

Finding Fulfillment in the Father - John 20:17

by Jon Courson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and being called to be ministers of reconciliation to others, rather than clinging to people or things.

Scripture: Luke 7:36, Luke 8:2, John 20:11, 2 Corinthians 5:18

Topics: "Fatherly Love", "Spiritual Fulfillment"

Description

Jon Courson delves into the story of Mary Magdalene, emphasizing her transformation from a woman possessed by demons to a devoted follower of Jesus. He highlights the depth of Mary's love for Jesus, contrasting it with Simon the Pharisee's lack of understanding and appreciation. Courson explores the concept of clinging to earthly relationships versus finding true security and fulfillment in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile us to the Father and offer us grace and mercy.

Transcript

No doubt her eyes would often flame like fire -- not unlike the look in the eyes of Charles Manson when he was apprehended. Other times, her eyes must have been dark, and dull, and dead.

You see, according to Dr. Luke, Mary Magdalene had previously been possessed by seven devils (8:2). But when she encountered Jesus, she was freed from the demons which had dominated her. No wonder that from that point on, she loved Him deeply and followed Him radically.

Tradition says Mary is the woman spoken of not only in Luke 8, but also in Luke 7. You know the story . . . A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to his house for dinner. And as he sat at the head of the table with the other Pharisees, checking out Jesus, listening to Jesus, skeptical about Jesus -- a woman burst into the room and wept. The tears streaming down her face hit Jesus' feet, and with the hair previously used to entice men, she wiped the feet of the Son of Man.

Observing the scene, Simon thought, 'If this man were truly a prophet, He would have known what kind of woman this is.'

Knowing Simon's thoughts, Jesus said, 'Simon, there were two men in debt to a creditor. One man owed \$5,000; the other \$500. But out of the goodness of his heart, the creditor said to both men, 'Your debt is forgiven.' Which of these two debtors would love the creditor more, would appreciate him greater?' 'The one who was forgiven the larger amount,' answered Simon. 'You have said well, Simon,' was Jesus'

gracious reply, 'for the one who is forgiven much loves much. Notice, Simon,' He continued, 'I came into your house and you didn't greet Me with a kiss; you didn't anoint My feet with oil; you didn't welcome Me lovingly. But this woman has not stopped kissing My feet, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with her hair.'

You see, Jesus knew what kind of woman Mary was all along. Love is not blind -- it just sees more. And because love sees more, it chooses to see less.

Maybe you feel like a terrible sinner today. Good News: You have the potential, the possibility of loving God greatly. If you don't feel like you're a sinner today, you can join Simon the Pharisee and love a little bit. But if you realize your sin and your failures and your shortcomings, guess what? You have the potential to be a lover of God and a lover of people in the biggest sense of the word.

The one who is forgiven little -- the one who is unaware of his sins -- loves little. That's why many church people are not lovers of God. They fail to see their need for forgiveness. But people like you and me, we know God's great grace and mercy because we experience it daily. And now Mary is at the tomb. The last one at the Cross was the first one at the tomb. That's what love does. It stays the longest. It bears all things and believes all things. It endures all things and hopes all things. It's the last one at the Cross and the first one at the tomb.

And when she gets there, her eyes swollen from crying, she stoops down to look inside. But when she sees the body is gone, her tears begin again. 'Woman,' why are you weeping?' asked the angels in attendance. 'Because they've taken away my Lord,' Mary answered. And turning away from the angels, she saw Jesus. But she didn't know it was Him. Why? I suspect it was because her eyes were full of tears. Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said, 'If you've moved the body for some reason, let me know where you've moved Him, and I will return Him to the tomb.'

Think about this. As a woman, Mary would have been significantly smaller than Jesus. Yet Mary doesn't say, 'You bring Him back,' nor even, 'Help me carry Him back.' She just says, 'I'll carry Him' -- because love is not blown away by the heaviness of its object. It pays the price. It expends the energy. It finds a way. At that point, Jesus uttered her name, and recognizing His voice, Mary fell at His feet.

The picture is wonderful, for if she was indeed the same woman of Luke 7, even as she fell at His feet previously -- washing His feet with her tears and drying them with her hair -- she falls at His feet again, and she clings to Him. 'Don't cling to Me, Mary,' was Jesus' response, 'because I have not yet ascended.'

At first reading, this sounds harsh. Yet there's an important lesson here, for Jesus is saying, 'Mary, My mission was to come to earth to die for your sins. The purpose of My coming was to provide reconciliation so that you and all who believe could be reconciled to the Father and have relationship with Him. Don't cling to Me.'

Ours is a generation of 'cling-ons.' Books, seminars, retreats about this subject abound. A wife will cling to her husband, hoping she might find fulfillment in him. And the tighter she clings to him, the more he backs away. So she clings harder -- and he backs away further. Or the husband clings to his wife, hoping to find satisfaction in her. But feeling used and smothered, she backs away. Husbands and wives say, 'If you're not going to fulfill me, I'll find someone who will; if you're not going to satisfy me, I'll find someone who will.'

It happens over and over again. We cling -- but never find what we want. Inevitably, the results are divorce, depression, destruction. Not even children are exempt. 'If you don't meet the needs of your daughter,' read the best-selling books, 'she'll try to fill them in someone else.' And so we think we've got to make sure our kids cling to us and receive from us -- otherwise who knows what will happen to them.

But Jesus comes in an entirely different manner to this sister of His, saying, 'Don't cling to Me. You've got to see the big picture. It's called reconciliation between you and the Father. That's why I came -- to die for your sins, to pay the price for your iniquity, so that you won't have to cling to your husband or wife, your pastor or the church.'

Who clings to the pastor, the boss, or a so-called lover on the side? People who are insecure. And the reason they are insecure is because they don't understand what they really need is, like Adam and Eve, to walk with God in the cool of the day.

You see, any of you who say, 'This afternoon I'm going to put down the paper; I'm going to turn off the TV; I'm not going to cling to my husband or wife. I'm going to go for a walk; I'm going to talk to my Father; I'm going to tell Him the things that are troubling me, laugh with Him about a sight we might see, look at the sky in its beauty' -- will come back with a sparkle in your eye, and a peace in your heart. You won't cling to the first person you see, suffocate those around you, or be disappointed in those you love.

The most secure Being in the entire universe is God. God doesn't need you. He loves you, but He doesn't need you. He likes you -- but He doesn't need you. God got by for billions and trillions and zillions of years without you -- totally content because the Father, Son, and Spirit fulfilled each other and loved each other. But part of God's plan was to show another side of His character -- grace and mercy -- to all of the universe. To do that required sinners like you and me.

There are those who teach God needs you. No, He doesn't. And that delights me because God is not clinging to me. I'll find in Him strength, joy, and love -- but He doesn't smother me. And He won't smother you. The real issue, gang, is a lack of spending time with the Father because a person who spends time with the Father -- who not only hears it in a Sunday sermon, but who goes out and does it -- will not have dependent characteristics and fifteen steps to work through to begin recovery.

When you get rid of the clinging, relationships take on maturity, depth, and solidity. But it doesn't happen by psychology or twelve-stepping your way out. It comes by doing one thing: walking with the Father. That's where you find security. Yes, we need to care, share, interact with each other. But we mustn't cling because the sad thing about clinging is that it drives people away. And the more they back away, the more we want to cling. It's a cycle which can only be broken by spending time with the Father. But you can't talk to the Father, walk with the Father, or receive security from the Father until you realize what Jesus Christ did for you on the Cross.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . . II Corinthians 5:18

God is holy and beautiful -- but, due to our sin, we couldn't relate to Him or be one with Him. So Jesus Christ came to bridge the gap, to die for our sin that we might have sin forgiven and fellowship with the Father anytime we want.

. . . and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; II Corinthians 5:18

Not only can we come freely to the Father because we have been reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ, but we are to reconcile others to the Father as well. Mom and dad, your ministry is not to reconcile your kids to you -- to get them to depend on you or look to you. Your ministry ultimately is to reconcile your kids to the Father.

If you say, 'I'm going to meet their needs; I'm always going to be there for them,' they'll rebel because you'll eventually let them down. But if you are a minister of reconciliation, you'll say, 'I want my kids to grow up knowing God. I know I have failings and shortcomings as a dad, but the heavenly Father will never let them down. Never.

Therefore, I don't care what they think about me as much as I care about them being one with God.' So when my daughter says, 'Dad, I need thirty bucks,' sometimes I give it to her. But other times I say, 'Would you pray about it? Would you see what doors God opens for you?' It is infinitely easier for me to open my checkbook, but it's infinitely more important for my kids to learn not to cling to me because I won't always be there for them. Therefore, I want them to learn to pray, to walk with God, to know the Lord.

I have been given the ministry of reconciliation -- and so have you. 'Don't cling to Me,' Jesus lovingly says to Mary. 'I go to the Father.' May God give us that understanding as well.

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