

Talks – Women – myfishbites.com

Women

This talk is a short talk on women in the Bible and their leadership skills and example. As we look at these examples of women, we pray that this is an inspiration to many women and girls! We'll look at this subject deliberately after the decision by the Church of England to allow women bishops.

My grandpa was quite a cheeky individual. He used to go to some churches that didn't allow women to speak and say things like: "Do you have women missionaries?" They would reply proudly, "Oh yes, we have women missionaries in Africa and in the Middle East." So he'd say, "Do they preach the gospel and head up missions where they are?" Again, the reply from the male church leader would be, "Oh yes". So then grandpa would say, "So they're allowed to preach and lead when they're abroad, but they're not even allowed to speak in your church?!" At which point the conversation would end...

We're going to look at just three women, although there are many others we could look at like Ruth, Rahab and Mary the Mother of Jesus. But in this talk we'll look at Deborah, the Woman at the Well and Mary Magdalene.

Deborah

Back in the day of the Old Testament in Israel, there came a time when judges looked after the people and the land. This can be found in the Bible book of, er, Judges..!

Judges 4.4-5 – Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

Here's a thing – Deborah, a prophet and the wife of Lappidoth... But some churches say women can't hold leadership responsibility. Some even say women can't be prophets etc. But here's Deborah in the Bible – a prophet and a leader. And she's married – but she is the leader / the judge across Israel and not her husband! And still some people in some churches believe women shouldn't be in leadership! As a famous preacher says, 'Some people don't let the Bible get in the way of what they believe'.

More than simply being responsible as a wife and probably mother, Deborah heard all the cases that came to her from across Israel. She was like the Supreme Court Justice of her day – the top judge and the one who was responsible before God for representing his justice to the people. But she was also a woman with a strong faith and action. One day, God spoke to Deborah saying how he would deliver their enemy into their hands. So she told the military general, Barak what God had said. But he refused to go unless Deborah came with him. So she agreed and because Barak wouldn't go alone, God said he would give the honour of the victory to a woman and not Barak.

We don't know why Barak wouldn't go without Deborah – perhaps he recognised the presence of God on her and wanted that presence to go with him. Maybe he doubted what had been said or maybe he didn't have a strong faith or character. Who knows! But what we do know is that Deborah went with him to the battle. At the battle, Barak defeated the enemy but the enemy king escaped. But not for long – he was lured into a tent when he was thirsty by a woman called Jael, who then killed him. So the honour of the king's death went to a woman. Jael was another woman who did a very brave and difficult thing.

So Deborah was a wife, a mother, a judge and someone who had a faith that led to action. She was a woman prepared to be used by God to see God's purposes done on earth. She was also prepared to step up when no man did. Note to women – don't get annoyed or bitter when men don't step up, instead try to help them and encourage them as Deborah did. She is an inspiration to many women and should be an inspiration to you too.

The Woman at the Well

In John 4 we find a great account of Jesus speaking to a woman at a well. (Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition calls her Photini – Saint Photini). This woman was seeking but she hadn't yet found the answer to her quest – but she would find the answer in Jesus.

Speaking to a woman at a well at midday was a revolutionary thing for Jesus to do. To speak to a woman, a Samaritan woman and a Samaritan woman who had been married many times and was with yet another man. Counter-cultural, as Jesus always is. And he didn't condemn her, shout at her or wave banners at her saying how bad she'd been! He treated her with a love that said, 'I love you so much I want to help you find life in me and leave the sin behind for a new life.' This is a message the church needs to preach today.

As Romans 2.14 says: "...the goodness of God leads you to repentance." (repentance means being sorry, turning around and following God)

But here's an interesting point that we want to get to. When people meet Jesus there is evidence for this. A true encounter will lead to change. The woman at the well was changed. Touched by the love and kindness of Jesus, she went back into the town (where people knew her and her reputation) and told the people about Jesus. The people came back with her to see Jesus.

John 4.28 – Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

This woman was a mini preacher and evangelist with just one meeting with Jesus! She not only witnessed about Jesus, she personally brought people to Jesus and then they believed in Jesus because of her testimony. Just imagine how much God used this woman. I'm sure she went on to speak God's life into many other people too and saw them changed. Proof of God using her! Just think of the people who wouldn't have come to know Jesus if it hadn't been for this woman. Never think God disqualifies you because you're a woman or because of your past. When you meet Jesus, he makes all things new!

John 4.39-42 – Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."

Mary Magdalene

When Jesus was killed there was a group of acquaintances and women there watching from a distance – likely including Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene (Luke 23.49). We don't know much about Mary Magdalene except that in Luke 8.2 we read, "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out."

So Mary Magdalene had an encounter with Jesus that freed her from demons and all the horrible stuff that meant. Jesus had brought her freedom, set her free and given her life and a hope. She was so changed from meeting him and his touch in her life that she followed him with a passion. This in itself is a real encouragement for any women... Jesus can break into your life and set you free from all the things that trouble you. Whatever it is, Jesus can bring change and heal you. When you meet Jesus it should lead to a changed and passionate love for him that causes you to follow him and live for him.

So in John 20 we find Mary Magdalene crying outside the empty tomb of Jesus. First of all she sees two angels (how amazing!) and then she sees someone she thinks is the gardener. But when this man calls her voice she recognises him as being Jesus and rushes to hug him. What an awesome moment. You think Jesus is dead and gone. But suddenly there he is – alive and shining brightly. In the hardest times in your life when it seems Jesus isn't there, he is. He sometimes seems to not be there but as we pursue Jesus and follow him, we will find him. And there are times where He's suddenly there breaking into our life. So always keep your hope in Jesus alive. He believes in you!

Then Jesus gives her a commission. She is the first one to see Jesus – a woman.

John 20.17-28 – Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

So Mary went back to the disciples and told them what she had seen and the things that Jesus had said to her. The first one to see Jesus; the first one to hear his voice; the first one to obey his first command after he had risen from the dead and the first one to speak to all the other disciples and bring the words of Jesus. Notice that Jesus didn't say, 'I have a message but I need you to go and find a man to speak the message of Jesus...' No, he spoke to Mary – the one who was there, available and ready to obey him. Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not significant if you're a woman – you are! Just like Mary Magdalene was.