

WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

By Pastor Glenn Pease

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1. THE WOMEN'S QUARTET IN THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST Based on Matt. 1:1-9

The Bible makes it clear beyond all dispute that there are two roles in the drama of life which women can play on a level of full equality with men. These two indisputable roles are, the role of

sinner, and the role of saint. Women can be both as bad and as good as men. When we deal with the really big and crucial issues of life we find that the equality of the sexes is a self-evident fact.

There are multitudes of insignificant issues in which one sex may be superior to the other, but when you get to the major themes portrayed on the stage of life, such as the themes of sin and salvation, then you find equality.

The genealogy of Matthew clearly confirms this conviction. There is no equality of numbers, however, for in the family tree of our Lord's human heritage there are over 40 names of men, and only 4 women. Women are not equal in Scripture when it comes to the legal and social role of preserving family names. Even in our culture it is most often the man's name that is preserved, and so the family tree is built on the blood line of the male's.

In this family tree of Jesus Matthew was inspired to include 4 women. Just as a beautiful flower can be found in the most barren desert, so here we have a wilderness of dry names out of which blossoms 4 roses. God inspired 4 men to write 4 lives of Christ, and he inspired Matthew to record 4 women through whom the Christ of the Gospels entered the stage of history. These 4 women make beautiful music together because they reveal the good news of the Gospel by their very presence in this blood line to the Savior. They will one day be a part of that universal choir singing the new song of the Lamb, who redeemed men and women out of every nation, language, and tongue.

As we look at who these women were we can hear distinctly some aspects of the song of salvation sounding forth from their lives. The songs of this women's quartet dissolve all doubt about women's equality with men as sinners and saints. Let's listen to two of the songs which their lives sing to us.

I. THEIR SONG OF SOVEREIGNTY.

There has never been a quartet anywhere who has made the message of God's sovereignty over history more clear and beautiful. These women have stamped the message on the record of history that God can bring good out of evil, and harmony out of chaos. None of these women would have ever sung a decent note, or even added a particle of beauty to the world apart from the grace and sovereignty of God.

If ever there was a group of women able to demonstrate that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, this is it. Three out of the four of these women had such bad reputations that their names were stained for all time. Tamar was involved in an incestuous affair with her father-in-law. Rahab was a harlot, and Bathsheba was an adulteress. Ruth, the 4th in the quartet hits higher notes in her life, and the result is that her name is still popular, and used frequently by Christians. They all, however, are equally involved in the blood line of the Messiah. God has to use sinners in the blood line from the first to the second Adam. There was no alternative, for all are sinners, and all fall short of the glory of God. But there are distinctions even among sinners, and one wonders about why God chose women of such bad reputation to be represented in this line to the Redeemer.

Is it not obvious that God is saying to us all through this song of these women that He is sovereign? Let no woman, or no man, look at what sin has done to them, and say they are hopeless. God is saying through these women, you cannot fall so low that God cannot raise you up, and then use you for His glory.

The king can make the poorest peasant a prominent princess. God has done it in these lives, and they can sing the song of God's sovereignty; the song of the good news that sin does not have the final word, but God does when we yield our lives to Him. The Cinderella

story is a reality, and not a fairy tale, in God's sovereign plan.

Women are equally under the sovereignty of God, and, therefore, they are equal in all that really matters. They can be forgiven, restored, and used of God to fulfill His purpose in history. So sings the women's quartet in the history of Christ. Their song makes clear the sovereignty of God's grace over His law. Law said that even the best of these four women could not enter the congregation of the Lord. Ruth was a Gentile and a Moabite, and Deut. 23:3 says, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord..." But here in Ruth we see this woman who is rejected by the law as part of God's plan to bring the Savior into the world. Rahab was also a Gentile, and she is in this family tree of the Messiah. God's grace to all men is being sung by this quartet, for they represent both Jews and Gentiles, and they sing of the universal nature of God's grace and plan of salvation.

Jesus the Son of God was not a pure Jew. He had the blood of Gentiles in His veins. The blood He shed for the sins of the world was representative blood, for it was both Jewish and Gentile blood. God's sovereign purpose was to bring the Jewish Messiah into the world by means of some Gentile women, and thus, make it clear that He was to be a universal Savior. If man would have invented a family tree for the Messiah, it would have been pure blood all the way, and uncontaminated by any Gentile, or by any notable sinner. But God's inspired tree has all that man would have left out, and, thereby, sounds forth loud and clear the song of sovereignty.

This song of sovereignty is a beautiful message. It is the Gospel. God can, and will, use any sinner in His plan. Matthew, who wrote this genealogy, was a publican. His friends were the hated publicans and harlots so often mentioned in Scripture. It must have been a thrill for Matthew to be able to record these women in the family tree

of the Messiah. What a message of comfort and hope to all those who felt forsaken and cut off from Israel because of their sin, folly, and cooperation with the Gentiles. What a song of sovereignty! Next, let's look at-

II. THEIR SONG OF SECURITY.

This song of the women's quartet is one that should mean a great deal to the average woman. None of these four could have known they were being used of God to preserve the blood line of the Messiah. Each of them could only thank God for her deliverance from sin, and could have hardly dared to hope that He would do more. Just to be accepted into the family of God's people was grace abounding. To be a channel of His blessing to the whole world was more than they could hope or dream. Yet each of them, though unworthy, became a vital link in the plan of salvation which opened the door of eternal life to all of us.

Let no woman deprive herself of the comfort and security that can come from this song of the quartet. So many women lack a sense of security because they feel so inadequate, unworthy, and unfruitful. They are nobodies in the plan of God they feel, and so they are insecure. Such negative thoughts could be eliminated if they would listen to this quartet sing the song of security. Their lives sing it out loud and clear. Everyone of them made enormous blunders. All of them were just average women, with no great talent or leadership ability. All they had was faith in God, and the capacity to have babies. That is why they are in this family tree of the world's Redeemer. Web Garrison said, "A woman who doesn't get a second look from her neighbors may play an essential role in the on going divine purpose that involves the destiny of mankind.

Faith in God is all any woman needs to be used of God. God uses

women of great talent and great leadership also, but He does so only because they respond in faith. Faith is that which all whom God uses have in common. Faith alone can give you the assurance and security you need to know that God will use you as a channel of His blessings. These women make it clear that faith can overcome all of the past, and enable one to start a new chain of influence. We may have a horrible heritage, but pass on an honorable heritage by faith. These women tell us that it is not only true that one rotten apple can spoil all in the barrel, but that it is also true that one good apple can start a whole new apple tree. Faith in God enables every woman to become the start of a new and beautiful tree of life. God can sometimes use the worst people to do the best things.

Women need to see that their greatest contribution to history and God's plan will be through their influence. Women should never exchange their supremacy of influence for any equality of power, for positive influence is the greatest power. None of these 4 became great and useful in God's plan because they possessed unique gifts. All of them are here simply because they were wives and mothers. None will question that women are superior in these two roles. Women ultimately succeed or fail, not in competition with men, but in fulfilling the roles they were designed to do well. Mrs. Elaine Stedman, wife of Ray Stedman, the well known pastor, wrote, "To love each person we meet, laying down our lives, our "rights," as He laid down His life, His rights-caring, reaching out, giving, listening, pouring the oil of His Spirit on troubled waters-this is God's plan for beautiful womanhood."

The struggle of women to gain equality has been an up and down battle all through the ages. If we look at the women back in patriarchal times, such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, we see them having a great deal of freedom and power in the home and society. As we move into the period of the conquest of Canaan there is a

suppression of women's freedom due to the great immorality of the nations around Israel. Paul's negative attitudes toward women were really and outgrowth of the history of temple prostitution in the nations of the world. Paul had nothing against women, but he was convinced that the church must avoid the dangers that Israel fell into.

To this very day the struggle goes on in the church. Where standards of sexual purity are high, women gain freedom and equality. In the early church there were those called the Montanists. They had women bishops and prophets. Their moral standards were very high. In groups, however, where the pagan lust was stronger than Christian love, women had to be kept in the background. If they were not, the church became a scandal to the world because of immorality. Whatever the situation, every woman who loves Jesus as Lord can join these women in the genealogy of Jesus and rejoice that they can be used of God to fulfill His purposes in history.

2. LISTEN TO YOUR WIFE Based on Matt. 27:11-26

Is there a man alive whose wife has never said, "You should have listened to me?" The pages of history are red with the blood of men who should have listened to their wives. Calpurnia pleaded with Caesar on that fatal Ides of March not to leave the house. She had a restless night, and three times she cried out in her dream for help. It was a sign to her, and she urged her stubborn husband to heed her warning. But Caesar was not about to join that pathetic minority who give credence to the silly feelings of their wives. He would rather die than admit a woman's intuition had any validity, and so he went out for the last time and died.

In our text we are looking at another Roman leader who was equally heedless of his wife's warning. Claudia Procula was her name, and she was the wife of Pilate. She was the only person who came to the defense of Jesus while he was on trial. Jesus would not defend Himself, but Claudia had a dream about Jesus, and she sent word to her husband not to have anything to do with this innocent man.

In typical macho fashion Pilate ignored the message and made the biggest blunder of his life. He sent Jesus to the cross. Because he did not listen to his wife he has been despised all through history on a level next to Judas. Jesus would have died anyway, for it was His plan to do so, and the Jewish leaders would have defied Pilate. Nevertheless, by listening to his wife he could have become a noble hero. There could have been St. Pilate churches all through history, and Pilate could have become a popular Christian name. But Pilate blew it because he would not listen to his wife.

Her lone voice said to Pilate, He is innocent, and it is wrong to condemn an innocent man. Don't do it. But the loud voice of the mob mobilized by the enemies of Jesus cried out for His blood. Who do you listen to-a mere wife or mean crowd? The majority of men in Pilate's sandals would probably make the same choice. What does a woman know about the ways of the world and political maneuvering? Am I supposed to make major judgments based on her dreams? Nonsense! I have to deal with political realities, and this clamoring crowd is no dream. These people are out for blood, and if I don't give it to them it may be mine they will be after. I know the man is innocent, and nothing He has done is worthy of death. Yet what is to be gained by sparing one innocent man and making a mass of people mad at you. Better one innocent man dies unjustly than risk many being hurt or killed in a riot.

Pilate did resist the injustice before him. He tried to get Jesus released, but they choose Barabbas instead. He did wash his hands of the whole ordeal and say I am innocent of this man's blood. But in the final analysis he refused to listen to his wife, and handed Jesus over to be crucified. He is now infamous for being the man who sent the Savior of the world to the cross.

From the beginning of the second century Christians have recited the Apostle Creed which begins, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ His Son who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate." Caesar only died because he did not listen to his wife. Pilate lives forever in infamy because he did not listen to his wife. It is high risk to ignore your wife. If this verse tells us nothing else, it tells us that a wife may have insight that a husband lacks, and, therefore, it is wise to listen to her.

This dream Claudia had spoke to her, and she made it clear to Pilate, but he did not listen. It speaks to us also and we are wise if we give heed. This dream did not come to Pilate himself, but came through his wife. God could have just as easily had Pilate dream the dream, but He did not do so. He gave the dream to Claudia, and she, because she was a loving and concerned wife, sent the message of it to her husband. God makes it clear that we do not get all truth and guidance directly. Often we get it through others who love us and want God's best for us. It is a terrible pride that keeps men from listening to their wives or others who care about them. If God wants to tell us something a man thinks, he can talk to me directly, and not go through my wife, mother, grandmother, or any other person in my life.

Claudia obviously loved her stubborn husband or she would not have sent him the warning. But Pilate was not open to advice and

guidance from such a source. Woe to the man who will not listen to the dreams of others as possible guidance for him.

**He would not go to school
Where the teacher was his wife.
Thus, he became a fool,
And missed his greatest chance in life.**

Pilate did not pay any attention to the dream, and the fact is, most people pay it no attention, but we want to focus on it, for it was the only positive note in the journey of Christ to the cross. Harold Bell Wright in, The 13 Truly Great Things Of Life says, "Of the 13 truly great things of life, dreams are first." He goes on to say that what many of us become begins with our dreams. This is certainly true for Pilate's wife. She would have been a famous lady of her day, but her lasting fame for all time was due to this dream she had that put her into God's revelation.

It is a mystery why God allowed the record of her dream to be recorded by Matthew. It almost seems totally irrelevant, for Pilate does not seem to have been impressed, and as far as we know it had no effect on the outcome of the trial of Jesus. We would not expect it to prevent the cross, for that was the goal of Jesus. He would not inspire a dream to prevent His own goal. The seeming irrelevance of the dream is what lead Martin Luther to the conviction that the dream must have been inspired by Satan as a last ditch effort to stop Jesus from going to the cross. The evidence will not support such a conviction.

Pilate already knew that the Jewish leaders had handed Jesus over out of envy. He was working for the release of Jesus, but gave in to the persistent demands of the Jewish leaders and their rabble-rousers. The dream of his wife only confirmed what he

already knew, but it did not alter the outcome because of the bitter hatred of the leaders of Israel. The point is, whether God or Satan inspired the dream, it does not seem to have had any measurable impact on the situation for good or evil.

So why is it here? For one answer we can look at Matthew's interest in dreams. He is the dream collector of the New Testament. The word for dream here is ONAR, and it is used just six times in the New Testament, and all six come from the pen of Matthew. If not for Matthew's interest in dreams we would have none of the four references to the dreams of Joseph by which he was guided to receive the baby Jesus as virgin born, and by which he was led to flee to Egypt, and later to bring Jesus back to Israel. The wise men were also warned in a dream to flee from Herod. Five of the six dreams deal with the birth and childhood of Jesus. Only the dream of Pilate's wife deals with the other end of his life-his trial and death.

What are we to make of these facts?

- 1. It is the only dream in the Bible of a woman.**
- 2. It is the only dream concerning the end of Christ's life.**
- 3. It was a disturbing dream that was more like a nightmare.**

It is only speculation, but here is what Edwin Markam, the poet, felt Claudia's dream was all about. It appeared first in 1902 on the cover of an American magazine called Success. It is too long to share it all, but here is the essence of it.

**Oh, let the Galilean go, strike off his cruel bond:
Behold the fathomless silence and those eyes that look beyond.
There's more than mortal in that face, -than earthly in this hour:
The fate that now is in the bud will soon be in the flower.
O Pilate, I have suffered many things in dream today.
Because of this strange teacher of the strait and mystic way.
I saw Him hanging on a cross, where the stones of Golgotha are:
Then laid, at last, in a guarded tomb, under the evening star.**

I saw him rise again one dawn and down a garden go,

Shining like great Apollo white, our god in the silver bow:
And then the wind of vision tore the veil of time apart,
And love of him ran greatening from camel-path to mart;
His story was a wonder on the eager lips of men,
The scourged Galilean walked the roads of earth again.
I saw Jerusalem go down before the wrath of spears,
And turn into a field of stones under the trampling years.
World-battles roared around this man, the world's mysterious king;
But over the storm of the ages I could hear the seven stars sing.
Rome crumpled and I heard a voice across the ruin laugh;
A power had risen on the world, shaking the thrones as chaff.
And down the ages ran your name, a byword and a jeer:
"He suffered under Pilate!" sounded ever in my ear.
The deeds of some are clean forgot, but yours did breathe and live;
Some are forgiven in the end, but none could you forgive.

It is, as I said, only speculation, but even the great Spurgeon agrees that it is likely Claudia saw in her dream the crucifixion. She states clearly that she suffered, and what could her suffering had been but the vision of this innocent man being crucified unjustly. Claudia would have been the first person to witness the crucifixion. It was in a dream, but it was very real. Spurgeon goes on to speculate that she may have also seen in her dream that this just man would one day be sitting on a great white throne judging the world. This man her husband was about to judge would be the judge of all men, and her husband was about to condemn the only man worthy to judge all men. Why else would she be so disturbed, and why would she rush her message to Pilate? It could not wait until he came home for he was making the most important decision of his life.

The second fact is that the dream is a valid channel by which God has communicated to both men and women. The dream is still a possible channel for God's guidance in our lives. It would be folly to suggest that all dreams have some significance, but it is equal folly to dismiss them as being irrelevant. The great scholar Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary wrote in, Hasting's Dictionary Of Christ And The Gospels, an article on dreams. In it he makes this statement, "We surely can find no difficulty in recognizing the

possibly and propriety of occasional Divine employment of dreams for the highest ends."

What he is saying is revelation by dreams is real but rare. We are not to look to dreams as a primary source of guidance. God gave us His word for that. But He may on occasion give us guidance through our dreams. Pilate's wife could have dismissed her dream as a meaningless nightmare, but she took it seriously and sent a message to her husband because of it. Was she a foolish woman to do so? Not at all. According to Christian tradition she became a believer because of her dream. So we learn it is not only wise to listen to our wives: It is wise to listen to our dreams, and recognize they may be conveying to us a message from God.

A. J. Gordon, the famous Baptist preacher and author of the late 19th century, had a dream that changed his whole ministry. He saw a stranger come into his church while he was preaching, and after the service the stranger just disappeared, but he knew it was Jesus. He realized that if Jesus was in his service he had to preach in such a way that his Lord would be pleased. He wrote, "It was a vision of the deepest reality. Apparently we are most awake to God when we are asleep to the world."

John Newton, author of Amazing Grace and many other great hymns, was a captain of a ship when he had a strange dream about a ring that was to keep him secure. But he was ridiculed for trusting in that ring, so he took it off and threw it into the sea. Then a stranger came and offered to dive to the depths and recover the ring. When he came up with it he did not give it back. He said, "I will keep it for you and be forever by your side." He knew it was Jesus, and when he awoke he left his life as a sea captain and became a pastor. He was one of the most famous pastor's in history, and it was a dream that changed his whole life.

History is full of such life changing dreams, and Pilate could have been a hero had he listened to the dream of his wife. Modern Jews have seriously considered having a retrial of Jesus and reversing Pilate's decision. There was so much that was illegal that the most mediocre lawyer could have secured the release of Jesus. The dream could have done it too. The dream was the only defense Jesus had, but it was enough if Pilate would have listened. He is innocent, he is faultless, stainless, and guiltless. God's plea for His Son was, "Not guilty!"

Claudia believed her dream and knew Jesus was being framed. Because she believed, she, the granddaughter of the Emporor Augustus, went on to become famous for the serving of Christ, while Pilate went on to become infamous for the suffering of Christ. The difference being, one believed and the other disbelieved the dream. Because Claudia gave heed to her dream she wrote part of the New Testament. It is only a sentence, but that one sentence is a powerful testimony. She is the only female who wrote part of the New Testament. No man spoke up for Jesus. Only one woman did, and she said He is just and righteous, and not worthy of the vile treatment He is getting. Without this one sentence coming from a woman's dream, there would have been not a single word of testimony in Christ's defense.

I really don't know what difference it makes, but God went out of His way to get this one testimony in His Sons defense. However irrelevant it may seem to us, it was important to God, and Pilate's wife was apparently the only mind God could use to accomplish this task. The mind of one woman was open to receive this revelation. That is why we need to listen to our wives. Sometimes they are the only ones listening to God. Let me share more illustrations of this reality.

David was about to act in anger and kill the fool Nabal for his refusal to help feed his men in an emergency situation. Abigail pleaded with him not to do this great evil. David listened to the voice of this woman who later became his wife. He calmed down, and got control of his emotions, and he realized she had saved him from folly. He said, "Blessed be thy advice and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood.."

Abraham Lincoln listened to his wife Mary Todd when she refused to go to Oregon. This kept him in Illinois where the summons reached him to go to Washington where he became the President of the United States. Had she not intervened, G. Hall Todd says, "Lincoln might have known only the virtual oblivion of a Pacific coast outpost."

President Theodore Roosevelt once remarked that there had never been a time when he failed after listening to the intuitive suggestions of his wife. We don't want to give a false impression that wives are not fallen sinners, for they are. Job refused to listen to his wife when she urged him to curse God and die, and this was clearly God's will that he not listen to her. Wives are not the infallible voice of God. It is just that they can be a channel of God's wisdom when other channels are not open. Therefore, it is just practical wisdom to listen to your wife. She may not always be right or wise, but it is always wise to at least listen.

3. THE MOST FAMOUS FEVER MARK 1:29-31

I never heard of Thomas Sydenham, even though he probably saved my life, and yours as well, if you have ever had a bad fever.

The highest fever that anyone has ever survived is 109.8. Most people will die if they reach 109.4. But many have died with far less because of bizarre methods of treatment. In England in the 1600's, the standard method of treating a fever was the hot bed. You piled blankets on the patient, and kept a roaring fire in the fire place, and if necessary you posted guards to make sure the patient could not escape this stifling inferno.

Dr. Sydenham made an interesting observation about this treatment. It almost always was effective in killing the patient. Even more interesting was his observation that poor people who could not afford a doctor, and thus, had to forego this special treatment, were more likely to recover from a fever. One poor lad was stricken with small pox while traveling. They took him to an inn where he was smothered with blankets. When he went into a coma they thought he was dead. They took him out of the hot bed and laid him on a table with just a sheet over him. The boy recovered because of his fortunate escape from the hot bed. Dr. Sydenham put his observations together, and finally persuaded the medical community that the way to fight fire was not with more fire, but with ice, air, quinine, and anything that would lower the fever.

When he died in 1689, he was immortalized as the father of clinical medicine. There is no way to know how many millions of lives have been spared because of his observation on how to cure a fever.

In this message we want to focus on the most famous fever in all the Bible. It is the fever of Peter's mother-in-law. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all record this event, and Dr. Luke gives us a doctors perspective, for he tells us it was no mere minor fever of 99 or 101.3, for he calls it a great fever. The Greek word is megas. It was a mega fever. She was very seriously ill.

The New Testament has two words for fever: Puresso and puretos. Puresso is used twice, both times of this particular fever. Puretos is used six times, four of which refer to this fever, and so six of the eight uses of fever in the New Testament refer to this fever of Peter's mother-in-law this is the most famous fever in the Bible.

It is also the first physical illness that Jesus healed in the Gospel of Mark. Earlier He had cast out demons in the synagogue, but this was the first disease that He cured. Jesus began His healing ministry as a fever fighter, and he knocked it out with a single punch.

This is the only record we have of Jesus healing one of the family members of His Apostles. We have no account of any of the Apostles ever needing His healing. They were, no doubt, healthy men and we only have a record of three years of their being with Jesus. It is possible they never had any major problems with illness. There is no record of Mary, or any of Jesus's brothers and sisters being healed either. Joseph died somewhere along the line before His public ministry began, and so Jesus did not do any healing before His anointing as the Messiah. What we have here then, is not only the first of His healing miracles in Mark, but the only one of a family member of His greater family.

You may not want to make anything of that, but to me it speaks very clearly of the respect Jesus had for women. Not only was a woman the first to receive His healing power, she was one of the least respected, and most often put down, women- a mother-in-law. Someone said one of the hardest times in life to disguise your feelings is when you are putting your mother-in-law on the bus. This mother-in-law likely lived with Peter and his wife because she was widowed. Peter was the oldest of the Apostles and so this woman was likely quite elderly. But the Great Physician is here making a house call that leads to her healing.

Here is a godly woman who just got sick on the spur of the moment. It ought not to be a shock that good people get sick, for they always have. Spurgeon said, "However good a man may be, he will not escape trial in the flesh. You may have a house full of sanctity and full of sickness at the same time." He adds, "Certain persons attribute all sickness to the devil, and impute special sin to those who are grievously afflicted. This teaching is as false as it is cruel." There is no hint here that she was in any way responsible for her illness, or that she needed forgiveness. This was just a common problem all people have at some point in their life.

Dr. Luke tells us that Jesus stood over her and rebuked the fever. This implies quite clearly that the fever was of the kingdom of evil. It is a sign of infection to have a fever and it can be helpful in killing bacteria that cause us to be sick, but it is not good to have a fever, for that is a sign of something wrong. Jesus rebuked it and got rid of it immediately. Dr. Luke pictures most sickness as the work of Satan, and so even here he sees a fever as his dirty work. When it left her she got up immediately and began to serve. That is what health is for, to make us so we can use our bodies in service. Health is not of much value if we do not use it for service. We are saved to serve and healed to serve, or healed to help.

**He touched her hand and the fever left her.
He touched her hand as He only can,
With the wondrous skill of the great Physician,
With the tender touch of the Son of Man.
And the fever pain in the throbbing temples
Died out with the flush on brow and cheek,
And the lips that had been so parched and burning
Trembled with thanks she could not speak.
And the eyes where the fever light had faded,
Looked up, by her grateful tears made dim,**

**And she rose and ministered in her household,
She rose and ministered unto Him.**

Author unknown

She was as minor a character as you can find on the stage of the New Testament drama. If she had not been so sick when Jesus came to Peter's house, she never would have been heard of. We only know of her existence because of her fever. It all seems so trivial to be the first healing miracle for Mark to select. Why not start off with a spectacular like leprosy, and make it, not just a mother-in-law, but somebody big and important.

But all such thinking as this is based on an misunderstanding of the healing ministry of Jesus. We want to examine this case of the most famous fever healing in order to get answers to two important questions about healing that effects how we feel today about healing. The first is-

I. WHAT WAS THE MOTIVE FOR JESUS'S HEALING?

The ministry of Jesus can be summed up with these three words: Preaching, teaching and healing. Out of 424 verses in the first ten chapters of Mark, 139 deal with healing. That is, one third of Mark's revelation about the ministry of Jesus is about healing. 33% of the greatest life ever lived is about healing. It was not a side line for Jesus. It was a major aspect of His ministry.

Why? What was the motive for His conquering so many diseases, and restoring people to health? I am sure there are several legitimate answers to this question, but this first healing that Mark reveals also reveals what I see as the major motive for most of the healings of Jesus. He healed people because He loved them, and hated to see them sick. Now this may not sound like a very profound

insight, but let me assure you that it is. Many of the greatest Christians in history miss this.

It has an impact on almost everything we do if Jesus healed people simply because He loved people, and treated all people as having absolute value. If Jesus only healed people as a means to some other end, then He was treating them with relative value. They were useful tools to achieve a goal. If Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law in order to draw a crowd, she was just a means to an end, and not an end in herself. But as we look at this scene, it is clear that Jesus healed her for the simple reason that He saw her sick and desired to make her well. He had compassion on people, and enjoyed giving them victory over sickness. His motive was love.

This is confirmed by an examination of the people Jesus healed. They were not people of importance. Peter's mother-in-law was a symbolic beginning, for most of the people Jesus healed were like her; nobodies as far as the community was concerned. There were no Queen of Sheba type healings in the ministry of Christ. No big name people of fame, no celebrities are ever mentioned. Jesus did not select His targets for healing based on their status in the community, or their office, or riches, or popularity. On the contrary, it almost seems as if He deliberately chose people who had none of these, and healed them just because they were sick, and because He put an absolute value on every person, regardless of their rank or role in life.

Most of the people who are healed by Jesus are people society has rejected. They are lepers, or those born blind, and mere beggars who contribute little to society. People who have long been victims of disease, and thus, written off as of no great social value. The lame man by the pool of Bethesda; the woman whom Satan had bound for 18 years are good examples. Only a couple of times did Jesus get

involved with people with any known status, and even then it was not them that He healed, but their unknown children, such as Jairus's daughter and the nobleman's son.

The point is, Jesus was the Good Samaritan. The man He found beaten and left for dead had no relative value to him. There was nothing about him that indicated that he had status or wealth, or could in any way benefit the Good Samaritan if he helped him. He did not stop and treat his wounds, and get him to an inn because he saw something in it for himself. He did it because the man had absolute value. That is, he was a human being, and not one to be treated as a means to an end, but as an end in himself. His motive was very simple and pure. He did it out of love for another human being in need.

In the great scheme of history what difference does it make if this robbed and beaten nobody is left to die, or is restored to health by acts of love? Probably none, but that is just the point. If it was done because the man was important, or because he had connections, or power, or some other relative value, then the motive for his restoration would be just logical, and not necessarily loving. What we need to see is that all other religions and philosophies deal with people for their relative value. Christianity alone, teaches that all people have absolute value just because they are made in the image of God. Because this is so, all people are to be recipients of love.

The healing ministry of Jesus confirms this, for that is clearly the primary motive of why He healed people. It is because they had a need He could meet, and when you love people you meet their needs whenever you can. Mark's Gospel is the Gospel of miracles. He has more space devoted to the miracles of Jesus than any other Gospel. But you will seek in vain to find any big shots on the list. The people that Jesus healed were just ordinary people who could give Jesus

nothing in return but gratitude. And that is all He expected, for His motive in healing was not to get anything. He never charged for His healing. He healed because He loved.

If we have any other motive behind why we serve people, and seek to meet their needs, we are probably going to have some problems. It can be hard enough when you do it out of pure love as Jesus did. He was disappointed that nine of ten lepers He healed did not even return to say thanks. But he did not give up and stop healing lepers because of their ingratitude. Reward was not His motive, nor was it popularity. He healed because He cared, and wanted to demonstrate in a practical way that God is love, and the kingdom of God is a kingdom of love where people are of absolute value.

This healing of Peter's mother-in-law is called the simplest and purest miracle story in Mark. There is no commentary on it. It is just recorded as an act of love. It has no significance in the great scheme of things. There is no reason to believe she would not have gotten better after a few days. It is such a minor matter, yet three Gospel authors record it, because it sets the tone for the whole healing ministry of Christ. It reveals that the master motive of the Master in His healing was simply love for people who had a need.

If you love people, and seek to meet needs, you will find your work is never done, for there is never an end to need. Jesus had just come from the synagogue where He literally had a devil of a time, as He cast out a demon from a man. Now He heads to Peter's home with His other disciples for a little peace and quiet for the remainder of the Sabbath. As soon as He walks in the home, He sees another need as He sees Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed. We all like to fantasize about getting away from it all. We go to church and then go home expecting a problem free day, and sometimes it happens, but often it does not. Jesus got some rest that afternoon, but when the Sabbath

ended the people came in mass to receive healing, and Jesus was busy into the night healing all manner of diseases.

Find a need and meet it was the philosophy of Jesus, and He proved it worked, for He healed people out of sheer love. There was no charge, it was all of grace. In the 13th century the most famous and influential theologian, Thomas Aquinas said Jesus just did miracles to prove that He was divine. Once that was proved there was no longer any need for healing, and so it has no place in the church. He has had a major impact on both the Catholic and Protestant church into modern times, for most Christians have bought into this view, and healing has not been a vital part of the ministry of most churches since.

But will it hold water in the light of Scripture? If healing miracles prove you are divine, then all of the Apostles were likewise proven divine, for they did healing miracles, and so did their successors. If that was the motive for Jesus healing people, then He should have chosen a means that was a little more exclusive, and that He alone could do. The fact is, He expected His followers to get into healing as a part of the Gospel ministry, and there's no hint that healing is proof of deity. Healing is proof of only one thing, that the healer cares. Fortunately, many Catholics have entered into the healing ministry, and some of the best books on healing are by Catholic authors.

To heal for any other reason than that you care for people is to pervert the gift of healing. It is not a fund raiser idea, or publicity tool, it is a sign that the kingdom of God has come, and that the God of all has compassion toward those who suffer. Even professional doctors who make their living by healing have learned that the greatest satisfaction in the profession is that which you give for free-compassion. This is often the key to healing, and is more valuable than the medicine.

Dr. Francis Peabody, a medical researcher at Harvard, back in the 1920's said, "The treatment of a disease may be extremely impersonal; the case of a patient must be completely personal... the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient." Dr. Bernie Seigel, a famous surgeon who specializes in cancer, wrote a book called Love, Medicine & Miracles, to describe his radical transformation from treating patients as machines to treating them as people. He discovered that his love for dying people often cured them when his surgery could not. He was ready to leave his profession because he was so discouraged with it. Then he discovered the power of compassion.

He stopped being a machine and began to practice a doctors cardinal sin: He got involved with his patients. He started to care for them as persons and not just cases. Soon he discovered he enjoyed his work again, and his patients were getting well faster and more often. He was healed himself when he began to practice medicine with the motive of love. It changed his whole career, and he quotes with approval, David Ben Gurion who wrote, "Anyone who doesn't believe in miracles is not a realist." I will be quoting this doctor often in the future, for he has by the power of love seen many miracles.

Many contemporary medical people are learning that the motive of the healer is often the key power in healing. It is being established by studies and statistics. Modern medicine is no longer skeptical of the power of love. This was the power behind the healing of the Great Physician. And because it is so, there is healing power in all of us, for all of us have the capacity to care. The second question we want to consider makes healing very relevant to us. The question is-

II. WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS'S HEALING?

The motive is the message, really, but we need to spell it out. If

Jesus healed people because He loved them, then there can be no end to healing as long as there is a need for love. In other words, the idea that healing ended with the ministry of Jesus is based on a reading into the healing of Jesus a different motive. If Jesus only healed people as a means of making a big splash, then, of course, when that end was achieved, He could forget healing. Many feel this was the case. Jesus just needed a way to get people's attention, and so healing was the means to this end. Once He had this accomplished, healing could end. It was meant then to be just a temporary ministry, and not part of the history of the church.

The problem with this view is that it makes Jesus treat people as a means to an end, and thus, with only relative value. If this is true, Jesus loses His place in history as the only person in history who taught that people are of absolute value. If all the people Jesus healed were just pawns in His plan, and means to an end, then Jesus was not unique in His value system. If you believe Jesus was unique, and one of a kind, you will have to reject this view, and see that the message of His healing ministry is that it is meant to go on for all time until He comes again, and all of God's people will experience a final healing, and have bodies that will never suffer again. But meanwhile there is no end to the need for healing.

The facts will not support the idea that Jesus had some other motive for His healing that ended the need for perpetual healing. Jesus healed the ear of Malchus in the garden of Gethsemane. It was a totally wasted miracle if Jesus had any other motive than love for the man and his need. He was on His way to the cross, and this healing did not do a thing to prevent that. He failed if He had any other motive than love for an injured man.

If His healing was for achieving some goal, then, of course, healing could cease when the goal was achieved. But if the motive for healing

was loving concern for people in need, than the healing can never cease. The facts of history show that the church went on healing people. It went on through the book of Acts where people were healed by the Apostles, and for centuries after that the church was committed to be a channel of the healing power of Jesus.

If love is the motive for healing, then the message is, healing can only end when the need for it ends. This means healing will not end until history ends, for it will be a need as long as time lasts. We dare not let the problems and complexities of the issue blind us to this basic message. Healing is a part of the ministry of Christ all through history. If it is true that the church is an extension of the incarnation, and Christ expects His body to represent Him in history, then healing has to be a perpetual part of the church's ministry.

It is a problem passage that we have to struggle with, for it raises a lot of questions, but Mark has Jesus add to the Great Commission that these signs will accompany those who believe, and one of those signs He lists in Mark 16:18 is, "They will place their hands on sick people and they will get well."

I have laid hands on only a few people for healing. Some of them have been healed and others were not. This is not surprising in that even professional healers have had to confess this mystery of healing, that no one has ever been able to guarantee a healing will take place. Healing is always in the hands of God, and no man can manipulate the hands of God, as if He was a puppet, and they were holding the strings. No healer has ever been 100% successful except Jesus.

Few pastors feel they have the gift of healing. I know of none myself, who feel they are healers. But healing is nevertheless to be a part of the church. Gift or no gift, we are to care enough to pray for and seek for the healing of people just because they need it. The

greatest cause for the limitation for healing is that people do not seek it. We have not because we ask not said James. In chapter 5 of his epistle James writes as if every church should experience the healing power of Christ in their midst. In verse 14 he writes, "Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well..."

To reject healing as a part of the ongoing ministry of the church is to reject the motive for Christ's healing, which was love. It is to reject the great commission of Mark's Gospel, and the fulfilling of that by the Apostles. It is to reject the clear message of James, and the vast history we have of healing in the name of Jesus. In my mind, this cannot be honestly done if one is truly desirous of knowing the truth. The message comes through loud and clear to me. We should take advantage of what Christ wants to do for us, and through us, in the realm of healing. If Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and His motive for healing was love, then the message of His healing is, He still heals today.

4. THE STOLEN MIRACLE Based on Mark 5:21-34

Art Linkletter, some years back, told about the 4 year old son of a Florida woman who got up one morning dragging his leg. The mother could not find anything wrong with it. This went on for two days, but he did not complain of any pain. On the third day the worried mother took him to her pediatrician. The doctor checked him carefully and could find nothing amiss, and so he sent him to the children's hospital for x-rays. Again, nothing was found to cause his problem. Meanwhile little Geoffrey still walked dragging one leg.

Finally after two days of testing one of the doctors asked him, "Geoffrey, why do you have to drag one leg when you walk?" The little guy replied, "I'm Chester. I work for Mr Dillion." Such is the power of TV.

X-rays could penetrate his body and enable the doctors to see his insides, but nothing can penetrate the mind to enable anyone to see the workings of imagination. This is the unseen realm of the human mind where pictures are developed that can radically altar the world of the seen. In his imagination this little guy could see himself as something and someone nobody else could see, and that image was determining his behavior.

I saw this power of imagination at work in my oldest granddaughter many years back. We had just listened to the story of Little Red Riding Hood on a record, and I felt it was well done. It taught the danger of speaking to strangers. Little Red Riding Hood should not have spoken to the wolf and told him of her plan to go to grandma's house. From my perspective it was a good lesson for Sarah to hear. As I turned the record player off, Sarah responded with her evaluation. "Parents should never let little girls go to grandma's house all by themselves."

Not there was an insight I never thought of. She saw it from a different perspective, and sure enough she was right too. You don't just send little girls out into wolf infested woods by themselves. So by the power of her imagination she saw a lesson for adults as well as children in that story.

The point is, there is no end to the possibilities of seeing more and more in everything as we let our imagination grapple with issues. It was by the use of his imagination that Leonardo da Vinci visualized so many of life's modern inventions centuries before they became a

reality. He pictured even things like the submarine and the helicopter. Everything that is began first in the mind. George Bernard Shaw said, "Imagination is the beginning of creation." We know that everything that God made was in His mind first, and even the plan of salvation with the cross and resurrection were in God's mind in eternity before they became a part of history. All art, buildings, and bridges, and all that man creates also begins with an image in the mind.

The mind has the ability to see the unseen. It can see something as being real even before it is real, and this seeing of it is the first step in the process of making it real. Faith gets into the picture here by believing what the mind can imagine or visualize. It can, in fact, be made to become a part of reality. Faith, therefore, starts in the mind and its power to imagine or to visualize. Faith sees the mental image and says, that can become an actual physical image.

This has tremendous implications for healing, because the body does not have the ability to distinguish between a vivid mental image and an actual physical experience. In other words, the mind can fool the body. It can, by a powerful image, make the body respond, just as if that image was an objective physical reality. The image is only pre-reality. It exists in the mind only, but it can become reality by its impact on the body. It is the age old idea of mind over matter. It is now a major factor in the world of scientific healing, and it is a major factor in the world of spiritual healing. Science and faith are becoming more and more one when it comes to the recognition of the power of visualization for healing.

Elmer and Alyce Green of the Menninger Clinic tell in the book, *Beyond Biofeedback*, how people can be trained to control their body by visualizing. They can even cut off the blood supply to a tumor in their body and deny it life. They can also increase the flow of blood to

other parts of their body and heal themselves of all sorts of problems. I know a pastor who controls serious pain by his training in bio-feedback.

Dr. Nicholas Hall of the George Washington Medical Center in Washington D.C. has reported that people can, by imaging, cause their body to increase the white blood cells and the T helper cells that make their immune system more effective. Patients who are good at visualization have, by their imagination, caused cancer to vanish, and have cured many other diseases. The literature on this is so vast, and as I became exposed to it my question was, I wonder if there is an example of this kind of healing in the ministry of Jesus? It seemed like there should be, for it ties in with faith so perfectly, and it is universal in its potential. All men can by this means have access to healing.

Such a law or principle of healing should be seen somewhere in the healing of the Great Physician. So I began to search for it. I found it in the experience of this woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years. She became an ideal Biblical example of the millions who have been victims of man's medical ignorance. She is also an example of the millions who have been victors through mental imaging. She was both victim and victor, and, therefore, one with whom a large percentage of mankind can identify. Let's look at her first as-

I. A VICTIM.

After 12 long years of trying every remedy the doctors of her day could dream up she was not relieved of anything but her wealth. She still had her bad health, and the text tells us she was even worse. It would be hard to get excited about your next appointment after 12 years of fruitless treatment. There is no way to know how much torture she had to endure, and how many gallons of nauseous drugs

she had to swallow, but we do know she had to have shed many tears of disappointment as one after another of the prescriptions proved worthless to stem the flow of her life blood. We can picture an anemic and anxious woman who left no stone unturned to find a cure, and all she had to show for it was many a turned stone. She was in the category of the incurable.

She was a guinea pig, and they tried everything that could be thought of, but nothing worked. You can't really blame the doctors, even though many use this text to do so. The fact is, doctors did not have any really powerful medicine until the 19th century. For centuries the only reason any of the concoctions they prescribed had any positive effect was because of the placebo effect. People believed it was good for them and so they got better. The Jewish Talmud, for example, recommends that a woman with a flow of blood drink a goblet of wine with a powder of rubber, alum, and garden crocuses, or Persian onions cooked in wine. Some tried sudden shock, or the carrying of a ostrich egg in a special cloth. Ridiculous remedies, but sometimes they worked for psychosomatic reasons.

For some reason this poor woman had no faith in anything she was given, and the result was she was worse rather than better. She was not only physically ill, but she was unclean and a social outcast. She was not much better off than the leper. One of the reasons she acted so secretly was because she was ashamed to be known publicly, and embarrassed to have her problem exposed to everyone. She didn't even want Jesus to know. She just wanted to steal a miracle from Him, and then slip quietly away, and never have a soul know what happened. She was not looking to be on the front page, she didn't even want back page coverage. She just wanted a hit and run healing known only to her. She had been victim enough because of her problem, and she wanted nothing more but obscurity.

It was good to see this humanly hopeless case of the chronically ill victim, for her healing is hope to all who feel their case is hopeless. Spurgeon pointed out that the church of Laodicea was so sick that Jesus said, "I will spew thee out of my mouth." That is really bad when the Lord of the church is ready to spit you out. But it was to this church that Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me." Jesus gave that sick church a visual image of Himself at the door ready to come in and heal their relationship. If they get this image in their minds and believed it, as sick as they are, they can be made whole again. This woman was a pathetic victim of her disease, but we want to look at the good news of how she too became a powerful victor.

II. A VICTOR.

This woman is to healing what Roger Bannister is to the world of sports-a marvelous example of the power of belief. Bannister lived in a world where it was believed that the four minute mile was impossible. It was beyond the physical capacity of the human body. Athletes could come close, but nobody could break this barrier. Bannister, in spite of the history of failure, believed he could break that barrier, and he visualized himself doing it, and the result is that he became the first person to ever do it. Once he shattered that image of its impossibility it became possible for other to follow. Six weeks later John Landy of Australia broke it, and soon athletes all over the world were doing it until it became a commonplace event with hundreds of runners doing it. Once the mental barrier was broken it became possible.

It became a vital part of athletic training that the event be first won in the mind before done in the body. Visualization is now a universal method of training. You would have a hard time finding a

great athlete in the world who does not practice visualization. They relax and perform their event over and over in their mind until it is perfected. Research shows that those who spend three fourths of their time in mental training do better than those who spend all their time in actually doing their event. It is not practice that makes perfect, but visualizing makes perfect. If you expect to be a victor, you need to be a visualizer.

This same principle has been discovered to apply in the realm of healing as well. Those who are most likely to win in the battle for health over all the foes that would defeat them are the visualizers. This discovery here revolutionized the world of healing just as it has the world of sports. Visualization is now a therapy that does wonders in the world of healing. It uses the mind as the most potent medicine for destroying intruders.

A young boy was taken to the Mayo Clinic because he had a tumor on his brain. The doctor said all treatment was futile, but they heard of this new imaging technique, and they wanted to give it a try. The boy was told to imagine rocket ships flying around in his head shooting at his tumor. The tumor was the bad guys, and the rocket ships were the good guys blasting these invaders out of the universe. He was playing video games in his mind. After a couple of months of this game he told his father one day that he took a trip through his head, and his rocket ships could not find his tumor anymore. When they gave him another cat scan they found his cancer was completely eradicated. He had won the battle with a mind game. He had terminal cancer, but he had terminated the terminator by the power of visualization.

If this was only an isolated incident, we could categorize it as an item for Ripley's Believe It Or Not, or The National Enquirer, and call it a freak event with no relevance for the masses. But it is not a

freak event, for this type of healing is going on all the time, and this woman in our text is an example of how visualization was working even in the New Testament. It is simply faith at work. Note carefully verse 28 where it says, "She thought in her mind, if I can just touch His clothes I will be healed." Here is a clear case of visualization. She had an image in her mind of her body being made whole. She did not come to Jesus saying that she had tried everything else, so I just as well give this a shot too. Not at all! She came with a solid conviction that this was finally her answer. If I can just touch His clothes, the battle of 12 years will be over, and I will be a normal well woman again. She had the victory in her mind before it became a reality in her body, and that is what visualization is all about.

The image she had in her mind was only pre-reality, but it was potent enough to become reality. Had she touched Jesus without her vision she would have just been another bump in the crowd, and no power would have gone out of Jesus to heal her. Technically Jesus did not heal this woman. He did not see her and say I have compassion on you, nor did He take any willful action to help her. This is a very unusual miracle. It is one of a kind, and that is why I have called it the stolen miracle. It was not given by Jesus, but was taken from Him. Jesus felt the flow of power out of Him. He did not send it forth voluntarily. It was drawn out of Him involuntarily.

This opens up the whole fascinating world of healing based on obedience to the laws of healing, which can be independent of the healer. Visualization is a method of healing that is used by secular science, the world of the occult, the new age movement, and by pagan religions and witch doctors. In other words, there is nothing exclusively Christian about this principle of healing. It is popular everywhere, and this has lead many Christians to be very anti-visualization. It is a basic tool for healing that is often anti-Christian. This is where the Christian needs to be wise as a

serpent and harmless as a dove. We need to be discerning so as not to be caught up in superstition and occult practices. On the other hand, we need to make sure Satan does not rob us of what God wants us to have. He robbed Adam and Eve of paradise, and he could rob us of precious gifts God desires us to possess. We need to pay attention so we do not lose a victory God wants to give us.

The Bible is the sole authority for our faith and practice. If something is not Biblical, it has no authority in the Christian life, even if the whole world raves about it. If it is Biblical, then it is legitimate for the Christian, even if the whole world rejects it. Visualization is a unique concept. It is a Biblical concept, however, and we see it in practice here, but it is so effective and so universal that non-Christians also use it. This confuses Christians, for they wonder how we can practice the same things as they do. It seems like we are falling for their ideas if we promote the things they promote.

All through history this has been the problem of orthodox Christians. The cults pick up a truth that the orthodox Christians have ignored, and they make it central to their theology. In order to distance themselves from the heretics the Christians reject the truth they highlight. This gives the cults all the more power for growth because they can show that the truth is Biblical that the orthodox Christians reject. This becomes a big tool for their opposition to Christians. The wise way of dealing with this sort of thing is to admit the truth has been neglected, and then start giving it its rightful place in orthodox theology. This is the way the issue of visualization needs to be handled. Don't give up this powerful tool to the anti-Christian forces, but recognize that the laws which make it powerful are God given, and will work for all who will obey them.

If you follow the foolish route of rejecting all that is made a central part of the cults, you will have to be consistent and reject prayer

itself. There is not a false religion or cult in all the world that does not use prayer. If your philosophy is to find out what the bad guys are doing and stop doing it, you will soon be anti-Christian yourself. The devil even uses the Bible, and so if you refuse to use a tool because the devil uses it, you will have to even reject the Bible.

My point is, visualization is a powerful tool for healing, and everybody under the sun has seen this. Do not reject it or refuse to use it because it works for non-Christian forces as well. Electricity also works for them, but I have never heard anyone giving it up because satanic forces use it. Printing presses also work for evil forces, but we ought not to stop printing Bibles and Christian literature because of it. Most Christians who study visualization in depth see it as a powerful tool God has given to men, and we are to use this tool for healing just like all other tools God has given. Jesus did not rebuke this woman for her visualization, but linked it with faith, and said her faith made her well. Faith is a visualization of what could be real, and a trust that Christ will make it real.

After 12 years of failure this woman had the faith to believe that success was only a touch away. Many preachers are convinced that this was superstition. The great Spurgeon even called it superstition, and a great blunder in thinking that there was any healing power in the garment of Christ. But he said in one of his 6 sermons on this, which he considered one of the most fascinating miracles in the New Testament, "She truly believed in Him, and if you believe in Christ, though you are in dark about a thousand things, your faith will save you." If your mind is open to an image of what Christ can do, that image can become true, even if the means of getting there is strange, and not necessarily an approved method. Stealing a miracle is nowhere recommended, but this woman did it successfully. But it was her faith and her ability to visualize that is the value for the rest of the world. As far as we know, no one else ever stole a miracle from

Jesus, but millions have by faith visualized His healing power and have been made whole.

Jesus was not like the arch of the covenant. Anyone who reached out and touched it would receive a flow of power that would electrocute them. Jesus was far more sacred than that sacred object, for He was the very Son of God, but He was touchable. Those who see this have developed a whole new concept of healing we can only mention. People are taught to visualize Jesus coming into their lives at various points in their experience when they have sinned. And they ask Jesus to forgive them and heal them. The more real the visualization, the more powerful the healing. Others come before the throne of grace and visualize Jesus reaching out to touch and heal them. The point is, Jesus is still in the healing business. Nobody is always healed, but everybody may be, and visualization is a key tool for helping it to happen.

How can anybody see beyond 12 years of complete failure and worthless treatment? The only way is by faith; a faith that is able to visualize in the mind what can be. This is the only healing miracle in the New Testament where all three Gospels record it with a focus on faith. It is the greatest faith healing in all the Bible. Such faith can even steal a miracle, but that is not necessary. Jesus gladly wants to give miracles of healing with such faith. There is no telling how many miracles we might experience if we could practice this art of visualizing Jesus at work in our lives-forgiving, healing, and making real that which we have been able to imagine. Let us pray that we will be motivated to use our minds more effectively for the purpose of healing in the body.

5. DARING DEVOTION Based on Mark 14:1-9

A physics professor in California learned about the power of encouragement and it changed his and many other lives. He told of how he first began to teach back in 1960. He would begin each semester with a hard nosed word of warning. He told the class he expected 50% of them to fail. It was a tough course and many will just not study hard enough to make it. Sure enough, year after year, about 50% of his students failed. His wife got involved with a dynamic church, and soon he was going also. In time he opened his heart to Christ.

He had a new enthusiasm as a teacher after his commitment to Christ. He decided that to be Christlike called for a new approach. The next semester he started his class by saying, "I want everyone in this class to pass. It is my job to see that you do. It is difficult material, but if we work together, everyone of you can make it." The astonishing result was that for the first time in his teaching career his entire class passed without any change in his grading procedure. The difference was that he stopped his discouraging remarks, and gave them words of encouragement. "Encouragement is oxygen to the soul."

A young man in a small northern town had been in prison for five years. When he came back to the town the first person he encountered was the mayor coming out of the town library. He said in a friendly voice, "John, how are you?" just as if he had been on a trip. That encouraging reception killed his fear and anxiety, and he became a loyal citizen and leader in the church in that community. History is filled with the stories of the power of encouragement. Everybody needs encouragement. There are no exceptions. Every person who has ever lived has needed encouragement, and that includes our Lord. When He walked this earth in the flesh He also needed what all flesh needs. He needed love, support, and the encouragement of others.

So great was that need, and so rare was the recognition of it, that when Jesus received it He honored the woman who gave it as no other woman or man has ever been honored. We are fulfilling prophecy by focusing on the daring devotion of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Jesus said in verse 9 that wherever the Gospel is preached in the whole world the story of what she did for Him will be told in memory of her. We want to honor our Lord by honoring her whom He most highly honored of all His disciples. Let's look first at-

I. HER DEVOTION DISPLAYED.

The setting is the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. We know nothing about this Simon, but it is obvious that he is one who had been cured by the Great Physician. Had he still been a leper he would not be throwing a feast for Jesus. He would have been crying, "Unclean, unclean," to all who came anywhere near him. John tells us that Martha was serving at this supper, and Lazarus was at the table also. Here was a great celebration of thanksgiving. A man raised from the dead, and another made whole who had leprosy. There may have been others from Bethany who were also products of the healing miracles of Jesus. It was clearly a happy and delight-filled occasion.

Suddenly a woman came into the room and approached Jesus as He ate. She filled the room with fragrant aroma as she poured a costly ointment over His head. Mark and Matthew do not name her, for when they wrote she was still living, but John was written much later when modesty did not require silence. He tells us it was Mary the sister of Martha. He also tells us that she anointed His feet, and wiped them with her hair on the same occasion.

Here we see a setting where many good people were focusing on many good things, but only Mary was focusing on the best. Martha was bustling about in service as usual, and the 12, plus those who

were products of marvelous miracles, were doubtless having a great time, and deeply grateful for their good health and abundant provisions. But only one, Mary, focused on the needs of Jesus. She had been at His feet before absorbing His teaching and His spirit. She knew Him on a deeper level, and had a sense of what He was facing as the cross approached, as no one else did. Spurgeon said, "I think this holy woman knew more about our Lord than all His Apostles put together."

Mary loved Jesus for giving her back her brother Lazarus from the dead. She could praise Him for restoring Simon the leper, who tradition says was her uncle. But she went deeper than the rest, and did not love Him only for what He could do, but loved Him for who He was. She alone of all His followers saw Him not just as a miracles worker, and the Messiah. She saw Him as a person; a person who needed to be loved and encouraged. Jesus had the cross on His mind. He was conscious that He was heading for death. There was only one person among all His followers that gave Him any encouragement, and that was Mary, by this daring act of devotion. Why do I call it daring? Because of the second point we want to look at.

II. HER DEVOTION DESPISED.

You would think that timely tenderness and lavish love for the encouragement of Jesus in His toughest hours would be greeted with cheers instead of jeers, but the latter is what came forth from those at the banquet. Mark tells us in verse 4 that there was indignation among the guests. Matthew tells us that some of them who were angry were the disciples. The opinion of the majority seemed to be that this act of devotion by Mary was a hair-brained scheme of senseless waste.

No fire of devotion gets to burning very long before somebody

tries to throw a wet blanket on it. Nothing is more discouraging than to have those whom you love best throw rocks of criticism at your devotion. The paradox is that Mary, the most praised woman in the New Testament, is also the most criticized. Every time she did something wonderful she was blasted by good people. You expect bad people to be against your devotion to Jesus, but what a shock when you are attacked by the best of people for your devotion. If you think you can be a zealous Christian and not be criticized by other Christians, forget it.

Martha, her older sister, loved Jesus dearly, and worked herself into exhaustion for Him anytime He was around, but she was critical of Mary, and thought of her as a lazy shirker of duty when she devoted her time to sit and listen at the feet of Jesus. Because she did listen closely, she grasped truth that helped her understand what Jesus had to do. Now when she displayed her devotion to encourage Him the disciples are down on her for being wasteful.

What a strange world it is! Truly God's ways are not our ways. Here are the greatest leaders of the day condemning a woman who is about to be exalted by Jesus as the number one encourager of all time. They are trying to dig a pit for her while Jesus is forming a pedestal. If you ever want a text to prove the majority can be wrong, this is it. Everybody was against Mary, and her devotion was labeled a waste. She only got one vote, and that was the vote of Jesus. This is a clear lesson that our goal is not to please men, not even the best of men, but our goal is to please Christ. In pleasing Him you may displease many others, but that may be the price you have to pay, as Mary did. Never assume that if everybody is critical of a person, that person must be at fault. Jesus makes it clear that it is the complainers who are at fault. They all voted against her, but Jesus vetoed their decision, and we see in our third point-

III. HER DEVOTION DEFENDED.

When Jesus heard their negative response and murmuring against her, He immediately told them to let her alone and stop troubling her. They were so convinced of her folly they could not quit bugging her. In contrast to this criticism, He went on to praise her for her devotion like He never praised anyone before. Jesus was very pleased with her lavish and luxurious demonstration of love, because she was the only one who did anything in preparing Him for death. No one could take away the sting of death for Jesus. He had to feel its full force as He bore the sins of the world. No one could relieve the pain He had to suffer, but He said of Mary in verse 8, "She has done what she could." She could not do much, but she did what she could, and Jesus was encouraged.

Jesus was encouraged because what Mary did was costly. It was a sacrifice worth 300 pence. This was about a years wages for the average man of that day. It would be sheer waste, as the disciples felt, except for the fact that Jesus was about to pour out His life blood for the sins of the world. It was a once for all act never to be repeated. Never again in all of history could anybody ever show the Son of God in human flesh that He was loved and appreciated. If Mary had not done what she did when she did it, Jesus would have gone to the cross without a human demonstration of great love.

Many were grateful, and many did love Him, but only Mary sensed the need He had for encouragement. She did what she could, and this pleased Jesus. George T. Coster wrote,

**It was her best, and yet how poor.
That cruse of spikenard sweet and rare!
She entered in at Simon's door
With trembling, though familiar there.**

**What could she give to Him whose call
Had brought her brother back from death?
It was her best, yet poor and small
For Him, the Lord of pulse and breath!**

**He took the fragrant gift; a wreath
Of Praise He twined about her name.
It lit for Him the cave of death
Against my burial she came.**

It meant so much to Jesus to have this act of love and devotion come before his death. It meant so much to Him that He guaranteed that it would never be forgotten. It is recorded in 3 of the 4 Gospels, and Jesus by His Spirit will make sure this story is told wherever the Gospel is told. Many showed devotion to Jesus after his death. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea came out of hiding to anoint the body of Jesus after he was dead. Millions down through history have sacrificed to give to Jesus, and to express their devotion. All of the Apostles laid down their lives for Jesus, but only Mary sacrificed and displayed her devotion while Jesus was alive and needing that encouragement. The result is that she is the most exalted and honorable of the New Testament.

What is the lesson for us? We cannot do what Mary did for Jesus. That was a unique once in an eternity experience that can never be repeated. However, it does make clear a principle of life that is often neglected, and that can be of benefit to all of us if we practice it. The principle is-display devotion now to the living rather than wait until after they die. All through history great men and women have been despised while they lived, and then honored after they were dead.

**Seven Grecian cities vied for Homer dead,
Through which the living Homer begged for bread.**

Mary, by her display of devotion to Jesus, and Jesus, by His honoring of her for it, make it clear that Christians are to be different. We are to recognize that all men need encouragement now, be they great or small. It is folly to wait until death to show your appreciation. Give people your love while they live. Christians have all eternity to show love to those in Christ. Mary and all the disciples had forever to show the resurrected Christ their love and devotion, but this act of devotion before His death is the one He most prized.

Let us not be foolish, but wise. Let us show love while we live in the flesh. In eternity the flowers we get before we die will be more precious memories than the flowers we get at our funeral. "Oh the waste of it!" said the disciples, and Jesus said by His action, "The real waste is love that is not expressed." The perfume kept locked safely in the flask is the terrible waste. Carlyle, the great author, worked constantly and neglected to express his devotion to his wife. After her funeral he wrote, "Oh, if I could but see her once more, were it but for five minutes, to let her know that I always loved her through it all. She never did know it-never!" He kept his alabaster box of love unbroken and discovered too late that it was a foolish waste.

Jesus wanted Mary's story spread world wide that Christians everywhere might learn that love expressed in life is never wasted. The only waste is to store it up until it is too late. What are you doing with your love? Is the perfume of your affection all tightly sealed and safe, or are you letting the living enjoy its fragrance now? Let us not only dare to be a Daniel, and dare to stand alone when that is called for, but let us dare to be a Mary and dare to stand out as extravagant lovers who are willing to pay plenty to be an encourager.

No Christian is living on the highest level unless other Christians are saying of them that they are encouragers. A Christian who

discourages other Christians is being duped by the devil to be a traitor to the body. The facts of history reveal that Christians discouraging other Christians has done far more harm to the cause of Christ than all the persecutions of the unbelieving world. Spurgeon was probably the greatest Baptist preacher in history, but he was the object of great criticism by other pastors, and petty people in his parish. He was strong, but he finally began to slump under the attacks. He went through terrible times of depression, and one wonders if he could have made it without the encouragement of his wife.

She would put Scripture above his bed such as, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great." Her constant encouragement and love enabled him to come through the pits.

Martin Luther had his pits as well, and who could blame him? He had plenty of people who hated him and his stand for the truth that shook up the whole church of his day. He was a rebel, and rebels do not escape criticism. When he married Katherine von Bora, he was criticized terribly, but she was the best thing that ever happened to him. She saved this man from more problems, sickness, and discouragement than we can ever know. But what we know is that Luther so needed and treasured her encouragement that he was afraid he was almost idolatrous of his wife, and he said, "I give more credit to Katherine than to Christ, who has done so much for me."

Most of the great men of history, like these two, are saying what Jesus said about the special women in their lives: "What she has done should be told wherever my work is proclaimed, for without that encouragement I might not have done any mighty work." You can aim no higher in life than to aim to be an encourager. This is not a

complex or rare gift. It is a gift open to anyone.

I read of some boys having fun on the banks of a river in Canada. Logs that floated down from the hills to the lumber mills would sometimes get stranded on rocks or in the backwater when the spring floods would subside. The boys were rolling the stranded logs down the rocky slopes and watching them plunge into the water and sail down stream in the foam of the current. They would laugh and shout with joy as the imprisoned log was released and plunged into action. Such is the joy of the encourager. People everywhere about us get stranded on the dry rocks of loneliness, or get imprisoned in the backwater of depression. Often all it takes to set them free to get back into the stream of things is an act of thoughtful love. We cannot match Mary, but we can come close, for Jesus said, "As you have done it unto the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me." Let's be liberal in love and daring in devotion.

6. DARING DEVOTION PART II Based on Mark 14:1-9

Leonidas, king of Sparta in 480 B.C. held a horde of 200,000 Persians at Thermopylae pass with 10,000 valiant soldiers. A trader led the Persians by a secret passage to their rear, and Leonidas saw that he was trapped. Most of his men were set free to flee the trap while he and 300 fought until they were all dead. A memorial on that spot reads, "Stranger, tell the Spartans that we lie here in obedience to their laws." Devotion to the laws of Sparta led them to die for her cause. Memorials for such daring devotion are almost always for men, for men have done most of the daring acts of devotion

though history. That is, if we limit our vision to wars in which men dominate. But if we move into other realms beside the battlefield, and look at the sacrificial devotion that was needed to build a worthwhile world to live in when the wars were over, we discover that women play a dominant role.

Jesus exalted the gentle virtues of women rather than the rough virtues of the mighty men of battle. This is a major difference of the New Testament from the Old Testament. Nowhere does Jesus encourage men to remember the victories of war and combat. But He does make sure that a woman's gentle and tender act of love becomes a memorial for all time. Her memorial was not because she obeyed the law, or because she won a battle, or laid down her life. Her memorial is due to the simple fact that she expressed her love in an act of sacrificial devotion.

We must face up to the fact that Jesus did not do for any man what He did for Mary of Bethany. This means that Mary did something here that no man ever did, and so we are compelled to recognize that no man can be fully Christ like who does not recognize, as Jesus did, that the female perspective on life can be superior to that of the male perspective. This incident and the response of the men, and the conclusion of Christ forces us to recognize that the female is often sensitive to things of which the male is blind. There are radical differences in the mentality of the sexes, and we are wise to evaluate these differences, and like Jesus do all we can to combine them, and get the best of both. Jesus was the

best of both. As a perfect man He combined the best of both the male and female virtues.

The whole context of this story reveals the contrast of the male and female perspective. It is, in a sense, the conflict of mind verses heart, but this is too simple a statement of the facts. Reality is more complicated than that. It is true that the men are evaluating the price and reasoning as to how the money could have been put to better use in feeding the poor. They are being more intellectual, and are critical of her being sentimental. It is false to say they had no heart, however, for they desired that the poor benefit. It is also false to say Mary was not using her mind. The fact is, she had a deeper mental grasp of the situation than did the men. Spurgeon said, "My own belief is that when she sat at Jesus' feet, she learned much more than any of the disciples had ever gathered from His public preaching."

Mary loved Jesus, not just with her heart, but with her mind also, for she had insight into His death that was superior to that of the men. None of them could even tolerate His saying that He was going to die, but she came and anointed Him for dying. It is an oversimplification to say the male-female contrast is the mind verses the heart, for both function in both sexes. However, since love is the superior virtue, and love seems to be easier for the female to express, this is what gives women the edge in the realm of the spirit.

The great preacher Horace Bushnell said, "Ah! It takes a woman disciple, after all, to do any most beautiful, in certain

respects too, as far as love is wisdom, any wisest thing." Any woman who feels inferior has not gotten her feelings from Jesus. He said the female perspective on love is superior to that of the male. The male, however, can have it too, for he can learn it from the female. Jesus expected just that, and that is why this story is to be a vital part of the message carried into all the world with the Gospel. Every Christian, male or female, will be less than their best who miss the message of this great act of love. Women need to learn as well as men, for no one is like Mary without some training. She is the only woman in the Bible that Jesus said would be preached about all over the world for all time.

One of the lessons that is vital for us to learn is the contrast between duty and love. The men tend to see obligation involved. They feel it was Mary's duty to sell the ointment and give it to the poor. Duty tends to be legalistic, and though it does a great deal of good, it is often without joy. When you serve out of a sense of duty you do what you must and no more. Mary acted, not out of any obligation or duty, but out of the spontaneous joy of love. She was extravagant, for love is a spendthrift. She was original, for love does not follow a rut like duty, but seeks for new and unique ways of expressing itself. The Christian who falls into the rut of duty tends to follow routine, and this can make him or her a stable person to have around, yet they are missing the spontaneity and creativity of love. The loving Christian who serves Christ looks for new ways to be loving. He or she surprises him with some new approach to serving. The duty bound Christian will go in circles like Martha, but the love

oriented will be seeking for creative ways to please her Lord.

The most creative thing the love motivated Christian is, is a self-starter. Millions of Christians can be moved to give, serve, witness, read the Word, and numerous other things God wants in their lives if there is some kind of a campaign to stir them up to do it. These are the masses of duty oriented Christians. The church would be sunk without them, for they are the majority. They are not the Christians most loved, however, for this place is held by Mary type Christians. Nobody told Mary it would be wise for her to give up her precious perfume for Jesus. She did not just come from a revival meeting. She was not on some spiritual high that had been generated by mass psychology or moving music. On the contrary, she was all alone, and everybody she knew was against her act of devotion. Her family and her best friends in the world said she was foolish.

Mary was a self starter. She did not fall into anyone's rut. Let Martha yell her lungs out, she was not going to miss a chance to sit at the feet of Jesus just so a passing need could be ready a half hour earlier. Mary was one who made her own choices about how she would relate to Jesus, and how she would show her love. Spontaneous love freely expressed is the highest pleasure that Jesus can receive from anyone. To love Him as Mary did is the ideal. Spurgeon saw Mary as the great example, and he said to his congregation, "I am not going to stir you up, my fellow Christians, to do anything for Christ, for I fear to spoil the freeness of your love's life. I do not want to be pleading with you to enter into His service

more fully, for the work of pressed men is never so much prized as that of happy volunteers.

Mary was one of those happy volunteers. It is no wonder that Jesus loved her, and was so deeply grateful for her love. Such love is rare even among believers, and Jesus wanted to make sure that every believer got a chance to see this ideal, and so He guaranteed it would be told everywhere. The poet wrote,

**She brought her box of alabaster,
The precious spikenard filled the room.
With honor worthy of the Master,
A costly, rare, and rich perfume.**

No bottle of perfume ever lasted so long, and touched so many lives with its fragrance as did this broken bottle of Mary's. Had she preserved it or sold it for the poor its influence would have faded soon, but because she poured it on Jesus it's influence will never end.

Nothing else that ever happened to Jesus impressed Him quite like this act of devotion by Mary. Jesus did so many marvelous things for others, but very seldom did anyone ever show Him their love in a special way. Mary made Jesus feel loved more than any other person as far as we have any record. John 11:5 tells us that Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, but there is no doubt that Jesus had a unique love for Mary, just as among men He had a unique love for John. Is it possible that John and Mary are the two most

**popular names because
they were the most loved by Jesus?**

I have wondered many times if Jesus ever fell in love. It is hard for us to think that He did, for when we think of love we link it to sex. But I got to examining life, and I have come to the conclusion that love and sex do not always have to be combined. Jesus could have an experience of love that is not out of keeping with His perfect and sinless nature. I remember when I first met Lavonne, and I know from experience that love and sex are two different worlds. They come together in time to make one world, but they can be totally distinct. I can remember the feelings of tenderness and warmth that comes with being with someone you enjoy. Out of this positive and pleasant experience of each others presence comes love, and later comes the sexual expression of love.

I can easily believe that Jesus entered into these initial stages of love in His relation to Mary. It happened late in His life because in God's plan He did not come to make any one woman His bride. The whole church of the redeemed was to be His bride. But I am convinced that Jesus did enter into the precious experience of love. He experienced the joy of being understood by a woman who cared for Him deeply. It is hard to believe that as a perfect man He would not fall in love with such a devoted disciple as Mary. It is a logical conclusion to come to when we see that in the Song of Solomon Jesus is symbolized by the male lover in that great love story. It is inconsistent with God's revelation to assume

Jesus never knew the experience of love. He wanted her story told for all of history because it was one of His most unique experiences.

One of the powerful lessons we learn from this is how to test our love. If your first impulse in a relationship to the opposite sex is sexual, you do not have a good foundation for marriage. True love will begin on a level of admiration, and build to commitment and loyalty before it gets to physical intimacy. It is the first stages of love that are the lasting basis for love. I am convinced Jesus experienced these basic beginning stages, and that is why He honored Mary as no other person. She could give Him no greater sacrifice, and He could give her no greater honor. We see here a clear demonstration of mutual love in its noblest and purest form.

Jesus wanted Mary's love for Him to go everywhere that the story of His love went. In so doing Jesus links together forever divine and human love. Any form of Christianity that tries to separate them is divorced from Scripture. The divine and human are married in this story, and what God has joined together let not man put asunder. Jesus wants our love just as we want His, for there is a mutual need. Mary is the great example of one who met that need. Mary loved Jesus more than the disciples, for none of them could see His need as she did. They never did until it was too late. D. L. Moody said, "Mary knew His mind, she had deeper fellowship with Him; her heart clung to Him." Because it was so, she built a memorial that has outlasted empires, and goes on daily all over the world challenging men and women

to daring devotion.

7. WOMEN IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Dr. Luke is the only Gospel writer who tells the stories of Mary and Elizabeth who was the mother of John The Baptist. He alone tells of Anna the prophetess. At the end of Christ's life He alone tells of His words to the daughters of Jerusalem who lamented as He was led to the cross. He tells more of the story of the women's role at the empty tomb. In Acts He gives women a major place; more so than many of the twelve Apostles. Mary at Pentecost and then Saphira, Priscilla, Drewsilla, Bernice, Tabitha, Mary the mother of John Mark, Rhoda, Lydia, The Slave Girl, Damaris of Athens, the four daughters of Phillip, and Paul's sister as an incidental reference in Acts 23:16.

Dr. Luke might well be called the Father Of Women's Equality. His Gospel is an example of a marvelous balance of men and women. It was so different from other Jewish writings that were dominated by men. In his Gospel God deals directly with women and not just through their fathers or husbands as we see in 1:25 with Elizabeth. If we survey the book we see this emphasis on women.

1 & 2 Largely about Elizabeth and Mary, but with a balance of Zechariah, Joseph, and the shepherds.

2:36-38 Anna the prophetess balances the story of Simeon.

4:25-26 The widow balances out the male leper story in verse 27.

4:38-39 Peter's mother in law is healed balancing the healing of the man.

7:11-17 Story of the widow of Nain right after the story of the Centurion.

7:36-50 The sinful woman balancing the story of the Pharisees.

8:1-3 Women balancing out the 12 disciples.

8:43-48 Healing of woman right after healing of demoniac.

8:40-56 Healing of daughter showing female child of equal value.

10:38-42 Women learned and became disciples as well as men.

13:10-17 Healing of woman in synagogue where they were to be silent.

15:8-10 A woman's loss to balance out the shepherds loss.

17:32 Lot's wife.

17:34-35 Female image balancing male image.

18:1-8 Widows need.

21:1-4 Widow honored.

22:54-57 A woman brings shame on Peter.

23:27-31 Women at the cross in a positive role.

23:55-56 Women at the tomb balancing the role of Nicodemus and Joseph.

24:1-12 Women play a major role in resurrection story.

Luke begins and ends his Gospel with women in a major role with a generous sprinkling of female involvement along the way. The Speaker's Bible says, "St. Luke's Gospel has been called the Gospel of womanhood. The word "woman" occurs in Mark and Matthew 49 times, and in Luke alone 43 times, almost as many times as in the two others put together."

E.M. Blaiklock writes, "Macedonian inscriptions bare witness to the respected and responsible position of women in the Northern Greek communities," and suggestions that the exaltation of womanhood in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts fits well with the tradition that Luke was a Macedonian." Here is another way of seeing the balance of men and women in Dr. Luke.

**Zachariah 1:5-22,26-38 Mary
Simeon 2:25-38
Naaman 4:25-27 Widow
Demoniac 4:31-39 Peter's mother in law
Centurian 7:1-17 Widow of Nain's son
Pharisees 7:36-50 Public sinner
Twelve 8:1-3 Women followers
Demoniac 8:26-56 Woman with hemorrhage and
daughter of Jairus
Samaritan 10:29-42 Mary and Martha
Men 11:31-32 Queen of South
Dropsey 13:10-17 Crippled woman - 14:1-6
Mustard 13:18-21 Woman with yeast
Shepherd 15:4-10 Woman with ten coins**

**Sleeping 17:34-35 Women grinding
Pharisees 18:1-14 Widow
Scribes 20:45-21:4 Widow's mite
Joseph 23:50-56 Women from Galilee
Disciples 24:1-35 Women at tomb**

In the book *All We Were Meant To Be*, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty wrote, "In speaking of liberation for the Christian woman, we are not thinking of an organization or movement, but rather a state of mind in which a woman comes to view herself as Jesus Christ sees her—as a person created in God's image whom he wants to make free and whole, to grow, to learn, to utilize fully the talents and gifts God has given her as a unique individual."

Let's look at the passages where women stand out.

2:36-38

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity,

37 and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

38 And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Dr. Luke no doubt had a practice that brought many widows to him, for we see a special interest in his Gospel toward widows. Matthew uses the word widow only one time; Mark uses it three times and John only once. Luke, however, has 12 references to widows, and this even surpasses Paul who refers to them 7 times in I Tim. 5, as he gives instructions about them. James had one reference also. Luke has more to say about widows than all the rest of the New Testament put together. It is of interest that in all 12 references of Luke the widow is always pictured in a positive light. Luke, of course, always puts women in a positive light.

Jesus pointed out how widows were taken advantage of in his day, as has always been the case, and he blasted the Pharisees for devouring widows houses. He used the widow as an example of great faith. A widow by persistence made an unjust lawyer take her case, and a widow's mite put the Pharisee's gifts to shame. Luke tells us in Acts that it was the needs of widows that led to the appointment of deacons in the church. Widow's have played a major role in the church from the beginning.

It is good to keep in mind that widows are not a unique type of person in a category by themselves. They are every kind of personality, and their needs vary greatly. That is why we see Paul giving instructions about the differences in I Tim. 5. Do not stereotype widows. Some need to remarry; others need to remain single and serve the Lord in special ways. God does not expect all to follow the same pattern.

Anna became a widow only 7 years after her marriage, and she lived a long life of service without ever remarrying.

There are about 8 million widows in the United States, and only 2 million widowers. This shows clearly that the basis for so many widows is that men die younger. It is of interest to note that just as meeting the needs of widows was the first social problem of the early church, so the first national public program of subsidy in this country was the Widows Pension Act of 1914. In the Old Testament they also had a social security system as we see in Deut. 14:28-29.

The name Anna means grace or gracious. She was a prophetess. This means she was a spokes person for God. The female had a role in Israel's religion, for God could and did speak through women as well as men. Matthew Henry writes, "The spirit of prophecy now began to revive, which has ceased in Israel above 300 years." We see in Acts 2:17 the equality of the sexes as channels of prophecy. Anna was one of the last of the old, and first of the new. As a prophetess she would pass on to others the truth of God. It is likely she did so just with devout women. In the Old Testament, however, we have the example of Huldah who spoke to men. II Chron. 34:22f and II Kings 22.

Anna was very old. Old age is magnified by Dr. Luke. He rejoices in old people, for long life was his aim in the medical

profession. They were a neglected group, but not by Luke, and not by God. The old were the first to know. The first two people not directly connected with the birth to recognize the reality of the incarnation were old people. God honored the faithful aged who looked for his promised king. These old lay people were not pictured as retired saints, but as faithful servants to the end. Wesley wrote, "Let the example of those aged saints animate those whose hoary heads, like theirs, are 'a crown of glory,' being found in the way of righteousness." These old saints were not weary in well doing.

Anna had labored long in the field, but could not be persuaded to retire until her labor bore fruit. Faithful to the end, and God rewarded her with this experience of seeing the Christ child. There is no retirement from serving God. Here was a godly woman who had great sorrow. She lost her husband after a very short time together. She had a long life of loneliness, but she was not bitter, but ever faithful in her prayers. Suffering either makes us harder or softer, bitter or better. She was old and alone, and yet sympathetic, hopeful, and faithful.

She never missed, but was ever loyal, and every day she was in the temple fasting and praying. Had she missed this one day, this event would have been missed, and she would never had been heard of, but she was there. She was an old faithful among the people of God. New people are often a greater blessing and more exciting than those who are just always there. You don't have to worry about them or

wonder where they are. They are just there. They are often taken for granted, but they are a real blessing in any organization.

The reason she was privileged to see the Messiah was because of her faithfulness and eager anticipation. Aged Anna is one of the unique people in the Biblical record. She apparently never left the temple, and so she stayed in one of the dozens of outbuildings scattered about the various courts. She would have to live off of the alms given to her. It doesn't sound like much of a life, but she plugged away day after day with the hope that the Messiah would come in her life. Talk about a nobody, and yet, she was selected to be named in the Word of God. Luke could have skipped this little detail, and left her in oblivion, but he did not, and this nobody became a somebody in the life of Christ.

Calvin in referring to Anna and Simeon wrote, "These two persons are entitled to greater reference than an immense multitude of those whose pride is swelled by nothing but empty titles." Calvin also says of her being there night and day, "It deserves our attention, that the same rule is not enjoined on all, and that all ought not to be led indiscriminately to copy these performances, which are here commended in a widow.....Silly ambition has filled the world with apes, from superstitious persons copying, with more zeal than knowledge, everything that they hear praised in the saints." Calvin is simply saying, most are not called to a life like that of Anna. She was unique and that is why she is being honored by God in this unique way.

In verse 38 we see Anna giving thanks, and so she is the first person on record who thanked God for the gift of His Son. Christmas to us was thanksgiving to her. How could she know what was going on without a special revelation? So we see here a balance with Zechariah who also received special revelation on John the Baptist. Anna's song would have been, mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. She was old, but she was not looking back to the good old days, but forward to the coming better days. The best was yet to be, and she bore witness to God's best coming in the Christ child. Here was one of the first preachers of the good news. A woman was used by God to be one of His first communicators of the Gospel.

Anna spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. It would be wonderful to know just how much she knew about the child, but the fact that she knew enough to tell others means she was one of the most informed people on the planet. God was using a woman first to tell the good news of Jesus. Adam Clark writes, "As Daniel's 70 weeks were known now to be completed, the more pious Jews were in constant expectation of the promised Messiah." John Wesley wrote, "The sceptre now appeared to be departing from Judah, though it was not actually gone; Daniel's weeks were plainly near their period..."

Anna, like Simeon, was a waiter and a witness to other waiters on God. If people were not looking, there was no point in telling them. Those who looked for and waited for

salvation are a select group of people. Noah and his family were an example of those expecting God to do something in the world when everybody else went about their business as usual. Those who expect God to act, and look for it, experience more than those who do not. Waiting is not the same as being idle. It means to be faithful in God's service knowing His promise will be fulfilled, and thus, you are ready when it is. Anna was a Widow, a Worshiper, and a Witness. We see clearly that there is room in the kingdom of Christ, as there was in the kingdom of Israel, for the service of a woman. Women are able to render equal service to Christ, for the gifts of the Spirit are not divided into male and female gifts.

Anna was the pioneer of women preachers. Many no doubt would merely humor the old gal knowing she was not long for this world. "Sure you saw the Messiah. You see all the 8 day old babies coming to be circumcised. I'm sure you could tell which of these little 8 day old tykes was the Messiah." After departing they would have a good laugh at her strange conviction. What is strange is that old people, foreign people, like the wise men, and the lowly shepherds were the people in on this great event. The so called wise and religious leaders did not have a clue.

8. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 2

Not all texts will be commented on because of complete sermons elsewhere, but all text with women will be listed.

Luke 4:25-26

25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land;

26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

Luke 4:38-39

38 And he arose and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they besought him for her.

39 And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her; and immediately she rose and served them.

In Mark 1:31 it says that Jesus took her by the hand and helped her up. These were the hands that created the world and they had power to lift and heal. It was the touch of the Master's hands that made her well again.

Luke 7:11-17

11 Soon afterward he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

12 As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her.

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

14 And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

15 And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.

16 Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

17 And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Luke only records two of the three raising from the dead. Matthew and Mark tell only of the daughter of Jairus and John tells only of Lazarus. In each of the two that Luke records the male and female roles are balanced. Here it is the mother and son, and with Lazarus there is the balance of his sisters. Augustine wrote, "Of the numerous persons raised to life by Christ, three only are mentioned as specimens in the Gospels." It is of interest that all three of those mentioned are fairly young people, and were single. In the Old Testament when Elisha raised the widows son, and then when Paul raised up Eutychus who fell out the window, we see again that they are young and single. We do have Dorcus raised by Peter but most were young. This does make sense in that there is little reason to raise an old person, for what

caused their death would soon cause it again, whereas a younger person could conquer the problem and live long. For all practical purposes there is no wisdom to pray for the resurrection of an old person. Jesus had greater compassion on those who lost youth, for to die young is always a tragedy in the Bible.

NAIN. This is a small city in Southern Galilee. Most who lived here were poor and of the underprivileged class. Jesus spent most of His time in Galilee. The Saducees said, out of Galilee arises no prophet. God would not chose a leader from such people they thought. But Jesus chose most of His disciples from Galilee. Jesus chose to go where the need was greatest.

There was a great crowd in the funeral procession, and so there were many eye witnesses to this miracle. This is the first raising of the dead that Jesus did. A procession of death met the procession of the Lord of life, and life conquered and turned a funeral into a party of rejoicing. Note the timing: The burial would have been over had Jesus come a little later, and it would not have been there yet had He been a little earlier. We see the providence of God goes hand in hand with a miracle. It was no miracle that they met at the right time, but it was essential for the miracle to become a reality. Sometimes Jesus planned bad timing for a purpose, as when He came late after Lazarus died.

We see multiple miseries here. Not only did her son die, it was her only son, and she had no husband, and was now left

all alone. It was a sad situation, and few people could see it and lack compassion. The Bible knows of no greater loss than the loss of the first born or of an only child. It leaves one childless which was a great burden to the Jews.

This was not like other miracles that were asked for. It grew out of spontaneous compassion for a sorrowing mother. It was not an answer to prayer. God gives much more than what is asked for. Everyday we receive blessings that are not asked for. God's grace goes beyond prayer. He does not act only when we plead with Him to act. Millions are healed who never ask for it. Even unbelievers have marvelous blessings by the grace of God, and they neither ask nor give thanks. Here is total grace that is freely given just because God is love. Jesus did not do this to prove anything, and that is probably why John did not select it as one of the great signs. Here is a miracle that grows out of the tender humanity of Christ.

Compassion is sympathy. The Saxon word is fellow-feeling. He suffered with her in that He felt her sorrow. The sole motive here is the pure impulse of His compassion. Jesus had never been cut off from love, but He could deeply sympathize with the loss of such a value as this mother had just experienced. She was apparently weeping as she walked, for He said do not weep, and He could say this because He was going to do something to stop her tears. He who will one day wipe away all tears began that ministry even on earth. Jesus was moved by tears. We see it at the tomb of Lazarus where He wept, and we see it here. He did

not say to her great is your faith, for He did not ask for any faith. This was an act of pure grace where nothing was required of the woman.

To be truly Christlike we must sometimes just act in compassion, and not ask whether people deserve it or not. Jesus did not ask if the son died from something stupid he did, or from some sin and suffering he had brought on himself. He just saw a need and did something about it. Sometimes we just need to fight suffering and gain a victory over it regardless of the circumstances. Compassion is to motivate us to do what we can to conquer suffering. There are two other reactions we can have to suffering. Complacency says there's nothing I can do. Condemnation says they probably deserve what they are getting. But compassion says, how can I help.

You may not agree with the ministry of Oral Roberts, but he says something that is quite relevant here. He writes, "I know when the gift of healing moves in me and I know when it doesn't. Here's what happens: I get a feeling of compassion, as opposed to a feeling of sympathy. When I get sympathetic I want to kind of stroke the person and say, "Now, now, it's going to be all right; God bless you." I have found the moment I get sympathetic I am dead as far as the ministry of healing is concerned. Compassion, on the other hand, is an irresistible urge to rid the person of torment. I mean, you feel it down deep and you can scarcely restrain yourself. You have to pray, touch, say a word, or do something. In that moment of compassion people can

misunderstand the look on your face in the same way that you can misunderstand a great doctor. Most of the great doctors I've ever dealt with are rather impersonal. There explanation is: "We've studied to be impersonal because the moment we have too much closeness, we get into the area of sympathy, and sympathy destroys the effectiveness of our relationship with the patient. In a sense, when compassion comes on you, your face, your eyes can change so that a person may wonder if you're angry. You're not mad at the person, but you're grappling with the enemy as you come against the power that destroys."

Death here is not seen as God's friend taking the son to be with him, but rather as an evil force that separates loved ones. Jesus reversed death, which He would not do if God had appointed it, and it was for the best. No detailed reading of the Bible can lead to any other conclusion but that death is an enemy, and our great joy is that Jesus is superior to it. Jesus is touched by the sad situations of life, and any theology that makes God responsible for these sad situations is contrary to the revelation we have of Christ. The highest revelation of God is in Christ, and so whatever does not fit the picture of Christ is not true.

A visitor to the island of Raiotea in the South seas tells of seeing 600 children gather to worship Jesus. Had the Gospel not come there these children would have been offered in sacrifice to pagan gods. An old gray haired chief said, "Oh that I had known the Gospel was coming. My children would be here among this happy group. But I destroyed

them." Jesus and His Word have saved many from a foolish death. Prevention rather than cure is the primary way Jesus works in history. Jesus makes it clear that suffering and death are of the kingdom of darkness, and are enemies of the kingdom of light. God forbid Israel to offer babies in sacrifice, but many did anyway, and all of these deaths were contrary to His will.

One of the greatest lacks in the Christian world is the lack of compassion. The world is filled with unbelievable need, but there can be no adequate response unless we are moved by compassion to meet those needs. C. Leslie Miller writes, "At a Sunday School convention a pastor told me of his wayward teenage son. "He has broken almost every law of God and man. He is killing his mother with sorrow and is breaking my heart. I've tried everything. What can I do?"

Pressed for attention by other people, I abruptly asked, "Have you ever tried a tender tear?" He went away in anger at my strange suggestion. A year later we met at another convention. He greeted me with, "It worked! It worked! When I got home that night my boy was asleep. As I stood by his bed my heart was flooded with a new and tender compassion. I found myself on my knees clasping my boy to my heart and bathing his face with tender tears. Almost before I knew what was happening he was on his knees beside me weeping, and both of us wept our way back to God. Tom's a new boy. Our home is radiant with happiness." Paul reminded the Ephesians, "By the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone of you night and

day with tears." Acts 20:31.

We see here that Jesus did not worry about the ceremonial defilement of touching the dead. Others would have avoided the pollution, but Jesus did not avoid a head on encounter with death, because He could do something about it. The body was wrapped in folds of linen, and often with the face open. We must recognize that we cannot be like Christ in all ways, for it would be sheer folly for us to stop a funeral with any hope of making a difference. Jesus told the young man to get up. A dead person cannot respond, but Jesus asked him to. What we see here is that when God gives a command, He gives the power to respond to that command. It is impossible for the dead to respond on their own, but God can give such power. He gives the power of all who are dead in sin to respond to the Gospel, and be resurrected to new life. Any one who hears the Gospel is given the power to respond to it, even though they are spiritually dead.

Jesus did not go through incantations and some long ceremony. He merely spoke the word just as He did when He said, "Lazarus come forth." His power and authority is direct, and none can resist. One day He will command all who are in the graves to arise, and they will at His word. He had power over death even before His own death, but He had not conquered it completely until He entered it Himself and overcame this final foe. George Macdonald spoke of this mother, "O mother! mother, wast thou more favoured than other mothers? Or was it that, for the sake of all mothers as well as thyself, thou wast made the type of the universal

mother with the dead son-the raising of him but a foretaste of the one universal bliss of mothers with dead sons?"

It is of interest to note that Jesus did not ask him to come and follow Him as He did to many, for the point of raising him was to restore him to his widow mother who needed him. Jesus did this, not for the sake of getting a new disciple, but for the sake of the mother. One day He will give back all children that death has taken from mothers. Jesus hates what death does in robbing us of loved ones, and He will restore all relationships in heaven. Jesus recognized that the hard part of death is not the dying, but the separation from loved ones left behind. The sting of death is for the living, and that is why he gave her back her son.

Most people die between birth and age 1. If you get past that your next rough spot is age 77. About 60 million people die every year, or about 2 every second. Death is a relevant subject to everyone, and so the one who can save us from it is relevant to everyone. Jesus is the Relevant Redeemer. The people were filled with awe, and so would any crowd be today who were at a funeral and saw the dead rise up and kiss his mom, and walk home with her.

Lewis Paul Lehman has outlined this story:

- I. DIVINE APPOINTMENT-met her at Nain.**
- II. DIVINE ASSURANCE-weep not.**
- III. DIVINE ACHIEVEMENT-gave him back to mother.**

9. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 3

LUKE 7:36-50

36 One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table.

37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,

38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?"

41 "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

42 When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no

water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Spurgeon points out how delicately Dr. Luke handles the story of this woman. "The evangelist-" the beloved physician, "Luke-does not lay bare the minute particulars of this woman's life's sins, but delights to dwell rather upon the story of her penitence and its fair fruits, and so makes her to shine resplendently as a wonder of redeeming grace." He shows us the three stages in the journey from darkness to light: Penitence, Pardon, and Peace.

When John Dillenger was riddled with bullets in front of a Chicago theatre, the paper had a most unusual picture-only the feet of the dead gangster was shown. The caption under the picture was-"These are the feet of John Dillenger-who knows where these feet might have gone if someone had guided them aright?" Our passage could be portrayed with

a picture of the feet of Jesus saying, "Who knows where they will go who follow these feet aright?"

This is the story of a good man who was no good, and a bad woman who was so good. It is of interest to note that most of the great female sinners were guilty of sins of the flesh. You have the woman taken in adultery; the woman at the well living with a man who was not her husband, and here the prostitute. The male sinners, on the other hand, that Jesus confronted were guilty of sins of the spirit. You have the sins of intolerance, prejudice, the rich young rulers greed, and the pride of the Pharisees. In those days the men were in control and so women could only go astray in the area of the flesh. Men had a monopoly on the rest of worldliness. Today women can be guilty of all the same sins of the spirit. So with the advantages of equality come the greater risks of condemnation. Women have always been equal in being saints, but now they can be equal in being sinners.

Do not judge the content by the cover. The Pharisee judged both the woman and Christ by circumstantial evidence. He could not see the heart of either. He judged that Jesus was ignorant because of His acceptance of her, when in fact, it was His compassion that made Him accept her, and not His ignorance of who she was. The Pharisee just slapped a label on her and did not consider that people can change and no longer be what they have been. He had pride without pity, and so he treated the sinner as the sin, making

him cold as polar ice. The surest sign that one's religion is not truly godly is a lack of tenderness toward the sinner. If you are more concerned about judgment than about salvation, you do not have the spirit of Christ.

Jesus did not condemn Simon but gave him the rope he needed to hang himself. Parables and illustrations take people from the unknown to the known so that people can see the truth that applies to others also applies to them. Better than arguing with someone is the method of Jesus which helps another to see where they are wrong.

HER TEARS

If there is any truly holy water in the world, it is the tears of the grateful penitent. Jesus would not be sitting at a table, but would be down on the floor with His feet out behind and His sandals removed. She intended to bathe His feet with ointment but her emotions made her use tears instead. She had not planned on this and so she had no towel, and that is why she had to use her hair. It was not a mere trickle of tears, but a torrent of tears. Deep emotion ought to characterize those who confront the Savior after repenting of a sinful life. Weeping implies she was deeply repentant, and one who had been cleansed, and who longed to express her love for the One who changed her life. To wipe His feet with her hair gives the impression of a wild head of hair. Here we see the depth of humility and love. She cared not for herself, but only for His comfort. The kissing was not customary hospitality, but an unusual expression of gratitude. This

clearly indicates she already has been delivered from sin, and was a new woman.

**She knelt and wept and with her untressed hair
She wiped the feet she was so blessed to touch.
And He wiped off the soiling of despair
From her sweet soul, because she loved so much.**

There is not the least resistance or resentment on the part of Jesus. Most men in that situation would try to impress the host and push her away, or at least protest. It is of interest to note that only this sinful woman and Judas are recorded as putting their lips upon the Master. It was a scandalous act as far as the Pharisee was concerned. He doubted that Jesus could be of God if He could tolerate such familiarity with one like her. It is likely most of us would tend to feel just like the Pharisee. A repentant prostitute would not receive a very warm welcome in most churches. The Pharisee thought that one is more godlike the further distance he keeps between himself and the sinner. If this was true, of course, there never would have been the incarnation. Had this woman come near His feet she would have gotten a kick in the teeth for her trouble.

Spurgeon said, "These are blessed words: "At His feet." That is where we also would stand and weep. That is where we would sit and learn. That is where we would wait and serve. That is where we hope to live and reign forever-at His feet."

Clarence Macartney writes, "There has been a vast amount of talking and writing about Jesus Christ....and yet a single tear of a penitent, a forgiven sinner like this woman, will tell you more about Christ and His person and His kingdom and His power and His redeeming love than all those others put together."

Some have asked the question, how did the Pharisee know she was a sinner? Edersheim, the great scholar, suspects that he knew her professionally. However he knew, he concluded that a truly holy man will have no dealings with unholy people. This was not the spirit of Christ at all. He had a great love and compassion for sinners. Being called a sinner does not imply there were some women in the city who were not sinners. This woman was a professional sinner, for she made her livelihood by sin. She was not a respectable person in that society. Even Jesus says in verse 47 that her sins were many. Jesus knew just how bad she was.

Spurgeon makes a point of this fact and writes, "Our Lord allowed her to wash His feet with her tears, but He knew well what those eyes had looked upon. When He allowed those lips to kiss His feet He knew right well what language those lips had used in years gone by; and when He suffered her to show her love to Him He knew how foul her heart had aforetime been with every unhallowed desire.....Yet, glory be to divine grace, she was not cast out when she came to Jesus, but she obtained mercy, and is now shining in heaven as a bright and special star to the glory of the love of Christ."

She was putting Jesus to a real test to see if He really did love and exult women, or was it just a front. She knew that in this context He would have to show His true colors. She would be treated with tenderness and respect, or she would be booted out as scum. Raymond Calkins writes, "His purity did not repel her. His goodness did not present an invisible barrier between Him and her. Oh, there must be a defect somewhere in what we call our goodness. We are good, but we are not gracious. We speak the truth, but we do not speak it in love. We have virtues and we lack insight and sympathy.I sometimes think one of the most tragic things in the world is the number of unlovely good people in it. One does not question for a moment the reality of their goodness. Yet the pity of it is, the more you know them the less you want to be with them; the less even you want to be like them."

Elizabeth Fry used this passage of Scripture as her main theme, and with it transformed many lives both male and female, and she also transformed the prisons of England.

Edgar Dewitt Jones writes, "Our tendency is to regard a person who is irreproachable in private life but who may be unforgiving, self-righteous, and censorious of others, in higher esteem than a person of kind and generous disposition who transgresses the laws of what the community judges to be public and private decency. We are prone to treat sins of

human frailty much more drastically than sins of human pride, temper, and lovelessness." Jesus never once blasted or rebuked a fallen woman. He did not favor in any way their sinful lifestyle, but He never denounced them when He met them. He only had sharp words of anger and rebuke for the self-righteous Pharisees.

Dr. William J. Dawson in, The Man Christ Jesus says of His attitude, "In His alarming system of spiritual pathology, the first (that is, sins of temper, pride, and lovelessness) resemble the paralysis of vital organs, the second (sins of human frailty), an attack of fever. Any man may contract a fever and after dreadful wanderings in the realms of delirious imagination may emerge again into a life of sanity. He may lie blind and helpless at the mercy of the flame that consumes him, but he may still retain his goodness of heart, his sense of right, and even his real passion for integrity.

But in the growth of evil tempers there is no crisis and no cure. They involve not a temporary obscuration of moral faculties, but their destruction. They are like paralysis, a decay of vital organs. Frailty of the flesh is curable; corruption of the spirit incurable."

Jesus is so often the friend of sinners, and they are not falsely accused sinners. They are the real thing. Jesus had a different attitude toward sin than most religious leaders of His day, or any day. Jesus saw the sinner as a victim of sin. Sin was an enemy of their life and happiness, and it had entangled them making their life miserable. He desired to

help them get free. His main concern was not how to punish them, but how to set them free. This clashed with those who approach to the sinner was how to see that they got what they deserved. This is the clash of law and grace to this day. Grace wants to reconcile the sinner, and law wants to punish. Love grows out of forgiveness and acceptance. Where this is not real there can be no love. The righteous need so little forgiveness that they feel so little love. They need to see their sinfulness on a deeper level in order to have a greater love.

In this text Jesus is dealing with a man and a woman, and as often is the case they see life from very different perspectives. Modern studies show that men are more rational and women more emotional, and we see it here. Simon is a good man as far as the law goes. He likely has a good head on him, and Jesus deals with him by the intellectual means of a parable where he has to make an evaluation and give a judgment. He is a head man. The woman, however, expresses herself, not by the head and words, but by the heart and action. She is motivated by emotion rather than intellect. Jesus does not reject either, but recognizes both to be essential. We are to love God with all our mind and heart. Jesus does not discount the womanly approach, but recognizes it as legitimate and not as a weaker, but rather in this case, superior to that of Simon.

Why do you suppose most of the stories of great sinners being forgiven by Christ are women? It is likely because they were discriminated against, and Jesus was concerned about justice as well as compassion, and Dr. Luke felt the same.

See also in Matt. 21: 28-32. Jesus did not hesitate to have a social relationship with anyone.

Here He was spending an evening with the class of people He most often blasted, and the class who sought to kill Him.

By the lack of hospitality it appears that this Pharisees did not really appreciate Jesus, but had another motive for the invitation. Jesus was being snubbed by the religious and wealthy leaders, but in that context He was being greatly appreciated by a sinner. She had to have already repented to come and expose herself to the eyes of the Pharisee and his guests. Here is a bold woman who is a known sinner, and she had the audacity to enter a Pharisees house. She was obviously highly motivated. Maclaren points out that the expensive ointment was likely part of the spoils of her sinful employment. A bad woman with stolen goods, as it were, and she is drawn to Christ. It is hard to grasp the paradox, for evil hates the light and flees from it, and yet sinners were attracted to Jesus like the sick to a physician. She had in her a desire to be forgiven and made clean.

There are many who feel that this woman was Mary Magdalene. Christian poetry and art often say so. Others say it was Mary the sister of Lazarus. (John 11:2) Magdalene is the most popular view, but the fact is there is no basis whatever, and all the evidence is opposed to it. Mary Magdalene had 7 devils cast out of her, but this is no basis to believe she was a prostitute. This woman is unnamed for a good reason.

Simon had all people in pigeon holes. He had a code of conduct by which he knew just how to act toward each person. Jesus dealt with people as persons, and it didn't make any difference what pigeon hole they fit, for they were all sinners who needed His love and forgiveness. Lockyer said, "Contact with a sinner no more contaminated him than the sun is fowled as it shines on a dung heap." Simon said if He knew what she was He would have nothing to do with her, but Jesus not only knew what she had been, He knew what she could become. It is the future that motivates Christ and not the past. To be like Christ we need to treat people in the light of their potential, and not on the basis of their failures of the past.

Jesus uses a parable to teach Simon. Dr. Luke is a great parable lover. He has 35 of them in his Gospel, and 19 of them are unique to him, and this is one of them. Jesus illustrates sinners as debtors. All are equally in debt, but not all are in debt equally. When we sin we are in debt, for there is a penalty to be paid. All have equally sinned, but not all have sinned equally. Some are greater sinners, and when they are forgiven they usually have a greater gratitude. Jesus admits that the Pharisee was a better man than she was as a woman, yet she loved more for she could sense His love more, for she had so much more to be forgiven. Jesus does give Simon credit for a less sinful life, but it did not make him a better person than her.

We see here that there are different degrees of love. This could lead to a false conclusion that says if only a great sense

of sin can lead to a great love, then one is better off living in great sin like this woman before conversion, for great forgiveness is not possible if one lives a good life and does not greatly sin. Both Simon and this woman had nothing to pay off their debt, and so they were alike in this in their inability to pay. People can prevent their debt from getting greater than it might otherwise be, but they cannot pay off the existing debt. Jesus freely forgives both. It is not harder for Him to forgive the big debt than the little one, for all are equally covered by His atonement. The fact is the greatest sinners often make the greatest saints because of their greater gratitude. The Prodigal is a hero, and not the elder son who never ran off to sin.

We learn from this account that it is possible for a woman to be a worse sinner than a man. But we also learn that it is worse to be a lesser sinner who won't admit it than to be a greater sinner who will. Simon thought because he was a lesser sinner that he was not in debt. You might point out that you do not owe Sears or Wards nearly as much as other people, but this does not cause them to regard your debt as no responsibility. True, there are others who owe more, but you are still in debt, and if you don't pay, it is you who must suffer the consequences. And also, it is true that the terrible sinner is not less forgiven than the lesser sinner.

Simon's problem was he could not change his thinking about people who have changed. He had a label on them, and the label would stay even though the contents had changed.

Jesus was fully conscious of being neglected and not being given the common acts of hospitality. He was not indifferent to how He was treated. Jesus calls him to look at this woman who, though a sinner, was more loving and hospitable even though he was not her guest, and this was not her home. Jesus appealed to His sense of logic, and He came to the right conclusion in the abstract example. Now let's see how you do in real life. Look at this situation again Simon. Is it possible that this woman who is a great sinner is closer to God than a Pharisee? Simon could pass a test intellectually and get an A, yet flunk the real life test. Jesus gave her the A and said she was superior to him. Simon did not experience the grace of forgiveness because he felt superior and in no need of it.

She loved much because she was forgiven much. Maclaren writes, "He does not mean to say that her love was the cause of her forgiveness, not at all. He means to say that her love was the proof of her forgiveness, and that it was so because her love was a consequence of her forgiveness." One of our greatest sins is in not realizing how much we have been forgiven, for this leads to a lack of love. It is hard to say thank you with zeal if you have no great awareness of the value of the gift received. Spurgeon wrote, "It is, dear friends, a deep sense of our sinfulness, coupled with the perfect consciousness of our forgiveness, that will work in us intense love to Christ." Again Spurgeon writes, "The Lord has made the first to be last, and the last to be first. Simon thought himself far in advance of this woman; but now that Christ had explained their true position, I should think he began to see that the woman was far ahead of him."

Jesus did not condemn the sinner, for He knew what modern psychology has learned. Dr. George Benson, a Christian Psychoanalyst says that often the condemnation of a sinner only helps the sinner go on sinning. They often hate themselves and rather than deal with this issue of self-hate, which is the real problem, they do evil and make others mad, and thus get their enemy outside of them where they can fight, and feel better about it. A rebel in a Christian home is often guilty with self-hate, but does what is rotten to get his family mad and screaming so he can have an external battle rather than an inner battle. He can then blame others for his problem, and not face his real inner problem.

If you give genuine acceptance it deprives a guilty person of the ability to fight outwardly, and they are forced to look in and see they are the problem. This will lead either to repentance, or to anger at you for showing them they are their own worse enemy. The battle with self-hatred that leads one to get others to reject him is seen in Peter in Luke 5:3-8. He felt sinful in the face of a great blessing undeserved, and he asked for rejection. It is healthy to feel unworthy in the presence of Christ and His power. But if one does not overcome it by feeling the acceptance of Christ in spite of your unworthiness, then one is in for real psychological battles.

Condemnation and rejection are only fitting when love and acceptance is rejected. Someone wrote this account: "A friend of mine, an elderly Quaker lady, entered her Paris hotel room to find a burglar rifling her bureau drawers

where she considerable jewelry and money. He had a gun which he brandished. She talked to him quietly and told him to go right ahead and help himself to anything she had, as obviously he needed it more than she did if he had to be stealing it. She even told him some places to look where there were valuables that he had overlooked. Suddenly the man let out a low cry, and ran from the room taking nothing. The next day she received a letter from him in which he said, "I'm not afraid of hate. But you showed love and kindness. It disarmed me."

Chester Warren Quimby in *Jesus As They Remembered Him* writes, "At no place is the sympathetic mind of Jesus shown more graciously than in His dealing with wayward women. He treated them with the same respectful courtesy that He would have given His mother or sisters. Before Him, they found themselves to be gentle women. He never let Himself be fooled. They knew He perceived what manner of creatures they were. Yet from Him came no scorn, and no rebuke. Always He approached them with the same high respect others accorded only true gentle women. These women were read and known of all men. They knew what to expect from men: from the pious, snubs and scorn; from the lewd, ribald jokes; from the lascivious, demands for physical satisfaction; and from their respectable sisters, cruel gossip. Then they faced this strange, clean man. Though He knew all, there were no insinuations, no contempt, no sly smiles. Jesus saw that under their bizarre manner they longed for true womanhood. While in His presence, they were again gentle women.

Spurgeon says this women is Mary of Bethany, and if he is right we have a prodigal daughter in the Bible, and she had her elder sister just as the Prodigal son had his elder brother.

Note, it was not her love or her tears of repentance that saved her, but her faith. It was a faith that acted in love. Note also that Jesus always says go. You cannot stay in one place even if it is with Jesus. Depart from me into life and live with the effects of being with me everywhere and everyday. Go in peace for you are forgiven and accepted and need not live in fear and doubt and self-hatred for your folly and sin of the past. You are now in the ark of God and can face the storm unafraid. The Pharisees may still gossip about you, but all is well between you and God.

**Oh cease my wandering soul,
On restless wing to roam;
all this wide world, from pole to pole,
Hath not for thee a home.
Behold the ark of God,
Behold the open door;
Hasten to gain that blest abode
And roam, my soul, no more.**

Kahlil Gibran in Jesus, The Son Of Man has the woman describe what happened to her soul when she first met Jesus. "It was in the month of June when I saw Him for the first time.....I was dead. I was a woman who had divorced her soul. I was living apart from this self which you now see. I

belonged to all men, and to none.....

The He looked at me, and the noontide of His eyes was upon me, and He said,....."Other men see a beauty in you that shall fade away sooner than their own years. but I see in you a beauty that shall not fade away, and in the autumn of your days that beauty shall not be afraid to gaze at itself in the mirror, and it shall not be offended.

I alone love the unseen in you.....

And then He walked away.

But no other man ever walked the way He walked. Was it a breath born in my garden that moved to the east? Or was it a storm that would shake all things to their foundation?

I know not; but on that day the sunset of His eyes slew the dragon in me, and I become a woman.....

The heroes of the Old Testament were bold and mighty men of battle, but when we come to the New Testament Jesus changed all that. He was not weak, but He combined the best of manliness with the values of womanliness. None was ever more courageous, yet none was ever more kind, gentle and compassionate. Strength does not exclude tenderness. This is the new ideal of manhood. One can be strong and yet tender. Jesus was the first true gentleman.

10. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 4

LUKE 8:1-3

1 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him,

2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,

3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

Here were 12 men and a number of women who were not married to the men, and, who in some cases had been evil women, and yet here they are together. A task not to be attempted by any but the Lord Himself, for only He can make the lion lay down with the lamb and not have trouble. Peter did have his wife along as we see in I Cor. 9:5. Most of the disciples may have had their wives as well.

G.K.Chesterton writes, "It is constantly assumed that when the lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is-can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? That is the problem the church attempted; that is the miracle she achieved."

Barclay writes, "There is nothing which the church needs more than to learn how to yoke in common harness the diverse temperaments and qualities of different people."

Christ did it, and in Him it can be done. Behind the service of these women was deep gratitude for service received. True dedicated service grows out of a sense of gratitude. If one has not received much from Christ, it is hard to be motivated to give much to Christ. Jesus did not depend upon chance hospitality. He had women of means to support Him. Each had apparently been healed by Jesus. We do not see a group of men who had been healed, but rather women. Is it because women were more grateful? Remember the ten lepers, and only one returned to give thanks. Men were not as grateful. Women responded to their healing by giving their lives for His service. This is a unique aspect of the ministry of Jesus. He raised womanhood to a level of active service. Jesus restored women to a place of service along side of men. They were not equal to the men in status, but they were in service.

Many feel like Archie Bunker who said to his wife in a theological debate, "Stifle yourself Edith. God don't want to be defended by no dingbat." These women were people saved from sickness, both mental and physical, and they followed Jesus, and were likely among those 120 at Pentecost. No doubt they did the work of women in that day. They cooked and cleaned and washed garments, but they also likely bore witness verbally to what Christ has done for them. You had wives and single women right alongside of the men doing what was needed to help Jesus accomplish his purpose, and this has always been the case. Women have played a major role in fulfilling the great commission.

These women would also be available for counseling with other women who had needs, or who feared to come to Jesus to be healed. It would not have been proper in that day for men to counsel with women, and so to give the ministry of Jesus a ministry to all, he needed women with him. Also, Jesus did not do a miracle to feed his disciples three times a day, and so he needed their expertise in their cooking skills. "We can live without science, and we can live without books, but even Christians cannot live without cooks." Jesus depended upon women and not miracles to provide for the physical needs of his disciples. It is never God's will to do a miracle to provide what can be provided by natural means.

Paula 347-404 A. D. was a wealthy Roman noble woman. She helped Jerome translate the Vulgate, and she founded a monastery, a convent, and a hospice. Other women in the middle ages founded religious orders and became leaders over huge monasteries for both men and women. "To paraphrase John, there are also many other things which women have done in the church's history; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose that the volumes would fill library shelves equal to those already devoted to the history of men's work in the church." None of the gifts of the spirit have a label on them that say, for men only.

MARY MAGDALENE

Barclay writes, "Clearly she had a past that was a dark and terrible thing." Many conclude that she was a prostitute, but there is no proof of this. The 7 demons she had cast out

does not indicate she was an evil person. She was apparently a woman of means like the other women.

JOANNA The wife of Cuza. He had a good job working for Herod and so she had means. She could use them to support Jesus, and so we can assume her husband was in support of Jesus as well. Her following of Jesus was not a mere fly by night temporary gratitude, which quickly faded. She was with him to the end, and is with Mary Magdalene in the resurrection story in Luke 24:10. While her husband devoted time to king Herod, she gave her time to the King of Kings. Often women can do more than men, for men are busy earning a living, and women can share that living with Christ. At least this was true for much of history.

Some feel that Cuza was the nobleman of Capernaum whose dying son was healed by Jesus in John 4:46-54. If so, this would be one of the reasons for Joanna being so devoted. There was great Christian influence in the house of Herod for in Acts 13:1 we read of another notable Christian from Herod's house.

SUSANNA means lily. Jews named their women after flowers and trees. Rhoda for example means a rose, and Tamar means a palm. Nothing is known about Susanna. All we know is that she was a follower of Jesus and a supporter of His ministry.

AND MANY OTHERS. Very few are named, but there were

many unnamed women that we will never know in time. God knows them, and their names are in the Lamb's book of life. The three that are named are well known. Most of the followers of Jesus all through history are not people known by name.

Flora Larsson in My Best Men Are Women is about the Salvation Army. The scene is described in a Bethesda Chapel on a Sunday in 1860. The crowd of over 1,000 listened to William Booth as Catherine sat in the minister's pew with her 4 year old son at her side. She sensed an inner voice urging her to speak a word, but she resisted, for she had not prepared, and she did not want to be a fool. Then she said to herself, I will be a fool for Christ, and when William finished, she rose to go to the pulpit. He was startled and puzzled knowing her timid nature. He asked her what is the matter? And she said she wanted to say a word. He let her, and thus began the history of women preaching in the Salvation Army. When she finished William announced that his wife will preach this evening.

Catherine was a strong believer in women serving Christ with all of their gifts. She wrote in a love letter to William: "God has given to women a graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and above all, a finely tuned emotional nature, all of which appears to us eminent qualifications for public speaking....I believe that one of the greatest boons to the race would be women's exaltation to her proper position, mentally and spiritually. Who can tell its

consequences to posterity? If indeed there is in Jesus Christ neither male nor female, but in all touching his kingdom they are one, who shall dare thrust women out of the churches operations, or presume to put any candle which God has lighted under a basket?"

She met resistance, but she got the door open, and thousands of others in the Salvation Army became women preachers. In 1878 out of 91 officers in the field 41 were women. William Booth was reluctant at first, but when he saw the success of women he gave it full support. He wrote a manual for guiding the Salvation Army in which he said, "Women have the right to an equal share with men in the work of publishing salvation. A woman may hold any position of authority or power in the army. Women must be treated as equal with men in all the intellectual and social relationships in life.

The results were that a 17 year old girl led a revival in Wales, and hundreds of men were converted. Police reported crime down 50%. In London the young female officers saw over one thousand repent in the first 6 months. Some came to America, and in a short time had tremendous crowds coming to an old fortress they had purchased and turned into a meeting house. Many of them were only 16 and 17. Some of these teen age girls were born leaders, and they preached night after night to great crowds.

In 1881 the call came from Paris to send troops. It was decided that Katie, the daughter of Catherine Booth, be sent.

She was only 21, and there was much opposition in Paris. The first meeting drew the roughest element into the little hall. A near riot made the police close the hall for 6 weeks. Poor Katie had preached to thousands in England, but the way seemed blocked in Paris, but she did not give up. When they opened again, a heavy woman nicknamed the devil's wife sat in the center of the hall, and she mocked all that went on. One night some of the audience got up to dance. Katie cried out, "I'll give you 20 minutes to dance if you give me 20 minutes to speak." They agreed, and after she spoke one young workman responded-her first convert on French soil. Then more came, and one night a young lout swore at Katie, and the devil's wife gave him a blow that nearly felled him. This amazon from then on became Katie's bodyguard.

She preached at night, and during the day she helped girls who were trapped in prostitution to get out of it. Converts grew and the Salvation Army became well founded in France. The women of the Salvation Army dared to go where policemen would not go, and win people for Christ. No army was ever more brave than this woman's army.

In 1900 the Salvation Army launched a crusade in Japan to liberate prostitutes. Every city had its district where the poor girls were prisoners, and where the police would return them if they did escape. The only way out was suicide. When they became old or sick they were thrown out. A special edition of War Cry offered to help any who wished to escape. The group marched into the district in Tokyo singing and handing them out. The brothel keepers attacked them

and broke their instruments, and tore their uniforms, and they were beaten.

The next night two girls came knocking on the door of the Salvation Army, and they were hidden. Letters came from others asking for help. Their keepers threatened death to all Salvation Army people. The press became alarmed at foreigners being beaten in the streets for opposing evil. Public opinion ran high, and the Emperor signed an ordinance stating that any girl who wished to leave a brothel was free to do so by filling a notice of cessation. Within a year 12,000 girls gained their liberty. The Army set up a home to receive them. They taught them cooking, sewing, and housework. They helped them get respectable work. Many became Christians who would never have heard the Gospel without this freedom to escape.

Evangeline Booth, the daughter of William and Catherine, holds the record for the longest female leadership in the Army's history. She was Commander for 30 years in the United States, and then General of the whole Army from 1934 to 1939. She was preaching at 10 years old with power and eloquence. As a teen she filled the halls of London, and even great preachers came to hear her. She had her opponents, and in one open air meeting a man threw a stone and cut her arm. She marched up to him and said, "Bandage this quick! You did it, so you fix it!" The man did and later joined the Army. She was clever. One time she was being hissed and could not be heard. She left the stage and came back with the American flag wrapped about

her. Hiss if you dare she shouted, and with dead silence she went on to charm the crowd with her eloquence. The point of this history of the role of women in the Salvation Army is, they were practicing the New Testament principles of the equality of the sexes long before other denominations realized they were only using half of their potential for the kingdom of God. Jesus was grateful for all the help He received from women.

11. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 5

LUKE 8:40-56

40 Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.

41 And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue; and falling at Jesus' feet he besought him to come to his house,

42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. As he went, the people pressed round him.

49 While he was still speaking, a man from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more."

50 But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she shall be well."

51 And when he came to the house, he permitted no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child.

52 And all were weeping and bewailing her; but he said, "Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping."

53 And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

54 But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise."

55 And her spirit returned, and she got up at once; and he directed that something should be given her to eat.

56 And her parents were amazed; but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

Lockyer writes, "Standing by the little bed, Jesus took one of the girl's cold hands in His and tenderly said in her own Aramaic tongue, "Rise up, little maid!" No lengthened process was necessary once His divine hand had been put forth."

Jesus knows what it is like to be a celebrity welcomed by a great crowd of eager cheering people. No doubt this atmosphere helped Jesus in performing miracles, for where faith is strong his power is demonstrated. Jesus must have made it clear that He was crossing the lake only for a short while, for they were all waiting His return. He said, "Thy faith has made thee whole." Much does depend upon the faith of the person, and not just the sovereignty of God. See Mark 6:5-6.

In New York City the greatest welcome in history was for

Lt. Colonel John Glenn after his flight into space. The mass of colored paper cleaned up after was 3,474 tons. They actually weighed this welcome and measured it. There was no way to weigh the welcome of Jesus, but the very fact that it is mentioned makes it likely that it was a huge and excited crowd.

The greatest of men are helpless and need a great physician, for no other can halt death. Here is a religious ruler among the class who rejected Jesus, but now when his daughters life is at stake, he does not rely on his theology, but desperately needs a deliverer. This father cares not for the crowd, or his peers, but comes to Jesus and falls at His feet begging for help. This reveals the great distress and the genuine desire. He dearly loves his daughter, and this tells us she had a good family and likely a good life. Girls were less thought of in the ancient world as a whole, but here is an individual girl who was greatly loved. Illness often makes a family appreciate a child more, for it causes fear that they might be taken away. He had great faith, or he would not have left his only daughter dying in order to get to Jesus.

Many people are afraid to ask for help. They are ashamed that they have a need, and they fear publicity. But here we see a man of public authority who was willing to admit he needed help. The woman who came and touched Jesus led to a delay, and then the news came that his daughter had died. Now the need was not just for restoration, but resurrection. But the good news is, Jesus is never too late. Even death does not mean the end of His reach. He has the key to death.

What a comforter Jesus was. This poor man would be a nervous wreck. The interruption of this sick woman would be almost intolerable. She was sick for 12 years, and that is rough, but he would be thinking, my daughter is about to die, and it is far better to be sick and alive, so why bother with her, let's go where the greater need is. It had to be a crushing blow when the news came that his daughter was dead. But Jesus gave him immediate assurance that she would be healed. Timing is not that important when it comes to a miracle.

In verse 52 Jesus says the girl is just sleeping. Munger writes, "If Christ had done nothing more for humanity than to give to it this word sleep in place of death, He would have been the greatest of benefactors. To that which seems the worst thing, He has given the best name..."

LUKE 8:43-48

43 And a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and could not be healed by any one,

44 came up behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; and immediately her flow of blood ceased.

45 And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the multitudes surround you and press upon you!"

46 But Jesus said, "Some one touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me."

47 And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the

presence of all the people who she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.

48 And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

G. Campbell Morgan, "On account of the peculiar form of physical disease from which she was suffering she was excommunicated from the temple, and not allowed to mingle with the worshippers. By that selfsame law she was divorced from her husband, and not allowed to live with him. By that same law she was ostracized from society, and in appalling loneliness she had lived for twelve years."

Spurgeon tries to imagine all the things she was advised to do, and all the quack drugs she no doubt took. One of the crazy prescriptions of that day was to eat the nail of a man who had been hanged. Spurgeon writes, "The wonder is that for 12 years poor human nature could stand out, not against the disease, but against the doctors."

She fits the picture of one who had tried all else and failed, then finally comes to Christ. Dr. Ceremony and Dr. Religion have prescribed all sorts of prayers and services, and Dr. Morality, all sorts of good deeds, and Dr. Civility all kinds of community involvement, but after it all has left you worse than before, you realize you need a Savior. Jesus did not charge. She was broke, and yet He healed her for nothing. Was she fearful He would charge, and that is why she came in secret? It is not likely, for He did all He did freely and

publicly. Others say she did it in secret because her touch defiled, and she did not want anyone to know that she had touched Christ.

She illustrates that no one needs to come to Jesus publicly to experience His healing. If one comes in secret believing, that is enough. Jesus however, does want a public confession. Spurgeon said, "O my hearer, you can be saved in silence. You have no need to speak to any person of your acquaintance, not even to mother or father. At this moment, while in the pew, believe and live. Nobody will know that you are now touching the Lord."

Legend says she was Veronica, the woman who ministered to him when he was dying. Legend also says she was wealthy at one time, but spent all to be healed, and now she finally gets it free. The best things in life are often free. We see here the cooperation of body and spirit, for both faith and her finger were necessary. Physical contact is not necessary, but in her case it was because she was trying to do it secretly. It almost seems as if the healing power of Christ was objective, for she got a healing without His willing it. It was like she was a pickpocket who came from behind and took healing out of his back pocket. An actual flow of power, like electricity, flowed out of Jesus into her. Jesus was sensitive to this power flow. He knew it was not just someone in the crowd pressing upon Him.

**Near Him she stole, rank after rank;
She feared approach too loud;**

**She touched His garments' hem, and shrank
Back in the sheltering crowd.**

**A shame-faced gladness thrills her frame;
Her twelve years' fainting prayer
Is heard at last; she is the same
As other women there.**

**She hears His voice; He looks about;
Ah! is it kind or good
To drag her secret sorrow out
Before that multitude?**

**The eyes of men she dares not meet--
On her they straight must fall:
Forward she sped, and at His feet
Fell down, and told Him all.**

**His presence makes a holy place;
No alien eyes are there;
Her shrinking shame finds god-like grace,
The covert of its care.**

**"Daughter," He said, "be of good cheer;
Thy faith hath made thee whole";
With plenteous love, not healing mere,
He would content her soul. (G. MacDonald)**

Sankey in Gospel Hymns wrote of her,

**She only touched the hem of His garment,
As to His side she stole,
Amid the crowd that gathered round Him,
And straightway she was whole.**

Reach out and touch someone is a popular phrase, and this woman reached out for the one who could heal by a touch. We talk about getting in touch with someone, and she got in touch with the Healing Christ. "Touch is the sense which love employs." Contact eliminates all distance between one who loves and the object of his love.

Clearly she was a woman of great determination and hope. After 12 years most would say I'll always have this problem, and just give up. She was still hoping for a cure. Women are supposedly stronger than men in suffering. The Christian attitude should always be to never give in and accept it unless it is clearly the will of God, as was Paul's thorn in the flesh. If you accept something as God's will you don't fight it, and so if you go to get medicine you are declaring, this is not God's will. Here is a woman driven by need and drawn by hope to find a cure. Many have tried to help her but none could. She had to bear pain and great loneliness. She was defiled, and according to the law she was practically an outcast, for all that she touched or sat upon would be defiled. She was so ashamed of her problem she did not come and ask for public healing. Like many with female problems, she did not want to broadcast it. She was hoping

for a hidden miracle that nobody would know about but herself. Instead, it turns out that the whole of history became informed of her problem and her miracle.

Here is doctor Luke admitting that doctors cannot cure all problems. This is humility on his part. He was not so proud as to think man had the answer to all. The world is filled with people who have problems that the wisdom of man cannot solve. Jesus is the hope of the hopeless, and He alone can heal the sin sick soul. She was a good example of ambivalence, for she believed, and yet was not so sure, and so wanted all to be in secret. Cowper wrote,

**Conceded amid the gathering throng,
She would have shunn'd thy view,
And if her faith was firm and strong
Had strong misgivings too.**

Note the contrast between her and Jairus. He was bold and straightforward, but she was sneaky. There is a parallel between them also, for the daughter had been born 12 years ago, and she had developed her problem 12 years ago. One was losing a great blessing, and the other was hoping to lose a great curse. We have here the case of the stealing of healing. She had to have greater faith than most to believe she could be healed without even asking Jesus, or having Him speak a word. No man is recorded as having this kind of faith that a mere touch could heal. Here is an unconscious healing. Jesus was on His way to heal another, and this was just an extra. Spurgeon called it, "A sort of over splash of the great

fountain of mercy." This was a side road and an interruption in His journey, but as Spurgeon said again, "The episodes of the Lord Jesus are as beautiful as the main run of His life's poem."

This interruption would give Jarius an illustration of the power of the touch of Jesus and strengthen his own faith. There are different types of touch. There is the touch of enforced nearness of the crowd which had no meaning. Then there is her touch with a purpose. It was aimed deliberately at Jesus for a specific gift of healing. We can still reach out and touch someone, and if that someone is Jesus we can still receive healing and forgiveness of sin. Every sinner needs to reach out and touch the hem of His garment, which today is the body of Christ, the church, which is to wear the robe of righteousness that can be touched.

Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Godet writes, "There is no reason for not attributing to Jesus the ignorance implied in the question..." "Anything like feigning ignorance ill comports with the candor of His character."

There is a paradox here. Jesus brings this woman out to give a public testimony, and yet he puts the gag on Jarius and his family in verse 56. He made the one who wanted to stay hidden come public, and made the one who wanted to shout it from the house top to keep it private. This was a minor miracle on the way to a major miracle, and so maybe it was not so impressive that it could not be brought to the attention of the crowd.

12. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 6

LUKE 10:38-42

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

40 But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things;

42 one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

THERE WILL BE ENTIRE MESSAGES ON MARY AND MARTHA, AND SO NO MORE IS ADDED ON THEM HERE.

LUKE 13:10-17

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

11 And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity."

13 And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God.

14 But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day."

15 Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it?"

16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?"

17 As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

Here is a case where Jesus showed public compassion for a woman in a context where women were to be inferior and unnoticed. If Jesus had healed a lamb that had broken its leg they probably would not have objected, but to heal a woman in the synagogue, and on the Sabbath, was just too radical. When Jesus does something for someone unasked, it is usually a woman He is helping, and so it was with this woman with severe curvature of the spine. Here we see the value system of Jesus in contrast with the value system of the Jewish leaders. They said tradition is the key value, but Jesus said people are. Jesus was not asked by her or anyone else to heal her. He just chose to respond out of compassion.

She had resigned herself to live with her problem, and did not even come with the hope of being healed. The presence of misery prompts His mercy. It did not make any difference to Him what day of the week it was. His mercy was in operation 7 days a week, and He had no day off from doing good.

It is possible that her problem was psychosomatic, for Satan can bind us by negative and obsessive thoughts. She had a spirit of infirmity, and this does imply her problem could be psychosomatic. Frank Lauback said, "Every thought tends to become true in proportion as it is intense and as it is long dwelt upon." Dr. David Morton of the University of Southern California said, "You are not what you think you are. What you think, you are."

Luke alone records this healing on the Sabbath. Barclay points out that this is the last time we ever hear of Jesus being in a synagogue. The authorities were watching His every move, and waiting to ensnare Him. Jesus was concerned that the Sabbath be not just a time of teaching but of action. It is a Christian duty for doctors and nurses and others to work on Sunday just as Jesus did. Jesus deliberately broke the traditions to make clear that people and their needs are more important than traditions and religious rituals. He was not trying to secularize the Sabbath, but to make it truly sacred by making it a day for person centered activity.

This woman was bent over like a hunchback, and must

have been a pathetic sight. Jesus called this distortion of the body a work of Satan and not the will of God. This woman was apparently faithful in attendance at the synagogue, but had been ill for 18 years. The faithful often must suffer long the afflictions of Satan before being delivered. Jesus was giving first class attention to what others considered second class people. She would be in a segregated part of the synagogue. If anyone had good reason to stay away from the worship service it was this woman. She had every right to stay home as a shut in, but had she not been there this day, she would have missed her miracle. Every time we miss a service we risk missing a blessing God has for us.

We see here that Satan can be responsible, not just for mental problems, but for physical problems, and he can keep even godly people bound by these problems. This is why the ministry of healing is a part of the Christian church. God's people can become bound by Satan, and only the power of Christ can set them free, and the gift of healing is the means by which many are set free. Jesus did not lay hands on all He healed, but here He did, for the power of touch was essential to convey true acceptance. For Jesus to walk over to a woman in the synagogue and touch her would be shocking to the Pharisees. It just was not done, but Jesus did it and taught the need for physical expression of acceptance. Words are often too easy and cheap. We need to express love and acceptance by touch.

Her response of praise was as immediate as her healing. This, no doubt, disturbed the Pharisees who did not like the

outburst of a woman in the synagogue. Doing the will of God and sharing love to others will not always please everyone. The rulers were more concerned about the system than about people. Religious people can put the highest value on their ritual even if it ignores the needs of people. Barclay writes, "It is all too tragically true that more trouble and strife arises in churches over legalistic details of procedure than for any other reason. In the world, and in the church, we are constantly in peril of loving systems more than we love God and more than we love men."

This leader was actually angry and put out with Jesus for violating a tradition. The fact that a life was set free from bondage to great joy did not touch him. All he cared about was that a rule had been broken. He could not distinguish between work and service. To work, in the sense of doing labor to earn wages, is not wise behavior on the Sabbath, and Jesus never once encouraged this. But to meet a need and serve people for their benefit is what God wants to happen on this day off from the routine of manual labor. Note how he scolds the congregation, for he did not have the nerve to attack Jesus, or this woman who was praising God. So he launches an attack on the general principle that the crowd should not come to the synagogue on the Sabbath expecting any practical blessing from God, such as healing.

General Booth in his book In Darkest England tells of a runaway girl who came to the Home For Fallen Women, and applied for a nights lodging. The clerk took her name and address and asked, "Are you a fallen woman?" The girl

blushed and looked down at the floor and explained that she was not, but she had no money and needed a place to stay. The clerk told her that this institution was for fallen women only. She left and then came back later and said, "I am qualified now, will you take me in now?" The rule was made more important than the person. The rule made her do evil in order to get help, and such a rule is evil in itself. When a rule robs people of their dignity and value, the rule ought to be violated. The purpose of rules is to avoid hurting people. When the rule is going to hurt people it should be broken for the sake of the person. If you were standing before a red light and saw a little boy about to run his tricycle off the curb into the street on the other side, you would be a fool not to break the rule and run through the red light to save the child.

The synagogue ruler was angry, and when you are angry over the violation of a rule, even though it was of great benefit to a person, your spiritual values are messed up. Jesus only got angry at that which hurt people and degraded them. He never got angry at rule violation, for rules tend to put rulers and institutions above people. History is full of stubborn anger that has injured people. Godly anger will always be for the benefit of people. Benjamin Franklin said, "People of action will make many mistakes, but they never make the biggest mistake of all-doing nothing." That was the mistake of the ruler.

Gilbert and Sullivan, the two talented music men who wrote lite opera, were partners. Sullivan one day ordered a

new carpet for a theatre they bought. When Gilbert saw the bill he blew his stack. One thing led to another until they ended in court over it. They never spoke to one another again. When Sullivan wrote music for a new production he mailed it to Gilbert. When Gilbert wrote the words he mailed it back to Sullivan. Once they had to make a curtain call together. They stood as far apart on the stage as possible. Here was stubborn anger that put their pride and rules above the value of persons, and this was folly. Imagine being mad at your own partner, but worse yet, imagine being angry at Jesus for healing a poor woman who had been bound for 18 years. Perverted values can make men angry even at life's best values.

Jesus got angry at those who got angry because of His compassion for people. The worst sins, from the point of view of Jesus, were those of religious people who lacked compassion. People who resist acts of love are the greatest hindrance to the ministry of Christ. Jesus argues from the less to the greater. If something is valid on a lower level, is it not more valid on a higher level. If compassion for animals leads to exceptions, how much more ought compassion for people lead to exceptions in Sabbath observance? See 14:5.

It is hypocritical to pretend to be concerned about God's law when you do not care about God's people. It is people that really matter, and all we hold dear must be evaluated in the light of how it affects people. It is a warped value system that puts animals above people. They cared more for bound and thirsty animals than they did about a bound and

suffering woman. It is not that their love for animals was wrong, but that their love for people was so inadequate. The lesser realms of life are to be a guide for conduct in the higher realms. If people have great love and compassion for their animals, even enough to break some of the rules for their benefit, how much more should this apply to the needs of people.

We hear of the sons of Abraham, but Jesus is the first to call a woman the daughter of Abraham, and give women an equality of inheritance. Jesus does not view all suffering as a value. Here is a case where she was a victim and a prisoner for 18 years, and what was good was her release, and not her bondage. She had been in this condition for 18 years, and so it was really no emergency. Jesus could have made an appointment for the next day, but He healed her on the spot because it was only right to meet her need as soon as He became aware of it. Barclay refers to a Latin proverb that says, "He gives twice who gives quickly." Barclay writes, "Jesus' whole action in this matter makes it clear that it is not God's will that any human being should suffer one moment longer than is absolutely necessary." "No helpful deed that we can do today should be postponed until tomorrow."

13. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 7

LUKE 13:18-21

18 He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?"

19 It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

20 And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?"

21 It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

These two parables have in common the concept of the small and seemingly insignificant having, in the long run, a great and powerful influence. They differ in that the one with the man sowing the mustard seed stresses the external growth of the kingdom, which the world can see. Whereas, the one with the woman stresses the hidden working of the kingdom. We have both the visible and invisible at work, and the female is used to illustrate the invisible.

Jesus is saying something that has been true throughout the history of the church. Women have been more like the yeast. They have worked behind the scenes hidden from the public view to bring about changes and advances in the kingdom. At Pentecost they were there in prayer, and the Holy Spirit fell on them, but they were in the background, and men held the public spotlight. They provided the gifts and talents such as Dorcus in Acts 9:36, and the mother of John Mark who opened up her home in Acts 12:12. Pricilla, however, had more public gifts in Acts 18:26 and Rom. 16:3,

as did the daughters of Philip in Acts 21:8-9. Women are more like the Holy Spirit who is in the background, and men are more like Jesus who is in the forefront, but both are essential to the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells two brief parables here using both male and female and we see the balance he gives to the sexes. He included women illustrations in his teachings to give them a feeling of equality and belonging. The small and hidden can become major, and this is what has happened to women in the kingdom. They were almost unnoticed to start with, but they grew in importance to become a major factor in the kingdom of God. It starts with an act of mercy to one woman on the Sabbath, and grows until the Sabbath becomes a day for mercy to all people. It starts with a story of kindness to a Samaritan woman, and grows until prejudice for all must die, and all people be accepted as equals in the kingdom.

Jesus is saying the kingdom of God works by small things making big changes. Small beginnings may work slowly but steadily until all is changed. If the yeast is working, every generation of Christians should be different in their total outlook on life, for they should be advancing in Christlike attitudes. Evil, of course, can and does work the same way, and so Jesus warned about the leaven of the Pharisees, for Christians can become legalistic. Jesus had just gained a victory over the false values of the ruler of the synagogue, and this was the beginning of new value system for the people of God.

Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God, or His coming into the world, is like a seed sown, or yeast put in bread. It will be just the beginning of changes that will grow until the church will think and act with the mind of Christ. No longer will people be subjected to burdens of religion. Christianity will establish proper priorities, and people will be superior to the system of religious laws and rituals.

These parable reveal how the kingdom of God and His reign in history begin, and finally permeate the whole. What Jesus said has happened in history, and the church has a totally different attitude toward people than did the Judaism of that day. No longer is the sinner stoned, but he is dealt with in compassion. The goal is not to punish but to forgive and restore.

Many oppose the positive view of these parables, and say they refer to the growth of evil because of a misunderstanding. Many take these to mean the kingdom of God will start small and grow until the whole world is Christian. Others have reacted against this view, and have imposed upon these parables a negative interpretation. Just because the liberal view perverts them is no justification for a different perversion in the opposite direction. If we see that Jesus is referring to the growth of right values and priorities within the body of God's people, we do not need to try and twist them into referring to evil. Jesus is comparing the kingdom to seed and yeast, and how they grow and permeate just as His love for people and their needs grew and permeated Christian thinking. Now we no longer think of days, traditions, and rituals as more important than people.

The idea of a great tree does not say the whole world will be converted, or that it would bear only good fruit, or that none of its branches would ever be cut off. All it is saying is that from small beginnings it shall become large. The birds making nests in it just stresses that it is large, and there is no need to try and find symbolic meaning behind the birds. In Eastern thought a great tree was symbolic of a great empire, and the birds on its branches are the subject peoples who come under its power. Jesus is saying the kingdom of God will become a vast kingdom with many people becoming a part of it. We see this image used so clearly by Ezekiel in 17:22-24 and 31:3f. We see it also in Daniel 4:10-12 and Psalm 80:8-13. Barclay writes, "Sometimes the fact that there are so many branches of the church is used as a condemnation. In point of fact, it is the church's great virtue and blessing. Not all people worship alike. Some find God in a bare simplicity; others in an elaborate form of worship. Some find Him in speech, some in music, some in silence. Amidst the multiplicity of churches a man can find that church in which he will find God."

J. C. Ryle writes, "Let us learn from this parable never to despair of any work for Christ, because its first beginnings are feeble and small." It is Christian thinking to believe that any small effort at what is good and right can eventually make a big difference. Zech. 4:10. The seed shows what the kingdom becomes in itself, and the yeast shows what influence it can have on the environment.

Some insist that leaven, or yeast, must always be evil, but

this is not consistent with the facts. The Bible uses the same symbol for both good and evil. You have the lion as a symbol of the devil in I Pet. 5:8, and of Jesus in Rev. 5:5. A symbol means what the author intends it to mean by the context. It is true that if you put a little error into your teaching it can grow and permeate the whole, but it is also true that a little truth can grow until it becomes dominant and changes your whole life for good. Satan can sow the field with tares just as Jesus can sow the field with wheat, and both grow so much alike. What is true for good is also true for evil, but Jesus is here illustrating the growth and influence of the kingdom.

Yeast is often used to refer to evil, but if an illustration for evil cannot be used for good then we have greatly limited the use of illustrations for good. Birds are used of Satan's forces snatching the seed of the word away, but it is foolish to think that birds only illustrate evil, for they are used more by Jesus to illustrate good than any other creature. Even the Holy Spirit is in the form of a dove. The serpent is the instrument of Satan, but the serpent lifted up in the wilderness is a symbol of Jesus, and he said we should be as wise as serpents but harmless as doves. He called the Pharisees serpents, but that does not mean it cannot be used with positive meaning. The context determines the meaning. Jesus is not saying the Gospel will convert the whole world, but that His truth and love will eventually be a dominant influence in the whole world.

Jesus does not refer here to the Pharisees, or to some stranger in the night. He is dealing with two commonplace

experiences of everyday life of ordinary people that are good and normal. Men sowing in the field and women making bread are good, and there is no basis for reading evil intent into these parables. All that those who read evil into this context is true, but they should limit their teaching to the passages where the evil tares and leaven of the Pharisees is being dealt with, and not bring them into a setting where they are out of place. Straton writes, of the originality of Jesus and says, "In the thinking of his hearers, leaven had always stood for the infective power of evil; yet here Jesus applies it to the transforming power of God, making what was in all probability an entirely new use of it." Jesus is saying good also can penetrate, so don't only think that evil can do so.

A.B. Bruce sees leaven as so positive he says there are three symbols of Christians in the parables: Salt, light, and leaven. All three of them when they get into something spread over the whole, and influenced the totality of the context. Alexander Maclaren writes, "Now, of course, leaven is generally taken as a symbol of evil or corruption...But fermentation works enabling as well as corrupting, and our Lord lays hold upon the other possible use of the metaphor." It is folly to read evil into this text and identify this woman making bread as the great whore of revelation sowing corruption in the church.

Leaven is a disturbing element. C. H. Dodd writes, "We should observe that the working of the leaven in the dough is not a slow imperceptible process. At first it is true the leaven

is hidden and nothing appears to happen; but soon the whole mass swells and bubbles as fermentation rapidly advances." So the influence of Christianity has also been disturbing. Acts 17:6 and 16:20.

It teaches that the source of the power for change is both external and internal. The dough has no power to change itself. The woman must add yeast to the dough. Some external agent must act, but once it is added the change takes place from within. Lightfoot writes, "Christianity is like leaven. It is not on the outside trying to get in, but it is on the inside trying to get out." Leaven is aggressive. It does not cease to work until the whole lump is affected. So Christianity is to spread into all the world until all people's hear the Gospel. This woman baking bread is a parallel with the man sowing seed, and both are normal good acts that illustrate the way in which the kingdom of God will grow in the world.

14. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 8

LUKE 15:8-10

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends

and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.'

10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

This whole chapter 15 is a parable in three parts. There is the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost son. It is a triune parable. It is like a pyramid with a different picture on each of the three sides. It is a progressive parable with one out of a hundred sheep that is lost; one out of ten coins that is lost, and one son out of two that is lost. Each parable deals with a higher value.

Men and women have the same inner desire to find what is lost and preserve what is valuable. Women are just as concerned about the evangelistic outreach of the Gospel as men are. If women do not feel the pull to go after a lost sheep, they could grasp the need to search for a lost coin. Jesus used illustrations to appeal to both sexes. We see that the man was the bread winner and controlled the source of income into the family, but we see the woman did have control of the purse strings to some degree once the money was earned. She had the ten silver coins, and was apparently in charge of them. This was her spending money, and so she did have some economic responsibility just as women always have.

The woman loses what is lifeless, but because it has value it motivates a concern to search and to rejoice in its recovery. Finding what is lost is so enjoyable because of the value of

what is lost. If you lose a rock in your shoe, you don't go try to find it, for it has no value. The whole point of Jesus is that the worst of people; the tax collectors and sinners have value. Even lost people are precious, and we are to seek to restore them to God because of their worth. It is never a Christian attitude to despise any for whom Christ died.

Many Christians misunderstand separation. It does not mean we are to have no love for, or relationship to, the worldly people, but rather, we are not to be partakers with them in their godless values, pleasures, and sins. To withdraw from any relationship, however, is to let the lost sheep stay lost, and not try to find it. It is to say, let the lost coin stay lost, we will do without it. Even if one could do this to a sheep or coin, it can never be rightly done with an infinitely valuable soul of a sinner.

This second parable adds nothing to the first as far as the lesson of the lost being of value. The real value of the parable is that it allows us to see that a woman can be symbolic of God's love and the evangelistic search for the lost equally with men. Both the man and the woman are representing God's love for the lost and his efforts to restore them, and the joy of seeing it succeed. One can ask in the light of this parable; is there any aspect of the nature of God that a woman cannot illustrate as well as a man?

In the case of the sheep and the coin, the lost will not come back as in the case of the Prodigal Son. They must be sought out and brought back, and so two out of three lost people

probably need to be found where they are lost, for they will not likely wander back to the fold. Most evangelism must be done outside the church walls. We see three kinds of lostness in this larger context. The sheep just wanders away; the coin is lost by the carelessness of someone; the son chooses to go his own way.

The woman did not just sit and cry about her loss, but she got busy searching for it. God did not sit back in heaven and cry about the fall of man; nor did he take the opposite view that there is no sense in crying over spilt milk. He got busy doing something about overcoming the negative state of affairs. It was action that counted. The Pharisees had their philosophy of how to relate or not relate to people, but Jesus had His plan of action to find and save people. She looked everywhere, and so the Lord will look everywhere to find sinners ready to return to God. Go into all the world He said. What kind of search would it be if she just looked under one chair and quit? It is diligent search until the object is found that is needed. So Jesus wants His body to look into every nation and tribe on the planet until every possible sinner is confronted with the Gospel.

The coin represents the total helpless state of the sinner if a Savior does not seek to find them. Someone wrote,

**"It was for me that Jesus died! For me, and a world of men,
Just as sinful, and just as slow to give back His love again;
And He didn't wait till I came to Him, but He loved me at my
worst;**

He needn't ever have died for me if I could have loved Him first."

Many have tried to see all kinds of symbolism here. The three stories representing the three persons of the Godhead is one example. The first represents the Son who, as a shepherd, went after the sheep; the last one represents the father of the Prodigal as being God the Father. This one of the woman is seen as a picture of God the Holy Spirit. Outstanding scholars like Bengel, Alford, Stier, and Habershon held that the woman represents the Holy Spirit. So also does Spurgeon and S.M. Brown, a Baptist author and editor who says the woman's sweeping fits the work of the Holy Spirit in removing rubbish and revealing lost truth and values to the church. He says, like the woman, the Spirit is the Comforter. One parable in three parts representing the three persons of the trinity. The woman is said to best symbolize the Holy Spirit because women were veiled and so also the Holy Spirit is the most hidden of the Persons of the Godhead. Trench suggests that the shepherd is Jesus going after the lost sheep, whereas the woman is the church filled with the Holy Spirit seeking those who are lost right in the very house of God.

If we see the whole picture, we see the lost who are not able to find their way back, but we see also the lost who by their free will respond and chose to come back. We need to see the whole picture for part of it is not the whole truth. Whole denominations develop by taking one parable and making it the whole truth. The lost are both dead in sin as a

coin, and yet also as responsible as a son to repent and return home.

Matthew Henry has a fascinating idea here. In the first parable only one out of 99 is lost, and in this one only one out of ten is lost. And so only a small proportion of people are lost with the rest still in the fold, or in the purse. He says this could mean there are many in the universe who never fell, but remained faithful to God. Why should we assume that the freedom God gave Adam must always lead to failure? He writes, "O the numberless beings, for ought we know, numberless worlds of beings, that never were lost, or stepped aside from the laws of their Creator!" This is not a far fetched idea. It is based first of all on the infinite nature of God, and the nature of the universe. Then there are other hints in Scripture of beings that never fell. There is no reason to believe that God in His eternal nature never created other universes before He created this one. He may have dozens, and even millions, of other universes, and with creatures that have never fallen and left the fold of loyalty to Him and His will. This is, of course, speculation, but there is no reason to think that it could not be true, and the eternal nature of God makes it likely that it is true. But this is not the place to pursue it.

Joy is an emotion of heaven. Angels can experience it, and do when the purpose of Christ's death is fulfilled. They see the fruits of His cross and rejoice, for they stood ready to come and deliver Him, but He would not call for them. They must have longed to come at His command and wipe out the

cruel men who crucified Him. But now they understand and see the fruit of His death and rejoice. What is the murmuring of the Pharisees on earth compared to the rejoicing of the angels in heaven. Note, the angels could do nothing for the recovery which was purely a human matter, but they can rejoice when human efforts are successful. St. Bernard said, "The tears of penitence are the wine of angels."

What happens on earth does have an effect in heaven. Angels are emotional beings, and they can be gladdened or saddened by what happens among men. The Pharisees were not in touch with the spirit of heaven, for they did not rejoice, but complained. We need to see all events on earth from the perspective of heaven. Jesus emphasized the infinite worth of every eternal soul. Every sinner is a potential citizen of heaven, which the angels will one day meet, and they rejoice, for every repentant sinner is an addition to their eternal family of friends. Angels are spectators, and it is like watching a football game to them. Every time a soul is saved it is like a touchdown for the team of Christ against the team of Satan. There can be great emotion connected with being a spectator, and the angels have that pleasure.

LUKE 17:32-35

32 Remember Lot's wife.

33 Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.

34 I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.

35 There will be two women grinding together; one will be taken and the other left."

15. WOMEN IN LUKE PART 9

LUKE 18:1-8

1 And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man;

3 and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.'

4 For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man,

5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'"

6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.

7 And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

8 I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

An entire message on this woman will be posted. For now we can just say that she illustrates that a woman can be the best illustration Jesus can find of persistence and perseverance.

She was a prayer warrior that matches any man on record.

LUKE 18:15-17

Who could they be but mothers, and so we see another picture of women in the life of Jesus. Women loved their children and wanted the best for them, and so they brought them to Jesus. The men thought women and kids were best kept out of the picture. They were something of a nuisance, but Jesus gives His view of the values involved here, and He comes on strong in favor of the mothers, which was a rebuke to His disciples. Dr. Luke, of course, was delighted to record this event, for his life's work involved a procession of mothers with their children. Who brings children to the doctor more than mothers?

In Mark 10:13-16 we see Jesus is quite angry at this point. Jesus took the children in His arms and blessed them, and laid hands on them. This could be an imparting of gifts to these little ones. Jesus was motherly in His relation to babies and little children. We see Jesus not only as the friend of sinners, but as the friend of children and mothers.

A child knows how to receive freely without feeling an obligation. To try and work for the gift and to be worthy of it is not in a child's mind. The Pharisees were so concerned about legalistic obedience to the law that they could not be childlike and receive the gifts of God by grace.

LUKE 21:1-4

1 He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury;

2 and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins.

3 And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them;

4 for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had."

Here we see Jesus using a woman as the highest illustration of sacrificial stewardship. When it comes to equality of the sexes, it is likely that women are superior rather than just equal in this realm. It is the widows of the world that are noted for their support for so many of the Christian ministries around the world. Seldom is it ever noted that widowers are so involved. They, of course, are much fewer in number, but they just do not stand out as great supporters.

LUKE 22:54-57

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance;

55 and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

56 Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, "This man also was with him."

57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."

It was to a woman that Peter denied he knew the Lord. It

had to be an embarrassment for the rest of his life that he denied his Lord because of the accusation of this woman. This text does not say anything so great about women, but it does point out how frightened a man can become when a woman is on to his deception.

LUKE 23:27-31

27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him.

28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

29 For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!'

30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'

31 For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Here was a good crowd of weeping women. This reveals the impact of the ministry of Christ upon women. The women were more sympathetic to the life and teaching of Jesus than were the men. They may have known little of the theological debates of the men, but they knew Jesus was good, loving, and that He met their needs. Sadler writes, "He seems to have removed the curse from the sex, so that they are now more ready to receive His truth than men." Many

feel they were not disciples, but people who were very emotional about seeing this man suffering. Even tender hearted pagans could be moved to tears by the cross, but tears are not proof of commitment. Pilot's wife was a pagan woman, but she pleaded with her husband to spare Jesus.

Spurgeon writes, "As for the words themselves, they are especially noteworthy, because they constitute the last connected discourse of the Savior before He died. All that He said afterwards was fragmentary and mainly of the nature of prayer. A sentence to John, and to his mother, and to the dying thief: Just a word or two looking downward, but for the most part he uttered broken sentences, which flew upwards on the wings of strong desire. This was his last address, a farewell sermonette; delivered amid surroundings most sad and solemn, restraining tears and yet at the same time causing them to flow. We reckon the words to be all the more weighty and full of solemnity because of the occasion, but even apart from this, the truths delivered were in themselves of the utmost importance and solemnity. This last discourse of our Lord before His death was terribly prophetic to a world rejecting Him, portentous with a thousand woes to a people whom He loved, woes which even He could not avert, because they had rejected His interposition and refused the mercy which He came to bring. "Daughters of Jerusalem," said He, "weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Not many hours before He had himself set them the example by weeping over the doomed city, and crying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto

thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Spurgeon goes on, "He said to the weeping women, "WEEP NOT." There are some cold, calculating expositors who make it out that our Lord reprov'd these women for weeping, and that there was something wrong, or if not all together wrong, yet something very far from commendable in their sorrow-I think they call it "the sentimental sympathy" of these kind souls. There is no being much more unnatural than a cold-blooded commentator, who bites at every letter, and nibbles at the grammatical meaning of every syllable, translating with his lexicon, but never exercising common sense, or allowing even the least play to his heart. Blame these women? No, bless them again and again. It was the one redeeming trait in the dread march along the Via Dolorosa; let it not be dreamed that Jesus could have censured those who wept for Him. No, no, no, a thousand times No! These gentle women appear in a happy contrast to the chief priests, with their savage malice, and to the thoughtless multitude with their fierce cry of "crucify Him, crucify Him!" They seem to me to have shown a noble courage in daring to express their sympathy with one whom everybody else hunted to death with such ferocity. To espouse his cause amid those hoarse cries of "crucify Him, crucify Him," was courage more than manly; those women were heroines more valiant than those who rush upon the spoil. Those lamentations in sympathy with him who was being led to die are worthy of our praise and not of our

criticism. Our Lord accepted the sympathy they evinced, and was only His great disinterested unselfishness which made Him say, "Spare your grief's for other sorrows." It was not because they were wrong, but because there was something still more necessary to be done than even to weep for Him."

Jesus is giving a warning. He is not rejecting their sympathy, but redirecting it. He is saying, "I can handle this ladies, but you are facing a trial even tougher to handle." His agony would be short and quickly turned to victory. There's would be long. Jesus was not self-centered as He marched to the cross, focusing on self-pity. He was thinking of the terrible consequence upon them for what they were doing. The wrath of God would fall upon Israel. Jesus was sad for them, and for Himself. He was weeping over Jerusalem, and said don't weep for me for the real tragedy is the price you will have to pay for what you do to me. There is no escape from judgment, for they must reap what they sow. Spurgeon wrote, "Jesus points and says, "Weep for the national sin, weep for the national curse, which will surely come upon you, because you are putting the just One to death."

The agonies of the future would be such that the most blessed state of womanhood for Israel would be to curse-motherhood. Mothers will so suffer and see their children parish so that it would be a blessing never to have had any. This is not what Jesus says, but what men will then say. You have heard people say the world is so terrible they

don't want to bring children into it. That was the case in 70A.D. when Jerusalem fell.

Here is a picture of people hiding in caves and so fearful of facing the enemy that they pray for the mountain to cave in and cover them. The fall of Jerusalem is a symbolic event of the final judgment of the world. What happened to Israel then will happen to the whole world for its rejection of Jesus. Jesus quotes a proverbial expression. If the fire consumes green wood what will it do to dry wood? If judgment even falls upon that which has some life and possibility of fruit, what kind of judgment will fall on dry dead fruitless branches. In other words, the heat is going to be so intense that the best will burn. If the Son of God had to go through the fire of persecution, what about the body with its dry and fruitless branches? Jesus is the green wood, and Jerusalem is the dry wood. Sadler writes, "If the Roman practice such cruelties on me, who am a green tree, and the very source of life, what will they do one day to your nation, which is like a barren, withered trunk...."

LUKE 23:49,55-56

55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid;

56 then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

The idea that women cannot take the pressure like men will not fit the facts. The men had all fled, but the women were there to see the worst; to see their Lord crucified. They no doubt wept, but they were there. Fulton Sheen asked, "Which stands up better in a crisis-men or women?" He answers, "One can discuss this in a series of historical crises, but without arriving at any decision. The best way to arrive at a conclusion is to go to the greatest crisis the world ever faced, namely, Crucifixion of our Divine Lord. When we come to the great drama of Calvary, there is one fact that stands out very clearly. Men failed; on the other hand, there is not one single instance of a woman's failing Him."

16. THE VOLUNTARY MARY based on Luke 1:26-38

It was August of 1683, and Vienna was about to fall into the hands of the Grand Vizier of all the Turks, Kara Mustafa. It would be a great victory for the Moslem Empire, and would open the door of all Europe for the warriors of Mohammed. Christians were praying all over Europe for a miracle. Vienna had to hold out for a few more days. Then one morning the Viennese heard the booming of cannons from Mt. Kalen. This was a signal for the arrival of John Sobieski and 20 thousand Polish troops. In spite of the odds which were 10 to 1 against them, their surprise attack put the Turks to rout, and Christianity was spared from a devastating

defeat. Pope Innocent XI, issued a decree establishing a great feast in honor of the virgin Mary for this deliverance.

As Protestants, we ask; what in the world did Mary have to do with this providential guidance of God in saving Christianity? It is hard for us to imagine a Christian life, so dominated by Mary, that she is exalted above her Son, the Savior of the world. But for centuries, the virgin mother of our Lord had an influence that eclipsed even that of her divine Son.

Back in 431 A. D., at the Council of Ephesus, Cyril of Alexandria, established the level of veneration that Mary would have for the next 1,000 years. He praised the virgin mother in this fashion: "Though whom the Trinity is glorified and worshipped, the cross of the Savior exalted and honored, though whom heaven triumphs, the angels are made glad, the devils driven forth, the temper overcome, and the fallen creature raised up even to heaven."

Web Garrison in his book, Women In The Life Of Jesus, points out that zeal for Mary's honor sparked the Crusades and the age of Knighthood. All of the creative arts flourished to honor her. Feasts of the Virgin multiplied until they dominated the civil, as well as the religious, calendar. Schools, Cathedrals, hospitals, libraries, and shrines without number, were named for Mary. At one point, one third of the women of the western world, bore some form of her name.

Mary had her millennium where she was queen of heaven, and she reigned also on the earth. Legends and traditions formed around her until she dominated the theological thinking of the people. Stories were told of how she was taken to the temple at age 3, and, like Samuel of old, was left as a servant in the house of the Lord. She was fed by angels from the Tree of Life. At 14, the High Priest informed her he received a message from God that she should wed. All the widowers of the land were called to the temple. One by one, they passed by her as she held the golden rod in her hand. When Joseph walked by, a dove flew out of the end of the rod and landed on his head. This was the sign that he was the one.

At her death, Jesus and the angels came for her soul. After three days she rose from the dead and ascended to God's right hand to be with her Son in the work of intercession. She became the goddess of Christianity and took the place of all the goddesses of the pagan world. Where Venus once stood, statues of Mary were erected. Thousands of paintings of the Madonna did much to spread the worship of Mary. Masterpieces like Raphael's Sistine Madonna, made her the object of adoration to all who loved beauty.

The veneration of Mary has continued into modern times. In 1854, the Immaculate Conception was made official dogma. This means Mary was born without original sin. In 1950, The Assumption of Mary was made dogma. This means she did not decay, but her body was raised up to heaven miraculously. Bishop Fulton Sheen, said in his

message, The Role of Mary in the Church, "It is easier to understand the meek and humble heart of Christ by looking at His mother. She holds all the great truths of Christianity together, as a piece of wood holds a kite. Children wrap the string of a kite around a stick, and release the string as the kite climbs to the heavens. Mary is like that piece of wood. Around her we wrap all the precious strings of the great truths of our holy faith—for example, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Church. No matter how far we get above the earth, as the kite may, we always have need of Mary to hold the doctrines of the Creed together. If we threw away the stick, we would no longer have the kite; if we threw away Mary, we would never have our Lord. He would be lost in the heavens, like our run away kite, and that would be terrible, indeed., for us on earth."

We could go on and on showing how the Catholic Church has exalted Mary. This explains why Protestants have had a hard time being honest and fair about Mary. It is the age old psychology: if something is taken to an extreme, go to the other extreme, to offset it. It is called over-compensation. If the Catholics adore her, let us ignore her. The result is, Protestants have become anti-Mary. The popular preacher, John Linton said, "I doubt if there is an important character in the Scriptures who have suffered the neglect that Mary has. Many of you, I venture to say, have never listened to an entire sermon on the virgin mother of Christ. Plenty of sermons on the Virgin Birth, but few upon the Virgin herself; many sermons about the disciple who leaned on Jesus' bosom, but few about the mother on whose bosom the Lord

Christ pillowed His baby head. Character studies on Peter who denied Christ, Thomas who doubted Christ, Pilate who sentenced Christ, Judas who betrayed Christ, but the Protestant pulpit is strangely silent concerning the pure quiet woman who mothered Christ."

We are so afraid of giving any support to the Catholic view, that we would rather neglect her than respect her, and give her, her rightful place in the plan of God. There are false Christs too, but God forbid that we take our eyes off Jesus, because there are perversions. It is folly to neglect any part of God's revelation just because men abuse it.

The facts are clear in the New Testament; Mary was with the 120 at Pentecost, and thus, part of the foundation of the church. She was a sinner who needed a Savior, like all the rest. There is no hint that she was lifted up as an object of veneration. There is not one reference to her in all the New Testament Epistles. She is never prayed to, and so all of the excessive exaltation of Mary is not based on the New Testament, but on the traditions of men.

Only once in the Gospels did someone try to praise Mary. In Luke 11:27, we read, "a woman in the crowd called out, blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus replied, "blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Mary is blessed because she heard the word of God and obeyed it. She is to be honored as an example of the blessed. But in no way is she made equal to Christ in anything.

As we approach Christmas, the role of Mary stands out as crucial. We want to give her the rightful place that is her's, in this greatest love story ever told. She was a star and deserves her name up in lights. Let's examine Dr. Luke's record of this, one of a kind, woman. First look at-

I. THE VIRGIN'S VISITOR.

Gabriel was the messenger who came to Mary from God. He and Michael are the only two angels in the Bible that are named. They are very special messengers. They do not just pop in on people for a visit. There are only three people in the Bible who ever got a visit from Gabriel. Daniel in the Old Testament, and Zechariah in the New Testament; and then Mary. Mary is the only woman in all of history to get a visit from this special messenger. I think we can safely conclude: Mary was somebody super special to God. She is, therefore, to be admired and looked up to as a great example. When you are the only woman in history to receive a visit from God's personal messenger, you qualify for VIP treatment.

Gabriel's first word to Mary was, "Greetings." It is equivalent to the Hebrew, Shalom, meaning peace. In our culture it would be, "Hello Mary." In Latin it was, "Ava Maria." Some translated it into English as, "Hail Mary." This is where you get the famous Catholic prayer, Hail Mary full of grace. Gabriel said to her, "you are highly favored!" Not, somewhat favored, or moderately favored, but, highly favored. This leads us to the second point which is-

II. THE VIRGIN'S VALUE.

Her value to God has already been established by the nature of the visitor she received from God. It is also clearly stated in words. Gabriel says in verse 30, "you have found favor with God." Keep in mind, that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Mary pleased God, and that is why we know, she was a great woman of faith.

Elizabeth exclaimed in verse 42, "Blessed are you among women." Then, in her own song of praise, Mary says in verse 48, "From now on all generations shall call me blessed." It goes against the grain of clear revelation to ignore Mary, or to put her down. Because of her value to God, the name Mary became the most popular female name in the world of Christians and Moslems. It was already very popular in Judaism. So common was the name among His followers; three out of the four women at the cross, were named Mary. John 19:25 says, "Near the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala." There were others named Mary as well, such as Mary the mother of John Mark, but Mary of Nazareth was the most valued of them all.

Mary, alone, was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. There had been millions of young virgins in Israel's history. There were, no doubt, many others even in Mary's own day, but God chose her. She was to be the most unique mother in all of history. Much of what we do at Christmas does not last, but what Mary did that first Christmas lasts forever.

The gift that came from God through her goes on giving and giving and giving. It is the only gift that never ends. It is the only part of Christmas that does not past away. The poet wrote,

**"Your Christmas lights will go out.
Your Christmas tree will fade.
Your Christmas gifts will wear out.
Your Christmas tinsel will be forgotten.
Your Christmas cards will be put away or
destroyed...
Only Christ will remain.**

**Long after the Christmas dinner is eaten.
Long after the merry making is hushed.
Long after the guests have departed.
Long after the gift certificate is cashed.
Long after the monetary thrill is dead.
Christ will remain."**

Author Unknown

Mary was only the box God's gift came in. She was the pretty wrapping, but not the gift itself. There is no escaping the facts, however, that God needed Mary to achieve His purpose.

I have often wondered why God did not send His Son like He did the first Adam. Jesus could have come, walking out of the desert, as a full grown teacher. He could have avoided all the hassle that Joseph and Mary had to endure. Why

would God chose the complex and complicated route of the virgin birth? It was all so slow and inefficient compared to what we see in the creation of the first Adam. God did not need a woman then: why does He need one for the second Adam?

I am sure we do not know all the reasons, but some of them are revealed by Gabriel. In verses 32-33, he tells Mary that her child will be given the throne of His father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. The second Adam had to be an authentic descendant of David. He had to have an historic right to the throne of God's people. Jesus could not just step into history with no genealogy and have any rights at all to be King. He would not be an authentic heir to the throne.

The point is, God goes by the book. He works through channels to fulfill His purpose. He needed an ideal girl from the line of David to achieve His purpose. The Virgin Mary was not a mere incidental piece of furniture on the stage for effect. She was crucial, and thus, a highly valued star in this great Christmas drama. She was not merely a temporary tool: a body God needed to make His Son authentically human. God needed her mind and her character as well. His Son needed a mother to love, teach, and train Him. Edward T. Sullivan wrote in, *How God Works*, "When God wants an important thing done in this world, or a wrong righted, He goes about it in a very singular way. He does not release His thunderbolts or stir up His earthquakes. He simply has a tiny, helpless baby born.... Then He puts an idea or purpose

into the mother's heart, she puts it into the baby's mind, and then... God waits."

God waited a long time for His Son to be raised by, and conditioned by, His mother. At age 12, Jesus could have broken away from His home. Mary and Joseph found Him in the temple. It was common for gifted boys to stay in the temple and study with the scholars. Samuel, you recall, was taken to the temple as a small boy. He was trained there for his role as the last of the judges. Paul was probably only 15 years old when he went to study at the feet of Gamaliel. Promising youth were recruited as a temple policy. When the scholars in the temple, who were astonished by the wisdom of Jesus, saw His potential, they would likely want to recruit Him. But Jesus went home with His parents. God chose that His Son would be a product of a Godly home and mother and not the product of a Godly institution. Mary's heart and mind became His primary school room.

We are not suggesting that this Galilean girl knew more than the temple scholars, but she had something more than scholarship that God wanted for His Son. Her song in Luke 1:46-55, reveals her spirit of praise and humility, her love for God and people, and her compassion for the needy. These were values that Jesus may not have learned so well from the temple scholars. God wanted the very best for His Son. The fact that He stayed home with His mother until He was 30 years old, tells us plenty about the valuable role Mary played in shaping the humanity of God's Son.

Those who exalt Mary above what the Bible authorizes have missed the whole point of her value. Her role was to help God produce a Messiah, with such balance of the male and female virtues, that He would be the ideal man, lacking nothing to appeal to all mankind. Every quality that made her great in the eyes of God are embodied in her Son to perfection. The idea that we need a more warm and compassionate spirit to intercede for us before the throne of God, other than Christ, is a rejection of Mary's success. Her Son is all that she ever was and more. To imply that she is more loving and compassionate than her Son, is to say, she failed to be all God wanted her to be. There is only one mediator between God and man, and that one is Jesus, because Mary succeeded in helping Him to become the best of all men. Mary was so successful in her role that she is no longer needed. The product of her obedience is all that we need-the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Virgins value in God's plan is beyond calculation. Let us never detract from that value by even a hint that her Son is in any way inadequate to be our one and only Mediator. Next, look at-

III. THE VIRGIN'S VOLITION.

When Mary heard the message of Gabriel, she responded in verse 38, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." By her own volition, Mary said yes to God. She was not forced to be the mother of the Messiah. She chose to cooperate with God by an act of her will. It was a fearful

responsibility, and Mary had her fears, but we do not hear any of the excuses that are commonly heard when God calls someone to do His will. There is none of the objection that she was too young or that she did not speak well. She could have made an excuse, but she believed the words of Gabriel in verse 37, "nothing is impossible with God."

Washington Lewis said about Mary at this point, "The Incarnation began when Mary said into thy hands I commend my body and ended when Jesus said into thy hands I commend my spirit." Many feel that it was at this precise point, when Mary submitted, that the Incarnation took place. She said yes to God's plan, and the Holy Spirit did His work to make her conceive the God-man.

On March 25, just nine months before Christmas, many celebrate the feast of the Annunciation. It could also be called the feast of the Conception, or the feast of the Incarnation. The God-man did not begin at His birth. Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth, but the Incarnation began at His conception, and the conception took place at the moment of the Virgin's voluntary surrender. She was Christlike in so doing. Jesus became our Savior when He said yes to God. Nobody took the life of Jesus, He voluntarily chose to lay it down for our salvation. He said, "Not my will but Thine be done." He volunteered to be the Savior and Mary volunteered to be the mother of the Savior.

The only way for any of us to be truly great in the

Kingdom of God is to, like Mary, volunteer our lives and our gifts to accomplish God's purpose in history. We do not worship Mary, but we honor her as one of the greatest of God's volunteers.

17. THE WOMAN AT THE WELL Based on John 4:1-26

Your kindness to one person can change the course of history for multitudes. Gypsy Smith was one of the great evangelists of the last century, and the beginning of the 20th. He won tens of thousands of people to Christ. His life was often in the midst of the crowd, but his greatest life changing experience was a one on one encounter. He felt very conspicuous, for he was from a Gypsy family, and he was accustomed to being rejected for being different. He felt nobody cared for him but his father. But one day, as he stood outside a chapel, an older man walked up to him and said, "The Lord bless you, my boy. The Lord keep you, my boy."

The man walked away, and he never saw him again, but a lump came into his throat, and a tear to his eye, for those words of kindness made a little Gypsy boy feel accepted. In his autobiography Gypsy writes, "When I reach the glory-land, I will find out that dear old man, and while angels shout and applaud, and the multitudes who have been

brought to Christ through the Gypsy boy sing for joy, I will thank that grand old saint for his shake of the hand and for his God bless you! For he made me feel that somebody outside the tent really cared for a Gypsy boy's soul." It is absolutely amazing what an act of acceptance to a person who expects to be rejected.

Jesus knew the power of acceptance in people's lives, and that is why we see Him practicing it when He encounters people who expected to be rejected. Zacchaeus was up a tree, not only because he was short of stature, but because he was short on acceptance. People would not give him ground to stand on, but would have gladly trampled on him. He was not an acceptable person, but Jesus came along and accepted him as a friend, and even ate with him. This acceptance changed this little man's life so that he became a big hit in the kingdom of God.

Even more radical is this encounter of Jesus with the woman of Samaria. Zacchaeus was despised, but he could at least be respected for being a success for what he did. But this woman was a failure. She had married five husbands, and now she was living with a man she was not married to. It is not likely all five of her husbands died, and so she was probably a divorced woman. She was still young enough to be attractive, however, for she had lured another fly into her web. She had something going for her in short range relationships, but in the long run she was a failure at keeping a relationship alive. She was a Samaritan, a woman, and on top of that, and immoral

woman. We have no description of anyone else in the life of Jesus who was a greater moral failure, yet, the encounter of Jesus with this woman at the well is the longest account we have of Jesus dealing with an individual.

Spurgeon calls John 3 and 4 the key soul winning portions of God's Word, because of the focus of Jesus on individuals like Nicodemus and this woman. They were radically different. He was a male Jewish leader, and she was a female Samaritan nobody. He was socially, politically, economically, and religiously her superior, but we see Jesus treating them as equals, and as objects of His love and acceptance. The record of her encounter is twice as long as that of Nicodemus, and the reason is obvious. As a woman and a Samaritan, Jesus had to make it clear that she was not less and object of the evangelism task of the church. Jesus was being far more radical here than we know, by his acceptance of this woman.

The Jewish rabbis said, "Rather burn the sayings of the law than teach them to women." And, "Let no man prolong conversation with a woman; let no one converse with a woman in the streets, not even with his own wife." Jesus was going against the grain of His day. Spurgeon points out, "Even the Apostles were tainted at first with the horrible superstition which made them marvel than Jesus openly talked with a woman." Jesus was doing a lot of teaching by this encounter. He was teaching the woman and His disciples, and the church for the rest of history. Some of the most profound truths of revelation are to be found in this chapter. It is also a guide to the principles of evangelism.

Here is the Master by precept and example showing us the means and the methods by which we can follow Him in winning the lost. We have here the authorized manual on how to be an effective witness and disciple maker. Let's look at two foundational insights that will help us make the Master's plan our plan. First note,

I. HIS PASSION FOR EVANGELISM.

Jesus was so tired that He was the only one of the group who stayed at the well to rest. The others all went into town to buy provisions. Farrar in his Life Of Christ writes, "The expression in the original is most pathetically picturesque. It implies that the wayfarer was quite tired out, and in his exhaustion flung his limbs wearily on the seat, anxious if possible for complete repose." In other words, Jesus is shot. In this state of body and mind, most of us avoid people like the plague. We don't care about any need but our own, and we are not interested in conversation that is even small talk, let alone things of eternal value. But Jesus has such a passion for witnessing that He engages this woman in extended conversation about deep spiritual matters.

He told His disciples, when they returned, that His food was to do the will of Him who sent Him. He had such a passion to touch people for God that He forgot about His hunger and exhaustion. The tragic truth is, most of us do not care enough about lost people to go out of our way to touch them, even when we are feeling our best. Intellectually we care, but we have lost the passion that compels us to care

enough to act. Leighton Ford begins his book **Good News Is For Sharing**, by telling of his experience on the Caribbean Island of Grand Cayman. His wife lost her diamond engagement ring. She feared she dropped it on the beach. Friends helped them sift through sand where she had been sitting, but no ring was found.

They went back to their motel room crushed, not just because of the monetary loss, but because of so many loving memories tied to that ring. Then he moved some papers on the bed, and there it was. They hugged with joy, and Leighton went flying out the door, and even though it was near midnight, he banged on doors and shared the good news with everyone. He is a professional evangelist, and yet, even he does not get that passionate over sharing the good news of eternal life in Christ. He knows we don't even come close. Why? Because Christians who think they are so free, are in reality, to a great degree, slaves of the culture.

It is not the in thing to do to challenge people's convictions. It is the in thing to tolerate, and let everybody do their own thing, and believe their own thing. We like this even as Christians, for it means we too are tolerated, and are free to believe and not be persecuted. It seems only right to give others that same freedom, and so the idea of trying to persuade someone to change almost seems anti-American. The result is, we are just the opposite of passionate in witnessing, for we are apathetic. The Gospel is everywhere, and anyone who really wants to be saved can be anytime they chose. They just have to turn on the TV, or radio, or go buy

a book. They are free to be saved at their convenience, so why should I buy them? We may not consciously reason this way, but we do practice this philosophy, and the end result is, we follow culture and not Christ, for we reject His passions for leading people to find a redemptive relationship with God.

Because of this lack of passion, we don't even care about our lost peers, let alone the fowl sinners like this woman at the well. We are almost pagan in our perspective, for we think that as long as people are happy, and they vote, and keep their yard nice, they are okay, and we don't have to be bothered by the fact that they are lost. People who are not drowning do not need us to make heroic efforts to save them. Only when you feel that people's lives are threatened are you moved to act with passion. Since we are captives of our culture, and do not feel a strong sense of the lostness of people, we are not moved to witness, or to go out of our way to help them find the Way.

It is not that there is a lack of books, seminars, and conferences on evangelism. They are available in abundance. What is lacking is the passion that compels Christians to act. When Baron von Hugel, the Christian philosopher, was on his death bed, he called his favorite niece to his side. He whispered to her his last words that summed up all his brilliant mind had learned in life. He said, "Caring is everything. Nothing matters but caring." Jesus cared about every person He encountered, and because He cared, He shared. He made an effort to touch their lives for God.

Stonewall Jackson had to cross the Shanandoah River in 24 hours. He told old Miles that he had ordered his engineers to prepare plans and to get them to him as quickly as possible. About 10 hours later Jackson asked old Miles how he was getting along, and he replied, "General, the bridge is built. I don't know whether the picture is done yet or not." We all need to be more like old Miles the bridge builder. He had a passion for getting the job done. If we wait for someone to come up with the perfect plan before we share Christ with someone, we will spend our life planning and preparing, but never performing. What we need is the passion that propels us to care enough to share.

It is better to try and fail than never to try at all. May God help us to be open to the passion of Christ so we are willing to try. Guilt can sometimes move us, and we can be scolded into some surface activity, but, as Lyle Schaller says, that is usually followed by his hostility, and then passive neglect. We need to focus on just one primary motive for evangelism, and that is passion for people. This is what brought Jesus into the world, and this is what moved Him to care about every individual He met, and this alone is what will make us the witness He wants us to be. May God help us to pray, "Lord fill me with your spirit of passion for people that will, in turn, give me your passion for evangelism.

Jesus had a passion for evangelism, but He did not have a zeal without knowledge. He did not use emotionalism, but very rational methods in winning people. Jesus knew psychology, and He knew human nature, and we see this

clearly as we look at our second point.

II. HIS PROCEDURE IN EVANGELISM.

A game may be won by the act of sinking a ball in a basket or cup, or taking it across a goal line, but that act is preceded by a procedure. That is, there is a process by which one comes to this winning event, and so it is with winning a person into the kingdom of God. Jesus did not just throw holy water on this woman at the well, and claim her as a disciple. She had to be won, and this calls for a process by which she is taken from neutral through negative, and into positive. This can be a complex procedure, but the details of this encounter are recorded so all Christians can see the basic principles of how to go about making a disciple for Christ. We will be looking at these basics in a series on John chapter 4. The first step we want to see in this process is His approach.

The first words of Jesus to this woman are words of request. He asked, "Will you give me a drink?" You may think that it is much ado about nothing to make an issue of this, but in fact, it is a key factor in successful evangelism. Most efforts to touch a life for Christ fail at this first stage, which is the approach. If you approach people with the words, "Are you saved?" Or, "Are you going to heaven?" Or some such words, you are taking an aggressive approach that may work in some cases, but is bound to fail in most, because it is an attack approach that puts people on the defensive.

You are approaching them as a superior approaches and inferior, and you come as a threat. It is the approach of those with a Messiah complex. They have the solution to everyone's problems, and if people will just give heed, they will be delivered. They come with the image of those who have it all together, and are in need of nothing. Listen to them and you too can be among the elite. There is no denying that this does appeal to some, but the Messiah Himself does not use this approach. His approach is not only better, and more effective, it is the honest approach that avoids the danger of pride in the believer, and offense to the unbeliever.

Jesus approaches this woman with a focus on His own need. He is thirsty, and she has the capacity to meet that need. By requesting a drink from this very worldly woman, Jesus establishes a common ground with her. He is not approaching her as a superior, but as an equal. She is there to get water because she needs water to live. He is not different from her. He has this same need for water. His approach to her is the approach of acceptance. It is a very opposite of the attack approach. In the attack approach you establish immediately that you are not on common ground with your target person. You are saved, and they are not. You have the answer, and they do not. You are in, and they are out. It is two different worlds colliding, and collisions are not pleasant experiences.

The approach of Jesus says, we are in the same world with common needs. His approach builds on the likenesses of the

lost with the saved, and not their differences. He gets there later in the process, but that is not an effective approach. When you make a request of another person, you have instantly conveyed to them that they are a valued person. They have what can be of help to you, and so they are of value to you. That is what acceptance is. If you do not convey acceptance of another, why should they even care to accept you, or anything you have to say?

The acceptance approach is almost always the only way to earn the right to witness to anybody. Forget all the nonsense of being superior to the lost. They may have many ways by which they can meet needs that you have. Jesus was no macho Messiah who refused to ask a Samaritan woman for help. She had a jar, and she could help Him satisfy His thirst, and He did not hesitate to ask her for that help. If you want a positive relationship with a non-Christian, you need to find an area of life where they have something by which they can meet a need of yours. Your request for help establishes that you accept them, and acknowledge their worth. This puts you on common ground, and gives you a basis to go further.

If anybody had the right to take the other approach, it was Jesus. He was not only a man, and she was a woman. He was the best of men, and she was the worst of women. He was a Jew, and she was a Samaritan. He was holy, and she was unholy. He had every reason in the book to approach this woman as a superior to an inferior. But He didn't, and by not doing so, He labels that approach in any of

His followers, one of audacity and pride. We all need to do a lot of self examination at this point. Do we accept people as Jesus did? Can we humble ourselves as He did to ask for help, even from an outstanding sinner? Do we look down our nose at people outside the kingdom, and convey a spirit of rejection, or do we look up to them as people of worth, and say to them, I could use your help? Until we can do the latter, we cannot get to first base in winning the lost.

Now let's not distort this, and pretend that Jesus accepted her sinful life style. He did not say, it is okay by me if you marry every Tom, Dick, and Harry you can seduce. I know you are between husbands, and working on your sixth success, but that is nothing to me. That is not what we mean by accepting the sinner. Jesus did not accept her sin, or okay it. He just accepted her as a person. A person worthy of being loved and cared about, and worthy of being redeemed. To accept another does not mean you approve of their sin. It simply means, you are willing to acknowledge your worth, and then treat them with respect. Jesus was a friend of sinners, because He accepted them, not their sin. Their sin, however, never disqualifies them for acceptance, because their sin is what makes them in need of a Savior, and, therefore, in need of acceptance.

Jesus needed this sinner to help Him get a drink, and because He was willing to acknowledge that need, He won her over to drink the water of life, and become His disciple. Get rid of your Christian pride, and look for ways you need a sinners help, and then you will be ready to approach them

with a Christ like acceptance.

18. MARY MAGDALENE Based on John 20:1-18

Abraham Lincoln said in December of 1839, "Many free countries have lost their liberty, and ours may lose hers, but if she shall, be at my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her." Lincoln was a man of loyalty to his country, and his loyalty made him a great man. We want to look at a woman who was loyal to her Lord, and also became great because of it. Mary Magdalene was not the last to desert Jesus in His hour of crisis. She never deserted him at all. She was not only loyal to the end, our text tells us she was loyal beyond the end, for even after death she maintained her loyalty, and was the first to come to the tomb.

No woman ever became so famous so fast as Mary Magdalene did by this early morning act of devotion. All of womanhood has been raised to a higher level because of Mary's love and loyalty. Because of her the first word spoken by the risen Christ was woman, and the first name spoken was Mary. We may say that love is blind, but the fact

is, love sees what no one else can see. Love enabled Mary to see the angels that Peter and John did not observe. She was the first to see the risen Lord, and hear him speak. Her love kept her near the tomb when the doubts of others scattered them. Her love was rewarded with acts of love in return.

A woman in deep devotion anointed Jesus for His burial, but the disciples did not understand. A woman in deep devotion was first at the tomb. The evidence is clear that women are more sensitive and loving in their devotion. No one among His male followers ever gave Him the comfort He needed. They slept while he sweat in agony. They ran, and they denied Him when He needed support. Only women anointed Him, showed Him love and hospitality, stood at the cross and rose early to come to the tomb.

We know so little about Mary, but her name is mentioned 14 times in the Gospels. That is more than any male follower of Christ except the three in the inner circle-Peter, James, and John. Mary Magdalene has excited the interest of more poets, artists, and musicians than any other woman in the Bible, and she has a prominent place in more biblical novels than any other woman. One of the problems, however, is that she has somehow come to be identified with the sinful woman that wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair. Back in the fourth century with link was made, and it became a tradition which has not been broken to this day, even though there is no basis for believing Mary was ever a wicked woman.

The Catholic church strengthen the tradition by establishing Magdalen houses all over the world for fallen women. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word Magdalen as "reformed prostitute." The result is that thousands of sermons have been preached on the life of sin Mary was saved from. For all we know, she may have been a very sinful woman, and if she was, the glory of her life and devotion is not in the least diminished. The woman at the well had been with 5 husbands, and she was living with a man unmarried at the time she met Jesus, but Jesus saved her, and she became a powerful witness in Samaria. Mary could have been a sinful woman also, but the point is, the Bible nowhere even hints that she was, and, therefore, honesty demands that we give her the benefit of the doubt, and respect her past rather than cast doubt on her morality.

The only fact we have concerning her past is recorded by Dr. Luke in Luke 8:2 where he tells us of those who followed Jesus in His ministry. After referring to the 12 he says, "And also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out." She, along with other women who had been healed, followed Christ with deep devotion because His healing power had given them life and freedom. They had been delivered from Satan, and now they were devoted to the Savior in deep gratitude. There is no call to read into this deliverance any rescue from a life of sin. Their bondage was sickness rather than sin. You can speculate that they were all wicked women, but that is all it is, for the Scripture does not put one blot on their character.

Let us then build our judgment of Mary on the foundation of what the Bible says, and not on tradition. Let's examine the clear positives of revelation, and not the vague negatives of speculation. Our text begins with a description of the depth of her devotion. The sun had not yet risen, but she was up and on her way to the tomb while it was yet dark. As far as she knew Jesus was dead, and she would never see him again, but she was still motivated by His love. Her life still had meaning because of Him.

Freud once wrote a letter to Princess Marie Bonaparte, and in it he said, "The moment a man questions the meaning and value of life he is sick." The disciples at this point were in grave danger, and had Jesus not risen, some or all of them would have likely developed psychological problems. Mary, on the other hand, was in better health because of Jesus, and even when she thought He was dead she was not frozen into inaction, and paralyzed by despair. Mary was motivated to act, for she was still grateful to Christ, and still saw a way by which she could express her love and appreciation. The other Gospels tell us that she and the other women had gotten spices, and they intended to finish the job of giving Jesus a decent burial.

The haste had been great because of the approach of the Sabbath, and these women were not satisfied with the half a job that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had done. Their Lord had given His best to them when He was alive, and they were determined to give Him their best in death. Why Mary was so anxious to get there we can only guess.

Possibly she just couldn't sleep, and couldn't be satisfied until she had done her best. One thing is for sure-Mary was not a woman of indecision. She was clearly a leader among women. Every time her name is mentioned in a list of women she is always first. She was first at the tomb because that was the kind of woman she was. She was a leader and always out in front. She was a winner, and not a waiter.

Some people are always waiting to live. When conditions change; when we get these bills paid; when the kids grow up; when I retire; and on and on it goes. People are always waiting to live, and ever planning to live in the future, but just enduring circumstances in the present. Mary was a now person. She was up and doing, and not waiting to see what would happen. She had a plan to be carried out as soon as the law allowed. Obstacles did not hinder her. The fact that the tomb was guarded and sealed did not stop her. The fact that it was Passover, and all of Jerusalem would be filled with strangers, did not delay her. She was up and heading for the tomb while it was still dark.

She is still a woman possessed, but no longer by the demons of darkness. Now she is possessed by the love of the Prince of Light, and this makes her fearless of the dark. Perfect love casts out fear, and we see it here in the life of Mary Magdalene. We learn from Mary that if you want to do something to express your love don't wait to see how things will go. She thought Jesus was dead, but still she did it now. Marie Ray wrote, "We have only the present moment, sparkling like a star in our hands-and melting life a

snow flake."

Mary didn't wait, but she went, and her love was richly rewarded. Jesus believes in that proverb about the early bird getting the worm. Mary was first at the tomb, and the first to see the risen Lord. Her great love motivated her, and Jesus honored that love by selecting her to be the first person to whom He revealed Himself alive. Peter and John were the two key leaders who came to the tomb, but Jesus chose Mary. She was there, not only first, but by her own choice. Peter and John would not have even come at all had it not been for her telling them what had happened. It is obvious that Jesus deliberately chose Mary to be first. Spurgeon wrote, "...Mary was selected to see Christ first, because she loved Jesus most. John loved Jesus much, but Mary loved Him better; John went away when he saw the empty sepulchre, but Mary stood without and wept."

John is the one writing this whole account of Mary being the first, and so we do not see him having any resentment against Mary, or the Lord, for selecting her to be first. Some are not so kind as John, however. John Calvin, for example, does not sound very delighted with the Lord's choice of a woman to be first. In his commentary on John he writes, "It may be thought strange, ...that he does not produce more competent witnesses, for he begins with a woman: But thus the saying is fulfilled, that God chooses what is weak, and foolish, and contemptible in the world, that he may bring to naught the wisdom, and excellence, and glory of the flesh." Calvin writes as if to justify the choice of Christ, but I cannot

help but feel Spurgeon has the best view of the situation, and that Mary is chosen because of her great love and devotion.

Not even Mary, however, saw the actual resurrection, for John says she arrived while it was still dark, and the stone had already been taken away. The fact is, no one but God and the angels witnessed the actual rising of Jesus. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "It is more than interesting, it is arresting, to remark in passing that we have no historic account of the rising of Jesus, but we have accounts of the risen Jesus." If Mary came before sunrise, and the resurrection had already taken place, then there is no certainty at all as to just when the actual event happened. Alexander Maclaren, the great Bible expounder, had an interesting conviction. He wrote, "The act of resurrection took place before sunrise. At midnight, probably, the Bridegroom came. It was fitting that He who was to scatter the darkness of the grave should rise while darkness covered the earth..... The earthquake and the descent of angels and the rolling away of the stone were after the tomb was empty."

Whatever the case, when Mary looked she did not wonder when He arose, but rather, who had stolen the body of her Lord. Resurrection was not in her mind at all. She jumped to a false conclusion immediately. Her first impression upon seeing the evidence was a negative one, and she ran to tell the Apostles of the bad news. The first message that Mary carried on that first Easter was negative because it was not based on fact, but on her imagination.

Her mind was filled with a false concept of what had happened at the tomb, and in desperation she ran to Peter and John for help. Why did she suddenly sense the need for male help? It was because she was convinced she was dealing with men who had robbed the tomb. She was hurt, and she needed help to find the body.

We see here that the very finest people can misinterpret circumstances, and they can bring much unnecessary grief to themselves. Mary was so sure of herself, but she had completely misread the evidence. The result was she told Peter and John a complete falsehood. She said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." She was blaming some mythical "they" for her anguish. They are always the cause for the world's problems. If they would just leave us alone we would be okay. Mary's "they" like most "theys" do not exist. She was causing her own problem because she thought "they" stole her Lord's body. We are the inventors of our own enemies so often, just as Mary was.

Jesus had shattered the chains of death, but Mary was still in bondage because of her ignorance. She saw the stone was gone, and her Savior was gone, and she gave it the worst instead of the best interpretation. So often we, like Mary, jump to conclusions, and we suffer sorrow when joy could be ours with a more positive interpretation of the evidence.

**We say, they have taken our Lord,
And we know not where He lies,**

**When the light of His resurrection morn
Is breaking out of the skies.**

Glory was ready to burst all around her, and yet she was in gloom. So many remain in gloom when glory is real. It is because facts are not enough. The resurrection is a fact, but facts have no power until we are aware of them, and until we accept their reality. Two plus two equals four is a fact, and it would be a fact whether we believed it or not. So also the resurrection is a fact whether we believe it or not. But only those who, like Mary, come to believe it, and encounter the living Christ will experience the reality of the glory of the resurrection. Mary was the first, but Jesus was not content until all His followers became aware that He was alive. It is now the goal of His church to reach the whole world with this message of victory over man's greatest enemy. May God help each of us to do our part.

