

STRONG WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

MARY MAGDALENE

PART 1

Clinging to Jesus

READ JOHN 20:11-18

INTRODUCTION

Mary Magdalene was certainly a strong woman. We know that she had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus from Luke 8. There are disagreements on whether or not this was a physical healing or a literal demonic exorcism. Either way, she was not only strong for that, but she also followed Jesus closely to the point of His death. She was with Mary (the mother of Jesus) at the cross and went to see where He was buried. She, along with a few other women, went to the tomb three days later to prepare His body for long term burial and found that the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. Most Biblical scholars believe that Mary was the first person to see Jesus resurrected. This is where we see her weeping outside of the tomb after the others had gone home.

The connection that she had with Jesus was so strong that she did not want to leave His side, even in death. Our relationship to Him should be the same. We should be dedicated to Him and to His will, desire, and Lordship over our lives to the point of not leaving Him. She was broken because she had lost her Lord. When we follow Jesus we are making a declaration that He is the most important person in our life. When she actually sees Jesus and realizes that it is really Him, she must've been so happy and would have been so relieved to see Him. That would make anyone cling to the person they thought they had lost for a very long time. We should have that same feeling of clinging to Jesus because He is our help and our hope. He has forgiven us and given us life for death and that is enough to make us hold to Him tightly.

For Mary, she needed to let Him go because He still had business to attend to. She never would have let Him go. The beautiful thing for us is that we can cling to Him forever knowing that He can and will take care of all our needs. Mary had the unenviable fortune to know Jesus before and after His death and that meant she had to say goodbye to the One that she loved yet again. This would have been difficult to say the least but we should be encouraged that when we see Jesus Christ in the flesh, we will never have to let Him go or say goodbye for eternity. This is certainly an encouraging thought. Mary needed to be strong. She needed Jesus just like all of us.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think it meant for Mary to have seven demons cast out of her? Physical or spiritual, how would that make you feel towards the person? Do you think that is the sole reason Mary was attached to Jesus?
2. Why do you think it was women who stuck with Jesus to the end and not (largely) the men? Why was it significant that Mary was the first person to see Jesus?
3. What comfort could Mary take from Jesus being back? Why was it important for us to see this interaction between her and Jesus? Are there any other implications that this passage holds for us and our relationship with Jesus?
4. What are the different ways that you cling to Jesus? How do you know when you are clinging to Him verses when you are not? Why is it important to know the difference?
5. Is it encouraging to you to know that you will never have to say goodbye to Jesus? Why or why not?

WRAP UP

Mary had a deep, personal connection to Jesus and she recognized that. She knew that He was more than just a “good man” or a “good teacher”. She recognized Him as Lord and Savior. This is such an important distinction for us to make as well. We need to cling to Jesus knowing that He is so much more than just a good man. He is God, Lord, Savior, Brother and Friend. This is encouraging.

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DEBORAH

PART 2

The Woman Judge

READ JUDGES 4:1-10

INTRODUCTION

How did Deborah do it? She was a prophet, a wife, and a leader of Israel. A Biblical version of today's "Wonder Woman!" What was her secret? How did she keep her priorities in line while doing something so bold for God as leading an army into battle?

Deborah prioritized her relationship with God- She was a "prophet", someone who walked so closely with the Lord that she would often have messages from Him for the people. She adjusted her heart to listen for His voice. Deborah was full of biblical wisdom, grace, and justice. She was an instrument of peace and people came to her with their problems and she settled them. All this happened because Deborah made her relationship with God the most important thing in her life.

Deborah was ready to be used by God- There was a problem that developed in her country and the Lord gave her a burden to do something about it. She was sensitive to his prompting and acted on what He was telling her to do. She was able to bring assurance to the commander of the army in such a way that he went into battle when he didn't want to by going with him. Everything about the way she loved and led made her someone God could use.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From Judges 4:1 and 5:6 we know this story happens after the time of Ehud and at the same time as Shamgar (3:31). According to 4:2-3 what challenging situation does Israel find themselves in now?
2. Deborah looms large in this portion of Scripture as easily one of the most respectable characters in the entire book of Judges. What is her role according to 4:4-7 and 5:6-7?
3. Why do you think Barak wanted Deborah with him? What repercussions did Deborah say this would have for Barak?
4. What steps can you take to make sure you are spending time with Jesus, prioritizing hearing from Him?
5. What's holding you back from being used by God? Is there something He wants you to do for Him?

WRAP UP

Following Deborah's example seems intimidating at first. But with simple steps to make sure we are walking with Jesus, knowing his word and hearing His voice, we will grow in biblical wisdom, grace, love, and justice! We will be instruments of peace for those who know us and come to us with problems. We will also have the opportunity to help bring assurance to those who are in need of it. Ultimately, by prioritizing our relationship with God, we will be ready to be used by Him.

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MIRIAM

PART 3

Miriam

READ

INTRODUCTION

In the story of Exodus we read the account of how God delivered the Israelites, who had been slaves in Egypt from Pharaoh. In this story we often remember Moses who God sent to talk on behalf of Himself to Pharaoh, Aaron who went with and helped Moses to speak, and of course the plagues that God delivered upon the Egyptians, but there is another instrumental character that God uses in His plan to free the Israelites that we sometimes forget... her name is Miriam.

Miriam is identified in scripture as both a leader and prophetess (Exodus 15:20-21), as well as the older sister to Moses. God used Miriam as a young girl to save her baby brother Moses, convincing the Pharaoh's daughter to allow Moses to stay with his mother before being raised in the Egyptian palace, this was during a time when Pharaoh had decreed all Hebrew babies to be killed (Exodus 2:1-8). Miriam was also chosen by God to lead the Israelites after their captivity alongside Moses and Aaron (Micah 6:4).

Despite being a leader to the nation of Israel, and having seen the way God had worked through Moses in freeing the Israelites from captivity, Miriam along with her brother Aaron began to complain and speak out against Moses' leadership because of his marriage to a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1-2), and begin to question whether they should be in charge instead. God ultimately hears their complaining, and is angered as they are really questioning God's choice in Moses as their leader, and God addresses and disciplines Miriam with leprosy for 7 days before restoring her (Numbers 12:3-16). The story of Miriam reminds us to be faithful in the position that God has called us into, and to be cautious in our attitudes towards leaders that God has placed over us, even if we disagree with them initially. As we go through the discussion questions you'll see this pattern copied in the New Testament teachings as well.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. While it does appear that God gives men and women different roles throughout scripture, it also tells us that God used Miriam as both a leader and a prophet for the nation of Israel. Does this challenge your ideas about the types of roles God gives to women? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever had complaints about someone who was in leadership over you? How did you express your complaints? Looking back is there anything you would have done differently?
3. Read James 3:9-10, as we look back on the story of Miriam do you think that the way we talk about our Christian leaders or our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ has the potential to anger God? Why?
4. Read Matthew 18:15-20, how did this passage tell the early church to address issues against each other? Do you think this is still applicable for us today? What are some things that are difficult about handling issues this way?

WRAP UP

The story of Miriam encourages us to examine our motives when we criticize or confront others, it reminds us to honor our leaders and the role that God has placed each of us into. When there is a real issue we should of course bring it to attention, but always in a way that honors God and the individual.