

1999 Advent Week 4 - Mary Magdalene

by John Piper

The sermon explores the themes of suffering and redemption through the stories of Mary Magdalene and Boadicea, emphasizing the hope found in Christ's grace.

Duration: 16:09

Scripture: Matthew 11:28

Topics: "Redemption Through Christ", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares the story of Mary Magdalene and her encounter with Jesus. Mary Magdalene was once a slave to King Herod and practiced sorcery, but Jesus saved her from her life of darkness. She became a faithful follower of Jesus and witnessed his miracles, including healing the mute. Mary Magdalene's life was transformed by her encounter with Jesus, and she found hope and purpose in him. The preacher emphasizes that there are no mysteries with God and that even in the midst of suffering and loss, Jesus brings redemption and new life.

Transcript

Before I read the second half of Mary Magdalene, a word of background. The setting is Britain. How she came to be there, you will have to wait for next year to find out, because that's the first poem for next December, though I have it in my mind.

All of the people mentioned in this poem are historical people, and all the places are historical places, but whether they intersected in this way is doubtful, though possible. Mary Magdalene, part two. Now almost thirty years have passed since Mary stood like stone, aghast at suffering so great, there were no words, no tears, no screams for her to use, but what would seem so faint as if an infinite complaint should fall from Mary's lips, but be then nothing more than agony.

How many times she heard him say that powers of darkness have their day, the Son of Man must suffer at the hands of scribes and priests, and that he would be put to death, but oh, the breach between the words we know and what they signify. What she had seen that dreadful day would be forever on the other side of speech, however poets tried to speak the pain in vain. But now, three thousand miles away, the vow that Mary Magdalene had made to Christ that day was being paid to one Baladicea, Queen of Icenia, a tribe between Iboricum and Isca on the Isle of Britannia.

The dawn had brought the news that all her tents were burned, the Roman recompense for all the Celtic Queen's bloodshed, when sixty thousand Romans bled along the Thames and made it red with blood beside Londinium. The dread of Roman vengeance now was felt in full, and every fighting Celt, Boadicea's great defense, was dead by Roman sword, and hence the Queen prepared the poison, drank the cup, and lay down on the bank beside the river Severn, there to die. But in her swoon a pair of servants, fearing for her soul in secret, swiftly came and stole away their weak and dying Queen and took her up to Diva, scene of all the ministry that one called Mary Magdalene had done for twenty years.

The servants had believed on Jesus Christ, and clad with simple woolen clothes, they bore their wealthy Queen in silk before the woman with the message of eternal life, in hope that love would triumph in the final hour and Christ would show His gracious power and save their honored Queen. They laid her on a cot while Mary made a potion on the fire and prayed, O Lord, the mercy you displayed in saving me, pour out on this great Queen and let her know the bliss beyond the silk and eminence of rank and wealth. O Lord, dispense your healing might and grant a space of life till she has tasted grace.

And then Mary gave the Queen a sip. She used a sponge and touched her lip as tenderly as if she were her child. Then the slightest stir gave Mary hope.

Your Highness, do you hear me? Mary asked. Your two good servants brought you here. My name is Mary Magdalene.

I came to your great island twenty years ago and I have seen your tears when Romans waited till your man was dead, then, ere your grief could span a week, attacked the grieving court and tortured you and made a sport of all your little girls. I saw you mount an army out of raw and raging isony and slay ten Roman legions in a day beside the River Thames. And now, Boadicea, there is a vow that I must pay.

And God has sent me here to tell you what He meant when thirty years ago the Lord and Maker of creation poured His life in blood out on the beams designed for Roman screams of criminals. Can you hear me, Your Highness? Mary paused. The Queen opened her eyes.

You caused my suicide to fail. And now the Romans will arrive and plow your back and mine with furrows for their pleasure. Better had the door of this small hut been shut and sealed.

The futile grace that wants me healed is not so merciful as my assistants think. To let me die at once and keep my simple plan had been a better kindness than to make me live and drink the grief and torture of a Roman chief. Your Highness, listen.

You shall get your death before the dew is wet upon tomorrow's grass. This brew that you have drunk cannot renew your life, but only add a breath, perhaps a day, before your death. And oh, I pray that you will see it is not a futile grace to be kept back from hell one day to find your way to heaven.

May the servants who have loved you well be granted their desire to dwell with you forever in the place where Jesus Christ displays his grace with never-ending joy for those who come and cease to be his foes. But I want to see you let the words sink in and listen as the birds of her beloved homeland sang their final song and fed the pang of Mary's words. One breath, you say.

Is that it now? Perhaps a day? She asked. And Mary nodded. Yes? And you, the common serf, profess to know the way to heaven? I do, Boadicea.

And do you? I think whatever God there is has made it clear to me that his design for life is misery. There is little ground for me to think it will be different in eternity. My life has been a chain with links made out of fraud and pain.

So deeply am I flawed that I will take more secrets to the grave than there is time for you to hear. There are no mysteries with God, said Mary. Jesus sees the field, the chamber, and the soul.

What's more, your Highness, there's a goal for misery that's more than wrath or even pain. It is a path, if you will have it so, that wakes the sleeping soul from death and breaks the bondage of a thousand charms. And as for flaws, these are alarms that we must have a ransom paid.

Boadicea, God has laid his Son out on a Roman cross so that if you believe his loss will be your everlasting gain, you speak so easily of pain and loss, the dying Queen replied. My husband and my daughters died at Roman hands. The honors of my queenship were denied and love withheld because I was a slave before King Prasutagus gave me liberty and risked his crown to marry me.

And now the frown of God, if God's there be, goes down with me to hell because by my own sin and cowardice I die. So, Mary, is there hope for me? Boadicea looked to see if there was censure in her face and wondered at the tears and trace of joy in Mary's eyes. O Queen Boadicea, come and lean on merits not your own and hear the story I will tell to cheer your final hours.

I will collapse my fifty years in little scraps of memory to show you why there's hope for you and me. When I was almost ten in Galilee, my cultic mother traded me to Herod Antipas. He gave her seven sheep to gain a slave.

For eight years I was locked inside a palace room and used to guide the king with sorcery. Then one night he threw me out and when I was about to die alone, deserted on the killing stone, a man named Jesus took my hand and seven fiends at his command took leave and never came again. For two years in his service then I watched his every deed and heard with my own ears the mighty word of God.

He made the dumb man talk, the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the leper clean, the harlot treated like a queen. I served him every way I could, but in the end I found the good I thought I did for him to be a gift for he was serving me. For this he told us he would die and die he did before my eye.

You saw a man get crucified, the queen inquired. I stood beside his mother, close enough to hear the very words he spoke and clear as thunder in a whisper he declared a word of hope for me and for a thief who hung beside him there and now it was designed I see also with you in mind. Oh queen of isony, give heed to what the robber said in need.

Dear Jesus, is there hope for me? To which the Lord replied, you'll be today because of this great price with me my son in paradise. And there I made a vow. If I could ever help a person die I promise I will speak this word.

Go I to see you. Have you heard what Jesus said? Now that he is risen from the dead you see it will be true. How do you know he's risen from the dead? The glow of dawn was bright above the grave and there the Lord of glory gave the highest honor of my life a slave as though I were his wife was granted first to see the Lord.

Go I to see his eyes stared toward the sky and she was silent for an hour. Mary thought the door of life had closed but suddenly she whispered softly Mary, say to me I mean, did you once have a man, a husband? Mary didn't plan for this and simply said, I did. His name was Joseph.

And a kid? She asked again. Mary drew her breath and slowly Three. So you have tasted loss and still believe with all the loss there is to grieve? I don't think much about the loss.

When you have stood before the cross and know that all is lost and then see Jesus Christ alive again it alters everything. And so I ask and plead before you go, Boazia Do you see your only hope for life is he? Again the pause made Mary fear but then God let his servant hear the final words of this great queen. Thank God for Mary Magdalene.

And now as we light candle four and slowly close another door of time remember when we come next year to read of Joseph some of us will not be here. Come, light and flame of candle four burn bright with truth that all our grief and woe are given us to help us know how we can take our wings and fly or help another person die. The lesson of her life is plain that every loss is meant for gain for God's beloved naught is vain God does not waste the gift of pain.

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