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Cracking the Code: Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary

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Luke 8:1-3

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Dan Brown has created the ultimate conspiracy novel. It's much bigger than aliens, who shot the Kennedys, and government cover-ups: the church hiding the true identity of Jesus Christ and misleading billions of believers. Dan Brown's brilliant mixture of fact and fiction provide a nice-sized window of doubt, and you're hooked.

Dan Brown himself says on his website "The debate that is being generated is a positive powerful force. The more vigorously we debate these topics, the better our understanding of our own spirituality..."

He also says "The Da Vinci Code is a novel and therefore a work of fiction. While the book's characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals...all exist."

Have you seen the book stores? The racks are full of books about Mary Magdalene, "undiscovered ancient texts," and a major questioning of who Jesus was. Many folks inside and outside of Christianity ask whether we should redesign our understanding of Christianity. And this didn't begin with Dan Brown, and it didn't begin in the last 20 years either. It's almost an invisible code behind the Da Vinci Code, and most of us have no idea that it's there. I think it is a major-yet-sublime reason the novel has become this crazy phenomenon. We're going to take some time over the next 3 weeks to explore who Mary Magdalene was, how the New Testament was constructed, and who Jesus is.

1. Who was Mary Magdalene according to the Bible? Mary is one of 7 people in the New Testament with them name. Mary Magdalene is distinguished by a reference to her home, Magdala (likely modern day Migdal). (Luke 8:2). The names just help sort out the individuals. It's a modern form of Miriam, Moses' sister. In the Scriptures, Mary Magdalene is not connected to any male. First, she was healed by Jesus and part of an entourage of women who supported and traveled with the disciples. *NIV Luke 8:1 Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.* Second, she was present at the cross, a woman in despair about Jesus' fate. (Matthew 27:55-56). She was not alone, but with other women. Third, some texts placed her at the cross either as Jesus was buried (Matthew 27:61, Mark 15:40), each time listed with other women. And Fourth, all of the remaining biblical texts about Mary Magdalene depict her as a witness to Jesus' resurrection. Part of the time was an entourage, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And no one believed their report at the time! John's account of Mary's close encounter with

Jesus in the Garden is the most dramatic. She clung to him, he told her to let go, and she left, a witness to Jesus, carrying out her role of announcing the resurrection. She was an apostle to the apostles in that sense. (She was never related to Jesus in any other sense. She didn't sing "I don't know how to love him", either! ☺). That's it...

One early Christian writing exists about Mary Magdalene, along with other women. It is a minor reference in Hippolytus' commentary on the Old Testament book Song of Solomon, symbolizing the spiritual wedding between Christ and his church. As far as other writings that fell outside Orthodox Christianity, there is an obscure reference to Mary in a Gnostic gospel of Philip, composed 200 years after Christ, which we have in broken fragments about Jesus giving Mary a kiss. Gnosticism is the name given a movement of ideas in the first few centuries of Christianity. People were given special knowledge, or gnosis. They also believed anything physical was evil. Only the spiritual was good. This made the bodily resurrection of Jesus a big problem. This belief makes Jesus' kiss most likely symbolic. There is also a Gospel of Mary Magdala in which Peter was supposedly disturbed because Mary received a revelation from Jesus. This Gnostic movement produced a lot of writings, because one of the major tenets is that those who believed received additional special revelation. In the Bible or outside the Bible, nothing mentions Mary and Jesus being married.

One final thing that I stand corrected on: I always thought Mary Magdalene *was* a prostitute. But our text today introduces Mary of Magdala as if she's a new character. Luke makes no effort to connect Mary to the previous scene involving the sinful woman who washes Jesus' feet with her hair.

2. Were Jesus and Mary Magdalene married? And if they were, would that somehow discredit Jesus' claim of deity? Was the word "companion" synonymous with the word "spouse" during the first century? And if Mary was married to Jesus, what was her last name? (sorry, I couldn't resist)

The question of whether or not Jesus was married is an interesting one for sure. But there isn't any reason why Jesus' couldn't have been married. Marriage is a holy covenant between a man and a woman, ordained by God in the very beginning. (see Genesis 2:24) The Bible has only the highest view of marriage.

And notice—no reference outside the Bible indicates that Jesus was married or Mary Magdalene was his wife. This matches the New Testament.

3. Did Jesus and Mary intend to establish a new dynasty by uniting their two royal bloodlines? This is an easy question to answer for two reasons:

Reason #1: If Mary was from the Tribe of Benjamin, of which there is no genealogical proof in the Bible, whatsoever...but even if there were, there is only one Tribe of the 12 Tribes of Israel that are of Royal blood: the Tribe of Judah. It's through the tribe of Judah that the line of David and Solomon come. This is easily seen through the genealogies in both Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-37. The Tribe of Benjamin is not a royal line.

Reason #2: If Jesus did marry Mary, He would not have done it for political reasons because He did not have a political agenda. He said Himself that His Kingdom was not of this world.

Pontius Pilate himself asked Jesus "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus asks back "Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?" Then Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” John 18:33-36

4. Did Jesus commission Mary to be His sole successor? Dan Brown says that Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene to be His successor not Peter. But in reality, Jesus didn't choose any ONE person as His successor. Not Peter, not Mary not any ONE person. "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Ephesians 2:19-20

Peter said himself: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9

So of course Jesus didn't choose Mary as His successor, He didn't choose any ONE person. The apostles plural and prophets plural are aligned with *Christ* as the cornerstone which provide the foundation of the Church. That means you and I are to continue on Christ's ministry in our time on earth.

5. Was Jesus a feminist? If by asking that question you mean: "Did Jesus raise the value of women up in the first century", the answer is yes, most definitely. In a time where women were considered property and were not even allowed to testify in court and could be divorced for burning their husbands toast, Jesus' treatment of women would have been extremely unusual. Mary Magdalene and other women were significant disciples.

ENTRANCE OF MARY MAGDALENE:

Matt - Mary! Mary Magdalene, why are you dressed like Carol Burnett?

Mary - Matt, things are getting to be a mess and I'm just here to clean things up!

Matt - Mary I'm glad to see you, but you don't look anything like the picture.

Mary - What picture?

Matt -The one Leonardo DaVinci painted of the Last Supper.

Mary - That's because I wasn't in that picture! Leonardo DaVinci never laid eyes on me and I can tell you for a fact, he wasn't at the Last Supper.

Matt - So, Mary, what about all these rumors? Some people are saying you were really Jesus' wife.

Mary - Isn't it hard enough to be married to someone who *thinks* he's always right? What do you say when people ask you if you get along with your Father-in-law? You would have to spend the night in homes of people you would rather not be around - like tax collectors. Speaking of tax collectors, if you think the IRS is scary, imagine having the Pharisees watch your every move! You could never wear really cute shoes because you would be walking the desert all day. In the evening you would be closed in a tent with thirteen men who had been walking the desert all day! Actually, the main reason I would not wish to be married to Jesus is because then I would be remembered as Jesus' wife and not Mary Magdalene, the woman Jesus saved. And isn't that enough?... EXIT

In pop culture today a new wave of quasi-non-fiction books is being released, in which Mary Magdalene is being exalted and morphed into a politically correct symbol yet one without any solid root in Christian history.

Mary Magdalene was not the wife of Jesus. She was a disciple of Jesus who points the way. As a witness to the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as one among the first to see and understand what God had done through Jesus, Mary Magdalene serves us far better as a disciple of

Jesus than as Jesus' alleged wife. Out of a death for sin comes the opportunity of new and resurrected life with God.

You know, the greatest mystery HAS been solved: the mystery of life and death. It is not trivial. It is a code to be cracked. And Mary Magdalene was a witness to one of the greatest mystery-breakers of all time: Jesus' resurrection. Jesus stands at the center of what God does for humanity. Jesus says simply "Believe in God. Trust in the work He has done and will do for you." What lies ahead for you when you embrace faith like that is a new and unending life of fellowship with God—living out his forgiveness and spiritual strength, because the Holy Spirit—the mind of Christ, God with us, has come. That's the real Jesus code...and it's something worth believing!

Something hit me that I didn't find in all my research: The real reason people have to come up with conspiracy theories and alternative understandings isn't because the message of Jesus Christ' resurrection is so bad. They have to come up with other ways to explain it...because the message is *so good*, they can't believe it could be true.