

BIBLE WOMEN – NEW TESTAMENT

The Widow of Nain – Herodias and Salome – Peter’s Mother-In-Law Lesson 17 – By Beverly McKey

I. GOD LOVES THE WIDOWS AND THE FATHERLESS

- A. God has always emphasized the duty that His people have to care for the widows and the fatherless.
1. **Exodus 22:22-24** – ²² *You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.* ²³ *If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry;* ²⁴ *and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; (then) your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.”*
 2. **Psalms 146:9 Proverbs 15:2** – *“The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.”*
 3. The Law of Moses included various rules regarding the ways the widows could be relieved in their distress.
 - a. She needed material support and several provisions were made.
 - 1) A special tithe every third year was collected to be distributed among the widows.
 - 2) Food was provided by “gleaning” the fields.
 - a) During the harvest, no land owner was to strip all of the produce from their fields at harvest.
 - b) They were instructed to go through their fields only once and anything that was left or grew later was to be left for the widows and the poor who could gather the leftover crop (gleaning).
 - 3) **Deuteronomy 25:5-10** – The Levirate Law concerning the marriage of a childless widow to her husband’s oldest brother was created, not only to preserve her husband’s name in the history of Israel, but also to ensure the widow would be physically and financially cared for.
 - b. The story of Ruth and Naomi is a perfect example of widows being fed by this gleaning process and the Levirate Law as well.
- B. The New Testament also continues that teaching as well.
1. **James 1:27** – *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit (care for) orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”*
 2. **I Timothy 5:15** – *“If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”*
 - a. Here the New Testament has authorized the church to support those called “real widows” or “widows indeed”.
 - b. The qualifications for such a widow are:

- 1) She must not be under the age of sixty years. The younger widows have more options than the older widows do. **I Timothy 5:9a**
- 2) She must have been the wife of only one man. **Vs 9b**
- 3) She must be well known for her good works. **Vs 10**
- 4) She must have brought up children. **Vs. 10**
- 5) She must be known for offering hospitality in her home to strangers. **Vs. 10**
- 6) She must be known for ministering to the saints (fellow Christians). **Vs. 10**
- 7) She must work at relieving the afflicted (sick). **Vs. 10**
- 8) She must have diligently been involved in many good works. **Vs. 10**

II. THE WIDOW OF NAIN

A. The account of the Widow of Nain shows that Jesus, who was equal with God, (**John 5:18**) also knew that widows needed special care.

Luke 7:11-17 – ¹¹Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. ¹²And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. ¹⁶Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." ¹⁷And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region."

1. This event is a continuation of the women whose lives were changed profoundly by an encounter with Jesus", which was begun in our lesson last week.
2. During this time, Jesus was traveling from town to town in the area of Galilee preaching to large multitudes, along with His twelve special disciples.
3. On this day as they were approaching the city of Nain, which was located about twenty-five miles southwest of Capernaum.
 - a. This distance is a good day's journey, so it would be nearly dusk when they arrived.
 - b. Dusk is also a common time for Jewish funerals.
4. As Jesus got nearer Nain, He could hear the loud mourning of a funeral procession coming toward Him.
 - a. Accompanying the body to the burial place was considered a "good work" that faithful Jews could not neglect.
 - b. The body was carried on a flat frame of wood with handles on the end which would rest upon the shoulders of the men carrying the

- body. It was considered a honor and a privilege by the men to carried it.
- c. The body would be wrapped in a burial shroud with the face exposed inside an open wooden coffin.
 - d. In the USA when we are traveling in our cars and we meet a caravan of cars with their lights on, we know it is a funeral procession on the way to a cemetery. To show our respect, we pull our car over until the procession passes.
 - e. Among the Jews, when meeting a funeral procession one would turn around and join the procession to the burial place.
 - f. It is likely that this is what Jesus did when he met the funeral procession.
5. Jesus knew, without being told, that this woman was a widow, and now her only child (a son) was dead too.
- a. **Luke 7:13** – *"When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"*
 - b. Jesus touched the open coffin.
 - c. Those who carried the body stood still and Jesus said, *"Young man, I say to you, arise."* **Vs. 14**
 - d. In this Jewish culture a "young man" could be anywhere between twenty years and forty years old.
 - e. The one who was dead sat up and began to speak.
 - f. Jesus presented the young man alive to his mother.
 - g. Fear came upon all of the people in the procession and they glorified God.
 - 1) They proclaimed that *"God has visited His people."* **Vs. 16**
 - 2) This report went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.
 - 3) Jesus had achieved His most important mission, which was to convince them that He was sent by God, and in doing so, they would turn return to God.
- B. Wouldn't you love to have seen the face of the widow when her son sat up and spoke?
1. Jesus, in His compassion, had restored her only child.
 2. As a widow already, with the death of her only child, she had no means of supporting herself.
 3. However, I am sure that this was not the first thought she had when seeing her son alive.
 4. It was just too good to be true! He really was alive!
 5. I am sure she would have gladly given her own life to save her son's life.
 6. Was it coincidence that Jesus just happened to be on the road at that specific time? Maybe not.

- C. There are some specific lessons we can learn and put into practice from this event
1. When Jesus saw her *"He had compassion on her."* Many of the miracles Jesus did were done out of compassion.
 - a. **Matthew 9:35-36** – ³⁵ *Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ³⁶ But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."*
 - b. **Matthew 14:13-14** – *"When Jesus heard it (that John, the Baptizer, was dead), He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴ And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick."* Following this passage, Jesus fed over five-thousand people with two fish and five small loaves of bread.
 - c. **Matthew 15:32** – *"Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."* *(Following this passage, Jesus fed over four-thousand
 2. Jesus taught that God's people should have compassion for one another.
 - a. **Matthew 18:21-35** is the parable of the "Unforgiving Servant"
 - 1) It is the story of a king who had a servant that owed him money.
 - 2) One owed ten thousand talents.
 - a) One talent was worth 6,000 days of work in the first century.
 - b) Ten thousand talents was worth 60,000,000 days of work (more than 164,000 years of salary).
 - c) The people Jesus spoke to knew this was an outrageous amount of money.
 - d) The master forgave the servant this enormous debt.
 - 3) Then the servant who was forgiven the debt went to another servant who owed him 100 denarii, which was equal to 100 days of work (just over three months).
 - a) The fellow servant was unable to pay the debt.
 - b) The forgiven servant had him thrown into prison until he could pay.
 - 4) When the master learned that the servant he had forgiven was treating his fellow servant so severely, he was very angry.
 - a) He went to the servant and said, *"You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant?"*

- b) The master then had his servant delivered to the torturers until he paid all of his debt, which would be impossible for him to do.
- c) **I Peter 3:8** – ⁸ *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;* ⁹ *not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.* ¹⁰ *For "He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.* ¹¹ *Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.* ¹² *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."*
- b. Jesus is the example all Christians should measure our lives against.
- 1) We cannot justify our own actions by comparing ourselves to other Christians.
 - 2) Jesus is the one we must strive to imitate.
 - 3) His example calls for us to be compassionate, especially toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 4) His example also calls for us to actively seek ways we can relieve the needs of widows and orphans.

III. Herodias and Salome

- A. A historical account of Herodias by Josephus, a first century historian:
1. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great (the ruler of Galilee when Jesus was born).
 2. Herodias was married to Herod Philip, the son of Herod the Great and also the uncle of Herodias. He was considered a king as well.
 3. Herodias and Herod Philip had a daughter named Salome.
 4. She left her husband to marry his half-brother Herod Antipas, also known as Herod the Tetrarch, who was also her uncle.
 5. Her marriage to Herod Antipas was not only considered adulterous by the Mosaic law, but it was also considered incestuous.
- B. A historical account of Herod, the Tetrarch (Herod Antipas)
1. Herod Antipas' first wife was the daughter of Aretas, the king of a neighboring Arab country.
 2. Once on a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas stayed in the home of his half-brother Herod Philip.
 3. While he was there, he fell in love with his half-brother's wife, Herodias, whose brother was Agrippa the Great.
 4. Herod Antipas and Herodias made plans for her to go to him when he returned to Galilee from Rome, after he divorced his wife.

5. Before Herod Antipas returned from Rome, his wife learned of his secret plans to marry Herodias, but Herod did not know that she had discovered his plan.
 6. Herod's wife, pretending not to know his plans, asked him to send her to a city on the border between Herod's territory and the territory of her father.
 7. Herod sent her there thinking that she did not know of his plans.
 8. Herod's wife had previously sent a message to the city, which was under her father's control, and all preparations had been made for her escape to her father.
 9. She told her father of her Herod's betrayal by making plans to divorce her and marry another woman.
 10. This enraged her father and since he had already quarreled with Herod about some of their boundary lines, he raised an army and prepared for war.
 11. Herod's army was eventually defeated and many Jews considered that his destruction was from God as punishment for his execution of John the Baptizer.
- C. The New Testament account of Herod, Herodias and Herodias' daughter.
- Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:**
1. Herod Antipas was half Jewish, but he had been raised among Gentiles in Rome and was an evil man.
 2. He hated John, the Baptizer, because he publicly denounced Herod for marrying his brother's wife, who was also his niece (according to Josephus). **Mark 6:18-29**
 - a. Herod wanted to put John to death, but he feared the Jews because they considered him a prophet.
 - b. In order to quiet John's voice among the people, Herod put John in prison.
 3. When Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod so much that he promised to give her anything she asked, up to half of his kingdom. **Mark 6:22**
 - a. The daughter of Herodias is not named in the scriptures.
 - b. It is the historian, Josephus, who identifies her as Salome.
 - c. It may be that Herodias and Salome planned these events, knowing Herod's lustful lifestyle.
 4. Salome went to her mother and asked, "*What shall I ask?*", and Herodias being evil, selfish and cruel instructed her to ask for the head of John the Baptizer on a platter.
 - a. Even as evil as Herod was, he was very sorry that she had asked for John's death.
 - b. However, because everyone had witnessed his promise, he would not refuse her and he immediately sent an executioner to carry out the deed.

- c. When the head of John was brought in on a platter and given to Salome, she gave it to her mother.
- D. It is difficult to imagine a mind so corrupt that it can conceive of such evil plans.
1. Herodias simply wanted revenge because John had criticized her publicly.
 - a. She never considered that his charge against her and Herod was justified, according to God.
 - b. It is doubtful that anyone like Herodias could even believe in God; but then she was the daughter of an idolatrous Arab king.
 - c. She valued vengeance above gold, silver, precious gems or land, since Salome could easily have asked for material wealth.
 - d. **Romans 12:19** – *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."*
 - e. It is God who will execute judgment upon the evil of this world; we cannot take that responsibility upon ourselves.
 2. While Salome was young, she was grown according to the standards of age at that time, since she married soon after these events, although it did not last.
 - a. Why did she ask her mother what she should ask for? Apparently, she was very much under the influence of her evil mother.
 - b. Even so, she could have refused to take her mother's disgusting advice.
 - c. Obviously, she had the same vengeful attitude that her mother had, so she was willing to help her mother take revenge against John.
 3. Herod and Herodias were very much like Ahab and Jezebel.
 - a. Both Herod and Ahab were evil, but their wives were even more evil.
 - b. Jezebel hated Elijah just as Herodias hated John, the Baptizer, who was often believed have the "spirit of Elijah".
 - c. They both sought to kill the object of their hatred.
 - d. Just as Jezebel was the downfall of Ahab, so was Herodias the ruin of Herod.
 - 1) The marriage of Herod and Herodias was adulterous and incestuous and shameful in the eyes of the people Herod ruled over.
 - 2) Herodias left her position as "Queen" when she was married to Herod Phillip and her position as wife of a "tetrarch" was far less socially powerful.
 - 3) Herodias was the sister of Agrippa, who was also a king and she was jealous that her brother was king and her husband was not.
 - 4) She prodded Herod to demand of the Roman Emperor, Caligula, that his title be advanced to "king".

- 5) Agrippa used his influence to see that this demand was refused and Herod was then banished and ended his days in exile.
- 6) Surprisingly, Herodias' pride forced her to be faithful to her husband and she shared the disgrace of her husband in exile.
- e. Legend says that Salome decided to join them in exile rather than being alone and that she fell through ice on a frozen lake where the broken ice caught her neck in a vice-like grip, decapitating her.
- f. If this is true, she suffered the same end as John the Baptizer.
- g. Like Jezebel and Ahab, they all reaped the consequences of their evil lives.

IV. **PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW - Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39**

- A. This account occurred very early in the earthly ministry of Jesus. **Mark 1**
 1. John, the Baptizer, had been put in prison.
 2. John himself said regarding Jesus, "*He must increase and I must decrease.*" **John 3:30**
 3. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee and it was there he called all twelve of His special disciples.
 4. They all went into Capernaum and on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught.
 5. Everyone was astonished at His teaching because He taught as one having authority and not like the scribes.
 6. In the synagogue, Jesus cast out an unclean spirit, which amazed the people even more and His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

- B. This is such a brief account one may wonder why we even include it in the study of Bible women; only two verses in three of the books of the gospel.
 1. We might logically conclude that Peter's mother-in-law was a widow, since it seems that she lived with Peter and his wife.
 2. We have just discussed the great responsibility that God's people have to care for the widows.
 3. Jesus certainly would not travel throughout Galilee healing the sick, the maimed, the blind, the demon possessed and then withhold a miracle for a family member of His own disciples.
 4. Apparently it was important to the full understanding of the gospel message since it is told in three of the four gospel accounts.
 - a. **Matthew 8:14-15** – ¹⁴*Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.*"
 - b. **Mark 1:29-31** – ²⁹*Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever,*

and they told Him about her at once. ³¹ So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.

c. **Luke 4:38-39** – ³⁸ *Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. ³⁹ So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them."*

5. Finding Peter's mother-in-law so ill was apparently unexpected, for they would not have tarried if they had known the seriousness of her illness.
 6. Each of the gospel writers emphasized different things which would appeal to the audience they were writing to.
 - a. Matthew wrote his account to the Jews, therefore, it would be important to the Jews to know that Jesus touched this sick woman.
 - 1) Jews would not touch the sick for fear of it making them "unclean".
 - 2) However, Jesus did not hesitate to touch her because His touch produced healing and He was not made unclean.
 - b. Mark describes Jesus as "taking her hand" indicating that Jesus offered the helping hand of a servant.
 - c. Luke was a physician himself and he was the only one who mentioned that she had a high fever, which a doctor would consider important.
 - 1) High fevers are more dangerous for adults than for children, since a child's fever can spike to a high degree even for common conditions, while adults do not unless their condition is severe.
 - 2) Luke also was the only one to mention that Jesus "rebuked" the fever.
 - 3) A rebuke is usually only involved when the illness is caused by an evil spirit. It doesn't make much sense to "rebuke" a normal illness.
 - 4) Since the news of Jesus and the miracles he performed was spreading like wild fire, it is to be expected that Satan would throw obstacles in their way every time he had a chance.
 - d. The healing was immediate.
 - 1) The fever left her and she got out of the bed and began serving them.
 - 2) This woman, along with Peter's wife were very likely very involved in caring for Jesus and the disciples.
- C. It may be that this small event is recorded to challenge religious errors that God, with His omniscience, knew would eventually be raised.
1. The Catholic church has misinterpreted **Matthew 16:18-19** when Jesus said, ¹⁸ *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail*

against it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

2. Catholics teach that Peter himself was the "rock" upon which the church was built.
 - a. They have declared that Peter was the first Pope, although the word nor the title "Pope" is mentioned anywhere in the New Testament.
 - b. Neither is the hierarchy of the Catholic church with its many titles (Priest, Bishop, Arch Bishop, Cardinal, etc.) of clergy ever described in the New Testament.
 - c. They have also demanded that their priests must remain celibate so they cannot be married.
 - d. Since the Pope is selected from the priests who have been promoted up the ladder to Cardinal, the Pope may not be married either even though Peter definitely was married.

- D. These six verses emphasize the importance of deep study of God's word so that we are not led into error by those who "seem to be authorities in the scriptures".
 1. The New Testament is written in language that the common person can understand, if one is willing to study.
 2. So many thousands of souls are led astray today by those who look for scriptures to defend their pre-conceived idea of what the Bible teaches, rather than searching out the truth, whatever it may be.
 3. We must pray daily that God will give us wisdom to recognize the truth of the Bible when we study it with open minds and hearts.
 4. We had Polly Cline as our guest speaker at our Ladies Half-Day two years in a row.
 5. She made a statement that I hope I never forget:
 - We must love the truth enough to recognize it even if it is taught by our enemy.
 - And we must love the truth enough to recognize error even if it is taught by our best friend.