

## Jesus Protected Women

### The first of three articles

Most of us do not think of Jesus as a protector of women. When we see the abuse of women in our culture, we don't have a Biblical solution because scriptures related to the subject do not come to mind. I would like to help by addressing three passages which relate to Jesus dealing with violence against women.

The first example clearly shows how Jesus protected a woman who was the victim of someone's political agenda. The passage is in the eighth chapter of John's gospel, where we see a woman "taken in the act of adultery". The Old Testament proscribed stoning for adultery. What did Jesus say?

First of all, we know that the crowd, at least the instigators, were seeking an opportunity to trap Jesus--either to have him repudiate the law of Moses, and thus God's authority, or to have him promote stoning outside the jurisdiction of the Roman authorities. The former would discredit him in the eyes of the righteous; the latter would provide a basis to accuse Jesus of initiating rebellion.

The amazing thing was this: the woman was simply a means to achieve their end. She was set up. These people had an air of spiritual indignation against her sin; some may have been sincere but were themselves used by those who plotted Jesus' downfall. But in this indignation, whether superficial or real, there was a total lack of concern for real justice (for where was the man involved in the adultery?). And there was a total lack of concern for the woman--no concern that she live a godly life, and no concern that she come to terms with her guilt before God for her part in the sin.

Jesus protected the woman by appealing to the consciences of the crowd: "Let him without sin cast the first stone." Regardless of their sincerity, these people had a double standard--they were hypocrites. The crowd disbanded, beginning with the oldest.

Then Jesus showed his concern for the woman and her sin. He showed the concern which should have been shown by those who had spiritual oversight and direct knowledge of the sin. Instead of using her, the leaders should have headed off this and any other sin on the woman's part; but they were the ones who allowed sin to fester and exploited it for their own purposes. But Jesus spoke of forgiveness: "Neither do I condemn you." Then he measured out an appropriate, effective admonition: "Go and sin no more."

I have to believe that the admonition was, in this case, appropriate adjudication of the law by the Lord of grace. In any case, we know that Jesus' response sprang from a genuine concern for her, for her assurance of the grace of God, and for her

continued walk with the Lord who would go to the cross for her and our sins. We know Jesus was sincere. And we know the results: she was protected from the violence of this mob and from her destructive lifestyle. Remarkably, she never had to fear the tyranny of that mob again--its power was permanently broken.

Of course, this passage from John chapter 8 is relevant in the sense that we tend to be hypocrites and overlook our own sins in condemning others. But it is also relevant to the abortion movement, where women are exploited for the sake of someone's political agenda.

Women today are exploited under a ruse of righteous indignation and a multitude of other concerns--for privacy, for the woman's financial future, for personal freedom, from a child growing up "unwanted", --even to environmental concerns for landfills overburdened with diapers. Guilt can be a great weapon in all of this, skillfully used by those whose real concern is their political goal. But many others with these same concerns simply are being used. Regardless of the sincerity of those on the side of abortion, we have the same effective weapon Jesus had--an appeal to conscience.

We can be thankful for those who emulate the concern Christ had for the woman he protected--a real concern for those who find themselves in problem pregnancies. Yes, a life was at stake then and now. But we can be thankful that the concern for these women, for many, goes beyond their little ones, to the salvation and emotional well being of the mother, and to the loving, effective concerns for any self-destructive behavior which may be present.

## Jesus Protected Women

### The second of three articles

Because we are not familiar with scriptures that reveal Jesus as a protector of women, I thought I would relate three situations where I believe Jesus demonstrated some timeless principles which we, His disciples, are called to employ in the protection of women.

In the first passage, I tried to show how Jesus protected the woman taken in adultery. She was a mere pawn in someone's political agenda--that of discrediting Christ. Jesus appealed to the conscience of the crowd when He said, "Let him without sin cast the first stone."

The second passage I would relate, from Mark's gospel, chapter 14, and the parallel passage in John 12, describes Jesus' response to the disciples who tried to put a big "guilt trip" on Mary for "wasting" a large container of perfume she had poured out on Jesus. While Mark shows all the disciples' involvement, John brings out the fact that Judas was at the root of this harassment. Judas was a thief; he manipulated this woman and the other disciples because he was a thief, and wanted to profit from this gift.

The amount was large; it was a container that could have been purchased by a retailer from a caravan. It had to be "broken" because it was hermetically sealed at the source--somewhere near India--to prevent tampering, i.e., someone's diluting the product as it passed through the many hands of trade. As men who buy perfume would say, "This was the real stuff." It was sealed to prevent exploitation of the purchaser--the very objective of Judas.

The sad thing was that Mary was doing what the disciples and everyone else should have been doing--honoring the perfect, sinless Son of God for the sacrifice of himself on the cross, a preparation for his death and burial. Her unselfish, caring, worshipful attitude contrasted sharply with the ugly self-seeking and shameful theatrics of Judas. This skillful, professional manipulator carried along the rest of the disciples. (It is interesting that the gospel writers show that the disciples were the ones being duped--there is no mention of the woman believing this ruse--but she was certainly victimized by it.)

While we see Jesus taking the disciples aside for private correction in other passages, Jesus in this passage was instant and direct in his rebuke. "Let her alone!" This is what the church should be saying to men who abuse women. We should not be embarrassed for them or coddle them.

Some women are abused by husbands and boyfriends in this way. Day after day, the weapon of guilt is used to manipulate. Their unselfish service to their families is thrown up in their

faces as Judas did: "Why was this not sold and the money given to the poor?" Like Judas, men who abuse women have their own selfishness at the root of their manipulation.

"Why are you bothering her?" Jesus said. This is the very question Judas should have asked himself; he knew the answer, for Jesus spoke to his conscience. I suppose the other disciples were brought to contrition by Jesus' unusually strong rebuke. But Judas' next steps, as we see in verse 10 of Mark 14, were to the chief priests in betrayal of his Lord. While this did not seem to be a violent situation, Jesus did literally lay down his life.

But Jesus also honored Mary with his words. The others could "honor the poor" at any time, with their own resources. Jesus said that Mary "did what she could", meaning that she used her own resources in contrast to the disciples who speculated about what "could have been" done for the poor, with someone else's resources. Mary sought to give Christ a memorial; Jesus left a memorial for her in stating that wherever the gospel was preached, her unselfish act would be spoken of.

Jesus demonstrated what our response should be in protecting women; we, as church elders, friends, and counselors, should be careful that we don't beat them up again. We should extol their good deeds; we should honor them. We should also acknowledge that we men (including teenagers) have been guilty many times of abusing our wives and mothers this way--of turning a deed of service into some kind of offense.

Horribly, we see this manipulation played out in the abortion scenario. Abortions are among the most lucrative medical procedures in the country. But those who make money are not going to say, "Do this so we can make money." These deceivers get everyone else caught up in their "concern" for bringing an unwanted child into the world. Those who seek to protect the child with the rule of law--the normal way we protect persons--are termed "mean spirited". A woman's family and the father of the child can be merciless in heaping guilt related to their reputation, finances, time, and freedom to pursue goals or retirement.

For the Judas Iscariots in the pro-abortion contingent, we should remember that Jesus was kind to Judas; he did not single him out, but addressed his sin along with the other disciples; he did not publicly reveal the real motivations of his heart; Jesus did not speak to incite, but to bring conviction, to protect Mary, and to nip this behavior in the bud. Later, when betrayed, Jesus addressed Judas as "friend".

We should remember that if Jesus had said nothing, this weapon of guilt formulated by Judas, and hurled by the rest of the disciples, would have been successful in bringing Mary down; her good deed would have been in her own eyes as something bad--a memorial to her own selfishness. If we say nothing, a woman involved in a problem pregnancy may fall as well to the assault of guilt; she actually may think she is being selfish in trying to

save the child; having an abortion, she is led to believe, is the unselfish choice.

Thank God for those who reassure the pregnant woman that she is the unselfish one for shielding that little one sealed away in the protection of her womb and for desiring to raise the child for Christ.

## Jesus Protected Women

### The third of three articles

This is my third example of how Jesus protected women. Because we are disciples--learners--of His, we are called to apply these same principles.

In the first passage I discussed, Jesus protected the woman taken in adultery. She was a victim of someone's political agenda--that of discrediting Christ.

The second article related, both from Mark and from John, the gospel account of the disciples who used guilt as a weapon on Mary for "wasting" a large container of perfume she had poured out on Jesus. While Mark shows that all the disciples were involved, John brings out the fact that Judas was the source of the problem; he manipulated this woman and the other disciples because he was a thief, and wanted to profit from this gift. Jesus protected Mary both from being used for Judas' gain, and from being hurt by the other disciples' thoughtlessness.

The third passage is from Luke, chapter 7, and is very similar to the passage concerning the anointing by Mary, except here the woman was not an invited guest, but came in off the street. The event occurred at a very different time in Jesus' life, when the religious establishment was courting him, guardedly; in this case, it was by Simon, a Pharisee.

At Simon's dinner, the woman entered after learning that Jesus was there; she wet Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair, then anointed them with a perfume.

Simon was oblivious to the drama before him; his only thought was to the superficial--"If Jesus were a prophet, he would have known what kind of woman she was." The amazing thing here was that Jesus proceeded to tell Simon not only what kind of woman she was, but what kind of man he was, as revealed by his secret thoughts and by the absence of certain actions.

Simon loved little in contrast to the woman: He did not anoint Jesus, he gave him no kiss of welcome, he did not wash Jesus' feet--all contrary to the custom of the day for an honored guest. The woman loved much, because she had been forgiven much.

Simon, like many of us, was oblivious to what was going on of a spiritual nature. He was oblivious to the drama of faith and conversion, and so he was oblivious to the One who was the author and object of that faith. Simon had no appreciation for salvation, so he had no appreciation for the Savior.

Jesus told of two debtors--one who owed much, and one who owed little. Both, however, were at the mercy of the moneylender because, in his parable, Jesus said that both were unable to pay.

Simon may have recognized his need for forgiveness, but he did not put himself in the same situation of need as this woman, and he certainly did not see himself as a great sinner in need of great mercies.

Simon was typical of all the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day. Jesus' thoughts of the Pharisees are described in Matthew 23: "You shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering in to go in."

The Pharisees were "control freaks"; they controlled those for whom they had spiritual accountability, but not for their ultimate good or spiritual benefit. Both the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles tell us that these religious leaders were moved with jealousy and sought to kill both Jesus and the apostles when the people began to follow them. It is strange that there are those who want to control others but not to help them.

Jesus would not allow Simon to thwart the work of grace and faith in this woman; again, he nips that protest in the bud before it is even on Simon's lips. Simon would say that she was "that kind of woman" --a woman of a particular type that doesn't change. You can lecture them; you can license them; you can "control" them--but you cannot offer them change, Simon would tell us. But Jesus assured the woman that she had brought special gifts, which were acceptable because of her faith in the Savior; her sins, though many, were forgiven; she could go in peace. But such a one would not have gone in peace had Simon had his way.

We know that, in our culture, there are men who abuse the women they control; these two perversions of love and responsibility seem to feed one another. Any threat to control is an opportunity for abuse. Women in these relationships of control are reminded constantly of the "kind of women" they are, where they would be without that man; but they are rarely nurtured, and certainly not nurtured in a spiritual sense.

We are baffled when we see this sick scenario played out in a woman's life; we then, understandably, are baffled when we see an entire culture that seeks to "shut off" the kingdom of God to certain young women today. We do not understand the forces behind giving condoms and abortions to young women without their parents' knowledge or approval. These relationships of control are protected jealously and powerfully, just as they were in the days of Jesus and the apostles.

But we are faced with the kindness of Jesus to Simon. Just as Jesus appealed, successfully, to the consciences of the crowd ready to stone the adulteress--and just as Jesus would later appeal to the consciences of the disciples and Judas who sought to shame Mary for her generous act--so we see Jesus kindly appealing to Simon. His words protected the embryonic faith of the penitent woman and, at the same time, prodded Simon. Simon was called to consider his dependence on the mercies of God and to agree with Jesus that this lukewarmness to his guest was evidence of his

deeper spiritual need. Jesus' response to being treated rudely was to share the gospel; may we do likewise!

I like the fact that those who were so quick to categorize the woman and to categorize Jesus were now asking, "Who is this that forgives sins?" Now they had questions.

It is worth noting that Jesus was able to speak to Simon because he was a guest at a meal. Not many pro-abortion or pro-control individuals are going to read a Christian newsletter. Christ's disciples are going to have to be out in the trenches to speak to the consciences of our generation--one by one--as Jesus did. We can also use mealtime with our spouses and children to address the worldly attitudes toward women that inevitably surface.

We can be thankful for those who reassure young women that they can say "no" to relationships of control, say "no" to violence, and say "no" to molds that from their births seem to banish hope for any different kind of life. What a wonderful thing--to tell someone to "go in peace"; but we cannot say that without knowing that we have a wonderful Savior who enables us all to leave sinful and self-destructive lifestyles behind. We can be thankful for those who nurture fragile faith with the many assurances that "He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus". We can be thankful, for the apostle Paul, a "Pharisee of the Pharisees", who is evidence that the "Simon's", too, can be redeemed by Christ.

We see something of the immensity of the love of Jesus in how he intervened differently with the three women I have discussed. The first woman was dragged from the act of adultery by a makeshift court into Jesus' presence early one morning. Mary was chastised verbally. But this woman of the account in Luke, with faith so new, was protected from even a word. Jesus' knowledge of our frames, our constitutions, and our weakness goes far beyond our imaginations, and certainly beyond poor Simon's presumptuous assessments.