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## WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS: JESUS THE LIBERATOR AND TRANSFORMER

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### ABSTRACT

Centuries have gone by since Jesus came to liberate and transform men and women. The very truth that women served in the team of Jesus while he was on the earth shows that in an androcentric patriarchal world, women were welcomed. This was made possible because Jesus went against the tide of patriarchy to reach out to the downtrodden, marginalised, and oppressed women. These women were victims of socio-cultural and oral traditions set up by the Jews. Jesus allowed women to be a part of his life. Even before his birth, God prepared women of low estate to be a part of his genealogy. We see the role of women in his birth, ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Jesus liberated and transformed a woman caught in adultery, the Samaritan woman whose life was in a mess, and women in need of healing to name a few. Women were able to serve on the team of Jesus because of their transformed lives. Many churches have come forward to allow women in the church ministries and to serve God.



## **Introduction**

Jesus came to proclaim the good news to the poor, to bind the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and a release from darkness for the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus came to liberate and transform individuals. History reveals that women are not recognized as men are and not given equal opportunities to avenues considered as ‘male’ domains in society and in the church. However, there were women who rose to leadership positions: Catherine the Great brought Russia out of feudalism, Joan of Arc in a way brought victory to France, Queen Elizabeth I strived to end the bloodbath of religious persecution in England. There are also great personalities like Indira Gandhi, (Prime minister of India) Golda Meir, (Prime minister of Israel) and Margaret Thatcher, (Prime minister of United Kingdom)<sup>1</sup> to name a few in this modern age.

Women played an important role in the life of Jesus. Jesus brought women to limelight by allowing them to be a part of his life and team. This paper explores women in the ministry of Jesus -in His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection and shows how Jesus is not only a liberator but also a transformer. To understand the role of women in the ministry of Jesus, it necessitates knowledge about the role of women in the early first century.

### **1. The Role of Women in the Early First Century**

In the Greco-Roman world and Judaism, the Greek women were the most secluded ones. Some of the women from the lower group did go out to fill water and were involved in business. During 475-425 B.C, women were not allowed to appear in public. The women of Tarsus were considered lustful, though heavily veiled over their face.<sup>2</sup> Inequality of gender started at a very early age, even the portion of meat given to boys was more than the portion of meat given to the girls. Conversation with male members outside the family was prohibited.<sup>3</sup> Though the Roman women experienced more freedom than the Greek women,

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<sup>1</sup> Loren Cunningham, “Your Gifts and Testimony,” in *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 55–56.

<sup>2</sup> C.C Kroeger, “Women in Greco-Roman World and Judaism,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 1276.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1277.



they were identified with a male figure like father, husband, or son.<sup>4</sup> This is like the concept of women in Indian society.

In order to protect their religious beliefs, the Jews came up with the oral traditions. They built walls like the Tosefta, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud and added it to the Word of God.<sup>5</sup> These traditions from the rabbis were discriminative in nature with regards to women. The extent of discrimination was such that, some Pharisees while walking shut their eyes in order to avoid seeing a woman. They were known as “Bleeding Pharisees.”<sup>6</sup> The Rabbis viewed women as more prone to sin than men, for they were taught that women were overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men. Therefore, many rabbinical laws concentrated on controlling women who were supposed to have a natural inclination to lust and sin.<sup>7</sup>

However, there were some rabbis that praised women. “Gamaliel likened women to a “golden pitcher,” while another rabbi praised his mother, “I will arise before the approaching *Shechinah* (a Hebrew word for the glory of God).”<sup>8</sup> But throughout the rabbinical literature women are categorised with children and slaves and sometimes even below them. For example, “the testimony of children, slaves and women were not admissible in legal disputes (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kamma 88a).”<sup>9</sup>

Josephus, a Jewish historian portrayed woman as inferior to man in all things and accordingly be submissive. It was also said, “Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good” (Sirach).<sup>10</sup> Inferior treatment was meted out to the Jewish women during the time of Jesus. The women were subordinate to their fathers, and to their husbands, they were restricted from studying the Scriptures (Torah), restricted in praying, and they were not considered while forming a quorum to form a congregation to worship communally. Their place of seating in the synagogue was separate from the men, they were not allowed to lead in worship. They could be divorced for trivial reason and were not allowed to bear witness in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> David Hamilton, “Distorting the Image,” in *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 101–102.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>9</sup> Judy L. Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture* (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 1996), 121.

<sup>10</sup> David M Scholer, “Women in Ministry,” *The Covenant Companion*, Companion Bible Study Series 17 (1984): 14–15.



the court of law.<sup>11</sup> But, the coming of Jesus broke all these barriers. “Jesus rewrote the rules regarding women by His words, His action and His relationship.”<sup>12</sup> The existing male literary sources of ancient Judaism reflect a negative view toward women.<sup>13</sup> However, positive roles did exist for women, in Judaism.

The discrimination against women appeared in the intertestamental period, when Herod’s Temple was built. The women were outside the Court of Israel. But in Solomon’s Temple and in the Second Temple built by the instruction of God, there were no separate Court of Women or the Court of the Gentiles.<sup>14</sup> The coming of Jesus brought in a new era of freedom for women.

## 2. The Role of Women in the Ministry of the Birth of Jesus

In the New Testament books, namely, the gospel writers Mathew, and Luke mention five women in the genealogy of Jesus who played a significant role. They are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) and Virgin Mary. Tamar is denied the levirate privilege and therefore, she pretends to be a harlot and conceives twins through her father-in-law, Judah (Gen 38). Judah declares her actions more righteous than his because he did not give her to his son Shelah. (Gen 38:26) Janice Capel Anderson projects “Tamar is ensuring that her dead husband’s patrilineage and the messianic line through the pursuit of levirate obligations are not lost.”<sup>15</sup> Justice is meted out to Tamar. It is also a reflection that Jesus born through this lineage will bring forth Justice.

Rahab is a Canaanite harlot living in Jericho who protected the spies of Joshua. She heard about the God of Israel and feared the Lord. She knew that the Lord had given Jericho into the hands of Israel and therefore asked that her family be saved during the conquest of Jericho. The writer of Hebrews projects Rahab as a heroine of faith (Heb. 11:31). Rahab is a marginalized woman and the heir (Jesus) down the line through her will set the marginalized women free.

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<sup>11</sup> Ruth Henderson, “Tradition and Status of Women in the Catholic Church,” *The Australian ejournal of Theology* 2 (February 2004): 1–2.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture*, 129.

<sup>13</sup> David M Scholer, “Women,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), 880.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture*, 90.

<sup>15</sup> Janice Capel Anderson, “Mary’s Difference: Gender and Patriarchy in the Birth Narratives,” *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 2 Women and Religion (1987): 187, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1202360>.



Ruth a Moabite widow, with no hope and future, follows her mother-in-law faithfully. Her mother-in-law, Naomi who seeks justice and happiness and a good lawful future for Ruth pursues a levirate marriage with Boaz. Ruth gives birth to a son and becomes the great grandmother of David through whose lineage Jesus is born. The wife of Uriah, Bathsheba commits adultery with King David. King David gets Uriah killed. Uriah's wife gives birth to a son, but the child dies. However, she is blessed with another son, Solomon within the constraints of marriage and the lineage is prepared and protected for Jesus to be born from the line of David.

The first mention of Mary in the New Testament is found in the genealogy of Mathew's Gospel, 1:16, And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary and Mary is the mother of Jesus, who is called Messiah. This verse means two things, one, that Jesus legally comes from the line of David through Joseph and secondly, Mary is the physical mother and the only human parent."<sup>16</sup>This shows that Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit and is Holy.

Tamar was denied justice; Rahab, though a prostitute, revered God and protected the spies' Ruth, a Moabite widow, faithfully followed her mother-in-law and was blessed with a levirate marriage with Boaz; and Uriah's wife Bathsheba went through the pain of losing her husband and child and was involved in adultery. David as king had power over everyone and he had misused this power by committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband killed in the war field. Adultery is sin and God condemns it. There is a tendency to see that, Jesus has come to save the adulterous and murderers. Three interpretations are derived based on the textual clues. The first interpretation is, the first four women were sinners and indicate Jesus comes to save sinners. The second interpretation is the first four women are Gentiles, indicating the gentile mission and the third interpretation is that all the five women served as instruments of the Holy Spirit, in moving God's plans and the messianic line forward, though there was some scandalous and irregularities in the birth of an heir.<sup>17</sup> For Witherington, "One thing that stands out is that these women were involved in 'irregular' unions and yet they

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<sup>16</sup> Ben Witherington III, "Women and Their Roles in the Gospels and Acts" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Durham, 1981), 218, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1119/>.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, "Mary's Difference: Gender and Patriarchy in the Birth Narratives," 188.



were the vehicles of God's Messianic plan. The genealogy also directs one to Jesus' indebtedness to women and to men for his Davidic ancestry and to Mary for his humanity."<sup>18</sup>

Witherington quotes Luke who represents Elizabeth and Mary as witnesses to the events concerning the birth of John and Jesus, and as active participants in God's Messianic purposes.<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus and Anna, the prophetess, provide a divine interpretation of Jesus' birth. According to Scholer, "Elizabeth blesses Mary and calls her the, "mother of my Lord," while Mary declares the saving act of God and Anna speaks about Jesus for whom all were waiting for redemption (Luke 1:41-55, Luke 2:36-38)."<sup>20</sup> Women played a key role while Jesus was in the womb, during his birth and soon after his birth. The women foreshadow Mary and reflect a supernatural birth of the Messiah contrary to the patriarchal norms, yet within God's overarching plans and an overall patriarchal framework.<sup>21</sup> The virgin birth is the epitome of it all.

## **2.1 Jesus at the Temple**

Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple to present him to the Lord and offer sacrifice according to the Law (Lk. 2:22-24). During this important time in the life of Jesus, Anna, a prophetess blesses Jesus. Witherington advocates that, "Luke deliberately places a high value on the witness of a woman, which Luke reiterates in the resurrection story. Anna is portrayed as a prophetess."<sup>22</sup> Judy Brown reiterates Witherington and adds Anna as a teacher-preacher and as the first woman to proclaim about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). And this proclamation was announced in the Temple.<sup>23</sup> Anna was a widow, who never left the Temple, but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day (Lk. 2:37b). Anna was married for seven years and became a widow and was living in the Temple, at the age of eighty-four. William Shurr, echoes Judy Brown, by proclaiming that it was Anna who ushered the Divine One into the world."<sup>24</sup> Instead of

<sup>18</sup> Witherington III, "Women and Their Roles in the Gospels and Acts," 218.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Witherington III, "Women and Their Roles in the Gospels and Acts" (University of Durham, 1984), 224.

<sup>20</sup> Scholer, "Women," 883.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, "Mary's Difference: Gender and Patriarchy in the Birth Narratives," 188.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, Monograph series/Society for New Testament studies, 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 140, bookSee.org.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture*, 124.

<sup>24</sup> William H. Shurr, "Society and Gender in the Gospel of St. Luke," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 84, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2001): 184, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41179005>.



stopping at Simeon's prophesy and blessing, Luke continues to narrate about Anna, the prophetess that highlights the writer's tone and approach of giving significance for a woman prophetess that was very rare. It shows that Luke was including women in his writings and treating them with equal importance as the men. This shows that God in His sovereign plan allowed a woman, and made sure it was recorded in His word.

### **3. The Role of Women in the Public Ministry of Jesus**

The role of women in the ministry of Jesus is of great significance as Jesus was a Jew in an androcentric, patriarchal society.<sup>25</sup> John in his gospel, reflecting on the commencement of Jesus' public ministry highlights Mary the mother of Jesus' role in the first miracle of Jesus. She is projected as the leader through whom other women had access to Jesus. Many women followed Jesus from Galilee and financed Jesus and his team. Especially, Joana, a wealthy and honourable woman is said to have renounced everything and followed Jesus and remained with Mary all the time. Mary of Magdala a woman "of exceptional wealth and of noble birth, with a great zeal in being a disciple of Jesus, served him and his mother Mary with faith. Mary Magdalene also was delivered from the possession of seven demons. Mary Magdalene is also an apostle, who was martyred in Rome."<sup>26</sup> Jesus had a special relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 11). Though Mary and Martha did not travel with Jesus, but they were prominent women in Jesus' life.

Beulah Wood propagates that Jesus affirmed women as co-workers. This is evident in his life, for Jesus highly regarded women and talked to them openly in public contrary to the culture (John 4, Luke 10: 38-42). Jesus discussed theology with women, such as the Samaritan woman and Martha (Jn. 4; Jn 11:27). Jesus commends a restored prostitute for her faith (Lk 7: 36-50).<sup>27</sup> Jesus honoured and respected all women, unlike the men of his generation and culture.

Jesus taught that women were equal to men in the sight of God. Women could receive God's forgiveness and grace. Women, as well as men, could be among Christ's personal

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<sup>25</sup> Scholer, "Women," 881.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church According to the Earliest Life of the Virgin," *The Harvard Theological Review* 98, no. 4 (October 2005): 446–447, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4125276>.

<sup>27</sup> Beulah Wood, *Co-Workers, Co-Parents and Co-Leaders* (Bangalore: IWIM, 2012), 4.



followers. Women could be full participants in the kingdom of God. These were revolutionary ideas. Many of his contemporaries, including his disciples, were shocked.”<sup>28</sup> Women from various backgrounds followed Jesus and ministered to him. “Women from all classes and walks of life followed Jesus.”<sup>29</sup> Jesus liberated and transformed women so that they may be who God intended them to be.

Mark associated women with service as he uses the verb, *diakoneow* which portrays the responsibility of women in his gospel (Mark 1: 29-31). He associates women with anointing (Mark 14: 3-9; 16: 1-8) and the role of witnesses (Mark 15: 40-41; 16: 1-8). Women are thus aligned with Jesus' suffering and death. Women are the last disciples of Jesus, and the only witnesses to his death, burial, and resurrection. At the end of the gospel, however, Mark projects women who ran away from the tomb, afraid to speak to anyone (Mk. 16: 8).<sup>30</sup> Susan Miller quotes Munro who asserts that Mark has intentionally downplayed the presence of women, because he is uneasy with the prominence of women in the early church and thus attempts to downplay their role in Jesus' mission. However, Mark refers to the women at the scene of crucifixion because they were the witnesses to the events of crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>31</sup>

Jesus showed dignity and worth of women by healing many women. Jesus accepted and forgave women who were ritually considered as unclean in the Jewish culture. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15), Jairus' daughter, the women with the issue of blood for twelve years, and the eighteen-year crippled woman, whom he calls as Abraham's daughter (Matt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:21-43; Lk. 8:40-56). Jesus publicly spoke of the woman with issue of blood for twelve years, to show that it was okay for women during such times to come out in public and be found in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus raised the son of a widow in Nain (Lk. 7:11-17). Jesus affirmed the sexual integrity of women. According to Luke and John's gospels, Jesus forgave two women

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph Tkach, “Women in the Ministry of Jesus,” *Grace Communion International* (April 2005): 1–2, <https://www.gci.org/files/Women6.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Sr. Bhavya, “Indian Women and the Experience of Inculturation,” in *The Church and Culture in India, Inculturation: Theory and Praxis* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 213.

<sup>30</sup> Susan E. Miller, “Women in Mark's Gospel” (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2002), ii, <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/1427/1/2002millerphd.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, “Women in Mark's Gospel” (University of Glasgow, Department of Theology, 2002), 3, [thesis.gla.ac.uk/1427/1/2002millerphd.pdf](https://theses.gla.ac.uk/1427/1/2002millerphd.pdf).



understood to be guilty of sexual sins, (Lk.7:36-50), a woman called as a sinner, anoints and kisses Jesus' feet in the home of a Pharisee. Jesus accepted her actions as a mark of love and declared: your faith has saved you, go in peace. She anointed Jesus for his death.

John 7:53-8:11 records the story of a woman caught in adultery, of whom only the woman was brought of the two involved in it. Jesus in the presence of male critics, did not condemn the women, but asked her to sin no longer. Another example is that of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman who is living in adultery (John 4). Jesus' disciples are offended, which shows their negative sexual assumptions that so controlled the society of the day. Based on the cultural and historical tradition of that time, it may be noted that women basically drew water in a group and was more of a social occasion. But the Samaritan woman coming alone during the midday to draw water signals that she was an outcast.<sup>32</sup> From the letter of Paul to the Corinthians, it may be inferred that prostitutes did not cover their heads in public places. The disciples perhaps were also surprised that Jesus being a Jew was having conversation with a Samaritan, that too a female. Jewish hatred and indifferent attitude towards Samaritans are more of a historical and racial contemplations than from any difference in religion.<sup>33</sup> Jesus breaks the barriers of race, culture and tradition to reach out with salvation to the needy Samaritan woman. He liberates and transforms her.

The Scribes and Pharisees publicly accuse the woman caught in adultery and challenge Jesus (John 8:1-11). According to Leviticus 20: 20, both must be put to death, but the first century Judaism brought only the woman.<sup>34</sup> The narrative of the woman caught in adultery shows the reader that Jesus asks if there were not two involved in it. So, why is only the woman brought to be punished, because she was considered as overcome by the spirit of fornication. Jesus through this incident teaches that both men and women are equally wrong and have to be punished. No matter what the situation was, Jesus never missed an opportunity to teach and put the women on equal par with men.

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<sup>32</sup> Jessica Brodie, "What Was the Significance of the Woman at the Well?" (Salem Web Network, August 7, 2020), <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/significance-of-the-woman-at-the-well.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Richard France, "The Religious Background of the New Testament," in *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*, Special Edition. (England: Lion Publishing, 1973), 498.

<sup>34</sup> Bhavya, "Indian Women and the Experience of Inculturation," 211.



Most commentators believe that the Samaritan woman had the same belief as Nathaniel because of the phrase, “he told me all that I ever did.” This parallel may suggest that the Samaritan woman is deliberately projected as a disciple. The Samaritan woman becomes the disciple and shares the ministry of Jesus to the people in her village. Many of them believed in Jesus.<sup>35</sup> She is an evangelist, bringing good news to the people in her village. Pericope, from John 4 presents the Samaritan woman as, “founder of a faith community and therefore a missionary apostle.”<sup>36</sup>

Jesus did not treat women as only home makers. The narrative in Luke 11:27-28, describes a woman praising the mother of Jesus. Jesus replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11:28) Throughout the gospel of Mark, the focus is on the twelve male disciples who accompany Jesus and not on the group of women who followed Jesus until the crucifixion (Mk 15:40-41). Kinukawa, proposes that Mark concludes with the silence of the women, because he desired to avoid offending the male readers of his society by portraying women more favourably than the male disciples.<sup>37</sup>

The gospels narrate, women sat at Jesus feet and learned from Him, women brought their little children to be blessed by Jesus, and they followed him to many places and finally crying while he was taken to be crucified. The narrative of Mary anointing Jesus may be interpreted in two ways: first, she was performing the responsibility of a servant by wiping the feet of Jesus; secondly, her action reflects the ministry of a priest, whereby she anointed Jesus for the ministry of his death. It was the priests who anointed people for special task. And Mary by anointing Jesus accomplished the task of a priest.

All the four gospels narrate the involvement of women in the life and ministry of Jesus. However, Luke is the one who narrates more on the relationship of Jesus with women and their involvement in his life and ministry. “One third of the Lukan gospel material centres around women.”<sup>38</sup> In an androcentric, patriarchal society, it is very significant that Jesus saw women as persons of dignity and worth and included them as his disciples and proclaimers of

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<sup>35</sup> Judith E McKinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 216 (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 211.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, “Women in Mark’s Gospel,” 269.

<sup>38</sup> Witherington III, “Women and Their Roles in the Gospels and Acts,” 224.



his life and ministry. This reflects the role of women in the first century context that is the heritage of the Jews and Christians today.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus used women as positive examples in his teaching as they responded to God with faith: widow of Zarephath (Lk. 4:26), the Syrophenician woman (Mt. 15:21-28) and the persistent widow (Lk. 18:1-8). The term used for women in following Jesus is the verb “*akoloutheo*” which appears about seventy-five times in the gospels meaning, following Jesus in the sense of being a disciple. Thus, women were disciples of Jesus, though some may argue that this term when used of women does not mean disciples.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus placed hearing the word and obeying it above the traditional role of women, namely the motherhood (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk.8:19-21). Some of the women mentioned in the gospels in relation to Jesus are Anna, (Lk.2:36-38), Elizabeth, (Lk.1), Joanna (Lk.8:3 & 24:10), Martha who makes a confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God (Jn. 11:27), Mary Magdalene, a prominent disciple of Jesus, Mary the mother of James (the Younger) and Joseph (Joses) is one of the female disciples of Jesus, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany sister of Martha, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Rahab, Ruth, Salome, Susanna, Tamar and the wife of Uriah.<sup>41</sup> Jesus welcomed women into his team (Luke 8: 1-3), along with his disciples, there were Mary, Mary Magdalene and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for Jesus and his team out of their means.<sup>42</sup> Jesus including women in his team was not welcomed according to the culture that prevailed.

God used the womb of Mary to bring forth Jesus, the Saviour into the world. She did influence him and therefore is a leader in that sense of influence. David Hamilton quotes Dorothy Sayers, “that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Scholer, “Women,” 881.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 882.

<sup>41</sup> Scholer, “Women,” 884.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Henderson, “Tradition and Status of Women in the Catholic Church,” *The Australian eJournal* (February 2004): 2.

<sup>43</sup> Loren Cunningham, David Joel Hamilton, and Janice Rogers, *Why Not Women? A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry and Leadership* (YWAM Publishing., 2006), 112.



#### **4. The Role of Women during the Crucifixion of Jesus**

At the crucifixion scene, Mark portrays women near the cross, while the male disciples whom Jesus had chosen were not found near the cross. Jesus saw his mother Mary standing at the cross during his crucifixion. He entrusts her to his beloved disciple John. Mary becomes the mother of the disciple and joins the spiritual family of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Jesus brought dignity and equality to women at the scene of crucifixion, for the beloved disciple and Mary were standing at the same place.<sup>45</sup> From the time of crucifixion, till death and burial women followed Jesus closely, while the male disciples were far away.

Schussler Fiorenza argues that the women present at the crucifixion (Mark 15: 40-41) are the "true disciples", whereas the twelve male disciples flee at Jesus' arrest (Mark 14: 50). However, Myers counteracts Fiorenza's argument saying that Mark's intention is to criticize the patriarchal society by describing the presence of women at the cross.<sup>46</sup> Whether one criticises patriarchal society, the reality is that at the crucifixion scene, the presence of women was evident. This shows that Jesus did have an impact on these women and perhaps the women experienced freedom in their spirit. This also shows that the women were courageous to witness the crucifixion scene risking their lives of persecution for associating with Jesus, while most of the male disciples were away from the scene.

#### **5. The Role of Women in the Resurrection of Jesus**

All the four gospels record Mary Magdalene as the first to discover the empty tomb. Mathew and John portray Mary Magdalene as the first to have seen the risen Lord.<sup>47</sup> She may be called an apostle as she has seen the risen Lord and was entrusted with the most important message of the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus. At a time, when women's witness was not accepted in the law of court, Jesus gave the resurrection message to the women. The only continuity between the crucifixion and resurrection is the women who saw Him first.

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<sup>44</sup> Witherington III, "Women and Their Roles in the Gospels and Acts," 259.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, "Women in Mark's Gospel," 2.

<sup>47</sup> Claudia Setzer, "Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 166, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 260, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3266223>.



All the four gospels narrate women were the first to receive the message of Jesus resurrection and commissioned to tell the male disciples of Jesus of this event. Luke reports that the men did not believe the report of the women (Lk. 24:10-11, 22-24) until they went and saw the empty tomb.<sup>48</sup> Women were entrusted with the most important and the very foundation of Christian faith, the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. Women were not only given the privilege of being the first to receive the message of resurrection from Jesus, but were the first to proclaim this message to the male disciples of Jesus. Jesus entrusted women the responsibility of proclaiming the resurrection.

## **6. Jesus the Liberator and Transformer**

Jesus liberated and transformed the Samaritan woman. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, and appointing her for a radical evangelistic mission. It is evident that Jesus was breaking down the walls of divisions and oppression and discrimination based on class, race, culture, and marital status. "The attitude of Jesus toward women is an example to all men. None could ever treat women with greater consideration than did the Lord Jesus Christ Himself."<sup>49</sup>

Jacobs states that the selection of the women for evangelism was clearly an expression of Jesus' outright rejection of gender and racially based prejudice. She also reveals that because Jesus took a very serious view of the way women were mistreated, he typically opposed the hypocrisy and its resultant double standards of misconduct and punishment for men and women in the matter of a woman charged with adultery (John 8:1-10).<sup>50</sup> Women are often blamed and punished while men most often escape the blame and punishment when charged with adultery.

There was a holistic transformation in the Samaritan woman. A theological transformation is seen in Martha. She understood the doctrine of resurrection. The other women who followed Jesus and ministered to him experienced liberation through Jesus the liberator. They were able to minister in a patriarchal society. They were entrusted with the message of resurrection. The Samaritan woman though not a part of the team of

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<sup>48</sup> Scholer, "Women," 883.

<sup>49</sup> Log Raditlhokwa, "Jesus Christ's Transformative Encounter with the Samaritan Woman: An Exposition of a Revolutionary Mission," *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 02, no. 05 (October 2014): 605.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 611.



women who served Jesus was the first lady evangelist in Samaria, having been transformed by Jesus the liberator and transformer.

After the ascension of Jesus, his disciples along with the women waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the upper-room (Acts 1:14). The Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire and rested on each of them in the upper-room. Women received the same power of God, as the male disciples, to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). After the ascension of Jesus, women continued to play a prominent role in the continuing ministry of Jesus, namely the proclamation of the gospel. The affects of the liberating power of Jesus are seen in the first century after His ascension.

Lydia and Tabitha are one of an example that represent “ideal followers of risen Christ by reconstructing the historical context. Lydia and Tabitha did not hold a leadership position within the community. “The non-literary evidence in the book of Acts depicts women as heads of household business owners living independent of father, husband or guardian and resided in extended family situations while involved in business.”<sup>51</sup> According to Calpino, women in the first century were entrepreneurs, carrying out business without the aid of male members. Both Tabitha and Lydia were in the Textile business. This was perhaps because of the liberating gospel that continued to influence these women after Jesus’ ascension.

### **Its Relevance to the Church Today**

It is more than two thousand years since Jesus’ ascension, but women seem to be in fetters. Women are discriminated even before their birth. The female infanticide and female foeticide, is on the rise and it is shocking. One of the Indian traditions (known as “Dudhapiti”) is killing of the female babies by applying Opium on mother’s nipple and feeding the baby, by suffocating her in a rug, by placing it on the face of the new born, by feeding them with poisonous Olender berries (Kellar or Kallar community in Tamil Nadu) or simply by ill-treating daughters.<sup>52</sup> This is a heinous crime against the girl child and it shows how life of a girl is worthless in some communities.

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<sup>51</sup>Teresa J. Calpino, “Women Work and Leadership in Acts” 14 No. 3, *Religious Studies Review* (2014): 115.

<sup>52</sup> Kanchan Mathur, “Body as Space, Body as Site: Bodily Integrity and Women’s Empowerment in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 17 (May 26, 2008): 56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40277391>.



If Jesus respected, honoured, and allowed women to follow him, why were the disciples all men, Jewish and twelve in number? It is a symbolic representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, they had to be all men. When the number of disciples became eleven, Peter suggested it was necessary to bring the number back to twelve. (Acts 1).

Beulah Wood promulgates that Jesus did not include women in his main team of disciples, as it would be improper for men and women to travel together day and night. Jesus in his teaching often included a woman's perspective: a hen gathering chicks, a woman searching for a lost coin. Jesus in his parables used women's household metaphors: sewing, cooking, feeding the hungry. He was concerned about pregnant, nursing women and widows.<sup>53</sup> Jesus often used women or the things associated with women as examples in his teachings "Jesus commended the queen of Sheba (Mt. 12:42), likened the kingdom of heaven to a leaven put in the dough by a woman (Mt. 13:33), the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1-13), lost coin of a woman (Lk. 15:8-10).<sup>54</sup>

From the Indian perspective, the majority of congregation in the church are women, it is the women who are the first ones to open to the gift of serving and hospitality, contributing to missions, participating with zeal in the outreach program, involving in praise and worship, or doing personal evangelism, participating in prayer meetings, and fasting prayer meetings, contributing to the saints and the like. It is a common sight to see that most of the congregation in the churches are women. As a result of the effect of the liberation gospel of Jesus, church today has witnessed many women in ministry.

## Conclusion

Jesus treated women with respect and dignity and treated women as equal to men in all aspects of life.<sup>55</sup> Women like the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Martha, Samaritan woman, and the like were influential for Jesus made their lives worthy. Therefore, the women were leaders in the ministry of Jesus.

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<sup>53</sup>Wood, *Co-Workers Co-Parents and Co-Leaders*, 5.

<sup>54</sup>James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomerg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 185.

<sup>55</sup>Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture*, 129.



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