

The Role of Women in the Ministry of Jesus (A Study in the Gospel of Luke)

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the pivotal role of women in the ministry of Jesus Christ, going beyond the often limited historical representation. A comprehensive analysis of the Gospel texts reveals the diverse roles women played, ranging from financial support and direct service to Jesus—such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Salome, who remained faithfully by His side until His death and even participated in His burial—to their role as primary witnesses to His resurrection. These women were not merely passive recipients of Jesus' teachings but were active agents in the spread of the Gospel and the formation of the early Christian community. This study particularly highlights their courage, loyalty, and steadfast faith amidst the patriarchal culture of their time, demonstrating their significant contributions, which have often been overlooked in traditional narratives. Furthermore, the paper explores the theological implications of these women's roles, challenging interpretations that marginalize or underestimate their active participation in Jesus' life and ministry. Thus, this research calls for a more inclusive and balanced interpretation of the Gospel texts to rightly acknowledge the fundamental contributions of women in shaping the history and development of Christianity. It also encourages the continued participation of women in serving God today.

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INTRODUCTION

Women in the Gospel of Luke are regarded as companions of Jesus because they actively participated in His ministry and mission. In Luke 8:1 and onward, it is mentioned that women such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna supported Jesus financially and served His group. Undeniably, Mary Magdalene is one of the most famous women in the New Testament. Her name has been popularized in numerous books. Unfortunately, her portrayal in these popular stories is often

misunderstood, as she is frequently depicted as a "sinful woman (prostitute) who repented" (Robert M. Prince, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, 2011, p. 128). Meanwhile, Joanna is believed to have served Jesus and His disciples with her wealth, as did Susanna.

There are many women who play inspirational roles in the stories written by Luke, beyond just Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. Although their names are not always explicitly mentioned, these women teach us valuable lessons about serving Jesus Christ. Examples include the sinful woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:37-38), the woman who suffered from bleeding (Luke 8:43-48), and the poor widow mentioned in the Gospel (Luke 21:1-4). Each of these women has a remarkable story that remains relevant and applicable in modern life. All of these stories emphasize the role of women in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Luke wants us to understand that these women were not merely "followers"; they were active contributors to the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The main objectives of this paper are to address the following:

1. Women are considered supporters due to their active role in Christ's mission.
2. They are able to create inspiring stories because of their significant contributions to the spread of the Gospel.
3. Their testimonies in the Gospel of Luke, including their witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, highlight their vital roles.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a hermeneutic approach to interpret the role of women in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Data were collected through exegetical analysis of several relevant Bible passages (Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Pauline epistles) as well as a literature review of theological studies discussing similar topics. Data analysis focused on identifying patterns and themes emerging from these various sources, with careful attention to the historical and cultural context of each biblical text to avoid biased interpretations and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of women in the Gospel narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Women as Supporters

In Luke 8:1-3, the Gospel of Luke highlights women who supported Jesus' ministry. Three women are specifically mentioned: Mary Magdalene (from whom seven demons had been cast out), Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward—possibly one of Herod's main sources of information about Jesus and His ministry—and Susanna, who is not mentioned again in the Bible. In addition to these three, there were many other women. These three central women in Luke's Gospel—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna—had been healed of various diseases and evil spirits and subsequently served Jesus and His disciples with their wealth (Luke 8:1-3).

Their roles included:

Financial Support: Providing resources for Jesus' needs, demonstrating that ministry requires material support.

Women were often disregarded and seen as powerless in a society led by religious elites (Wijaya, 2018: p. 143). Addressing this misconception, Suroso in Wijaya explains that Jesus offered a revolutionary approach by openly welcoming women and making them His companions in ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

Women provided financial support in the Gospels, particularly in Jesus' ministry, as an expression of their active participation. In Luke 8:1-3, women like Mary Magdalene and Joanna supported Jesus' mission with their wealth, indicating they were not passive followers but significant contributors to spreading the Gospel. This support reflects the restoration of women's roles in a society that often marginalized them and reinforces that Jesus' ministry included everyone, regardless of gender.

In the Gospel (Luke 8:2-3), it is clear that these women served Jesus' group, including His twelve disciples, with their wealth. One example of women serving Jesus with their wealth is seen in the story of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who anointed Jesus with costly nard oil in Bethany, worth 300 denarii. This proves that Mary was not a poor woman.

During Jesus' journey with His twelve disciples in their mission, there were women who deeply loved and cared for their ministry. It is essential to understand that in the New Testament, the dignity and worth of women are recognized, which was quite different from the Old Testament. Women became Jesus' coworkers throughout His ministry (Iwan Setiawana, Martonob, Yulia Vriska Tripenac, Chresty

Thessy Tupamahud, 2021. Theological Study of Women's Status in the New Testament, p. 167).

Faithfulness: Actively involved in following Jesus to the very end, including during His crucifixion and resurrection.

The faithfulness of the women who followed Jesus can be seen in Luke 23:49. Their loyalty extended beyond the beginning or middle of Jesus' journey—they stayed with Him until His crucifixion and death. While Jesus' disciples became lost, denied, and even abandoned Him, these women never left His side. This demonstrates the immense love and faithfulness these women had in following Jesus.

Faithfulness to Jesus until the end is a calling faced by every follower, even in the face of challenges and suffering. Unconditional loyalty means remaining steadfast to God in every situation, including during persecution or hardship (Revelation 2:10). Endurance in faith results from unwavering belief and commitment, requiring believers to persevere to the end (Matthew 24:13).

Spiritual support, which always relies on Jesus, is essential to maintaining faithfulness. Thus, faithfulness to Jesus is a spiritual journey requiring endurance, sacrifice, and support from God and others. Luke wrote this passage to demonstrate the trustworthiness of women's faithfulness as witnesses to Jesus' death, as they were the first to witness His ministry. This also served to encourage women in the early church to be actively involved in ministry. What Luke wrote directly contrasted with Jewish and Greek culture, where women's testimonies were not accepted, and they had no freedom in religious service.

Luke later recounts how women were involved in ministry and were given the role of being witnesses to their faithfulness to Christ. Because of Mary's great faithfulness to Jesus, He greatly respected women and taught His followers, "Here is your mother!" leading His disciples to accept her into their home (John 19:27). Even amid His suffering on the cross, Jesus made this statement, reflecting His deep love for Mary for her unwavering faithfulness in following Him to the end (Sidauruk, Neston, 2019. Women's Existence in Jesus' Paradigm and Ministry, p. 6).

Empowerment of Women: Showing that women had a crucial role in the work of salvation, not merely as supporters but also as active servants. These women reflect significant dedication and contribution to the ministry of the Gospel.

Service to Jesus Christ encompasses various important aspects of Christian life. The example of women serving Jesus aims to inspire people to actively return to serving Him. Serving others as serving Christ means offering sincere help, reflecting love in everyday actions. Service is a response to God's

grace and must be carried out wholeheartedly as a form of devotion to God. Through service, Christians participate in the mission of salvation and extend Christ's love in the world, regardless of gender.

Sidauruk, Neston, 2019. Women's Existence in Jesus' Paradigm and Ministry, p. 6

B. Women as Inspirational Figures

Luke presents various stories of women, such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Luke 7:2-3); the widow's son in Nain (Luke 7:11-17); the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:37-38); the woman who was bent over for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17); the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48); the girl searching for a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10); the persistent widow pleading before a judge (Luke 18:1-8); and the poor widow who gave all she had (Luke 21:1-4). These stories highlight their contributions to the spread of the Gospel.

Women played a vital role in proclaiming the Gospel, as evidenced by these biblical stories. Mary Magdalene and other women were the first to witness Jesus' resurrection and were entrusted with sharing this news with His disciples (Matthew 28:8) (Pdt. Rustam Miling, S.Th, 2023. The Strength of Women in Evangelism). Furthermore, Jesus did not prohibit women from serving and emphasized that they had the same opportunities and rights in God's work (Luke 8:1-3).

C. Women as Witnesses of Christ's Resurrection

Luke records that women not only followed Jesus but also served and proclaimed the Gospel, serving as witnesses in important events, including His resurrection (Luke 24:10-11). In the Synoptic Gospels, Mary Magdalene is also described as a key eyewitness in Jesus' resurrection. After the angel informed Mary and the other women of His resurrection, they were instructed to inform the disciples. However, the disciples initially did not believe their report. Mary Magdalene then told the disciples that she had personally seen Jesus. She became a crucial witness to His resurrection, strengthening the disciples' faith and providing clear evidence of Jesus' victory over death (Deviros Enakberi, Sumbut Yermianto, A Biographical Study of Mary Magdalene's Life and Ministry According to the Synoptic Gospels, 2023, p. 30).

She also witnessed the crucifixion and was the first to find the empty tomb on the day of the resurrection. Her role challenged traditional views of women's testimony at that time, demonstrating that Jesus valued their contribution to salvation.

It is important to note that in the cultural context of Jesus' time, women's testimonies were considered less credible than men's. In Jewish tradition, women were often regarded as a minority whose testimonies were doubted, even equated with the testimony of robbers. This created challenges for Mary Magdalene and other women as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Nonetheless, their presence in the Gospel narrative shows that Jesus valued women's roles, challenging existing social norms. Their testimony became significant evidence in the context of Christian faith, despite much skepticism.

David Iman Santoso, in *Theology of Luke* (p. 78-79), states, "The four Gospels record that at the break of dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other women went to Jesus' tomb. From here, it is clear that these women were the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection." This news prompted Jesus' disciples to rush to the tomb, where they found no body, for He had risen, just as foretold, and in line with the women's report.

In addition to living alongside Jesus, these women also became witnesses to all the events He endured—from His arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and even His resurrection. Therefore, the testimony of these women became concrete evidence of Jesus' prophecies about what He had told His disciples.

This proves that the role of women as witnesses serves as one of the foundations of Christian belief concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which remains the basis of believers' faith today (Esap Veri, 2021. *Theological Study of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and Its Relevance for Contemporary Christians*, p. 45-46).

CONCLUSION

The ministry of women in the Gospels demonstrates the crucial and equal role they held within the context of the church and society. Jesus valued women, elevating their status from the discriminatory views of His time, and involved them in ministry, such as Mary Magdalene, who became a witness to His resurrection. In the New Testament, women served as evangelists, teachers, and supporters of ministry. Gender equality in ministry affirms that women have the same rights and opportunities to serve God and contribute to the mission of the Gospel.

The ministry of Christian women in the modern era includes various important roles in both the church and society. Christian women are involved in diaconal service, helping the underprivileged, leading prayer groups, and facilitating Bible studies. Despite progress, they still face challenges such

as gender stereotypes and a lack of support in church leadership. Today, women are more active in various fields, including education and social services, contributing to the development of communities and spirituality. Gender equality in the church is increasingly recognized, encouraging women's active participation in leadership roles.

Jesus paid special attention to women in His ministry, challenging the patriarchal norms of His time. He involved women in His ministry journey, as recorded in Luke 8:1-3, where they supported Him with their wealth. Women like Mary Magdalene and Joanna demonstrate that Jesus valued their role, uplifting the status of women in society. Thus, Jesus affirmed that salvation and ministry are open to all, regardless of gender.

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