**New Hope Sermon Deliverance and Mercy - the Power of the gospel John 20**

Another piece of the power of the gospel is God’s Mercy and Deliverance. There is not another “god” or religion in the world that can deliver people from the evils that shackle them. Only Jesus Christ can do this because He has power over **all** evil. And in His great mercy and love, He will deliver those who call on Him for that salvation.



**Meet Miles McPherson**

He did it for Mary Magdalene, but before we get to her story, I want to start with the contemporary story of Miles McPherson. His testimony appeared in the March 2019 edition of *Christianity Today* under the title “My NFL Dreams Were Turning to Dust.” He writes:

“Don’t put the powder in your nose,” I said as I looked in the mirror. “Don’t do it.” I was sure I could talk myself out of snorting cocaine one more time. My words sounded so real, so genuine but just like that I saw my image disappear from the mirror as I bent down and took another hit from the table. It was an awful high, the chemicals of the cocaine laced through my body at the same time they battled against my guilt and my conscience. I would yell at myself, “What are you doing?”

The tragedy of my addiction was that it threatened everything I had worked for. I was a defensive back playing for the San Diego Chargers and living the life I always wanted.

The cocaine that I consumed … took me by the lapels and forced me into submission. Soon enough I was completely under its control … Every chance I got I drove myself down to the seediest neighborhoods of the city and paid good money to a dealer who sold me poison.

At the time, there were several guys on the team who were Christians, and they were very vocal about Jesus … One day on a chartered flight back from a game, I was making my way down the aisle from the bathroom when he got in my face. He knew what I’d been doing in there. Staring me down, he asked, “If you were to die today, would you go to heaven? You know Jesus wants your heart. What are you going to do?”

Finally one weekend, the moment of truth arrived. I began a cocaine binge in the evening and when 5am rolled around, I still hadn’t gone to sleep. I felt the oppression of the drug on my life in a new way. I was shackled by my habit and utterly helpless against it—I fully believed it would kill me. If anything was going to free me, it had to be mightier than my addiction. I recalled what my Christian teammates had said about *the power* of Jesus, and so I cried out to Jesus to save me. Who else was going to do it? … It was God or nothing.

When I got up off my knees, everything was different. I felt as if I had been delivered—that all the desire to use had fallen away. By God’s grace, from that time forward I would never do drugs again … My story of the shackled man who gets set free has meant more to people than I could have ever imagined. I’ve told that story all over the world, at crusades and in prisons, hospitals, rodeos, the list goes on. And I have witnessed thousands of people come to faith in Christ.” (Christianity Today, March 2019, My NFL Dreams Were Turning to Dust, pp. 88-89)

The power of Jesus Christ is stronger than cocaine addiction and any evil that puts people emotionally, physically, or spiritually in chains. Mary Magdalene understood that truth and this is why she was so devoted to Jesus as his disciple.

**Meet Mary Magdalene**

Scripture indicates that Mary Magdalene was actually the first person Jesus revealed himself to after his resurrection. There is both incredible kindness and unlimited mercy in choosing her first. Her story is a story of mercy because Mary Magdalene herself had been delivered by Christ.

What do we know about Mary Magdalene? We first meet her in Luke 8:2 as part of the group of women who were now Jesus’ disciples and whom he had healed or delivered. They traveled with him and the apostles and took care of Jesus’s needs. Luke notes that Jesus had delivered Mary from 7 demons. We don’t know what those specific spirits were. But we do know that whenever evil spirits are involved, there is addiction, destruction, loss of control of one’s life and a horrible sense of being shackled. Think of the slave girl in Ephesus whom greedy men were controlling because she could prophesy future events and it brought them money. Or think of the man in Gadara who had over 300 demons controlling him. Mk.5: They had destroyed him so completely that all he did day and night was cut himself and run screaming among the tombs. He had lost all his sanity and dignity as a human being and was living more like an animal. Demon possession is a person’s worse nightmare and once you are in the control of a demon, you have turned over your own free will and all the positive parts of life and hope and peace and love and joy. As Jesus said, *Satan comes to kill, to steal and to destroy but* ***I*** *have come that they might have life to the fullest, abundant life.* Jn.10:10

So, it is reasonable to assume that Mary had been under horrifying spiritual oppression when Jesus delivered her. That is mercy, beloved, and the power of the gospel acted out. There is nothing Mary did to deserve her freedom; Jesus must have just looked at her with love and bought her freedom with his word as He cast the demons out of her. I don’t know how the demons had shackled her – what they were making her do that was killing her as surely as the drug addiction was killing Miles McPherson, but we know Jesus delivered her completely. And for Jesus to meet her outside the tomb, as she was overcome with grief, is a wonderful evidence of God’s mercy and kindness.

Now, there are myths circulating that she was married to Jesus or they had an affair. But this is part of the slander and falsehoods people circulate to make money off of a sensational story. However, there is no intimation of this illicit relationship with Jesus anywhere in the gospels. In fact, we don’t hear about her again until Christ’s crucifixion, (Mt. 27:56, Mk.15:40, John19:25), his burial (Mt.27:61, Mk.15:47) and his resurrection (recorded in all the gospels). She was part of the group of women who watched his crucifixion from afar and then noted where he was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb and finally who prepared spices and oils to anoint his body after he had been in the tomb for 3 days.

**The reality of the evil spirit world**

Again, we are not told the names of the 7 demons who had tormented her. We simply know that Jesus delivered her. So, to me it seems like an act of immense kindness and mercy that He appeared to her first in His resurrection. God’s mercy is able to overcome and overlook any shackling you have had in your past.

And this is the power of the gospel. This truth that God’s deliverance and mercy is extended to all who call out to Him needs to be told everywhere in the world where people are shackled by evil. Interestingly, in parts of the Majority world where there is a clear understanding of the spirit world and a great bondage because of the power of evil spirits, the truth of Jesus’s greater power is a key component of salvation for these people. Westerners pride themselves on their rational, scientific worldview that dismisses the spirit world, but most people in the Majority world know better. Stories abound from Africa, any region controlled by folk religion or the reality of witch doctors and shamans and people who live their lives placating these evil spirits and the mediums who are in contact with them. This is the whole world of curses and evil spirit demonstrations that are daily reality for so many. So, the “pride” of Western rationalists and secularists have gotten the story all wrong. (See the story of Bruchko in Latin America, Abou in Africa,etc. ). In the classic book *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* David Augsburger says:

“In African culture reality lies in the realm of the soul and not in that of internal or external things. Reality lies, not in relationship between man and things but in that of men with the spirits.. The phenonema of possession, spells, amulets shaman’s incantations, and voodoo rituals are central issues of concern…because they deal with what is powerful or sacred, whatever is real to the counselee. To secularize the counselee’s problem and seek to provide naturalistic explanations is to miss the central issue of power encounter, faith struggles and the collision of values of worldview and of ultimate visions of reality.” (Westminster Press, 1986,p. 276)

Jesus understood those evil powers and His ability to deliver people from each of those bondage-controlling forces is part of the power of the gospel. He did it for Mary Magdalene. Since all addictions also become a force of evil in a person’s life, He did it for Miles McPherson. And He still does this in countless ways today.

But it is not just in the extremes of demon possession or drug addiction. There is emotional and mental bondage of shackling, even for Christians, caused by any number of other things, and this brings the issue much closer to our reality. For example, research shows that the youngest generation – now called gen Z – has an incredible bondage to social media and their smart phones. Millennials do as well. Or you could be shackled by your desire to please people and be accepted and liked by them. Miles actually started his cocaine addiction because he was invited, as a young NFL recruit, to a party with a number of the successful players on his team. They were all doing drugs and offered a free “hit” to him. He felt if he didn’t take it, he wouldn’t be accepted as part of the group and he reasoned that it was only for this one time. He had no idea of the power of the drugs. But, as he noted, cocaine took him by the lapels and almost killed him. Others can become shackled by lust and illicit sexual activity that violates God’s commands about sexual purity and giving one’s body only to another in marriage. That creates a double shackling – of guilt and of the lust that burns through one’s body and mind for continual satisfaction. Maybe it’s depression that has clouded your judgment and kept you believing lies about “God’s love for you and your value and worth in His eyes. Maybe it’s a spirit of pride that has refused to surrender your heart to Jesus’ Lordship or a spirit of ego dominance that excludes God. Remember Miles’ words from his Christian teammate: “You know Jesus wants your heart. What are you going to do?” Or, maybe you are shackled by injustice and abuse in your past and carry the emotional baggage around like a wounded bear, always licking your wounds. Or find you are addicted to Netflix and the entertainment industry with its endless movies or TV shows. The list itself is almost endless.

Evil powers are real, beloved, and when you have been shackled by an evil power, you find change is beyond your control. You can’t seem to get free, no matter how hard you talk to yourself to quit that habit.

The global power of the gospel is that Jesus has the power to deliver you and then in His merciful kindness keep revealing Himself to you and using you to bring His message to others. Will you let Him?

Jesus’ resurrected appearances demonstrate the power of the gospel. His mercy is mixed with compassion. Like Mary and Miles, you are precious to Him and His deliverance is your key to freedom to live in that love.

Then go and tell others, like Mary and Miles both did, about your wonderful, merciful Savior

Song of response: Wonderful, merciful Savior Precious Redeemer and Friend
“Who would have thought that a Lamb Could rescue the souls of men - O-oh, You rescue the souls of men

Counselor, Comforter, Keeper, Spirit we long to embrace
You offer hope when our hearts have Hopelessly lost our way - O-oh, we've hopelessly lost the way

You are the One that we praise, You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace Our hearts always hunger for - O-oh, our hearts always hunger for

Almighty, infinite Father Faithfully loving Your own
Here in our weakness You find us Falling before Your throne - O-oh, we're falling before Your throne

You are the One that we praise, You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace Our hearts always hunger for - O-oh, our hearts always hunger for.” (by Selah)

Amen. Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 5/5/19