



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

Wilmington, North Carolina
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Women Helping Jesus Luke 8:1-3

Where would the work of God's kingdom be if it were not for faithful women through the centuries?

Even among Baptists—or maybe I should say, *especially* among Baptists—our missions efforts would be terribly lacking were it not for faithful women!

Think about it: when we Baptists think of missions personalities, two of the first names that come to mind are Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong. Lottie Moon (1840-1912) was the great missionary to China who literally gave herself so the Chinese people might hear the gospel. Annie Armstrong (1850-1938) was the great promoter of missions who framed the constitution of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as being a pioneer home missionary. Is it any wonder that two of the missions offerings we receive are named for these women?

But it's not just these two well-known women who have contributed so much to the work of God's kingdom. There have been countless others through the centuries in local churches who have contributed so much!

It's certainly appropriate that we think about these contributions this morning on this Baptist Women's Day as we look at our text, Luke 8:1-3. *Read text . . .*

An interesting report . . .

What Luke tells us here in our text is actually quite interesting.

We often picture those following Jesus as He traveled around preaching and teaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons as being the twelve men we know as the Twelve and later the Twelve Apostles.

But Luke gives us a very different picture here. He tells us that as **Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another**¹ preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, it was not only **the Twelve** who accompanied Him, but also **some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases!** Luke identifies them as **Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others.**

And then look at what he says. **These women were helping to support them out of their own means.** This could also be translated that they **ministered to them out of their own possessions.**²

Luke reported that along with the Twelve, many women were following Jesus and helping support Him and His disciples. These women were following Jesus alongside the Twelve, and their support was helping to make it possible for Jesus to carry on His ministry.

Now it wasn't that unusual in the ancient world for women of financial means to provide support for rabbis and their disciples. But to leave their home and travel with the rabbi and his disciples was unheard of!³

But here was this group of women who had experienced Jesus' healing and redeeming power, traveling with Him and His disciples and helping Him by ministering support to them! They were with Jesus through His earthly ministry. And at the end of it, it was these very women who were last at the cross and first at the tomb (Luke 23:49; 24:10, 22, 24)!

Now I think it's instructive to look at what follows our text in the rest of Luke 8. It can help us see more clearly just what it was that these women were helping Jesus with.

In 8:4-18, Jesus tells two parables about proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God. The first was about a farmer who sowed his seed on all kinds of ground in the open field. The point of the parable was that there would be different kinds of responses to the gospel as the seed was sown. Some would outright reject it, some would receive it gladly at first, but would wither away in times of trial. Some would never come to maturity, choked by the worries, riches, and pleasures of this earthly life. But some *would* sprout, grow to maturity, and bear bountiful fruit.

The second parable was about what people did when they lit a lamp—they put it on a stand so others could see the light. So followers of Jesus must put their lamps on a stand, letting His light shine through them by how they live.

Then in 8:19-21, when Jesus' mother and brothers are looking for Him, He emphasizes that **“those who hear God's word and put it into practice”** are His real relatives.

Luke then goes on in 8:22-56 to tell us about four miracles that Jesus performed that showed His power and compassion as God's Son and Messiah King.

When He and His disciples were sailing to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and a storm arose, threatening to sink them, Jesus was asleep. When they woke Him, He got up and rebuked the wind and the waters, and all was calm. He showed *His power over natural disaster*.

When a man possessed by a Legion of demons who had tormented him for a long time met Jesus, Jesus cast the demons out of him, and sent him to tell what God had done for him. He showed *His power over the demons*.

And when Jesus' power instantly healed the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years—as He was on His way to help the dying twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue—He demonstrated *His power over disease*. By the time He got to Jairus' house, the girl had died. But Jesus raised her, demonstrating *His power over death!*

This was the Jesus and His work that these women were helping support out of their own possessions!

So what's the point?

So what's the point of all this for us on this Baptist Women's Day? Isn't it pretty obvious? *Women fulfill a major role in helping Jesus and supporting the work of His kingdom. We should give God thanks for all the faithful women who have been and are involved in the work of God's kingdom!*

In his commentary on Luke, Charles Talbert reminds us how Luke shows us in the book of Acts as well as his Gospel account how women filled many influential roles in the early church.⁴

In Acts 1:14, Jesus' mother Mary and other women were among His followers who joined together in constant prayer in the upper room after His ascension.

In Acts 16:13-15, Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira, was the first convert in Philippi, and first hosted the fledgling church in her home.

In Acts 18:24-26, Priscilla and her husband Aquila took the impressive young preacher Apollos, who didn't have a full understanding of the gospel, into their home **and explained the way of God to him more adequately.**

And in Acts 21:8-9, **Philip the evangelist** (who was also one of the first Seven deacons) **had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.**

How to help Jesus . . .

So how can women help Jesus in the work of His kingdom today? Let me mention three ways. They're not the only ways, but these three are crucial.

First, *by being persons of prayer.* That's where it all starts.

Prayer is in many ways an expression of our relationship with God. Who we are and what we do grow out of that prayerful relationship. Prayer should undergird all we do. Seeking God's guidance and empowerment is absolutely necessary for being a part of what God is doing as we join Christ on His mission.

I expect you have known some real prayer warriors, as I have—those folks you call on when you need someone to pray with you or for you about something. One of the greatest I knew was Mrs. Mary, a member of our second church. I saw God answer her prayers so many times!

We need women (and men!) like her who will be persons of prayer!

The second way is *by sharing Christ through words of witness and deeds of love.* This kind of ministry and witness touches lives and is truly an expression of being on mission with Christ in the world.

Mrs. Sarah Margaret lived that out so well. She was always doing something to share Christ's love by ministering to people in need—cards, letters, calls, visits, food—you name it, she did it! She was always ready to witness for Christ in word and deed. When her health began to fail and she was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), she visited as long as she could; then she telephoned until she lost her voice; then she wrote until she could only scribble; then she had her daughter write! She was truly a faithful witness to the end!

We need more who are committed like this to sharing Christ through words of witness and deeds of love.

Finally, women can help Jesus by promoting prayer for, financial support of, and personal involvement in missions. That has been the heartbeat of WMU from the beginning. A. T. Robertson, the great Baptist New Testament Greek scholar, once referred to the women in our text as "the first woman's missionary society for the support of missionaries of the Gospel."⁵

Mrs. Wilma at our last church believed in supporting missions. She had been the WMU Director for decades, into her 90s. She had trouble getting around because of injuries from a fall a few years earlier, but she was always at church. And she was always praying for and promoting missions. The goals for the missions offerings were always really big. During the offering seasons, she always called on Mondays to see how much we had so far. And if we were short of the goal, she would ask to speak in worship, and would challenge the congregation to give. After she spoke, we always met our goals!

This kind of concern for missions has made it possible for us to do so much more! Prayer support is key; financial support is vital; and now opportunities abound for personal involvement in missions. The question comes at the level of our commitment!

Indeed, just like the women Luke told about who were following and helping Jesus, *women today fulfill a major role in helping Jesus and supporting the work of his kingdom*. This morning, you could fill in other names in any of the areas I've talked about—women from *this* church who have been prayer warriors, true ministers, faithful witnesses, and missions supporters. The examples are plentiful. They have left and are leaving us a marvelous heritage. The question is, will we follow their example, and affirm and encourage the women of our church as they're involved in and support the work of God's kingdom?

†MEG

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® (1984 edition).

² My translation.

³ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 96.

⁴ Talbert, 93-97.

⁵ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. II (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), 111.