

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Known. Loved. Chosen.
11 & 12 February 2023
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

Scripture Text: Luke 43:1

Video Clips: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YwhPc5OxZxM5a4Nrm1wA5tueTBg6-7vt?usp=share_link

Sermon Preamble

We are in a sermon series called Chosen. We are known, loved, and chosen by God. The big idea is that we are dearly loved and chosen by Jesus, and Jesus invites us to choose Him in return. We are drawing from the media series, *The Chosen*, following Jesus' ministry through the life, culture, and times of 1st Century Palestine. The broad outlines of *The Chosen* media series are biblically accurate. It is important to read the Bible as you watch *The Chosen* media series. Allow your holy imagination to consider the life, times, and tendencies of human nature as the details unfold. As we draw closer to Easter, our vision is to meet Jesus with fresh eyes and an ever deepening heart of love that declares, "Lord as you have chosen me, I choose you." In this message, we share scenes from *The Chosen*, Season 1 Episode 1, where we meet some of the disciples and Mary Magdalene.

Video clips in this message depict content of sexual violence, suicide, self-harm, and abuse

Our journey in this message will land at the hope and good news of what it means that we are known, loved, and chosen. The video clips contain some hard content. The clips are not graphic and they are not long, but some of the video clips depict possibly triggering content of sexual violence, suicide, self-harm, and abuse. To be sensitive to anyone's experiences, we encourage you to do whatever you may need to feel emotionally safe. Please know that South Bay Community Church has pastoral and mental health counseling support and prayer available for you.

Let's meet Mary Magdalene. Mary had struggles before she met Jesus

After Mary met Jesus, hear the Word of the Lord as repeated by Jesus to Mary: "But now, this is what the Lord says – he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel; 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'" (Isaiah 43:1).

See Video Clip 1. Do Mary's struggles resonate with you? Perhaps you struggled with childhood fears, or perhaps you can recall the innocence of children before the realities of life intrude. Both in our natural and spiritual lives, we begin with innocence and hope trusting in those who are to take care of us. We trust in God and the promises of scripture. We have an expectation when we are young chronologically or young in the faith that life is supposed to be good and that all will be well. Sincere and innocent, we are filled with hope. It is heartbreaking when children are exposed to abuse and other sins of this world that robs them of that innocence; that is not the way it is supposed to be.

Even with her fears, Mary starts with hope. She has hope in her earthly father and hope in her Heavenly Father until the realities of life dashed those hopes. *The Chosen* media series includes the account of Mary from the beginning before she met Jesus.

Mary Magdalene, one of several women named Mary in the Bible, worked alongside and traveled with Jesus

There are a number of Mary's in the Bible, so it is sometimes difficult to keep them straight. There is Mary, the mother of Jesus. There is also Mary, the sister to Lazarus and Martha. There is Mary Magdalene. Magdalene is not her last name, but Magdala is where she was from, so it is a way to distinguish her from the other Mary's. Mary Magdalene was one of the women who worked alongside and traveled with Jesus.

“Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases:” (Luke 8:1-2a). Jesus was radical; women were not typically included in this way, but Jesus had another vision. Jesus affirmed women directly all through his ministry. Jesus did not wait for a chaperone or speak through a husband or father. Jesus saw and affirmed women as sisters and the daughters of God. The scripture tells us the twelve were with him and also some women.

The scripture lists some of the women. “Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means” (Luke 8:2b-3). The scripture informs us that women were supporting Jesus financially.

Mary Magdalene was first in many categories and events

The gospels mention Mary Magdalene 14 times, more than most of the male disciples. In 8 of the 14 times, Mary Magdalene is mentioned in connection with other women. She is always the first one named, implying that she was a leader. 5 times, the gospels mention her in conjunction with Jesus’ death and resurrection. Mary was present or near at every event in Jesus’ last days. Mary was the first person at the tomb, and the angel spoke to her. Mary was the first one to learn that Jesus had risen, and she was the first one to whom Jesus appeared. Mary was also the first one to tell the other disciples as Jesus instructed, although the other disciples did not believe her.

It appears that Mary Magdalene was a woman of means able to support Jesus’ ministry

Magdala was a thriving town on the coast of Galilee only about three miles from Capernaum where Peter lived and where Jesus did much of his ministry. In Capernaum, excavation of the town continues today examining artifact items to learn about the town’s life and times. Magdala was known for the two industries of dye works and textiles. Mary Magdalene may have been connected to these industries, enabling her to have the means to serve the Lord. It also appears that Mary was single without family obligations, so she was free to follow Jesus and serve the ministry.

Before Mary Magdalene met Jesus, she had total demon possession

“Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;” (Luke 8:2). Mary was plagued with 7 demons. The number 7 doesn’t usually mean literally a count of 7, but 7 represents completion or totally. This implies that Mary’s condition was very severe. Whatever her condition, she experienced psychological and emotional trauma. Her life was one of agony, shame, injury, and all the suffering that went with her condition.

Mary Magdalene very possibly was subject to violence from the oppressive Roman centurion

See Video Clip 2. Human history records sexual violence and abuse by controlling oppressors like the Romans against members of the oppressed group like the Jews. The account of Mary of sexual abuse from an oppressor may not be our exact story. We may not have suffered to this degree, but we may know someone who has.

There may be other ways we can relate to Mary’s struggles. We can relate to being overwhelmed by life’s tragedies, trials, and sufferings. We can relate to coming to the end of ourselves and feeling that we have nothing left to hold on to. We can relate to those times when it feels God is far away, and there is no one there who cares. Even prayer and scripture can feel empty in those moments that are dark and painful spaces to be in.

The pain we see in this portrait of Mary is very real for us today. We have spoken often in this church about the mental health epidemic in our country today. The spectrum of mental health issues can touch so many from children to seniors. The Bible does not give details about Mary’s struggle before she met Jesus. The writers of The Chosen media series considered the possibilities of that biblical time to use their holy

imagination to develop the details of Mary's account. This is a universal account that we can understand even to the point of what Mary does next.

Mary Magdalene saw no other alternative but to end her life

See Video Clip 3. There are hurting people who see no other way but to end their lives. These people without hope include men and women, teens, and adults of all ages. Suicide is the 12th leading cause of death in the United States. In this country, there is an average of 130 suicides per day. Even among adolescents ages 15-19, suicide is the 4th leading cause of death globally. In 2020, 1.2 million people attempted suicide, and there were 45,979 deaths by suicide. The news reports point out that social media does not help. For example, TikTok is receiving scrutiny because of the access users are exposed to suicide and self-harm postings.

The video clip shows us that even the scripture that gave Mary Magdalene comfort as a little girl did not comfort her in this moment of total hopelessness. In her pain, she couldn't see God.

In The Chosen, God saw Mary about to end her life. She lost faith in God, but God was still faithful to her

In the video, God literally got Mary off the edge of the cliff with a distraction that captured her attention. Mary may have been ready to end her life, but God had other plans for her. Mary followed that distraction away from the cliff, as she did not recognize God's lifeline to her in that moment. God always extends a hand and provides a way of escape. God provides a lifeline for another choice different from the one that would do us harm and is not best for us. We have to open to take it.

Mary ripped up the scroll that had the Isaiah passage on it and dropped the ripped scroll into the sea below. But God was still faithful to God's promise in Mary's life. Although she did not know it, and although she felt far from God, God was still calling her by name. Remember that the biblical scripture said, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1b).

The context of Israel as the audience for Isaiah 43:1

When the prophet Isaiah wrote these words, he was addressing the Children of Israel who were in exile under Babylonian captivity. It was not written directly for Mary or for us. When reading and applying scripture, we must always consider the context and whether the principle is a larger principle for all times or a word specific to the original intended audience.

For many years, Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah had been warning Israel that a day of reckoning was coming for their consistent rebellion towards God and idolatry. The Bible tells us that God is long-suffering and patient, but there does come a time when the consequences of our choices play out and God says, "Enough you have refused to listen to me." In 587 BC, for Israel, that time had come. King Nebuchadnezzar's armies invaded Jerusalem, killing many Israelites, destroying the temple, burning down important buildings, and leaving Jerusalem in ruins. Thousands of Jews were taken into captivity; you can read the account in Jeremiah 52 and world history. God shattered their false confidence by not protecting Jerusalem.

Their arrogance, pride, rebellion and stubbornness against God's ways all came crashing down, and the temple fell. The temple was not only their house of worship, but also the physical representation of God's presence. For some, that siege probably felt like God had been defeated. For many years, the prophets had been preaching that God's judgement was coming.

God's prophets also foretold that captivity would last for 70 years. So captivity is their new normal for at least two generations. God tells them to settle in and make the best of it. Because of their choices, it will be awhile before they are free again. It is like us, as the children of God, being grounded for 70 years. Can you imagine the despair, disillusionment, depression, and devastation over time? Many of the older people felt that God had abandoned them. They were hopeless foreigners in a strange land. The younger people had no historical sense of God at all.

God promises hope and comfort for those God has chosen for all times

Yet, through God's prophets, God continues to remind Israel that God has not forgotten them. Isaiah chapters 40-55 address the exiled Israelites with words full of comfort and hope, known as "The Book of Consolation of Israel." Furthermore, in these chapters God's prophet, Isaiah, looks beyond the current circumstances to the coming, suffering servant who will carry God's purpose to the world, even unto death. By the time of the writing of Isaiah 43:1, Israel has been in exile for many years. God wants the children of Israel to know that God has not forgotten them. God still loves them. Israel can trust God. The people of Israel are still in God's heart. God is still with them.

Those truths never change. While the original audience for Isaiah 43:1 was not Mary or us, it applies to us because the words speak truth for those God has chosen for all times.

Some of us are victims of this broken world struggling and suffering with realities we never chose but were thrust upon us. Some of us are struggling and suffering from consequences that have landed us where we never wanted to be. For us, God's Word in Isaiah 43:1 to us is the same. In fact, you can fill in your name for Jacob and Israel.

Isaiah 43:1 for us is what God wants us to know and remember.

God reminds us of who God is and who we are. God is the one who created us. God is reminding us of God's authority in our lives. God is our maker, author, and sovereign God. God has all the rights and credibility to say what God is about to say.

God then reminds us that God is the one who formed us. The word formed suggests God's intentionality. God is forming and shaping us according to God's distinct plan and purpose for each person.

Because God is our creator and master planner, God reminds us that we have nothing to fear. God is in control, even when it doesn't appear so. There is nothing that gets past God; nothing takes God by surprise. There is nothing God cannot use, redeem, and turn it into good. We may not like it; we may not understand it; but God can redeem anything for God's purpose.

God reminds us that God has redeemed us! God has chosen us to be God's family. God has a plan to bring us home, no longer separated by sin and disobedience. We are the redeemed!

Redeemed (from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary) means to get or win back: to free from what distresses or harms; such as: to free from captivity by payment of ransom; to extricate from or help to overcome something detrimental; to release from blame or debt; to clear. We can meditate on each one of those phrases and praise God for what Jesus has done for us. The redeemed definition speaks to Israel in their captivity. The redeemed definition speaks to Mary in her distress and detrimental reality. The redeemed definition speaks to all of us in our human condition apart from God.

Jesus made it possible for us to be redeemed, restored, and reunited with God completely by God's grace. There was nothing we did, nothing we could do, and nothing we can do to gain God's favor. It is all grace towards us. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God does this because of God's love for us that is personal. "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me! (Psalms 139:17-18). God's thoughts are constantly towards us. God's thoughts are personal toward every person, not a massive thought about humanity. God has chosen every person as God's own. God knows every person by name. God knows us deeply and intimately: the good, the bad and the ugly; God loves us anyway. *See Video Clip 4.* Let us meditate on the truth that when you met Jesus, like Mary, you are known, loved, redeemed, and chosen. Jesus knows your name.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDING FOR USE IN FAMILY GROUP

Sermon Preamble

In what ways might the effort to fill in the details based on knowledge of the biblical time, tendencies, and human nature allow us to identify with Mary Magdalene?

Video clips in this message depict content of sexual violence, suicide, self-harm, and abuse

Why is the presence of sexual violence and abuse both in biblical times and today important to consider in applying the scriptural message to our personal lives today?

Let's meet Mary Magdalene. Mary had struggles before she met Jesus

In what ways do Mary's struggles before she met Jesus resonate with you in your life before you met Jesus or developed a closer relationship with Jesus? Why?

Mary Magdalene, one of several women named Mary in the Bible, worked alongside and traveled with Jesus

In what ways did Jesus radically differ from how the biblical world treated women?

Mary Magdalene was first in many categories and events

Biblical scripture presents Mary Magdalene as the prominent first in many events. What are those important events that Mary Magdalene is the first?

It appears that Mary Magdalene was a woman of means able to support Jesus' ministry

Scripture records that Mary Magdalene financially supported the ministry of Jesus. What were the two prominent industries in Magdala that may have provided Mary Magdalene the resources to support Jesus' ministry?

Before Mary Magdalene met Jesus, she had total demon possession

Consider how Mary's total demon possession impacts suffering from agony, guilt, shame, and suffering. How do you feel knowing that Jesus totally delivered Mary?

If you are suffering, how does Jesus delivering Mary give you hope?

Mary Magdalene very possibly was subject to violence from the oppressive Roman centurion

History confirms violence during slavery in the United States inflicted by the oppressive slave owners on the oppressed slaves. In what ways is violence and abuse from the powerful oppressor against the oppressed still occurring today?

How does violence lead to mental health problems?

Mary Magdalene saw no other alternative but to end her life

The video clip depicted Mary as about to end her life by jumping off a cliff into the sea below. How can we address the suicide actions still prevalent in today's world? If you find yourself struggling with thoughts of suicide, find help by calling 988 (Suicide and crisis hotline) or contact South Bay Community Church (www.sobcc.org or (510) 490-9500).

In The Chosen, God saw Mary about to end her life. She lost faith in God, but God was still faithful to her

In what ways have you witnessed the faithfulness of God, even when a person wants to commit suicide?

In what ways has God provided a lifeline for you to choose differently than the choice that would harm you?

The context of Israel as the audience for Isaiah 43:1

What is the history of Israel that is relevant as the original hearers of the Isaiah 43:1 scripture?

God promises hope and comfort for those God has chosen for all times

Even though the Isaiah 43:1 scripture was written originally to the people of Israel, why does the scripture reflect a biblical principle applicable for those God has chosen in all times?

Isaiah 43:1 for us is what God wants us to know and remember

Review Isaiah 43:1, and insert your name for Jacob and Israel. What are the key points God wants us to remember and apply in our lives from this scripture?