

381 The Sheaf of the Firstfruits

Last week we identified Mary of Bethany as one of the “spiritual stars” as the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection drew near, for she perceived the link between Jesus being “the Lamb of God” on the one hand, and His imminent death for “the sin of the world” on the other. She then had the courage to anoint Jesus as the Passover Lamb, irrespective of what others might think of her behaviour (John 12.1-8).

This time we come to another Mary, Mary Magdalene, who stands out for her extraordinary devotion to the Lord Jesus. We learn from Luke 8.2 concerning this Mary, “out of whom went seven devils”, so she had had “a past”, with her life now being deeply transformed by her encounter with Jesus. As part of her devotion to Him, we read that, with other women, she “ministered unto him (Jesus) of their substance” (Luke 8.3). We can appreciate from these few details that the relationship between Jesus and this Mary would have been somewhat special while wholly proper, which sets the scene for what was to happen later between them.

Mary, of Magdala, a small village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, duly became a member of Jesus’ inner circle, and seems to have been “the one who made things happen”. She was there at Golgotha (with yet two further Marys! – John 19.25), and, after the burial of Jesus’ body by Joseph and Nicodemus, she “beheld where he was laid” (John 19.38-42 / Mark 15.47 / Luke 23.55).

Then, “The first (day) of the weeks”, (the literal Greek in all four Gospels), “cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre ...” (John 20.1a, KJV). She and her companions (Matthew 28.1 / Mark 16.1 / Luke 24.10) were bringing “sweet spices” to anoint Jesus’ body, showing both their utter devotion to the Lord Jesus and their complete disregard for the armed guard and the great stone across the tomb’s entrance! (Matthew 27.66).

When shocked by their seeing “the stone taken away”, Mary immediately ran back to report this news to Peter and John, with her understandable assumption that “they have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him” (John 20.1-2).

The two men ran off to see for themselves and then returned home (vv 3-10), but we learn that Mary had quietly returned and was now left alone at the scene, weeping. She “bent down into the tomb” (v.11,

Literal), and when asked by the two angelic figures, “Why weepest thou?”, she stated again, “they have taken away my Lord ...” (v.13).

Then we are brought to the lovely climax of the scene. “When she had thus said, she turned herself back” (v.14), and the “Gardener” asked her just the same question, “Why weepest thou?”, and then a second question, “Whom seekest thou?”. How did this “Gardener” know if she was seeking anyone?! She made her pathetic request (v.15), and was then confronted by one word, the sound of her own name, “Mary”.

Suddenly she saw. Suddenly she recognised. She gasped out, “Rabboni”, and instinctively reached out to hold her Lord in wonder and loving devotion (v.16).

But this touching was not yet to be, for the Lord had “not yet ascended to His Father” (v.17a). However, some time later that morning, another group of the women “came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him” (Matthew 28.9b). So whatever did Jesus mean with Mary Magdalene about His “not yet having ascended”??

The answer lies back in Leviticus 23. The Levitical “sheaf of the firstfruits” of the barley harvest in Israel had to be waved “before the Lord”, and until this had been done, no one was allowed to eat even one grain from the new harvest (Leviticus 23.9-14). Now this Levitical requirement was a “type”, pointing forward (as do all the “types”) to the “antitype” of the Lord Jesus.

So on His Resurrection morning Jesus was the antitypical “sheaf of the firstfruits”, the very first of the great harvest of souls to be raised from the dead because of His victory over death (I Corinthians 15.20). Mary Magdalene could not “partake” of this new harvest at that moment, but soon, after Jesus had ascended to His Father as “the sheaf of the firstfruits” and had returned, any of His followers, including this Mary too no doubt, could so partake, and if that meant touching the Risen Jesus, then fine! (eg Matthew 28.9b again / John 20.24-29).

One wonderful consequence of Jesus’ death and resurrection is that His Father is now our Father, and His God is now our God (John 20.17b). Think about it! What joy, hope and certainty that gives to all who are “in Christ Jesus” in these times of fear and foreboding. We join with Mary Magdalene in exclaiming “Rabboni, Master, Lord!”, as we await the day when we too will be able to touch Him.

