**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #20**

**Galilean Women Followers of Jesus**

**Luke 8:1-3, 4-8, 9-15,**

**Luke 8 1:3**

***1*** *Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him,* ***2****as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,* ***3****And Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Mary Magdalene was mentioned also in Mark 15:40, 47, Luke 24:10 and John 19:25. She was one of the witnesses of the crucifixion and then the empty tomb. There was a town called Magdala. This name means “tower” in Hebrew.

2. Jesus cast out seven demons. The number seven could mean completely possessed.

3. Joanna is mentioned again in Luke 24:10. The NT does not say anything about her. Joanna is a feminine given name deriving from Greek [***Ἰωάννα***](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E1%BC%B8%CF%89%CE%AC%CE%BD%CE%BD%CE%B1) ***/ Iōanna*** from [Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew) **יוֹחָנָה *Yôḥānnāh*** meaning “God is gracious.”'

4. Joanna is the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward. This Herod is Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1).

5. Susanna or Susanna, or Shoshana in [Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language), but the NT says nothing about her.

6. Women were the early supports of the ministry of Jesus. They must have had access to and acceptance of Jesus’s teaching.

7. It is certainly unusual in the Jewish society for women to support a rabbi, and this account in Luke of the Galilean women is certainly a message for the church not to neglect the ability of women to offer help to the community. Jesus accepted their ministry and he certainly is setting an example for us to think about.

**Luke 8:4-8 - The Parable of the Word of God**

***4*** *When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable:* ***5****. “A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.* ***6****Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture.* ***7****Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it.* ***8****Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Some call this by another name, the “Parable of the Sower” but it is not about a Sower but about the word of God.
2. The scene is familiar for the Palestinian way of putting seeds in the land. Most important is how the seeds were scattered in different ways:

a. Some fell along the footpath. In Palestine according to J. Jeremias, farmers put the seed in the field and plough afterwards, (The Parables, pages 11-12). So some seed fell on footpath of the field or on a rocky soil where thorn bushes grow. Jeremias depended on rabbinic writings (Berkot 7:2).

b. This seed was trampled on and even the birds ate the seed.

c. Some others fell on rocky soil and needed a little cover of the soil, but withered for lack of moisture. Mark added because it had no root.

d. Others fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.

**Luke 8:9-10 - The Meaning of the Parable**

***9****Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant.* ***10****He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that “looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.”*

**Luke 8:11-15 - The Parable Explained**

***11****“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.* ***12****The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.* ***13****The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away.* ***14****As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, the cares and riches and pleasures of life choke them, and their fruit does not mature.* ***15****But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. The parable of the word of God is one of the direct messages, which says that God is generous in treating humanity. From our history we know that there were three schools of thought that tried to define the dynamic understanding of the human nature.

a. The first one is that human nature is born evil, and its renewal is impossible. Some read this in this parable that the various places where the word of God has fallen refer to evil nature of humanity. This was the old school of the Gnostics, but this is false.

b. The second is that we reshape our nature and make it either good or evil by our deeds and the way which we freely chose, which is not very easy to explain as many of us do not believe that we are born as an unfinished project which needs to be completed. The parable is certainly dealing with this kind of understanding of humanity, for those who have made their heart stony or a highway for every thought and every feeling do not give the word of God a good soil to grow or to bring any fruit.

c. The third school is just saying that the parable is about us living in the church, where we are given the word of God but our understanding rather than our nature is the main problem that suffocates the work of the Word of God. This school is certainly the main line of the ascetics of the 4th and 5th centuries all over the universal church.

1. The parable certainly addresses our churches today. It tells us that there are fewer faults in preaching and many more in the hearing. We must remember what we have said before, that Jesus’ condemnation of the generation when he compared himself with John the Baptist and said that the common saying is true for the people in the market who say we played the flute for you but you did not dance; we mourned and you did not weep with us – a struggle between the style and the content will always be the eternal problem of the church in history. Many people leave the churches because of the style of the preachers.
2. The “secrets of the kingdom” is in the original Greek “mystery.” This word mystery has a long history in both the pre-Christian literature of both Judaism and Paganism and in the Christian Writings. So what is a mystery in the Christian sense?

a. It is a cognitive understanding based on the perception of unfamiliar way of the work of God. The nearest way is the common saying by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:

***18****For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ***19****For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.* ***20****Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* ***21****For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.* ***22****For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;* ***23****But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,* ***24****but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Cor. 1)*

Here the Gospel contradicts the “familiar” and that is the human logic. God send his Son to die for sinners, this is what the *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man; the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor 2:9)*

b. The will of God is a secret, which was revealed to the prophets (Amos 3:7 compare also Eph 1:9). Thus the book of Daniel is the book of the secrets of God, (2:18ff, 27, 4:6)

4. What was Jesus actually saying?

a. The Jews will see but will not believe and hear but will not accept. The problem is the Law can harden the human heart. Paul speaks of this in Romans 11:25: *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”*

b. Please note that *“though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”* (1 Cor 13:2)

c. Those who were in the company of Jesus did not understand Jesus and had many doubts even till they witnessed resurrection, for Jesus *is “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his saints.” (Col 1:26) (Notes #20 continued next page)*

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**A Note from Philemon**

**Jesus is the divine mystery**

“It is important for all of us to reveal to the Lord Jesus, how do we understand Him? How do you define the Lord who is the Mystery of the divine Love? We say that Jesus is above all definitions, and that means above our way of analyzing and defining.

If we define Jesus we can end with an “idol” that is a god who we have created by our definitions. The best cure of this hidden paganism is to inspect our love. We transport our human love to our worship and our understanding of doctrines to the extent that the divine love, which is love without a reason, has little or no room at all in our heart. Divine Love must not analyze in the same way as we analyze what we know about our human love. This is because divine love is unknown to us and is why divine love was revealed in the Person of Jesus who is not an idea or a book. We can master ideas and interpret books, but we can’t do the same when we face human persons. I had a visitor who told me that he analyzes persons. I was surprised, for the human heart is deeper than any cave we know, and I asked him how successful he was in his work. He said [he had] very slight success. Jeremiah the prophet said, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? (17:9)* I pray that I will know the secrets of my heart.

We can’t love without a reason; we have reasons for everything because of our limited capacity. For this reason our Lord told us to lend to others without expecting a return of the debt so we can catch a glimpse of divine generosity. In the same way we were asked rather than ordered to forgive the trespassing of others in the Lord’s Prayer for when we forgive for no reason but just as a flow of generosity, we can see the divine love.

This is the mystery of love. It is unusual and beyond definition. Jesus died for me to save me. I did not ask for his death, nor is there anyone who will die for me. Jesus volunteered out of his great love to come to save me.”

**Luke 8:16-18 - The Dynamic of Witness: A Lamp under a Jar**

***16****“No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.* ***17****For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light.* ***18****Then pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away.”*

**Notes and Studies**

1. There is a sense of irony in the saying but it is about how the Jews were looking at the Messiah. It is not a mystery that can be hidden, because the light will shine for those who seek the light.
2. Jesus did not come to give us a secret teaching, for his life was shared publicly with those who heard him.
3. More staggering is the last statement, that to those who have, more will be given, but those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away. The irony is clear: if we possess something and value it, it certainly will grow, but if we think that we have nothing and are naked, we lose sight of what we have. It is a frightening statement about the lack of maturity. For those of us who think that they are nothing, they will never mature. For those of us who think that they have something little, they can work with it and make it grow up.
4. Lastly, what Jesus is saying is that what he says to us cannot be hidden. Let it be known. The caution is the fear of the condemnation of the society, which in its legalistic understanding of the kingdom has hushed all attempts to speak out loud of God’s mercy and love.

**Luke 8:19-21 - The True Hearers of the Word**

***19****Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd.* ***20****And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.”* ***21****But he said to them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”*

**Notes and Studies**

1. This portion of the Gospel of Luke militates against three major issues in the Jewish society.

a. The ethic belonging to the people of God, which is located in the family relationship, does not qualify for anything. This will appear later on in the out-loud cry of Paul in the letter to the Galatians.

b. Hearing and doing is the same thing in Hebrew. There aren’t really two verbs for hearing and doing. For Christians who don’t know Hebrew, when they hear the confession of Ancient Israel that starts with the word Shema which means “hear” it also means “do it.” The Lord our God is one God and you shall worship the Lord, not by hearing, but by doing.

c. We must notice that while Jesus denied his biological link with his mother and brothers and qualified those who hear the word of God and do it as mothers brothers and sisters, he did not include father in that relationship because he is completely dependent on the Heavenly Father.