

Luke 8:1-3

"The Women Who Served the Lord"

November 3, 2024

1. Intro

- a. If you remember from last week, we looked at the amazing story of the sinful woman who crashed Simon the Pharisee's dinner party, and then started cleaning Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiping them with her hair, and kissing and anointing his feet
 - i. Simon, of course, was horrified
 1. Not just at this sinful woman's actions, but also at the fact that Jesus, a supposed prophet, would allow such disgusting behavior
 - ii. Jesus used this as a chance to teach Simon a lesson about love and mercy, and the response of one who knows they have been forgiven much
 1. And then Jesus makes the stunning statement to this woman whose sins were many...
 - a. "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
- b. As we saw last week, this is a beautiful reminder for us of the five great truths that were rediscovered in the Reformation,
 - i. According to the authority of the Scriptures alone...
 1. We are saved through faith alone
 2. By the grace of God alone
 3. ONLY because of the finished work of Christ alone
 4. And all for the glory of God alone
 - ii. These are the foundational building blocks of the Gospel
 1. Remove any one of them, and you empty your message of all of its power to save
- c. The story of the sinful woman, who loved much because she had been forgiven much, teaches us MUCH about the essential role of FAITH in our salvation
 - i. But, as we connect that passage with our passage today in chapter 8, we learn another very important lesson...
 1. Throughout all of history, WOMEN have played an absolutely essential role in the eternal purposes of God
 - a. From the Old Testament, to the Gospels, on through to the days of the early church after Pentecost, and very much so still today...
 - i. Despite the accusations that the world wants to throw at us
 - ii. Christianity is the ONLY faith that truly honors women, and frees them from the shackles that paganism and secularism have bound them with for millennia
- d. We see this truth at the end of chapter 7...
 - i. It wasn't Simon or any of the other men in that room that Jesus commended
 1. But instead, Jesus highlights the faith... of a woman
 - a. And an exceedingly sinful woman at that
 2. And this extraordinary act is then carried on through to the next passage, where Luke tells us of many other women who played important roles in Jesus' ministry
 - a. Let's look at this passage together

2. Luke 8:1-3

- a. *¹Soon afterward [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, ²and 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 household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

- i. All we have here is just three verses, but it is so important that we grasp the weight of these three verses even being in the Scriptures
 1. During this time in history, women were pitifully devalued
 - a. In the bigger picture of the Roman Empire, women were not considered to be citizens of the empire, unless their father was a citizen, or they married a man who was a Roman citizen
 - i. That meant that any woman outside of those two circumstances, regardless of where you were born or how much money your family had... you were outside of the protection of Roman law
 1. Most of them were not allowed to be educated
 - a. For the most part, most women in Rome were at best, slaves to their husbands
 - i. At worst, they were simply a commodity to be used
 - b. This was the case in much of the Roman Empire, but it was also the case among the Jewish people in those days as well
 - i. The laws of the Old Testament had typically favored men in general
 1. But as the Pharisees and religious leaders added to God's law over the years, this bias became absolutely absurd
 - a. For example, in Deuteronomy 24:1, Moses wrote that a man could divorce his wife if he found "some indecency" in her
 - i. This word for "some indecency" is specifically tied to the idea of sexual uncleanness
 - ii. We see this idea affirmed in Matthew 5:31-32, where Jesus says that sexual immorality is the only lawful grounds for a man to divorce his wife
 2. But this wasn't enough for the Pharisees
 - a. In the Greek Bible that was widely used in those days, this word for "some indecency" was translated more along the lines of simply being improper
 - b. So what then, would it mean for a wife to be "improper" enough so that the man could divorce her?
 - i. According to the Talmud, a Jewish man could divorce his wife if she did something immoral
 - ii. He could divorce his wife if he found someone prettier than she was
 - iii. And he could divorce his wife, even if she burnt his dinner
 3. On what grounds could a wife initiate a divorce?
 - a. Only if her husband said it was OK
 - c. This is just one example of how the Jewish culture of those days did not honor women, but it is a pretty telling example, isn't it?
 - ii. And yet, here at the end of chapter 7 we find Jesus commending a WOMAN's faith... in the dining room of a Pharisee

1. And just as shocking, Luke gives us a glimpse behind the scenes of Jesus' ministry, and we discover that there are actually MANY women following him
 - a. And maybe even MORE shocking, these women aren't just following him, but they are also actively providing for Jesus and his disciples!
 - i. We don't really ever ask the question of how Jesus and the boys get fed during these three-and-a-half years, do we?
 - b. Well, thanks to Luke, we get the answer
 - i. Jesus and his disciples were provided for by Mary, call Magdalene
 - ii. They were provided for by Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager
 - iii. They were provided for by Susanna, and MANY OTHER women who were a part of Jesus' band of followers
2. None of the other Gospel writers give us this behind-the-scenes info... so why did Luke include it?
 - a. Well, it turns out that this is one of the main themes found running throughout Luke's Gospel
 - i. He took extra care to highlight the angel Gabriel's message to Mary
 - ii. He made sure we knew about Mary and Elizabeth's reunion when their babies were still both in their wombs
 - iii. He alone gives us the story of sweet Anna, who lived almost her entire life in the Temple, wholly devoted to the Lord
 - iv. Luke alone told us of the woman in Simon the Pharisee's house
 - v. And Luke alone gives us this account of these women who took care of Jesus and his disciples
 - b. Think about who Luke was... Luke was a Gentile
 - i. An outsider... one who had been GRAFTED INTO the family of God, just like you and me
 1. Out of all the New Testament authors, he alone would have been able to relate, to some degree, to those who had been undervalued and underappreciated in that culture
 2. Just as it must have meant so much to his heart to be reconciled to the God of Abraham, he must have realized how much it meant to these women to be accepted by the God's Messiah
 - c. So who were these women that he mentioned?
- b. The first is Mary Magdalene
 - i. Luke just tells us generically that seven demons had gone out of her
 1. But Mark confirms for us in Mark 16:9 that it was Jesus who had driven these demons out of her
 - a. If you remember from last week, we talked about the fact that some commentators believe the sinful woman from the previous chapter was in fact Mary Magdalene
 - i. But the simple truth is, Luke just doesn't make that connection, so we should be cautious about assuming that the two are the same
 - ii. The Scottish Baptist pastor, Alexander MacLaren, gives us an additional reason for not linking the two...
 1. He writes this in his commentary,
 - a. "By strange misunderstanding of the Gospel story, Mary Magdalene has been identified with the woman

who was a sinner in the previous chapter in this book, and her fair fame has been blackened and her very name taken as a designation of the class to which there is no reason whatever to believe she belonged. Demonic possession was neither physical infirmity nor moral evil, however much it may have simulated sometimes the one or the other.”

- b. As MacLaren also says of her, “the Scripture record of Mary is very sweet and very beautiful”
 - i. We do not want to tarnish that story by making ungrounded assumptions
- c. From the moment that Jesus freed Mary of the demons, it is apparent that she was one of his most devoted followers
 - i. When all of Jesus’ disciples departed from him at the cross – all except for John,
 - 1. Matthew tells us that only the women stayed nearby
 - a. Among these women were Jesus’ own mother
 - b. As well as Mary, the mother of James and Joseph
 - c. As well as the mother of the sons of Zebedee
 - d. And also, Mary Magdalene
 - d. Mark tells us in his Gospel that Mary Magdalene was also among the small group of women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body
 - e. And John tells us in John 20, verses 11-18, that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ!
 - 2. Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out, truly had one of the greatest honors of the entire Scriptures
 - a. She was the first to see the risen Christ
 - b. And she was the first to go to the disciples and spread the worldview shattering news that “Jesus is alive!”
 - i. Hers is a sweet and beautiful story indeed!
- c. After Mary, Luke tells us of Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was Herod’s household manager
 - i. There is a lot of speculation about Joanna and her husband Chuza
 - 1. Some believe that Joanna became a follower of Christ, and in anger, Chuza must have divorced her
 - 2. Others believe that both Joanna and Chuza became followers of Jesus, and quite possibly Chuza was executed by Herod under the sentence of treason
 - 3. There is also a church tradition that says that Chuza was the nobleman in Capernaum in John chapter 4, whose son was at the point of death
 - a. And incredibly, Jesus heals this man’s son from Cana, which was over 16 miles away!
 - ii. Well, again, we simply do not have the facts to support any of those arguments
 - 1. What we do know is that Joanna, whose husband was Herod’s household manager, was a deeply devoted follower of Jesus
 - a. That in itself tells us something, doesn’t it?
 - i. How incredible is that, that the impact of Jesus’ ministry was already changing hearts, not just among the poor and downtrodden, but even in the household of the corrupt ruler of Judea!
- d. And then, after Joanna, Luke tells us of the woman named Susanna
 - i. Unfortunately, we know absolutely nothing about Susanna, outside of just her name

1. But Maclaren again gives us some wonderful insight regarding this woman...
 - a. "And then as for Susanna, is it not a sweet fate to be known to all the world forevermore by one line only, which tells of her service to her Master?"
 - i. We would all long for our name to be recorded in the Scriptures as Susanna's was, wouldn't we?
 - e. And then Luke concludes by saying that it wasn't just these three women who served the Lord in such an amazing capacity,
 - i. But rather, there were MANY others, who provided for Jesus and the disciples, out of their means
 - ii. Jesus elevated women out of the demeaning and insignificant conditions that their culture had placed them in
 1. And through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, their wonderful service to the Lord has been recorded to all the world, forevermore
3. But the reality is, this isn't just a New Testament thing
 - a. Yes, on the surface one could make the faulty assumption that the Bible is a book written by men, and its all mainly about men, so therefore its really only good for men
 - i. But that would be a very foolish and superficial accusation
 1. Let's just look at a snapshot from the book of Judges
 - a. Judges is one of the most depressing and disheartening books in the Bible
 - i. The depravity and wickedness we see in this book from men who were supposed to be men of God is just downright disgusting at times
 2. But who are some of the brightest lights during this dark time?
 - a. Deborah, the prophetess who led 10,000 Israelites to defeat the army of Jabin, King of Canaan
 - b. Jael, a descendent of Moses' father-in-law, who drove a tent peg through the head of King Jabin's military commander, Sisera, ending that great battle
 - c. Although she isn't mentioned in the book of Judges, Ruth lived during the time of the Judges
 - i. Hers is an incredible story of faithful devotion to her mother-in-law, Naomi
 - ii. But it is an even bigger picture of God's heart for the nations
 1. For Ruth was not an Israelite – she was a Gentile
 2. And yet through His providential hand, God brought this Gentile into the family of God
 - a. She was married to Boaz from Bethlehem
 - b. They would become the great grandparents of King David
 - c. And Ruth would be entered into the genealogy of Jesus Christ himself
 - d. And we cannot neglect to mention the fact that Ruth gets an entire book of the Bible devoted to her story
 - i. Just think about that for a minute
 1. There are only 66 books in the Bible
 2. Although many of them are named after their author, most of the content of those books is often laws, or prophecies, or letters of instruction
 - ii. But out of 66 books, two are named after women – Ruth and Esther
 1. And both of these books are largely biographical

3. That fact alone, when you think about all that God could have chosen to include in His revealed Word to humanity, is pretty staggering
4. But then as we move back to the New Testament
 - a. Think about the contrast between the faith of Mary and the doubt of Zechariah in Luke chapter 1
 - i. Zechariah is the faithful old priest, who should have believed God for anything
 - ii. Mary was just a young teenage peasant girl
 1. And yet it was Zechariah who struggled with unbelief, and it was Mary who said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
 - b. We've talked about Elizabeth and Anna and the sinful woman in Simon's house
 - c. We've talked about the list of women in Luke 8 who faithfully followed Jesus and supported him out of their own means...
 - i. And how it was only the women, apart from John, who stayed near to Jesus at his crucifixion
 - d. And we've talked about how it was the women were the first at the tomb after his death
 - i. And Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ
5. But it keeps on going in the book of Acts
 - a. In Acts 16, Timothy joins Paul and Silas on their journey to Macedonia
 - i. Timothy was already a well-respected disciple of Jesus
 1. But Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 1 that Timothy's faith came through the faithful discipleship of his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois
 - a. For you moms and grandmas out there, I pray that that will be a great encouragement to you as you continue to faithfully pour into your children!
 - b. Also in Acts 16, we find Paul and Silas in Philippi, which would soon become the home of the Philippian church
 - i. Who were the first converts that would become the foundation of what would be one of Paul's favorite churches?
 1. The first was Lydia, a seller of purple goods and a worshipper of God
 - a. Acts 16:14 says that the Lord opened her heart to hear all that Paul was saying, and upon her salvation, she was baptized
 2. The second convert of this amazing church was the slave girl who was possessed by a demon and was able to make her owners great profit through her fortune-telling
 - a. Paul cast the demon from her in the name of Jesus
 - i. She was freed from her chains
 - ii. And Paul and Silas were thrown into chains
 3. But isn't that amazing, to think about the roots of the church that would get one of the sweetest letters in all the Scriptures?
 - a. It all started with these two women!
 - c. In Acts 18, we're introduced to the husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla
 - i. These two together become very dear friends to the Apostle Paul
 - ii. They also take the gifted speaker, Apollos, under their wings, and they disciple him so he has a greater understanding of the faith
 - iii. And in Romans 16, we find that the Roman church actually meets at their house
 1. Similar to Colossians 4, where Paul greets the church that meet in the home of a woman named Nympha
 - a. It is significant that, while Luke and Paul could have easily always referred to just the husband, Aquila
 - i. They instead, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, chose to ALWAYS include Priscilla alongside of him
 - d. But Aquila and Priscilla are actually the second and third people that Paul lists in his final greetings to the church in Rome

- i. In verse 1 of Romans 16, Paul writes,
 - 1. *¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*
 - a. THAT is a pretty incredible commendation, isn't it?
 - i. In the same spirit of the women from Luke 8, Phoebe supported many of the other believers, including the Apostle Paul, out of her own resources
 - ii. And Paul says to welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints
- e. And in Philippians chapter 4, we're introduced to the two women, Euodia and Syntyche
 - i. These women unfortunately only get acknowledged in the church because they were having some sort of disagreement that Paul wanted them to get past
 - 1. But listen to what Paul ALSO says about these two ladies...
 - a. In Philippians 4:2-3, Paul writes,
 - i. *²I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, WHO HAVE LABORED SIDE BY SIDE WITH ME IN THE GOSPEL together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*
 - ii. Did you catch that?
 - 1. Paul didn't say that Euodia and Syntyche worked FOR him, or that they served UNDER his leadership
 - 2. Paul, who is being increasingly accused in our day of patriarchalism and male chauvinism...
 - a. This Paul commends these two women for laboring SIDE BY SIDE with him in the Gospel
- f. Brothers and sisters, I hope and pray that you can see clearly from the Word of God that women are far from insignificant in serving the Lord throughout the centuries
 - i. And that has continued on throughout the history of the church, hasn't it?
 - 1. One of the first martyrs of the African church was a young mother named Perpetua
 - a. In 203 AD, she was thrown into the arena in Carthage for her faith in Jesus
 - i. And when the wild beasts didn't kill her, she was lined up with the other prisoners and killed with a sword
 - 2. One of the greatest theologians in the history of the church was the man whose name no one seems to know how to pronounce... Augustine
 - a. If you read his own autobiography, you'll see that it was his mother, Monica, whom he believed to be the primary instrument that God used in his salvation
 - 3. Fanny Crosby might not be a familiar name to some of us either, but we have sung MANY of her songs right here in our church services
 - a. Fanny became blind when she was just a toddler, but in spite of her blindness, she wrote over nine thousand hymns, giving her the well-earned title, "The Queen of Gospel Song Writers"
 - i. *Blessed Assurance*, and *Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* are two of her songs that we sing often here
 - ii. And just think about the various missions offerings that we have throughout the year...
 - 1. The Lottie Moon Christmas offering

2. The Annie Armstrong Easter offering
3. The Edna McMillan state missions offering
 - a. All three named after women who served the Lord faithfully and tirelessly...
 - i. Across the world in China
 - ii. Here at home in the United States
 - iii. And even right here in Oklahoma
 1. It is tremendously significant that all three of these major offerings of the Southern Baptist Convention are named, after women
4. We could go on and on when it comes to missions work, couldn't we?
 - a. Amy Carmichael in India
 - b. Gladys Aylward in China
 - c. Ann Judson, wife of Adoniram Judson, in Burma
6. Throughout the history of the church, God has blessed the work of faithful women in the Church
 - a. Sometimes as they labored side by side with the men of the church
 - i. But often as they blazed trails where no man was willing to go
 1. But don't get the wrong idea... it isn't just the women who were martyrs or missionaries that God has used greatly
 - a. It is the countless hundreds of thousands who have joyfully and faithfully taught our children and grandchildren back in kids' church, or spent hours upon hours rocking babies in the nursery
 - b. It is the great multitude of women who have lifted their voices in song, as they sing in choirs and praise bands, helping the congregation to turn their hearts in worship to the Lord
 - c. It is the many women who labor behind the scenes doing all sorts of secretarial and administrative work, freeing the shepherds of the church to proclaim the Word of God much more effectively
 - i. I think it is safe to say that, if everything in the operation of the Church had been left up to the men, the church probably would have never even made it out of 1st century Jerusalem!
 2. In Ephesians 3, Paul tells us that the great mystery that God had kept hidden for ages was that THROUGH THE CHURCH, He would reveal His wisdom to all the heavenly rulers and authorities
 - a. That is a mind-blowing statement, isn't it?
 - i. Really, God? You're going to use US... a bunch of flaky, unfaithful, prone-to-wander saints to show your wisdom throughout the heavens?!
 1. It doesn't make sense at all, but as Paul reminds us, God's power is exalted in our weaknesses
 - ii. It is through the Church that His manifold wisdom will be made known to all the rulers and authorities
 1. And in God's great wisdom, He has ordained that women will play an absolutely indispensable role in advancing His Kingdom
 3. So this begs the question then, why is the Church, especially here in the Southern Baptist Convention, constantly being accused of hating women?
7. As I mentioned earlier concerning Paul,
 - a. The church is increasingly coming under the same accusations they have laid against him
 - i. The Church is too patriarchal
 - ii. The Church is too male-dominated

- iii. The Church is too chauvinistic against women
 - 1. Obviously, the main target of these attacks are the ever-shrinking number of churches who do not allow women to be pastors
 - 2. Obviously, we fall into that category
 - a. So how do we answer these claims that we are too fundamental? That we are holding onto antiquated and outdated traditions made by man?
- b. Well, the first thing we do is point to everything we just talked about for the past 40 minutes or so!
 - i. In a world that has consistently demeaned and devalued women, the overwhelming evidence from the Scriptures and from the history of the Church is that it is only OUR God, the God of the Bible, who has elevated women to a place of dignity and honor
 - 1. It is only the Christian faith that has upheld the beautiful truth that both man AND women have been made in the image of God
 - 2. It is only the Christian faith that has seen women make such a dramatic impact upon a lost and dying world, as they have faithfully followed Jesus, and supported HIS ministry by their very own lives
 - ii. When we know the Scriptures well, AND when we know church history well, it isn't difficult at all to counter the arguments brought against the church by the world
- c. But the second thing we must do is that we must be willing to STAND FIRM upon those Scriptures
 - i. And we must stand firm upon the historical practices of the Church that are grounded in those Scriptures
 - 1. For centuries after Pentecost, the Church has faithfully held to the biblical standards of leadership within the church
 - a. In Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, he ashamedly put forth the qualifications for the shepherds of the church
 - i. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul wrote...
 - 1. *¹The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable...*
 - a. And so on
 - i. The overseer, the elder, the pastor, must be THE HUSBAND of one wife
 - ii. In Titus 1:5-6, Paul told Titus,
 - 1. *⁵This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination...*
 - a. And so on
 - i. Again, elders are to be appointed in every church, and they are to be men
 - ii. And as you may know, the most controversial passage is found in 1 Timothy 2, right before Paul gives the qualifications for elders
 - 1. In 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Paul writes,
 - a. *⁸I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—¹¹with good works. ¹¹Let a woman learn quietly*

with all submissiveness. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

2. Obviously, there is a lot we could unpack in this passage, and we definitely do not have the time to do it
 - a. But the simple truth that we need to note is that Paul's stance on women teaching or exercising authority over men IS NOT a cultural issue
 - i. Paul doesn't base his statement on what was going on in the church in those days, or what was common throughout the Roman Empire
 1. No, Paul grounds his statement all the way back to Adam and Eve, and ultimately GOD'S design for humanity and His Church
 - b. Why are men given the responsibility of shepherding the church?
 - i. Because Adam was formed first
 1. This is the creation order that God Himself established
 2. And Paul says that this creation order permeates not just through the family, but through the church as well
 - a. When men abdicate that authority in the church, they are walking in the same footsteps as Adam, as he failed to shepherd Eve in the Garden
 - b. When women usurp that authority in the church, they are walking in the same footsteps as Eve, as she stepped past Adam's authority
 - c. Its interesting that, God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to enjoy EVERYTHING in the Garden for their own flourishing and for His glory, except the fruit from one tree
 - i. But they just had to eat from that tree, didn't they?
 - d. In the exact same way, God has given everything to both men and women in the Church for their own flourishing and for His glory, except for the positions of shepherding and leading the church
 - i. But like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we continue to insist on doing things our own way
 - iii. Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has ordained things to be in such a way, not to restrict his people, but to allow them to flourish
 1. When Jesus walked this earth, he chose twelve MEN to be his Apostles and to begin to build HIS church upon this earth
 - a. Does that make Jesus patriarchal? Does it make Jesus a chauvinist?
 - i. Not at all. What it makes Jesus is an obedient Son.
 - iv. Last week we talked about the five Solas of the Reformation
 1. The first of those Solas was Sola Scriptura... the belief that Scriptures alone hold the authority in our lives
 - a. And Scripture alone holds the authority over the Church
 - i. And what do the Scriptures tell us about the role of women in the church and in the home?
 - ii. They tell us that by God's wonderful design, He looked at Adam and said "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him"
 1. And by His grace, He created Eve from one of Adam's own ribs

- b. Sisters in Christ, it is not good for the men in the church to be alone
 - i. The church has thrived throughout the centuries as women have humbly and joyfully stepped into the roles that God has created for you
 - 1. We certainly cannot do it without you
- c. We praise God for Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Susanna and the countless other women who have served the Lord throughout the history of the church
 - i. We praise God for you who continue to serve HIS church today!