

## Jesus' Extraordinary Treatment of Women... How Jesus Lifted Women's Role in Society

### Reference Books for Further Study:

- **How Christianity Changed the World by Alvin Schmidt**
  - Note chart on pages 120-121
- **Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, Cultural Studies in the Gospels by Kenneth E. Bailey** (A very scholarly, detailed book with great chapters on Jesus interactions with women)
- **What If Jesus Had Never Been Born? By D. James Kennedy** (This book doesn't specifically have a chapter on Jesus and women but an excellent, readable book on Jesus' impact on the world)

**The Gospel of Luke**...Written by the physician Luke... A focus on the compassion of Jesus. Beautiful interactions with women, as well many different ethnic, religious, economic and social groups including the poor, the sick and the neglected.

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke 5:31-32 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

**If Mark is a Gospel of action, Luke is a Gospel of relationships.**

### Jesus' Interactions with Women in the gospel of Luke:

- The Birth of Jesus... Luke 1 & 2. Notice the focus on women:
  - Mary .... The mother of Jesus
  - Elizabeth.... The mother of John the Baptist and the cousin of Mary
  - The prophetess, Anna... Luke 2:36-38
- Jesus Raises the Widow's son... Luke 7:11-17
- Anointed by a "Sinful Woman" at the Pharisee's house... Luke 7:36-50
- Woman with the issue of bleeding... Luke 8:40-56
- Mary and Martha ...Mary at Jesus' Feet ... Luke 10:38-42
- Heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath ... Luke 13:10-17
- (The Parable of the persistent Widow... Luke 18:1-8)
- (The Little Children and Jesus... Luke 18:15-17)
- Widow's Offering... Luke 21:1-4
- Women announce the Resurrection... Luke 24

## Jesus' Extraordinary Treatment of Women... How Jesus Lifted Women's Role in Society

### 1. OLD TESTAMENT VALUE

- a. The social condition of women in the First Century had been radically altered from that of their Old Testament sisters. In earlier times women participated in every aspect of community life except the Temple priesthood.
  - i. Women freely engaged in commerce and real estate (Proverbs 31)
  - ii. Manual labor (Exodus 35:25, Ruth 2:7, 1 Sam 8:13)
  - iii. They were not excluded from temple worship. Women played music in the sanctuary (Ps 68:25) prayed there (1Sam 1:12) sang and danced with men in religious processions (2 Sam 6:19, 22)
  - iv. Women were included when God instituted the Mosaic covenant... Deut.29:11
  - v. And were present when Joshua read the Torah to Israel and they were required to be present of public reading of the scriptures on the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 31:12)
  - vi. Several women exercised leadership roles over Israel
    1. Miriam led the women of Israel in public worship (Exodus 15:20-21)
    2. Deborah was a judge and a prophetess (Judges 4:4)
    3. Huldah was a prophetess whom King Josiah consulted instead of Jeremiah, her contemporary (2 Kings 22:14-20)
  - vii. God told Abraham to listen to his wife (Genesis 21:12)
  - viii. Abigail's wisdom and valor so touched King David that he married her (1Samuel 25:23-42)
  - ix. The wise woman of Tekoa was sent to persuade King David to lift the ban on his son Absalom (2 Samuel 14)
- b. Nothing in the Law of Moses prevented men and women from conversing with one another! Yet, the society of Jesus' day, with custom dictated by rabbinic Judaism, differed strikingly from the Old testament social order.

### 2. BY NEW TESTAMENT TIMES, WOMEN'S RIGHTS HAD DECLINED

***By the time of Christ, however, the role of women had drastically changed for the worse. What brought about this drastic change from the esteem women had in Old Testament Biblical times to their near exclusion from society by the first century? Very likely this degraded view of a woman's role was imported by Greek thought. Through the influence of their pagan neighbors the Jewish rabbis slowly relegated women to their first-century seclusion and low status in society.***

### **3. The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day in other cultures:**

- a. In ancient Greece, women had the social status of a slave. A wife was not permitted to eat or interact with guests in her husband's home.  
Girls were not educated and when they grew up they were not allowed to speak in public.
- b. The status of Roman women was also very low. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her all her possessions. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children. Women were not allowed to speak in public.

### **4. The Low Status in Jesus' Day in Jewish culture:**

- a. Jewish culture in the first century was decidedly patriarchal. The daily prayer of Jewish men included this prayer of thanksgiving: "Praised be God that he has not created me a woman."
- b. Men were not to greet women in public.
- c. Women married young and were under the complete protection/authority of a man... her father, her husband or a male relative of her husband if she was a widow
- d. This left women in a very vulnerable position within Judaism. They had little access to property or inheritance, except through a male relative. Any money a woman earned belonged to her husband. Men could legally divorce a woman for almost any reason, simply by handing her a writ of divorce. A woman, however, could not divorce her husband.
- e. In the area of Jewish religious practice....
  - i. Men were required to pray certain prayers daily, but women were not. While the study of the Scripture was regarded as extremely important for men, women were NOT allowed to study the sacred texts. Rabbi, Eliezer, a first-century teacher, is noted for saying, "Rather should the word of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman."
  - ii. At the temple in Jerusalem, women were restricted to an outer court. In synagogues they were separated from the men and not permitted to read aloud. There were not allowed to bear witness in a religious court.

## 5. JESUS EXTRAORDINARY TREATMENT OF WOMEN

- a. For Christ, women have an intrinsic value equal to that of men. Jesus said, "... at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female" (Matt 19:4 referring to Genesis 1:27) Women are created in the image of God just as men are. Like men, they have self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions.
  
- b. Jesus came to earth not primarily as a male but as a person. He treated women not primarily as females but as human beings. The foundation stone of Jesus's attitude toward women was his vision of them as persons to whom and for whom he had come. He did not perceive them primarily in terms of their sex, age, or marital status; he considered them in terms of their relation to God.
  
- c. Considering the backdrop of first-century, Middle Eastern, Judaic culture.... Jesus' words and actions are strikingly inclusive.
  
- d. **Without knowledge of the Jewish rabbinic attitudes that prevailed in Jesus' day, the uniqueness of Jesus' behavior escapes us.**
  
- e. Author Philip Yancy comments, "For women and other oppressed people, Jesus turned upside down the accepted wisdom of this day. **According to the biblical scholar Walter Wink, "Jesus violated the mores of his time in every single encounter with women recorded in the four Gospels."**

## JESUS DEFIES THESE EXPECTATIONS IN AT LEAST FOUR WAYS:

### 1) JESUS SPEAKS WITH WOMEN IN PUBLIC

- a. Jesus REFUSES to treat woman as inferior. Jesus treated women with respect and rejected cultural norms. He recognized their dignity and their gifts.
- b. Luke 7:11-17 Jesus steps forward in a crowd of mourners to speak with the widow at Nain and to call her son back to life.
- c. Luke 13:10-16 Jesus cures a woman who had been crippled for 18 years, laying hands on her in the Temple and saying, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity". When the leader of the synagogue becomes indignant that Jesus has healed a woman on the Sabbath, **Jesus uses a title of particular dignity for her, calling her a "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). Women had NEVER been called "daughters of Abraham" even though the expression "son of Abraham" was often used to indicate that a male Jew was recognized as bound by a covenant to God. With this title, Jesus recognized this woman as having equal worth.**
- d. John 4:4-42 Jesus ignores two codes of behavior.... He initiates a conversation with a (despised) foreigner, a Samaritan. In addition, this foreigner is also a woman. **He chose her to be a reliable missionary for him! (John 4:39)**

### 2) JESUS TREATED WOMEN WITH RESPECT AND COMPASSION

- a. Jesus refuses to view women as unclean or especially deserving of punishment. Women who were menstruating or persons who had any flow of blood were considered ritually unclean. In this condition, women were not allowed to participate in most religious rituals. Anything or anyone she touched was deemed unclean.
- b. **The most dramatic story concerning a woman in this state is the account of the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years as recorded in Luke 8:40-48. Luke emphasizes Jesus' compassion for the woman by the way he situates the story (against the backdrop of Jairus.... An official of the synagogue.) Jesus turns his attention away from the synagogue official to the woman (thereby equalizing the two people). When she touches his garment, the woman's touch rendered Jesus unclean. He says nothing of her ritual impurity, but instead addresses her as "Daughter" and says that her faith has healed her and to go in peace.**
- c. Jesus also recognized the dignity of women in situations that seem by ritual law to demand judgment
  - i. The sinful woman who anoints Jesus (Luke 7:36-50)
  - ii. The woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11)

### 3) JESUS HAD WOMEN DISCIPLES

- a. Unlike rabbis of his day, Jesus taught women about scriptures and accepted them as equal followers as men.
- b. Matthew 12:46-50 "Here are my mother and my brothers."
- c. Mary and Martha ... Luke 10:38-42. **Jesus' acceptance and blessing of Mary's desire to learn. She is described as one who "Sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak". This is the typical position of the male disciple. To sit at the feet of a rabbi meant that a person was one of his disciples.**
- d. Women traveled with him and ministered to him. Luke 8:1-3
- e. Women were present at Jesus' crucifixion Mark 15:41

### 4) WOMEN RECEIVED JESUS' SELF-REVELATION

- a. Women were equal recipients of Jesus' self-revelation
- b. The Samaritan woman at the well... John 4:1-42 (vs 25-26, 39)
- c. Martha.... John 11:25
- d. The first witnesses to the resurrection are women... Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18; Matthew 28:1-10, Luke 24:1-12; Luke 24:22-24
- e. **Were expected to be responsible for their sins... Woman at the well (Jn 4:16-18) and the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:10-11). He knew women had the personal freedom and self-determination to deal with the issues of personal sin, repentance, and forgiveness.**