

Christ's Treatment of Women

By Dallas Willard

I'm supposed to speak to you this morning on Christ's treatment of women, and that's a very large subject. I'm sure that you find it important and interesting and there's a lot of discussion of it around this campus. And that's how it should be. I don't have much time and I'm going to have to leave a lot of things to one side. There are many things that we could talk about in Christ's treatment of women, but I want to focus on one thing which you will find I think best presented in Luke, the eighth chapter in the first few verses. And if you would like to and you have your new testaments with you you might turn with that, or to that with me. Now let me say to begin with we might talk about the compassion of Christ for women and there is much that we could say on that topic. There are many interesting cases of how he entered into the lives of women to help them with their sicknesses and their problems of all kinds but I don't think that's very revelatory of what Christ thought about the place and role of women in his kingdom and in his creation. We also could talk about how Christ refused to participate in the degrading manner in which women were treated in that time. For example, we could speak of the women taken in adultery and in this world today there are still countries where a woman who is taken either in even in fornication much less adultery [inaudible] did it but the upshot of it was that a woman taken in adultery was safe from death because he intervened. And in a certain sense, he went contrary to the law in order to do that.

We might also speak of his teachings concerning divorce. Uh in that day it was possible as it is today in many countries for a man almost by the wave of a hand to get rid of a woman, to dump her on the streets and I don't have time to enlarge upon what that meant but that was that was just an utterly mind-blowing disaster for a woman. There was no unemployment insurance; there was no local counseling service with a little grant or two to help them get along. Their life was ruined for all practical purposes. There are a lot of things there we could talk about, but instead I want to talk about how Christ invited and brought women into his work of advancing the kingdom of God. Let me read with you these first few verses of Luke 8\, "And it came to pass afterwards that he went throughout every city and village preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God and the twelve were with him." Now you'll understand who the twelve were, the twelve were of course those whom he had chosen to be his special students, if you wish they were the members of his graduate seminar in following Christ. And he had selected them that they might be with him as the scriptures said. And of all the seminaries and education programs I have longed to be in I would have longed to be in that one. But now I want you to notice that they were not the only ones that were with him.

And would you just read the following three verses or two uh yes two verses. "And the twelve were with him and certain women." Certain women. Now, we might just play on the word a moment and say you can bet they were certain women because if they have been uncertain they wouldn't have been with him. I, it wasn't the sort of role that a woman might play to be traipsing around the country with itinerant preacher and his friends. But his is a very special group and there is some obscurity as to who they were but fundamentally they were his acquaintances and friends and people who had come out of Galilee with him, and I want you to notice what these women did. Certain women which had been healed, and undoubtedly that was because they were

certain. It's because they had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary called Magdalen out of whom went seven devils. It's good to be rid of your devils, and Joana the wife of Coosa, Herod's steward, and Susana, and then note, many others. Many others. And then finally notice what they did. They ministered unto him of their substance. They ministered unto him of their substance. The word substance there is an interesting Greek term that has a long history and we don't have time to go into it this morning, but those of you who are studying Greek, uh you might find it interesting to take that word and break it down and look into its history to see what it means. There is a superficial meaning which is certainly a part of what is intended here. Namely, they ministered to him of their possessions, of their property. In other words they got out the old check book and wrote some checks, or they brought a jar of preserves from Galilee to have for breakfast, or something of that sort. Now that is the superficial meaning. But I'm glad the old version gives us the word substance instead. And indeed if you trace that word back in Greek philosophical thought you will find that it is one of the terms which are used for substance.

The real stuff of their lives, and that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. You see I don't want to talk to you about getting married. I know that's on a lot of your minds because I came up through school very like this one. And I know that probably getting married was more on the minds of people if anyone had wanted to give test on getting married at any time everyone would've gotten an A. But I'm not going to talk about that and I'll tell you why I'm not going to talk about that. We are all individuals before God. And when we find in the Scripture that we are to be priests and kings, and when we speak of the priesthood of the believer, I hope that we understand that that is not something which is open only to the male population. Priesthood of the believer in the kingdom of God is available to all. Now that was not true in the Old Testament. A woman in the Old Testament for example, if she had a husband or a father, could

not even make a vow to God without the permission of her husband or father. But we're not talking about that, we're talking now about you as a woman living in the kingdom of God. And I say to you that you are a king and a priest and you are directly related to God and that's the way God sees you and as you stand in your life, and as you stand in the judgment, that's going to be you. Your husband isn't going to stand there for you, nor your father, nor your brother. You are going to stand there, and you're going to stand there with Jesus Christ himself. And it is that Spirit of unity which Jesus shows in his ministry here with these women.

But I want to tell you another reason why I'm not going to talk to you about marriage. And that is because a lot of you women here today are not going to get married. I know that's the sort of thing [audience laughter]. I know that's the sort of thing which it is not normal to say, ok. You're all beautiful, it isn't because you aren't pretty, and it isn't because you aren't smart. It's because there aren't enough men to go around ladies. [Laughter] And a lot of those that do go around you wouldn't want. See fellas I know you're here I'm talking to you now. Ha-ha. No. There are many reasons, it's quite complex and there's no point in going into it I just want to say very simply that many of you are not going to get married, many of you men are not gonna get married either. Another thing many of you who are gonna get married, and this again just normally isn't said, but I say it to you because out of, I don't just teach philosophy. I've been a pastor and teacher for 23 or 24 years, even though I am only 21 you understand [laughter]. For some reason the mileage doesn't show but I've been over the road I'll tell you. And I want to say to you that many of you who are going to get married and many of you who are going to marry minister and devout Christian men are going to get divorced. And you say don't say that. I say that to you because I have to deal day after day, week after week with people, women and men, who are Christians and who said it will never happen to me, but it happened.

And I am not going to talk a lot about marriage also because many of you who are going to get married and live happily you're going to live a major part of your life as a widow. Your husband is going to die, and you're going to live alone as a widow. I don't want to start you thinking about how but uh it'll happen, ok? So now what I'm saying to you is this. You are an individual before God. As a child of the kingdom of God, I want to say to you two very simple things about playing your role as a companion of Christ ministering to Christ of your substance, two very simple things. And one is this, make sure that you appropriate the essence of the Christ life as a reality not something which you just have positionally but something which you move into as an experiential fact. Make sure that you appropriate that and allow it to come into your members so that where sin has abounded, Grace with the much more abound, and your members will be submitted effectively and efficaciously to the righteousness of God and made holy make sure that you don't fall short of that. Make sure that you have enrolled in the school of discipleship to Christ. Many people, if you ask them are they a Christian; they're ready for an answer.

But let me ask you; are you a disciple of Christ? I want to read a verse or two on that point from the 14th chapter of Luke. There were many people following Christ in that time as there are in this day, and there are many people who are willing to get people enrolled and subscribed and ready to go for something even if they aren't very clear what it is. Look please and Luke 14:25\ "And there went great multitudes with him and he turned and said unto them, if any man come to me and hate not his father and his mother and his wife and children and brethren and sisters yea and his own life also he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." And again in verse 33, "So likewise whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Now I don't

know what your view of what a Christian is but the only place in the Bible where it's explained to us what a Christian is is in the book of Acts. Where they could no longer call the Christians Jews because they weren't Jews any longer and a lot of Gentiles were sort of just getting in on it right and left and they had to think up a different name for the disciples and as far as the New Testament is concerned, a Christian is a disciple. And if you are offering or if anything has been offered to you on a different basis than the discipleship which Jesus called men and women to you may not have gotten plugged in and the right source. Jesus is saying something here that is fundamentally important and again we don't have time to elaborate on it in great length but he is saying, I'll put it very simply he's saying if you do not, if you are not ready, if you're not willing and if you don't actually settle in your heart to the most important thing in this world is for you to be with Christ.

In whatever ways that calls for in your life, if it involves stepping aside from your family, if it involves giving up a possession, if it involves saying no to something that is very dear to you yourself if you have not made that kind of commitment, you cannot be his disciple. He didn't say maybe you can't he didn't say it'll be hard, he just said you can't. What's he saying here, is he saying something to punish us? Like if you don't be a good boy you won't get a piece of cake, no I don't think so. I think what he's saying is something more like what might be said to you if you were to go to one of your mathematics professors and say I would like to take your Calculus course. And he would say unto you he would say verily verily I say unto you unless you have passed Algebra, you cannot take my calculus course. Now is he punishing you? No, he's not punishing you he's telling you that you can't cut the mustard in that calculus course if you don't know algebra. And what Jesus is doing here is something very similar. If you have not made this kind of commitment you are not prepared to learn the lessons in his school and one of our

problems in our Churches today is that we are over recruited on a false basis and undertrained and by and large the membership of the churches are going nowhere because they haven't come in at the doorway of discipleship, they've been given some different door. Now if you come in that way, then you stand a chance of being able to show forth in your life as a woman the power and the reality of the Christ life. I want to say something secondly to you that now you may think is a little bit unspiritual. I put it in order because the most important thing is that you understand and appropriate the life that is in Christ. But once you have done that then you have got to be, dear lady, a no nonsense person. And I think I'll just put it to you like this. Once you have got the issue of discipleship settled, then you want to do what you can to get the very best information and understanding and, that you can on the most important topics in human life. Don't you stand around and wait for some man to come by that knows enough mathematics to figure out your checkbook. Learn math. You may think what a silly thing for someone to come all the way from discipleship to learning math.

Do you know this world runs on mathematics? I can tell that though really doesn't move you much. Ok. And they don't know how to figure it out; they don't know what happened, where their money went. They are not business women they are not business men. You know Jesus said something very interesting that you should look at in the 16th chapter of Luke. The parable of the unjust steward. He winds up by saying in the eight verse of the 16th chapter of Luke, "The Lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely, for the children of this world are in their generation, and that's an important phrase now, in their generation. By the way that's where you're living; you're living in this generation. In their generation are wiser than the children of light and now heed these words. And I say unto you make yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that when you fail they may receive you into an everlasting habitation. He that

is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much if therefore you have not been faithful in unrighteous mammon who will commit to you the true riches. Jesus is saying something to you very simply. If you can't take care of your money and your property and your energy don't expect to be a spiritual giant. Now the grace of God, of course is efficacious for people who don't know mathematics. We can be thankful for that. But if you sit around waiting for God to figure your checkbook, it'll be unfigured. And if you try to explain to the bank, well you know I thought God would do it for me, I'm just using these as illustrations friends, but I say it is most important for you to understand that you have two types of substance which minister to Christ in the kingdom of God from, and that is your spiritual substance, and if you wish your physical substance, and in both of those domains as you walk through life, ladies, as individuals before God, that is where God would work with you and that is where you can work with God. And there's no man on a white horse, a black horse, a red horse, or any of them that's gonna come by and change this.

If you get married, it may help you a little bit but still the issue of what your substance is and how you minister it before God stands uppermost in your life. I want us to close by just thinking a little bit about this lady that is discussed in the very last chapter of the book of Proverbs, and I want to try to give you a different perspective on this lady. She's often read about and held up to us and that's a good thing, but again we normally see her in the context of a relation to a man. What I want you to see is the imminent good sense and capability of this woman. Look at verse ten in Proverbs 31, who can find an excellent woman, a virtuous woman, speaks of the heart of her husband, and how that husband trusts in her. And then we get an explanation why, why this husband in verse 11 he doesn't need to go out and rob banks, right. The verse in the old version says the heart of her husband doth trust safely in her so that he shall

have no need of spoil. Now look, look at what this woman does. She will do him good and not evil. She seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands. She seeks wool and flax to make clothing, mainly. And she makes the clothing. She is like the merchant ship, she bringeth food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens. She considered the field, notice this, she's buying property and buyeth it and with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms. Maybe she lifts weights. [Laughter] She perceived that her merchandise is good. Her candle goeth not out by night. She makes good candles, right? Makes good candles, this lady, she makes candles that burn all night. She layeth her hand to the spindle and her hands upon the staff and the making of cloth and thread. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor, yea she reacheth forth her hands to the needy, she's not afraid of the snow; she didn't live in Southern California either, right. Because her household is clothed with scarlet, that is a special type of warm clothing. She maketh herself coverings and tapestries. Her husband is known at the gates. She maketh fine linen. Strength and honor are her clothing, now he moves to the moral and spiritual aspect.

And I want you to notice this lady had a very interesting thing about her in verse 26. She openeth her mouth with wisdom. Ladies, be wise, ok, be smart. There is nothing spiritual about being stupid. Just like there is nothing spiritual about being poor, mm? This lady opened her mouth with wisdom and when she opened her mouth, she was not a smart Alek, she was not mean. In her tongue was the law of kindness. Now a lot of people have the law of kindness in their head, but it never gets down to their tongue. This lady, the law of kindness was right in her tongue, and her tongue was kind. Many people think they're kind because they want to be kind; this lady was kind because kindness was in her tongue. Do you dare to be like that? You dare to

step out as an individual and trust God to make you like that? Are you willing to venture, to trust God instead of some man? To make you an individual who out of the substance the rich abundance of your life can minister unto the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope so, I hope that you-