

A NEW LOOK AT CHRIST'S MODEL CHRISTIAN

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“Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” Mark 14:9

Christ went to an enormous expense in His life and death, even to hell and died our second death in order to save us. Would it not seem reasonable for Him to select at least one person to hold up before the world as a “model” Christian, “Here is what Christ died to achieve? Here is a sample of the fruit of His infinite sacrifice”?

Any successful business venture first prepares a prototype, like Ford's newest diesel/electric car that gets 70 miles per gallon, on display at the auto shows. If manufacturers can develop a prototype, why can't Christ have one?

Surely before He must die, He ought to be able to point to one human being as a prototype, and say, “I want the whole world to see an example of what My sacrifice will accomplish so it can be multiplied over and over, a ‘prototype’ re-done in at least 144,000 people. Thus I shall ‘see the labor [“travail,” KJV] of [My] soul and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

Jesus says, “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!” (Isa. 45:22); but if He can find a prototype of what salvation can do for

someone here and now, He will at least invite the world to look and see it.

It can't be a “satisfaction” to Christ to see billions of people physically “saved” who have no heart-appreciation of what it cost Him to save them; He has that now! What will make Him happy is what we read in Psalm 22, the joy that flooded His dying heart those last few moments of His consciousness: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You” (vs. 27). There, almost word for word, is the first angel's message!

If the time comes that the Ford Motor Company turns out millions of diesel/electric family cars that get 70 miles per gallon, it will be because they first had a perfect prototype. And Christ's final display of the “144,000” before the universe will be because when He told His Father, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4), He had one person in mind as His prototype. From “all the families of the nations” in “all the ends of the earth,” a vast throng will be developed who reflect perfectly the character of Christ—a work for a corporate body never truly accomplished in previous history.

If you are in love, you may enter a room full of people, but you have eyes to see only one person, ears to hear only one voice. So Jesus is longing for His Bride-to-be, somebody special.

Yes, before He died, He did have a visible prototype, and He was so happy that He expressed the most enthusiastic endorsement that He ever

uttered about anyone. She was about the most unlikely candidate for such an honor that you could imagine. He passed by all the scribes and Pharisees, the do-gooders, even His own Twelve, and selected a person who had fallen into an abysmal pit of shameful sin, so far down that her mind was inhabited by “seven demons” (Mark 16:9). Jesus said of her, “[This woman] has done what she could.” (Mark 14:8).

You can’t proclaim “this gospel” that He talks about throughout “the whole world,” whether with satellite TV or in giving personal Bible studies, unless you include this story! Jesus has elevated her story to become a part of “the third angel’s message in verity.” We don’t dare neglect it!

We see ourselves somewhere in this story that will encourage us and at the same time humble our pride, some spiritual vitamin or nutriment for the soul that is not visible in any other Bible story.

The amazing thing about this woman is that (1) Bible evidence is clear that she had suffered sexual abuse (put together all that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John say about her); and (2) she had fallen into a would-be suicidal frame of mind. You doubt that? Well, just let seven demons control you and you will want to end it all. They drive you. Read your Bible from beginning to end and you’ll have a hard time finding anyone who was more of a “goner” than this lady.

Why is her story such an important illustration of the gospel that it must be included whenever we tell it? “What this woman has done” is a human

interest story with divine overtones that reveals something vital that contributes to the accomplishment of Christ’s purpose.

We see ourselves somewhere in this story that will encourage us and at the same time humble our pride, some spiritual vitamin, mineral, or enzyme, some nutriment for the soul that is not visible in any other Bible story. For the first time in His career, Jesus is asking for a human being to fill in a missing part of His gospel story, to take a role; for the first time ever, He will share the spotlight—with a woman once possessed of seven demons!

When Jesus said of her, “She has done what she could,” there was nothing more she could do. When your and my names come up in the judgment, if He steps forward before the hosts of heaven and says, “He/she has done what he could,” nothing will make us more superlatively happy.

When Mary could at last begin to grasp repentance in Simon’s behalf, she could forgive him—she was free!

You already know her story: the great and honorable Simon the Pharisee either seduced her or raped her. Feeling crushed and humiliated, she ran away; there were no counseling services for victims of clergy sexual abuse. “Here’s nothin’ goin’ nowhere,” and she took her nose-dive into the abyss. She lost all sense of self-control as the seven demons filled her mind.

Then she chanced to meet Jesus. He probably never had such a prolonged struggle to save anyone, for we read that “seven times she had

heard His” voice in prayer for her to be delivered (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568). The only way to understand it is that she backslid again and again. When you think you’re converted and then you fall, you feel so chagrined and discouraged that you sink even lower. Jesus had a battle on His hands! Casting the Legion of devils out of the demoniac in the Gadarenes was easy compared to this. I don’t know who the seventh devil was that He finally cast out, but from my experience I would surmise it was Mary’s deep-seated resentment against the man who had ruined her life. When at last she began to grasp repentance in his behalf, and could forgive and pray for him, she was free.

Of course she wanted to say “Thank You for saving my soul.” But how? No one would listen to her testimony of praise. But being an intelligent woman, her ears had caught something the Twelve were too dense to catch: Jesus was going to die. She could anoint His dead body with ointment! So, she bought the most expensive available, fit for an emperor, probably exhausting her savings. She put it away for safe keeping until. . . .

Meanwhile, the spotlight shifts to Simon the Pharisee. He can’t sleep nights. He’s a great guy at the office, full of fun, except when he wakes up at night in a cold sweat. He has ruined a woman’s life, and David’s similar agony in Psalm 32 torments his soul. Finally, his health breaks down (guilt unresolved will do that to you), and he becomes a leper. Total despair.

Then he chances to meet the same Jesus, who magnanimously heals him with no questions asked, no promises exacted. Restored to his family and to society, Simon too is decent enough to want to say “Thank You,” but he doesn’t know how to shed a tear, or how even to say the words. The strictest devotee of a works program, he can say thanks only by putting on a banquet in Jesus’ honor. It draws a crowd.

Mary gets an idea. Why waste ointment after Jesus is dead? He wouldn’t know what she was doing. Anoint Him now! Where she got the idea of washing His feet with tears is a mystery, for never in world history had any man had his feet washed with tears, and there has been none since. She probably didn’t plan to do it. As Mary anointed Him, her soul burst open with tears she never knew were there, and she bathed His feet with them.

The story would have ended there, but we owe thanks to Judas Iscariot for making it become immortal. It was he, the tall, handsome, honorable gentleman that everybody expected would become the Prime Minister of the new kingdom, who gave Jesus an excuse to say something.

Judas harshly condemned what Mary had done. And the Eleven had no better sense than to follow his perverse lead. He and they together forced Jesus to speak up for Mary, who by this time was humiliated and wanted to run.

Looking at Judas and the others in the eye, the Son of God said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me”

(Mark 14:6). (The rebuke rankled in Judas' heart and he forthwith decided to betray Him.)

The Eleven had now experienced a preview of "the shaking" that is yet to come upon God's remnant church. Note: it was something beautiful that started it, not something bad.

Here's the scene: the woman kneels quietly at Jesus' feet; she has never said a word, didn't need to; she is the most eloquent sinful preacher the world has ever known. And here are the Twelve, most covered with shame for their thoughtless, hardhearted unbelief; and here is Simon the Pharisee congratulating himself for not giving in to his heart's convictions to confess that Jesus is the Messiah: "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner" ["I know her!"] (Luke 7:39).

And here is Jesus; shall He give up on Simon and call it a day? Saving Mary was a good day's work, why not go home and rest? Let Simon rot!

But no, Christ is *agape*; He loves this other sinner who is bothered with an eighth demon—Laodicean spiritual pride. Simon doesn't know himself; how can Jesus enlighten him? So He tells a story. A wealthy creditor forgives two debtors equally, one who has owed a mere 50 silver coins, and the other the huge sum of 500. "Tell me, Simon, which of the two will love him more?" Simon has enough sense to get the point, but he can hardly answer straightforwardly. "I suppose the one whom he forgave most" (Luke 7:43).

Then Jesus demonstrated for him the principle of corporate guilt and repentance. The only reason why Mary loved more was not because her sin was greater than Simon's, but because she felt it was greater. Simon was the one owing 500; you love in proportion as you sense you have been forgiven.

You're only a small sinner? OK, you must therefore love little, for you think you have only been forgiven little. Hence your lukewarmness, Laodicea.

God will have a people in the last days who so identify with Christ that in such repentance they will follow Him "wherever He goes," and Mary Magdalene becomes their "patron saint."

Corporate guilt is sensing how the sins of others would be ours but for the grace of Christ (and there is no end to them!).

"Pastor, this will kill me! I have enough sins of my own without feeling guilt for others!" Yes, you are quite right about such guilt killing you. That's precisely what happens when we bear it; and that's what happened to Jesus when He took on Himself the guilt of the world's sins. They killed Him. But yours and my sins are actually the sins of the world, for we are by nature no better than anyone else. To what depths could you and I fall if Jesus were to let go of us?

True justification by faith "lays the glory of man in the dust," Ellen White tells us (and here it is at work). God will have a people in the last days who so identify with Christ that in such repentance they will follow Him "wherever He goes," and Mary Magdalene becomes their "patron saint."

We must ponder several lessons that cry for attention:

(1) God has had many problems to deal with during human history. The most serious one concerns His last days' church, Laodicea: the disease of lukewarmness. It's a thermostatic "balance," half loving the world, half loving Christ. Unless Laodicea finds some way out of that problem, the Book of Revelation with its glorious triumphs is doomed to remain forever unfulfilled.

But it tells of a time when the church will make "herself ready" for the marriage of the Lamb (19:7-9). How can God solve that deeply rooted problem which has for so long delayed that "marriage"? The answer: learning to "love much" as Mary did.

(2) But how can we learn to "love much"? Jesus expressed the governing principle when He explained why Mary "loved much": to love much is possible only when one senses he is forgiven much (see Luke 7:47).

(3) So, shall we abandon ourselves to seven demons so we can learn by experience the need for being forgiven "much"?

That would be one possibility, but the danger is that once so "possessed," we might never find our way out. Mary was extremely fortunate; we might perish.

There is a simpler solution: this principle of corporate repentance. We don't have to engage in depravity to the nth degree; we can realize that we would sink to it except for the grace of Christ. (A proud heart doesn't like this.)

Corporate repentance is realizing that the sins of someone else would be ours if Christ had not redeemed us from them. It means we are no better by nature than anyone else. We need a Savior 100%; we don't have even 1% of righteousness which is our own. The ultimate truth about ourselves is revealed in the light of Christ's righteousness. This is why it "humbles the pride of man [and woman] in the dust." Undreamed of possibilities lie within each imprisoned human heart, waiting only the liberating touch of such repentance.

(4) The gospel is not a story without a denouement; the plot must at last be resolved. Jesus must see His designated prototype in Mary repeated in the experience of a church body, a host of people worldwide of whom He can honestly say, "Here is the patience of the saints," here are they that have overcome, "even as I also overcame" (Rev. 14:12, 3:21).

Don't believe that Laodicea's case is hopeless. If we could have met Mary before Jesus prayed for her that seventh time, we would have judged her case hopeless, especially since she had already been prayed for six times. For us to give up on Laodicea is to "insult ["do despite unto," KJV] the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29) and deny what Christ died to accomplish. You can't truly believe in Him unless you also believe in the church that He "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The unfallen universe will be "glad and rejoice" to see the church grow up out of her childish state of lukewarmness to the mature

“measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). She will at last make herself ready to be His Bride. The longing, hungering heart of Jesus will find

His corporate soul mate—“someone” who fully appreciates Him for what He is.

Why should Jesus say that the story of one bad sinner must be told everywhere the gospel is proclaimed? What is so special about Mary Magdalene’s tearful offering at Bethany?

1. As a photographic print resembles its negative, so her strange act resembled His great sacrifice. Jesus had to defend her, for in doing so He was defending Himself, His cross.

2. She had paid an enormous price for that alabaster flask of precious ointment (300 silver coins, the wage of a working man for a year). So Jesus paid an enormous price to redeem us.

3. What Mary did was wildly extravagant—“wasting” an entire flask of “very precious” ointment when only a teaspoonful was needed; so what Jesus did was equally (more so!) extravagant—shedding His blood sufficient to save an entire world when only a handful of people will respond.

4. Mary’s motive was totally non-selfish; she had no thought of being praised by Jesus. All she wanted to do was say, “Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul!” So Jesus’ motive was purely and simply love for lost people, no acquisitive purpose mixed in to becloud that pure flame of devotion for us. Mary was unconsciously reflecting the motives of Jesus.

Her perceptions, her discernment, were more sensitive than that of any of the Twelve disciples.

5. The Bible singles her out as a “sinner,” meaning, an outstanding one (Luke 7:37); she was “forgiven much,” not little. She knew it, realized it; therefore her now converted sinful heart could be stretched outsize to “love much” (vs. 47). Hence her amazing deed, the most beautiful ever performed by any repentant sinner in history.

6. Jesus therefore saw in her an example, a “prototype,” a demonstration, of what His agape-love could and would eventually produce in “144,000” people.

7. Her act of love in no way contributed to her salvation; it was only an expression of gratitude for her salvation already accomplished.

Thus Jesus defined the clearest demonstration of what the word faith means: “Go in peace,” He said; “your faith has saved you” (vs. 50). Thus Jesus nailed down for all time to come a clear definition of faith: it is a heart-appreciation of what He has done for us in saving us from hell itself. When faith is so understood, it can do nothing else than “work” (Gal. 5:6).