

Mary Magdalene Remembers (Easter message: 4/12/20)

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning and welcome to Jerusalem's breaking news this morning, the first day of the week. You can see behind me a much different scene than I shared with you on Friday. The crowds have disappeared from Calvary, and all that remains are the three empty crosses where they had crucified the three criminals.

There is a special guest with us this morning who claims to be an eye-witness to many of the happenings.

Good morning and what is your name?

Mary, Mary Magdalene.

So, are you from Magdala?

Yes, that is where I lived until a couple years ago.

What has brought you to Jerusalem?

I am a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Do you mean the criminal that was on the center cross last Friday?

Yes, the Lord Jesus was crucified on that center cross. But, he was not a criminal. As even the centurion realized, Jesus is the Son of God.

You were a witness to what happened here?

Many of the women disciples of Jesus were here watching from a distance. We stood together over there. We had followed him from Galilee to care for his needs. Jesus' mother, Mary was part of the group, John & James' mother; and, many others.

How did you come to know Jesus?

Jesus was traveling about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: I was one of them; and he cast seven demons from me. Also, Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support Jesus and his followers out of their own means.

You must have been very grateful to Jesus. Is that why you were following him?

Yes, at first. The longer we followed him the more evident it was that God the Father was working through him. He was doing many miraculous things. He fed the five thousand by multiplying the loaves and fishes. He healed lepers and the lame. Jesus gave sight to the blind and much more. His teaching was with an authority like no other.

Wait, you call God your Father too, like Jesus did. This is very strange for a Jew.

Jesus taught us to pray to OUR Father. Because of our belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, we have the privileged relationship as sons and daughters of the Father.

OK, I didn't mean to get side-tracked. Let's stick to the facts for now. Did you see Jesus die on Friday?

We heard him cry out, "It is finished." Then his head fell to his chest. When the Roman soldiers came from Pilate, they broke the legs of the criminals on both sides of Jesus so that they would die more quickly.

They did not break Jesus' legs because he was already dead. To make sure, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear. Blood and water flowed out of his side. I thought his mother was going to faint. It was a terrible sight to behold.

What happened next?

The crowd slowly drifted away. Many of them were shaking their heads and mumbling. They had seen the darkness. They had felt the ground shake. No one seemed to know what to think.

Did you women hang around?

Yes, we couldn't believe what had happened. Then as evening approached, there came a rich man from

Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. He told us he had gone to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate ordered that it be given to him.

Joseph was accompanied by Nicodemus, the Pharisee who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with our burial customs. At the place right over there, is a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

They rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Many of us women saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then we went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But we rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

My sources tell me that yesterday the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Did you see any signs of the Roman guards?

Not on the Sabbath; but very early this morning we did?

You were at the tomb early this morning? Why?

When the Sabbath was over, several of us bought spices so that we might go to anoint Jesus' body more properly. Joseph and Nicodemus had to hurry so much that we didn't feel Jesus' body was properly anointed. Very early this morning, just after sunrise, we were on our way to the tomb and we asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

Who did roll the stone away?

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to us, "Women, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Yes, there was a report this morning of another earthquake. But you saw an angel? You saw Jesus alive?

Yes, we ALL saw the angel. We saw that Jesus is alive.

Well isn't it kind of strange that women are the witnesses? After all, women are not allowed to give testimony in court.

Maybe it is strange; but, the Lord Jesus always treated us differently than other men treat us. We saw what we saw. Jesus is alive.

Are there any men that witnessed this Jesus raised from the dead?

As Jesus told me to, I ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and told them that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. Before I could say any more, Peter and the other disciple started for the

tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed that Jesus was not there but did not realize that he was alive.

So, as of now, no men have verified your story.

It is not a story. It is my testimony. I saw the Lord Jesus. He has risen. He is alive!

There you have it folks. An eye-witness account. The empty grave can be verified, but as of right now, all we have is the testimony of women. I will keep you updated as developments unfold.

The Plot thickens: Matthew 28:11–15 (NIV84)

11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

CONCLUSION:

The Roman soldiers were experts at crucifixion. They regularly performed this cruel means of death. They knew dead when they saw dead. Even without their expertise, when you stick your spear into a man's side and the water and blood pours out, it proves they are dead. Besides, by all accounts, the flogging and physical punishment were enough to kill a man. Then to have to carry your cross up the hill, even with help, would be nearly impossible. The way crucifixion kills you is not by the nails driven through your hands and feet, or the respective loss of blood. Your body weight hanging on the cross makes breathing too hard to sustain your life. There was no doubt Jesus was dead.

The Roman soldiers were experts at standing guard. This is what they did routinely; and yet, it was very serious business. If a prisoner escaped, you could be forced to take their punishment, even the death penalty. They were professionals and guarding was a daily duty. You kept watch over a camp. You kept watch over your leaders. You kept watch over a city. Certainly, you could be trusted to guard a dead man behind a large sealed tomb. What could go wrong?

Grave robbers getting the best of Roman soldiers was highly unlikely, unless they were all drunk or had deserted their post. On the other hand, if you had tried to kill one of the gods on one of your crosses, that was a big problem too. They had to find the body of the crucified Jesus.

A risen Jesus was a big problem for the Jewish Leaders. Over and over again they had publicly denied that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, any Jew that said Jesus was the Christ would be cast out of the synagogue and the Jewish community. They would be shunned. They would be a pariah. Then there was the whole matter of them having engineered an illegal arrest and holding a mock trial in the middle of the night. Then they partnered with the Roman authorities; they manipulated the Roman authorities; to have Jesus crucified.

If Jesus was in fact raised from the dead, their whole reality came crashing down. Their positions of power and prestige were lost. That meant that they had horribly misjudged Jesus; had horribly misunderstood the scriptures. They had misrepresented Jesus' miracles and stubbornly refused to hear his teaching when others easily saw its truth and power. It had to be Jesus' disciples had stolen the body. They had to find Jesus' body.

They had to get things back under control. So far, it was only some women saying they saw Jesus raised from

the dead. Time was of the essence. They had to find the body. Yes, it matters a great deal whether Jesus was truly resurrected. It mattered to the Romans. It mattered to the Jewish authorities. It mattered to Jesus' disciples. It matters to the whole world. And yes, it matters to you and me. It matters eternally. Amen and amen. Let us pray.