

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK OF JULY 12, 2020

WEEKLY READING: MATTHEW 26 – 1 CORINTHIANS 2

PASSAGES REFERENCED: GENESIS 16-18; MATTHEW 28:1-10; LUKE 10:38-42; JOHN 4:1-42 & 11:1-44; GALATIANS 3:26-28

When we read stories, we often find ourselves identifying with the characters. We connect with the ones we are most like. This seems to be something that just sort of happens, maybe even subconsciously. It most often occurs when we read novels and other types of fiction. But it can also happen when we read non-fiction, including the Bible.

It's natural for us to identify with people in the Bible whose lives or personalities are most similar to our own. And while there are an abundance of characters to connect with, I've always found it a little hard. I think that's because there aren't as many women highlighted in the Bible. And those who are, aren't ones I feel a real similarity to or don't have a very long or detailed story. Maybe this is magnified for me because I really don't connect much with the one character I share a name with: Sarah. The prospect of identifying with a barren old woman who laughed at God and then made a mess of things by trying to make God's promises come true on her own (Genesis 16-18) isn't all that exciting.

So for me, I've taken to finding encouragement in the stories of Jesus' interactions with women. One of my favorite stories is Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). There are a lot of reasons I love it so much, but what sticks out most is that it's actually the longest personal conversation Jesus has with anyone and it's the first time He tells someone that He's the Messiah. I also appreciate Jesus' relationship with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42 and John 11:1-44). I love that Jesus allowed Mary to sit at His feet as He taught – something a traditional rabbi in that time would never have allowed. And I love Jesus' conversation with Martha after her brother Lazarus died where He again told a woman exactly who He was. He then asked her if she believed Him, to which she replied, *"yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."* (John 11:27)

So naturally, the most impactful story for me from our reading this week is found in Matthew 28:1-10 when the women went to the tomb and learned that Jesus had risen. When they got there, they discovered He wasn't there. The angel told them, *"he is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."* (Matthew 28:6-7) As they went on their way, they met Jesus, who again urged them, *"Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."* (Matthew 28:10) What a beautiful gift Jesus gave those women in allowing them to be the first witnesses of the resurrection and the first preachers of the good news that Christ is risen.

As you spend time reading and studying Jesus' relationships with women, it's easy to see He loved them and they loved Him. Author Sarah Bessey in her book *Jesus Feminist* expounds upon this point: *"After years of reading the Gospels and the full canon of Scripture, here is, very simply, what I learned about Jesus and the ladies: he loves us... On our own terms. He treats us as equals to the men around him; he listens; he does not belittle; he honors us; he challenges us; he teaches us; he includes us – calls us all beloved. Gloriously, this flies in the face of the cultural expectations of his time – and even our own time. Scholar David Joel Hamilton calls Jesus' words and actions toward women 'controversial, provocative, even revolutionary.' Jesus loves us. In a time when women were almost silent or invisible in literature, Scripture affirms and celebrates women. Women were a part of Jesus' teaching, part of his life. Women were there for all of it."*

And Dorothy Sayers, in her collection of essays called *Are Women Human?*, also addresses this observation: *"Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never*

known a man like this Man – there never had been another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them as ‘The women, God help us!’ or ‘The ladies, God bless them!’; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about women’s nature.”

Jesus loved women. He taught women, He listened to women, He didn’t belittle women, He respected women, He included women, He honored women, He valued women, and He trusted them with being the first to preach the good news of His resurrection. He loved women then and He loves women now. So ladies, be encouraged today by all these stories of Jesus’ relationships with women. And church, let’s follow Jesus’ example and respect, include, honor, and value women, but also everyone regardless of their past, present, education, political beliefs, personalities, or whatever else might get in our way of seeing people as Jesus does. As Galatians 3:26-28 reminds us, *“in Christ Jesus [we] are all children of God through faith, for all of [us] who were baptized into Christ have clothed [ourselves] with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus.”* – Sarah Neel