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TRANSFORMED AT THE TOMB

I wonder. Do most women feel they are often misunderstood? Do you think I will in my lifetime understand women? Perhaps one of the most misunderstood women of Scripture is Mary Magdalene - yet she can help us understand Jesus Christ in a most profound way. Because she was transformed at His tomb.

Her first mention in Scripture is Luke 8:1-3, which says Mary Magdalene was with the group of women who traveled with the disciples, and who provided for them out of their financial means. One even had connections at Herod's palace. This text tells us Jesus healed Mary Magdalene of evil spirits, as seven demons came out of her. No wonder she loved the Lord!

SINNER - Oppressed by evil spirits, Mary would likely have been a social outcast, regardless of her social standing. But contrary to popular supposition, there is no evidence whatsoever that Mary was a prostitute. That comes from misreading the previous passage Luke 7:36-50, when a woman, described by Simon the Pharisee as a "**sinner**," anointed the feet of Jesus with an alabaster flask of ointment.

Tawdry ideas often become popular. Over time, Mary has even been accused of being Jesus' lover or carrying His child. Gnostic writers a hundred years after the apostles claimed she had secret knowledge of the Savior. Of course, all these made-up notions are complete nonsense, with no basis in history.

This Mary was called Magdalene because she was from the town of Magdala, on the western coast of the sea of Galilee, about five miles south of the larger city of Capernaum. Archaeologists have only recently uncovered important information about Magdala. By the way, archaeology affirms the Bible but will never "prove" it. The Bible, God's written Word, is the standard to which we compare all other knowledge. Archaeology helps confirm the real history of real people and real events, as recorded in the Bible.

Magdala was an important fishing center, trading with Rome. Coins from 29AD, when Jesus was there, have been found. Some scholars call Magdala "opulent" for its time. Perhaps Mary had wealth. But perhaps most intriguing is a religious building on the outskirts, perhaps a synagogue or church.

We next see Mary Magdalene in Scripture at the cross, as mentioned by name in Matthew 27, Mark 15 and John 19. She is included in Luke 23 with the women who came with Jesus from Galilee and saw His crucifixion and burial. She features prominently by name at the tomb in all four Gospel accounts.

Scholars say Mary Magdalene was "**last at the cross and first at the grave**" as a reflection of her deep love for Jesus. We don't know the extent of her sins, but certainly she was forgiven much and loved Him much. Casting out demons would have given her life back - and soon Jesus would give her much more.

Early on Easter Sunday morning, the first opportunity after the Sabbath, the women came to Jesus' tomb to finish His hurried burial on Good Friday. In John 20, Mary Magdalene runs to tell Peter and John that the tomb is empty. The word of men was needed to establish the truth of the matter. Jesus is not there.

SAVED - "*Why are you weeping?*" asks a voice in verse 15. In her grief and confusion, she didn't recognize it until He spoke her name. He who was lost is found - Jesus is alive! She worships Him, but He tells her His physical presence will be with them only a little while, as He will soon ascend to Heaven.

In John 20:18, Mary shows how she was transformed at the tomb by believing the Savior, alive from the dead. And she shows US how to respond to the Risen Lord. Jesus said many times, "**if you love Me, you will obey My commands.**" And His command to Mary was to go and tell others that Jesus is alive. She did that very thing. It's intriguing to think that a church at Magdala could be a result of her testimony.

The Lord honors Mary Magdalene to be the first person to testify about the risen Christ. At a time when testimony of women was not recognized by the courts, this is a powerful affirmation of what Christianity brought to the world - the equality of believers. "**In union with Christ**," Scripture says there is no ranking of male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. All are equal at the foot of the cross.

Are YOU a believer in the risen Lord Jesus Christ? Like Mary, who can you tell today that HE LIVES - and He will transform their life just as He has yours? *Trust and obey Him, and tell everyone you can!*