



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Luke 8:1-3

“Mary Magdalene”

TRANSCRIPT

[AUDIO BEGINS]...now have you found Luke chapter 8, and verses 1 through 3?

“And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.”

Now will you turn to the Gospel of John, the 19th chapter, and the 25th verse. John chapter 19, and verse 25, “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.” Chapter 20, verses 1 and 2,

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them,

They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.”

The 11th verse, as Mary, returning a little more slowly than the men who engaged in a footrace to the tomb, apparently missing them, now Mary stands by the tomb. Verse 11,

“But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not, (the Greek is more vivid, ‘Stop clinging to me,’) for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things unto her.”

May God bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the testimonies of the lives of those who came into contact with Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the wonderful Spirit manifested in so many of them. Delivered by him, they loved

him. And in loving him received the blessings of God through him. And Lord, we are met this morning in this auditorium in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ, the one who had risen from the dead. We desire to know him better through the word. To love him more deeply through the things that we learn in this word, and to serve him more effectively in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so Lord, as we are met here in this auditorium we pray that the ministry of God may come to us, not simply that we might be blessed but that through us others may come to know him to and also that the heart of Jesus Christ himself may be blessed through the fellowship of those whom he has redeemed. We thank Thee for the wonderful grace of God and that we are able to sit today with the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. And we pray, Lord, that if there should be some one person in this auditorium we sense that there is, who has not yet believed in Jesus Christ, that today may be the day in which they see him as the one who loved them and gave himself for them. And that they, as Mary, may discover him as their redeemer and Lord. And Lord we pray for the ministry of Believers Chapel and the many important things that loom before this assembly in the future.

We pray, oh God, if Thou shouldst give us days upon this earth before the Lord comes that we may effectively preach and teach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Enable us Lord to reach the many in this community who need to know what it is to be saved, to be born again, through Jesus Christ. Lord, upon every land there are men and women and young people and children who need the gospel of Jesus Christ and we have that truth. And so, oh God, help us to have the spirit of sacrifice and love for Christ that will enable us to go out and reach them for him. We pray that all of the financial needs that exist which are limiting at the present time, the outreach of the gospel of Christ it seems, may come in. We desire, Lord, to ask Thee and not to ask men and so we lean upon Thee and expect from Thee in Thine own time. Give us the faith from Thy word and the perseverance after having received the promises of God to await their fruition as

Thou dost deem fit. We commit, Lord, our meeting to Thee today and pray that there may overshadow our meeting the sense of the presence of our God. We pray for the young people who are here, for the older ones, may our meeting be a meeting in which Christ is honored and exalted. For we ask it in his name and for his sake. Amen

[Message] The subject for today as we conclude our studies in prominent figures around Golgotha is Mary Magdalene, or The Reward of Gratitude. Outside of the intimate three -- Peter, James, and John -- Mary Magdalene is mentioned more often than any male follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fourteen times, I think, she is referred to in the New Testament. She has excited the interest of poets, of artists, of musicians, and of novelists. But beyond one famous hour we know very little of Mary Magdalene.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that we know very little of this lovely woman she is a vital link in the story of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. She was granted remarkable privileges apparently because of the constancy of her faith and love of Jesus Christ. She was the messenger of the empty tomb and she was also the messenger of the living and appearing Messiah.

I think that God has had a private joke over Mary Magdalene. It almost seems as if he has gone out of his way to select the unlikeliest person to be the messenger of the resurrected and appearing savior. It almost seems that he has purposefully laughed at the theologians in selecting this maladjusted woman to be the one to announce the fact that the tomb was empty. In fact, she's the one who announces the fact that our theologians cannot even reasonably set forth in doctrinal fashion because no one can really describe the resurrection in the final analysis. And so I think it's a kind of private joke that God has. It's the kind of way he has of overturning our tables in that he selects one whom you and I would never have selected to be the one to bring this wonderful good news to the other disciples.

This morning we want to take a look at Mary and her past, then Mary at the cross and at the sepulcher, and finally the appearance that Jesus gave to her. But first of all will you turn in your Bibles to the 8th chapter of the Gospel of Luke and we want to see what the Bible has to say about the past of this woman. The 2nd verse says, “And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils.”

What kind of a woman was Mary Magdalene? Magdala was a little village on the southwestern side of the Sea of Galilee, about five miles or so from Capernium. It was a city that was not known particularly, although there is some evidence in Jewish records that it was a city that was known for harlotry. Beyond that, however, there is very little that we can say about this place from which Mary came. What does it mean when Luke says that, “Out of her went seven devils?”

Tradition has it that Mary was immoral and that this is the reason, this is the explanation of our statement, “Out of her went seven devils.” Now it is true in Jewish thought there is some evidence for immorality and demons being linked together; that is, in certain of the literature there is evidence that if a person was thought of as demon possessed that meant that they were immoral. Furthermore, the Talmud says about Magdala that it was a city that was famous for its harlotry and for that reason later on it suffered destruction. Now some look at this and say, “Mary Magdalene really means simply Mary of Magdala and therefore this is nothing more than the Jewish way of saying, “Mary the Harlot.” She was Mary from Magdalene.

In fact it became very popular and in the 4th through the 6th Centuries evangelists and others who taught the word loved to lay great stress upon the fact that Mary had been an immoral person and probably a harlot and out of this have grown a number of the representations which the artists have made of this woman. They have painted her as an auburn haired woman who staggers out of a house of shame, weeping and sobbing, and falls at the feet of Jesus. Now this, of course, is not found in the word of God. There

is nothing in the Bible to suggest that Mary was immoral at all but nevertheless this has been tradition. Now there is also tradition that Mary Magdalene is connected with a kind of sweet or sick sentimentality. In fact, the very word maudlin is a contraction of Magdalene and when we speak of someone as being maudlin we speak of someone who is being sickly sentimental. But this, I say, is not biblical; it is not supported by the words of Scripture. I do not think that as far as the word of God is concerned there is any evidence whatsoever that Mary Magdalene was an immoral person and that that is the explanation of the seven devils who went out of her.

Is it possible that Mary was unbalanced? Now as far as I'm concerned I'm prepared to believe that Jesus Christ can heal any kind of insanity. In fact, I've seen some very, very wonderful things done by our Lord with unbalanced men and women. A few years ago, in fact two years ago, I was in California for the Mount Hermon Bible conference of the Dallas Seminary and had a very interesting conversation with a woman who was about thirty-five years of age. In fact, she was thirty-five at that time, she told me her age. You could tell that she was a strange woman I guess [Laughter] when she told me her age. But this is the only thing that was left of her strangeness. She had been seeing a psychiatrist for a long, long time and then she came into the sound of the gospel of Jesus Christ and she was wonderfully converted. After she had begun to grow in grace she still continued to go to her psychiatrist but finally she went to a psychiatrist and she said to her psychiatrist that she had been saved and that she no longer needed him. He looked at her very astonished and he said to her, “Marilyn, I want you to know that if you don't keep coming to me I'm not going to be responsible for what happens to you. You have so many anxieties and fears that need attention.” She said, “I know, but I'm reading God's word and he's taking them away one by one.” The psychiatrist put his hand to his head and said, “Oh, oh.” And she said to me three years later, she said, “You know, for some time after that I worried a little bit because of what the psychiatrist said, but it's true. It's been three years and I'm of a sound mind now as a result of having been saved

through the gospel of Jesus Christ.” I said, “Marilyn, that was very unkind of you to go to that psychiatrist, you probably gave him more anxieties and fears than he’s ever had before and he’s probably still struggling with them.” [Laughter]

Now I am prepared to believe, I’ve had enough illustration of this, I’m prepared to believe that God can through Jesus Christ heal the unbalanced. And, of course, it is possible, I suppose, that when we read, “Out of whom went seven devils,” that this is at least an explanation. Perhaps we should say in modern terminology that Mary Magdalene was a paranoid schizophrenic with complications from severe manic depressive cycles. I guess that’s the biblical translation that we would give of this if we thought that Mary Magdalene was unbalanced. But really I doubt that that is the explanation of these words, “Out of whom went seven devils,” because I do believe that as far as the Bible is concerned there is such a thing as demon possession and it seems to me that this is the simplest and most direct explanation of this woman Mary Magdalene. That’s what she was, she was demon possessed. She was apparently, as far as we can tell from these words, a gentle woman of good birth. You will notice that she is mentioned before Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward. And so apparently she was a woman of gentle birth, perhaps of even outstanding birth. And furthermore, she was a woman who had considerable means because she supported the Lord Jesus with the other women and the disciples who went around with the Lord Jesus. So here is a woman, then, of good birth, of money, who was under the thrall of an evil dominion of demons for many, many years. She actually suffered a curse that is more saddening and more blighting than insanity. Seven devils inhabited Mary Magdalene.

I think it’s kind of interesting that the Bible when it pictures a woman like this who was demon possessed says nothing whatsoever about Mary afterwards and the testimony that she gave. You do not read in the New Testament of any of the things that we so often see today. When a man who has had a very, very unusual background in sin is converted the very first thing that we do today is to bring him up and set him behind

the pulpit and let him tell us about the sins in which he has been engaged for many years passed. Because, you see, we like the sensational, you never find that in the New Testament. Now this was the perfect illustration, Mary could tell us all about what it is to be possessed by demons but we never read of any of that in the New Testament. All of this sensational approach to the past, of the past, in which we parade the sins and iniquities of men who have been saved before the sensibilities of audiences, is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. Mary is silent about her past, silent because, well, it's possible there were no significant details. Or silent purposefully because it's not the kind of thing that we ought to lay a great deal of stress upon.

I wish I knew the story of Mary's conversion. I wish there were a passage in the New Testament in which it is described. Some time ago I ran across a description of her conversion, it's thoroughly manufactured but let me read it to you. I think it's probably kind of close to what happened. This is what we read, and this, of course, is supposed to come from the Gospel of Luke. Now mind you, it is thoroughly manufactured, a man made it up, but it may well be a fair representation of what happened,

“And Jesus entered, and passed through Magdala which is by the Sea of Galilee. And there met him in the way a certain woman whose name was Mary, possessed with seven demons. And when she saw Jesus, the devils tore her and she cried out in fear, and her father came to Jesus and besought him to heal her saying, My daughter has been grievously tormented from her youth until now. If Thou canst do anything have mercy upon us. And Jesus moved with compassion, rebuked the devils, and they fled out of her and she fell at his feet as one that had been dead. And Jesus took her by the hand and said unto her, (well you know what he said. Anybody who can write good literature would have him say what? Mary). And he said unto her, Mary. And she arose in her right mind and went into her home. This is that Mary Magdalene who ministered unto Jesus.”

We do not know the story of Mary’s conversion, I kind of like that. You know why I like it? I like it because of that last expression that she fell at his feet as dead and Jesus spoke to her and said, “Mary,” because that’s how she recognized him when he appeared to her in the garden. And it just might be, it might be, we cannot be sure, that the voice that Mary recognized in the garden was in the same tone in which Jesus had spoken to her at the first. And this, of course, was why she immediately recognized him when she heard the word, “Mary.”

Well now, this is the background of Mary and this is all that we know of her. We know from verse 3 of Luke chapter 8 that she ministered unto the Lord Jesus of her substance. It was the custom in those days for devout women to follow Jewish rabbis and they were perfectly free to minister to those who had been a blessing to them of their substances. And Mary apparently did that. We do not read of anything in the New Testament that Mary said that was really significant. She was a woman who had been under the thrall of evil for so long that her mind was probably very dormant and dull and no great thoughts come from the mind of Mary Magdalene. As a matter of fact, no really significant words come from Mary Magdalene. But when she comes to know Jesus Christ as her savior there springs up from her heart a great and tremendous force of love like some pent up flood and she expresses that love for Jesus Christ in that she gives herself completely to him.

The next picture that we have of Mary is the picture about the cross of the Lord Jesus. Will you turn with me to John chapter 19, and verse 25? It is the last days of our Lord’s ministry upon the earth, Mary no doubt has heard of the things that are happening. She has heard that the storm is gathering and it appears that Jesus is going to need her help. And so she hurries to Jerusalem in order to minister out of love for him and now, finally, Golgotha is reached and Mary stands there with the others, perhaps helping to support the Virgin Mary. As John describes it he says, “Now there stood by the cross of

Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.” And so Mary now is by the side of Golgotha, she is silent, she is pained, she is no doubt bewildered because of the things that have transpired. And so she stands and she watches the Son of God give his life. She is, I say, bewildered and no doubt pained greatly because this is the one who has meant so much to her. And I think that probably she led Mary, the mother of Jesus, away home. But she didn't stop with observing him on Golgotha, she also observed his burial and I want you to turn with me now to Matthew chapter 27, and verse 61. Matthew 27, and verse 61, now in Matthew's account of the burial of the Lord Jesus he adds this verse, Matthew chapter 27, and verse 61, “And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.” And so the fourth picture that we have of Mary is the picture of one who is in the evening sitting over against the sepulcher of the Lord Jesus in mute despair. Despair because the one whom she loved is now gone.

Now let's turn to the fifth picture in John chapter 20, verses 1 and 2. It was the custom for the Jews to visit the place where the dead had been buried for at least three days after the death. It was believed by many Jews that the spirit hovered about the body for three days after the death but that on the fourth day the spirit was gone and then there was no use to visit the tomb of the one who had gone. Now it is perhaps possible that Mary went out in that spirit. On the other hand, the other gospels seem to indicate that they went out to complete the burial process. They went out wondering who was going to remove the stone from the tomb. Apparently Jesus had been buried hastily and they felt that it was necessary for further spices to be placed in that tomb.

And so on the first day of the week, it is Sunday morning, it is the third day from the time that Jesus died, for in Jewish thinking, remember, any part of the day was considered to be twenty-four hours, a day and a night. Jesus had been in the grave part of Friday, that was the equivalent of a day and a night, Jewish time reckoning. He was in the tomb all day Saturday; that is, a day and a night, Jewish reckoning. And then part of

Sunday, a day and a night, according to Jewish reckoning of time. That is the only way in which we can harmonize the various statements in Scripture that after three days Jesus should rise from the dead. That he should rise on the third day and that the Son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. It is nonsense to believe that Jesus was crucified on any other day than Friday. It is impossible to harmonize and reconcile the accounts of the New Testament. Any part of a day was a complete day according to Jewish reckoning of time. A day and a night and that is provable from the Old Testament Scriptures. There are illustrations of it in the Old Testament.

So it is Sunday morning, it is the first day of the week and Mary Magdalene comes out with other women to anoint the body of the Lord Jesus. She comes out while it was yet dark, John says, “Unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher.” And immediately Mary rushes back to Peter and to John and evidenced, by the way, of the fact that Peter, though he had sinned by denying the Lord Jesus, was still recognized as the chief of the apostles, first among equals. And so she rushes back to Peter, she knocks on the door of Peter’s house in number 7 Beersheba Street. And Peter comes to the door and he hears these remarkable words from Mary Magdalene, “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, we know not where they have laid him.” And I am sure that if Peter is like most men and the woman knocks on his door and makes this astounding statement early in the morning when women ought not, it seems to be, out I’m sure he must have said, “The demons have come back to inherit Mary Magdalene.” But nevertheless, there was a note of authority about it, enough so that he said, “Let me get my sword and also my clothes on and we’ll go and get John and we’ll go out to the sepulcher.” And so Mary is the messenger of the empty tomb, a remarkable privilege. She is the one who announces to the apostles that the tomb is empty.

Well now, Peter and John get together and they race out to the sepulcher, you’ll remember. And John outruns Peter because he’s a good deal younger, just as if Mr. Prier and I were racing out I would outrun him because I’m so much younger than he

[laughter]. But in the footrace Mary is lost. And Mary, of course, as she, because of her love of the Lord Jesus, she makes her way out too to the sepulcher but apparently on the way out she misses them as they come back. And so now in verse 11 we find Mary standing without the sepulcher weeping. Someone has said, “This is the greatest recognition scene in all of literature.” And I’m inclined to believe that it is true. Here she is, maudlin Mary Magdalene and she’s weeping without the sepulcher and she stoops down and takes a look into the sepulcher because apparently this woman is so full of our Lord Jesus Christ that even with the sense of his absence she still kind of looks into that sepulcher to see if really he is gone. And amazingly she sees two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain.

Mary is a kind of person who has a one track mind. I read a story, it was just a really a joke about a man who had a boy who had a one track mind. He loved ice cream. Let’s just say Aspen’s ice cream. He loved Aspen’s ice cream. He kept asking his father for an ice cream cone, “Daddy I want an ice cream cone.” Finally the father on a trip out riding, he said, “Now son,” he engaged in a lengthy explanation, he said, “Now son,” he said, “You’ve already had lunch and furthermore when we arrive we’re going to eat, in addition, in the light of the fact that you’ve eaten all of these other things that you’ve eaten, an ice cream cone is liable to make you sick.” He engaged in a lengthy explanation and he stopped and there was a long silence as they went on mile after mile and he began to congratulate himself on the fact that he had persuaded his son not to ask for an ice cream cone any more. Finally the little boy says, “Daddy?” “What son?” “I want an ice cream cone.” [Laughter] He had a one track mind.

Mary had a one track mind and her one track mind was for our Lord Jesus Christ. And so she looked, and she sees the angels and the angels said, “Woman, why weepest thou?” Someone has said, “Even angels are puzzled by women’s tears.” [Laughter] Men, have you ever gone in to your wife and discovered her crying? And you say, “Why are you weeping?” “Oh, because I’m so happy,” boo hoo hoo, you know [laughter]. Well

now, later on the Lord Jesus asked her this question so I'm not really sure that's the meaning. “Woman, why weepst thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing.” Now I wonder why she turned herself back. John Chrysostom said that as Mary was looking at the sepulcher and the angels were there that she saw the angels do obeisance to someone and she turned to whom they were bowing and she turned and saw Jesus because the angles had recognized the Lord Jesus. And so she sees the man who is standing behind her and she hears him say, “Woman, why weepst thou? Whom seekest thou?” Now I think it's interesting that the Lord Jesus has modified these words, this question. He says to her, “Why weepst thou? Whom seekest thou?” She was looking for something, she was looking for the body of the Lord Jesus, and he takes her attention away from the body to a someone.

You know, this is quite common of the Lord Jesus, he takes us away from things to himself. “Why weepst thou? Whom seekest thou?” After all, Mary, your theology is all wrong. When they take away the body they do not take away the Lord. The Lord is distinct from his body to start with. The theology which he had suggested in her plea to the men was deficient. But now she's looking for something and he wants to lead her to someone. And she says, supposing this man to be the gardener, “Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” She plans a second burial. And you'll notice now she's taken her eyes off of the gardener again and she's looking back at the tomb because in verse 16 we read when Jesus said, “Mary,” to her she turned herself. And so she takes apparently a quick glance at the gardener thinking he's the gardener, makes the statement but looks back to the angels and the empty tomb. What a picture.

You know, that is a kind of picture of you and me. We often look at things instead of Christ. We often look at those things which represent problems and puzzles and perplexities to us instead of looking at the one who can solve all of our problems.

And so Mary has taken a quick glance at the one who will solve all of these problems but now her mind is back again on that empty tomb and the angels that are in it. And she hears the magic word, “Mary.”

Will you turn back to the 10th chapter of the Gospel of John for just a moment? In the 3rd and 4th verses we read, Jesus is speaking,

“To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.”

And so when that voice came to Mary of, “Mary,” she recognized immediately who it was because his sheep know his voice. Do you know his voice? Do you know the voice of the Son of God? Deep down in your heart can you distinguish his voice from other voices when you open up the Bible, which is God’s word, do you hear the voice of God? I’ve heard all kinds of elaborate arguments for the inspiration of the holy Scriptures. Many of them are very valid; I would not question them at all. I like objective proof if we may have objective proof. But in the final analysis one of the strongest arguments for me is that in the word of God I hear my Father’s voice. You see, I have come to know him by reason of personal experience with him. You laugh at me and you say, “Well that’s subjective.” No it’s not subjective; it comes from knowledge of him. I know him. I recognize his voice. I’ve had experience with him. If you were able, if this wall were not here, and you were to put my father, my father who is living in Charleston, South Carolina now, he’s just had his eightieth birthday this past week, and if you were to put him behind this wall so that I could hear his voice and he were to speak I could say to you, and you could not of course, that’s my father. I know it’s my father. I know his voice. I know him. I’ve had experience with him, impossible for me to miss the tone of his voice. I know him.

That’s why when I read the word of God and the Holy Spirit takes the word of God and brings it home to my heart I know this is my Father’s voice because I’ve come to know him by experience. Laugh if you will, there is no greater evidence for the inspiration of the holy Scriptures and the fact that I know my God through his word. Explain all you wish, I have a long series of evidences and proofs of the inspiration of the holy Scripture myself, perhaps more than you. All is worthless if I do not know my father’s voice through the word. It is the Holy Spirit who uses the word and it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who brings conviction concerning Jesus Christ and concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures. Do you know anything about what it is to be in the reformed tradition? That’s what that means. What I’m telling you is nothing more than what the great reformers have said down through the years. They have said that ultimately we know our Father’s voice through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and his internal testimony. And Mary when she heard that voice and the tone of inflection, “Mary,” she knew who it was. As a matter of fact it’s just possible, I say, that that may have been the word that awakened her and caused the demons to flee. At any rate, she immediately said, “Rabboni.” And so when that wonderful word, “Mariam,” for that was Mary’s name, Mary is the Greek, Mariam is the Hebrew name. “Mariam.” She said, “Rabboni,” and she had recognized her Lord.

Many years ago I read an Eastern parable. A sheik was one day walking down a road, he met a woman carrying in her one hand a basin of water and in the other hand she was carrying a torch. And the sheik asked the woman why she had the basin of water in one hand and the torch in the other. She said, “I’m going to put out the flames of hell with the basin of water and I’m going to burn up the glories of heaven with my torch.” “Why are you doing this?” the sheik said. “That men may love God for what he is and not what they escape or receive.” I think that was the spirit of Mary Magdalene. She did not love Jesus Christ for what she received or for what she was going to escape primarily though those were true. But she loved him because of what he was, he was her

master and her Lord. He was the one who had brought her to her right mind and she had come to know him. And so Rabboni, they've taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him. That's the spirit I think we've lost in Christianity today. We don't have much love for Jesus Christ today. We don't have much love in evangelical circles either. We have lots of doctrine and doctrine is very important. I do not depreciate doctrine at all. Next week we'll probably be talking about doctrine. But let me assure you that if all you have is just a lot of doctrine and you do not have any genuine love for Jesus Christ the appropriation of that doctrine, you're a half-wise Christian.

Mary was one who loved Jesus Christ and it is this affection, it is this adoration, it is the power of this devotion that is the strength of Christianity. Rabboni, now she hears some remarkable things from Jesus. Apparently as she fell at Jesus' feet she clutched him and so the Lord Jesus says unto her, “Mary, touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God.” Oh the optimism of God, I said. A maladjusted woman is the first witness of the risen master. How unwise Mr. Prier, Mr. Dean, Dr. Mimms, is it wise to select a person like this with so important a message? Is it wise to select a person that everyone knows has been demon possessed? To go into town and to say to the apostles that Jesus is not only alive but he's appeared? Oh, the wonderful optimism of God. But also the wonderful reward of love. And so Jesus speaks to him and he says, “Mary, stop clinging to me.” Why? He invited Thomas to come and put his finger in his side. How can he say to one, “Stop touching me, clinging to me,” and to the other, “Come, Thomas, put your hand in my side.” Well the problems were different. Week before last when I was in Oklahoma City preaching two questions came, all based on - both based on this text. How is it that Jesus can speak to Thomas and say, “Come touch me,” and say to Mary Magdalene, “Don't touch me.” It's very simple, Thomas wanted to be sure that it was the Lord; identity was the question with Thomas.

With Mary Magdalene it was something else, she was grasping the Lord because she desired his presence and she wanted to maintain that presence and Jesus said, “Mary, stop clinging to me, this is not the time to enjoy my presence in permanent fashion. I have not yet ascended to my Father.” But now you’ll never understand this if you do not understand the Greek verb. He is not saying, “Stop touching me because I have not yet made the act of ascension.” The great tense is perfect. Now if you’ll remember the perfect tense in Greek points to an action in past time, the results of which continue and Jesus is saying to her, “Mary, stop clinging to me, you cannot enjoy my personal presence now for I have not yet reached my ascended state. Now when I reach my ascended state and the Holy Spirit has been shed forth and we have been united in the one body then you shall have me all to yourself Mary. The time shall come, Mary, when you and I shall have a relationship as if I and you are the only people in all the world. And do you know that that is the relationship that we as Christians enjoy with Jesus Christ? We have the relationship, each one of us, with the Lord Jesus as if we are the only two persons in this universe. “It is expedient for you that I go away, if I go not away the Spirit shall not come to you, but if I go away I will send him to you and the one who is with you shall be in you, and through him you and I shall have unbroken, complete and ultimate, and final fellowship. Mary, stop clinging to me, the time is not yet come when you can enjoy me fully and completely. Rather, Mary, go and say,” and the message of the ascension, the finished work is over. The unfinished work is to begin. Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father and that work is still going on. “Go to my brethren and say unto them, “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, the new family relationship that exists. My Father and your Father, and my God and your God. My Father by eternal generation, your Father by temporal regeneration.”

Did you notice that little word “and”? “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, my God and your God.” He did not say, “Go and tell the brethren I ascend unto our Father and our God.” Why not? Because our relationships are different. Our relationship

to the Father is not the same relationship that Jesus has. He has an additional relationship because of his nature and so it is my Father and your Father, my God and your God. Never let us forget that Jesus Christ is the first born among many brethren. This is why I always hesitate to speak about my brother Jesus for while it's true and the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews gives me the authority for saying that, I always like to remember that he's the first born or supreme among the brethren.

Now Mary is given this wonderful message and the text states in verse 18 that she came told -- I love the Greek text here, “She cometh telling,” -- that's the character of the mourner now who has become a missionary and so with all who meet the risen master. “She cometh telling,” what a vivid way to put it. Now my time is just about up. I want to close with two lessons this morning. First the satisfaction of the life whose passion is love for Christ. A simple woman, Mary Magdalene, no special gifts. She didn't have the greatness of soul that the Virgin Mary had. She didn't have that gift for speech that Martha had and that gift for service that Martha had. She didn't have that gift for sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus in brooding reflection and coming to understand great spiritual truths that Mary of Bethany had.

Here is as simple minded woman whose past was largely lost. A woman whose past was gone, perhaps she never even remembered it. She never was able to build up the faculties that God had given her because they were under the demon's possession. But here is a woman who through love for Jesus Christ has her whole life ennobled. And I think in Mary Magdalene we have a tremendous message for those who are unsatisfied, for those who are marred, for those whose lives have been blighted, for those perhaps who've come to Jesus Christ late in life there is always hope and I think in Mary Magdalene the satisfaction of the life whose passion is love for Christ is so wonderfully set forth that you know this morning I can speak out to you and say to you that I do not care what your past has been, what your problems have been, what your perplexities are, how much of a mess you have made of things up to this point, there is not only hope for you,

but there is hope for satisfaction in this life and genuine usefulness for Jesus Christ if love for Christ is the passion of your heart.

And finally the second lesson is that love enables us to see the greatest thing that God has prepared for us and that is the face of Jesus Christ. Now it so happens I read the Bible myself. I read it with the sense that every word is important in God's word. After twenty-five years of the study of God's word I do not know of hardly any unnecessary word in holy Scripture. I read this book as if every word has been given us under the guidance and the direction of a sovereign God. And therefore I look for significance in all of its words and in all of its phrases and in all of its clauses. I have discovered amazing things in God's word which I could not even share with any of you, you're not ready to receive them. Now it is not that I am so much above you, you probably have some things or you ought to have that you cannot share with me yet. But I have many things in God's word I cannot share with anyone. I believe that everything in God's word is significant. When you have studied the word as I have for twenty-five years you will understand. So get going.

But listen, I do not think it was an accident that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. After all, what better person to appear to than Peter when he shoved John aside and rushed down into the sepulcher. Why should not Jesus have appeared to Peter? Or why not to John? Disturbed - there is the telephone [Laughter]. You remember last Sunday morning, there isn't a church in Dallas that has a telephone ring during the morning service [Laughter]. Not even things like that happen accidentally. Why not to John the apostle? The lover, the mystic: why not to John? Why to Mary? It's not an accident. Mary is a person who is dominated by love for Jesus Christ. It shows out everywhere, look at her life. She has attached herself to the Lord Jesus from the time that she has come to know him. She has given her life wholly to him. She has ministered to him of everything that she has, of her substance. “Everything Lord that I have is yours.” She is with him at the cross, where are the apostles? They've gone into hiding like

wounded animals. What about the other disciples? “We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed us real,” and they’ve gone home in spite of these remarkable reports that have come. Who is at the sepulcher sitting over against the sepulcher? Weeping because of the Lord Jesus. Who goes back to that sepulcher? It is Mary Magdalene who is dominated by a love and passion for Jesus Christ. And for the person who has dominated by love and passion for Jesus Christ there comes this great revelation, she is the first to see the risen Christ. The love that Mary has is the love that enables us to see the greatest thing that God has prepared for us, the face of Jesus Christ. And she sees it because she loves him.

You think I’m going to say, “Amen,” now, I’m not. No I’m not, I’m going to talk very plainly to you now for just one minute. And I’m going to say something to everyone of you in this auditorium and I say it to myself because I’ve already said it to myself. When Mary was at the feet of the Lord Jesus she grasped the feet of the Lord Jesus and the Lord spoke to her and said, “Mary, stop clinging to me, I’ve not yet reached my ascended state.” But now, fellow believers, he has reached his ascended state. And this wonderful experience of love and revelation to love is available to every one of us and oh may God speak to your heart and may you sense how important it is that you come to know him, that you get into this book, this inspired book, and listen to the Father’s voice concerning the Son so that you get to know it and so that you get to know him. And in getting to know him have the experience of seeing his face through the word of God. May God speak to your heart and if you don’t respond to an invitation like this which Jesus Christ has given do not be surprised if family discipline does not come. It’s wonderful to have a Father in heaven, wonderful to have one who disciplines us too. But it’s a serious thing to know divine truth and not respond to it. I trust that next Sunday morning if we come together again in the will of God we shall each know him better through the word. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this wonderful requital of love which Jesus Christ gave to Mary Magdalene in showing her himself before apostles, before gifted women, and gifted men. We thank Thee for the halo of glory about the head of this poor demon possessed woman because she responded to love and loved, and was loved in return. And oh God, we pray for each one of us now that Jesus Christ has ascended and longs to have men and women grip him in the grip of fellowship. Oh God help us to cling to him, possess him, come to know him and love him and be loved in return. And as a result of it Lord, oh will Thou use us as servants. For the glory of Christ, and now may grace, mercy, and peace go with us till Jesus comes. For his names' sake. Amen.