

# Mary Magdalene and Faith

## Encountering Jesus--part 8

March 30, 2014

### **DAY 1: Faith is impossible, part 1.**

1. This week we'll investigate what is *biblical* faith. Is it enough just to *know* a set of facts or truths? Is it enough to *acknowledge* what we believe is true? Is faith even something I can generate? Does it depend upon my faith "muscles?" Is it really faith if it doesn't impact our lives?

2. We'll seek answers to these questions as we look at Jesus' first resurrection appearance after His death.

*John 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.*

3. Who does Jesus identify as the first eyewitness to the scene of the resurrection?

4. What does she first observe?

5. Pretend you're Mary. You've been following Jesus for about three years. You've heard Him predict His arrest, details about how He'll be tortured, His death and His resurrection. You've heard Him say that after three days he'd rise from the dead. Here you are, three days after His crucifixion. You see the stone rolled away. What would *you* be thinking?

6. Mary takes off from the scene to find Peter and John.

*John 20:2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*

7. What things strike you about her statement? Is she right? Wrong? Mistaken? Jot down your thoughts.

8. Mary's statement to Peter and John is flawed from beginning to end. In fact, it's not just flawed, it's catastrophically wrong. In spite of all Jesus had told her, her faith is at "0".

9. When you struggle with your faith, should this be all that big a surprise? Do you tend to get "too" discouraged when your faith lags?

## DAY 2: Faith is impossible, part 2

*Matthew 20:17 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, <sup>18</sup> "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"*

1. This particular episode is the third time Jesus predicted what was going to happen to Him. What three specific things will the *Jewish* leaders (chief priests and teachers of the law) do?

2. What three things does He predict the *Romans* (*Gentiles*) will do to Him?

3. What is the last thing He predicts?

4. It's one thing to predict what you'll have for lunch tomorrow. It's another thing to predict the biggest events of your life--*in stunning detail!*

5. If you had heard the words in Matt. 20:17, where would **you** have been on the third morning after the crucifixion?

6. Where were Peter and John? Were they "on sight"?

*John 20:2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*

7. Why weren't the most important disciples at the tomb? Did it not "register" with them what Jesus had told them? Was it just too "inconceivable?" How would you explain their lack of faith?

8. Consider what it takes to come to faith! Neither Mary, Peter and John nor ANY of the disciples believed Jesus had risen from the dead!

*Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

9. What do these verses and your study the last two days say about faith?

### **DAY 3: Faith is rational.**

1. I regularly hear secular people describe faith as if it's the opposite of reason, or the opposite of logic, or the opposite of science. That's certainly **not** how the bible views faith. Jesus Himself urged people not to make a rash decision to follow Him, but to **count the cost** of discipleship. You count the cost by using your head, making a rational decision. Weigh the evidence, then decide.

2. I've heard skeptics decry the disciples as superstitious, not mentally sharp, gullible and naïve. Is that the case? Instead of just believing that they were naïve, let's look at the evidence! Use your "detective" skills.

3. In the first century A.D. virtually no one in the Jewish, Greek or Roman cultures expected someone to be raised from the dead. That was as far out of the realm of possibility as it would be for most people today. *And the disciples were no different, as we'll see!*

4. Skeptics have said that the disciples **wanted** Jesus to rise from the dead, that they needed Him to rise from the dead for the sake of this movement. In the eyes of skeptics, the disciples are not credible. "Of course they believed Jesus rose from the dead." This may tickle the pride of skeptics but it is the opposite of the evidence we'll study.

5. The disciples were not at the tomb on morning three. They were hiding in a house, sulking about the death of their leader.

6. The beginning of coming to faith started with Mary's eyewitness testimony. THEN, Peter and John head for the tomb.

*John 20:3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*

*<sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.*

*<sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,*

*<sup>7</sup> as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.*

7. Put on your CSI hat.

a. John got there first. What did he do? What did he see? (John 20:5)

b. What did Peter do? What did he see? (John 20:6-7)

8. What would you be thinking if this had been you?

## DAY 4: Faith is rational.

Let's dig into the evidence Peter and John saw.

*John 20:5 He (John) bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.*

<sup>6</sup>*Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,*

<sup>7</sup>*as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.*

2. John records eyewitness testimony. All right, all you CSI Wherever junkies. Pretend you're at a crime scene. There is evidence before you. What do you see? Three eyewitnesses. Stone rolled away that no group could roll away. No body. Empty tomb, that is of a body.

3. Peter and John see two things in the tomb:

a. Strips of linen (used for burial of the body). The body is gone, but the grave clothes are left behind. What do you make of that?

b. The burial cloth which had been wrapped around Christ's head was also lying there, "*folded up by itself.*" What do you make of that?

4. Consider the possibilities of a missing body.

a. Did the Jewish leaders somehow steal the body? Would they have stripped the corpse of the grave clothes, removed the cloth around His head and folded it neatly? The Jewish leaders were not allowed to even touch anything that was associated with something dead! Finally, if the Jewish leaders wanted to discredit the Christian movement, all they had to do was produce the corpse! They didn't because they couldn't. Case closed.

b. Did the Roman authorities steal the body? Ask yourselves the same questions you just asked about the Jewish leaders. If the Romans had the body why wouldn't they just display it?

c. Did the disciples take the body out of the tomb? Ask yourself the same questions from above. Did the disciples appear to be eager to believe the resurrection, or were they just as obstinate and obtuse as everyone else? Finally, would the disciples one day die for a faith that was based on a lie?

5. Let's finish with Peter and John:

*John 20:8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.*

<sup>9</sup>*(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)*

<sup>10</sup>*Then the disciples went back to their homes,*

6. Were they naïve? Too eager to believe? Living by "wish fulfillment" or were they more like skeptics?

## DAY 5: Faith comes by and in grace.

1. How did Mary finally come to faith in Christ?

*John 20:11 ... but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb<sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.*

<sup>13</sup> *They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."*

<sup>14</sup> *At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.*

<sup>15</sup> *"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."*

<sup>16</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).*

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

<sup>18</sup> *Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.*

2. Go back and underline every piece of evidence that was presented to Mary about the resurrection.

3. What did it finally take for Mary to come to faith?

4. What strikes you about the tenor of the interchange between Mary:

a. ...and the angels? (20:12-13)

b... and with Jesus? (20:14-16)

5. Mary becomes the first Christian. Think of it. This was a woman (in that culture women could not give evidence in court). She had a checkered past, was known to have had seven demons torment her. She was not a leader, not a disciple, not a religious person, and not someone who "had it all together." She had no moral successes nor gifts.

6. **SUM:** (1) Faith is a gift because it's impossible for us to generate. (2) Faith is based on biblical evidence. (3) Faith is given by grace, not earned.