

JESUS AND THE WOMEN OF HIS TIME: JESUS AND JEWISH CULTURE

Luke 4:17-21

"And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.'" Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.""

This is one of the most beautiful accounts in the bible. With the words *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* Jesus summed up His mission on earth. There was a sense of accomplishment and finality in the statement. Jesus came to set the captives free! Indeed!

Jesus Had Purpose

To find a truly biblical view of women and their place in God's kingdom, the best place to start is by looking at Jesus and how He related to and treated the women He encountered.

There was purpose to everything Jesus did on earth. He had only three and half years to fulfil His destiny, so He did not waste time on what was insignificant or irrelevant to His purpose on earth. He had a message of hope, deliverance and salvation to preach and He did not waste time on the unimportant or unnecessary.

A careful look at the scriptures shows that Jesus had a very radical view about women and often deliberately went out of His way to challenge the cultural biases against them.

JEWISH CULTURE IN JESUS' DAY

First, let's take a look at what Jewish culture was like when Jesus lived on earth.

- Women were generally considered to be inferior to men.
- Women were considered a little more than property. *"He who acquires a wife gets his best possessions"* – Rabbi Jesus ben Sirach. This summed up a woman's position.
- They were always under the authority of men – either their father before marriage, or their husband afterwards.



- Basically, because women were considered as 'inferior' or 'servants,' their place was in the field, at the well, or in the kitchen. They could not go out in public, talk to strangers and were not allowed to talk to men in public, except to their own husbands. When outside of their homes, they were to be doubly veiled
- Women were not allowed to testify in court since the testimony or witness of a woman was considered untrustworthy.
- They were not allowed to enter the temples and were segregated from men in the synagogues.
- Because women were only valued for their, 'subservient' roles as wives and mothers, they were not permitted to be taught by rabbis.
- Rabbi Eliezer, who lived in Palestine in 1st century, was quoted to say, *"Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman... Whoever teaches his daughter is like one who teaches obscenity"*.
- Popular Jewish prayer: *"Oh Lord I thank you for not creating me a woman."*

GROUP EXERCISE

* Instructor's notes: Trainees to get into groups for this exercise and feedback afterwards

Time: 20 minutes

1. Discuss Jewish culture and how women were treated during Jesus' lifetime.
2. Compare your own cultural background with Jesus'. Are there any similarities or differences?



JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN

Bearing in mind the general opinion and attitude of men towards women, Jesus interacted with them in a rather radical manner which contradicted everything the society was accustomed to.

1. Jesus overthrew many centuries of Jewish law, tradition and custom, by putting value on women and treating them on an equal level as men.
2. Jesus broke many of the existing traditions and customs of the Jewish religious groups of the day. He broke several of the rules that endorsed inequality between men and women.
3. This is one of the reasons why they were constantly seeking to kill Him!
4. Jesus even welcomed women among His disciples, which was a real break from tradition.
5. There were many instances where Jesus personally interacted and dealt with women.
6. The manner in which He did this was revolutionary. The actions of Jesus of Nazareth towards women were revolutionary.
7. Jesus' mission was to set the captives free. The captives were women who were being suppressed, oppressed and mistreated, and also men who, bound by tradition and culture, suppressed, oppressed and mistreated women.

