

And Some Women...

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me to Luke chapter 8 as we continue our studies into this magnificent gospel.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your Word be our rule, your Spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Children should be seen and not heard. Like many of us, I grew up in Anira where my parents would say that to me.

Children should be seen and not heard. In other words, Colin, shut up. Right or wrong, and I dare say in my case it was right, but in most cases it was wrong.

Imagine we lived in an era where men would say, woman should be seen and not heard. That's the kind of situation many women in Afghanistan find themselves in today.

[1 : 13] Repressed, denied education, and totally controlled and dominated by their men.

According to news reports, over half of all Afghan women are now struggling with psychological conditions like anxiety and depression as a function of being forcibly told by their men, woman should be seen and not heard, and in most cases actually not seen either.

Now, it wasn't quite that bad in Jesus' day, but it wasn't an awful lot better. Women were not considered reliable witnesses, so were not allowed to give testimony in a court of law.

They were all but relegated to the status of slavery. One of the reasons the religious leaders of Israel hated Jesus so much was the prominence that he gave to women in his ministry.

As we go through Luke and its companion volume, Acts, some of the most prominent people in the advancement of the gospel are women. For all that Jesus was hated by men, not one woman in Luke Acts is spoken of as his direct enemy.

Women buried Jesus. Women were the first witnesses of his resurrection. Now, our passage, Luke 8 verses 1 through 3, follows the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus with perfume and then anointed his feet with her hair, or wiped his feet with her hair.

[2 : 49] Jesus held her up as an example of outstanding faith, whereas all the man of the story could do, Simon the Pharisee, was to complain against Jesus. And now Luke tells us of certain women who traveled with Jesus and provided for him, without whom Jesus could not have completed his mission.

The names of some of them are mentioned. Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Susanna. How great the faith of these women was.

In this passage, Luke's doing two things. In the first instance, he's reinforcing the status of woman in the kingdom of God as being entirely equal with men.

Remember, Paul was Luke's spiritual mentor. The same Paul who wrote of the kingdom of God in Galatians. Here there is no Jew or Gentile, no slave or free, no male or female, but Christ is all and is in all.

But Luke is also in this passage reinforcing the centrality of faith in the kingdom of God. What stands these women apart isn't their physiology or femininity, but their faith.

[4 : 08] It's not their biology, but their belief. These are true people of faith. This is not primarily designed to argue for biblical feminism, but for biblical faith.

And it's women in whom we find this faith so often in the New Testament. So we must not discount the seminal role these women of faith had in the early church. And we must not discount the seminal roles of women in the church of today.

As we survey this short passage together in Luke 8, we want to see three things. First, faith has a history with Jesus. Second, faith travels with Jesus.

And third, faith engages in the mission of Jesus. First of all, faith has a history with Jesus. Now, three women are named in this passage, but there were many more who traveled with Jesus and provided for Him and His disciples.

The three are Mary of Magdala, commonly called Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. Of them, Luke writes, and some woman who had been healed from evil spirits and infirmities.

[5 : 29] They all had this in common. They had a history with Jesus. He had healed them from evil spirits and from sicknesses, and now they were following Him.

They were different people. Joanna was the wife of a very prominent civil servant in the service of Herod, the same Herod who would later pronounce sentence upon Jesus and crucify Him.

In other words, in the very court of Herod, in the inner circle of his senior civil servants, someone's got a wife who follows Jesus.

So, we have a higher class of person, and yet she's got a history with Jesus. We don't know the details of what Jesus had healed her from, but it was either a demonic possession or some other kind of illness.

Now, of Susanna, apart from her name, we know next to nothing. We think the reason that Luke names her is that when he's writing his letter, she was a well-known figure in the early church in Jerusalem, such that Christians could approach her and ask her for her recollections of Jesus.

[6 : 47] So, someone comes and says, did someone in the church in Jerusalem in the first century come and say, well, did Jesus really say this? And someone else would say, well, go and ask Susanna over there in the corner, and she'll tell you exactly what He said.

We don't know whether she was high class or low class. We don't know whether she was married. We don't know whether she was single. But what we do know is that she, too, had a history with Jesus, that He'd showered His healing grace into her life.

Of Mary Magdalene, we know a lot more. It would be an interesting study to look into her life because she stands as a constant in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

She traveled with Him in life. She was a witness of His death on the cross. And she was one of the women present on the morning Jesus rose from the dead.

Throughout the history of the church, unpopularized in her own day by Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code, false teachers have tried to make out that she was married to Jesus. But there is absolutely no biblical or historical evidence for this at all.

[8 : 00] It is merely the depraved legends of those you've got nothing better to do than to dishonor the name of our Lord. We're told here that from Mary Magdalene, Jesus had cast forth seven demons.

Now, some have tried to suggest that the sinful woman mentioned in the previous passage in Luke, Luke 7, who wept, dried Jesus' feet with her hair, and then anointed them with oil was Mary Magdalene.

So, Mary Magdalene, they say, was an ex-prostitute. Now, there were many ex-prostitutes in the early church, but Mary wasn't one of them because demonic possession did not demonstrate itself in that sensual way.

Rather, in the Bible, it's more akin to what we would call today schizophrenia. Mary had been demented by these seven demons by whom she'd been possessed.

What she had may have looked to us like mental illness, but everyone knew that it was demonic possession which was causing it, that it wasn't natural, such that it could be cured with the essence of certain herbs or by talking about it.

[9 : 12] Mary Magdalene was perhaps Jesus' most faithful follower, but purely because Jesus had done something amazing for her. He had cast out seven demons and restored her sanity.

She had a history with Jesus. His grace had healed her and changed her. Now, as we can see, there were many other women, each of whom had their own stories of how Jesus had rescued them.

But they all had this one thing in common. Once they were blind, but now they could see. Once they were imprisoned, but now they were free. Once they were dead, but now they live. They all have a history with Jesus.

All of us have a history with Jesus if we're Christians. He's done something in our lives. He's poured out His saving and redeeming grace into our hearts, changing us and transforming us.

And now we believe. We follow Him because He first forgave us. We love Him because He first loved us. We engage in His ministry because He first ministered to us.

[10:22] We're not trying to pay back to Him a debt we owe because such payment is beyond us. Rather, because we have a history with Jesus, we want to devote ourselves and our futures to Him.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Romans 12, therefore, therefore, I urge you in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, for this is your true and proper worship.

Jesus showed mercy to these women in healing them from all their illnesses, and they showed Him true and proper worship by following Him and providing for Him.

Go through the history of the church and you'll find all kinds of people who have a history with Jesus. The great St. Augustine of Hippo, before he met Jesus, was a promiscuous and sensual man.

Martin Luther was a madman. John Newton, author of Amazing Grace, was a slave trader.

[11:45] But we don't need to go into the history of the church to look for these kinds of people. We just need to look at the person sitting next to us this morning.

Every sincere Christian has a history with Jesus. We've all got our own stories to tell of how Jesus found us all messed up and made sense of our lives.

Now, we're not Anglican, right? So we don't do the whole kind of sign of peace to each other, which is really nice, but it's kind of awkward for us Scots because there's no way. After the service, turn to the person sitting next to you and ask them, what's your history with Jesus?

Because all biblical faith has a history with Jesus. Jamie, you're sitting all by yourself up there right in the corner. You've got no one sitting next to you, so you can ask Tanya. That's why these people follow Jesus, because faith has a history with them.

Second, faith travels with Jesus. Faith travels with Jesus. Luke 8, verses 1 through 3 records a particularly busy period in the ministry of Jesus filled with powerful preaching and powerful miracles.

[13:06] Some of the more prominent features of that ministry are recorded in the four Gospels, but the vast majority of what Jesus said and did during these months and years is not recorded for us.

Earlier this year, the Scottish pop artist Lewis Capaldi wisely cancelled concerts at which he was to perform. He said of himself, I'm burned out and my health is suffering.

But however busy Lewis Capaldi was, it was nothing compared to how busy Jesus was for the three frenetic years of his busy ministry. He traveled up and down the length of Israel more than once and every day was surrounded by crowds.

He never got a break. For those traveling with Jesus, it must have also been a whirlwind of activity. The twelve disciples were with him all the time, but so were these women of whom we read here. Their names are not up in lights, but they were with Jesus all the same. We don't know their names, but Jesus did because every day he talked with them and they watched and listened to him carefully.

[14:22] They listened both to the sermons he preached and to his more casual conversations which aren't recorded for us. They watched him performing great miracles, but they also watched his daily routines.

Their interaction with Jesus wasn't hit and run. It was constant, continuous. Luke summarizes it this way at the end of verse 1. They were with him.

They traveled with him. Their knowledge of him and their love for him as time went on grew. The more they knew him, the more devoted they became to him.

We know that Mary Magdalene's travels with Jesus went even further for she was with him at the cross and the empty tomb and beyond. For as long as she lived, can you imagine Mary Magdalene as a very old lady, for as long as she lived she'd always remember fondly how she traveled with Jesus for those years.

Perhaps she'd remember his smile, the tone of his voice, what his hands looked like and felt like.

[15:35] She'd remember his wisdom and love. Perhaps even she'd remember his tears. You know, all Christians have a history with Jesus but we all travel with Jesus.

If we think of life as a journey, we're walking that journey with Jesus beside us. From the first moment we believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, He stays with us by His Holy Spirit.

And He travels the roads we walk with us. He goes up the mountains of our pleasures with us and He goes down into the valley of our pains with us.

We're never alone because Jesus travels the journey of our lives with us. And I think this is the most beautiful and poignant truth for us all to consider.

All of us have stories of a past with Jesus but we've also got stories of how Jesus is with us today and is traveling with us on this crazy journey that we call life with all its unexpected twists and turns.

[16:49] I'm sure many of us here love that poem Footprints. Remember, there are two sets of footprints in the sand belonging to us and Jesus. But at the hardest times in our lives there's only one set of footprints and we think that at these times these hard times Jesus has left us but no, He says, there's only one set of footprints and they belong to me because it's then at these hardest and most painful times of our lives Jesus is carrying us.

You see, faith travels with Jesus. We cannot conceive of a day when He's not with us, when He's the unseen guest at our tables, the unseen hand holding ours, the unseen shoulder upon which we lean.

Saint Polycarp of Smyrna was a bishop in the mid-second century. He had been a disciple of the Apostle John and had become a Christian at a very early age.

As an old man he was sentenced to death by the Romans to be burned at the stake and as he was tied to the stake and the fire was set beneath him he was asked by his executioners to recant his faith in Jesus.

Turn your back on Jesus and you will live Polycarp they said to him. He famously said to them eighty and six years I have served him and he has done me no wrong.

[18:30] Polycarp was a Christian who had traveled long with Jesus eighty-six years. I became a Christian when I was fifteen years old.

The week after I went to a service in a nearby church and I sat next to a very old American man. After the service he started speaking to me and he asked me how long son have you been a Christian?

I told him a week. He smiled kindly and he said to me son I've been a Christian for eighty years. My eyes opened in wonder I didn't even ask him his name. Here was another man who had traveled long with Jesus. Eighty years. At the end of May three major figures in the Western Christian Church died.

Tim Keller pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. Harry Reeder pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. And our own precious Donald MacLeod professor of systematic theology in what will always be the Free Church College to me.

[19:50] Each one in their own way had a profound impact upon Western Christianity. But what was notable for me about each of them was this. Right up until the end of their lives they were faithful Christians.

None of them gave up. Between Keller, Reeder, and DolomacLeod, they followed Christ for over two hundred years.

They traveled a long way with Jesus. Now some of us here this morning came to Jesus early in life and some of us have come rather later.

But for however long we live here on earth we travel the road with Jesus just as these women of faith traveled with Him. We experience His daily grace and forgiveness, His daily love and compassion, His daily wisdom and care.

Oh, we could only see how precious we are to Jesus and how close He is to us in the highs, but most especially in the lows of our lives.

[21:04] Faith travels with Jesus. Well, finally, faith has a history with Jesus. Faith travels with Jesus. Faith engages in the mission of Jesus. Faith engages in the mission of Jesus.

Think of the amazing things the disciples did. The Apostle Peter preached the greatest sermon in the history of the church on the day of Pentecost. Thousands were saved and he went on to raise people from the dead.

The Apostle John wrote a gospel and other books of the Bible. The Apostle Paul engaged in missionary work and to him we owe the expansion of the church into Europe. Compared to them, what did these women do?

Answer. They were providing for Jesus out of their own means. Verse 3. Their money provided for the food Jesus and His disciples ate.

the clothes they wore, the daily necessities of their lives. Furthermore, this word serving seems to suggest that they were engaged in what we would call today a diaconal ministry.

[22 : 16] They were doing what was needed so that Jesus and His disciples could get on with the ministry and mission of preaching and teaching the gospel. In other words, without them and their diaconal ministry, Jesus and His disciples could not have engaged effectively in mission.

Now, what this means in practice, we don't exactly know. Did they wash their clothes? Probably.

Did they prepare meals? Probably. Did they organize meetings? Probably.

We don't know, but what we do know is that without them, the ministry of Jesus would have ground to a halt. Now, this all sounds very dramatic, but from this passage, we can't say anything other.

The word used to describe their activity is that from which we get the word deacon, which means servant.

I'm not agitating for Roman deacons here, but what I am saying is that women played a vital role in the mission and ministry of Jesus and His gospel.

[23 : 27] they provided for Him. They served Him. They were devoted to the Jesus with whom they traveled and with whom they had a history of grace. Because this is what true, sincere Christian faith does.

Motivated by gratitude at the saving work of Jesus in our lives and filled with an awareness of Jesus' presence in our lives, we want to provide for His ongoing mission of making disciples of all nations for Him.

And we'll give out of our own resources to do that. We'll give out of our time and of our talents and of our tithes. Nothing will be too much to give to Him who has given everything for us.

It may be that all we can do is to give a tenth of our meager pension. It may be that all we can do is to spend an hour on the phone phoning another Christian to make sure they're okay.

It may be that all we can do is to pray. And that's fine. Whatever it is, we'll do it enthusiastically.

Because you know, the most remarkable thing about all this is that at this stage of the ministry of Jesus, these women had not experienced the most amazing aspect of Jesus' ministry.

[24 : 45] Namely, He's going to sacrifice Himself upon the cross to take away their sins. And on the third day, He's going to rise again from the dead to give them new life.

They didn't know that, but still they served Him. We've all seen so much more of Jesus than they did, which should make our desire to serve Him all the stronger.

Our passage begins with the words, and it came to pass afterwards that He was traveling from city to village proclaiming and announcing the good news of the kingdom of God and the twelve were with Him.

I want to ask you a question, speculate with me. How many people in these cities and villages Jesus and disciples visited became believers in Jesus? How many in heaven today because of Jesus and His disciples mission tour to these villages and cities?

None of that would have happened. unless these some women had been providing for them and serving them out of their own means.

[25 : 56] These cities and villages would not have heard the good news and these people saved during this mission journey would not have been saved. China would never have heard the good news of the gospel through Hudson Taylor unless there had been a team of fundraisers and prayer warriors the names of which we'll never know back in Britain providing for Taylor's needs.

The Central Asians to whom Dr. Adam preaches the good news of the gospel will never hear of Jesus unless people like us give generously, pray, and provide for His needs.

And Glasgow will never hear the good news of Jesus unless we commit ourselves like these women to serving the mission of Jesus out of our own means whatever means these may be.

Some of us are called to be preachers of the gospel. Others are called to serve by praying, still others to serve by giving. Whatever way God calls us to serve Christ like these women will serve Him gladly because faith always finds a way to serve Christ and to enthusiastically engage in the mission.

Let me challenge each one of us here, myself included, in what ways are we serving Christ and providing for the mission of the gospel? Could we do more?

[27 : 29] Can you imagine the offense which Jesus' attitude to these women must have caused the Taliban type Pharisees of his day?

Our churches are filled with women and this passage calls us to value and mobilize their service but more than any of that this passage holds up the faith in Jesus which we can all have, male or female.

Faith has a history with Jesus. Faith travels with Jesus and faith provides for the mission of Jesus. It all starts with faith in Jesus you see. We started off by saying that in Jesus' world, or the world of Jesus' day rather, women were seen but not heard.

What about our faith in Jesus Christ? Is it seen at all and heard at all? Do we have faith in Jesus at all? One thing I know, if only we could see how Jesus can untangle the messed up life of a man or woman like me and of how Jesus travels with us on the journeys of life, we'd want to be just like these some women.

Not just to believe in Jesus, but we'd want Jesus to be with us every day of our lives. let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth of this passage.

[29 : 08] We sometimes stand envious of these disciples and these some women because they traveled with Jesus for those three years and they must have seen so many things about him that we don't see.

We will see one day, but we don't see now. And yet we thank you that because we have the Holy Spirit within us, we have a greater vision than they did, that we've got a greater understanding of his mission and of all that he accomplished and by the Holy Spirit he's closer to us than even if he was standing beside us.

And Lord, we pray that each one of us this morning would respond in faith to what we've heard. Lord, we thank you for our beloved children. As they come in in a moment we ask and pray Lord that their faith in Jesus would grow.

And we ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.