

What Did Jesus Do for Women?

Luke 8:1-25

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And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. - Luke 8:1-3, ESV

Contemporary feminists often blame Christianity for being anti-women. Some neo-pagan-minded feminists put "goddess" bumper stickers on their cars, imagining that a return to the days of goddess-worship would liberate them from the male-dominated oppression of the church. A close reading of the New Testament against the cultural background of the first-century Roman Empire tells a different story: Jesus elevated the status of women from property to persons, from objects to possess to vital members of His church and partners in His ministry.

From the opening lines of Matthew's Gospel, which record four women in Jesus' genealogy to the naming of women as His prominent supporters here in Luke 8 to the repeated mention of key women in the early church in Paul's letters, the New Testament shows us repeatedly how Jesus respected women, elevating them and granting them the dignity of intelligent, spiritual persons. Consider . . .

1. Women were the first eye-witnesses of the resurrection, even though their testimony would be ridiculed and dismissed in court in the Roman Empire.
2. Jesus commended Mary for sitting at His feet and learning, something women were forbidden from doing in Jewish synagogues and in almost all religious groups. Any other rabbi would have sent her to the kitchen to help Martha, which is exactly what Martha expected Jesus to do.
3. The Gospels make it clear that the women were the ones who stuck close to Jesus during His crucifixion and afterward. John was the only male disciple at the cross, but the women stayed close to their Lord through His suffering, death and burial.
4. The Gospels highlight the remarkable faith of several women, including the Syro-Phoenician woman and the woman who suffered from the issue of blood. Their faith has inspired millions of people for thousands of years.
5. Several early churches met in the homes of wealthy or prominent women (Nympha in Col. 4:15 and Apphia in Philemon 2). Several of the key converts in strategic cities in the Book of Acts were women, including Lydia in Philippi.
6. Paul saw women and their relationships as key to the peace and harmony of the church, which is why he pleaded with Euodia and Sythyche to agree in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2)
7. Men in the church are commanded to love their wives sacrificially and to live with their wives in an understanding manner. They are told that their love is to reflect Jesus' love and that a lack of love for their wives would hinder their prayer life. (Ephesians 5:26-30; 1 Peter 3:7)

In a world where women had little or no legal rights and got little or no respect as intellectuals or spiritual people, Jesus came along and turned the world's view of women upside-down.

I chuckle when I see women who think we'd be better off with goddesses and priestesses. I want to go up to

them and ask them if they realize what they're desiring: Temples to goddesses in the ancient world were just houses of prostitution and the priestesses were just the prostitutes. They were used by men to serve their pleasure and left to deal with the consequences, which were often ugly when they got pregnant.

It is not an overstatement to say that Christianity is the best thing that has ever happened for women in the history of the world. It brought real liberation and true humanization to millions, spreading women's rights as it advanced the Gospel. Two key examples can be seen in India and China, where missionaries led the fight to bring an end to widow-burning and foot-binding.

Have some Christian men abused women and mis-understood concepts like male leadership in the home and church? Absolutely! People have always distorted the truth and manipulated it to serve their sinful self-interests. But that does not negate the incredible good that Jesus did for women during His life or that His church has done for women ever since.