

How Jesus Breaks the Muzzle of Religious Tradition for Women

Your heavenly Father has a beautiful plan for your life—one that no one else on earth can fulfill because you are unique. You are the only one of you that God has.

However, religious tradition and Jewish custom have been relentless in their suppression of women. Even those extraordinary women who have overcome female subjugation and have launched out and done exploits in Christ's name have had little recorded about their triumphs of faith.

Most of the world today represses female initiative, restricting women to one level or another of servitude, subordination or outright female bondage. From Muslim nations, in which women must cover their faces and bodies with long flowing robes, to uncultured tribes, in which tradition relegates them to a status little above animals, the role of women is one of subservience and inferiority, and it should not be.

In the Christian church worldwide, traditional theology has extracted two statements by the apostle Paul out of their context and used them to establish a doctrinal absolute that consistently restricts women to silence in the church and prohibits them from initiative and leadership (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). But God never intended for women to sit on the sidelines while men did all the work of the ministry. He wants every woman to know that she is His special child, equal to anyone else in the world and designed by Him with unlimited potential.

My husband, T.L. Osborn, and I have spent more than five decades proclaiming the gospel to millions, face to face, in

more than 70 nations. As a woman, my role has been unlimited, and yours can be too.

It has been my privilege to organize crusades, meet heads of state and other government officials, secure permits, arrange for contracts for stadiums and grounds, install equipment, negotiate with businesses for tons of literature and purchase thousands of evangelistic tracts. I have organized the cooperating pastors, set up workers' institutes and convert schools, and presided over the crusades. While the crusades are taking place, I alternate with my husband, teaching and preaching daily in the meetings.

In addition to all of that, as corporate president of Osborn Foundation's international world headquarters, I oversee all our international offices with our enormous worldwide missionary outreaches.

Being a woman does not alter my status as a believer, a disciple of Jesus Christ, His follower, His servant. What He said to all believers, He says to me—and to you also. His Great Commission applies to women in the same way it applies to men, and the power of the Holy Spirit in a woman's life to accomplish it is no different than it is in a man's life.

Biblical Examples

Eve, the first woman God created, has inspired many a discourse that has resulted in the institution of ironclad church doctrines that put women "in their place," silent and nonassertive in God's No. 1 job. But if a woman's disobedience resulted in the fall of the human race, let's not forget it was a woman's obedience that resulted in the redemption of humankind.

God chose a woman as His channel for redemption, forgiveness and eternal salvation. A woman was used to bring joy, peace, love, comfort and fulfillment to the human race.

And don't forget these other biblical facts related to women:

- Women were active in the ministry of Jesus (Luke 8:1-3).
- The last person at the cross was a woman (Mark 15:47).
- The first person at the tomb was a woman (John 20:1).
- The first person to proclaim the message of the resurrection was a woman (Matt. 28:8).
- The first preacher to the Jews was a woman (Luke 2:37).
- Women were at the historic prayer meeting following Christ's ascension (Acts 1:14).
- Women were in the upper room on the day of Pentecost and were given power to be witnesses of Christ, the same as the men (Acts 2:4; 1:8).
- The first people to greet the Christian missionaries Paul and Silas in Europe were women (Acts 16:13).
- The first European convert was a woman (Acts 16:14).

Are these facts important? Do they have a message for us? Do they relate to women today? I believe they do.

There is no better example for us than Mary of Magdala, a demon-possessed businesswoman who came to Jesus, was delivered by Him, became His follower and supporter, assisted in the business arrangements, was at the cross, helped prepare His body for burial, was there when Jesus arose and was visited by Him, received His message, delivered it to the apostles, was filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and was an anointed messenger and witness of Jesus Christ in the early church.

Mary had seven demons. But Jesus cast those demons from her so that she could have life—real life, eternal and abundant life.

She was completely delivered.

Jesus took the good in Mary—her God-given ability—and made her a useful, successful person. She became a minister to human needs.

According to respected Bible commentaries, Mary was on Jesus' team as He went from village to village (Luke 8:1-3). Her experience proves that Jesus came to redeem women and to use them as His co-workers, disciples, messengers and representatives, just as He came to redeem and use men.

Since Jewish religion traditionally suppressed women, writers of the Scriptures dared not make much mention of their acts of faith. But a close study of women in New Testament history clearly shows them in places of great influence and action, carrying out the new role of the redeemed woman in the church of Jesus Christ. When Jesus becomes Master of your life, you as a woman can do anything God puts in your heart to do.

Delivered From Tradition

I have a friend in Africa who is the wife of a prominent evangelical leader. Until she attended one of our women's conferences, she was timid and nonexpressive and did little more than warm a church pew.

Her husband was revolutionized by our conference. He saw that his own male superiority complex had made no allowance for his wife's ministry to develop. Her potential was totally uncultivated.

As a successful leader, my friend's husband was inundated with calls to preach and minister. He drove himself day and night, almost to the breaking point, while his allegiance to archaic religious tradition kept his wife's powerful personality and energy shackled and restrained.

They both got their eyes opened at the conference. He saw the

terrible waste of human energy and influence that church tradition had imposed by keeping the women of his congregation in silence. And she realized how ridiculous it was for her to allow herself to be subdued by chauvinistic prejudice.

That African woman, with the encouragement of her revolutionized, soul-winning husband, began to realize she was filled with the Holy Spirit just as her husband was and that she had the same anointing, the same faculties and the same responsibility to share Jesus with the world that he had. She not only became a powerful voice and influence in their rapidly growing church but also began to organize the women of the area.

Since attending the conference, they have given birth to an African women's organization of preachers, evangelists, church builders, convention speakers, community promoters, home builders and school and clinic organizers. They have built a Pan-African women's headquarters building and teaching center. They have done their work so well that even the government is recognizing their influence and their contribution to their nation.

Mary Magdalene was completely delivered by Jesus Christ—not only from demons but also from religious male domination. I pray that every woman who reads this will have a miracle deliverance—not only from sin, disease and negativism, but also from the tradition of churchmen that locks God's army of women in a pious world of silence.

This world is lost. The gospel must be proclaimed by every voice and instrument possible. Christ's commission is to all believers, regardless of gender (Gal. 3:28). The church can no longer afford the silence of two-thirds of its constituency.

Mary Magdalene is a symbol of what Jesus came to do. He defeated death, hell and the grave. He broke down the walls of division. He annulled the laws of segregation. He abolished

the curse of racial or sexual prejudice.

By His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus defeated Satan once and for all. The new, liberated church was born. The Jesus-woman for the Jesus-church emerged as a redeemed, Spirit-filled, powerful woman to fill the role for which God created and destined her.

Now you have a choice. You can choose to love, obey, follow and serve your Lord. You can determine to accept your true identity as God's child—a co-heir with Christ—and fulfill His dream for your life.

Your future, your new status, your new life of love and happiness and success and achievement all depend on your willingness to make a decision right now, to say to yourself and to God, "From this moment on, I will recognize—and walk in—my understanding of my worth as a woman in the kingdom of God."

I made this choice long ago when it became apparent God was calling my husband into worldwide ministry. I didn't want to stay home and hear about his exploits secondhand; I wanted to be a part of them!

How about you? Are you ready to get off the pew and step into the exciting future God has for you?

Daisy Wasburn Osborn (1924-1995) firmly believed that in Christ we are all equal, regardless of sex, race or color, and she devoted much of her energy to encouraging women to become all God intended for them to be, in spite of opposition from their churches, families or inner selves. The author of several books and a sought-after speaker in her day, she was responsible for countless conversions and transformed lives.

Read a companion devotional.