

Jesus, Lover of a Woman's Soul – “Don't be Afraid, Just Believe”

(If you don't have time to do the study, please read the first page front and back for background)

The quest for fulfillment became the driving force behind women of the '80s and '90s. As women tuned into the highly mobile, high-tech society around them, they begin to turn their energies to new frontiers.

To excel, to succeed, even to surpass the accomplishments of their male counterparts, has been the goal of many women who have challenged men's domain. Now, however, as women examine who they have become, many are wondering where they really belong. It has become painfully clear that achievement and success have not delivered the payoff of personal fulfillment that women have sought. In the brief reflective spaces sandwiched between their frenzied commitments, women are now realizing that external accomplishments do not meet their deepest inner longings. So the search for fulfillment continues.

The desire to find continuity and meaning draws women toward the spiritual arena, where cults are flourishing. As believers, we know that only Jesus can fill the void in a woman's life. What women desperately need today is exposure to vital Christianity. All of us rub shoulders with a variety of women every day—women with whom we share a coffee or lunch break, mothers who trade off car-pooling children, neighbors, and friends.

They all need to know the answers to these questions, “Who is Jesus Christ?” and “Why did He come?” They also need the answer to “How did He treat women?” and “How can women know Him today?”

To fully appreciate Jesus' approach to women, we need to resist our impulse to approach Scripture from our twenty-first century cultural perspective. Our understanding of Scripture is more accurate if we step back in time—into the shoes of the women of the first century AD.

The Life of Women in Jesus' Time

What was it like to be a woman living around the rim of the Mediterranean during Jesus' time? How was a woman's role defined by the cultural and religious constraints of that era? By examining the context in which Jesus presented His radical teaching, we begin to appreciate His extraordinary approach in relating to women.

Think back to that time when a man was commended because he killed his wife for appearing in public without her veil. A Roman woman's rights were completely subject to her father's power. If she married, then those rights, even the power of life and death, were transferred to her husband. In both Greek and Roman cultures, women held a second-rate status. Their legal rights were practically non-existent. In fact, only a husband could petition for a divorce. In such a society, permissive polygamy was considered normal—for men. Needless to say, such a practice only further relegated women to an inferior position since they were treated like property, a mere commodity to indicate status or position. Jewish women fared slightly better than their contemporaries in surrounding cultures. A married woman with children did hold a certain place of honor as a wife and mother, but even that position was tied to her ability to produce male children. It was an agricultural society. Fathers needed sons to help them work the land and lots of them.

There were three common sayings in those days:

- 1) *Hail those whose children are boys; Woe unto those whose children are girls.*
- 2) *At the birth of a son, all are glad. But about a daughter, people mourn.*
- 3) *When a boy comes into the world, there is peace. And when it's a girl, there comes nothing.*

Those sound bizarre, even cruel, to our modern ears!

Because of a twisted interpretation of the Mosaic Law, the rabbinical leaders taught that women were uneducable. They were considered unreliable as courtroom witnesses. Women were even held responsible for the lustful temptations men suffered. A Jewish rabbi would not talk to his wife or daughter in public. There was even a group called the “Bruised and Bleeding Pharisees” because they would rather cover their eyes than look upon a woman in public. As a consequence they would bump into walls and houses. Notice the transfer—because women were the greatest source of their own personal sin (lust), the woman becomes evil. Rather than face the sin in their own hearts, they make women the scapegoat. That contributed, of course, to the cultural position of women.

But perhaps the plight of Jewish women could best be summarized by the prayer Jewish men daily prayed, “Thank You, God, that I am not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman.”

Enter the Lord Jesus Christ...

Into the midst of this culture, the Lord Jesus Christ entered—with a radically different value system from that of His culture in the way He regarded women. Thus as Jesus’ ministry unfolded, the average citizen of Israel began to witness an extraordinary approach to women, one that cut against the grain of commonly held practices.

Jesus never spoke condescendingly to women, never made derogatory jokes about women, never humiliated or exploited women. And women who knew Him loved Him! And wanted to serve Him!

Jesus treated women as no man had ever treated them before. His warmth, personal attention, tenderness, sound teaching, and compassion toward women were revolutionary. And why shouldn’t He? He created us!

A Sick Woman & A Dead Girl

Time: Jesus' Second Year of Ministry, ~AD 29

Historical Perspective

Jesus had been teaching God’s Word to large crowds in the area around Capernaum, healing many people. Then, He and His disciples got into a boat and headed to the east side of the lake. A windstorm literally came down from the surrounding mountains through the Jordan River gorge upon the Sea of Galilee, which is 680 feet below sea level, and shook the boat like a tempest. This type of storm was, and still is, a common occurrence. Jesus demonstrated His power over nature by rebuking the wind and waves then admonished the disciples for their lack of faith. Soon after, He encountered a woman and a girl in desperate need.

Women were not highly respected in Jesus' day. In fact, they were held responsible for the lustful temptations men suffered. A Jewish rabbi would not even talk to his wife or daughter in public. There was even a group of them called the “Bruised and Bleeding Pharisees” because they would rather cover their eyes than look upon a woman in public. As a consequence they would bump into walls and houses. Notice the transfer—because women were the greatest source of their own personal sin (lust), the woman becomes evil. Rather than face the sin in their own hearts, they make women the scapegoat. That contributed, of course, to the cultural position of women.

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1. Read Mark 5:1-21. Why would a large crowd gather around Jesus as described in v. 21?

Focusing on the Woman

2. Read Mark 5:24-34 and Luke 8:42-48. Describe the woman and her circumstances.

3. Consider what kind of life this woman had led for 12 years. How would this ailment have affected her family life, social life, and worship opportunities? See Leviticus 13:45-46 and 15:19-33 for clues. Considering what you as a woman enjoy in life, what did she miss out on?

4. Reread Mark 5:24-34 and Luke 8:42-48. What brought the sick woman **to Jesus** for healing?

What do you think she might have heard about Him?

5. Put yourself in her shoes. As an ordinary woman, what emotions would she have experienced...

- As she reached out to touch Jesus' cloak?
- After she felt healing?

6. Discuss Jesus' response to the woman.

Historical Insight: Her condition, though unknown, is probably uterine hemorrhaging like a number of women experience with endometriosis or fibroid tumors. The medical treatments available for her condition were limited although the Talmud (a book of Jewish history and rules) claims that physicians had at least 11 remedies. Some of the ones documented were: 1) carrying ashes of ostrich eggs on your head and 2) taking around-in

From the Greek: The Greek for “healed” actually means ‘save.’ Here both physical healing (‘be freed from your suffering’) and spiritual salvation (‘go in peace’) are meant. The two are often seen together in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 2:1-12; 3:1-6). (*NIV Study Bible* note on Mark 5:34, p. 1503)

7. Why do you think He insists upon her revealing herself? What would be the advantage to her?

Think About It: Now she could enter society because she is healed AND she receives spiritual life as well. God always does more than we ask or think.

8. Discuss the woman’s response to Jesus seeking her out. Why would she have been trembling with fear?

Focusing on the Girl (and Her Family)

1. Read Luke 8:40-42 and Mark 5:21-23. Describe the scene.

2. Consider Jairus’ position in the community (see “Historical Perspective” above). Contrast his apparent view of Jesus with that of the Pharisees and other religious leaders we have studied so far. Why the difference?

3. Read Luke 8:49-56 and Mark 5:35-43. What specific circumstance has occurred in Luke 8:49?

4. Discuss Jesus' words... • To Jairus—

- To the wailing crowd outside Jairus’ house—

5. Why did the wailers laugh at Jesus? Who went into the room with Jesus?
6. Once inside, what did Jesus do for the girl AND her mom and dad? Notice His tenderness toward the girl through His words and gestures.
7. Discuss why Jesus instructed the girl's parents to tell no one what had happened.
8. How is Jairus' initial faith challenged and stretched through this whole incident?

From Jairus' viewpoint, he had to wait an agonizingly long time for Jesus to respond to his request through delays, diversions, and disappointing news.

Look carefully again at Mark 5:36. What was Jesus' plan all along? Had He forgotten Jairus? **Write down the verse and memorize this verse.** What comfort does it give to you?

Dependent living is learning to say to Jesus, "Lord, I can't do this on my own. But, you can in and through me. I will trust you." Then, see what He does.

What is Jesus' manner towards both of these women? In what ways did Jesus show that He thought of both the woman and the girl as worthwhile individuals?

God's love knows no partiality.
Review these passages about our Creator:

*John 1:3 says, "Through Him **all** things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."*

*In Col 1:17, we read, "For **by Him** all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him..."*

*In Gen 1:26a, "Then God said, '**Let us make man** (mankind) in our image, in our likeness...'*

As Creator, He designed us with a mind to know God, emotions to love God, and a will to obey God. This holds true for women as well as for men. Our female minds need to be filled with the knowledge of Him so that our hearts may respond with great love for Him and our wills can choose to obey Him.

Jesus knows us backwards and forwards. He knows about our emotional nature, our need for security and significance, and even our hormones! He understands our need to nurture and to be loved—both from those humans closest to us and from our Creator God. And even though His culture neglected to give women the worth they deserved, He could do no less than show that He loves men and women equally. In fact, He openly demonstrated His love for each individual He met—both men and women—for whom He would ultimately die. We experience His love and are commissioned to live it out in our daily lives so others can experience His love through us.