

# ERWIN & REBECCA LUTZER

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Jesus, Lover of a Woman's Soul

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lutzer, Erwin W.

Jesus, lover of a woman's soul / Erwin and Rebecca Lutzer.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8423-8426-1 (hc : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8423-8426-X (hc: alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8423-8427-8 (sc : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8423-8427-8 (sc : alk. paper)

1. Jesus Christ—Views on women. 2. Women in the Bible. 3. Bible. N.T. Gospels—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Lutzer, Rebecca. II. Title.

BT590.W6L88 2006

232.90082—dc22

2005030828

Printed in the United States of America

11 10 09 08 07 06

6 5 4 3 2 1

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#### INTRODUCTION

# JESUS AND TODAY'S WOMAN

What relevance does a man who lived two thousand years ago have for today's woman? If that man is Jesus, the answer—in a single word—plenty!

Today Jesus reaches to us across the centuries, inviting us to come to Him for the same hope and healing He gave to the women He encountered so long ago. Unlike other great teachers, who can only inspire us by their example, Jesus still connects with us, asking that we respond to His invitation of restoration and personal validation. His promises of rest for the weary, bread for the spiritually hungry, and forgiveness for the guilty are just as valid today as when He first made them.

"Jesus was the original feminist," the fictional character Sir Leigh Teabing explains to cryptologist Sophie Neveu in the novel *The Da Vinci Code.*<sup>1</sup> For many people, the word *feminist* conjures up images of radical individualism, abortion rights, and a host of other "causes." We can say with confidence that Jesus was not a feminist in this modern sense. Nor did He intend that the church be built on Mary Magdalene, as author Dan Brown claims in his mega–best seller.

If by *feminist* we mean that Jesus broke with the demeaning view the men of His day had of women; if we mean that He

overstepped the legalistic boundaries of prejudice—if such be our interpretation of the phrase, then *yes*, Jesus was "the original feminist." Jesus *was* revolutionary in His treatment of women. He dared to believe in the ministry of women and valued them in a way that was foreign to His times.

Today, critics tell us that Christianity has encouraged a maledominated, women-suppressing culture. It is quite true that women have often been treated as second-class citizens throughout the history of the church, and plenty of derogatory remarks about them can be produced to support the claim. But such a bias against women cannot be traced to the pages of the New Testament or the early church. In the first centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection, for the most part, women who were followers of Jesus were honored, and their husbands in turn were taught to honor their wives. Many of the strictures that later Christian writers placed on women have more to do with popular culture than with the New Testament itself.

In this book, we intend to show how Jesus undercut the double standard that marginalized women in His day. In doing so, He did not negate the teachings of the Old Testament, but rather, He revealed that the religious leaders had added their own self-righteous restrictions to the Law and ignored the totality of its teaching. Unfortunately, these religious leaders merged the customs of the day with their own personal bias and elevated these to divine status. Jesus affirmed and validated women as equal partners in the family of God, which He came to establish. When He proclaimed liberty to the captives, He did so, in part, by countering the debilitating cultural bias against women. Jesus clearly created a new family of brothers and sisters who shared the same heavenly Father (Mark 3:31–35). Thus, as members of the new family, women must have equality of spiritual privilege.

Jesus made no explicit comments about changing the Old Testament order of male leadership in worship and within the family structure. He even chose twelve male apostles. But in His personal dealings, He simply ignored the prevalent traditions of His day, traditions that relegated women to a second-class status. In His presence, women came out of hiding and were validated as daughters of God.

Many of you know the stories of the men who left all to follow Jesus. But we often overlook the women who also left all to follow Him. We can only appreciate such a radical idea when we realize that Jewish women of that day were not even supposed to read the Scriptures, much less leave their homes, except briefly to fulfill a domestic responsibility. A first century rabbi went so far as to say that the words of the Torah (the Hebrew Scripture) should be burned rather than be entrusted to a woman. And yet, Jesus shared His Word with many different women as He walked the dusty roads of ancient Israel. In fact, He entrusted the most important message of the early church—that of His own resurrection—to be first proclaimed by a woman with a dubious past.

In short, the purpose of this book is to lead you into the heart of Jesus. You will see how He broke many taboos, how He rejected the entrenched stereotypes, and how He was willing to be misunderstood in order to help the women He encountered.

If you could meet Jesus today, what would your request be?

Forgiveness?

Healing?

Eternal life?

Deliverance?

Cleansing?

Validation?

Hope?

Love?

The women who met Jesus had the same needs. Some of them sought Him out, while others were found by Him. Each had exhausted human resources, and all needed a miracle from someone who understood them and would not condemn them. Some had great faith; others did not.

Every story in this book tells of a divine encounter. And you can meet the same Jesus today if you come to Him with your deepest longings. He calls out to us today in a voice loud enough to be heard amid the din of our gender-biased culture.

Our prayer is that when you are finished reading these chapters, you will be able to say with deep confidence *Jesus is the lover of my soul*.

Join us on a journey that points the way.

Erwin and Rebecca Lutzer Moody Church Chicago, Illinois



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: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. LUKE 8:1-3

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# JESUS, LOVER OF Mary Magdalene

Karla entered our lives in the early years of our ministry. Child-hood trauma had left Karla unsure of how to cope with the challenges and stresses of living in the real world. She was young, an immature Christian, and had been going through emotional and spiritual turmoil for several months. Her two-year marriage was challenging, and her job was stressful and mentally demanding.

Added to these situations was the burden of her invalid mother, who frequently relied on Karla to care for her physical and emotional needs. Many years before, her mother had left a major religious cult, and she still struggled occasionally with frightening visions and evil oppression. She had recently shared with Karla that she had a trancelike dream of evil images that had terrified her, and that she remembered calling out over and over again for Karla.

As the confusion and tension grew inside her mind, Karla began to have unusual and scary thoughts herself. One day while at work she shared her fears with a coworker, an overzealous believer from a different religious group. Over the lunch hour, the woman insisted upon laying hands on her and praying in an unusual manner.

Within a short time, Karla began to hear voices. Her percep-

tion of reality started changing, and she began to have grandiose thoughts about herself.

Later that same day, in an altered state of consciousness, Karla left her job and drove to her neighborhood. Going from door to door, she made bizarre pronouncements about Jesus and the end of the world. She even stopped at a playground to warn the children of impending doom. Concerned about her behavior, one of the neighbors called the police. Even after her husband arrived, Karla was uncooperative.

Her husband decided to take her to the hospital for evaluation. While there, she told the medical staff that she had the power of Jesus. When she began demonstrating unusual strength, she was forcibly restrained and sedated with psychiatric drugs designed to put her in a state of artificial calmness.

This is where we entered the picture. After receiving a phone call about this situation, we began to prayerfully intercede for this desperate young woman. Within the hour, Karla became peaceful and spoke rationally, and the next day she was released from the hospital. The doctor said that she had suffered a nervous breakdown and told her to rest and to take tranquilizers. She remained rational, but her inner turmoil continued.

I (Rebecca) was able to meet with Karla soon after her release. For several hours, God gave me the compassion and patience to listen and to talk with her. Her thoughts were confused and unfocused. What she knew about herself, her life, and her relationship with God were in conflict. At times, she was agitated; occasionally, she cried inconsolably. I believed that she was under demonic oppression. With her permission, in the name of Jesus, I spoke directly to the evil spirits that were torturing her, commanding them to stop and to leave her presence. After this, her countenance relaxed; she became calm and began to concentrate and to understand the spiritual battle that she was going through.

We believed Karla needed a safe, quiet place in which to recover; a place where she could receive counseling and help in a concentrated effort to restore her peace of mind. It was very important for her to know that she could be delivered from all demonic influence and oppression. We discussed Karla's experience with a pastor friend who had written a book about spiritual warfare. He concluded that some of the demonic spirits that had been tormenting Karla's mother had transferred to Karla. We were willing to commit whatever time and effort it would take to see full deliverance and restoration for Karla. Though we were new at dealing with cases like this, we were eager to learn how to fight against demonic spirits. We invited her to stay with us.

Karla was childlike in her thinking and responses. Her concept of who she was in Christ had been shattered. Thoughts of despair and suicide troubled her. She had believed the lies of Satan rather than the truth of Scripture. Through prayer and reading and studying the Bible, God enabled us to guide her back to biblical truth and a "sound mind." As we listened to her and showed gentle, patient love, the Holy Spirit began the healing process of restoring her soul.

We have kept in touch with Karla throughout the years. Her life has not been easy—she's struggled with an unfaithful husband, divorce, single parenting, financial difficulties, health problems, and being misunderstood by others. But she has never wavered in her faith in Jesus, who became the lover of her soul. Just as Jesus delivered Mary Magdalene from her tormenting demons, He also did the same for Karla. And just as Mary Magdalene devoted her life to following Jesus, loving Him more than any other person, so has Karla. Jesus did for them what no one else could—He forgave their sins, delivered them, made them whole, and restored their sanity—is it any wonder that they love Him so?

#### 500

One of the best-kept secrets is the role that women played in the early church. And today no woman is receiving more attention than Mary Magdalene.

She is deserving of renewed interest and study. For many centuries she was dismissed as the "penitent prostitute" who interrupted a feast in the house of a Pharisee to show her devotion to Christ. To be sure, the official church was glad she received forgiveness, but the accusation stigmatized her as a woman of the streets. She was grudgingly praised for introducing herself to Christ, but she could not escape the disgrace of the scarlet letter.

This misidentification can be traced back to AD 591 when Pope Gregory gave a message in which he said that the prostitute whose story is recorded in Luke 7 was really Mary Magdalene who was mentioned in Luke 8 as the woman delivered from possession by seven devils. However, scholars agree that there was no reason to make such a connection. In Luke's Gospel the story of the unnamed prostitute is separate from the later reference to Mary Magdalene. Not until the Second Vatican Council in 1964 did the Catholic Church officially correct the error.

Read Luke 8:1-3 and you will agree that the author introduces Mary Magdalene as a new person in the life of Jesus. No effort is made to connect her with the previous story about the woman who anointed Jesus at the feast in Simon's house. Yes, Mary was a troubled woman before she met Jesus, but we have no reason to think that she was a harlot.

Mary Magdalene has come to symbolize the struggle of women throughout the centuries: often misunderstood, casually dismissed, and eclipsed by the role men play in spiritual leadership. This woman who occupied a prominent place in Jesus' life has too often been stigmatized by a church dominated by male

leadership that has, at best, grudgingly recognized the contribution women have made to the history of the Christian faith.

Mary Magdalene has many sisters. She provides motivation for all the women who sit in the pews of our churches, desiring an opportunity to serve but unsure whether they will be accepted and affirmed. Many gifted women seek in vain to be validated, to feel useful and respected in meaningful ministry. The story of Mary, whose life began in secret turmoil and ended with a personal affirmation from Jesus, gives us all hope. This woman with a troubled past ended up being the first witness to the resurrection of her Lord.

In the final chapter of this book, we shall discuss the contemporary debate about Mary Magdalene as she is depicted in the Gnostic Gospels and in the novel *The Da Vinci Code*. We will answer questions about her relationship to the Holy Grail and French royalty. But in the rest of this chapter we will study her place in the New Testament by examining several snapshots of her relationship with Jesus.

## TRANSFORMED BY JESUS

Jesus did what no rabbi of His day would ever have approved: He allowed women to travel with Him on His journeys throughout Israel. One of those followers was Mary Magdalene, a woman who evidently was unmarried since she was identified only by where she came from. The name Magdalene, or Magdala, probably refers to modern day Migdal, which historically has been an important agricultural, fishing, and trade center on the western shore of ancient Galilee.

We don't know where Mary and Jesus first met. Perhaps it was when He visited her town near Galilee. She had heard about His miracles and sought deliverance through His healing power. Mary Magdalene's distinguishing characteristic is that she underwent an exorcism at the command of Jesus. She was possessed by evil spirits, who no doubt terrorized her. There has been much speculation regarding the seven demons Mary is said to have had. The fourteenth-century Italian poet Dante believed Mary Magdalene's demons were not literal; he termed them as seven scars: pride, envy, anger, intemperance, lasciviousness (lust or salaciousness), covetousness, and spiritual sloth.

Actually, Dante might well have underplayed Mary's predicament. Passages in the New Testament that speak about demons should not be interpreted as superstitions of an ancient era; nor are they symbolic references to psychological scars. The record shows that Jesus often encountered alien spirits who had an independent existence and tried to defy Jesus' authority, even speaking to Him at times. In this case, we know that when Mary Magdalene met Jesus, He delivered her from their power.

Those of us interested in the underlying causes of human behavior would like to sit down with Mary and ask about her past. We'd like to know when she became aware of these alien spirits, and how she coped with her suffering. Was she involved in occult practices?

Of course, we don't know the answers to these questions. But we do know something of the common characteristics of those who are haunted by unseen, powerful, evil personalities. Feelings of guilt, fear, self-loathing, and restlessness often are identified by the tormented. We can imagine that Mary was depressed and lost her will to live. There may have been a constant struggle between what she knew was right and the things she was driven to do. Did she have a penchant for antisocial behavior? Undoubtedly, she was embarrassed and ashamed. She liked nothing about herself; she felt cursed and confused.

After Jesus delivered her, we can picture her as being overwhelmed with two realizations. First, she was clean: the inner emotional turbulence had ended, and her tormented soul was at peace. Second, she was given the gift of dignity and value. After years of hopelessness, she found someone who could free her. Someone who saw in her something worth saving, redeeming, and loving. It was Someone whose opinion counted much more than that of all of her peers combined.

Mary's transformation was remarkable. She probably even looked younger; the weight of the world had been lifted from her fragile shoulders. It no longer mattered what others thought of her. She had met a man who had the power to change her life. Now she would devote herself to following and serving Him.

## A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

As far as we know, Mary never returned to Magdala again. If she did, it was only for a brief visit. She became part of an inner circle of women, including Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna. Some names were listed in Luke, others were not.

We must remember this when we feel insignificant and when our names are not recorded or honored. Not all faithful people had their names recorded in the Bible, even if they lived during the time of Jesus. Our names might never be in a newspaper or on a speaking roster, but God knows who we are, and we are just as special to Him as Mary was.

We read, "These women were helping to support them out of their own means" (Luke 8:3). They not only ministered to Jesus and His disciples financially, but personally and spiritually as well. The word *helping*, sometimes translated *minister*, is actually *diaokinos* in Greek, from which we get the word *deaconess*. Paul

calls Phoebe a *diaokinos* in Romans 16:1. These women who helped Jesus were the original deaconesses.

Jesus and His colleagues needed money in order to live; after all, they didn't receive wages for traveling and sharing the Good News. Jesus Himself was not reimbursed for His speeches and miracles. These women supported Him by offering prayers, obtaining and preparing food, and showing their helpfulness through acts of kindness and encouragement. From town to town, village to village, often living in the open fields or caves, these women went along to help. Mary was a member of Jesus' entourage, this group of women who traveled with Him and provided for Him.

The rabbis would never have condoned this. Women were viewed as untrustworthy and seductive; in fact, they were usually blamed for men's lusts and any adulterous relationships that might ensue. So it's probable that the official religious leadership thought it improper to travel with what could be misinterpreted as a harem. But Jesus would not allow men to blame women for their sexual indiscretions and lusts. When He said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28), Jesus was putting the blame for men's unholy desires squarely upon their own shoulders. *They* had the responsibility of controlling themselves and, if necessary, gouging out their eyes to keep from sinning (v. 29).

In a blatant countercultural move, Jesus made sure that women were not treated as outcasts or unworthy of ministry. Traveling in a group insured that the entourage maintained proper decorum. And we can be sure that the very presence of Jesus would prevent any impropriety. But He would not shield Himself or His disciples from the presence of women who had a godly zeal to help in ministry.

But second—and this is important—the other rabbis would

not have traveled with such an entourage because women were viewed as "weak-minded." One sect of the Pharisees would pray every morning, "God, I thank you that I am not a woman." What is more, a man only had to clap his hands three times to legally divorce his wife for something as trivial as burning the bread. The prevailing attitude was that women were deemed worthy only to bear children and serve the male species.

Jesus thought differently.

The oft-misinterpreted biblical teaching of male headship has frequently caused men to look upon women with feelings of superiority. Whether by the Pharisees during the time of Jesus or the present leadership in some churches, women have often felt restricted in exercising their gifts. However, many have overcome such discouragements and have achieved great things in the name of Christ. Like Mary Magdalene, they have risen above their limitations to play an important role in the spread of the gospel.

Consider these examples: a woman named Fabiola founded the first Christian hospital in Europe; Amy Carmichael opened a Christian orphanage for abused girls in India; and a newly widowed Elisabeth Elliot lived with the remote Ecuadorean tribe who had murdered her husband, in order to translate the New Testament into their language.

We know that Jesus would applaud these gifted women, and many more throughout church history. Their vision and determination motivated them to do great things for the sake of the Kingdom.

### AT THE CROSS

From the beginning of their association with Jesus, these women evidently continued helping Him right up to the Crucifixion.

Speaking of that event, we read, "Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons" (Matthew 27:55–56). It is noteworthy that Mary Magdalene is not singled out in any way as having greater importance or being more special to Jesus. At great personal risk, all of these women came as close as they dared to the gruesome crucifixion of their friend and Savior.

The depth of Mary Magdalene's commitment can be gauged by her presence at the cross. John the apostle describes the scene: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25). Together they stand, weeping and watching in horror. This was not a place for a woman to be; for that matter, it was not a place for a man to be.

Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* has changed the way we view the suffering of those who were crucified. It was probably difficult for the women to get near Jesus' cross because of the band of soldiers and the crush of the mob. But as time passed, the crowd thinned and the women stepped as close as they could, "until they finally stood where they could hear the low moans of His suffering, see the blood slowly dripping from His wounds, and there they hear the low exhausted tones in which He committed His mother Mary to His apostle John."

Evidently, when Christ released His mother to John, most of the women left shortly thereafter. But two women refused to leave. One was the mother of James and Joses, and the other was Mary Magdalene. They stayed until after Jesus died and His body was taken away.

Joseph of Arimathea, a secret follower of Jesus, asked the Roman governor Pilate for the body of Jesus. Pilate granted him his request. With the help of a man named Nicodemus, another follower of Jesus, Joseph took down the body from the cross. The two men prepared Jesus' body with expensive spices, wrapped it in linen cloth, and placed it in Joseph's own garden tomb, newly cut out of rock. "Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid" (Mark 15:46-47).

Last to leave the cross; first to see Him laid in the tomb.

Mary loved this man, Jesus, who gave her a new beginning—a man who forgave her past and offered her an eternal future. He also restored her dignity by allowing her to help Him in His ministry. The intensity of her love was a direct result of the deliverance and forgiveness she had received. Forgiven much, she loved much.

Mary, like the twelve disciples, was unprepared for Christ's death. When Jesus predicted He was about to die, His core group of followers simply refused to believe His words, insisting that it could not be true. They found it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that the Messiah could be so helpless as to be overcome by evil men. During their time with Jesus, they had concluded that He could always outwit His enemies. They had seen it with their own eyes. But now Jesus was dead. They were devastated. And if they did not expect His death, they most assuredly did not expect a resurrection.

Mary waited until the end of the Jewish Sabbath before she and the other women crept through the predawn darkness to the tomb were the body of Jesus had been laid. Customarily, women would prepare a body for burial by placing spices next to it. So Mary came looking for the body of Jesus to complete that task. How grateful we are that she did not find what she was looking for!

Mary also came to the tomb to find answers to her questions. How could the One who had the power to deliver her

from seven demons be dead? How could the man she trusted no longer be there for her? How could the Messiah die a horrible, unjust death? "When they hounded Jesus and hung Him on a cross, they really showed how helpless God is. When the chips are down, Mary told herself, a person is alone and deserted."<sup>2</sup>

# THE RESURRECTION

When Mary arrived at the tomb, she did not think that anything unusual had happened. Grief distorts reality. Mary was not looking for the living Christ, she was looking for a dead one.

Suddenly a man addressed her. Thinking he was a gardener, she asked, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (John 20:15).

"Mary." The man called her by name.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, "calls his own sheep by name and . . . they know his voice" (John 10:3-4). Jesus' relationship with us is always personal. We are born into an impersonal world, given a number on our cribs, then later another number on our death certificate. In between those two events, our identities are defined by numbers such as a social security number and credit card numbers. If we are not careful, someone might steal our identities. But Jesus knows who we are, personally and confidentially. He calls us by our first name, just as He did with Mary.

Mary quickly turned and "cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)" (John 20:16, emphasis added).

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (v. 17). She was shocked to see Him and reached out to touch Him, possibly grasping His feet. Jesus told her to stop touching Him, for He had not yet gone up into the presence of His Father. The nature of their relationship had changed. He was no longer the earthly Jesus, but a heavenly Jesus in transition.

This is the only time in the New Testament that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were alone together. Standing in His presence she was blessed in two ways:

First, Jesus called Mary His sister when He said, "Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (v. 17). Obviously, since God is *His* father and God is *her* father, that makes Mary His sister. This is also the first time He called His disciples *brothers*, giving explicit expression to the new family that had been created. Jesus is the "elder brother" and we are all a part of the family.

Second, Jesus gave Mary an assignment, "Go to my brothers." She is to return to tell the disciples what she has seen and heard. This woman is the first witness to the Resurrection, the first one to carry the news to others. The doctrine that is at the heart of Christianity was first proclaimed by a woman!

Why did Jesus choose Mary to deliver this joyful message? Most likely, there are several reasons. Primarily, He chose her because of her faithfulness. She did not deny Him as Peter did. She did not forsake Him as the disciples had. She stayed near the cross as He was dying. She went to the tomb to anoint His body. She was willing to search for His missing body.

Jesus also chose Mary because of her love for Him. She loved Jesus, not in a romantic way, but with a love stemming from gratefulness and devotion for what He had done for her. He had freed her from a prison of demonic affliction and torment. He had dramatically and completely changed her life and given her something to live for. No wonder she loved Him so deeply! Wouldn't you? Those of us who have been set free and forgiven of our sins love Him deeply, as well. *Every sinner has a past; every saint has a future*.

And then, not to be overlooked, the fact was that she was the only one at the tomb at that very moment. Mary had gained the right to be honored as one of the greatest women of New Testament history. This, by the way, is one proof of the narrative's historicity. No Jewish author in the ancient world would have invented a story with a woman as the first witness to the most important event in Christendom! In fact, the Jews did not accept the testimony of a woman; it was deemed invalid in and out of court. No wonder Mary recruited other women to go with her to tell the disciples the news.

Quite predictably, the disciples did not believe Mary and the other women when they said Jesus was alive. "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like non-sense" (Luke 24:11). Jesus was, in effect, saying to Mary, "They don't trust you, but I do. . . . . I know that you are a woman of integrity; I know that you are worthy of bearing a message for Me."

All four Gospels insist that Jesus first appeared to women. Darrell Bock writes, "This detail, running against the larger, ancient culture as it does, is one of the key evidences that these resurrection stories were not invented by a church trying to give Jesus a higher status than he really had." Jesus shattered the stereotypes.

Leonard Swindler says that in choosing Mary to proclaim the Resurrection, Jesus is clearly rejecting the second-class status of women. The effort of Jesus to connect women with His gospel, he writes, "is so obvious that it is an overwhelming tribute to man's intellectual myopia not to have discerned it effectively in two thousand years." This event was a great affirmation of women's value and merit.

Mary was changed by the Resurrection. We've all met people who have had to stand beside the grave of a little child or another loved one and wonder how they could carry on. The Resurrection assures us that someday these graves will be as empty as His own. "Because I live, you also will live" (John

14:19). To stand at the Cross and not know that there is a Resurrection would be cause for despair. But like Mary, who proclaimed, "I have seen the Lord!" we can be certain that the Christ we love is alive and that we will spend eternity with Him.

Jesus was drawn to those who were powerless, those who were marginalized, those who needed help and admitted it. The same is true today. In ancient times, women were also drawn to Jesus. "His purity of soul, His reverent courtesy to the [opposite] sex, His championship of their equal dignity with men before God, and His demand for supreme zeal in all in the spread of the New Kingdom, drew them after Him."

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Jesus is the same man today for all the same reasons. We can trust Him, just as the women of Jesus' day found Him to be a man they could trust.

And subsequently He found them to be trusted friends. Jesus broke with precedent and gave them an expanding role in the church. He let them help Him, and they demonstrated devotion and dependability. When the mother of James and John came to Him with a question, He listened politely. Every woman who encountered Jesus felt validated and worthy because He gave them His full attention. Today He asks women to come out of the shadows and serve Him to the best of their abilities, utilizing their gifts. Mary Magdalene is proof that who we are does not determine who we shall be.

She also reminds us that Jesus can be near without our knowing it. We walk in the midst of the ascended Christ. He is at our side. He calls our name, but we might be too busy to hear it. Through circumstances, through suffering, through a friend, and especially through the New Testament narratives, He speaks and wants us to hear. He is nearer to us than we know.

We can agree that women have made significant contributions throughout church history. One that has been overlooked is hymn writing. In some cases, these hymns are sung in churches where women are not allowed to speak. One such hymn writer is Jennie Evelyn Hussey, who lived in New Hampshire during the early 1900s. She spent most of her life caring for her invalid sister even though she herself suffered from crippling arthritis. When the pain was almost too much to bear, she wrote a memorable poem called "Lead Me to Calvary" that would give her a place among the great poets of our time. We sing:

May I be willing Lord to bear Daily my cross for thee. Even thy cup of grief to share Lead me to Calvary.

But the stanza that we can use as our own prayer is this one:

Let me like Mary through the gloom Come with a gift for thee. Show to me now the empty tomb Lead me to Calvary.

Mary teaches us that we have to move beyond the Cross to the empty tomb. There, through our tears, we encounter hope and help as Jesus calls our names. And when we hear our names, we are invited to share the Good News of Jesus with everyone who crosses our path.

## A PRAYER

Yes, Father, like Mary, I want to peer into the empty tomb of Jesus and experience the assurance that you are standing beside me despite my own disappointments and loneliness. I thank you that you lifted Mary out of a private dungeon to give her hope and healing. That is my prayer for myself and all those around me who also stand in need of a touch of your grace. I thank you for your love and companionship. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# ENDNOTES

#### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 248.

#### Chapter 1

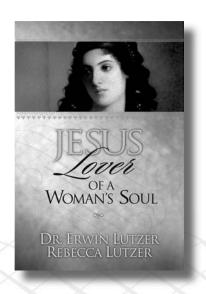
- <sup>1</sup> M. Madeline Southard, *The Attitude of Jesus Toward Women (*New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), 133.
- <sup>2</sup> William Barker, *Personalities Around Jesus* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 96.
- <sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004), 138.
- <sup>4</sup> Leonard Swindler, "Jesus Was a Feminist," Catholic World (1971): 180.
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in Southard, The Attitude of Jesus Toward Women, 122.

#### Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, Breaking the Da Vinci Code (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004), 54.
- <sup>2</sup> Mary Whelchel, unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1955), 140.
- <sup>5</sup> Augustine, Confessions, 1:1, translated by John K. Ryan (New York: Image Book, 1960). See web site last accessed October 17, 2005, http://www.amazon.com/gp/reader/0385029551/ref=sib\_rdr\_ex/002-6041383-9975243?%5Fencoding=UTF8&p=S018&j=0#reader-page
- <sup>6</sup> M. Madeline Southard, *The Attitude of Jesus Toward Women* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), 89.
- <sup>7</sup> Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, 155.
- <sup>8</sup> Southard, The Attitude of Jesus Toward Women, 88.
- <sup>9</sup> William Barker, *Personalities Around Jesus* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 80.

#### Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup> The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Matthew 8–15 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 467.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 474.
- <sup>3</sup> Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 73.



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