

Introduction – Life was hard in ancient Israel, but if you were a woman, it was even harder. Women had fewer social freedoms and less legal rights. Most women were dependent financially on a male relative – a father, husband, or son. Women were expected to work hard, but men controlled the money. Women had a lower profile in religious life. They were not allowed to be priests. They were not allowed in the inner court of the temple (The “court of men”.) They were not allowed to follow a rabbi – a teacher of the Hebrew scriptures.

Some ancient rabbis said terrible things about women. But there was at least one rabbi who had female disciples. Some travelled with him and supported him with their own money. This rabbi treated women with respect. He taught male and female the same theology, the same message. His name? Jesus of Nazareth.

It is well known that at a certain point in his ministry, Jesus named the big 12 of the disciples. Peter, James, John, Andrew, Judas Iscariot, Simon the Zealot, Matthew the tax collector and the other five that nobody ever remembers. But make no mistake all 12 were male. And, some have argued, that this means that all disciples were and should be male. This, however, is a very narrow view.

A disciple is someone who is following Jesus to become like Jesus. Like him in his priorities. Like him in his character. Like him in his spiritual power. Like him in his servanthood. These disciples were given different spiritual gifts that would be called upon to make the body of Christ function well. So a simple question might be – were there women who literally followed Jesus to become like Jesus? And today, if you use the idea of following Jesus in the figurative sense, does Jesus invite women to be his followers? I think it follows that if Jesus had literal female followers in the first century, then women today can also be disciples.

Luke 8 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³ Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

OK, lets be NOTICERS when it comes to this passage. Because there are some things worth noticing here!

- The twelve and women traveled from one town to another. They travelled from one town and village to another. This is kind of a summary verse that helps us understand what likely was months of ministry. Who were there? The twelve... and the women. Three named and MANY OTHERS. This is Counter Cultural!
- Friends, Jesus never did ANYTHING accidentally. Whenever he does something, it is designed with a PURPOSE... He is always interacting with a person, training his immediate disciples, and training us. He is charting a course for the future that may not look like the past. In the past, it

may have been male access only to rabbis, but in his clan, women had immediate access to him. Every day. Same as the guys.

Map: Travels of Jesus- Now, we know that some of the travels of Jesus were pre-disciple calling. These are in RED. Jesus was baptized without disciples present, he travelled through the wilderness being tempted alone etc. But for sure, he would have had the men and women in tow throughout Galilee - That's the BLUE line and travelling back and forth to Jerusalem – that is the GREEN line. Bottom line: lots of time with women disciples.

The chosen: I love the pictures of Jesus and his followers in this series. They do a really good job of trying to be historically accurate while filling in the gaps in between what the Bible clearly teaches about the life of Jesus. One of the things they do right is that they picture women travelling with the men.

- Three of them named – Mary Magdalene – seven demons... but still welcome with the disciples! Jesus was about redemption and training. So look at me friends – because some of you have had demons in your life. Demons that have come from addictions, from occult behavior, from some kinds of sexual behavior – you need to know that being delivered from demons does not disqualify you from discipleship. In fact – once you experience the dark side and come into the light, it makes you a much more grateful, passionate, committed follower of Jesus. You know where you have come from and you NEVER want to go back!
- Joanna – don't slip by this one cuz it is hilarious – She is a woman used to living in a palace, but is so intrigued by Jesus that she is living in the fields. Notice that she is a financier of Jesus ministry. Jesus is putting spiritual gifts and resources into play. The money for all these disciples has to come from somewhere! She apparently got her money from Chuza, her husband whose job it was to manage Herod's household. Including paying for everything with Herod's debit card. His salary came from Herod's account, so get this, Indirectly, through Joanna, Herod is financing Jesus' ministry! Only God could make that happen!
- Susanna – also a financier
- MANY OTHERS. How many? 5? 20? Not sure. But we know that there was an entourage of male and female people following Jesus and becoming his disciples.
- In fact, when Jesus sends out the 12 disciples, we know that they are the 12 men mentioned above. But when he sends out the 72 disciples, it is commonly thought that many of them were the women mentioned in Luke 8. Jesus was including them in evangelistic, bridge building and gospel communication from the start.
- How would it feel to be these women? Background of being oppressed, uneducated, not believed in, demon possessed, maybe abused, definitely used.... And Jesus says "I want you on MY team." The team that will change the world, the team that lasts for eternity. And they are like.... Me? I though only boys could do that. Rabbis don't have girl disciples! And Jesus says with a knowing grin... "this one does!."

Our vision: making disciples of Jesus for kingdom impact. You need to know that this includes ANYBODY who will have the courage to follow and become like Jesus! If you come to CCC saying "does that mean me?" I mean, I am a girl... can I be included? I am asian, am I in? I am rich, can I be included? I have done some horrible things... I have anxiety... my husband works for Herod... I have been demon possessed... and Jesus says "YES!" Come to my family!

Good stuff, eh?

This is not accidental. It was Jesus' agenda to raise the value of women and it was Luke's as well.

Jesus not only did this in the lives of Mary and Joanna and Susanna (and many others), he also had an impact on a household that included a brother, named Lazarus, and two sisters named Mary and Martha – yes a different Mary – there are at least four in the Jesus story. Apparently Martha is the oldest and the owner of the house where the action takes place.

MAP – They live in this place called Bethany. It is just a couple of miles walk from Jerusalem, so many think that the disciple-SHIP. (get it?) parked at Bethany whenever the disciples went to Jerusalem for festivals and that they often stopped by the Garden of Gethsemane for rest or teaching or a campfire...

Anyway, one of the first times he was in Bethany.

Luke 10 38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. **39** She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **40** But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, **42** but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

This is a familiar Sunday School story if you were raised going to church. And the main point is often elucidated: Martha was following Jesus by busying herself with serving while Mary was learning. And Learning is better. This is an excellent application from this passage. But it is deeper than that. Because being a disciple is inherently about learning AND serving. Jesus said it well "If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all."

So, what gives? Why is this subversive? Why would Luke put THIS in his account of Jesus – of all things? There is a backstory here that is hard to describe to a 3rd grader, but you all will understand. You see, there was a very clear pathway for somebody to become a rabbi. They were required to attach themselves to a rabbi and get as close as possible. They would repeat what the rabbi said. They would do what the rabbi commanded. They would love what the rabbi loved. But the key posture for a rabbinic student was to let the rabbi sit on a chair while the students gathered around his feet to listen. That phrase "Sat at the Lord's feet" is not just about geography, it is about intent. You sit at a rabbi's feet because you want to be a rabbi.

Now, Martha may have been flustered to be doing all of the work on her own, but she would also know the social conventions. Men sit at the rabbi's feet. Women do the hospitality – make preparations, set the scene, wash, cook.

But Jesus has a bigger agenda to communicate. There are big things here. Martha has 117 things on her mind. Jesus has one. Making disciples who make disciples who make disciples. He does not only want Mary to BE a disciple, but to be a disciplemaker. And what she learns in the moments with Jesus will never be taken from her. And this is our agenda as a church as well. You really are not a disciple of Jesus until you do what Jesus DID. You become a disciple, not by accumulating Bible knowledge or

attending church. You become a disciple by making disciples. So, gut check here, how are you doing? Do you have a handful of people whom you are investing in to help them grow deep in Jesus, hear his calling, flow with his power, and obey what he tells them? Men, women, the calling is not by gender, but for all who name the name of Jesus. And this passage clearly points us this way.

One final episode that shows just how much Jesus planned to elevate the women disciples.

Luke 24 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸Then they remembered his words.

⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

And in John, it clarifies that Jesus himself appeared to Mary and commanded her to tell the disciples that she saw him risen from the dead with his ascension soon to follow.

John 20 ⁻¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

OK, remember, Jesus does NOTHING by accident. He did not make a mistake by appearing to the women disciples before the men disciples. Why? Well the first reason is that a woman's testimony was not allowed in a court of law. It had to be corroborated by a male to be considered reliable. Jesus is turning that tradition on his head by having the first witnesses be women with credible testimony of the most important event that ever hit the planet.

Second, he commissioned the women to be the very first people to communicate the full gospel. Jesus is risen and will soon ascend to the Father. They thought the cross had won. They thought that death had the victory. They thought the movement was over. They thought they had a lifetime of defeat to look forward to... along with the threat of Jewish and roman leaders. But the women brought good news! To a group of men and women... on a Sunday morning. Jesus is back! He rose! I saw him with my own two eyes! Resurrection is real and here and now. This changes everything. It was the first Easter. Resurrection day. And the first to proclaim it are... women.

Jesus did not do this by accident. He had an agenda to move women from not worthy... to disciples. From not allowed to teach... to training for rabbis. From not considered reliable... to highly trustworthy. From oppressed to free. From uneducated... to fully educated. From not teachers, not evangelists, not worthy of a Sunday morning message to being worthy of the best, most important words ever spoken to men on a Sunday. "I have seen the LORD!"

It was the agenda of Jesus and Paul to elevate the status of women. He wanted us to continually open doors for his creation until the hierarchy goes back to the creation order. Men and women are co-rulers with God and serve not according to gender, but gifting. The power play of the Christian faith is not a power over, but a power under. It is the willingness to serve and promote others so that the mission might go forward. So, if you have power, you continually use that power to honor Jesus and lift up others!

We know that the New Testament Church took this quite seriously. In fact, in the new testament, we see some amazing faces of women who were elevated to significant positions of teaching and leadership – once again breaking the gender stereotypes of the day based on the example of Jesus. We have two that prepared the way:

- **Anna - prophet (Luke 2:36)** – Anna met Jesus at 8 days old at the temple and prophesied over him, along with the old prophet Simeon.
- **Mary, Mother of Jesus – songwriter and author of scripture (Luke 1:46-55)** – Not only was she chosen by our heavenly Father to raise Jesus, she also composed a song included in the Bible and so is a female author of scripture along with Miriam of the Old Testament.
- **Mary and Martha, Joanna, Susana** - followed Jesus – (Luke 8:1-3, 10:38-42) - Check
- **Philip's Daughters/Women Prophets – Acts 2:17-18, 21:9** – It was predicted by Joel and it happened on Pentecost that when the Holy Spirit Came, women would be prophets just like the men... and immediately, Phillips four daughters got the gift and started using it.
- **Mary Magdalene – first to proclaim the resurrection – Matt 28:5-7** – Already discussed
- **Junia – outstanding apostle – Romans 16:7** – A woman apostle? Yup. Right there in Romans. Apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus who planted and led churches.
- **Phoebe – messenger of book of Romans, Deacon – Romans 16:1-2** – Did you know a woman, who was a deacon, carried the book of Romans to Rome? And if they had questions, they would ask HER to explain the letter to the romans when they read it.
- **Priscilla – teacher – Acts 18:2-3, 18-20, 24-26 ++** - Priscilla was a teacher who served with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus for years and then was commissioned by him to be a teacher in his absence. She gently corrected and instructed the missionary Apollos.
- **Euodia/Syntyche – Contending side by side– Phil 4:2-3**
- **The Elect Lady** - hosted the church – 2 John

So, in New Testament times, women were leaders, teachers, apostles, deacons, writers, disciplers, funders, church planters and warriors for Jesus.

Now, good hearted people in the church have disagreed on this over the years. People who love Jesus, love the Bible and love to do the right thing come to different conclusions. And here is where our denomination – the Christian and Missionary Alliance - stands. Women can do anything in the church that men can do except be a lead minister or elder. And even with the Governing Board, it must be a

majority male elders, but includes female members – simply because we need the voice of women at every level of leadership. Women can lead communion, baptisms, weddings, funerals, classes, preach sermons, lead men and women in a spiritual sense in every possible way. Since the beginning of the Christian and Missionary Alliance over 100 years ago, there have been women as missionaries, pastors, evangelists and board members. Our Founder, AB Simpson, called this the “ARMY OF IRREGULARS”. That’s us. And nobody is discounted based on how good looking you are, where you came from or whether you are a boy or a girl.

Now some of you know that there was a bit of a stir a few years back among good hearted, Jesus loving, Bible believing Christians at CCC who prefer that women not teach from the platform for a full 35 minutes. So, in order to develop unity in disagreement, the elders put a pause on women teaching full sermons in order to 1) give a break from the heat of the moment 2) allow those who disagree to do some Biblical study on the matter and ask all the questions they need to and 3) expand the role of women on our stage without crossing the ‘full 35 minute sermon’ mark. And we promised that the full sermon would be restored in due time and we’d let the congregation know when that time was right. The elders are discerning that the time is right. So, we will have our first full sermon by a woman in over 5 years this coming February 26 when Rebecca Lyons comes for thrive and stays for a Sunday message! She is a powerful communicator with the gift of teaching and has a great message for us all to hear.

The denomination and elders are 100% unified and quite firm in this decision, but are also very willing to discuss and educate anybody who would like to learn more. We have some papers on key passages and Alliance polity that may be helpful. And we trust that this congregation is a unified body on mission to reach the lost, spread the gospel and grow the kingdom of God. Thanks for continuing to show that unity and love even when things may not fall according to your preferences.

We pride ourselves on being a denomination and a church where people can have unity in disagreement. Where we can respect each other and not have to ‘get our way’ on every issue. Where we are focused on Jesus and the mission. We want to imitate the way of Jesus and passionately follow the example and commands of the Bible to the glory of God, as we constantly reach one more for the sake of the gospel. Friends, our elders, our denomination and our staff are unified on this. Will you join Jesus, join Paul, join the Christian and Missionary Alliance, join your lead minister, all your ministers at CCC, and your elders in affirming women according to their gifting. Because we need EVERY person – men and women, rich and poor, every language, every color of the rainbow to be put into play for the sake of the gospel. The mission is too important to leave players on the sidelines. The glory of God, heaven and hell, and the kingdom of God are all at stake here.