

Jesus: Author of the Women's Liberation Movement

I have to admit that before I wrote my book *Fashioned to Reign*, I never understood the radical message of gender equality that the Gospel writers were trying to convey through the life of Jesus.

Yes, I knew that Jesus hated religion. I was very aware that He was a counterculture radical who overturned the deceptive tables of hypocrisy and drove the moneychangers out of the holy place. I have read the Bible every day for 30-plus years, so I understood that quite a few women hung around Jesus. Yet because I didn't have a real grasp on the first-century oppressive culture of Judaism and the massive mistreatment of women during the days of Christ, I totally missed one of the most profound messages of the Gospels: Jesus championed the equality of women.

It's all through the four Gospels—it's almost impossible to miss the message. Like wanted posters in a train station or warning signs at a nuclear site, the Gospel writers etched their surprising decrees with alarming frequency throughout their manuscripts. But somehow I managed to stumble blindly through the hallways of freedom and step over the feminine treasures of womanhood. In my search for the wellsprings of revival, I somehow missed the fountain of beauty, flowing ever so gracefully from the Book of Life.

The Samaritan Woman

In the book of John, we see Jesus again, tired and thirsty from a long day's journey sitting at the edge of the well in the hot noon sun with no way to draw water from the deep spring. His disciples went to town to get some lunch, so He's alone but not for long. By a divine coincidence, a Samaritan

woman emerges on the scene with a water pot in her hand ... just in time to quench His thirst.

Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." (I love the way Jesus gets right to the point and doesn't waste words).

The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans). I'm sure she's being a little sarcastic here because Jews look down their noses at the Samaritans and women ... she is obviously both. There's a deeply rooted prejudice on the part of the Jewish people against her race and her gender. James and John, for example, want to call fire down on the Samaritans. Yet Jesus is asking the Samaritan woman for some help.

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." OK ... stop and think about what's really happening here. Step back in time with me once again. Let's go all the way back to the first century. Jesus is offering a woman—a Samaritan woman—living water! Remember, men don't talk to women; women are possessions. They are not taught, they are not valued, they are not celebrated, their heads are covered, and they definitely are not spiritual.

Turning the Tables

She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" This girl is smart and intuitive. When she met Jesus a few minutes earlier, she emphasized to Him that He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. But suddenly the tables have turned. The thirsty Man is honoring her; He is treating her like she is a person, so she rushes to find common ground. Even though she

is a half-breed, she claims "Jacob as her father." She knows how to make a connection with a Jewish man; she reminds Him of their common roots.

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." OK, we can see that the woman is hungry and that Jesus is eager to give her a river of life. But now the story gets a little sticky. Jesus is about to uncover a painful cycle of dysfunction in her life. Will she lie to cover up the fact that she's a fornicator or will she trust Him enough with her heart to let Him unearth decades of abandonment, divorce and betrayal?

He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."

The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." Jesus shows her respect in the midst of her sin and compliments her for being honest.

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

This woman may have a messed up personal life, but she has a deep hunger for the things of God. In a culture that refused to educate women, this Samaritan girl is well-read and obviously has been exposed to the Scriptures. Her story reminds me of so many people I've met throughout life. When

you view their story from a distance (five husbands and now she is living with her boyfriend), they seem to have no interest in God whatsoever.

The religious world often writes these people off, speaks piously about them from the podium and uses their stories to illustrate wickedness. But underneath years of dysfunction and a mountain of pain (much like the story of Rahab of old), there lies a hungry heart—a passion to know God.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Wow! The most profound teaching ever revealed on worship was taught to a Samaritan woman who’s living with her boyfriend!

The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Five husbands and one boyfriend later, the woman is still looking for the Messiah, the Anointed One, who will release the oppressed and set the captives free!

Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.” Did you get that? Jesus just revealed Himself personally as the Messiah for the first time in recorded history, and it was to a Samaritan who was a woman.

At this point, His disciples came, and were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, “What do You seek?” or “Why do You speak with her?” Are you getting this? The disciples are shocked that Jesus is talking to a Samaritan who is a woman, but they aren’t about to confront Him about His inappropriate behavior. They have seen this movie too many

times before.

So the woman left her water pot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, " He told me all the things that I have done."

So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (Read John 4:7-41.)

The First Evangelist

Look at what's happening here—a Samaritan, a woman, who's been married five times and is now living with her boyfriend, who the religious world would not even allow to step foot in the synagogue, just became the first evangelist in history. This woman, who would never qualify to be an elder in anyone's church, has just turned a Samaritan city upside down with one encounter with her Messiah.

I'm telling you that disqualifying women from leadership is costing us our cities. You say, "She wasn't a leader." You're right, she didn't have a title. But she led people and they followed her to Christ. Leadership is more than a title, a plaque on a desk or name on some flowchart. Leadership means people follow you, they listen when you speak, they value your words, and they emulate your experience.

There are a lot of people running around with a plaque on their desk, their name on some flowchart, or they have some lofty title; but nobody's following them. John Maxwell puts it like this, "He who says he's leading and has no followers is

just taking a walk.”

Not only were those Samaritan people following her, they learned about Jesus from her! She taught men and women that Jesus was the Messiah. We’ll talk more about this later, but if Paul’s words to Timothy were universally applied, “I don’t allow a woman to teach,” many Samaritans would not have found Christ.

Some may argue whether or not a woman should carry the title of leader, elder, apostle or prophet. But true leaders are acknowledged by titles, not created by them. Calling somebody an elder doesn’t make them an elder anymore than calling somebody an engineer makes them an engineer. A builder is somebody who builds. A skydiver is a person who jumps out of a plane with a parachute. A dancer is someone who dances. A leader is someone people follow, and a teacher is a person people learn from. You get the picture.

You can choose to redefine these roles to protect your understanding of the Scripture but you’re just refusing to acknowledge that when a man is learning from a woman, she is teaching him, and when people follow a woman, she’s leading them ... PERIOD!

For more on this subject, check out my book Fashioned to Reign.

How is God changing your view of women in leadership? Let me know in the comments below. {eoa}

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