

Jesus and Women – Fact vs Fiction

Luke 7:11-17 (Mother's Day 2006)

I was struck this week – the overwhelming number of references to Jesus and women in the Bible; There's far more there than I realized
I always knew the high regard Jesus had for women; that he saw them as equal to men; that he ministered to them; and accorded them much dignity
But I didn't realize *how* much; that the evidence is so overwhelming

From the positive side on this Mother's Day, I want to look at what the Bible says about how Jesus viewed, thought of, and treated women in general
From the negative side, I want to address some of the fictional fallacies being spread these days about Jesus and women
Which means that in some ways, this message is part 1 of next week's message on the DC

There have always been, and will always be, people who say and advocate strange things
Popular figures always draw speculation and weird wonderings
The hard part is sorting out fact from fiction
Some of the fiction is inaccurate and harmless; Too much is inaccurate and *heretical* . . .
It's damaging to the truth re the name/fame of Christ; Deserves a strong rebuttal
This morning I want to focus in on the gospels in order to discern and clearly distinguish between fact and fiction when it comes to Jesus and women

I'm going to be referring to *many* biblical examples that will hopefully fuel your own study and strike you as overwhelming, but we're going to start with **Luke 7:11-17**
The place of women in the first century Roman world, as well as Judaism, has been well documented – most frequently, women were regarded as second-class citizens
Which made Jesus' regard and treatment of them pretty much *revolutionary* for his era
It was about as counter-cultural as you can get

One of the first signs of that is the fact that . . .
FACT: Jesus acknowledged women publicly – practice it (v13)
It's one of the first things you see in this passage – he acknowledges and treats this woman like he would treat any man
She was first and foremost a human being, then a woman

Luke makes a point of emphasizing the *public* part of this account
Nain was small town about 12 miles SE of the Sea of Galilee
Like any small town, funerals were well attended because everybody knew everybody
A considerable crowd was already present (12b)
Into the middle of this walks Jesus with *his disciples and* [another] *great crowd* (11b)
All that to say – there were *a lot* of people; this was a very *public* setting

Jesus approaches the woman *directly*, and acknowledges her by addressing her
Not just high and bye, or a nose in the air as you walk by; No uncomfortable silence
No secret meetings behind closed doors; No worry about what people thought
He *saw her* . . . and spoke to her (13) – acknowledging her publicly despite the cultural norms otherwise

This was common for Jesus – to recognize women as people, not property; as persons, not objects; as human beings made in the image of God; And do so *publicly*

Also see that in –

His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well
Where his disciples *marveled that he was talking with a woman* (Jn 4:27), in public
With the woman who had a bleeding disorder, touched his garment (Lk 8:43-48)
He acknowledged her, and did so publicly
Far from ignoring them, he acknowledged them *publicly*

We need to do the same

We need to accept the fact that women deserve the same public recognition as men, and **practice it** – individually and as a church
That's why I can't wait to introduce to you our new Director of Women's Ministry next month – I want to acknowledge her publicly
Don't be afraid to offer words of praise and affirmation to a woman – in public
One caution for men – compliment a woman's actions, attitudes, demeanor, or accomplishments – yes
But be very careful about complimenting her dress, looks, hair (unless she's your wife)
That's dangerous ground for all involved

It's fact that Jesus acknowledged women publicly, it's . . .

Fiction: The early church suppressed women secretly – refute it

Some have advocated recently (like Dan Brown in DC), that Mary Magdalene was *branded* a prostitute in the early church, but wasn't really; in order to marginalize her and suppress women in general
They supposedly did this out of fear that women would take over and usurp the male power structure

Let's separate fact from fiction here

They are correct in that Mary Magdalene was *not* a prostitute
The Bible doesn't say that; Extra-biblical sources don't say it
This common misconception was first propagated in a sermon by Pope Gregory the Great in 591
More than likely, he was confused by multiple references to different Mary's, and came to a faulty conclusion that can't be supported by Scripture
An easy thing to do since there are *7 different* Mary's referred to in the NT
So at least in this respect, Dan Brown is in good company with biblical scholars in that Mary of Magdala was *not* a prostitute

Problem is – there's *no* truth that the early church, sometime in the 2nd-4th centuries, branded her a prostitute
There's *nothing* before 591 that indicates it, says it, or implies it
Secondly – there's nothing to indicate some sort of conspiracy among church leaders to suppress women in general; nothing
It's fiction, and we need to **refute it**

Some try to argue that there's no record of it, because the early church leaders changed the biblical account
But that's not plausible because if they had, they wouldn't have left the resurrection accounts in there referring to MM and the women as being the *first* to the tomb
That place of distinction would have been reserved for men; especially when they were considered more reliable witnesses in that culture

It's also not plausible for them to have changed the gospel accounts because they were already known, distributed, accepted among the churches *before* turn of the 1st c.
Had they tried to change the text 100-200 years after that, they would have undermined their *own* leadership in the eyes of the churches, by trying to change what was already accepted as authoritative

There's no evidence that the early church tried to suppress women secretly – because none ever existed

Accept and practice the facts; Refute the fiction

The second fact we see from our text is that . . .

FACT: Jesus valued women highly – embrace it (v13,15)

Nobody ministers to someone they don't value

In fact, that's why we often don't get involved in the lives of the hurting or downtrodden – we don't value them enough to get dirty and be put out

But Jesus valued this woman from Nain as shown by the fact that he –

Comforted her – *Do not weep* (13b)

Helped her – raised the man from the dead, and *gave him to his mother* (15)

This was a huge help because as a widow presumably without relatives, she would have been destitute and helpless without him

Jesus didn't help her because of what she did, or what she could offer to his ministry

She *had* nothing to offer

He helped her because he valued her

Had compassion on her (13) – his heart was moved by her plight

Jesus valued women highly, and we need to **embrace** it

We need to embrace his example, attitude, method – and do likewise

Instead of being moved by golf, we need to be moved by people

Instead of helping only those who can help us, we need to help the helpless

Embrace the fact that Jesus valued women highly

Other examples of this include his –

Healing women physically (Peter's mother-in-law; Lk 4:38-39)

Forgiving them spiritually (Canaanite woman)

Extending tenderness (bleeding woman; Lk 8:48; daughter)

Expressing concern (his mother at the cross; Jn 19:26-27)

Giving them his undivided attention (woman in the crowd; Lk 11)

All while bucking religious norms to do so

We need to embrace that same ethic, way of thinking, method

Jesus valued women highly, but he didn't marry a woman and father a child; That's . . .

Fiction: Jesus was married and had a child – reject it

This is another of those popular fallacies being propagated these days – that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and fathered a child with her

Like I was abducted and dissected by little green aliens last night

Both assertions are fiction (completely made up), and equally ridiculous

Once again, there is no historical record anywhere, there are no eyewitness accounts, not even an ancient *fictional* account that – says, or implies a marital relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene; None; Which is why we need to **reject** it

This lack of evidence includes Gnostic documents like “The Gospel of Mary Magdalene” and “The Gospel of Philip” – not even written by them

G of MM – 180 AD, G of P – 300 AD

Like me writing and publishing the memoirs of George Washington today, in his name

Among other things, these two documents claim –

That to be saved, need to experience a secret knowledge of the divine w/in you (gnosis – the whole heresy is based on secret knowledge)

That you had to resort to asceticism (harsh treatment of your body) in order to release it from evil – your body and all things physical were considered inherently evil

That the death and resurrection of Christ is not necessary for salvation

That God failed to create the world to his liking

That the HS is a woman; Christ's resurrection was just one example of a weird form of conception that leads to birth

And on and on; It gets increasingly weird from there; Call it what it is – wacko

It's these documents, written hundred's of years after the eyewitness accounts in our gospels, that are appealed to as true

And even if they are reliable (which they're not), the only reference to any kind of relationship between Jesus and MM, comes in one sentence –

“[Someone; it's blank due to deterioration] loved her [MM] more than [all] the disciples, and used to kiss her on her [often] on her [blank; we don't know where – forehead, cheek, lips]

Point is – even if they were reliable, which they're not, there's still no allusion to marriage or a child between Jesus and MM; None

It's a fact: Jesus valued women highly – *that* we need to embrace

But it's fiction that he was married and fathered a child – *that* we need to reject

The 3rd fact of Jesus and his view and treatment of women, is that he . . .

FACT: Jesus included women consistently – apply it

He did so . . .

• **In his illustrations (Mt 25:1-10)**

Classic example of this is the parable of the 10 Virgins in Mt 25

Uses women exclusively to illustrate our readiness or lack thereof for Christ's kingdom

Others examples include a reference to –

The queen of the south to illustrate wisdom (Mt 12)

Those busy with life to illustrate the unexpected nature of Christ's return (Mt 24)

Widow's persistence before corrupt judge, illustrating need for steadfast prayer (Lk 18)

Widow who gave all she had at the temple to illustrate complete trust in God (Lk 21)

Jesus consistently included women by using them in his illustrations

• **In his teaching (Lk 10:39)**

Informally as he went –

Taught Martha about true resurrection and life at Lazarus' death (Jn 11)

Taught a group of women on way to the cross, warning them of hardship to come (Lk 23)

Taught Mary Magdalene of his future ascension (Jn 20) after his resurrection

Formally – allowed Mary (Martha's sister) to sit at his feet while he taught (the traditional place of one who learned from a teacher/rabbi; Lk 10:39)

There was no role distinction when it came to learning from Christ

He was concerned with the growth of women and men alike, no matter what situation

- **In his ministry (Lk 8:1-3)**

Jesus consistently included women in his ministry by . . .

Allowing them to influence him

Think of Mary, his mother – she no doubt modeled godliness, faith, and dedication for him as he grew up

Allowing them to serve him

Even sinful women like the one in Lk 7 who anointed his feet with tears and ointment

Allowing them to provide for him

Mt 27:55-56 – Many women followed him and were *ministering to him*

Providing food; Praying for him; Supporting him emotionally

Financially by giving from their means (Lk 8:1-3)

Allowing them to proclaim him

Anna the prophetess in the temple proclaimed him as Messiah (Lk 2)

Mary Magdalene proclaimed his resurrection to the other disciples

Jesus consistently included women in his illustrations, teaching, ministry – that’s a fact

And we should **apply** the same method and same means in our ministries

Consistently including women in our teaching – one of the reasons we have a Women’s

Ministry dedicated to teaching and growing women in their walk with Christ

That’s why we’re not segregated now, in different rooms

That’s why SG’s are inclusive of both men and women

Consistently placing women in positions of influence, service, and teaching where

Scripture allows; See that all across our ministries – CM and up

Jesus included women consistently in his life and ministry – that’s a fact we need to apply

But he didn’t abolish the different roles for men and women in the church

In other words, it’s . . .

Fiction: Jesus appointed women as apostles – dispute it

This is another fallacy based on weak inference at best – specifically that Jesus appointed

Mary Magdalene and possibly others, as apostles

Jesus acknowledged women publicly (yes), valued women highly (yes), and consistently included them in ministry (yes)

But none of that negates his designation of different roles for men and women

He never appointed nor intended that women occupy the primary roles of leadership in the church – then or now

It’s fiction that he did, and we need to **dispute** it

First of all, on the grounds that it’s totally contrary to the biblical account

Lk 6:12-16 says that *he called his disciples* [presumably men and women] *and chose from them twelve whom he named apostles*

The list is a list of 12 *men*; there are no women listed

Second – nothing in any extra-biblical source that Jesus appointed women as apostles

The closest thing to it is a reference by Hippolytus in the 3rd century, when he called MM an “apostle to the apostles”

He wasn’t advocating that she was a formal apostle like the others

He was saying that when Jesus told her to go and tell the apostles about his resurrection, in that sense, she was an “apostle to the apostles”

She was a messenger, to those who were messengers

Third – we already covered the problems with the assertion that the gospels were tampered with and re-written 200+ years after the fact

All of which lends weight to our confidence that what we have are the reliable accounts as originally written by the apostles under the inspiration and influence of the HS

It’s fact that Jesus consistently included women in his teaching and ministry – and we should apply that to our own church and lives

But it’s fiction that he went so far as to abolish all roles, and appoint women as apostles – that we should dispute

Summary

Mother’s Day is a good time to embrace the facts and reject the fiction re Jesus and women

Make it a point to acknowledge them publicly, value them highly, and include them consistently – start with your Mom, today

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