

# **The Book of Luke**

## **Women in the Ministry of Jesus**

Lesson #6 for May 9, 2015

Scriptures: Luke 1:39-55; 2:36-37; 7:11-17,36-50; 8:1-3; 18:1-8; Romans 10:17.

1. The Gospel of Luke is famous—or, depending on your point of view, perhaps infamous—for being the Gospel of women. Many early Christians rejected Luke's Gospel for that very reason. We can rejoice that Jesus rose above the cultural norms of His day to involve so many women whose needs He met and to whose love He responded.
2. It is a well-known fact that in the cultures of Jesus's day, including the Greek and Roman cultures, the status of women was very low. They were little more than property. They were to be used and/or abused by men, more or less at will. They had few legal rights and were often nothing more than sex slaves. Considering that background, is it any wonder that women were attracted to Jesus? Jesus called them daughters of Abraham. (Luke 13:16)
3. Even from before His birth, the story of Jesus was tied to the stories of some remarkable women. Read Luke 1:39-45, the testimony of Elizabeth. Also read Luke 1:46-55, the Magnificat or Song of Mary, much of it taken from the Old Testament. But, they were not the only ones. Read Luke 2:36-38, the brief mention of Anna at the temple in Jerusalem. While they almost certainly still held to the hope that many of the Jews had that Jesus would release them from the Roman yoke, all three of these women recognized that Baby as being a very special Baby, perhaps even the Messiah. Anna specifically mentioned that she believed this Baby would bring salvation to the Jews. What message do you think Anna gave "to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free"? (Luke 2:38) Did she speak even to Pharisees and Sadducees? If so, how did they receive her message?
4. Read Luke 7:11-17. Between Nazareth and Capernaum, there was a small village called Nain. It lay on a high tableland overlooking the valley. As Jesus led His disciples and many other followers up the hill toward Nain, they were met by a funeral procession carrying an open bier holding the body of a dead young man, the only son of a widow. Try to imagine that scene in your mind. Jesus went over to the procession which then stopped. He turned to the mother and said, "Don't cry!" Then He reached out to the dead body and said: "Young man! Get up, I tell you!" (Luke 7:14, *GNB*) When the young man started to move, did the men carrying the bier freak out? Imagine the astonishment of all present as the young man opened his eyes. Jesus took him by the hand, lifted him up, and then restored him to his mother. (For more details see *The Desire of Ages* 318.1-5.)
5. Do you think that was just an accidental meeting? Or, did Jesus specifically go that direction at that time because He knew that funeral train would be there?
6. Read Luke 8:41-42,49-56. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue. Every week, it was his job to choose the person who was to lead out in the synagogue service, praying, reading Scripture, and preaching. On occasion, he may even have chosen Jesus to do those things. But, because of the influence of the scribes and Pharisees, he probably was reluctant to be seen with or associate with Jesus. But, as his daughter was dying, he knew of only one place to go. He sought out Jesus who said to him, "Don't worry, I will come to your house." While they were still on the way, Jairus received a message that his daughter had already died. In His usual manner, Jesus said: "Don't be afraid; only believe, and she will be well." (Luke 8:50, *GNB*) Jesus proceeded to the home of Jairus. There, in the presence of a small company of her parents and His three disciples, Peter, James, and John, He resurrected the young girl and instructed the parents to give her something to eat. Every detail of our lives is important to God. The people outside who were mourning had laughed at Jesus when He said that she was only sleeping. What do you think they had

to say when the news reached them that the child was alive?

7. Read Luke 8:43-48. While Jesus was making His way to Jairus's home to heal his daughter, a woman who for 12 years had been ill with bleeding managed to get close enough to Jesus to touch the hem of His garment. To everyone's surprise—except Jesus—He suddenly stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" Even Peter in the midst of that bustling crowd wondered how He could ask a question like that! But, Jesus did not want this woman to go away unnoticed. After identifying her, He said, "Your faith has made you well." (Luke 8:48, *GNB*) That woman had tried for many years to get help; but, no one was able to help her. Then she heard about Jesus and determined to get to Him if at all possible. (See *The Desire of Ages* 343-347.)
8. Think of all the people who touched Jesus in one way or another that day. Only one of them received His healing power. If you had asked the people in that crowd what they thought of that woman, they would probably have had nothing but disgust and repulsion for her. According to Levitical law, she was considered unclean, and she was supposed to keep herself separate from other people. But, Jesus recognized her as a daughter of Abraham, a seeker for the truth.
9. Read Luke 7:36-50. This is an incredible story which happened to the famous family of a leading Pharisee and Jesus. With the help of Ellen White, we can put together a very incredible picture.

**Simon had led into sin the woman he now despised. She had been deeply wronged by him. . . .** But Simon felt himself more righteous than Mary, and Jesus desired him to see how great his guilt really was. **He would show him that his sin was greater than hers, as much greater as a debt of five hundred pence exceeds a debt of fifty pence.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 566.5.

Those present, thinking of **Lazarus**, who had been raised from the dead by Christ, and **who was at this time a guest in his uncle's house**, [240] began to question, saying, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" But Christ continued, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 9, 1900 par. 15; *Daughters of God* 239.4. [Bold type is added.]

10. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were brother and sisters. (John 11) Thus, all were related to Simon who had led Mary into sin. **Mary's life of sin probably began with that incest.** And that led her all the way to demon possession. (See *DA* 568; Luke 8:1-3.)

When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.2.

11. Read Luke 10:38-42. To many people, this is a troubling story. Many women, especially, feel a burden to adequately prepare for guests who come to their home. Martha was very concerned. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were relatives of Simon and probably belonged to

a family of Pharisees. Mary was the black sheep of the family, having left home, become a prostitute, and even finally being demon-possessed before Jesus cast out seven demons from her life. Now that the Master was in their home, Martha felt a great need to show her respect for the One who had done so much for her family. But, Mary realized that the presence of Jesus was too precious to be wasted on ordinary matters, and she sat at the feet of Jesus.

The cause of Christ needs careful, energetic workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 525.2.

12. But there is a deeper meaning to this short story which follows right after the story of the “good Samaritan.”

If you thought “the good Samaritan” was radical, this powerful little story suggests that Luke has plenty more where that came from. In describing Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, he has chosen this incident as part of his introduction. It took place at Bethany, as we know from other accounts of these sisters, and Bethany was not far from Jerusalem—near, in fact, the top of the road described in the **parable** we’ve just studied. The incident can’t, therefore, have taken place at this point in the story, but Luke has placed it here to alert us to something special about Jesus’ work. Not only was he redrawing the boundaries of God’s people, sending out a clear message about how the **gospel** would reach to those outside the traditional borders. He was redrawing the boundaries between men and women *within* Israel, blurring lines which had been clearly laid down.

The real problem between Martha and Mary wasn’t the workload that Martha had in the kitchen. That, no doubt, was real enough, but it wasn’t the main thing that was upsetting Martha. Nor was it (as some have suggested) that both the sisters were romantically attracted to Jesus and Martha was jealous of Mary’s adoring posture, sitting at Jesus’ feet. If there was any such feeling, Luke neither says nor hints anything about it. No: the real problem was that *Mary was behaving as if she were a man*. In that culture, as in many parts of the world to this day, houses were divided into male “space” and female “space”, and male and female roles were strictly demarcated as well. Mary had crossed an invisible but very important boundary within the house, and another equally important boundary within the social world.

The public room was where the men would meet; the kitchen, and other quarters unseen by outsiders, belonged to the women. Only outside, where little children would play, and in the married bedroom, would male and female mix. For a woman to settle down comfortably among the men was bordering on the scandalous. Who did she think she was? Only a shameless woman would behave in such a way. She should go back into the women’s quarters where she belonged. This wasn’t principally a matter of superiority and inferiority, though no doubt it was often perceived and articulated like that. It was a matter of what was thought of as the appropriate division between the two halves of humanity.

In the same way, to sit at the feet of a teacher was a decidedly male role. “Sitting at someone’s feet” doesn’t mean (as it might sound to us) a devoted,

dog-like adoring posture, as though the teacher were a rock star or a sports idol. When Saul of Tarsus “sat at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3), he wasn’t gazing up adoringly and thinking how wonderful the great **rabbi** was; he was listening and learning, focusing on the teaching of his master and putting it together in his mind. To sit at someone’s feet meant, quite simply, to be their student. And to sit at the feet of a rabbi was what you did *if you wanted to be a rabbi yourself*. There is no thought here of learning for learning’s sake. Mary has quietly taken her place as a would-be teacher and preacher of the **kingdom** of God. [Remember Luke 8:1-3.]

Jesus affirms her right to do so. This has little to do with the women’s movements in the modern West. They do have some parallels with Jesus’ agenda, and the two can make common cause on several issues; but they should not be confused. Jesus’ valuation of each human being is based not on abstract egalitarian ideals, but on the overflowing love of God, which, like a great river breaking its banks into a parched countryside, irrigates those parts of human society which until now had remained barren and unfruitful. Mary stands for all those women who, when they hear Jesus speaking about the kingdom, know that God is calling them to listen carefully so that they can speak of it too.

**We would be wrong, then, to see Martha and Mary, as they have so often been seen, as models of the “active” and the “contemplative” styles of spirituality.** Action and contemplation are of course both important. Without the first you wouldn’t eat, without the second you wouldn’t worship. And no doubt some people are called to one kind of balance between them, and others to another. But we cannot escape the challenge of this passage by turning it into a comment about different types of Christian lifestyle. **It is about the boundary-breaking call of Jesus.** As he goes up to Jerusalem, he leaves behind him towns, villages, households and individuals who have glimpsed a new vision of the kingdom, and for whom **life** will never be the same again. God grant that as we read his story the same will be true for us.—Wright, N. T. (2004). *Luke for Everyone* (pp. 129-130). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

13. Read Luke 18:1-8. What are we supposed to learn from that parable? Almost certainly, it was a true story that was known by people in the crowd. It should teach us at least the following three things: (1) We should never become discouraged about praying for the needs that we see. (Luke 18:1) (2) Prayer can change even the heart of an evil judge. (3) Victorious faith is persistent faith. (*Christ’s Object Lessons* 165)
14. Read Luke 21:1-4; Mark 12:41-44; and *The Desire of Ages* 614-616. In contrast to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were making a great show of giving their large donations at the temple, that poor widow was standing nearby, quietly hoping for an opportunity to cast in her two small coins when no one was looking. She did not realize that Jesus with divine insight was watching her. The Pharisees and Sadducees would have despised this woman; and when they counted the offering, they may even have thrown out her two mites as not being worth the trouble to deal with. But, Jesus recognized the motive behind this woman’s gift. It was a much more appreciated gift in God’s eyes than the large sums of money given by the Pharisees and Sadducees from their abundance of wealth. The Pharisees and Sadducees were there to show off. She was there to give her all. And that

woman's influence through this story has had a greater impact on the work of God down through the generations than what all the others put together gave. If there was anyone who could have rightly refused to give because of how the money would be used, it was that woman. Refusing to give our tithes and offerings because we do not like what some person or group in the church is doing is absolutely forbidden by this story.

15. Read Luke 23:55-24:12. Why do you think it was that women were the last at the tomb Friday night and the first there on Sunday morning? Where were the disciples during that time? Mostly, they were hiding behind locked doors in the upper room! There are several possible explanations for these facts. Because women were despised but, nevertheless, were expected to carry out certain societal duties even for the dead, there was less fear of the Romans on the part of Mary and the other women in approaching the grave. They would probably not have been bothered by the Roman guard at all. On the other hand, the disciples may have been arrested if they had attempted to go to the tomb.
16. All of that having been said, those women were so committed to the Jesus whom they had followed all the way from Galilee that they were willing to take their lives in their hands to do what they thought was going to be their last opportunity to honor the body of Jesus. At great expense they prepared what was needed for an honorable burial.
17. What was Jesus's overall attitude toward women? Did He believe they had a place in the spreading of the gospel?

He who gave back to the widow her only son, as he was being carried to the burial, is touched today by the woe of the bereaved mother. He who gave back to Mary and Martha their buried brother, who wept tears of sympathy at the grave of Lazarus, who pardoned Mary Magdalene, who remembered his mother, when he was hanging in agony upon the cross, who appeared to the weeping women after his resurrection, and made them his messengers to preach a risen Saviour saying, "Go tell my disciples that I go to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God," is woman's best friend today, and ready to aid her in her need if she will trust him.—Ellen G. White, *Health Reformer*, August 1, 1877 par. 16; *ST*, November 29, 1877 par. 16; *BEcho*, September 1, 1893 par. 2; *The Adventist Home*, p. 204.2; *RC* 170.5; *WM* 156.1.

The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.—Ellen G. White, *6T* 117.4 (1901); *RH*, Aug. 26, 1902 par 5; *9T* 128.3; *Ev* 464.2-465.0; *Mar* 104.3; *OFC* 321.6.

18. Read Luke 8:1-3; 23:55-56; 24:1-12. Through the eyes of Luke and despite the bias of most of the biblical writers, we can begin to see a picture unfolding of the importance of women in the early church. Women played key roles in many aspects of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Is it any wonder that women were attracted to Jesus considering how they were treated by Jesus in contrast to how they were treated by most other men? Jesus attracted not only people like Mary the formerly demon-possessed prostitute, but also women of high society such as Joanna, the

wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager. Susanna was also probably a prominent woman. And many other women provided for Him and His disciples.

19. What would we think of a pastor today who traveled around with numerous women including wives of wealthy society members and even a former demon-possessed prostitute?
20. Aren't you glad that God is the One who judges us rather than any human being? Would any of us have been able to see the value in a woman like Mary?
21. The God Who created man and woman as being equal in the beginning (Genesis 1:26-27) and Who teaches us that all are equal in the eyes of God when it comes to salvation, (John 3:16; Galatians 3:28) should lead us to deal with both genders as equals.
22. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the seminal event in the history of Christianity. Many who try to reject the miraculous nature of everything that Jesus did also reject the idea that He could have risen from the dead. But, if the story was a made-up story—as they claim—no writer in those days whether Jew or Gentile would have given women the primary role in reporting that event. Such an idea would not even have occurred to them.
23. As we have seen in this lesson, women had a great deal to do with the birth and the later ministry of Jesus Christ. (Luke 2:36-38; 8:1-3; 10:38-42) While their names are, by and large, not mentioned, they were there apparently at every step along the way. Mary, the former prostitute and demon-possessed woman, was the one given the privilege of first announcing the good news of His resurrection. And she was sent to “evangelize,” that is, to take the “good news,” to the “General Conference” committee of her day, i.e., the disciples of Jesus. Jesus clearly treated men and women equally. He refused to consider women as the “opposite” sex or the inferior sex!
24. In light of what we have studied in this lesson, is it clear to you that Luke showed great respect for the roles of those women in the story of Jesus? From the time of His annunciation until He ascended back to heaven, women were there at almost every step.
25. Fortunately for us, having finally learned this lesson after Jesus returned to heaven, Paul told us clearly in Galatians 3:28, *GNB*: “So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.”
26. As a Christian church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how can we best follow the example of Jesus in our relationship with and use of women? If Jesus were alive today, what role would He assign to women? Can you think of any higher responsibility than to be the one who carried the very first message about the resurrection? Who would not want to have had that privilege?
27. In this lesson, we have seen the self-sufficient righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes contrasted with the humble faith of the woman who was suffering and thought that if she could only touch the edge of Jesus's garment that she would be healed. The Pharisees were looking for opportunities to arrest Jesus while the thankful Mary poured expensive perfume over His feet and dried them with her hair.
28. The raising of Jairus's daughter tells us that Jesus had great respect not only for women but also for children, even female children. Are we ready to follow the example of Jesus?

© 2015, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last Modified: April 2, 2015

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Luke\SS-6-Luke-2015\_05\_09-Fin+.wpd