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Blessed by Women
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In a patriarchal society – which characterized most of the culture in which the Bible as a whole was written

In a time when women were considered to be property

In a time when a women's testimony wouldn't even hold up in court, and where a husband could stone his wife if she did not comply with his wishes;

where women were considered unclean and only good for the bearing of children

We have an amazing number of places in this book called the Bible that lift up the status of women, and confer dignity and honor to them – more than just about any other sacred text written during these ancient times.

Still, usually in sermons, when we go to church, we hear a lot about what men did in Scripture. Moses, Elijah, the disciples and Paul – were all men!

But today, on Mother's Day 2018, I thought perhaps we could just take a peek at some of the ways that women are honored in Scripture – and how very liberating and almost radical that was at the time these texts were written.

For each of these women, the scripture from Proverbs on the front of your bulletin applies:

“She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future.”

As far as I am concerned that's the best part of that whole passage, because it speaks to the internal state of a woman who is confident in God's calling on her life.

First of all we have books in Scripture that are named after women – that have women’s names...one of those books is RUTH

Unheard of back then to have a book with the title being a woman’s name!!

Let’s take a look at Ruth...

RUTH

Ruth is story of friendship, and Ruth is also mentioned in Matthew’s gospel.

Where is she mentioned?

Ruth is in the geneology of Jesus.

Women are never mentioned in genealogies for Jews. Traditionally, only men are mentioned.

Yet Ruth is the great, great, great, great, great (how many) grandmother of Jesus.

And what is so amazing about this is that Ruth was a Moabitess.

Moabites were Gentiles and arch-enemies of the Jews. In fact there is a scripture that says the following:

Deuteronomy 23;3 No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord,

The fact that Ruth is a book in the Bible and also part of Jesus’ geneology, not only lifts up women, but women who are Gentiles from every race and culture.

It speaks to God’s inclusion of all people through Jesus.

Ruth's story is about her tenacious friendship – she never gives up on her mother-in law Naomi...just as Jesus never gives up on his friendship and presence with all of us.

Ruth the female Moabitess...actually foreshadows the very nature of Christ.

Maybe you are in a situation walking with someone and you want to give up. **Ruth encourages us – never give up. Trust God. Be loyal in your friendships and you will reflect the very nature of Christ who never gives up on us.**

Two other women are mentioned too in the geneology of Jesus – strong women – incredible people. One is Tamar – and I can't get into that story cause I don't have time...but the other women in Jesus' geneology is **Rahab** the prostitute.

Now its Mother's day – not really a time to talk about prostitutes...but quite frankly this prostitute Rahab was used by God to help the Hebrews cross over into the promised land.

Rahab was fearless! She was strong! She hangs a scarlet cord out her window and tells the spies when it is safe to enter the city. She helps God's people when no one else would, get to the promised land.

This story has a lot of suspense to it. Spies, scarlet cords, secret meetings. You almost need some scary music with it. And in the end, although the city is destroyed Rahab is saved and lived in Israel with her family all her days.

She is mentioned in Hebrews -

Hebrews 11:31

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

Many say the scarlet cord that Rahab hung out of her window to let the spies know it was safe to cross over, was a foreshadowing of

Jesus blood, shed for us, to give us safe passage to heaven.
Amazing that Rahab is mentioned in Jesus' genealogy – isn't it?

Maybe you have done some things that you are not proud of. Jesus' forgiveness covers it. He uses us, , and gives us back dignity and honor when we turn to him– he receives us as his own.

Strength and dignity was given to Rahab the harlot and she is mentioned twice in the NT in addition to being mentioned in Jesus' genealogy - as well as multiple times in the Old T for her faith and service to God's people.

Then there is **Esther** – the other book in the Bible with a female name. Esther is a Jewish girl, living in Persia with the rest of the Jewish nation.

She wins a beauty contest and becomes Queen. The Gentile King Artaxerxes, doesn't know she is a Jew, and decides to murder all the Jews.

Well guess what?

Esther in her position actually saves the Jewish people.

Maybe you have heard the very famous quote from the book of Esther that Mordecai, Esther's Uncle says to her ... "**Perhaps God has put you into this position, for such a time as this**".

Encouraging Esther, saying that God had a purpose and a plan for her.

Through Esther's influence, the whole Jewish nation is saved. Today the Jews celebrate this event when they celebrate the festival of Purim. Great story! (Apocrypha)

Esther illustrates God's purpose in all things, even winning a beauty contest.

Maybe you are in a situation right now...that you don't understand... but it is exactly for such a time as this. God has you there for a reason. **God's purpose and plan are always at work...** Know that and be encouraged.

Now we will move to the NT. In the NT we have Jesus who talked to Gentile women, such as **The Samaritan Woman** whom many have said is the first evangelist in all of scripture!

Women were not to be spoken to in public by men back then, and Samaritans as a race were hated by the Jews.

The fact that Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman in the middle of the day, by the well (a social hang out) is a double whammy. Look at the Scripture...

The Samaritan woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he,^[d] the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a Samaritan woman....

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him (Jesus) because of the woman's testimony....(John 4, selected)

Again, a woman of questionable character, being given dignity and honor because of Jesus' presence with her.

At a time when women were not honored, Samaritans hated, and the Samaritan woman despised (came at noon to the well) It is **Jesus** who lifts her up and **creates the first evangelist in scripture – and it's a woman.**

Moving on...

Maybe you have heard about **Mary and Martha**. Soul mates of Jesus who lived in Bethany. Jesus would retreat to their home often from the stresses of his itinerant ministry.

Jesus never had a home of his own. Never lived the American Dream. It was Mary and Martha's home (which was also the home of Lazarus, their brother) that was the closest thing to it.

Sometimes when we think of the story of Mary and Martha we think about the time when Mary was sitting listening to Jesus and Martha was busy serving.

And Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better thing...by not rushing around serving but by listening to him.

One little detail we often miss in this story is that Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet. That position was very significant.

Sitting at the feet of a rabbi was a place reserved only for men. It was a place that offered education and tutorial in the law, and the prophets.

Jesus is basically saying to Martha, come and take this honored position, at my feet that Mary has taken. You are just as valuable and honored as any male student. You too can learn of me, Martha.

Jesus was way beyond his time honoring and lifting up women, and putting them into ministry.

Very briefly two more women whom we find in the book of Acts.

These are women directly involved in ministry, and absolutely essential in the birth of the early Christian Church that we don't hear too much about.

One is **Priscilla** who works with her husband Aquilla to preach and teach. The fact that Priscilla is always mentioned first indicates that she was the primary teacher and evangelist – not her husband. Really interesting...

Here is one excerpt about them in Scripture....

Apollos (a new believer) began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.

So from the Samaritan woman, to Mary and Martha, to Priscilla, scripture lifts up women, honors them with strength and dignity and qualifies and anoints them to do ministry.

Totally counter-cultural. Completely renegade...out of the ordinary in those ancient times. Women...take that in.

There are so many more women that I could mention...that had a huge influence on spreading the gospel and teaching and prophesying...

If I had time I'd talk with you more about them...

Deborah – A wise judge and leader in OT times who influenced the Israelites at a critical juncture to follow Gods ways – huge position of leadership

Or

Lydia – a wealthy woman, who sold purple garments, and who helped Paul get the church started by allowing it to meet in her home

There are so many more...

But I want to end with **Lois and Eunice**. If you look towards the back of your Bible you will see two letters written by Paul to a guy named Timothy.

Timothy was a young helper to St Paul. 2 Timothy 1:5 speaks of Lois and Eunice – Timothy's Mom and grandmother.

2 Timothy 1:5

⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now... lives in you.

So, I want to thank all the mothers and grandmothers who have raised their children in the faith. You are giving them the best heritage! An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy where kid's faith is concerned.

I want to thank all women, who maybe didn't have children of their own but who nurtured people God brought to them, and who didn't give up on them, and were a friend to them, like Ruth

I want to thank all women who have been in difficult situations but have recognized God's purpose and plan in the midst of it all, and hung in there through the years, like Esther, and prevailed – and in so doing saved people they loved

I want to thank women who have received a calling from God to evangelize like the Sam Woman, for doing that faithfully. Sharing Christ boldly and openly...such an important calling.

Or those women who have received a calling from God to preach like Priscilla,

Or a calling from God to get educated in a specific area of ministry – to learn and grow – just like Jesus called Martha and Mary to sit at his feet and do that...

Friends, all these women I mentioned and many more are examples for us to follow,

They are in the Bible,
If you didn't know it before, know it now, that the Bible lifts up women and honors them and calls them into ministry...

I hope this look at Scripture pulling out just a few of the women that God used, in a time when women were considered to be unfit to lead and learn, will encourage you...

And I'd like to close reading the scripture together that Karen read for us today....from the book of Joel...

**In those days, says the Lord,
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.**

...Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved;

Joel 2: 28-29, 32

Let us as men, and as women, as mothers and grandmothers, be faithful to that same Holy Spirit who calls us all. Amen