

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
February 9, 2020

Culture Shift:
When Women Became Precious

Luke 8:1-3

Service Introduction:

We continue a "Historical Apologetics" message series. "Apologetics" refers to a defense of the faith. The goal of apologetics isn't to reason someone into faith in Jesus, but rather to deal with some of the issues that might keep a person from even listening to the Christian message.

Today the Christian faith is often viewed negatively. But a study of history reveals that when Christianity becomes the dominate faith in a culture, you see positive cultural shifts.

We are studying the following cultural shifts:

- When Children Became People (Feb 2)
- When Women Became Precious (Feb 9)
- When Men Became Sacrificial (Feb 16)
- When Work Became Worship (Feb 23)

Gospel Lesson:

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, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 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 (Luke 8:1-3).

Message:

Women have a right to be angry!

In countless conversations, I have heard women share their frustrations about gender inequality. I heard on National Public Radio that when an occupation that had previously been dominated by males begins to be filled by females, the wage scale for that entire occupation, women and men, goes down. It is just not fair! Where is the whole concept of equal pay for equal work?

Women have a right to be angry!

1. Women Have a Right to be Angry!

But recently I had a conversation with a Christian woman who was angry, not about the way women are treated today, but the way they are treated in the Bible. She pointed to the book of Judges, and especially the horrible appendix in Judges 19-21. This story is so horrible and graphic, that I cannot even summarize it here in public. It is part of your homework. In fact, you should know that the message

outline (printed after this sermon) is really homework for you to study this week. We can't look at every passage here.

I had always read Judges 19-21 as a tragic appendix to a tragic period in Israel. Spiritually the nation was at a low point. They had drifted from a close and personal relationship with their Creator and Redeemer. But what I hadn't fully grasped is that when the Israelite society turned away from God, it was the women who suffered.

I started to review some of the events of the Old Testament and saw that again and again. Great King Solomon, the wealthy and wise ruler who built the temple, began to lose connection with his Creator and Redeemer. What happened? Women suffered. 1 Kings 11 records that he had 700 royal brides and 300 concubines. King Solomon was not a "Women are precious" advocate. He bent to the culture of the day and made women a useful tool in demonstrating his power and in forming alliances with neighboring tribes and kingdoms.

Judges ends with the phrase, "Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). In the days of King Solomon, things didn't get much better.

I have a new appreciation that when women read the Old Testament, you have a right to be angry!

2. God's Worldview was Still Present.

Did the God of the Old Testament devalue women? Is that God's worldview?

I found it amazing that right next to these horrible stories of the abuse of women, we have accounts that reveal God's worldview of woman was still present.

Judges 19-21 is a horrible appendix to the book of Judges revealing the unbelief and the callousness of the people of Israel toward women. But the book of Ruth is also an appendix to the book of Judges, set in the same time period. Ruth is held up as a role model of godliness in contrast to an ungodly nation. When Ruth's husband dies, she chooses to accept the likelihood of lifelong singleness and all the deprivations that would bring in that culture, rather than forsake the worship of the true God. Next week when we focus on the man's role, we will also see that Boaz, the man who would become Ruth's husband, who also held on to God's worldview in the midst of an ungodly culture.

In spite of the power of sin to destroy the relationships between men and women, God's worldview was still present.

Another example is our Old Testament lesson for today, Proverbs 31:10-31. Proverbs 31 has this heading: "The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him." Who is king Lemuel? We really don't know. It could be Solomon or another king. But what is significant is that Proverbs is primarily the sayings of King Solomon. And yet at the end of this book, written primarily by a man who had not treasured women in his lifetime, is this beautiful psalm of praise for a godly woman.

By the way, as you read this ABC of Godly Womanhood (it is an acrostic psalm, each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet), many women hear this and make comparisons. They don't compare well to this godly woman and so feel defeated and ashamed. "Maybe I'm not good enough." But later today, please read this psalm again. Does it ever tell a woman to do anything? No, the command is to those who see her faith in action. "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise

at the city gate” (Proverbs 31:31). The author is simply saying that these are the qualities that godly women reveal over and over again, and they are worthy of praise!

So even though Solomon devalued women, God’s worldview was still present in God’s Old Testament church.

But what is God’s worldview about women? Let’s take a look at few verses in the New Testament to make that clear.

3. God’s Worldview Revealed

Let’s start with Galatians 3:26-29:

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

There is so much that we can learn simply by going back to our baptisms. No matter what our gender, when we go back to our baptism, we are told God the Father sees the exact same thing. He sees us clothed in Christ Jesus. We all look the “same” to him – absolutely perfect and infinitely precious as his own dear Son Jesus! Women and men equally inherit all that our heavenly Father can give us.

Peter says the same thing as he wrote to wives and husbands.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers (1 Peter 3:7).

What does “weaker partner” mean? While there is disagreement, the context implies that her willing submission to her husband puts her in a position of weakness. (I would encourage you to check out the *People’s Bible* from our library and pray that through.) But what I want to consider here is that women are called “heirs with you of the gracious gift of life.”

That, to me, is the short, simple summary of God’s worldview of women. “Heirs with you of the gracious gift of life.”

I am not discounting the different roles that God has given to men and women, especially as it is revealed in the family. At the creation, the LORD God said he would make a “helper suitable” for Adam. He would create someone equally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), in a perfectly complimentary role.

We see that role most clearly in the Christian family. But even there, it is far from perfect. In Colossians 3, Paul wrote: “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Colossians 3:18-19). The sinful nature that was present in the Old Testament that caused women to be devalued is present in Christian homes to this day.

Our message series at the end of August will focus much more on these roles that we have as Christian men and women. Right now, let’s see God’s worldview was lived out in Jesus’ ministry and in the ministry of the apostles.

4. God's Worldview Lived

I encourage you to read the gospels with Jesus' treatment of women in mind. In John 4, the apostles are amazed that Jesus broke cultural taboos. When a Samaritan woman came out to draw water, Jesus spoke with her. Jesus blesses this woman with one of the few times that he plainly says that he is the Christ. And then God uses this woman to bring an entire Samaritan village to Jesus. Don't you think that Jesus viewed this woman as "an heir with him of God's gracious gift of life"?

Our gospel lesson, Luke 8:1-3 shows Jesus welcoming the care and support of believing women. In fact, it was women who especially stepped up to support him in his ministry. Who was there at Jesus' crucifixion? We know the Apostle John was there. Were there any other apostles? We don't know. But the women were there in Jesus' darkest hour and then early Easter morning went out to the tomb. "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them" (Luke 24:10).

That view of women as fellow heirs of God's gracious gift of life continued in the ministry of the apostles. On the outline are listed just a few of the places where women played important roles. Lydia who took the lead in the mission in Philippi (Acts 16:16-18), Priscilla and her husband Aquilla who helped Paul and taught Apollos (Acts 18:18-26); Philip's daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:8-9); and the many women mentioned by Paul in Romans 16 who "work very hard in the Lord."

Church historians suggest that the early Christian church had a larger proportion of women than men because women were valued more highly than in the existing culture. Tim Keller in his book *The Reason for God* wrote:

In the broader [Greco-Roman] society, women had a very low status, being subjected to high levels of female infanticide, forced marriages, and lack of economic equality. Christianity afforded women much greater security and equality than had previously existed in the ancient classical world (page 20).

I would encourage you to read the longer quote in GroupWork (found at the end of this message).

5. God's Worldview Changed Culture

"Heirs together of God's gracious gift of life." A woman was equally precious as a man, equally an heir, and worthy of respect and praise. This is God's worldview.

Where Christianity spread, the worldview spread with it. For example, on the back of the worship folder is this quote:

"In India, widows were voluntarily or involuntarily burned on their husbands' funeral pyres. Christian missionaries were a major influence in stopping these century-old practices and ideas." <http://www.faithfacts.org/christ-and-the-culture/the-impact-of-christianity>

And as Christianity began to dominate in the Mediterranean world, women's status in culture began to change. It is interesting that a recent study entitled "Religion and Gender Inequality: The status of Women in the Societies of World Religions" shows that in non-religious states or countries, women are treated more equally than in predominately Christian countries. However, as you look over the list, you notice that nearly all those "non-religious" states were, a hundred years ago, predominately Christian countries. The Biblical worldview that women are "fellow heirs of God's gracious gift of life" influenced

the culture that continues to be evident to this day.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279526649_Religion_and_gender_inequality_The_status_of_women_in_the_societies_of_world_religions)

6. We Have a Long Way to Go!

But I do not in anyway want to say that “We’ve made it.” In fact, when I asked a few female members of our staff whether our church elevated women as equally precious to men or if we held them back, the overwhelming message is that there is much that we could do differently. At the WELS Leadership Conference a couple of weeks ago, in a discussion on this very topic, the female presenter told a story that made me wonder, “How often does this happen at St. Paul’s?”

Her congregation has mailboxes for their members in the church lobby. A project that she was working on would have been easier if the wives’ names were on the boxes, but only the husband’s name was on the box for a married couple. She said, “I think I’ll ask the pastor if we could add the women’s names.” Her female co-workers on the project discouraged her from doing that. “What’s the use? They won’t change.” Or “It must have to do with the roles of men and women.” The group self-censored themselves on something as simple as names on mailboxes.

How many times does something like this happen at St. Paul’s? Where we as a congregation have given the impression that a woman’s comments or views are not welcome, please forgive us. Text me. Email me. Let’s open up a dialogue.

In that connection, in the “My Next Steps” section on the bottom of the outline, I encourage you to ask some critical questions.

- What in our congregation’s culture illustrates that we do not value women?
- What cannot change because those practices are a result of God’s roles for us as men and women?
- What can change because they are simply customs?
- What must change because the practices perpetuate inequality between men and women as co-heirs of God’s gracious gift of life?

We have a long way to go in our own congregation to live out God’s world view that women are precious co-heirs of God’s gracious gift of life.

We have a long way to go in our culture as well. Last week’s Super Bowl half-time routine was an example of our culture valuing women not simply because they are tremendous singers and entertainers, but because of sex appeal and revealing clothing. And perhaps you have heard about the efforts to curb the sex trade that goes along with the Super Bowl and other major events.

I’m not saying this to cast judgment on the entertainers. I’m saying this as a call to us as individual Christians and as a Christian Church. How many women are turned off to Christ because they see the church as patriarchal and anti-women? There are some of God’s commands, like those regarding the sanctity of life, that will be interpreted that way. We want to continue to respect God’s Word about the different roles God has given us as men and women in our families and in our congregation. But at the same time, let’s humbly ask, “Where have I been part of the problem? Where have I failed to treasure women? Where have women taken on an adversarial role toward male Christians because they see prejudice in our words or actions? Where have we failed to work together as co-heirs of God’s gracious gift of life?”

The world is watching us. Will they see us humbly acknowledging our sins when we become aware of them? Will they see us constantly seeking to apply God's will faithfully even as the culture changes around us? Will they see us as part of the solution for our culture? Will they see us live out this truth: That we all, women and men, are equally precious in God's sight, equally clothed in the perfection of Christ at our baptisms, equally co-heirs of God's gracious gift of life?

Holy Spirit, work in us that it may be so. Amen.

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Culture Shift: When Women Became Precious

1. Women have a right to be angry!
 - a. Judges 19-21 – A tragic appendix to a tragic period in Israel
 - b. 1 Kings 11:1-3 – The king as a role model?
2. God's Worldview was still present!
 - a. Ruth 1 – Godliness in the midst of worldliness
 - b. Proverbs 31:10-31 – "Honor her... and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."
3. God's Worldview revealed.
 - a. Fellow heirs of the promise and God's gift of life: Galatians 3:26-29, 1 Peter 3:7
 - b. Different roles to complement each other: Genesis 2:18; Colossians 3:18-19
4. God's Worldview lived.
 - a. In Jesus' ministry: Luke 8:1-3; John 4:1-24; Luke 23:55-24:10
 - b. In the Apostles' ministry: Acts 16:16-18; 18:18-26; 21:8-9; Romans 16:1-16
5. God's Worldview changed culture (see quote in question 4 of GroupWork).

"In India, widows were voluntarily or involuntarily burned on their husbands' funeral pyres. Christian missionaries were a major influence in stopping these century-old practices and ideas."

<http://www.faithfacts.org/christ-and-the-culture/the-impact-of-christianity>
6. We have a long way to go!
 - a. In the church
 - b. In culture

My Next Steps to Be a Culture Shifter

- **Dig Deeper:** Work through GroupWork. Read one or more of the books referenced in GroupWork.
- **Celebration:** What in our society illustrates Scripture's high view of women that is likely caused by Christianity's positive influence on our culture? What in our congregation's practices illustrates that we value women and their ministry?
- **Introspection:** What in our congregation's culture illustrates that we do not value women? What cannot change because they are a result of God's roles for us as men and women? What can change because they are simply customs? What must change because the practices perpetuate inequality between men and women as co-heirs of God's gracious gift of life?

GroupWork

1. Who is/was the most influential woman in your spiritual development?
2. Read the horror story of Judges 19-21 before you arrive for small group.
 - a. Summarize what happened to the unnamed concubine (19:22-28).
 - b. After the slaughter of the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20), how did the tribes find wives for the surviving men of Benjamin? (21:15-25).
 - c. This sad story of the mistreatment of women illustrates the spiritual depravity of the Israelites at this time. What examples of mistreatment of women in our culture illustrate spiritual depravity today and the desperate need for the Gospel?
3. Read Genesis 1:26-27 and Galatians 3:26-29. How do each of these passages teach that women are equally precious to men? (Hint: Think “creation” and “redemption.”)
4. Christianity caused a culture shift. Read and comment on this quote from Timothy Keller’s *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. What in this statement surprises you? Encourages you?

In the broader [Greco-Roman] society, women had a very low status, being subjected to high levels of female infanticide, forced marriages, and lack of economic equality. Christianity afforded women much great security and equality than had previously existed in the ancient classical world (page 20).

Keller explains this statement in an endnote on page 249:

This statement may surprise many readers who have heard that older religions and paganism were more positive toward women than Christianity was. It was extremely common in the Greco-Roman world to throw out new female infants to die from exposure, because of the low status of women. Greco-Roman society saw no value in an unmarried woman, and therefore it was illegal for a widow to go more than two years without remarrying. But Christianity was the first religion to not force widows to marry. They were supported financially and honored within the community so that they were not under great pressure to remarry if they did not want to. Pagan widows lost all control of their husband’s estate. Finally, Christians did not believe in cohabitation. If a Christian man wanted to live with a woman, he had to marry her, and this gave women far greater security. Also, the pagan double standard of allowing married men to have extramarital sex and mistresses was forbidden. In all these ways, Christian women enjoyed far greater security and equality than did women in the surrounding culture. See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper, 1996), chapter 5: “The Role of Women in Christian Growth.”

5. Conclude by working through “Celebration” and “Introspection” on the bottom of the message outline. Email your group’s conclusions or your individual conclusions to Pastor Panitzke at ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org.