

WOMEN IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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Introduction

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, from the very beginning to the end, Luke includes women in significant events. They are present at the announcement of Jesus' birth and as the first witnesses of His resurrection. In this paper I will discuss that Luke's positive view of women is demonstrated by the inclusion of women as disciples, contributors, and servants, and therefore, as full participants with men in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' value of women is important for women and men, for it gives a genuine picture of the significant role they play together.

Women as Valued Disciples

Luke's positive view of women is demonstrated by the inclusion of women as valued disciples. Luke's Gospel provides an orderly and accurate account of Jesus' life and ministry, and gives the reader a genuine picture of Jesus' interaction with women.¹ The people Jesus refers to as "disciples," are a mixed group of people who responded to His call, were with Him at different parts of His journey and were involved in the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The Twelve disciples (and many others) physically and literally follow Jesus around. At times, His disciples include the seventy who are sent out, or

¹ Mark L. Bailey, "Luke," unpublished class notes for BE105 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2020). Luke 1:1-4.

a larger group who follow Him. Among this group of disciples are women who follow Jesus alongside the Twelve.

In Luke's Gospel, many women are privy to Jesus' teaching, miracles, life and ministry. Some are ones who received healing themselves and responded to His call (Luke 8:2). Jesus' value of women is also noted as He includes women and allows them to be part of His informal teaching times. When Martha pleads with Jesus to correct her sister, Jesus responds favorably towards Mary -- that it is good for Mary to sit at His feet. For it says that Mary, "was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word" (Luke 10:39). Luke portrays her in a position of a disciple, "at the feet of the teacher."² Jesus' response to Martha is suggesting it is good for Mary to sit as His disciple.

A group of women are with Jesus throughout His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:28). By allowing the women to travel with Him, Jesus is going against many social norms; for at that time women would not have accompanied a Rabbi on his travels.³ In this section to Jerusalem, Luke records Jesus' words, interactions, teachings and miracles along the way. It gives a clear picture of what following Jesus may have looked like. Luke affirms in Luke 8 there is a group of women traveling with Jesus and the twelve disciples, which includes Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna.

Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary

² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 194-195.; Grant R. Osborne, "Women in Jesus' Ministry," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 259-91, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://search-ebscohost-com.dts.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000821146&site=ehost-live&scope=site;>; Net Bible, note on Luke 10:39, accessed July 14, 2020, <http://netbible.org>.

³ Grant R. Osborne, "Women in Jesus' Ministry," 259-91.

who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means (Luke 8:1-3, NASB).

Luke also reminds the reader of the women's presence in Jesus' travels, when he recounts the angel's words to Mary Magdalene, Joanna and another Mary at the empty tomb in Jerusalem.

The angel says, "Remember how He spoke to you while you were still in Galilee" (Luke 24:6)"

The women are present with Jesus in very significant events. The first time Luke records Jesus speaking about His sufferings, death and resurrection, is in Galilee (Luke 9:22). The text provides information about the setting and who was present. It says Jesus was "by Himself" and the "disciples" were with Him. It indicates Jesus is "alone" with His "disciples." Jesus asks a pointed question of His disciples, regarding who the crowds say that He is. It is a private conversation with His disciples, and not with the crowds. He follows their response with information about His death and resurrection, information He wants His disciples to know and remember. The angel at the tomb reminds the women of this when the angel says, "Remember how He spoke to you while you were still in Galilee, saying that that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6-7)." In referring to this time, the angel at the empty tomb reminds the women of their presence at Jesus' words. They remember. For they, as women, are Jesus' disciples, who traveled with Him and were present at very significant events.⁴

These women are also fellow witnesses. "It is remarkable and significant ... many women, at least eight of whom are known by name and often with as much or more data as some

⁴ Robert J. Karris, "Women and Discipleship in Luke," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 1-20.

of the Twelve, were included as disciples and proclaimers during Jesus' ministry (not to mention Elizabeth and Anna in Luke 1-2).⁵ Mary Magdalene, Joanna and another Mary, are the first witnesses of the resurrection. They are the first of the disciples to proclaim Jesus is risen!

The women may also be among the seventy witnesses sent out by Jesus on His travels to Jerusalem, and are more than likely among the witnesses sent out to the nations at Jesus' ascension (Luke 10:1-23 and Luke 24: 44-53).⁶ Luke includes in Luke 23:49 and Luke 23:55 the facts that the women accompanied Jesus from Galilee and were witnesses of His life, death and burial. So, it is very likely they were with Him in other important events as well, including these times of commissioning. They are valued by Jesus, and commissioned disciples sent as witnesses of His life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection.

Women as Generous Contributors

Luke's positive view of women is demonstrated by the inclusion of women as generous contributors. Throughout Luke's Gospel, Luke calls to attention the women who give unselfishly, unsparingly and even provide out of their own financial means for Jesus' ministry. They are chosen from the beginning of the Gospel as participants in God's plan of salvation. The Gospel opens with two women (Elizabeth and Mary), who both have miraculous pregnancies, and whose sons will give their lives for God's purposes. Their lives give life to the world.

⁵ David M. Scholer, "Women," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 880–887.

⁶ Robert J. Karris, "Women and Discipleship in Luke," 1–20.

In the beginning of Luke, the reader recognizes Mary, the mother of Jesus, to be a model disciple as she submits to the Lord with complete trust.⁷ In an attitude of surrender she says, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She is a generous mother as she surrenders her life and gives her son for the sins of the world. She will later witness her son give His life and die a brutal and agonizing death.⁸

Luke often uses contrast to highlight the contribution of women as valuable and generous. In Luke 7, the “sinful woman,” unsparingly displays generous love and gratitude to Jesus as she washes His feet with her abundant tears (Luke 7:38). The text indicates she is “weeping.” She is not just shedding a few tears, but she is crying profusely, like someone who grieves or laments.⁹ Jesus contrasts the host, a Pharisee named Simon, with that of the sinful woman. She is the hero. Simon gives nothing to Jesus – not a kiss, anointing or washing of His feet. Jesus says she did not “cease” to kiss His feet and she “loved much.” This woman displays overwhelming love and gratitude for Jesus, in contrast to the stingy religious leader.

Luke not only includes the extravagant, but also the humble and generous gift of a widow. While in Jerusalem, before Jesus’ death, He notices and points out a widow giving into the offering. Even though she only gives two small copper coins, Jesus says she gave more than the rich who put gifts into the offering. “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all

⁷ Darrell L. Bock. *Jesus According to the Scriptures: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 126-131, 277.

⁸ Though not in Luke, John records Mary being present at the crucifixion (John 19:26-27).

⁹ Net Bible, note on Luke 7:38, accessed July 14, 2020, <http://netbible.org>. This is a loud sort of crying that would be easily heard and noticed by all. There were so many tears that she could bathe Jesus’ feet and needed to use her long hair to dry them.

that she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4). He once again uses contrast, and she is the hero. To most, her small gift would go unnoticed, yet Jesus commends her for giving richly.¹⁰

Women are also significant contributors to Jesus’ ministry. Their gifts fund the mission of Jesus and the disciples. In the middle of the Gospel, Luke spotlights the contributions of the women disciples who are traveling with Jesus and the Twelve. He specifically names Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s Stewards and Susanna. They and many others “were contributing to their support out of their private means” (Luke 8:3). In the text, “contributing to” also can mean “to serve,” therefore some assume the women’s contribution is more domestic, like cooking or doing various chores. Yet, Luke seems to indicate otherwise.¹¹ Seventy-five of the uses of this word in Greek literature mean “go-between” -- like a messenger. A parallel to this is when Luke uses this word in Acts 19:22 to describe men who Paul sends as messengers and representatives.¹² These men are Timothy and Erastus. The Luke text is indicating the significant role of the women’s contribution to Jesus’ ministry. Because of their ability to give out of their personal means, some may have been from the upper class.¹³ They are industrious, committed, sacrificial and influential disciples. These women are legitimate contributor’s to Jesus’ ministry and give generously from their own personal finances.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “Luke 9:51-24:53,” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. by Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 1645-47. The widow was praised because she gave sincerely and at some considerable cost to herself.

¹¹ Robert J. Karris, “Women and Discipleship in Luke,” 1-20.

¹² Robert J. Karris, “Women and Discipleship in Luke,” 8-9.

¹³ David M. Scholer, “Women,” 880–887.; Darrell L. Bock, “Luke 1:1-9:50,” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. by Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 712-714.

Women as Faithful Servants

Luke's positive view of women is demonstrated by the inclusion of women as faithful servants. Though Luke does not use the word "servant" to describe specific women or men, he does use this word in his introduction to describe the eyewitnesses who were with Him from the start.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and *servants* of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Luke acknowledges the accounts of Jesus' life and ministry came from eyewitnesses who were also *servants* (or ministers) of the word.¹⁴ These eyewitnesses were with Jesus in His life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is portrayed as a faithful servant from the beginning of Luke's Gospel. She uses a different word, bondservant, to describe herself. She is an eyewitness who knew Jesus the longest -- from His birth. We know from the Gospel of John she was also present at His death. A look into Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55), quickly reveals the depth of her character. She is faithful -- faithful when chosen by God, full of faith in her Song and faithful in the end. She is the Lord's bondservant.

The eyewitnesses and servants with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry include the twelve disciples, and also the women. Luke draws attention to this group of women, who are with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, by naming them (Luke 8:1-3). He also names them, Mary

¹⁴ Net Bible, note on Luke 1:1-4, accessed July 14, 2020, <http://netbible.org>. Eyewitnesses and servants are a single group who "faithfully" passed on accounts about Jesus.

Magdalene and Joanna, as the first eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Though the twelve disciples dispersed (Mark 14:50), the women are the only ones Luke specifically lists present at the crucifixion. "The women from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing things" (Luke 23:49). Again, later that day, Luke specifies the same women follow Joseph of Arimathea and witness the tomb where the body is placed. Both of these references to the women of "Galilee" remind the reader of the women mentioned in Luke 8:1-3 who faithfully followed Jesus.¹⁵

The faithfulness of the women continues as they prepare spices for Jesus' burial and come to the tomb on the third day, at first light. Luke records the women as, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, along with "other" women. These women are the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection. The angel speaks to them and reminds them of Jesus' words -- of His death and resurrection. The women remember and run to announce this to the other disciples. They may be the first ones to believe.

Not only were the women the first witnesses to the resurrection, they were with Jesus all along the way.¹⁶ These women were faithful servants and eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection. Only these women could say that.

¹⁵ Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, et al., vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 1045-1046.; Robert J. Karris, "Women and Discipleship in Luke," 12-15.

¹⁶ Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life*, SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 124. Because the women were witnesses of the resurrection, they are seen as genuine disciples.

Full Participants

Luke's Gospel gives an account of women as full participants with men in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first century was a time when women were viewed in a more negative light.¹⁷ Women's traits were considered weak and negative. Daughters were not valued. According to tradition, a Jewish man would thank God in his prayers he was not a woman.¹⁸ Jesus represented a new paradigm that gave women dignity and a significant role to play as His disciples and witnesses to the world.

Luke does not represent the cultural view held regarding women, but instead represents Jesus' value of women, by the inclusion of them as disciples, contributors and servants. Jesus gives women dignity. He touches, heals and is touched by women. He is compassionate towards the widow of Nain (Luke 7:13). He allows the sinful woman to weep over Him, wash and kiss His feet (Luke 7:36-50). He does not rebuke the bleeding woman for touching Him, but insteads heals her and sends her in peace (Luke 8:43-48). Jesus takes Jairus' daughter by the hand and raises her from the dead (Luke 8:54). On the Sabbath, He lays hands on a bent over woman and heals her (Luke 13:13).

Women during the first century had limited options. They also had limited rights, were under the complete authority of their husband or father, had little security in marriage and received no inheritance for the future. In Greece, women were "instruments to be used rather than individuals to be treasured."¹⁹ Roman women were still under authority of their husbands and

¹⁷ David M. Scholer, "Women," 880-887. Josephus Against Apion 2.201.; Philo Quaest. in Gen. 1.33.

¹⁸ David M. Scholer, "Women," 880-887.

¹⁹ Grant R. Osborne, "Women in Jesus' Ministry," 259-91.

fathers, but had somewhat of a better position than Greek women, especially if they were in the upper class.²⁰ Jesus substantially raised the status of women, increased their options and rights and made them full participants in His mission.

Luke's Gospel includes women in almost every aspect of a disciple, because Jesus included women in most aspects of following Him. This is not just significant for women, but for men as well. Jesus' value of women is important for women *and* men, for it gives a genuine picture of the significant role they play together. Together, women and men have the ability to represent the body of Christ as fellow valued disciples, generous contributors and faithful servants. Without one, the body is deficient and incomplete.

Conclusion

From the very beginning, Luke includes women in significant events. They were with Him from Galilee and eyewitness of His death and burial, and the first witnesses of His resurrection. Luke's positive view of women is demonstrated by the inclusion of women as valued disciples, generous contributors, and faithful servants, and therefore, as full participants with men in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' value of women is important for women and men, for it gives a genuine picture of the significant role they play together. Together men and women more fully represent the image of God and bear witness of the good news of the gospel.

²⁰ Grant R. Osborne, "Women in Jesus' Ministry," 259-91.

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