in all four Gospels to be the first to share the good news of Christ's resurrection, she is often called the first evangelist. She is mentioned more often than any other woman in the New Testament.*

*Mary Magdalene is the subject of much controversy, legend, and misconception. There is no evidence to back up claims that she was a reformed prostitute, the wife of Jesus, and the mother of his child.*

*Being a follower of Jesus Christ will result in hard times. Mary stood by Jesus as he suffered and died on the cross, saw him buried, and came to the empty tomb on the third morning. When Mary told the apostles Jesus had risen, none of them believed her. Yet she never wavered. Mary Magdalene knew what she knew.*

*As Christians, we too will be the target of ridicule and distrust, but we must hold onto the truth. Jesus is worth it.*

***Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.***

*Next week's lesson February 21, 2021, "Priscilla: Called to Minister"*

*Background Scripture Acts 18:1-26, Romans 16:3-4, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and 2 Timothy 4:19*

*Sources for this lesson: The Bible, The Teacher's Bible Commentary, H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs, Editors, Mary Magdalene by the Christian Education Department, Who was Mary Magdalene, sermon by Jerry Flury, Baptist Denomination and The Present Word Adult Bible Studies.*