

PREVIEW!

Thirty-eighth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Mark's Story of the Passion* from Mark 16:1-11
“Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.” Mark 16:9

The current issue of *World* magazine features a letter written by Robert Fahrback who is serving fifteen years in a Texas prison. He's already been there eight and a half years. The prison experience has been horrible, he writes. “*I am at a psych prison crazy house where you take medicine for voices, seeing things that others can't. Where people cut on themselves, and I was one of them. I've been like that for years. I came to prison and started on medicine—1200 milligrams a day. I was trying to get away from the angry feeling I had toward people and even myself. But now I am off all of it because someone loved me enough to give me his life so I can be free in my mind where all the battle is. Boy-o-boy and what a battle it was.*” He is talking about how he met Jesus Christ and how by faith alone Jesus saved him. Then he adds, “*You have not messed up your life to the point where God can't fix it.*” (February 3 2007, 47)

That's what happened to Mary Magdalene. We meet her in Mark's gospel in chapter 16, verse 9. Mark says, “*Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.*” This last section of Mark's gospel doesn't appear in the earliest and best manuscripts we have available. The style and vocabulary are different from the rest of the gospel. And the events related in verses 9-20 are not in chronological order. There is every reason to conclude that this passage was added later and not written by Mark. Nevertheless, what is recorded here is confirmed by other gospel accounts, and since the passage is from a very early source, most evangelical Bible scholars treat it as Scripture. That's how I look at it too. So, let's see what these verses tell us.

To square the events of Christ's resurrection described here with the other gospel accounts, we should probably reconstruct them in the following manner. Mary Magdalene was part of the group of women who went to Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning to complete the interrupted burial preparations. Mary apparently ran ahead of the others and discovered the tomb open. She tore off to alert the disciples, and Peter and John hurried to the tomb to see for themselves. Meanwhile, the other women came to the empty tomb, found it open, stepped inside and encountered an angel who told them that Jesus had risen. The women were stunned into silence. A few minutes later Peter and John arrived at the tomb but didn't see the angel. Mary had accompanied the two disciples, and when they left, she lingered, overcome by grief. It was then she met two angels, and while she talked with them, Jesus appeared. She thought at first he was the gardener, but when he spoke to her and called her name, she realized it was Jesus. She ran to the upper room to tell the disciples she'd seen Jesus, but they didn't believe her.

At this point, let's ask, who was Mary Magdalene? She was from the town of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. All we are told in verse 9 is that Jesus had once cast out of her seven demons. This is confirmed in Luke 8:2 where Mary is mentioned with several other women who followed Jesus and provided support for

him. Demons are evil spirits. They are fallen angels who are capable of taking control of human beings. We don't know what effect the possession had on Mary. It could have been physical. Jesus encountered demon possessed people who were thrown into seizures or afflicted with other physical bondage. It could have been mental. The demoniac Jesus met on the eastern shore of Galilee lived in a cemetery. He screamed and gashed himself with rocks, and terrified other people. Or, Mary's demon possession could have been moral. Some cases of possession involve vulgar sexual sin and blasphemy. At any rate, for Mary the torment of demon possession was an experience of excruciating suffering.

Then Jesus had come into her life and with a word he had set her free. Her deliverance included forgiveness. Demon possession is usually tied to dabbling with the occult, the worship of false gods, or sometimes the use of drugs. Demons do not enter mentally alert and generally righteous people. So there were sins from her past that had led Mary down the path to destruction. And there may have been ugly sins that she committed at the command of her demonic masters—things she would have remembered, memories that twisted her personality. So, Jesus had made her clean. He had freed her mind. He had healed her body. Like Robert Fehrbach Mary Magdalene could say because of Christ, *"You have not messed up your life to the point where God can't fix it."* Mary lived each day filled with an undying gratitude and love for Jesus. Great healing and great forgiveness produce great love.

Maybe you have experienced the deliverance only Jesus can give. Maybe you look back on your life and you know that if it were not for what Christ has done for you, your life would be a complete ruin. He's healed you. He's set you free. Probably you still struggle, but you know first hand the power of Christ in your life. Maybe you're here this morning because you know you're trapped and you're looking for help. Let me say to you, Jesus Christ has set people free who were far worse than you. When he went to the cross and died, he bore hell itself so you do not need to. Come to him and cast yourself on his mercy, for he saves those who turn to him!

That's why Mary had hung around the tomb in such deep grief. She believed that Jesus was dead and that the empty tomb meant only that someone had moved his body. And if Jesus was dead, then her hopes had been crushed. There could be no complete healing in her life. But then Jesus stood before her, and called her name. And suddenly everything was right again. What Mary now saw was a preview. She was the first to see him alive from the dead. Soon his disciples would see him too. And then five hundred followers gathered in one spot would see him. But Mary saw him first.

But Mary's encounter with Jesus was a preview of another sort as well. Let me try to explain what I mean. When Jesus rose from the dead he stepped into another realm. He entered a state where death could no longer touch him. Once you've died and are really dead, dead beyond reviving; and then you come back to life, you are no longer vulnerable to death. You've crossed a threshold into a world where death no longer exists. That's where Jesus was as he walked up to Mary. She was still on the dark side.

She would still come to the point where her body would give up its life and die. But Jesus had gone beyond that.

You and I live on this side of death as well. As a result, we tend to think in terms of making our lives better here and now. If you are suffering from any of the things that cause sorrow in life, you want desperately to get out from under those things. If you're unhappy, you want to be happy. If you feel guilty, you want to be forgiven. If you are grieving, you want to laugh again. Our focus is on the life we live on this side of death. That's where Mary was. She loved Jesus because he had freed her from the demons' power. But now, as she beheld Christ, she was getting a preview of something greater than anything she'd ever thought about. She was looking at life as it is lived on the far side of death.

I talked this weekend with a member of our church about the losses death has inflicted upon her. About people she misses. And our conversation soon led to heaven. The people she has lost, and those I have lost—all of them loved Jesus. They are alive now on the other side of death. They haven't received resurrected bodies yet because the resurrection of the dead that Jesus has promised has not yet taken place. But that day is coming. They will receive new bodies—and so will all of us who trust in Jesus. Never again will death threaten us. And never again will sin or physical suffering or mental disturbances afflict us. Everything will be perfect and whole and lovely.

Jesus had already stepped over the invisible line into that world on the morning Mary saw him. And as she looked at him she could see the future. Her future. Our future. A greater future than anything we will experience in this world. She was catching a preview of eternal life. She could see it and touch it and hear it as she fell to her knees and hugged Jesus' legs and he spoke to her. My dear friends, if you love Jesus, what Mary previewed is what you and I will one day experience. And it will be more wonderful than anything you can imagine. Really and truly!

Preached by Dr. Rick Perrin on February 4 2007 at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, 5637 Bush River Road, Columbia, SC 29212 and Dutch Fork High School Tel. 803-772-1000
www.DiscoverCornerstone.com Copyright 2007