

Knowing the Voice of the Lord *A Study of Mary Magdalene*

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“How can I really know the voice of the Lord?” This question comes up frequently, especially when big decisions need to be made or when there is trouble. An inner debate arises as to whether the voice being heard is God’s or our own. Jesus said that we would know His voice (John Chapter 10), so how can we learn to hear His voice? Much can be learned from an unlikely source: Mary Magdalene. Do you remember her? She was the woman from whom the Lord had cast out seven demons. How was she able to hear the voice of Jesus?

Read the account of Mary Magdalene and her encounter with the Lord Jesus in the garden shortly after His resurrection. This is found in John Chapter 20.

John 20:1-18

Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. ²And so she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." ³Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they were going to the tomb. ⁴And the two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter, and came to the tomb first; ⁵and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*; but he did not go in. ⁶Simon Peter therefore also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he beheld the linen wrappings lying *there*, ⁷and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb entered then also, and he saw and believed. ⁹For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

¹¹But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹²and she beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around, and beheld Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that* He had said these things to her.

Notice in this encounter that Mary did not recognize Jesus when she saw Him, but only after He spoke her name. [*This is a little picture of how walking with the Lord is by faith and not by sight.*] She knew that voice, particularly as He spoke her name. Even in the midst of great distress, seeing Jesus crucified and then finding the tomb empty, she was able to hear and recognize Jesus' voice. Is it possible for us to know the voice of Jesus just as well? Yes, because Jesus wants us to hear His voice as a sheep hears its shepherd.

How was Mary Magdalene able to know Jesus' voice?

- 1) **She had heard the Lord speak as He commanded the demons to depart from her.** In Luke 8 verse 2 we learn that Mary Magdalene had seven demons cast from her by Jesus. Thus, in the midst of a miracle Mary heard the powerful voice of Jesus. That kind of voice is spoken of in Psalm 29: 3-5:

Psalm 29:3-5

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
The God of glory thunders,
The LORD is over many waters.
⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful,
The voice of the LORD is majestic.
⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

This voice would likely not have been loud, but it *was* powerful. Jesus was not in the habit of making a show when He cast out demons. He just got their attention with the with a voice that carried power and authority. I believe the tone He used to speak to the demons would have been very different from the tone He would use to speak her name, however it was still a characteristic of the Lord's voice. Since miracles can still happen even in our lives we must be alert to hearing that powerful voice of the Lord in the midst of the miracles.

- 2) **Mary sought the truth and found it in Jesus.**

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

John 18:37

Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Whatever Mary Magdalene's life was like before she met Jesus, it was plain that she did not know the truth regarding God. Once she was delivered from all the demons she traveled along with several other women who served Jesus and His disciples. As a result of the time she spent listening to and observing Jesus, she realized that He was the way to

God. Her searching for God, for the truth, led her to Jesus. She believed in who He was, had experienced His deliverance, knew He was the truth, and so could hear His voice.

Even though Jesus is not walking on earth today, we can still meet Him through the Word of God.

Psalm 119:160

The sum of Thy word is truth,
And every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The word is truth and Jesus is the Word, and so when we read it with an open heart we will hear Jesus speaking to us. Spending time in the Word is a very important way to hear the voice of the Lord. Ask Him to speak to you through the Word. Memorizing scripture is also important, because at critical times the Lord can call to your mind the Word to guide you.

- 3) **Mary Magdalene had a personal relationship with Jesus.** The key word here is *personal*. She would have had multiple opportunities to hear Jesus speak to the disciples and she almost certainly had some personal conversations with the Lord. I can imagine that Mary drew as close as she could to the Lord when He was speaking so that she could hear every word, and she probably asked Him questions as well, and talked to Him about her fears or concerns. When the Lord talks to one of His sheep, to a believer, it is with a still small voice and by name, so it is very personal and intimate.

John 10:3-5

"To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep *by name*, and leads them out. ⁴When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him *because they know his voice*. ⁵And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

Not only do sheep flee from the voice of a stranger, but they also do not do well with loud noises. So the shepherd speaks to them in soft fashion to keep them calm and give them direction. In such a way does the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus, talk to us.

This soft voice of the Lord is mentioned in Chapter 19 of I Kings, reading from the King James Version:

I Kings 19:11-13

¹¹And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an

earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: ¹²And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. ¹³And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

Our expectations are, perhaps, that God's voice will be in the wind, earthquake or fire, but to believers He will come most often with the still small voice and by name—it is so exciting that the Lord wants our relationship with Him to be on an intimate “first name basis.”

How can we have personal, intimate, first-name-basis conversations with Jesus? Through prayer—talk to Jesus about whatever is on your heart—your fears, concerns, your praises, your love for Him, thanksgiving; He will respond to you.

- 4) **Mary was a humble servant.** She helped care for Jesus and the disciples out of her own means, she traveled with Him and probably cooked and did other tasks for the men, she bought spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial, and she even was willing to carry Jesus' body away. God will speak to those who are humble.

Isaiah 66:2

"For My hand made all these things,
Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD.
"But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Note also in the scripture we read previously from I Kings that Elijah covered his face as a sign of humility and reverence and then God spoke to him by name. Be humble before God and He will speak clearly to you.

5) Mary Magdalene did not fear man.

Not even the disciples had the courage to ask for the body of Jesus, let alone to see where the body was laid. They were afraid of being arrested for being a follower of Jesus. Mary Magdalene and the other women apparently had no fear, just a devotion to Jesus.

Deuteronomy 13:4

"You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

Fear God and He will speak to you. Fear man and it will cloud your judgment and make you question whether you are hearing the Lord.

Proverbs 29:25

The fear of man brings a snare,
But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.

6) **Mary heard the Lord in the quiet of the garden.**

Ecclesiastes 9:17

The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

Although God can speak to you in any setting or situation, the fewer distractions the better. When Jesus spoke to Mary there were no other people in the garden. He had her full, undivided attention. When we are really seeking the Lord's counsel or need an encouraging word from Him, we must find that "garden" in our day, that time when we can be alone in the quiet to hear His voice.

Mary Magdalene knew the voice of the Lord, and so can you. Let's review how:

- 1) Miracles happen, even in your life. The voice of the Lord is within those miracles. Listen to that voice!
- 2) Seek the Truth through God's Word. He will speak to you through the Scriptures.
- 3) Have a *personal* relationship with Jesus. Develop that in prayer.
- 4) Be a humble servant.
- 5) Do not fear man.
- 6) Enter the quiet of the garden.

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