

Luke Chapter 8 v 1 - 3

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[0 : 00] Romans 12, page 1139. I'm going to read the first 16 verses.

First 16 verses. Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, these members do not all have the same function. So in Christ, we though many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

[1 : 10] We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach.

If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor. Serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope. Patient in affliction. Faithful in prayer.

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

[2 : 11] Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud. But be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Then I'd like you to turn back to where we were this morning. Luke in chapter 8. Luke in chapter 8. As I said this morning, we were going to revisit the first three verses of the chapter this evening.

This morning we looked at the rest of those verses through to verse 15. Jesus teaching on the kingdom of God and what it means to be part of and how our hearts, in one sense, are the reflection, as it were, of where we are with God.

But I said we're going to come back to verses 1 to 3 because I think that they are important too. This is all God's word and we're going to look at them in a little while. But I'll read them once more. So that's page 1036, Luke chapter 8.

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases.

[3 : 29] Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out. Joanna, the wife of Chusa, the manager of Herod's household. Susanna and many others.

These women were helping to support them out of their own needs. Or their own means, rather. We'll come back to that later. If you have your Bibles, then we're going to look at Luke chapter 8, those first three verses.

But we're going to be doing quite a bit of study in other parts of New Testament as well. I don't know when the last time was. You went to the cinema, the pictures. I'm hoping to go in the next few weeks to go and see Stan and Ollie.

I've always been a very big fan of Laurel and Hardy, and I'm looking forward to going and seeing that. But when you have been, I'm sure, in the cinema, and of course you get there and the lights go down, and you know that the film's about to start.

But as soon as the film is over, as soon as the titles begin to roll, the lights come up, and the cinema owners want you to get out because they've probably got another group of people to come in.

[4 : 38] But of course the reality is that the film hasn't finished, frankly, that way, because those titles go on for several minutes, don't they? They're listing not only the actors or the main actors in the film, but also hundreds and hundreds, it seems, of people who were needed to make the movie.

They're named along with their particular jobs that they did. All their work is behind the scenes, behind the camera, isn't it? We haven't seen any of them, but we've seen their work.

We've seen their support in that sense. The lighting engineers and sound technicians, the scenery makers and the caterers, costume designers, the music writers, all these things.

It's a great long list, some with very strange titles and job descriptions and so on. Chief grip, what does that mean? What does it mean, chief grip?

But anyway, all these things. A huge list of people without whom the film could never have been made. It's not only in the sphere, of course, of movies, but in almost every area of life.

[5 : 45] There are a vast number of people who work behind the scenes, support workers. Think of the armed forces in our own nation. Yes, there are those who are trained to fight on the front line, to engage the enemy in battle, but supporting them again are a host of different regiments with their own particular areas of expertise and support.

Logistics, communications, transport, provision, medics, and so on. Without them, those soldiers on the front line would certainly lose the battle and be unable to fight the enemy.

Now, I give those illustrations because when we get to chapter 8 of Luke and the first three verses, we have a wonderful peep behind the scenes, as it were, of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know, as we're told there, that his ministry particularly was to go from town to town on tour, as it were, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and along with him were the 12 disciples.

In fact, they, in chapter 9, are sent out themselves to copy and to follow and to back up the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that's what we have in the Gospel of Luke.

[6 : 58] But for the first time in Luke, we're told that there were others here, people that were vital to the ministry of Jesus. People who were vital to the ministry of Jesus.

And we are told of some of them, some of the names of them, and of others as well who supported them. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out.

Joanna, the wife of Cheser, the manager of Herod's household. Susanna and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

This morning we thought about how the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ now is focusing on the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God.

Without going into any more detail than we did this morning, the kingdom of God includes the church of Jesus Christ. If you're a Christian, you are a citizen of the kingdom of God. You are part of, you're living within the kingdom of God, where God is the king of your life.

[8 : 03] The Lord Jesus is the Lord. And one of the things that we recognize then is this, that within the church of Jesus Christ, within the kingdom of God, there are many whose work is hidden.

There is many who serve unseen. Many who serve, in one sense, in the wings. Before we come to what that means for us, how we apply that to ourselves as a local church here, let's just give a little background, if we can, to these three women who are mentioned.

First of all, there's Mary called Magdalene. Now, she's probably the most famous of the Marys, after Jesus' mother, Mary, but there were quite a lot of Marys. It was a very popular name.

We don't know much about her, even though we have heard of her, I'm sure. She was called Magdalene because she was from the region of Magadan. So it was a bit like a nickname.

She was from Magadan, and so she was Magdalene. It was an area on the shores of Lake Galilee. Not sure where it is. Historians haven't been able to find it.

[9 : 09] But we know, Matthew chapter 15, Jesus went there. He crossed the lake with his disciples. He visited that area, but we're not told of anything particularly that happened in the area of Magadan.

But clearly, it was while he was there that Mary was delivered. Delivered of these seven demons that had plagued her. These demons that had oppressed her.

Possibly even she was healed as well. Now, that's important. It's important that we, even though we're not told what Jesus did there, clearly Jesus performed miracles in places that we're not told about.

In fact, John, when he writes his gospel as he gets to the end, tells us there are many things Jesus did that we don't actually know about. John chapter 20, verse 30, he said, Jesus performed many other signs, that's another word for miracle, because a miracle was a sign pointing to who Jesus is as the Son of God.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. So John and Luke and the other gospel writers were very careful and selective, if I can put it that way, to include those miracles and the teaching of Jesus that God the Holy Spirit led them to.

[10 : 29] But many other things that Jesus did that we aren't told about. Now, Mary Magdalene, we're told about her here, but also she appears later on.

She's one of those women who was very careful to find out where Jesus had been buried. She followed Joseph of Arimathea to the place where Jesus' tomb was and took note, we're told.

And then, on the day after the Passover, Easter Sunday morning, early on, she and some of the women went to add spices to his body.

So John tells us in his gospel, chapter 20, verse 1, 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.

She and some of the women met with angels there. Here we're told, later on in that chapter, she bent over, verse 11, and looked in the tomb, saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

[11 : 36] And then it was Mary Magdalene who was given the prestigious honor of being the very first person to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ when he was raised from the dead.

Wasn't Peter? Wasn't John? Wasn't one of the disciples? It was Mary Magdalene. For there we're told later on as well that, verse 14, at this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there.

She did not realize it was Jesus. And we're told she thought he was the gardener, the caretaker, and then he spoke to her, Mary, and she knew. She was the one who went back and reported to the disciples, those 12 disciples, that Jesus was alive.

So she had a very important role. But here we're told of this support she gave. Then there's this lady, Joanna, verse 3 of chapter 8 of Luke, the wife of Chuzah.

That's how I've pronounced it. It could be Chuzah, it could be Chuzah, it could be anything. But anyway, I'm going to call him Chuzah, the manager of Herod's household. He is an important woman, possibly one of the most important women in her community and society.

[12 : 49] Her husband, we're told, was the manager of Herod's household. He was the top dog, the chief servant, we might say, the head keeper of the king's staff.

That was a privileged and high position. And she, along with her husband, would have had great status in the community. People would have looked up to her, working for the royal family, and him being the top dog, as it were.

If he was the manager of Herod's household, could it be that he was there when John the Baptist had been arrested and spoke to Herod on many times about his sinful life?

Could he even have been the one who arranged the birthday party? I'd have thought so. If he was looking after the palace and the household of the king, that birthday party at which the stepdaughter of Herod danced, and by her mother's persuasion asked for the head of John the Baptist.

We don't know. Whatever we do know is that Joanna was a devoted follower of Jesus in spite of her position and in spite of these things, she followed Jesus and sought to support him on his preaching tour.

[14 : 01] She too appears later on in Luke, in Luke 24, at the tomb side on Easter Sunday and went to tell the disciples that she had seen the angels.

So here's another woman. And then finally we have Susanna. If your name's Sue, Susanna, this is where your name comes from, from this lady.

And we know nothing more about her than her name. She's never mentioned again in the New Testament. She's never mentioned again in the Gospels. We know nothing more about her except again that she was someone who supported Jesus, helped him out of her own needs and the disciples as well.

Matthew and Mark also mention some of the ladies, some of the women who cared for Jesus' practical needs, some of them who were witnesses to Jesus' death and burial in Matthew 27.

What I want us to recognize again is just how important these women were to the ministry of Jesus, the ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God.

[15 : 11] Now what does that mean for us? What does that mean for us today in our church, in our situation? Well, I think it means a few things, two things in particular that are important for us to comprehend.

It means that every member of the church, every citizen in the kingdom of God is valuable to Jesus or even, I would say, of equal worth to Jesus.

Here we've got three very different women as far as we know. We know that Mary was somebody who'd previously been possessed by demons. We don't know anything about it. There's lots of speculation about what her life was like, but none of that comes from the Bible, so don't believe that.

But she knew that she was possessed. A woman, perhaps, who was unable to control her life like the man who was found in the tombs. We're going to come to him in chapter 8 later on.

Here was a woman who was delivered of these demons. And then we have a woman who's a very important official in one sense, married to an important official in the community.

[16 : 19] And then we have a woman we know nothing about. Three very different women and we're told there are many others as well who support it. Remember the woman that we read about in Luke chapter 7 at the end of chapter 7.

We spent some time in it before Christmas. The one who, we're told, was a sinful woman who came and washed the feet of Jesus with her own tears and kissed them and dried them.

Why is that story there? It's there, particularly because of what follows to highlight to us that as far as Jesus was concerned, these people who served him and loved him were valuable to him, as valuable to him as the twelve disciples.

Remember how Jesus put it when Simon, the Pharisee, was angry at Jesus because he treated this woman with respect. verse 41 of chapter 7.

He says, a parable, two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii, the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both of them.

[17 : 30] Now, which of them will love him more? Jesus goes on to say that she loves me because she knows she's been forgiven and he tells her, your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

In the world in which we live, men and women are classified, aren't they? We've moved a little bit away from the class system. I don't think we're quite so much as we were in previous generations with the working class and middle class and upper class and the aristocracy, but we're still classified by one another.

People are valued, as it were, rated by any number of differences, whether it be the amount that you earn, your bank balance, or the job that you do, or the color of your skin, or your age, or your gender.

In the world in which we live, people are always judging one another, seeking to exalt themselves above others. that's not the case in the church of Jesus Christ.

It's not the case in the kingdom of God. When Paul writes to the Christians at Galatia, and you don't need to turn here, he tells them and encourages them with this wonderful truth.

[18 : 44] Listen to it. So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There's neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, nor is there male and female. You are all one in Christ Jesus.

We are of equal standing, equal worth in the eyes of our God. We are equally valuable to him.

Now that amazing truth, of course, doesn't mean that we're clones of one another. It doesn't mean that we are or have to be exactly the same as one another.

We have differing tastes, differing interests. We have points of view that may differ to one another. Do not want to talk about Brexit, but I imagine we've all got different views on Brexit.

[19 : 45] But all of them are quite acceptable in the church, even if they're not in the world. But none of those differences are meant to divide us. None of those external things, as it were, or even attitudes and thoughts are a cause for us to take pride in ourselves above another or keep us from loving one another equally and fully.

Here's what Paul writes to the Christians at Philippi in chapter 2. He reminds them of this. Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, that's the Holy Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, these are all about our connection with Jesus, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

The church of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, is unlike any other kingdom, society in the world. It's not a place for one being better than the other.

It's not a place for conceit and pride. It's not a place for, if I can put it this way, women being better than men and men being better than women or any of that. It's a place of unity in Christ.

[21 : 20] And secondly, one of the things that I think comes out of here in this little snippet, and it's so important and I want to impress upon you as much as I can, every person in the church of Jesus Christ has a valuable job to do.

Every single believer has a valuable, if I can put it almost unique to them, work to do. Now these women were all helping support the ministry of Jesus out of the means that they had, we're told there at the end of verse 3.

We don't know exactly what they did. Clearly some of them had some money. Probably Joanna would have been the one with the money because of her husband's profession but others as well.

So they would have supported Jesus financially, making sure that he and the disciples were fed and had could buy the things that they need. But obviously as well they supported them practically.

In other ways too, helping and supporting, going ahead of them. We don't know, we're not told, but they very much were serving Christ and the purposes of God in that situation.

[22 : 35] I've got to get away, if I can put it that way, from simply looking at the followers of Jesus as the twelve disciples. This is what the Bible is teaching us, isn't it? There were not just those twelve men, there were many others as well, women included, who were serving, supporting.

Each one of them, as they had opportunity, used the gifts they had. Now in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, every single one of us has an equally important ministry to perform.

Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 16 is one of the many places that stress this truth. Paul writing to the Christians, reminding them that they are part of the body of Christ.

From Christ, the whole body, that's the whole church, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love.

Notice, as each part does its work. Each part. This is something that's expressed throughout the New Testament again and again concerning the church of Jesus Christ, that we are to use the gifts that God has given us and the means he's given us to serve him, to serve one another, to serve the purposes of God.

[23 : 59] Paul writes to the Corinthians to thank them for their financial support. He says to them, this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, this is 2 Corinthians chapter 9, but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

So the Lord blessed us financially. Perhaps he hasn't in that sense that we are overflowing with money. But whatever we have is to be used before the Lord and is important in the work of the gospel.

God doesn't need our money, of course. Cattle on a thousand hills, the psalmist says, are his. He chooses to give us the privilege of sharing in the work of the ministry by giving.

And then also, practically, 1 Peter in chapter 4. Above all, Peter writes, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[25 : 16] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. That's hard, isn't it? The end bit, not grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its manifold forms.

And then he gives a little list. If anyone speaks, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides. So that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Again, as Christians, at times, we begin to look at the church and the ministries of the church in the way that the world would. And we would say, well, of course, the preacher or the pastor or the elders, those people who hold positions, they have a much more important ministry than mine.

And I have to say to you, rubbish. Sorry, rubbish. Because that's what the scripture is teaching here. It puts speaking alongside serving in exactly the same way.

One may be up the front dodging the tomatoes. The others may be at the wings. But the work of the ministry, the work of the church, can only go on when each one plays their part because each one has a vital ministry to perform.

[26 : 40] We are wrong to think of certain parts of the body of Christ as being more important than others. That was the problem in Corinth. In the church there, a lot of people were very pleased with themselves about the positions they had and the jobs they had and they looked down on others.

But Paul had to remind them using this wonderful illustration of a body. And he says this, the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I don't know how a foot would talk.

How would a foot talk if it could talk. How would it speak? Would it speak with a squeaky voice or would it speak with a deep, it's pretty low, it's pretty low wouldn't it, low. Because I'm not an eye, no sorry, that's the foot, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body.

It would not have for that reason, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. I'm not going to carry on with different parts. If the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not be for that reason, stop being part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

[27 : 56] If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts and one body. So if you think, I wish I could, I hope to aspire one day, better preach.

I hope to aspire one day to be an elder or to be a deacon or somebody important, then dear friends, you've got it completely wrong. The work that the Lord has given us to do, wherever it is, is vital to the life of the church and is of equal, equal importance.

As I said before, when we thought about those other things in life. Now, this does raise an important question, a relevant question, a contemporary question.

This is where I'm setting myself up for a huge fall. Raises the question concerning the role of women and men in the church.

If men and women are equal, of equal worth, which we've ascertained that they are, and if the ministry that each of us do is of equal importance, as I've said it is, doesn't that mean that men and women should do the same jobs?

[29 : 12] In other words, shouldn't it mean that women can preach, be pastors, elders, and so on? Doesn't it mean that?

Well, let's think again. Think again of the illustration that Paul has given us about the body. He's made it very clear that there are different parts of the body to perform different roles for the body.

So he goes on to say in verse 21 of 1 Corinthians 12, if the eye cannot, sorry, the eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you, and the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you.

On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. The foot is a vital part of the body as much as the nose is.

I came up with this which I think is quite humorous and you probably won't even understand what I'm talking about. The foot is as vital a part of the nose even though some people's feet can smell and others have a nose that runs.

[30 : 20] See, feet running, nose running. Do you get it? That's quite clever really. Anyway, even though the nose can smell and it can run and the feet can smell and they can run, they clearly can't do the same job, can they?

Foot can't operate as a nose and the nose can't operate as a foot. They are different. Why? Because as we read right at the beginning in 1 Corinthians 12, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them just as he wanted them to be.

so I put it to you this way, you are a woman because God created you to be a woman and God created me to be a man because we are different to perform different ministries that the whole together may serve the Lord and glorify him.

It's not about one gender being cleverer than another or superior to another or better than another or more loved by God than another. It has nothing to do with that.

God has created us with different physiques, different bodies and therefore they perform different tasks. What do I mean by that?

[31 : 32] Well actually when you read through the New Testament you find that again and again women are mentioned as performing certain ministries which I would put to you are unsuitable for men to perform.

In 1 Timothy in chapter 5 Paul is writing particularly concerning older women particularly widows and he speaks about them being these people those who are well known for her good deeds such as bringing up children showing hospitality washing the feet of the Lord's people helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Later on when he writes to Titus he says something similar again about the ministry that older women have. He talks about them not being addicted to much wine but that's not of course a problem here but that they are to teach what is good then they can encourage the younger women to love their husbands and children to be self-controlled and pure to be busy at home to be kind to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God.

Now I stress those aren't the only jobs that women can do but they are things that women can do that men cannot do most notably we cannot give birth okay just a physical thing isn't it it's a reality but also it's not appropriate for a man to teach a younger woman about how she should care for her children it's not appropriate for a man to be an example as it were to how a wife should support her husband these are ministries that are essentially given to women as I said not the only ones but there is a sense in which women are fitted in this way to serve in a particular aspect and role in the life of the church God has created humans it's interesting right at the very start of Genesis chapter 1 we're told God created he said let us make man in our own image and so they made man both male and female we are to compliment one another men and women not to war with one another but to work together as a team a partnership remember when God created Adam it was because no helper could be found for him in the garden amongst all the other creatures and so a woman was made to be a helper to support to strengthen to encourage one another so it is in the church it's because of God's creation that men and women do not do exactly the same thing within the life of the church here's Paul writing to Timothy about this whole matter and ultimately if people argue with you and say well no there should be women who teach and preach in the pulpit and should be ministers of the gospel then you have to go back to the word it's not about tradition it's not about prejudice it's not about there's a big word begins with M that I can't remember about men putting women down being a misogynist that's it

I can't spell it but I've heard of it Paul writes this I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man she must be quiet and he tells us why for Adam was formed first then Eve there's a created order that God has given he doesn't say because women are stupid because they're not he doesn't say because men are better because they're not he says there's a created order we're made by God that we may serve in different capacities in life and so also in the church it's not a matter of culture people all argue and say well of course in Jesus' day women were badly treated they were never educated they were unable to do the things that they could do now that's true but this isn't about culture because wonderfully women have found great liberty and freedom and expression and can do everything almost that men can do doesn't mean that God word changes the reality is this and I don't say this in a patronizing way though perhaps for some of you ladies you may feel it is the reality is that women have been wrongly badly treated by men they still are but that should never be the case in the church that should never be the case in the kingdom of God that is never what Jesus teaches because there is difference does not mean one is better than the other in fact I would say dear friends that in our present western society because there's been such a furore about making men and women exactly the same and getting rid of those differences and seeing that actually they are exactly the same hasn't it brought into our generation this great turmoil about gender where people aren't sure whether they should be a man or be a woman it's a problem of the human heart not a problem of the externals even if we were as we pretend in our present society to say that men and women are exactly the same it won't stop people treating one another badly it won't stop people abusing their positions within marriages because the problem is the heart that must be changed not the physical body

[37 : 38] God has made you dear friend as a woman as a man for a specific reason because in that gender if I can put it that way of who you are you are able to serve the Lord in his church in the world as he is pleased we need one another earnestly if Jesus was willing enough to acknowledge he needed these women to care for and support him in ministry cannot we also humble ourselves and say we need one another ladies you need men men we need ladies in fact that's again something that Paul makes very clear people have misused and twisted Christianity to make it out to be misogynist and it is not even among some aspects of the church today but here's what

Paul has said in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor is man independent women we need one another but most of all we need to serve as these women did in the kingdom if we want to see the ministry and the work of the gospel go forward in our town we want to see the church of Jesus Christ here in Whitby develop and grow it will only do that as we read from Ephesians 4 as each part does its part as each one of us serve doesn't matter what our background whether we're Mary Magdalene doesn't matter what our status whether we're married to the chief executive of the palace doesn't matter even if we think we're a Susanna an unknown unimportant person you dear friend and I have a ministry and a work to do which the Lord will give us the help to do let's