

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor
Fresh Starts and New Beginnings Series

A NEW LIFE: THE STORY OF MARY MAGDALENE

Luke 8:1-3; John 20:11-18; Titus 3:4-7

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INTRODUCTION: Today, we will begin a new series of sermons called Fresh Starts and New Beginnings. For the next five weeks, I will preach on various followers of Christ, and we will learn how Jesus transformed their lives.

There are 3 points to today's sermon:

- Mary was given a new life.
- Mary was given a new calling.
- God offers us the same.

1-MARY MAGDALENE WAS GIVEN A NEW LIFE

INTRODUCTION: To give you some background, in Luke 8, it was still fairly early in the ministry of Jesus. His main disciples, the twelve that we know about, traveled with him as he taught them. Others followed him as well. In Luke 7, Jesus was having a meal, and a woman came to where he was and washed his feet with her hair and that led to a wonderful teaching moment that has been the content of many, many sermons.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:1-3

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³ Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

EXPLANATION: Let me introduce you to a woman named Mary Magdalene.

- She is mentioned 13 times in the Gospels.
- In every case except one, she is listed first among the names of women. This indicates that she may have been held in a special place of prominence among the group.
- For you super saints who know the scriptures, you may be surprised to hear me say that. Let me explain:

Historically, Mary received a bad reputation from Biblical scholars. Some people believed that Mary was a sexually promiscuous woman or a prostitute. However, many have come to disagree with that belief, and there is nothing in scripture to prove that is the case.

Let's see what we can learn from this passage of scripture.

- Given her name, we believe that Mary was from or associated with the town of Magdala in Galilee.
- At one time, Mary was possessed with seven demons.
- Christ cast those demons out.
- Mary was one of several female disciples of Jesus who traveled with him and supported him from their own pocketbooks.

It's interesting that the Bible specifies that Mary was possessed by seven demons.

- In the Bible, seven is the number of completion. Therefore, Luke's statement is an indication of the complete control these demons had over Mary's life.
- Other Biblical passages described the physical and mental states of those who were possessed.
- So, while we do not know the details of her previous life, we can assume that Mary was deeply affected by the demons who controlled her. She probably experienced severe mental, emotional, and physical distress. She definitely experienced spiritual unrest. So we see that because of Jesus...
- Mary was given a new life.

2-MARY WAS GIVEN A NEW CALLING

EXPLANATION: Quite some time later, according to other scriptures, Mary Magdalene and other women were present at the crucifixion of Jesus. They also

witnessed the removal of his body from the cross and his burial in the tomb. Because of the mandatory rest associated with the Sabbath, they were not able to perform the customary burial rites. So, on resurrection morning, Mary, along with other women, wanted to anoint the body of Jesus. Once there, they saw the empty tomb, and an angel proclaimed the resurrection of Christ. Mary ran to tell the disciples, but the disciples did not believe her. Peter and John ran back to the tomb to see for themselves what was going on, and Mary followed.

You can imagine Mary's confusion:

- She was distraught over the death of her friend and Savior.
- She was confused at the empty tomb, and whatever assurance she may have felt from the first angelic message was quickly eroded by the disciples' unbelief.

Let's pick up in John 20, when Mary returns to the tomb for the second time.

SCRIPTURE: John 20:11-18

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.¹³ 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."¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, 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."¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"¹⁸ 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.

EXPLANATION: It might sound strange to some of you, but at this time, among this culture, women were not considered reliable witnesses. Yet, Christ chose a woman as his first witness. This first-person account gave Mary a unique authority.

As you know, a witness is always someone who speaks on behalf of what he or she has seen and heard. Think about it:

- Mary was a woman whose life was dark, her future bleak, and she became a woman living in the bright light of Christ's love!
- Mary was a woman who was confined by demonic influence. Because of Jesus, she became a valuable member of a community of disciples.
- Mary was a woman in pain, but when her Savior healed her, she became a woman with a purpose.
- Mary's former life was one of chaos, but the Lord gave her a calling – and that calling was to deliver the news of the resurrection! Can you imagine the thrill of this? As I typed these words in my notes, waves of chills covered my body.

Yes, Mary was the first person who was recorded to have seen the resurrected Christ. Jesus could have appeared to anyone. He could have appeared to his mother, his brothers, or his male disciples. Instead, he chose to make his first appearance to Mary Magdalene.

- Mary was given a new life.
- Mary was given a new calling. And . . .

3-GOD OFFERS US THE SAME

SCRIPTURE: Titus 3:4-7 (New Living Translation)

“But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

EXPLANATION: The definition of new is -- something that has not existed before or is recently discovered.

- We recently celebrated the beginning of a new year, there has never before been a 2023.
- Someone who has never been to our church before is a newcomer.

- Senior adults might call a modern invention a newfangled idea.
- A man and woman who have just gotten married are called newlyweds.
- When a mom has a baby, the doctor hands her the newborn.

In our lost condition, we are living in darkness. We are slaves to sin:

- We are struggling to make it in a world full of pain and confusion, but Jesus offers us a new life in him.
- The punishment for sin is death, but Jesus paid the price for us. Because of his mercy, we can come to him, ask for forgiveness and receive the gift of salvation.
- When we do, he makes us right with the Father and gives us the Holy Spirit to live inside us.
- Because of Jesus, we too, like Mary Magdalene, can experience God's love and become a valuable member of his family. Like Mary Magdalene, when we commit our lives to Christ, we are given a new purpose—following him—and a new calling to tell others the good news.

Mary had demons. Maybe you don't have demons like Mary, but you may have what we call personal demons: heavy weights you cannot shake, sinful habits you cannot break.

Or, perhaps – hold on when I say this one – you are just downright angry at God. You feel that he's let you down. You're disappointed that life has not turned out the way you wanted, and you cannot shake your angst at God.

Maybe you have hate in your heart for other people who are not like you, or maybe you are holding grudges for things that happened long ago. Please hear me when I say:

- Like Mary was given a new life, you can have a new life.
- Like Mary was given a new calling, you can have a new calling, a new direction.

Jesus gave Mary a new life, a fresh start, a new beginning. He offers to make us new, but what do we do with that opportunity?

ILLUSTRATION: Listen to this illustration about a boy named Cameron. Cameron was the son of friends of mine. He was a teenage basketball player.

- At the end of his senior year, he and his parents traveled to a basketball tournament together.
- When they arrived at the hotel, Cameron pulled his shoes from his gym bag, and his parents began to gag. The shoes, which Cameron had worn for several years, were in less-than-optimal shape, but the worst part was the smell. They reeked.
- Cameron's dad tried to convince him to throw them away. He offered to buy him a new pair, but Cameron refused. The smell was so bad that the parents made him wrap them in garbage bags and keep them in the trunk of their car.
- Not long after that, in the middle of a game, Cameron's laces broke. A friend came to the rescue with a spare pair, but after the game, Cameron's dad took him to a shoe store and made him purchase a brand-new pair of basketball shoes. They were not cheap, but Cameron's parents wanted him to have the best.
- Interestingly enough however, Cameron still would not throw away his old shoes. He left them on the garage shelf, wrapped in garbage bags until his mother finally got rid of them when he wasn't looking.

APPLICATION: Like Cameron initially did, perhaps someone listening has refused to accept the gift that the Father offers. You know that there is not anything you can do on your own to save yourself, but you are not ready to give up trying. I am amazed at the number of people I speak with who think they need to clean up their lives before they come to Christ. But the Lord accepts us as we are, even if we reek like Cameron's shoes.

Like Cameron, you're going to keep going until you cannot go anymore. Unfortunately, Cameron's unwillingness to change shoes led to a bigger problem than a nasty smell. When his shoelaces broke, he was pulled from the game and had to sit on the bench. His negligence cost him precious time, and since he was the team's best shooter, it cost them all points on the board. Do not wait to accept Christ's offer. It will only cost you in the end, and who knows? You may wait until it's too late.

But maybe you already know Jesus as your Savior. Maybe you have committed your life to him, but you are just too attached to your previous way of life. Maybe you are like that silly teenager... you are keeping your stinky sinful past wrapped up in the secret places of your heart, waiting to pull it out on a rainy day to relive, or maybe as a reminder of what was. Can I tell you this? It's not worth it. Imagine if Mary Magdalene asked Jesus to keep just one of her demons as a pet. That would have been ludicrous. Yet, that's the way many who claim to be believers act. We hold onto certain sinful habits, like refusing to let go of that grudge we've held since 1975. We wrap them up and put them on a garage shelf just in case we might need them on a rainy day.

Cameron did not need his old, broken, stinky tennis shoes, and you do not need the sins of your past. If you have committed your life to Christ, then, like Mary Magdalene, you have been freed. You have been made new.

INVITATION: Someone once said, "The adventure of a new life in Christ begins when the comfortable patterns of the old life are left behind."

At one time, there was an unfinished road to Calcutta, India. Half the road was paved in asphalt for cars, but the other half was a dirt road for pedestrians. Imagine, if you will, that you are walking down that road on a rainy day. You are headed towards Calcutta, and because you are walking on the dirt road, you are covered in mud. Someone passes you and encourages you to step onto the pavement and walk. When you do, you find that you are able to stay much cleaner. Either way, however, you are still on the way to Calcutta.

God does not call us to move from one side of the road to the other. When we come to Christ, God sets our feet on a whole new road, in a different direction, with a different destination. Because of the free gift of salvation offered us through Jesus, we can have a fresh start and a new beginning.

The altar is open. Come forward and I will be happy to tell you more about Jesus, what he did for you and what he wants to do. If you know Jesus as your Savior, then I encourage you today to evaluate how you are living. Are you living in the light of the new life he has given you, or are you hanging onto the sins of your past.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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