

Sunday, July 23, 2023 | Everyday Disciple

Week 14 | Luke 8:1-3 | “The Female Disciples”

Last week, Luke compared a woman with a scandalous reputation to a prominent Jewish leader. And rather than the religious elite acting as the example to follow, we learned that a forgiven sinner has much to teach us about what it means to love. She taught us that **the depth to which God has forgiven us should equal the depth of our devotion to God.** Those who've been forgiven much love much. But those who've been forgiven little love little.

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Today, we'll take a closer look at Jesus' entourage. And we won't be surprised to learn that the twelve apostles were among those who followed the Lord during his travels. But, more than any other gospel writer (we'll talk about that more in a moment), Luke also wants us to know that Jesus had many female disciples who served alongside the Son of God. Though not apostles, these ladies were still instrumental in laying the groundwork for God's upside-down kingdom.

Thus, contrary to popular belief, Christianity is not a so-called "boy's club." Misogyny, sexism, and bigotry are not welcome in Jesus' community. Both men and women stand on equal ground before the Savior and, as such, fulfill distinct yet equally valuable roles (cf. Gal. 3:28). In fact, this is what sets Christianity apart from every other world religion: women are not property nor second-class citizens but daughters of the King of kings and servants to the Lord of lords. Or, as Rebecca McLaughlin puts it, "Far from being antithetical to woman's rights, Christianity is their first and best foundation."<sup>1</sup>

The first century was an age ruled by men. It was, in the truest sense of the word, a patriarchy. Women were considered property with little to no rights of their own. What's more, they were also thought of as being dumber and less capable than men. In fact, a typical daily prayer in rabbinic circles at this time was, "Praise be to God that he has not created me a Gentile! Praise be to God that he has not created me a woman! Praise be to God that he has not created me an ignoramus!"<sup>2</sup> And, if that doesn't ruffle some feathers, listen to the opinion of this Rabbi

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<sup>1</sup> McLaughlin, Rebecca, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Women: How the First Female Disciples Help Us Know and Love the Lord*, (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2022), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Kimball, Dan, *How (NOT) To Read the Bible: Making Sense of the Anti-Woman, Anti-Science, Pro-Violence, Pro-Slavery and Other Crazy-Sounding Parts of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), p. 121.

who wrote, "Four equalities are ascribed to women: they are gluttonous, eavesdroppers, lazy and jealous."<sup>3</sup>

To be clear, these chauvinistic sensibilities were not exclusive to Jews. The Greco-Roman world was also a world ruled by men. Dan Kimball explains that their poets confidently asserted that women were "the source of evil in this world. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil."<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, you don't want to be a Jewish or non-Jewish woman in the first century.

In light of that, it is remarkable how often women are featured prominently in the gospels. Theologian C. H. Talbert, in his book *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), compiled a list of all the references to women in Luke's account.<sup>5</sup> I've included this list on the back of your handout.

#### **Passages only found in the Gospel of Luke:**

- Elizabeth (1:5-7, 13, 24-25, 36, 40-45, 56-61)
- Mary (1:26-56)
- Anna (2:36-38)
- The widow of Nain (7:11-17)
- The sinful woman (7:36-50)
- The female disciples (8:1-3)
- Martha and Mary (10:38-42)
- The crippled woman (13:10-17)
- The parable of the woman with the lost coin (15:8-10)
- The parable of the widow and judge (18:1-8)
- The women report Jesus' resurrection (24:22-24)

#### **Passages found in other gospel accounts:**

- Peter's mother-in-law (4:38-39)
- The hemorrhaging woman (8:43-48)
- The widow's mite (21:1-4)
- The women at Jesus' crucifixion (23:49, 55-56)

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 710.

- The woman at Jesus' tomb (24:10-11)

From its inception, Jesus' kingdom elevated womanhood to a place of dignity and value like never before. Rather than being considered, at best, second-class citizens or, worse, property, the NT demonstrates that women have intrinsic value on par with men. And not only that, Jesus' female disciples have much to teach us about what it means to follow Jesus.

Thus, Luke wants us to know *three* of Jesus' female disciples:

**i. Mary Magdalene (vs. 1-2).**

**READ:** Luke 8:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup> and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out...

Out of all the female disciples, we know the most about Mary Magdalene; which is to say, we don't know very much at all. But, compared to the other female disciples, Mary Magdalene is the outlier. First, she had seven demons removed from her by Jesus. That no husband is mentioned likely indicates that Mary Magdalene wasn't single.

In today's world, we have people plagued with mental disorders of every kind. But imagine being inhabited by seven malevolent beings, all with their own voices and intentions driving you to do unspeakable things. Mary experienced a form of slavery worse than anything we know. But Jesus was there. He healed her spirit and made her whole again. And because of that love, she would follow him to the end and beyond. Mary Magdalene would bear witness to Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection. She will, quite literally, see it all. Doubtless, much of what we know about the life of Jesus is because of her testimony, because she told and retold the things she saw.

Mary's life shows us that once Jesus has delivered us from great darkness, we will follow him wherever he leads.

**ii. Joanna (vs. 3a)**

**READ:** Luke 8:3a

<sup>3</sup> ...and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager...

Even less is known about Joanna than Mary Magdalene, but the little we know has fantastic implications. Luke tells us she was married to a guy named "Chuza," who was King Herod's

“household manager.” We'll talk more about what a "household manager" is in a second. But for those interested in royal lineages, the “Herod” that Luke refers to is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who had all the children under the age of two killed in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus' birth. So, already we can assume that Herod Antipas came from a pretty messed up family. But not only was Herod the son of a mass murderer, he was also the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist. Jesus will come before Herod and be pressured to perform some miracles, but he will refuse (cf. Lu. 23:6-12).

A “household manager” was someone who took care of the daily affairs of important people. They directed the servants, kept track of meetings, and ensured a ruler's house would run smoothly. Think of them as the executive assistant for some CEO of some Fortune 500 company. Thus, in light of that, it should strike us as quite remarkable that Joanna, a woman of considerable wealth, influence, and status, is a well-known associate of Jesus, a homeless, itinerate teacher. This implies that Jesus' influence had reached the upper echelon within Palestine. In fact, this also means that every time we're given a peek into Herod's inner court, it was likely Joanna who provided the information for people like Matthew and Luke.

But Joanna's inclusion among Jesus' female disciples demonstrates that life on the road with Jesus is preferable to kingly palaces. She chose a life of service over a life of luxury because she saw in Jesus something more valuable than anything she already had.

### iii. **Susanna (vs. 3b)**

**READ:** Luke 8:3b

...and [Susanna](#), and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

If less is known about Joanna than Mary Magdalene, even less is known about Susanna. So, why include her here? Because while we do know who Susanna was or why she deserved a special mention by Luke, we can safely assume she is worthy of the recognition. At the very least, we know that she, like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and many other women, "provided" for Jesus and the disciples "out of their means." But even that isn't much to go on. However, while Susanna might not mean much to us today, she clearly meant something to Luke and the Christians in the first century. She appears as little more than a name to us, but she is so much more to many others. And, at the very least, God saw fit to preserve her name for over 2,000 years.

Whatever speculations we might have about Susanna, one thing is sure: she was a disciple. This illustrates that, while no one knows our name, should we follow Jesus, he will never forget us.

In fact, all believers have their names written down in the "Lamb's Book Of Life," which guarantees a place for us in God's kingdom.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

**Beneficiaries** of God's work become **benefactors** of God's work.

The best use of your time, talents, and treasures is when they're in service to God's kingdom. On that last day, you will wish you had given more to God. Every care or worry in this life will fade when we enter that eternal rest. Paul says in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." What awaits us is greater than anything we can experience here. Why not lay up for yourselves treasures that cannot be lost, stolen, or destroyed (cf. Matt. 6:19-21).

If you have been a beneficiary of God's work through Jesus, how can you not then become a benefactor of God's work? Others like you need Jesus. The ministry needs faithful men and women who will come alongside the Lord and support his work with all that they have. How awful will it be for those who have been given so much but haven't given anything back?

You cannot say you're a Christian, and it not cost you something (cf. Matt. 16:24; Rom. 12:1). So, what have you sacrificed for Jesus lately? If nothing, can you really say you're a follower of Jesus? What would Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna say if they saw how you lived your life for God? Would they feel like you're a kindred spirit? Or would they try witnessing to you?

## Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: