

Opening comments:

- Update on Andy; read 2 Cor 4:16-18
- My own love and thankfulness for this church
- The men's breakfast yesterday; again the 1<sup>st</sup> Sat of every month

This is the final study in our series on gender issues. I want to review our goals to see how we've done and to remind you of our agenda for how to apply this material in the weeks to come:

- To bring healing to people and relationships damaged by unbiblical understandings and practices of manhood and womanhood;
- To help men and women realize and pursue their full ministry potential through an understanding of their God-given roles;
- To enable parents to teach and model biblical manhood and womanhood for the good of their children;
- To enhance our own understanding of and appreciation for the gospel as we explore its deepest metaphor: the relationship of a husband and wife;
- To promote the spread of the gospel by fostering a biblical wholeness in relationships that will attract a fractured world.

NOTE: We aren't going to have opportunity to delve into goal 2, related to gender issues in the church. (I had planned for 8 weeks but only had 7 because of Bret's sermon on eschatology, took 3 weeks on the home.)

Today's sermon centers in on the first and last goals. My purpose this morning is to promote harmony between women and men and to honor singleness. Our focus will be the ministry of Jesus, particularly in the gospel of Luke. Three points:

- 1) Jesus affirmed male headship.
- 2) Jesus elevated and honored women.
- 3) Jesus validated singleness, through both His example and His teaching.

**Read Luke 6:6-16. Pray.**

**Point 1: Jesus affirmed male headship.**

Perhaps the most obvious thing about the list of the 12 apostles—so obvious that we don't even notice it—is that **they were all men**. Jesus had a whole company of followers, well more than just these 12 men (cf. 10:1 where He sends out the 72). That's what verse 13 means when it says, "he called his disciples and chose from them 12." These were His select 12, and He spent all night praying about His choice before He called them the next day (v 12). These 12 He called His "apostles" (v 13).

What are apostles? The apostles were individuals specially authorized by Christ to represent Him, speak for Him, and provide the foundation for His church through true and authoritative teaching (Eph 2:20). They were the first leaders of the church. And they were all men.

Some have suggested that we shouldn't read too much into this; after all, these 12 were also all Jews. If we want to infer from Jesus' selection of men that church leaders must be male, should we also infer from His selection of 12 Jews that church leaders must be Jewish?

Clearly not. Jesus' mission was first to the Jews and second to the other nations (Mt 10:5-6). He came to be the "consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25). And so when the church began, it was a predominantly Jewish movement. Eventually in Acts, we see it expanding to include Gentiles as well, but it's not surprising that in its early, Jewish stages it was led by 12 Jewish leaders. But this argument for why they were all Jews does not explain why they were all men. The church was never a movement of only men that eventually expanded to include women. Jesus always had both men and women among His followers.

Others have suggested that it would have been culturally impossible for Jesus to remain respected if He had appointed some women among His apostolic band. It would have been culturally offensive, too controversial. But Jesus hardly steered away from controversy. In fact, the incident we read just prior to His selection of the 12 (vv 6-11) demonstrates that when He wanted to make a point, He stirred it up!

So we are left with one option: Jesus deliberately chose 12 men to affirm male headship. Once again, let me remind you of the definition of male headship we have used from the very first sermon:

In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction. ~ Ortlund, *Recovering BM&W*, p 95

Men, the fact that Jesus affirmed male headship means Jesus gave men the responsibility to lead the partnership—in the home, in the church—in a God-glorifying direction. Does your exercise of headship do that? Ask yourself: If this whole church were following YOU, where would we be headed?

## Point 2: Jesus elevated and honored women.

For us to appreciate fully how radical Jesus' relationship to women really was, we have to get a sense of the culture at that time. In general, women were second-class citizens. For example, Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, wrote that the reason the Law required women to be submissive was that it considered them inferior in all areas. He gives us an idea of the stereotypes and legal restrictions on women at the time: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted [as legal witnesses], on account of the levity and boldness of their sex." In the apocryphal book of Sirach, written about 180 BC, the author writes: "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; and it is a woman who brings shame and disgrace." (42:14) A common prayer of the period for a Jewish man went like this: "Lord, thank you that I am not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman."

This attitude even emerges in the Scriptures, for example, when the disciples return to Jesus and find Him talking to the Samaritan woman at the well:

*John 4:27* Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

In this cultural climate, Jesus' behavior and attitude toward women was revolutionary to say the least. **[NOTE: In each of the four categories, I will list all the data from Luke's gospel on the PowerPoint display but only emphasize a single incident, the one in bold.]**

1. He used women as illustrations in His teaching (often pairing the illustration with another that was distinctly masculine).
  - 4:26 Elijah's ministry to the widow of Zarephath (paired with Elisha and Naaman, v 27)
  - 13:20-21 The parable of the woman's yeasty loaf (paired with the man who sowed a mustard seed, vv 18-19)
  - 15:8-10 The parable of the woman who lost her coin (paired with the man who lost his sheep and the Prodigal Son). Interestingly, here the woman represents God the Father!**
  - 17:35 At the coming judgment, two women will be grinding: one will be taken, the other left
  - 18:1-8 The parable of the persistent widow
  - 21:1-4 The commendable widow who gave all she had
2. He interacted publicly with women.
  - 7:36-50 The sinful woman who anointed and wept over His feet
  - 10:38-42 Mary and Martha. Martha was doing exactly what women were expected to; Mary was not. Jesus' indicated that for all His followers—men and women, drawing near to Him is the ultimate priority.**
  - 11:27-28 The woman who spoke a blessing upon Jesus' mother
  - 23:27-31 The mournful women following the processional to His crucifixion
3. He spontaneously and graciously healed women.
  - 4:38-39 Heals Simon's mother-in-law
  - 7:11-17 Raises widow of Nain's son (obviously, this was a miracle done FOR a woman, not TO a woman)
  - 8:40-56 Heals hemorrhaging woman; Raises Jairus' daughter
  - 13:10-17 Heals woman crippled for 18 years. He makes the point that she is a "daughter of Abraham," thus of equal spiritual status with the men in the covenant community.**
4. Women were involved in strategic roles in His ministry.
  - 1:39-2:38 Five people speak to others about the special significance of the birth of Jesus; three are women (Elizabeth, Mary, Anna). Obviously, Jesus did not initiate this, but it sets the tone for women's involvement in His ministry.

- 8:2-3 The band of women who travelled with Jesus and the apostles, supporting Him out of their own means
- 23:27-56 Women present at His crucifixion and burial
- 24:1-12 Women given the first announcement of the resurrection.**

What is especially significant about this is that the other three gospels (Mt 28:7, 10; Mk 16:7; Jn 20:17) indicate that Jesus and the angels commissioned them to tell the apostles that He had risen. And it wasn't just because the ladies came to the tomb and the apostles did not. John 20 shows that at least Peter and John came to the tomb, too, but Jesus didn't appear to them there; only the women.

It would be easy to overemphasize this and conclude that Jesus elevates these women to a status equal to or higher than His apostles, or that He means for women to be authoritative spokespeople for divine messages in the church.

But it would also be easy to underemphasize it, too. Let's not do that. Think about what's happening here... The resurrection is the center of apostolic preaching following this event. There are places in Acts where the whole apostolic message is summed up as "the resurrection—Jesus rose from the dead!" (cf. 4:2, 33; 23:6)

And when it first takes place, on that first Easter morning when Jesus walked out of the tomb and proved His victory over death, what did He do? How did He start spreading the word? Did He appear to Pilate and Herod? Did He head to the room where the apostles were gathered? Did He show Himself to His three closest apostles: Peter, James, and John?

NO! He showed Himself to women, and—even more scandalous—He instructed WOMEN to go share this awesome news with His apostles. The resurrection is the central message of apostolic preaching, and Jesus deliberately puts it in the mouth... of some women!!

Does Jesus think women have a vital and valuable role to fulfill in service to Him? Unquestionably! And does He limit that role to fixing meals, training children, and keeping house? No. He puts women right at the

center of His plan to spread the good news of His gospel to every creature!

Friends, do you realize what a valuable and honorable place Jesus intends for women to have in service to Him in His kingdom? Ask yourself: does your view of women make you uncomfortable with Jesus' choice to make them the first witnesses to His resurrection? Does your view of women cause you to revel in this elevation of femininity or does it make you squirm? If you were Jesus, would you have handled it a little differently? Do you wish you could suggest a few improvements to Him on His plan to launch the take the gospel to every creature by starting with a few women? To put it most pointedly, would you make yourself out to be wiser than God?

No one honored and elevated women like Jesus, and we would do well to emulate Him in this.

### **POINT 3: Jesus validated singleness.**

Jesus remained single for His entire life, and He was the most whole individual who ever lived. His life indicates that singleness is a valuable and respectable calling.

So does His teaching. In Matthew 19:12, Jesus says that some *choose* singleness and others should *use* their singleness as an opportunity to advance the kingdom of God. He implies what we all should know: singleness provides unique and unparalleled opportunities for service to God.

In the economy of Creation, marriage has special value because our marching orders include "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." But in the economy of Redemption—in the age of the Gospel—singleness has special value because our marching orders are now "Go, and make disciples of all nations." Creation says "it's not good for man to be alone" but redemption says (in the words of Paul) "I wish you were all single" (1 Cor 7:7).

Singles—high schoolers, college students—do you realize that God has given you this period of singleness (which may last your whole life long)

as an amazing opportunity for greater service to Him? You are called to USE your freedom from a spouse to spend yourself in ministry to others, advancing God's kingdom, serving the church, spreading the gospel. Singleness is not an opportunity to spend your money on yourself and fill up your free time with self-centered entertainments. It's not a license to own 3 game systems, or to browse the internet for 12-hour stretches, or to spend your weekends traveling all over the world with your friends just because you can and you have nothing else to do.

God has given you these single years as a chance to store up extra treasure in heaven! Don't waste them. Whether you are 18 or 80, being single is a God-given stewardship to live—in a sense—more like Jesus than any married person ever could. He said, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Lk 9:58). Single-minded, stripped-down, sold-out determination to give up literally EVERYTHING is the unique and wonderful calling of Jesus and those who, like Him, are single.

For Jesus, marriage is commendable, but it is not the greatest good. He says:

**Luke 14:26** *If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

If forced to choose, we must give our allegiance to God and His kingdom. Even the deepest human relationship gets surpassed by the value-structure of the kingdom.

One final word of encouragement to singles who long to be married. One of the goals of this series was to enhance our understanding of and appreciation for the gospel as we explore its deepest metaphor: the relationship of a husband and wife. What that means for single people is that, though they might be unmarried right now, they are not missing anything... they are not missing ANYTHING that is ultimate or enduring.

Since human marriage is the shadow of the reality of the union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), no believing single will miss out on the *reality* of marriage even if God calls him or her to live without the *shadow*.

~ Bruce Ware, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, p 90