

WHY WOMEN FOLLOW JESUS LK. 8:1-3

INTRODUCTION: Now let's look at the section on women.

(When we understand why women followed Jesus in his ministry, we can understand why women (and men) should gladly follow Him today.)

Women were prominent among the followers of Jesus. We may be surprised to learn that women were prominent among the followers of Jesus.

A. Mary, His mother. First of all, Mary, the mother of Jesus.

1. Her faith contrasted with Joseph's unbelief. 2. When the angel told Mary she would bear the Messiah, she responded, "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." To avoid grief and to dissuade Joseph, on the other hand, found Mary's story of a virgin birth a bit difficult to believe and so sought to divorce her quietly until an angel told him not to.

3. She was in the Upper Room at Pentecost.

B. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, and other women who had been set free from their afflictions and infirmities, followed Jesus and provided for him and the Apostles out of their own resources. (Luke 8:1-3)

C. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John, were among a number of women who were present at Calvary, watching from a distance. (Mt. 27:55)

D. Mary and Martha. Luke 10:38-42. Jesus commended Mary for listening to his teachings and reprimanded Martha for being overly concerned with household chores. He said that Mary's was the better part.

Translated into other terms, we could say that Martha was doing a really feminine job, whereas Mary was just behaving like any other disciple, male or female. For some that's a hard pill to swallow, but that's the way the Bible records the story.

II. NOW NOTICE HOW WOMEN FOLLOWED JESUS.

A. We have noted that several women provided for Jesus out of their own resources. (Lk 8:3) Evidently they were women of some wealth in their day. It is interesting that the Bible mentions no other monetary contributions to his ministry.

B. We remember that women were last at the cross in courage, while the male disciples left him and fled in fear. They followed Jesus to the cross because He had blessed them and healed them, and their gratitude was great. They showed unflinching courage and extreme faithfulness in remaining close to Jesus throughout the long hours of His suffering upon the cross.

C. We also noted in the story of Jesus that faithful women were the first ones at the tomb in love on the Day of Resurrection. RISING LIFE and with the they arrived to come at dawn to the guarded tomb, full of faith that the sealed stone would somehow move. Their perseverance was rewarded by the sight of the radiantly empty tomb and the angels who announced, "He is not here. He is risen. Go and tell his disciples." Jesus appeared first not to Peter, the spokesman for the Twelve, nor even to John, the "beloved" disciple. It was women who were the first to receive the central fact of the gospel and the first to be instructed to tell it abroad.

D. And all these women who were involved in the life and ministry of Jesus responded gratefully, openly, and wholeheartedly.

E. Yet we are told that "the fact that women followed Jesus is, without precedent in contemporary Judaism."

III. Since this is true, and yet so many women did in fact follow him, let us now ask WHY WOMEN FOLLOWED JESUS.

A. First, I believe many of them followed him because of his teachings.

i. For example, the teachings of Christ on human sexuality were different from those of his time.

It is striking that his message nowhere included references to circumcision, that distinctively male rite of initiation from which Jewish women and female proselytes were excluded.

In place of this ancient practice which had assumed such importance in Judaism Jesus focused on faith as the basis of one's standing before God.

This immediately put the woman, as well as the foreigner, on equal footing with the Jewish male.

To one, for example, he said,

"Daughter, your FAITH has cured you. Go in peace."

B. Other women followed Jesus because of his power to deliver. They followed him because he had power to deliver them from their sicknesses and from their tormenting sins.

Mary Magdalene followed him because he delivered her from "seven devils."

We do not know what these seven devils were--whether various nervous disorders or actual demon possession or mental or emotional illnesses.

But whatever it was that afflicted her, Jesus had healed her, and she had become his faithful and devoted follower.

The same thing was true with Joanna, Susanna and the other women mentioned by Luke.

And to Iorina efeiqmoo eft zebas YIREGORI

C. Other women followed Jesus because of his demands for commitment. (4)

1. He called all without distinction to the freedom of the Kingdom of God.

2. He called women to make that supreme commitment to Him before anyone else, a commitment which if necessary might set "a daughter against her mother, or a son's wife against her mother-in-law."

E. Other women followed Jesus because of his love and because of the tender way he dealt with women.

One illustration of this is the tender way he spoke to his mother from the cross.

F. He treated women not primarily as females but as persons or as human beings.

Without gushy sentimentality, demeaning condescension, or undemanding indulgence, he accepted them as persons in a way that moved them to repentance and love.

Jesus always took women seriously in their own right as individual persons and never urged them to be "feminine" or jeered at them for being "female."

He did not have a "patriarchal ax" to grind or a "male ego" to defend.

G. Women followed Jesus because he was woman's Best Friend in a "Man's World."

1. Aristotle viewed women as inherently defective and inferior.

2. Demosthenes said: "We have courtesans or mistresses for pleasures of the spirit (social and intellectual), concubines for sensual pleasure, and wives to give us legitimate sons, and to look after household affairs."

Women were either consort or lover or mother but never all three.

3. In Roman society the wife was considered PROPERTY under the complete control of her husband.

4. It is not a pretty picture which is painted of the position of woman in the ancient world.

A woman found her identity not as a separate person but as a member of a family. She was a daughter, then a wife, and then a mother. 15

Whether single or married, she was under the jurisdiction of some male; she was never her own person.

Betrothal terms were the same as those of a contract to purchase.

The word for husband also meant "owner" or "master"; and a man's wife was included in lists of his possessions.

The law treated women harshly. There were glaring inequities in the treatment of women under the law --- particularly in regard to inheritance laws, laws about adultery and fornication, and laws about vows.

5. Whereas upright men would not associate with women in that day because of the way women

were considered and treated, Christ associated with all sorts of women --- the wealthy, politically prominent, the poor and morally disreputable, and with the outsider.

He encouraged women just as much as men to become his followers.

6. In a day when most religious teachers refused to teach women because their minds were supposedly incapable of grasping God's truth, Jesus taught women openly, even in the Temple Court.

And some of his greatest spiritual truths were revealed to women.

7. Jesus also incorporated in his teachings objects and incidents with which women were familiar: wedding feasts, lost coins, grinding corn, putting yeast in bread.

* And never is a woman or something "feminine" ridiculed or rebuked.

8. Jesus did not only TALK with women, but he went so far as to TOUCH them publicly-- something unheard of in Jewish society where a man would not allow a woman to count change into his hand for fear of contact. Luke (13:10) tells how Jesus' healing touch brought relief to a woman crippled for 18 years.

He even called her a "daughter of Abraham," which is a distinction rarely used though men are often called "sons of Abraham."

9. In return, women felt free to TOUCH Jesus. Remember the sick woman who had a constant hemorrhage for 12 years, who in faith touched the hem of his garment? When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" she must have trembled because she knew she was ceremonially "unclean." Jesus did not rebuke her but commended her and healed her as he said, "Daughter, you are free."

10. Moreover, Christ publicly accepted more intimate gestures of love on several occasions from women who washed, dried, kissed, and anointed his feet.

In that day for a single young man to allow a woman to kiss and fondle his feet was most unusual.

And for a woman, particularly a chaste single woman like Mary of Bethany (JN 12), to take her hair down was considered immodest.

Yet in his presence Mary felt free and pure. And Jesus commended her for her devotion and trust.

11. Throughout his life's ministry Christ's attitude toward women upset and appaled his contemporaries, dumbfounded his critics, and flabbergasted his disciples; but regardless of it all he refused to make a difference in spiritual matters on the basis of sex, but kept the central emphasis on FAITH as the crucial condition of our relationship with God.

17

IV. Since all these things are true, it is no wonder why so many women followed Jesus in his lifetime because of the way he treated them; and these are precisely the same reasons why women (and men) today should gladly follow Jesus.

1. Because he never puts you down or shows any disrespect, regardless of who you are or what you are like.
2. Because he treats you tenderly and lovingly regardless of the way you are treated by others.
3. Because he treats you as a PERSON or A HUMAN BEING, and not as a male or a female, or black or white, or a private or a general, or as uneducated or highly educated, or as rich or poor, or as conservative or liberal, but only as a PERSON.
4. We should all gladly and willingly follow Him because he, and he alone, can deal with the human problems of guilt, anxiety, fear, depression, and suffering, and can give peace, forgiveness, a sense of worth, and purpose in life, and an eternal destiny with hope and security.

If we turn away from Him to whom shall we go?

We have never known such a person as Jesus, and we shall never know such another. This is why we all -- men and women -- gladly follow wherever he leads.

