

PART THREE
LIFE AND CHARACTER OF NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN

Section I -- Women mentioned during the life of Christ.

There is no doubt that Christ's attitude toward women was revolutionary to any other leader of his day. He appreciated women as distinct personalities with intellectual capabilities and spiritual worth.

WOMEN IN CHRIST'S EARLY LIFE

ELIZABETH

Luke 1:5-7 She was a descendant of Aaron, a righteous woman, blameless before God; but she was childless.

24-25 Gives God the glory for her coming child.

39-45 She recognizes Mary as the mother of the Lord and is humble before her.

57-63 She is obedient to God in naming her child.

When we consider how great Elizabeth's son was (Matt. 11:11) we cannot help wondering how great an influence on his life was this mother who was righteous blameless, thankful, humble, and obedient to God.

ANNA

Luke 2:36-39 A prophetess, servant of God, fasted, prayed.

MARY, CHRIST'S MOTHER

Because the account of Mary is so excellent in C. C. Ryrie's book, I quote again from it beginning on page 20 going to page 24:

It is necessary to note one thing in the annunciation -- the angel's proclamation that Mary was "highly favored." Although great grace was bestowed upon Mary, it was no greater than that which is bestowed upon every believer today whether male or female.

When Mary returned to Nazareth after visiting Elizabeth, Joseph, finding her with child, was minded to put her away privily. Although Joseph was only espoused to Mary, this was entirely in order, for "from the moment of her betrothal a woman was treated as if she were actually married. The union could not be dissolved, except by regular divorce; breach of faithfulness was regarded as adultery." Making a public example of her "alludes to the law of the woman suspected of adultery set forth in the Book of Numbers 5:11-31." But, of course, the appearance of the angel to Joseph solved his dilemma.

All of these instances demonstrate two things: in many respects Mary is not an exceptional case, living as she did under Jewish customs regarding women in her day; and yet she is exceptional by virtue of her relationship to the Lord Jesus, and in this she is the turning point in the history of women by being the first fruits of that which the teachings of Jesus did for women. One further observation must be made: not only is her blessedness related to her Son, it is also related to motherhood. It is the obvious truth of saying that no man could have

been the mother of Jesus, and yet it is so obvious that it is often overlooked. She is not only the mother of our **Lord**; she is the **Mother** of our Lord. The Mother could only be a woman; yet the Incarnation was in a man.

MARY'S PUBLIC ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

Four times the general silence which surrounds Jesus' relationships with His mother is broken. The first is the time when He went to Jerusalem for the Passover at the age of twelve. When Joseph and Mary missed the boy on the homeward journey and returned to find Him in the temple, He plainly told them that He must be about His Father's business. This strange and unexpected reply made it clear that in connection with the work which His Father had given Him to do there must be no interference from His mother. And yet the gospel writer adds that Jesus was subject to His parents. Here is an illustration of the later Pauline principle that obedience "in the Lord" is expected of children toward their parents. As mothers, women are expected to fill a place of authority and leadership in relation to their children but never to the compromising of the spiritual responsibilities of those children.

The second incident, the scene at the wedding in Cana, illustrated the same principle. Here Mary appears without Joseph; indeed, this and "all the later notices of the Lord's Mother confirm the supposition that he died before the Ministry began." When the wine was used up, Mary appealed to Jesus for help, and He replied, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." There is no doubt that "Woman" is an address of respect, but "what have I to do with thee" wherever used "marks some divergence between the thoughts and ways of the persons so brought together." In this passage it "serves to show that the actions of the Son of God, now that He has entered on His divine work, are no longer dependent in any way on the suggestion of a woman, even though that woman be His Mother . . . The time of silent discipline and obedience . . . was over."

Anxiety must have prompted the third incident when Mary sought Jesus amid a crowd of people to whom He was ministering. When told that His mother and brothers were asking for Him, Jesus replied; "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." Swete summarized well the significance of this remark:

This relative renunciation of kinship appears at the outset of the Ministry (John 2:4) and continues to the end (John 19:26), and a similar attitude is urged upon the disciples (Mark 10:29). But it is a relative attitude only (Matthew 10:37), and is perfectly consistent with tender care for kinsmen, as the saying on the Cross shows. . . . The bond which united the family of God is obedience to the Divine Will.

Again the incident illustrated the principle that supernatural relations transcend natural ones. Nevertheless, natural relationships and responsibilities are not obliterated, and the fourth encounter illustrates that.

It is the incident at the cross where Mary is committed into John's keeping. "The Oriental, even the Jewish, mother would have been prostrate, with disheveled hair and garments; Mary is found 'standing' (John 19:25). There is no mention of words, not even of tears. Silently and quietly at the direction of her Son she leaves the cross, though we know that a sword was at the time piercing her through and through."

As far as the gospel records are concerned, there are no other recorded encounters of Mary with her Son. There is not even any record of a post-resurrection appearance to Mary, and however significant or embarrassing this may be in other respects, it is not important to this subject because our Lord did appear to other women after His resurrection. The importance of this will be discussed below.

MARY'S POSITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

A summary of what has been said concerning Mary is in order, partly to justify why so much space has been devoted to her. The incidents which involve her introduce and illustrate a number of themes which are further developed throughout the New Testament. (1) The inclusion of women in the genealogy of Christ as a sign of God's favor; the emphasis on the blessing of Motherhood; (2) the responsibility of a mother in the training of her child; (3) the further, and often more difficult, responsibility of not standing in the way of that child's spiritual obligations and calling; (4) the duties of children to their parents. These themes which are developed elsewhere in the New Testament are all illustrated by Mary's position in the gospels. That most of these are related to the home leads one to the conclusion that Mary is significant as a model of ideal Christian womanhood. There is certainly a dearth of material concerning Mary in the inspired text, and although this has been taken by some to be "a deliberate act on the part of the evangelists to reduce the mother to relative insignificance in the presence of her Divine Son," one feels that the truer explanation is that "this slightness of texture is itself a note of genuine portraiture; for the reason that Mary was of a retiring nature, unobtrusive, reticent, perhaps even shrinking from observations, so that the impress of her personality was confined to the sweet sanctities of the home circle." Or, as Walpole puts it, "...we see in the little that is told of her what a true woman ought to be."

Finally, what were Mary's position and significance in the early church? The only other reference to her in the New Testament occurs in mentioning her among those gathered in the upper room before Pentecost. After this her name disappears from the record and even in the one instance she is not mentioned as any sort of fount of information concerning the Savior nor does she take any place of leadership with or among the disciples.

REFERENCES TO WOMEN

- Matthew 12:50 "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."
- Luke 12:53 "... the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."
- Matthew 14:21 "And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children."

PARABLES INCLUDED WOMEN

- Luke 13:18-21 Man and the mustard seed, Women used leaven in meal.
 Luke 15:3-7 Man found lost sheep. Women found lost coins. (This indicates women can be soul winners).
 Luke 18:1-5 Woman before a judge - illustrating faithfulness in prayer.
 Matthew 6:28 Men toil, Women spin.
 Matthew 24:40-41 Men in field. Women grinding.

THE LORD TAUGHT WOMEN

The Lord taught women, even though Jewish Rabbis said that a man should salute no woman, not even his own wife, in a public place. John 4:6-30, 39-42 is the account of the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. In this we find Jesus doing contrary to the custom of the day in the following: (1) He taught a woman in public; (2) He, a Jew, was speaking to a Samaritan; (3) He was dealing with a harlot; (4) He did not reject her testifying of Him to others.

THE LORD REBUKES A WOMAN

This woman was the wife of Zebedee, the mother of James and John.
 Matthew 20:20-22. She was ambitiously indiscreet, asking favors for her sons.
 27:55-56 Yet she ministered to Jesus to the end.

THE LORD AIDS CERTAIN WOMEN

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| Healed: | Matthew 9:20-22 | Woman with issue of blood. |
| | Luke's 13:10-16 | Bent woman - Angers Jews on the Sabbath. |
| | Matthew 15:21-28 | Syrophoenician Woman - healed daughter. |
| Forgave sins: | John 8:4-11 | Adulterous woman - opposes the Jews |
| | Luke 7:37-50 | Sinful woman - respects her humility and condemns the Pharisees' pride and lack of hospitality. |
| Blessed children: | Mark 10:13-16 | |
| Raised Dead: | Luke 7:12-15 | The widow's son at Nain. |
| | John 11 | Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus. |
| Equal share in salvation: | | Galatians 3:28; Mark 16:15 |

No other religion in the world considered women's souls equal to men's souls. Many other religions denied that women had soul's.

THE LORD ACCEPTS SERVICE FROM WOMEN

- Mark 12:41-44 Christ praised the small gift of a widow.
- Mark 14:3-9 Woman anoints Jesus' head in Simon's house. Christ rebukes those who criticized her and honors her with the telling of the act till the end of time.
- Luke 8:2-3 Women gave of their substance: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary the Mother of James, Salome.
- Luke 23:49,55 Women followed Christ from Galilee to Jerusalem to the cross.
- Luke 24:1,9-10 Women came to embalm the body of Christ. Their faithfulness rewarded them with the first news of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene - John 20:11-18.
- Mark 16:1
- Luke 10:38-42. He accepted the hospitality offered by Mary and Martha.
- Martha: Vs. 38 - Hospitable, and energetic.
Vs. 40 - Overly anxious, burdened with care.
John 12:2 - Serves the Lord a second time.
Jn. 11 vs. 21, 22, and 27 - Great faith.
Vs. 24 - Knowledge of the scripture.
Vs. 28 - Has concern for her sister.
- Mary: Luke 10:39 - Receptive to Christ's teaching.
42 - Spiritual insight.
John 11:20 - Quiet resignation.

THREE TIMES AT JESUS' FEET

- Luke 10:39 - For instruction
John 11:32 - For Comfort
John 12:3 - For service - to honor Him - in great humility.
Mark 14:8-9 - Jesus proclaims an endless memorial for her.

The following quotation from *Woman's Place in the Early Church* by C. C. Ryrie, pages 31-32 is excellent concerning Jesus' attitude toward women:

(1) Jesus Christ opened the privileges of religious faith equally to men and to women. (2) He gave His message publicly and privately to women as well as to men. (3) The frequent and prominent mention of woman in the gospels is in itself noteworthy by contrast with their status in Judaism. (4) Christ gladly received certain kinds of service from women, including their public testimony. (5) There can be no doubt that as regards spiritual privilege Jesus considered the two sexes equal.