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Recommended Citation

Specht, Walter F., "Jesus and the Status of Women Part 3: Jesus Related His Teachings to Women" (1976). *Faculty Publications*. 4122.

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Jesus Related His Teachings to Women

Jesus sought opportunities to instruct women in the deeper mysteries of the kingdom of God.⁴

By WALTER F. SPECHT

ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE illustrations of Jesus' willingness to help a person was His visit with a Samaritan woman (John 4:4ff.). The Jews looked upon the Samaritans with considerable contempt.¹ On one occasion they expressed their hostility toward Jesus by calling Him a Samaritan and one who was demon-possessed (chap. 8:48). The Samaritans were regarded not only as enemies but as ceremonially unclean. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus went so far as to say, "He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one that eats the flesh of swine."² John's explanation, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (chap. 4:9*), probably means, "Do not use vessels in common" (N.E.B.). According to the Mishnah, "The daughters of the Samaritans are [deemed unclean as] menstruants from their cradle."³ This means that the Samaritan woman was regarded as ceremonially unclean by the Jews, and that this uncleanness would be conveyed to the water utensil she carried.⁴

David Daube asserts: "By asking the woman to give him to drink, Jesus showed himself ready to disregard that hostile presumption respecting Samaritan women for the sake of a more inclusive fellowship."⁵

Jesus was fully aware of her sordid life, and He tried to arouse her slumbering conscience. He offered her living water and revealed Himself as the Messiah (verses 25, 26).

At this juncture the disciples returned from buying food and were amazed to find Jesus conversing⁶ with a woman (verse 27).⁷ No rabbi would have done such a thing. In fact the rabbis had a saying: "A man shall not be alone with a woman in an inn, not even with his sister or his daughter, on account of what men may think. A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, and especially not with another woman on account of what men may say."⁸

* Bible references in this article are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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The disciples, however, did not outwardly question their Master's behavior. Often they had seen Him violate Jewish conventions, and apparently they were able to control their scruples while Jesus remained in Sychar for two days evangelizing the Samaritans.

The story of the adulterous woman (John 7:53-8:11) discloses Jesus' tender dealings with women, and in this case, a woman of ill repute. The account asserts that she was "caught in the act of adultery" (John 8:4). But the record makes it clear that she was brought to Jesus for the sole purpose of trapping Him into saying something that could be used against Him.⁹ They hoped that He would either acquit the woman, and thus in effect set aside the Law of Moses, or condemn her, and thus challenge the Roman authorities, who alone had the right to impose capital punishment.

These would-be guardians of the law revealed their own male prejudices. Why was not the man who had committed adultery with her also brought before Jesus? Why was he allowed to escape?¹⁰ According to the Mosaic law both the adulterer and the adulteress were to be executed (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Death by stoning was prescribed only for a man and a betrothed virgin who were guilty of adultery (Deut. 22:23, 24). Apparently stoning became the method of executing others guilty of sex crimes. But it seems that women were dealt with more severely than were men.¹¹

An Adulterous Woman Finds Forgiveness

Not only did this woman's accusers drag her into Jesus' presence but they placed her in full view of everyone. Instead of immediately answering the loaded question of the scribes and Pharisees, however, Jesus stooped and began writing in the sand. We can only speculate as to why He did this.¹² He may have chosen to ignore these professed guardians of the law.¹³ Or He may have wished to spare the woman further embarrassment. One scholar suggests: "The Lord is tortured with the horror of it all. He would not look at them or her."¹⁴

Nor does the passage reveal what He wrote, though



Jesus offered living water to the Samaritan woman He met at the well.

several manuscripts include the expression "the sins of every one of them" after the word "ground."¹⁵ Derrett¹⁶ suggests that He wrote part of Exodus 23:1, "You shall not join hands with a wicked man, to be a malicious witness." Morris thinks He may have written the words He later spoke.¹⁷ *

When these men, impatient at Jesus' delay and indifference, pressed for an answer, He replied, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Thus He "not only sidestepped the snare which his critics had laid, but cut them down to size." It was a "devastating rebuke to male arrogance."¹⁸

Though He did not condone the behavior of the adulterous woman, He did not condemn her, but admonished her: "Go, and do not sin again."

Another scene near the close of Jesus' life is worth noting.

On the way to Golgotha to be crucified, Jesus was attracted by the demonstration of grief by a company of women who followed Him on the *Via Dolorosa* (Luke 23:27-31). This company apparently consisted of sympathizing women from Jerusalem. Alfred Plummer notes: "In the Gospels there is no instance of a woman being hostile to Christ."¹⁹ Although He was touched by the grief of these Jerusalem women, He felt that it was misplaced. Our Lord was not being driven to an unwilling death, but was voluntarily giving His life for the world—even for them. These women would do better to weep for the same cause that He wept—a doomed Jerusalem whose judgments might have been averted. "Weep for yourselves and for your children," He urged (verse 28). He foresaw the doom of Jerusalem. If an innocent one like Jesus could be crucified, what would be the fate of guilty Jerusalem?

Close Associates Revered Christ's Instruction

An outstanding example of Jesus' association with women, and His high regard for them, is seen in His close friendship with Martha and Mary. These two women are introduced in Luke's Gospel with the following words: "Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching" (Luke 10:38, 39).

The unnamed village where these sisters lived, according to John's Gospel, was Bethany, situated less than two miles from Jerusalem (John 11:1, 18). Because of the prominence of these women, John referred to Bethany simply as "the village of Mary and her sister Martha." Apparently these sisters were unmarried and were living together in the little village. Since Luke represents Martha as the mistress of the home (Luke 10:38), likely she was the older of the two. Her Aramaic name means "lady," which may indicate that she came from a fairly wealthy circle.²⁰

Contrary to rabbinical custom, Jesus not only accepted the hospitality of Martha's home but also taught His message to her and her sister. Just as "people pressed upon him to hear the word of God" at the Sea of Galilee (chap. 5:1), so Mary took a seat at His feet and eagerly listened to the word.²¹ ("To sit at someone's feet" was an idiomatic way of saying "to study under someone." As a

young man, Paul was educated "at the feet of Gamaliel" in Jerusalem [Acts 22:3]. To sit at a teacher's feet suggests the humble position of the learner. The Jewish rabbi Joezer of Zerediah is reported to have said: "Let thy house be a house of meeting for the wise [recognized teachers], and bedust thyself with the dust of [i.e., sit at] their feet, and drink with thirst their words."²²)

Although there is no evidence that there was a formal teacher-student relationship between Jesus and Mary, such as existed between a rabbi and a *talmid*, our Lord did not hesitate to impart His teachings to her and to her sister. In Judaism, women, as a general rule, were not allowed the privilege of studying under a rabbi. George Foot Moore says: "Some of them may have been taught by their fathers or their husbands at home to read the Bible, but since this involved the learning of the ancient Hebrew language, it is probable that such cases were rare. . . . Instruction of women in the unwritten law was still more rare."²³ Some of the rabbis were strongly opposed to efforts to teach women. Jeremias cites two sayings of Rabbi Eliezar (c. A.D. 90), whom he describes as the "tireless upholder of the old tradition."²⁴ "If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery."²⁵ "Better to burn the Torah than to teach it to women."²⁶ Jesus was not bound by such Pharisaic notions, but enjoyed discoursing with women who hungered for spiritual food.

It seems evident from Luke's account that Martha, as well as Mary, loved to sit and listen to the teachings of our Lord. However, while Mary sat at Christ's feet and listened to His words,²⁷ Martha became distracted by domestic interests. Irritated by Mary's neglect of the household duties, she inquired, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me²⁸ to serve alone? Tell her then to help me" (Luke 10:40). With sublime tact, Jesus defended Mary.

His mild rebuke of Martha contains an invaluable point: "Martha, Martha, you are fretting and fussing about so many things; but one thing is necessary. The part that Mary has chosen is best; and it shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41, 42, N.E.B.).²⁹

Martha Trusted Jesus Implicitly

Although there is no specific record of Jesus' having visited this Bethany home before the death of Lazarus, our Lord frequently stayed there.³⁰ Following the triumphal entry Jesus went out to Bethany with His disciples (Mark 11:11), and returned to Jerusalem the next morning.

The account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus (John 11) indicates the closeness³¹ of Jesus' relation with the sisters and their brother and His affection for them (John 11:5). This is especially evident in Jesus' conversation with Martha after Lazarus' death. "If you had been here," she cried, "my brother would not have died" (verse 21). But then she added, "And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you" (verse 22).

What did she mean? She had come to trust Jesus implicitly with full assurance of His interest in them, His compassion for them, and His power to do what should be done. Jesus assured her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha responded bravely, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (verse 24). Jesus replied, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who

* Ellen G. White states that Jesus wrote the secret sins of the accusers. See *The Desire of Ages*, page 461.

believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (verses 25, 26). Of special significance was Martha's response: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (verse 27). No greater affirmation of faith was made by any of Jesus' followers. After assuring Mary, as well, Jesus went to Lazarus' grave and raised him to life. □

To be concluded

REFERENCES

- ¹ See, e.g., Sirach 50:25, 26.
- ² Sheb. 8.10 (Danby ed.), p. 49.
- ³ Nid. 4.1 (Danby ed.), p. 748.
- ⁴ Kel. 1.1ff. (Danby ed.), p. 605.
- ⁵ David Daube, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 69 (1950), p. 138.
- ⁶ For *meta* plus the genitive as suggesting the idea of communication, with, see C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, p. 61; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 611.
- ⁷ John 4:27. The translators of the K.J.V. mistakenly translated *meta gunaikos* as "with the woman." "The translators of the King James Version, under the influence of the Vulgate, handle the Greek article loosely and inaccurately."—ROBERTSON, *Grammar*, p. 756. "It was 'a woman,' any woman, not the particular woman in question."—*Ibid.*
- ⁸ Strack-Billerbeck, Vol. II, p. 438, quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 274.
- ⁹ Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, p. 96.
- ¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Ellen G. White in *The Desire of Ages* asserts: "These would-be guardians of justice had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus."—Page 461.
- ¹¹ Note Ellen G. White: "With all their professions of reverence for the law, these rabbis, in bringing the charge against the woman, were disregarding its provisions. It was the husband's

duty to take action against her, and the guilty parties were to be punished equally. The action of the accusers was wholly unauthorized."—*Ibid.*

- ¹² See the discussion of this point in *The Desire of Ages*, page 461 and *The Ministry of Healing*, page 88.
- ¹³ Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 888.
- ¹⁴ William Temple, quoted in Morris, *op. cit.*, note 20.
- ¹⁵ These include U II 73 331 364 700 782 1592 and some Armenian MSS. Compare Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 461: "There, traced before them, were the guilty secrets of their own lives."
- ¹⁶ J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery," *Journal of New Testament Studies*, Vol. IX (1963-1964), pp. 18ff.
- ¹⁷ Morris, *loc. cit.*
- ¹⁸ Jewett, *loc. cit.*
- ¹⁹ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 528.
- ²⁰ *Marta* is the feminine form of *maras* "master." See Leipoldt, *Jesus und die Frauen*, p. 128, note 189.
- ²¹ Greek, *logon*.
- ²² Aboth 1.4.
- ²³ George Foot Moore, *Judaism*, vol. 2, p. 128.
- ²⁴ Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 373.
- ²⁵ Sot. 3.4, quoted in Jeremias, *loc. cit.*
- ²⁶ J. Sot. iii.4, 19a 7.
- ²⁷ N.E.B. The aorist tense of *parakathestheisa* means, "having taken her place at the Lord's feet"; *ekouen*, however, is the imperfect, suggesting her persistence in listening.
- ²⁸ Some MSS read the aorist, *kateleipen*, "indicating that she had been assisting before she was drawn off by Jesus' presence," Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies*, Vol. I, p. 358. However, if one follows Nestle in reading the imperfect, *kateleipen*, it would mean, "She has continued to leave me."
- ²⁹ The Greek manuscripts have various forms of verse 42. Some read "few things are needful" (not an elaborate meal such as Martha was planning). Others read "one thing is needful," which may refer to one dish, or the spiritual communion Mary had chosen, or, perhaps, does it refer to both? The reading of some MSS, "few things are needful or only one," seems to be a conflation of the other two.
- ³⁰ See *The Desire of Ages*, page 524: "At the home of Lazarus, Jesus had often found rest. The Saviour had no home of His own; He was dependent on the hospitality of His friends and disciples, and often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household, away from the suspicion and jealousy of the angry Pharisees. Here He found a sincere welcome, and pure, holy friendship. Here He could speak with simplicity and perfect freedom, knowing that His words would be understood and treasured."
- ³¹ Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 538.

When You're Young BY MIRIAM WOOD

Job-Hunting—1

A PROBLEM of much concern to a large segment of people on the contemporary scene is the scarcity of jobs. This is particularly depressing to young people, for any number of reasons. Many need summer jobs in order to save money for the next year of education; the same group need part-time employment during the school year to keep even a half step ahead of the gargantuan costs of private education—and higher public education, for that matter. For people who've just declared their last year of school terminal, at whatever level, the problem boils down to one of actual livelihood. At the present time no one has come up with a way to live without food, shelter, and sufficient clothing to move about. Money has to be gotten for these necessities. And where does the average person get money? He earns it by working at a job.

At present, then, we have an employers' market. With this in mind, let's consider how, if you're looking for a job, you're most likely to succeed in your quest. First

of all, you'll need to have something to offer. I know this is so obvious you may wonder why I've bothered to state it; that's exactly why I have done so. The obvious is too often ignored. You need some kind of skill or training, some kind of expertise. However, if at the moment you can't point to a mechanical expertise, don't give up. There's another area I'd like to suggest, slightly different—an attitude of being willing to master the work. This means that you can't regard the job merely as a "way station" on your road of progress. You've got to get off the symbolic train, alight at the station, take your baggage along, move in, and settle down for as long as necessary—again symbolically. You can't just hover in midair, helicopter-fashion, ready for instant takeoff.

With that attitude, then, you put yourself together for an appearance at the personnel office, or the business manager's office, or whatever. No matter what you read or hear or see about the total "unmattering" of your appearance on this oc-

casional, don't you believe it. While it is true that a potential employer of a very young person doesn't expect, in the case of a girl, white gloves and a picture hat, or "a little navy suit with a white blouse," he doesn't expect dirty bare feet in thong sandals, either. He doesn't expect a mane of hair covering the eyes obviously uncombed and greasy. In the case of a young male, the dirty bare feet are out, as well as the mane of ungroomed hair. In both cases, dirty, ragged blue jeans just won't do—except for construction jobs.

If you feel that your rights, civil or otherwise, are violated by the expectancy that you be clean and neatly groomed, just remind yourself that you are the one asking for the favor. The busy personnel officer taking his time for the interview didn't implore you to put in an appearance. Most of us can't afford the luxury of the kind of dissent that bluntly flouts convention. (Only enter-tainers who make millions of dollars can afford to look like slobbers no matter what. That's their way of heaping scorn on the public in return for their money and adulation.)

Now about the vocal part of the interview. Questions will be asked to which you must respond. You'll need to have crisp, concise answers ready. This isn't the time to indulge yourself in long, sweeping paragraphs of oratory, recounting your triumphs or even your fanciful dreams. Neither is it the time to figuratively hang your head, dig your toe into the carpet, thrust your finger in your mouth, and mutter monosyllabic replies. What your interviewer is after is a clear impression of you as a person. Though you may disagree violently, if I were a young person desperately seeking a job, and were being interviewed, I'd certainly preface or end some of my replies with "Sir" or "Ma'am" or use the name of the interrogator once in a while. I wouldn't be abrupt and graceless. I'd show respect. I'd show that I am willing to take my lowly place on the totem pole of the business world. I'd show that I have manners, the oil that keeps the wheels of progress going smoothly.

We've only just begun to talk about the subject of successful job hunting in today's world. We'll have to continue with it next time.