

MARY MAGDALENE... who was told to keep her distance
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(John 20:17)

The Lord Jesus Christ did and said many strange things, and every day promised new and exciting experiences to the men who followed Him. Yet even they must have been greatly surprised when they heard of His command to the beloved Magdalene. It was Easter Sunday morning when the faithful woman went down to the tomb. Dismayed at the thought that someone had stolen the Lord's body, she asked one whom she supposed to be the gardener, if he had taken away the body; and while she awaited an answer, she suddenly heard the Master's voice, and recognized her Lord. Instinctively she fell at His feet to worship Him; but as she reached out her hands, He said, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father~" It seems that later she was permitted to touch Him, but the initial command brought an entirely new note into the teaching of Jesus.

The New Command

The key message of Christ's ministry had been, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." When a leper fell at His feet, the Saviour stretched forth a hand and touched Him. Just one week after meeting Magdalene, He invited Thomas to place a finger into the mark of the nail; and to say the least, His denial to Magdalene seems as strange as His invitation to Thomas seems unfair. Why did Christ tell the woman to keep her distance? The text obviously supplies the answer. "I am not yet ascended to my Father." There is a threefold newness of relationship here, and we do well to notice it. (i) A new relationship between man and Christ. Something had happened to Jesus, for whereas He had formerly invited people to draw near, now He forbade His disciple to touch Him. Calvary had altered the Saviour's attitude. (ii) A new relationship between Christ and God. On that Easter day, neither communion in the mount nor the promise of an imminent departure for heaven would suffice. It had become immediately necessary to present Himself before the Almighty. Why? (iii) A new relationship between God and man. The Fatherhood of God takes the pre-eminent place in the Gospel. "I ascend unto MY FATHER and YOUR FATHER, and to my God and your God." Therefore it is clear that the first thing Jesus did on that memorable day was to ascend into the immediate presence of God.

The New Credentials

When an ambassador has been appointed to a foreign court, his first duty is that of presenting his credentials to the reigning sovereign. Until these have been accepted, he has no authority to represent his people in that land. The same thought is expressed in the Old Testament teaching concerning the high priesthood of Israel. Before the priest could represent the people, he himself had to be accepted by God. Then the blood of the offering would be sprinkled on the mercy seat, and the appointed man could act on behalf of his nation. The epistle to the Hebrews clearly reveals that Christ is now our accepted High Priest. His death at Calvary fulfilled every type concerning the blood of the lamb, and the only thing that remained to be accomplished was the presentation of His credentials before the throne of God. Therefore on that Easter day the scene in

MARY MAGDALENE... who was told to keep her distance heaven beggared description, for all the angelic host watched the eternal Son presenting before His Father the evidence of His sufferings.

The New Challenge

"Then the same day at evening . . . came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." It was as though He said, "Can you see these wounds in my hands and my side? They were the credentials which I presented on your behalf in heaven. My Father accepted them; will you?" Thomas was not present at that meeting, but all his doubts were banished eight days later, when the Saviour invited him saying, "Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." This constituted the new challenge. Here we have blessing in triplicate. The disciples looked at the, Lord and discovered a new peace. "Peace be unto you. They recognized the way of pardon. "He shewed unto them His hands." They experienced pleasure. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

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