

Mary Magdalene

'Jesus entered a certain village in Bethany. A woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. She had a sister named Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened His words. Martha was distracted with much serving and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, is it nothing to You, my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me!" Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the best part which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38 to 42).

'When Jesus came to Bethany and was in the house of Simon the Leper, a woman came up to Him with an alabaster flask of very precious perfume and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table ... Jesus said to them, "She has done a praiseworthy thing for Me ... In pouring this perfume on My body she has done it to prepare Me for My burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this Gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will be told in memory of her" (Matthew 26:6 to 13).

'While Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper, as He was reclining at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive pure perfume. She broke the jar and poured the perfume over His head ... Jesus said, "She has done a good thing for Me. She has done what she could. She has anointed My body for the burial. Surely I tell you, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in the entire world, what this woman has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:3 to 9).

'One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to dine with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at a table. Behold, a woman of the town who was an especially wicked sinner, when she learned Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of perfume. Standing behind His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair and kissed His feet and anointed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw it he said, "If this Man were a Prophet, He would know who and what sort of woman was touching Him – for she is a sinner." Jesus replied, "Simon, I have something to say to you ... Do you see this woman? When I came into the house you gave Me no water for My feet but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no (greeting) kiss but she, from the moment I came in has not ceased to kiss My feet tenderly. You did not anoint My head with oil but she has anointed My feet with costly perfume. Therefore I tell you, her sins, many as they are, are forgiven – because she has loved much" ... Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven! ... Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:36 to 50). It is noted, Jesus was an invited guest in the Pharisee's house, yet even as a guest He rebuked the Pharisee in his own home for criticising Mary.

It is not recorded in the Bible exactly when Jesus met the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus but we do know what happened to the family after they met Jesus, they all changed. Martha knew Jesus was the Lord and realised He had authority because she referred to Him as Lord. When Lazarus died, Martha knew Jesus could heal and He could raise people from the dead. She had great faith. 'Martha said to Jesus, "Master. If You had been here my brother would not have died. Even now I know whatever You ask from God, He will grant it to You" (John 11:21 & 22). Mary felt the same way. "Lord. If You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32).

If we read John chapter 11, then onto 12:1 to 11, we see a picture of a loving family, very close to Jesus. 'A man named Lazarus was ill. He was of Bethany, the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived. This Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped His feet with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was now sick, so the sisters sent a message to Him saying, "Lord, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus received the message He said, "This sickness is not to end in death but is for the glory of God so the Son of God may be glorified. Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus. When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick He stayed two days longer where He was ... Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus is sleeping but I am going there to awaken him out of his sleep ... Lazarus is dead." When Jesus arrived (in Bethany) He found Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Bethany was only about 5 kilometres away from Jerusalem. Many Jews had gone out to console Mary and Martha concerning their brother. When Martha heard Jesus was coming she went to meet Him while Mary stayed in the house ... Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ... Martha said to Him, "Lord I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God Who was to come into the world." After she said this she called her sister Mary, privately whispering to her, "The Teacher is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she arose quickly and went to meet Him ... When Mary came to Jesus she dropped down at His feet ... When Jesus saw her sobbing, He was deeply troubled in spirit. Jesus wept. Jesus, Who was groaning within Himself, approached the tomb ... Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha said, "But Lord, by this time his body must smell for he has been dead four days!" They took away

the stone ... and Jesus shouted, "Lazarus. Come out!" Out walked Lazarus'. Chapter 12:1; 'Six days before the Passover, Jesus returned to Bethany where Lazarus was. They made Him supper and Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with Him. Mary took some rare precious perfume that was very expensive and she anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. The whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume ... Jesus said, "She has kept the perfume for the day of My burial" ... The chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also because on account of him, many of the Jews believed in Jesus'.

We can learn a lot about Mary's family from the above verses. In Matthew and Mark, their house was said to have belonged to Simon the Leper. In Luke, the house is said to have been the home of a Pharisee named Simon. By the time John had written his epistle, the house was known as Martha's house. During the time they were friends of Jesus, the family lived in Bethany, but Mary must have been born in Magdala (Matthew 15:39) which was a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. That is where she gets her name. A Magdalene is an inhabitant of Magdala; just as a Nazarene is an inhabitant of Nazareth. Jesus was close friends with the whole family. In fact we are told He loved them. 'Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus' (John 11:5). It is not recorded when Mary moved to Bethany from Magdala, but being a younger sister, she probably moved in to live with her elder, married sister Martha after the death of their parents.

Taking into consideration the culture of the day, in the epistle of John, the house is said to have belonged to Martha, and as head of this household, she was the one who had welcomed Jesus to her house, after Simon had invited Him. That means that Mary was Martha's younger sister. Had Lazarus been older than Martha, then she would have told Lazarus to tell Mary to help her serve because he would have had that authority, but since she asked Jesus to chide Mary, it seems Lazarus was probably younger than his sisters and did not have the authority to tell Mary what to do. There is no mention of their parents in the scriptures. There are references to a man, a Pharisee known as Simon the Leper who was probably Martha's husband. Since there is no mention of their mother, Martha as the eldest, would have filled their mother's role. The fact she was always busy serving, makes this assumption most probable. The first time and the last time we read about Martha, she is busy serving food to Jesus and others. By reading the above verses, it is possible to deduct that Simon, the owner of the house may have had leprosy. They were in Simon the Leper's house, which is later described as Martha's house, and the woman with the perfume was identified as Mary, Martha's sister. It is obvious Jesus did not want Mary's act of pure love to ever be forgotten. What is also deeply profound, is Mary had deliberately kept the expensive perfume especially for His burial. How long had she known and been able to comprehend the facts about Jesus' death and burial, when the twelve disciples were not able to grasp it? How long had she been keeping that special perfume? Only Mary knows the answer, but Jesus knew she had been keeping it for Him. That shows the closeness of their friendship. Mary spent so much time listening to Jesus, she alone was able to perceive what nobody else could.

The reason Mary was particularly blessed was because she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His words. We do not know exactly when, but she was delivered of seven demons Jesus had cast out of her (Luke 8:2). He had totally restored her broken life of sin (Luke 7:47 & 48), they became friends and Mary was the most blessed woman on earth. No other person did what Mary did; Mary anointed Jesus for His burial. Where would Mary have gained the inspiration to anoint Jesus? By listening to Him. Out of all the thousands of His followers, including the twelve disciples, Mary was the only person who seemed to realise what Jesus was saying regarding His death. When the women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body after His crucifixion, they were too late because He had already risen. Mary has been written in history as the only person who had the privilege of anointing Jesus. The Lord shares His secrets with those who sit with Him like Mary did. Mary also had the ultimate privilege of being the first person to see Jesus after His resurrection. That was probably because she had been the one who had prepared Him for His burial.

The Pharisees wanted Jesus out of the way; they wanted Him killed. They wanted Lazarus killed too, because after Lazarus was raised from death by Jesus, many Jews believed in Him. Herein lies a conflict. Simon the Leper was a Pharisee, probably Lazarus' brother-in-law and they lived in the same house. We know Mary anointed Jesus in the house belonging to Simon; the same house that was later known as Martha's house. We know they were in Lazarus and Martha's house because Martha served and Lazarus was at the table with Jesus (John 12:2), so we know they were all in that house at that time. If Simon was Martha's husband, that would be why she inherited the house. That would also explain Simon's strong reaction when he saw Mary anointing Jesus' feet. He acted like a disgusted brother-in-law, who despised his young sister-in-law's life-style. It seems, Simon had not taken notice of the radical change in Mary since she met Jesus.

Mary had been one of the women who had ministered to Jesus as He travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem, and she was at the cross of Jesus. 'Many women watching from a distance, were of those who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee (to Jerusalem) ministering to Him. Among them was Mary of Magdala ... (Matthew 27:55 & 56). Later, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary (Jesus' mother) were sitting opposite the tomb (Matthew 27:61). The women had been at a distance, then they went and stood by His cross. 'By the cross of Jesus stood His mother (Mary), His mother's sister (Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John), Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene' (John 19:25). Then the women went a distance away and watched to see where Jesus was to be buried. 'Some women were there watching from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene (Mark 15:40). Mary Magdalene and Mary (Jesus' mother) saw where He was laid (Mark 15:47).

The ultimate blessing was when Jesus appeared to Mary first – before anyone else. 'On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark and saw the stone had been removed from the tomb ... Mary stood outside the tomb sobbing. As she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb and she saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain. They said to her, "Woman, why are you sobbing?" She told them, "Because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid Him." On saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there but she did not recognise it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For Whom are you looking?" Supposing He was the gardener she replied, "If you carried Him away from here, tell me where You have put Him and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me for I have not yet ascended to the Father but go to My brethren (the Jews) and tell them. I am ascending to My Father and your Father and to My God and to your God." Then Mary Magdalene told the disciples she had seen the Lord and He had spoken to her' (John 20:1 to 18). In these verses we can sense the depth of love Mary had for Jesus. She said with raw emotion, "They have taken away my Lord." In her heart, He belonged to her. Jesus confirmed this kinship when He said, "My Father and your Father and to My God and your God." That is the close kinship we need to develop with Jesus, so His Father becomes our Father.

What had Mary of Magdala done to deserve those two points of honour that nobody else in the history of the earth had received; the anointing of Jesus then her first sighting of our risen Lord before anyone else? She sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to Him speak. Maybe we all need to learn to spend more quality time with Jesus, soaking in His presence. Jesus said what Mary did for Him would be told wherever the Gospel is preached. As we know, Mary was the only person who anointed Jesus for His burial and Mary was the first person Jesus spoke to after He rose from the dead. When we read the story of Mary and Martha we can see Mary listened to the Lord, while Martha was too busy serving to listen to His voice. Jesus rebuked Martha for serving so much she could not hear a word He was saying. Remember Jesus said there is need of only one thing, and it was Mary who chose the best part. It was the quality time she spent listening, that opened her eyes to the truth about Jesus' death and burial. She knew He was going to die. She knew He was the Messiah. Jesus was speaking about Mary when He said, "She loves much because she has been forgiven much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47). That could apply to all Christians. We have all been forgiven much, so we need to love much. It is only by taking the time and really listening with our spiritual 'ears', that our eyes are opened and we learn the secrets He has woven throughout the Word of God. Spending time with Jesus is the only way our relationship with Him will develop into a close, unbreakable bond that will last into eternity.

The last scriptural mention of Martha was when she served Jesus and the others the day Mary anointed Jesus (John 12:2). There is no record of what became of Lazarus after he was raised from the dead but it is possible the religious Jews succeeded in killing him as they were trying to (John 12:10). The last time he was mentioned in the Bible, was just a day after Mary had anointed Jesus (John 12:12 to 17), and this man Lazarus is mentioned only by John. Simon the Leper, Martha and Lazarus slipped into quiet oblivion. Although Jesus loved all of Mary's family, and although the crucifixion took place only days after Lazarus was so wonderfully raised from the dead, we notice neither Martha nor Lazarus were there to support Jesus in His hour of need – but Mary was there for Him and she alone saw the risen Lord before anyone else.

Amen and God bless you.

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