

main course

mark's women: bible study 3

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Bible Studies by Lance Stone based on John Proctor's 'Mark's Jesus'

Bible Study 3: Mark's Women

AIM

To reflect on the way women are presented in Mark's gospel and to see how this speaks to us today.

YOU WILL NEED

Bibles or at least copies of Mark's gospel for everyone in the group.

A copy of 'Mark's Jesus', by John Proctor, available from Church House bookshop or the Grove website, either as hard copy or as download <http://www.grovebooks.co.uk>

The booklet is also reviewed on the Vision4life website. You don't need one for everyone but have it available for those who want to follow this up.

GETTING STARTED: TWO FEATURES OF MARK'S GOSPEL

In this Bible study we are going to focus on two features of Marks' Gospel:

- i) the 'Markan sandwich'. Mark has a habit of beginning to recount an incident, being interrupted by another one, and then returning to the first. This is story-telling device that has the effect of enriching both stories, by setting them in a kind of tension with one another. As John Proctor puts it,

'The various layers of the sandwich sharpen one another's flavours. The outer story frames the inner, and the inner gives shape to the outer.' (*Mark's Jesus*, p.14)

- ii) Mark's women. There is an interesting range of women profiled in Mark. Again, to quote John Proctor, referring to Jesus' disciples ('the twelve'),

'To discuss the twelve is to talk of twelve men. It is difficult to know how else Jesus might have chosen his followers, within the constraints and mores of that society. But Mark's Gospel also shows many women of faith. In a society less equal than ours, Jesus crossed the gender boundary, in both the company he kept and the commitment he inspired.' (*Mark's Gospel*, p.19).

We will look at one passage that combines both these features: a Markan sandwich which involves women.

Read: Mark 5: 21-43.

Discuss:

- i) Where is the sandwich? How does one incident interrupt another, before returning to the first? What is the effect of the sandwich?
- ii) Before considering *Background* (below), discuss what points immediately strike you in this incident.

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BACKGROUND

Jewish law regarded all women as unclean during menstruation. To touch such a woman, or be touched, would have meant being defiled and rendered impure. The woman who approached Jesus is in a constant state of haemorrhage and is thus permanently excluded from the community. Her excludedness is the price to be paid for other people's purity. The synagogue would be one place from which this woman would be excluded. Whose responsibility would it be to ensure that such people are kept away and the rules kept?

Note also that dead bodies were also considered to be unclean and to touch one would have rendered you defiled and impure.

- iii) See how many points of similarity and difference you can identify between Jairus and the woman.
- iv) What about points of similarity or contrast or similarity can you identify between the woman and Jairus' daughter? (See last paragraph of p.13 of *Mark's Gospel*).
- v) Having been touched by the woman, what is the next thing that we are told Jesus touches? In what ways is Jesus playing fast and loose here with laws and taboos in relation to both the woman and to the girl? What do you think is the significance of this?
- vi) Jesus, we are told, felt power going out of him (v.30). He presumably could have gone on regardless, leaving the woman with her bleeding secretly cured, and he would not have been delayed. What do you think was the effect on the woman of her being exposed to the crowd by Jesus' question, 'who touched my clothes?' Are there any lessons we can learn here about true healing? In what ways might healing be different from 'curing'?
- vii) Does anyone have any testimonies of Christian healing?
- viii) What do we learn about Jesus from this incident?
- ix) What might we learn from the woman?

Prayer: try to incorporate any lessons you have learnt from this incident into prayers for our church and our world.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

- What was the most helpful thing?
- What was the least helpful thing?
- What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more bible studies like this on the Gospel of Mark there are three more on the website.

If you want a different Bible study about a woman who meets Jesus then look for Remembering Him which should be on the website shortly.