
THOSE WHO SHOULD, DON'T. THOSE WHO SHOULDN'T, DO.

BY MICHAEL CARD

One of the most interesting aspects of getting into the gospels is learning about the different interests of the various authors. Mark writes simply and succinctly. He seems particularly fascinated by Jesus' ministry to those who are demonically possessed. Luke's language is more technical. He focuses on the prayer life of Jesus. John writes the story of Jesus like a person who had preached those stories again and again, as indeed he had. Matthew sees Jesus as the new Moses. Isn't it amazing that God chose four men to provide different perspectives on the life of Jesus in order to provide us the fullest possible picture?

For me one, of the most interesting examples of this is Luke's habit of contrasting religious men, who should "get it" but don't with simple women who shouldn't get it, but do. (We need to remember that women were generally looked down upon in the 1st century until the coming of Jesus, who brought them a new dignity.)

Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know this will happen?"

* The first example is in Luke chapter one. The first part of the story concerns Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. (Lk. 1) He is elderly. He is a priest. When we first meet him, he is ministering in the Holy Place of the Temple, burning incense before the altar. There is only a single curtain between him and the Holy of Holies. (This curtain will be ripped in two as Jesus dies on the cross just thirty years later. Mat. 27:51) He is supposed to be alone there, but as Zechariah lights the incense, the angel Gabriel appears to him in the dim, smoky space. The angel tells him the good news concerning the birth of his son, John. A priest, in the Temple, hears a message from Gabriel himself and ... he disbelieves.

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant..."

Cut to Mary in the very next scene. She is a young girl, in an obscure village, engaged to an obscure craftsman. She is not in the Temple, but probably in her parents' humble home. How does she respond? She believes. "I am the Lord's slave," she says.

Zechariah was not willing to submit. Mary was. Score? Religious guys who should get it: 0. Simple girls who shouldn't: 1.

When the Pharisee who was the host saw what was happening and who the woman was, he said to himself, "This proves that Jesus is no prophet. If God had really sent him, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

* The next example, in chapter 7, concerns Simon, a Pharisee and a nameless "sinful woman." Simon has invited Jesus to his house for supper. But he neglected to provide Jesus water to wash his tired feet when he arrived. Perhaps because he was still not sure whose side Jesus was on, he neglected to greet him at the door with the customary kiss. Finally, he failed to provide Jesus with refreshing oil to anoint his head.

When the sinful woman arrived, she washed Jesus' feet with her tears, continuously kissed his feet and poured costly perfume on them. Simon did not love Jesus. The woman did.

Religious men who should: 0 Simple women who shouldn't: 2.

While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people putting their gifts into the collection box. Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two pennies.

* In chapter 21, Jesus is observing the rich (men?) putting their offerings in the Temple treasury. At the same moment, a poor widow puts in two virtually worthless copper coins. It is important to note that she put in *two* coins, she might have kept one for herself, but she didn't. She was disturbingly, sacrificially generous. They were not. Wealthy, religious men: 0.

Poor women: 3.

They told the apostles what had happened, but the story sounded like nonsense, so they didn't believe it.

* Finally, in chapter 24, we see that crucial group of witnesses which Luke simply refers to as "the women," returning with spices intending to anoint Jesus' dead body. At the empty tomb, they encounter two radiant angels who tell them the good news that Jesus is no longer there. He is risen! When they run back to tell the Eleven, the cowering men refuse to believe them. Luke

the doctor uses the medical term for delirium to describe how the disciples regarded the women's message. The women believed. The disciples didn't. Men who should have gotten it: 0. Women who weren't supposed to have: 4.

What about you?

So what's the point? Are these passages there merely to give women another chance to beat up on us guys? I don't think so. Luke shows us several similar instances where both parties are male. (The Good Samaritan 10:25ff, The Rich Man and Lazarus 16:19ff. The Tax Collector and the Pharisee 18:9ff) Why else would he tell us these stories except to comfort those who are looked down upon as "clueless" and to deeply disturb people (male and female) who arrogantly think they "get it".

Who are you? Are you entrenched in the "fashionable" crowd where it is cool to disbelieve, to refuse to submit, to flaunt wealth? Or do you find yourself most often standing on the outside? Excluded? Looked down upon?

In the end, according to Luke, which group truly "gets it" and which group doesn't? ☞

