

Celebrating Moms and Women

Talking about Mother's Day and the Importance of Women in Ministry

Thesis: Today we want to celebrate moms and women. Our Lord, the kingdom of God, and Scripture have always had a much higher view of women in comparison with culture and the world.

Text: John 20:17-18; Romans 16:1-2

Today we want to celebrate moms and women. Our Lord, the kingdom of God, and Scripture have always had a much higher view of women in comparison with culture and the world.

I pray today that as we share about the impact of women through the lens of Scripture, that we will honor and bless both moms and women for their place in the kingdom of God and in our lives.

First, we will honor and bless moms. Then, I want to talk about the importance of women in ministry.

Honoring and Blessing Moms

Thank you, Moms:

- Thank you for your prayers for us, how you have travailed for God's purposes.
- Thank you for what you have held close to your heart: the promises and purposes which God has revealed to you about your children and about others.
- Thank you for your nurturing heart.
- Thank you for the sacrifices you have made for your children, families, and community.

On this Mother's Day, I believe that the Lord wants to bring you near, to gather you to himself like a shepherd does a lamb, or like a mom does her children:

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young (Isaiah 40:10-11).

I pray that you will feel the tender embrace of the Lord this morning.

Someone said it well concerning this special day:

*But I also want Mother's Day for a lot of other mothers.
I want Mother's Day for all the mothers who never held their living babies.
I want Mother's Day for all the mothers who are still hoping for a child.
I want Mother's Day for all the mothers who said goodbye to a child much too soon.
And I want Mother's Day for those who no longer have a mother to send a card to.*

I pray that every mother—

*the mothers who hold their children,
the mothers who hope for children,
the mothers who have said goodbye to a child too soon—*

will all feel seen, and remembered, and loved this Mother's Day. And that we can all live a better life in the present because of the children we love so much.

(Kristen Ivy, May 9, 2015, <http://theparentcue.org/mothers-with-no-babies-to-hold>.)

I pray that each of you-- even though we may be physically separated from one another because of the coronavirus-- that each of you will feel seen, remembered, and loved this Mother's Day. I see you. We see you. And, we bless and honor you today.

I pray for mothers who carry a burden for a wayward child and/or grandchild-- may the Lord give you grace to keep praying and faith to believe in the power of God to reach those far from him. Thank you for your steadfast prayers.

I pray for those who are single, who long to be married and to have children. Lord, I ask you to hear the cries of their hearts. I ask you to draw near to them with comfort and grace. I pray that they will have grace, faith, and purity to live in the tension of a holy desire and a longing not yet fulfilled.

Lord, gather these lambs to yourself and give them your presence, your grace, your strength, and your comfort. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

A High View of Women in the Eyes of God, the Kingdom of God, and Scripture

There is a debate among some circles about whether or not the Bible supports women in ministry.

I believe that women are given a much higher view than culture in the eyes of God, the kingdom of God, and Scripture.

Does the Bible support women in ministry?

Let's look at 2 passages of Scripture that provide a foundation for the narrative and interpretation of other scriptures: John 20 and Romans 16.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her (John 20:1-18 NIV).

Mary Magdalene had been there at the crucifixion of Jesus along with Mary the Mother of Jesus, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and the Apostle John.

Now, Mary is the first one to see the empty tomb. She is the first one to tell the apostles that the tomb is empty.

Peter and John ran to the tomb. After the seeing the empty tomb, the disciples just went back to their homes. Mary stays outside the tomb of Jesus, crying. All of them were still hurting, disillusioned, confused, and grieving.

Now, something extraordinary happens. Think about it. Jesus is raised from the dead. And the first person he meets is Mary Magdalene.

Who was Mary? Before she met Jesus, she was afflicted by 7 demons, which Jesus cast out of her (Luke 8:2). Jesus changed her life, healed her, set her free, and gave her a life of meaning and purpose.

Jesus and Mary have an encounter in which he reveals himself to her in his physical, resurrected body.

Then, Jesus tells Mary to go to the disciples and to tell "my brothers" that "I am returning [ascending] to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

This declaration is the foundational reality of all of Christian ministry. It is the news that the crucified Jesus, who has been raised from the dead, is now to be the Lord of the world. And it is Mary Magdalene who gets to share that news and minister that news first (NT Wright, Facebook post, 2'20'20).

The other passage is Romans 16.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me (Romans 16:1-2 NIV).

[There] are several names [in Romans 16] which strike us as interesting in their own right. We note, not least, the importance of the women in the list. Paul

names them as fellow-workers, without any sense that they hold a secondary position to the men....

And of course, heading the chapter, is a Christian not in Rome but in Cenchreae, where Paul has been staying. Cenchreae was the eastern port of Corinth.... There is already a church there; in our own day the land at that point has slipped into the sea.... Phoebe is a deacon in this church, holding an office whose precise significance remains a matter of debate (it was probably a junior role, below those who were variously called 'elders' or 'overseers') but which clearly involved some responsibility.

Phoebe has, says Paul, been a benefactor to himself and many others (verse 2). That doesn't just mean that she has helped him out with hospitality, though that may have been so as well. It means that she belongs in that class of people, vital for the health of ancient societies, who put their private means at public disposal. To be called a 'benefactor' was a great honour. Indeed, the emperor himself claimed to be the state's supreme benefactor. Phoebe was clearly a person of substance and leadership. She was almost certainly going to Rome on business on her own account, and it is a matter of great significance that it is to her that Paul entrusts the delivery of this, his fullest and most remarkable letter (NT Wright, Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 2: Chapters 9-16).

Paul gives the letter written to the Romans, one of the most important letters ever written, to Phoebe.... Paul asked Phoebe to take the letter and to deliver it to the different house churches in Rome. Almost certainly, the person who is delivering the letter will be the person who reads the letter out loud, because she was probably there when the letter was dictated. And, she is probably the first person to explain or give exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans: "What did Paul mean by that?"

Whatever the other passages in the New Testament mean about women in ministry-- and some of them are difficult to interpret (1 Timothy 2, for example, contains words that don't occur anywhere else in the NT)-- think about what these narratives mean for the First Century World and its view of women (NT Wright, Facebook post, 2'20'20).

In the First Century World, women had no rights; they were viewed as chattel. Roman law declared that women could not speak, vote, and exercise authority over men by holding public office.

What God is saying through the testimony of Scripture in John 20 and Romans 16 is counter-cultural and revolutionary. Jesus shows us in the way he treats women that God holds women in high regard.

For you are all children of God through the faithfulness which is in the Messiah, Jesus. 27 You see, every one of you who has been baptized into the Messiah has put on the Messiah. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no 'male and female'; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus. 29 And, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham's family. You stand to inherit the promise (Galatians 3:26-29 NIV).

Those who are baptized have thus 'put on the Messiah'. They are the Messiah's family. As a result, old distinctions cease to be relevant in terms of their status in the family, their standing before God or one another. This is not to say that every aspect of their human identity becomes irrelevant; Paul is still aware of himself as a Jewish Christian (see, e.g., Romans 11:1-6), but this is not the basis of his standing as part of the true family of Abraham. He is still aware of some people being slaves and others free, or why would he have written the letter to Philemon? He is still aware of maleness and femaleness, as numerous passages indicate. But the point is that all these are irrelevant for your status in Christ. The ground is even, as has often been said, at the foot of the cross. 'You are all one in the Messiah, Jesus' (New Testament for Everyone - Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians).

Let me say that I believe all Christians, male and female, young and old, have equal status at the foot of the Cross. We are all children of God. We are all a part of the true family of God. We are all ministers of God. We are all servants of God in our spheres for influence. Each one of us represents the Lord to people. We are all called to love God and to love others in very real and tangible ways. So, we are all in ministry.

I am grateful for all the ways in which women serve the King of Glory and the Kingdom of God here and around the world. Whether you have a title or not, whether you are recognized by men or not, thank you for ministering according to the grace that the Lord gives you in your spheres of influence.

To be clear, the Bible supports women in ministry. That is my understanding of the word of God and the heart of God, in spite of what current culture or religion would say to the contrary. And to be honest, I have brothers and sisters in Christ who see things differently than I do. I just want to be clear about what I think, feel, and believe.

If the Lord is calling you to full-time Christian vocational ministry, I encourage you, whether you are male or female, to respond to what the Lord is saying. Start by being

faithful where you are. Ministry makes room for itself. Walk out your calling in the context of a local church and leadership structure that can help you discern and confirm what the Lord is saying. It is the local church that can help affirm, bless, and release you to God's call of vocational ministry.

Here is how I understand gifting and calling to ministry.

Need to understand terminology: degree of frequency in which God uses a person in the area of a spiritual gift.

1. **Role:** All Christians have responsibilities, roles, or things to do like respond to an emergency, meet a need, fulfill an assignment.
2. **Gifting:** The Lord begins to use a person in an area on a more regular basis, and it becomes apparent to the person or body that the Lord has gifted a person with a regular use of a spiritual gift.
3. **Ministry:** The Lord uses a person so regularly in regards to a spiritual gift and with sufficient anointing and results that the body confirms that gifting. "That person has the ministry of"
4. **Office:** Regarding the Ephesians 4 gifts and the ranking of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the Lord appoints and anoints a person to the level of government or ministry in an area for the sake of his church, either locally, translocally, or globally.

Closing

Today we want to celebrate moms and women. Our Lord, the kingdom of God, and Scripture have always had a much higher view of women in comparison with culture and the world.

I pray today that as we shared about the impact of women through the lens of Scripture, that both moms and women will feel honored and blessed for your role and place in the kingdom of God and in our lives.

Action:

1. I want to encourage you to reach out to your moms, if they are still here, and to express your love, honor, and appreciation. Tell them how much you love them. Even if they weren't perfect, we want to obey the Scripture to honor our parents.

- a. And, the Lord might have you reach out to a mom who wasn't your physical mom to encourage that mom and to bless her in her role and calling.
2. If you had a mom who was broken and who hurt or wounded you deeply, I pray that you will get help and prayer so that the wounds might be healed. Talk with someone you trust, walk in the light, and receive prayer. And as needed, please talk with a pastor, counselor, or someone trained to help you process toward healing and wholeness.