

Mary Magdalene



Jesus held a highly progressive view on discrimination against women and played a pioneering role in abolishing it. Regarding the abolition of discrimination, Jesus had women disciples who were always with him yet appear on no official lists. According to Mark, these women—most often mentioned first is Mary Magdalene—followed him from Galilee and attended to him (Mark 15:40–41). Matthew repeats Mark’s note that they were “those who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to him” (Matt 27:55). Luke likewise mentions the women “who had followed him from Galilee” (Luke 23:49). It may be that “the claim that Jesus had twelve male disciples was appended to the Jesus story by Paul for other purposes—especially to set terms for relations with the Jews.” 1)

In John 20:16, when Mary Magdalene meets the risen Jesus, she calls him *Rabboni* (an affectionate form of “Rabbi,” roughly akin to “teacher”). This shows the two stood in a teacher–disciple relationship. In the KJV, *Rabboni* is glossed as “Master,” whereas the NIV reads “Teacher.” English *master* can mean “teacher,” but it can also mean “lord,” a form of address used for one’s husband. In John 11:32 Mary addresses Jesus as *Lord*. It is possible that, through the anointing rite, Mary came to regard Jesus as a husband-king and used such terms.

In Luke 10:38–42, Martha (who appears also in John) welcomes Jesus; when her sister Mary receives his special favor, Martha complains to Jesus. In Luke 10:40 she says, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” She could have spoken directly to her sister, but petitioning Jesus in this way implies that Jesus held authority (or guardianship—as father or husband) over Mary. Jesus and Mary may well have been intimate lovers—or even husband and wife.

“In John’s Gospel there is an anointing; the only reason this event in Bethany—where only close disciples and family gathered—could have been so naturally accepted is that Mary was Jesus’ wife.” 2)

“*Magdalene* has nothing to do with a town named Magdala; no one has found Jewish or Roman records mentioning such a city. A ‘Magdala’ has recently been fashioned for tourists, but it is not authentic. Hebrew *migdal* (‘tower’—as in *migdal eder*, ‘tower of the flock,’ Gen 35:21; cf. Mic 4:8) has the same consonants as ‘Magdala’ and connotes height, greatness, and importance. The early church may have called Mary ‘Magdalene’ not because of a place but because she was tall, robust, and eminent. I believe Jesus had a female companion—his wife—and that he bestowed upon her the pride and honor of shattering the old barriers of sexism. That woman was Mary Magdalene.” 3)



Jesus and Mary Magdalene

Luke 8:2–3 says, "Some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities— Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; and Susanna; and many others—provided for them out of their means." From this we learn that Mary Magdalene devoted her property and followed Jesus, serving him and his disciples.

"Other early Christian texts discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi on the upper Nile state that the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' was Mary Magdalene. Some scholars argue that the author of the Fourth Gospel was originally Mary, later clumsily altered to 'John.' The original booklet clearly says that the person who leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper was not John but Mary." 4) Such a scene would be entirely acceptable if the two were husband and wife.

Jesus' entrusting of organizational funds to Mary Magdalene was a great act aimed at abolishing discrimination against women at its root. Mary was not only one who gave up her property and followed him; she also rightly understood and practiced

Jesus' teaching. Yet Christianity, by likening Mary's act of pouring perfume and wiping Jesus' feet with her hair to the gesture of a courtesan, denigrates Jesus' revolutionary act and appears to rationalize the betrayal by Peter and the other disciples. Whatever Mary's background, she followed Jesus' teaching well and earned his confidence; it seems he especially provided for her and entrusted her with leadership of the movement before his death.

Sources

1. *Made Jesus, Real Jesus* (Korean trans. of John Shelby Spong), Korea Institute for Christian Studies, 2009, p. 94.
2. John Shelby Spong, *(Korean title) Anachronical Violence in Bible*, Korea Institute for Christian Studies, 2007, p. 149.
3. John Shelby Spong, *(Korean title) Anachronical Violence in Bible*, 2007, pp. 151–152 (summary and edited).
4. Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, *The Laughing Jesus*, Three Rivers Press, 2005, p. 70.