

Jesus, Women, and Men

John Piper

Luke 13:10-17

And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

Jesus has done more than anyone has ever done to bring purity and harmony between men and women. I want to illustrate this truth beginning with our text and then showing the same thing from other parts of his teaching as well.

A woman was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. She was bent over and could not stand up. She had been this way for 18 years. Jesus was in the synagogue too. He was the teacher that day. Now what happens here is quite amazing. Jesus does not ask her about her disease. She does not ask Jesus to heal her. Verses 12-13 simply say, "And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.' And he laid hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and praised God."

She asked for nothing. She promised nothing. She had not cornered Jesus. She had not forced his hand. He could have finished his lesson and gone home and no one would have even thought about this woman. But he stopped. He called her. He took the initiative and made an issue of this woman.

So Jesus is on the offensive here. He has something he wants to say. He wants to say something about the Sabbath day and what it means to keep it holy. He has something he wants to say about the hypocrisy of the synagogue leaders who water their oxen on the Sabbath but get ticked at Jesus' healing. And he has something he wants to say about women and men.

It's the last one we are concerned with today. Verse 16 is the key verse on this point: "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" If the only point Jesus wanted to make was the point about doing good on the Sabbath or the point about the hypocrisy of the leaders, he could have simply said, "Ought not this woman whom Satan bound for eighteen years be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" But that is not all he said. He called her a "daughter of Abraham." "Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham . . . be loosed from this bond?"

Those words, "daughter of Abraham" are intended to carry a message to the synagogue leaders. The message goes something like this: On top of all the other reasons why you should care more about a suffering person than a thirsty ox, is the fact that this woman is a fellow heir of the blessing promised to Abraham. You pride yourselves in saying, "We are the children of Abraham." Well, she too is a child of Abraham. You hide from the warnings of John the Baptist by saying, "We have Abraham as our father." Well, she too has Abraham as her father.

And so the message of Jesus to the synagogue leaders was a message not only about their Sabbath keeping, and not only about their hypocrisy, but also about how men and women ought to relate to each other as fellow heirs of God's promises. He was saying to men in the synagogue then, and he is saying to men in the church today, "The believing women in your midst are heirs of the promises of God. They too are the meek who will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). They too are the righteous who will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

Do you see what this means for us men and women today? Husbands and wives. Brothers and sisters. Boy friends and girl friends. All of us as we relate to each other as men and women. It means we should learn to look at each other through the lens of God's word. Here's what I mean.

This woman in the synagogue has been bent over for 18 years. What's that like? It's horrible. That's what it's like. People stare. People think you've committed some terrible sin. Kids laugh and make jokes. You can't look anyone in the eye. People don't know how to make conversation. You can't have normal sexual relations with your husband. You feel like you're an embarrassment to everyone you're with.

So what do you see when you look at this woman? If you were her husband what would you see? Husbands (let's just bring it right up to date), what do you see when you look at your wife? The answer to that, of course, depends on what lens you're using. What you see will be very different depending on whether you look through the lens of Playboy magazine or the lens of the Word of God. If you look through the lens of God's Word you will see a daughter of Abraham. If we learn to see Christian women the way Jesus saw this woman in the synagogue we will see them as heirs of the King of glory. And that will have a deep effect on our relationships.

Of course this cuts both ways. Women are just as likely to be disappointed with their husbands as men are to be disappointed with their wives. Women are just as prone to speak negatively of their husbands. Women are just as prone to try to get their husbands to be all the things that they dreamed they would be. And therefore it probably needs to be said that women too must learn to look at him through the lens of the Word of God. He is a son of Abraham as a believer in Christ. He will one day shine like the sun in the kingdom of his Father. With all his imperfections he will be changed in the twinkling of an eye: every sin will be gone for ever; and he will receive a body like Christ's glorious body.

We will, I think, in the age to come be dumbfounded as we look back at how poorly we were able to treat each other on the way to glory. There is an honor and respect and even reverence that we should show to each other as men and women. How much happier would be our homes if they were filled with expressions of this honor! And they WILL be filled with these expressions to the degree that we learn to look at each other through the lens of God's word - as daughters and sons of Abraham; heirs of all God's promises; destined together for unspeakable glory.

Now that is the sort of thing Jesus did to help us recover what God created us to be as male and female in the image of God. And he did it again and again. So what I want to do in the time that remains is to give a few more illustrations of how Jesus helps us recover the purity and harmony of how men and women relate to each other. There is much more that could be said than can fit here.

1. In Matthew 5:28-29 Jesus says, "Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

With that one word Jesus condemned in the most forceful way possible (the threat of hell) all forms of pornography and the entire enterprise of commercializing the female body in advertising and entertainment. Can you imagine how much wrath is being stored up in heaven against the billion dollar

business of doing precisely what the Son of God prohibits - namely, enticing men to look upon women with sexual desire - not as persons, mind you, but as objects of sexual pleasure alone! And what is clear from Matthew 5:28f is that Jesus Christ means to rescue women from this attack on their personhood. Men who follow Jesus guard their eyes for the good of women and for the glory of God. And women who follow Jesus look to Jesus for how to use their bodies, not to the world.

2. In Matthew 7:12 Jesus said, "Whatever you wish that people would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." You don't think, do you, that Jesus meant for the relationships between men and women to be excluded here do you - as though men and women should not treat each other according to the golden rule? No. We ought to treat each other the way we'd want to be treated in somebody else's shoes.

It's hard to say something more radical than this. Relationships are revolutionized when two people live by the golden rule. The reason it is so revolutionary is because you and I by nature have an all consuming desire to be treated well by other people. Nobody in this room likes to be made fun of. Nobody here wants to be ignored and treated like a useless person. Nobody wants to be exploited or taken advantage of. That means that if everybody in this room lived by the golden rule of Jesus nobody would make fun of any other person here. Nobody here would treat another like he or she were useless. Nobody here would take advantage of someone else. The measure of our love for our own happiness would be the measure of how eagerly we pursued the happiness of each other. It would be utterly revolutionary, especially in marriages and relationships between men and women in general. And that is just what Jesus commands.

3. The most devastating thing Jesus ever said against characteristic male and female sins was the word in Matthew 18:3, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Men who act like backyard bullies and women who play the helpless coquette are not child-like. They are childish. Genuine childlikeness and humility, like everything else Jesus taught, is revolutionary for the relationships between men and women.

Now how does this relate to our conclusion last week - that God has called men to bear the primary responsibility for leadership in relationship to women? - that men are held accountable first by God for taking the initiative to do what can be done to make things the way they should be in the relationship?

The answer is: Jesus purges Christian leadership of everything that makes it ugly and builds into Christian leadership what makes it beautiful. He purges it of self-exaltation; and he builds into it the reality of servanthood. He says, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled" (Matt. 23:12). That's the end of arrogance and self-exaltation in Christian leadership. And he says, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). That's the key to beautiful leadership that builds up others.

But what a mistake it would be to say that because Jesus elevated the concept of servanthood he cancelled out the concept of leadership. We know from what he said and what he did that this is not true.

What he said was this: "Let the leader become as one who serves" (Luke 22:26), But He never said, "Let the leader stop being leader." Nor did he say, "Serving makes leaders less than leaders." He simply said, "When leadership is appropriate, let it be a servant leadership."

And what he did was to give himself as an example of what he said: at his lowest point of servanthood, with the towel wrapped around him washing his disciples' feet like a slave, no one in that room doubted who the leader was. He was the one they would follow. On his knees - and, if they understood, they

would be on theirs! Servanthood does not nullify or cancel out leadership; it transforms leadership. When Jesus hung on the cross seemingly weak and utterly helpless he was leading a great host into glory.

So what Jesus does for us is this: he shows us and he teaches us that if a man takes up the mantle of leadership according to Genesis 2, he must not seize it as a right for himself; he must accept it as a responsibility given by God. The language of leadership is the language of responsibilities not the language of rights. It's the responsibility of servant leadership, not the right of lordly domination.

This is exactly where Paul takes us in Ephesians five when he speaks of husbands loving and leading like Christ. And that is where we will turn next week.