



First at the Cradle & Last at the Cross: Women in Luke's Gospel

Luke Series #25

Selected Passages from Luke

David Sunday

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It is good to be worshipping with God's people and it doesn't matter what room we are in for God is with us no matter where we are. It was a joy to hear you singing and see the worship team so close in our temporary arrangement.

As we go through this transition phase in our building improvement project, I want to do something a little bit different in our Luke series over the next two weeks. If you are visiting with us, you need to know that we have been going through the Gospel of Luke since last November. It is the longest book in the Bible and to get through it will take us quite a while. We are about a third of the way through our journey. This week and next, I want to take two distinctive themes found in the Gospel of Luke and focus on them with laser-like precision. You might remember we did this with the theme of Jesus' prayer life in Luke's Gospel which I personally enjoyed quite a bit.

Next week, we're going to look at something to which you may not have given much thought—the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus—Jesus' reliance on the Spirit and the implications for us. If you read Luke this coming week, I encourage you to pay attention to Luke's constant references to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today I'm going to preach on a subject I have never preached on before: women in Luke's Gospel. I think the theme as recorded in Luke of women in Jesus' life is important for us to hear. We often think about the men of the Bible more than the women. In church history as well, men tend to get a lot more coverage than women. That is unfortunate. Luke places a special emphasis and concern on the women in Jesus' life. I think this might be because Luke was a doctor and perhaps in His dealings with women he saw their plight firsthand. Luke was also concerned for outcasts and the poor. In first century society, women were often in this category. Therefore, this is an important theme in Luke's Gospel.

Luke records 24 instances of Jesus meeting a woman, talking about one or mentioning a woman in a parable. Darrell Bock—a scholar of Luke—said there are 13 women who appear in Luke’s Gospel who do not appear anywhere else in the Bible. Here are some of these appearances:

- Elizabeth—the mother of John the Baptist (1:5-25).
- Luke gives us the ‘*Magnificat*,’ a window into the virgin Mary’s innermost thoughts as she is carrying the baby Jesus in her womb (1:46-56).
- The prophetess Anna who with Simeon welcomed the baby Jesus in the Temple (2:36-38).
- The widow from Nain whose only son Jesus raised from the dead (7:11-17).
- The sinful woman whose extravagant devotion was welcomed and extolled by Jesus (7:36-50).
- Martha and Mary—who ministered alongside Jesus and His apostles (10:38-42).
- The crippled woman whom Jesus called a ‘daughter of Abraham’ (13:10-17).
- The parable of the lost coin (15:8-10).
- The parable of the widow and the judge (18:1-8).

Luke also emphasizes stories that we do find in the other Gospels, showing us how women played a significant role in Jesus’ ministry. From the time of His conception until His resurrection and ascension, women were prominent in the advance of Christ’s Kingdom.

Why should we talk about this today?

1. It is a gospel issue. I hope to show by the end of this sermon how vitally this theme connects with the gospel. I would not be preaching on it if it did not relate to the gospel.
2. It is a global issue. Many issues in the world touch the church in our society. It is important for us—as 21st century Christians—to be aware of what is happening in the world. I’m going to give you some statistical figures from several reports which you can easily access online.
 - a. Violence against women and girls is widespread in the world today. In the United States, every nine seconds a woman is assaulted or beaten. We don’t hear about this in church very much. After our first service, one of the older members of our congregation said to me, “We need to talk about that more often in the church because it affects God’s people also.” Around the world, one woman out of three has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime. Nearly 33 percent of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner and domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury to women—more than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined. That is the world in which we live.
 - b. You have probably heard about human trafficking in recent years. It is becoming the fastest growing crime industry on our planet. We had a documentary shown at our church about this. There are figures from the United States State Department estimating there are 12.3 million adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor and forced prostitution around the world. You can guess that a disproportionate number of these are women.
 - c. Girl soldiers are drafted into armies around the world.
 - d. Systematic ‘gendercide’ is also a problem—the elimination of a gender. Justin Taylor posted a documentary on his blog that says the four most dangerous words today are: “It’s

a girl.” In many countries—particularly Southeast Asia and China—the United Nations estimates there are as many as 200 million girls missing due to abortion, sex selection or abandonment. This is simply because they are girls.

- e. This is not just a foreign global issue. Many Americans are funding the exploitation of women through the use of the pervasive poison of pornography. Think about the connection of that industry to the exploitation of women and how pervasive the use of pornography is within the church.

So we can see that in the 21st century there is a great need for Christians to have the mind of Jesus Christ toward women. The world into which Jesus was born in the first century did not regard women with great dignity. The ancient historian Josephus wrote, “The woman is in all things inferior to the man, says the law.” According to most of the Rabbinic customs in Jesus’ day, women were not allowed to study the Scriptures. A Rabbi named Eleazar said, “Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman. Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness.”

How would you ladies feel if you came to our prayer meeting on Wednesday night and heard a man praying, “God, praise be to You that You did not create me a Gentile, a woman or an ignorant man.” I think you might beg to differ on that last point. This prayer was common among the Pharisees of Jesus’ day but women would not have heard it because they were not allowed to pray with men. Often, they were not allowed to eat with men.

It was almost universally assumed that men were superior to women and women lacked personal value. Men didn’t speak to women and a woman who spoke to a man was immediately suspected as immoral. Women were thought to be responsible for much of the evil in the world. A woman’s testimony was usually not admissible in a court of law unless she was testifying about an assault upon her own person. Even then, if a man called into question the credibility of her testimony, it was summarily dismissed.

The Son of God, our Savior, comes into this world. Luke is concerned to show us that Jesus viewed women very differently than was common in that society. Jesus also views women very differently than our society commonly does today. My point is that no one ever cared for women the way Jesus did. I think we need to learn to see women through the eyes of Jesus. It is very practical in the way we raise our sons and daughters. It is very practical for the men in our church to see women through the eyes of Jesus.

What would that look like? I have three headings to summarize Luke’s exposition of the women in Jesus’ life. If we saw women through the eyes of Jesus we would see:

1. Women are people in need of compassion.

2. Women are people worthy of respect.
3. Women are people who are amazingly competent to minister and serve in God's Kingdom.

Women are People in Need of Compassion

Chuck Swindoll writes, "While even respectable men didn't give women the time of day, Jesus went out of His way to speak with them in broad daylight. It would have been a scandalous topic for the tabloids. He welcomed women to His side. He was supportive, considerate and caring of women—especially the ones who most needed help. He broke through oppressive, ugly cultural roles and rescued women from painful pasts—demonic control, unfair treatment and crippling diseases."

Think about some of the women we've already seen in Luke's Gospel:

- *"Simon Peter's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him [Jesus] on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them"* (Luke 4:38-39).
- A few weeks ago, Pastor Dan Leeper gave us a wonderful sermon from Luke 7 on the widow of Nain. *"As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow"* (Luke 7:12). In this time, there was no social security for widows. She was destitute after losing her husband and son and would lose everything. But Jesus in mercy and compassion raises her son from the dead and gives him back to her.
- We also saw in Luke 7 the notorious woman who was a sinner. She was so moved by the kindness of Jesus and forgiveness of her sins that she came to the Pharisee's house where Jesus is dining, stands at His feet and wets His feet with her tears as she weeps hard. As she anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them with the hair of her head, Jesus shows no trace of embarrassment or disgust.
- Last week we saw in Luke 8 the woman who had a discharge of blood for 12 years. She had been isolated, ashamed and unwelcome in the synagogue. She sneaks up behind Jesus because she doesn't want to be seen or exposed, touches the hem of His garment and is healed. Jesus welcomed her out into the open and had her tell of her healing so she could be restored to the community. He had compassion on her and called her 'daughter'—a title He used for no other woman in the Gospels. He says, *"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace [physically, spiritually, relationally]"* (Luke 8:48).

The next story in Luke concerning a woman is in Luke 13:10-17. It displays the Savior's compassion in all its glory.

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. ¹⁴ But the

ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in 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 donkey 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 these things, 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 woman who for 18 years had a disabling spirit (verse 11). Jesus makes it clear that Satan had bound this woman and is the cause of this disabling spirit (verse 16). What would it be like to not be able to fully straighten yourself up, have people laugh and stare or have children make jokes about you? People might wonder, "What kind of sin have you committed to make you a bent cripple?" No one can look her in the eye or talk with her because she is such an embarrassment to society; instead they go the other way.

Then she hears Jesus calling her to come. I don't know when this woman had last heard someone call her to draw near to him but in this voice there is tenderness, compassion and respect. She draws near to Jesus and when He has her close He says, "*Woman, you are freed from your disability*" (verse 12). Free at last, she can stand up straight and function normally in her relationships with others. "*And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God*" (verse 13).

However, the people did not see this woman through the eyes of Jesus. The religious people did not have the heart of Jesus for this woman.

But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day" (verse 14).

This woman has been struggling for 18 years and no one ever reached out to try to help her. Jesus answered, "*You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? [You care more for your ox or donkey than for this woman] And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?'"* (verses 15-16) Jesus is making a point about this woman. He could have said, "I have authority to heal and do whatever I want on the Sabbath." But He wants the people to know this woman is a daughter of Abraham. Through faith, she shares in the covenant promises and is a joint heir with Jesus. She is a first-class citizen in the Kingdom of God.

Paul the Apostle underscores this wonderful truth in Galatians 3:26-29:

*“...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**”*

Jesus dignifies womanhood by showing that this woman—along with any man who believes—is a full heir to the promises of God in Jesus Christ. The compassion He shows to her was characteristic of all His dealings with women.

Do you see women through the eyes of Jesus? Are you sensitive to their needs and the hardships they face? Do you seek to actively come alongside them, alleviate their sufferings, lift their burdens and welcome them as fellow heirs of the grace of life? I am thankful for the work of our deacons as they minister to widows—often in ways that are unseen. I believe it reflects the compassionate heart of Jesus Christ. To see women through His eyes is to see people in need of compassion.

Women are People Worthy of Respect

Just as Jesus called this woman a ‘daughter of Abraham,’ Luke consistently shows us that women are worthy of respect. They are worthy of respect for their godliness. Luke tells us Elizabeth was *“...righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord”* (Luke 1:6). Luke extols the godliness of Mary who so magnifies the Lord and Anna who prayed and fasted in the temple.

Women are also worthy of respect for their intelligence. I want you to turn to Luke 10:38-42, the story of Mary and Martha. We’re going to look at this story in more detail at the end of August. There are many instructive lessons here but I recently saw something clearly in this story which I had never before seen. Verse 39 tells us: *“And she [Martha] had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.”* It is important to note that to sit ‘at the Lord’s feet’ is to take the position of a disciple, student and learner. In the first century, women were not allowed to be students, to study the Torah or theology. Jesus affirms Mary sitting at His feet as a disciple. He even says to Martha: *“‘Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her’”* (verse 42).

Jesus welcomes women as disciples, learners and students. They are just as welcome to learn theology as men are. God didn’t create women only to wait on tables or work in the kitchen as Martha was nobly doing. He also created them to know the Word of God and be intelligent students of the Scriptures. That is why it is so important for our church ministries of education to offer a high level of Biblical and theological education for men and women.

In His parables, Jesus constantly portrays women as intelligent, resourceful, commendable examples of faith and discipleship. As you read the Gospels, you see a Savior Who is constantly affirming the dignity, godliness and intelligence of women. He is a God Who loves them and is concerned for them. We never hear Jesus put down a woman, make a chauvinistic remark, look at a woman inappropriately or say to a woman, “This is guy stuff. Mind your own business.” He was never exploitative, intimidating, demeaning, a teller of lewd jokes or coarse jests. I wish I could say I have never done those things. From the earliest days of His life, Jesus exalted and affirmed women. He lifted them up.

One man wrote: “Women found in Him the Man they wish every man could be and men see in Him the man they know they ought to be.” To see women through Jesus’ eyes is to see them and treat them as worthy of respect.

Women are Amazingly Competent to Minister & Serve in God’s Kingdom

When we went through Luke 8 a couple weeks ago, we quickly sailed past Luke 8:1-3. I want us to see an important point Luke is making by including these women in his Gospel.

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

As Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, a group of women constantly accompanied Jesus. Some of them were wealthy and relatively high in society. Herod’s household manager would be like the Chief of Staff of the President of the United States and his wife was involved in Jesus’ entourage. These women are meeting Jesus’ needs.

What is so beautiful about these ladies is they followed Him all the way to the cross, even when many other disciples like Peter and Judas have fled. These women did not flee but remained with Jesus. Luke 23 contains the story of the death of Jesus. “*And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things*” (verse 49). The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. “*Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments*” (verses 55-56).

They don’t leave Jesus when many of the men do. They also become some of the first witnesses of the resurrection, which is a compelling indication of the authenticity of the Gospels. In the first century, a woman’s testimony was not admissible in a court of law. If someone was trying to make up the Gospel

accounts, they would not include the testimony of women. The Gospel writers unashamedly include the testimony of women. In fact, women are the first heralds of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Consider Luke 24:10-11:

Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

The women went out early in the morning to the tomb and found He was not there but had risen from the dead. They proclaimed it to the other apostles but the other apostles didn't believe them at first! "*These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them*" (verse 11).

Then Luke 24:22-24 continues with:

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.

Jesus values the ministry of women and allows them to be the first heralds of His resurrection. They make a significant contribution through the advancement of His Kingdom, sometimes through their own means or through their lack of means. Think of the story of the widow whom Jesus extolled. She was so poor that she could only put two small, copper coins into the offering box. Jesus said, "*Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on*" (Luke 21:3-4). Her story will endure forever as an example of devotion to Jesus' Kingdom. Whether their contribution is great or small, women who serve Jesus faithfully and sacrificially are appreciated and valued for their contributions to His work.

What does it mean to see women through Jesus' eyes? It means to act compassionately and lift the burdens of women, to affirm their dignity by respecting their godliness and intelligence, to appreciate their ministries as competent servants of Christ their King. That is how Jesus viewed women. It is no wonder that women loved Him so. No one ever cared for women like Jesus did.

Dorothy Sayers, famous mystery writer and Christian apologist, wrote:

"Perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the cradle and last at the cross. They had never known a man like this man—a prophet and teacher Who never nagged at them, never flattered, coaxed or patronized. Who took their questions and arguments seriously, Who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female. Nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything inferior about women's nature."

Praise God for a Savior like this—full of compassion, respect and appreciation for the contributions everyone makes to His Kingdom.

What does this have to do with the gospel and why is it vital for us to consider? I believe this theme calls for three connections to the gospel:

1. **Reconciliation:** Warring parties are brought to peace and enmity is exchanged for peace and oneness. Through the blood of Jesus we have been reconciled to God. We were at enmity with Him but now the enmity has been removed, hostilities have ended and God's heart is full of mercy and acceptance to us and our hearts are changed toward God. Likewise, when we are reconciled to God, there is reconciliation in human relationships.

At the fall, hostility started to ensue. One of the areas of strife is between men and women. Jesus ended those hostilities through His death on the cross. Through the blood He shed, He is creating a new humanity in which He is the Head and everyone in His body is a joint heir of the promises. We love, respect and value one another for we are all one in Christ Jesus. Peace with God also brings peace in our homes, communities and harmony between the sexes. Only the gospel can do this.

This is why—when we think about the needs of the world—our first impulse as a church is to send missionaries who will preach the gospel in all the nations. We don't put a lot of hope in humanitarian aid—as helpful as that might be temporarily. We put our hope in the gospel. Some of you were here to hear Ruth Daugherty speak a few months ago. She is a woman on the front lines of a culture where women are still battered, bruised and treated poorly as they were in the first century. Alicia Havens was telling me how hard and oppressive it is to live as a woman in a Muslim society. Through the gospel, they have seen the lives of women change. Think of Cindy McFarland in Togo, West Africa. The ministry she is involved in for women is freeing them from oppression.

2. **Sanctification:** It is vital for us and for the training of our children to recognize sanctification as part of the gospel. It is when we are set apart unto God as a holy people. Sanctification in Christ and life in the Holy Spirit will radically transform your attitude toward the opposite sex. Paul says, "*We have the mind of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 2:16). If we view the opposite sex the way Jesus did, it will transform our relationships.

If every man viewed women as Jesus viewed them, the pornography industry would quickly become bankrupt. There would be no more desire for that because men would be viewing women through holy eyes of compassion, dignity and respect. Human trafficking, violence and abuse would end. Abuse is unthinkable, despicable and deplorable to those who view women with the eyes of Jesus.

Humility and honor in our relationships is one of the results of sanctification. First Timothy 5:2-3 says, “*older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are truly widows.*”

Seeing women through the eyes of Jesus is also a real antidote to the feminist agenda. If you see your identity in Christ, you find freedom from the need to stridently assert your own rights or imagine your gender is superior. You can put away anger and resentment as you rest in your identity in Christ.

Sanctification in Christ—life in the Spirit—transforms your view of the opposite sex.

3. **The effect this has on the church—the body of Christ:** If our Head is compassionate toward women, respectful of their dignity and appreciative of their gifts, so should His body be. Let us be a church that pursues the gifts and honors the contributions of women, affirms the intelligence of women by offering robust Biblical and theological teaching to men and women, and focuses not on what women cannot do but on what women can do through the workings of the Spirit.

My Nana Hazel died a few weeks ago and she had asked that we sing No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus at her funeral because this was her life story. She was a single mother who raised her kids with lots of hardship. But she found Jesus to be toward her everything He is revealed to be in the Gospels. That is the story of every woman’s life who has trusted in Jesus. No one has ever done more good for women than Jesus.

His love for women is not at the expense of His love for men. Part of His love for men is that He wants to make them men, “*...Predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son*” (Romans 8:29).

We’re going to pray and ask God to give us the mind of Christ for one another. Would you join me in prayer?

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the relevance of Your Word and the way it has the power to transform generations and cultures. I pray for us as a church in the 21st century that You would help us to not turn a blind eye and deaf ear to the oppression that goes on around the world. We pray for our missionary endeavors—the going forth of Your gospel into places like Afghanistan and North Africa. Lord, remove burdens and oppression and bring freedom and wholeness to people and women. I pray the young girls of our church would grow up embracing their dignity in Christ and seeing the honor You place on them. I pray our young boys would grow up learning to love, respect and honor women.

I pray for special help and protection in our church against the pervasive poison of pornography. Bring conviction wherever that evil is being entertained and give us the mind and eyes of Christ to see

women as Jesus does. Father, I thank you that at the cross You removed the barriers in relationships. There we find the power to love as we have been loved in Christ. Open our eyes to see the beauty and power of the cross and cause it to transform our relationships with one another. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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