**Jesus the Game Changer Church Campaign**

**Week 3 Sermon Outline**

**WOMEN & CHILDREN**

In modern western nations, it is very hard to grasp what it was like to be a woman, or the place of children at the time of Jesus. There are still struggles for women to gain parity in pay in many occupations, and recent revelations from the entertainment industry, show that the abuse of women by powerful men, still exits. These attitudes should be challenged and ought to not be part of a society where we believe in the equality of men and women.

While there is still more to be done, the difference between a women’s life today and that in the past, is black and white. It is important to say that there were some wealthy and powerful women in Jesus’ day that had position and power, however this was a tiny and insignificant number against the general population. The place of children today in most western nations is one of care and protection. It is not to suggest that the people of Jesus’ day did not care for their children, (note Jairus in Luke 8: 41-42), but children were not treated with the same worth as they are today.

In the case of women, they had no rights and were treated as possessions by the men in their lives. Plato wrote that women were inferior to men in every way; intellectually, physically and emotionally, and should be treated as such. Women were married to older men in their mid to late teens and had little choice in who they married. They had no rights in the marriage and the expectation was that they would produce male offspring. They could be divorced easily with no recourse. If a woman wanted to go to court, she could not represent herself, but had to take a man with her, as her testimony did not count. O.M. Bakke in his book “When Children Became People” quotes Plato, and writes how he frequently grouped children together with other marginal actors in classical society: women, slaves and animals.

The low place of children, particularly babies and women in general, was demonstrated by an awful but regular action called exposure. In the Greco Roman world, it seems there was around 20-25% more men than women, so when you can’t choose the sex of your child, why the disparity in gender numbers? This is partly explained by exposure. If you wanted a boy and a baby girl was born; or if for some reason you were not able to provide another child, you took the baby outside and exposed it to the elements. If someone found the child, it may have a life, most probably as a slave, but if not, it died. Girls were a drain on the family and a financial liability for the future. Therefore, they were viewed as expendable.

This is a culture Bakke writes where “Children and slaves were the father’s property, just like material objects. To a very large extent, he could treat his wife, his children, and other household members as he pleased, without fear of legal consequences.”

It is little wonder that Jewish men at that time would pray – “I thank you God that I was not born a gentile, a slave or a woman.”

**Jesus**

Then into this culture came Jesus who treated women and children in a radically different way.

Luke 8: 1-3

Luke unfolds the story of Jesus’ ministry through this gospel narrative. He includes all sorts of interesting pieces of information. Here he mentions three women that not only follow Jesus, but also support his ministry. First mentioned is Mary Magdalene. Many have assumed she is a prostitute, but there is no evidence from Luke or any other writers that was the case. What we do know was that several demons were cast out of her and she is indebted to Jesus. There is also Joanna, linked to Herod’s household, a position of privilege and potential influence. Finally, Susanna, only mentioned here, who out of her own means supports Jesus.

It’s instructive to note that some of these women are also mentioned at Jesus’ crucifixion when all the male disciples had run away (Mark 15: 40-41). They also find the tomb empty, announcing Jesus had risen (Luke 24: 10).

John 20: 10-18

Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb with other women to add spices to the body of Jesus. It was a custom of dealing with the dead and was one of honour and respect. When they get there, Jesus’ body had disappeared. John recounts that the others ran back to the rest of Jesus’ followers to tell them what they had discovered, but Mary remains in the garden. John records that the first person whom Jesus revealed himself to as the risen Lord, was a woman. In a community where the testimony of women did not count in courts of law, and if you were inventing this story of a resurrected Jesus, the only reason you would include a story of Jesus appearing first to a woman was because that is precisely what occurred. Alongside of this factor, it is instructive that Jesus did appear to a woman first. Jesus held women with respect and honour, and this story is an example of the important place women held in Jesus’ ministry. Remember this is in a culture that did not give women the respect they deserved, so Jesus’ action was a radical departure from the culture of the time.

Luke 10: 38-42

At first reading, with today’s attitudes and behaviours in mind, this is a surprising story. Here was Martha working away to prepare a meal while Mary is just sitting around. When Martha points out this obvious injustice, Jesus sides with the lazy sister. This does not seem fair.

Key to this story is that Mary wasn’t just sitting around, she was learning. Martha had taken the traditional role for women of preparing food. Mary on the other hand, was sitting at Jesus’ feet, the place of learning. Here was a woman learning, growing in knowledge and expanding her mind. When Martha complains, Jesus makes the point that Mary is learning and its importance “and it will not be taken away from her”. Not even by her industrious and annoyed sister, or by a culture that believed she should not learn.

Matthew 18: 1-6

In episode 7 of Jesus the Game Changer, we look at humility and leadership. In this episode, the attitude of the Greco Roman world to pride, position and power is discussed. What is clear, is that talking about how wonderful you were, was fairly usual behaviour. Here in this passage, it seems that this was the topic of the disciples’ conversation (verse 1) asking Jesus who was the greatest. Jesus wants to make a point about greatest, so uses a child. Jesus places a child in the midst of the gathering and uses the child as an example of what greatest looks like. This is both a lesson for the male leaders on humility, but also an example of the importance of children.

**Paul**

Ephesians 5: 25-32

Many see the Christian churches attitude to women as misogynistic. Passages like this in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church, especially verses 22-24, seem to suggest men should control women.

Yet, in the context of this culture, Paul is radical in his attitude towards women and his teaching to men.

In this passage, Paul tells men to treat their wives as they treat themselves and to give themselves to their wives as Christ did for the church. Keep in mind this is said to older men who have younger wives.

**Rodney Stark**

A guest on the series, Rodney Stark, sociologist and researcher from Baylor University in Texas, suggests that the life of women in Christian families is far and away better than the rest of society. They married a little older, they had more choice, they could not easily be divorced, and their husbands were taught that it was not right to be sexually unfaithful to their wife, a usual practice at that time. In fact, Stark reflected: “It’s a wonder that every woman did not became Christian.”

**Today**

*[Spoken as a male speaker. If you are a woman speaking, you may want to personalise this section.]*

In a world where women are continuing to be treated as objects, it is the message of Jesus that helps women see themselves as free to be themselves in Christ.

Guest speaker on Jesus the Game Changer, Jo Vitale makes this statement:

“I've found a freedom that I don't see anywhere else in our culture. A freedom from being objectified, from being seen as just a sexual object, a freedom to become who God has called me to be in every aspect of life, and it's not about meeting cultural expectations and what society says I have to do. It's about who does God call me to be.”

Many criticise the Christian faith due to a narrow reading of some verses, as being misogynistic to women, but women like Jo Vitale have found freedom in the teaching of Jesus.

**The challenge of this message is threefold.**

**Firstly –** Jesus’ life and teaching made a radical difference for women in the way He treated them and the example He gave to the Early Church. The Early Church gave women the opportunity to participate in ministry and have a sense of significance, far ahead of the culture in which they lived.

Yet even with the radical change this made, and with all the shifts across the globe for women’s rights, there are ongoing challenges.

* Sex slavery and trafficking of women globally, continues to be an enormous challenge.
* Women are being objectified constantly in advertising and media, putting pressure on women to live up to impossible images.
* The cosmetic surgery industry is a multi-billion dollar industry, often built on women seeking to fulfill the unrealistic expectations of men and our community.
* The prolific growth of pornography is creating expectations of men about their intimate relationships that are demeaning to women.
* Domestic violence continues to grow in Australia as women die at the hands of their partners or ex-partners.

**Secondly** – Every male must reconsider again how they look at women; how they think about women and how they treat women. In a culture that celebrates the freedom and opportunity of women, we are also a culture that continually objectifies women and judges them on how they look rather than who they are. This is true across media and entertainment industries, so much so that we fail to notice the influence this has on our own attitudes.

**Thirdly** – Women; you are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of your creator God. Jesus lifted your place and the dignity given to you. Seek to live out the words of Jo Vitale; you should not be judged on your appearance; you are not a sexual object; Christ has given you the freedom to live life being the person you have been created to be. Live in that freedom.