



The Investigator's Gospel

An Eyewitness Journey Through Luke

Session 9 – Chapter 8 – The Kingdom, Power and Authority of Jesus

The Women of Galilee (Luke 8:1-3)

Luke begins Chapter 8 with a summary statement, outlining not only his activities, but also his companions:

1 After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Matthew gives a similar list, from the site of the crucifixion (Mat 27:55-56): *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 Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.*

This makes us reconsider the common picture of Jesus and the Twelve travelling through the Holy Land unaccompanied. While the women are not given leading roles throughout, they were consistently in the background, occasionally coming to the front of the story – most notably at the raising of Lazarus, and the Resurrection itself.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene (“of Magdala”) is the most prominent. Despite considerable development in tradition and myth, we know of her only her hometown (Magdala), the fact that she had been exorcised of seven demons (the effect of which is unknown), and that she was a faithful follower, both in the ministry years of Jesus (as above), as well as the crucifixion (as in Matthew) and the resurrection (as in John 20). In John, she is the first witness of the Resurrected Jesus, and the first to announce to the disciples the wonderful news – a considerable honour.

While it is common to equate Mary with the “sinful woman” who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears (Luke 7), there is no direct evidence for this. However, in a famous published series of sermon by Pope Gregory 1, in 590, this identification is made: *“She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices?”*

What follows is a pretty inspiring series of sermons on the power of the converted life, with Mary sadly recruited as the role model of reformed prostitute. Many painters, taking advantage of this, produced throughout the centuries alluring red-headed women in various states of undress, often contemplating a skull – a sign of repentance.

Mary also captured the imagination of early writers, culminating in a “Gospel of Mary Magdalene,” written sometime in the late 100s or early 200s. Fragmented copies from the 200s and 400s were discovered. It is one of the so-called “gnostic” gospels, reflecting a popular Greek philosophical blend with Christianity, relying upon “secret knowledge” (gnosis) which

Jesus passed along to only a select few. The Church strongly rejected this heretical movement, which eventually died out, until coming to prominence in recent decades.

The most notorious distortion of the life of Mary is found in Dan Brown's fantasy novel, *The daVinci Code*. Here, Mary is portrayed as the wife of Jesus, with whom she fathered children, who became the forerunners of the French royal family. All of this is of course utter nonsense, with no historical basis in truth whatsoever.

Far more useful is what we actually do know about Mary. She was from Magdala, a community on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, to the west of Capernaum. Its wealth was derived from a fish-processing industry, particularly a fish sauce called *Garum*, which was exported throughout the Roman empire. Recent excavations have revealed a first-century synagogue, of considerable importance.

Mary was a woman of means, despite her afflictions, sufficient to support Jesus (literally, "They were serving them from their possessions"). More than a supporter, Mary becomes an important figure, as Luke and the other Gospels reveal.

As for the other women mentioned:

Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household (8:3).

The Greek term *epitropos* can refer to a business manager (cf. Matt. 20:8, "foreman"), a child guardian (Gal. 4:2), or even a governor or procurator. The sense here is probably the manager of Herod's estate. The reference confirms that Jesus' ministry is reaching even the upper echelons of society. This Herod is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great (see Luke 3:1). Herod had a base in Jerusalem, as well as in Tiberias, south of Magdala, and also on the Sea of Galilee. It is likely Tiberias being referred to here.

Susanna. Her name means "Lily." Nothing else is known about this woman.

These are women of some substance and means. It was not uncommon for wealthy patrons to support traveling teachers in the Greco-Roman world. What is uncommon is that these women travel with Jesus, a respected rabbi, and are treated as his disciples. Rabbis of this day did not have women disciples. The Apostle Paul also has women working with him in positions of considerable authority and leadership. He mentions many of them by name in Romans 16 – deacons, co-workers, even apostles!

Jesus' mother and brothers – Luke 8:19-21 (also Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35)

According to the Gospels, Jesus had four brothers, James, Joseph, Judas and Simon, and an undisclosed number of sisters. His brothers did not believe in him during his public ministry (John 2:12; 7:3, 5), but appear with Mary among the first believers in Jerusalem following the resurrection (Acts 1:14). Since his "stepfather," Joseph, is never mentioned during Jesus' public ministry, it is likely that he had died before Jesus began to preach. Jesus' brother James plays a central leadership role in the Jerusalem church. Independent confirmation of the conversion and leadership role of Jesus' brothers is provided by Paul, who identifies them as itinerant preachers (1 Cor. 9:5), calls James one of the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1:19, 2:9), and refers to a resurrection appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Two New Testament letters, James and Jude, have traditionally been ascribed to these brothers of Jesus.

- *John 2:12 - After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.*

- *John 7:3, 5 - Jesus' brothers said to him, 'Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do... For even his own brothers did not believe in him.'*
- *Acts 1:14 - They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*
- *1 Corinthians 9:5 - 5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?*
- *Galatians 1:19 - I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother.*
- *Galatians 2:9 - James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars...*
- *1 Corinthians 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also.*

There is considerable debate concerning the actual relationship of these “brothers” to Jesus. There are three main possibilities.

- (1) Roman Catholic theologians have traditionally followed the interpretation of Jerome that these are not Jesus' brothers, but rather his cousins. This is usually suggested to protect the perpetual virginity of Mary. This view is unlikely, since Greek has a distinct word for cousin (anepsios, Col. 4:10).
- (2) A second view is that these are children from a previous marriage of Joseph. One problem with this is that no mention of these children is made in the birth narratives of Matthew or Luke.
- (3) The most likely explanation is that these are the brothers of Jesus born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. Matthew 1:25 suggests that Mary and Joseph had normal sexual relations after Jesus was born: *“But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son.”*

Little is known of Jesus' brothers from non-biblical material. Josephus reports the stoning of James, Jesus' brother, under the high priest Ananias. The early church father Julius Africanus is quoted by the church historian Eusebius (in the early 300s) as saying that the relatives of Jesus spread the gospel throughout Palestine, starting in Nazareth and Cochara (in Transjordan). Hegesippus, also cited by Eusebius, relates a story about the grandsons of Jude, who were summoned to Rome by the emperor Domitian. Domitian feared that as members of the royal line of David they might be politically dangerous. When Domitian found that they were merely poor farmers and were looking for a heavenly rather than earthly kingdom, he dismissed them and ordered the persecution of the church to stop. The historical veracity of this account is uncertain.

The Four Miracles – The Gradual Revelation of “Who Jesus Is”

The four miracles in Luke 8 are packaged together in Matthew, Mark and Luke, indicating that they are to be understood together, as a set. Together, they reveal Jesus as having dominion over the natural world (calming the storm); the spiritual world (exorcising the demons); the physical world (healing the woman); and death itself (raising the young girl). In Chapter 7, John the Baptist sends messengers questioning Jesus' identity. In Chapter 9, both the Confession of Peter and the Transfiguration will confirm Jesus' full nature, role and identity. Chapter 8 is the lead-up to this revelation.

The Calming of the Storm (8:22-25)

The Sea of Galilee, lying in a basin seven hundred feet below sea level and surrounded by mountains, is particularly susceptible to sudden violent storms. With two large valleys open on the west, cold westerly winds can descend quickly, turning the placid lake into a raging sea, with waves up to seven feet. In the winter sudden easterly winds can blow up to six- or seven-foot waves. Luke is not exaggerating when he says the disciples are in great danger. In contrast to the fear of the disciples, Jesus is asleep in the boat when the storm hits, and incredibly remains so.

He is awakened with “*Master, master, we’re going to drown!*” Matthew has, “*Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!*” Mark records, “*Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?*” In all three stories, Jesus rebukes the wind and waves (as in Psalm 104:7 - *But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight*). The disciples are asked, “*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*” (Matthew); “*Why are you still afraid? Do you still have no faith?*” (Mark); “*Where is your faith?*” (Luke). In all three Gospels, confronted with Jesus’ power, the disciples are “*amazed,*” “*terrified,*” and, combined by Luke, “*in fear and amazement*” (a compelling sign that Luke had both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark for reference). They ask, “*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey his command.*” Only God has such power. But how could Jesus be God, they wonder?

Jesus and Legion (8:26-37)

Luke begins with a geographical reference (8:26) *They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee*. Also referred to as the Gadarenes and the Gergesenes, this was a non-Jewish region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, under the administration of Philip the Tetrach, and the Region of the Decapolis. That it is a Gentile region is amply demonstrated by the pig farm on the shore!

A man stricken by a demon (or demons – the uncertainty of the plural form throughout this passage is reflected in the Gospel of Matthew, who describes the man as “two men”) falls at Jesus’ feet, crying, “*What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!*” The text makes clear it is the demon, rather than the man, who fears this confrontation. The demonic fear is to be “ordered into the Abyss.” The Greek word means “bottomless” or “very deep” and came to be used of the place of captivity of evil spirits or fallen angels. In Revelation 20:1–3 Satan is seized and sealed up in the Abyss for a thousand years. Matthew 25:41 speaks of the place of “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Demonization and exorcism were not uncommon in the first century, appearing both in Judaism and in the greater Hellenistic world. The New Testament itself testifies to Jewish exorcists other than Jesus and the apostles. Jesus points out in Luke 11:19 that the disciples of the Pharisees practiced exorcism, and in Acts 19 seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva attempt to cast out demons in Jesus’ name (but fail miserably!). Luke 9:49 (par. Mark 9:38) speaks of a man outside the band of disciples who is casting out demons in Jesus’ name. This last example is somewhat different since this man appears to be a true follower of Jesus.

First-century exorcists—both Hellenistic and Jewish—used a variety of techniques, including rituals, incantations and spells, potions or herbs of various kinds, and rings or other magical objects. Jesus’ exorcisms contrast sharply with these examples. No incantations or magical objects are used. There is no sense that the power is in the technique or the words that are used. Jesus rather commands the demons from his own authority and they immediately

submit. The exorcisms are not meant as showy demonstrations of his magical arts, but to confirm the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in his words and deeds.

A large herd of pigs (Mark says 2000!) are feeding nearby. Inexplicably, the demons beg to be sent into the pigs, who immediately rush down the steep bank into the lake and drown. In all three Gospels, the swineherds run to town to report what happened. The townsfolk rush to the scene, where they discover the formerly stricken man “sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.” Rather than rejoicing, they fear the power which has healed the man who had previously overpowered them. They beg Jesus to leave the area.

Touchingly, the now healed man begs to go with Jesus, but he is instructed to “return home and tell what God has done for you.” Since Jesus is unwelcome in the area, a disciple must now do the work.

Once again, the revelation of Jesus power – dominion over the spiritual realm – causes amazement and fear, as only God has such power. But how could Jesus be God, they wonder?

To Touch His Cloak (8:43-48)

Upon returning to Capernaum, they are greeted by a crowd centred around Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. His twelve year old daughter is near death. Jesus agrees to come.

While en route, pressed and jostled by the crowd (“which almost crushed him”), Jesus feels a particular touch. *‘Who touched me?’ Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, ‘Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.’ But Jesus said, ‘Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.’*

It was a woman as described by Dr. Luke: “*who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her.*” Peter’s words in Mark are less charitable to the medical profession: “*She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.*” Matthew, perhaps wisely, stays out of it.

The woman, with her “bleeding,” would have been considered ritually unclean, and unable to engage societally, which may account for her plan to surreptitiously simply touch Jesus’ cloak, rather than engage him directly. When she does, her healing is immediate. Jesus senses that “*power has gone out from me.*” The wording here is important. Jesus is not simply a conduit for the power of God, or one through whose prayers the power is invoked. Jesus himself is the source of miraculous healing power. Only God has such power. But how could Jesus be God, they wonder?

Jesus says to the woman, *‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.’* This is the only time in the Gospels Jesus addresses someone with this affectionate term. It indicates the tenderness with which Jesus speaks to her. She is now “in peace,” restored to the community from which her illness had excluded her.

Jairus’ Daughter

The focus returns to Jairus. While the “touching of the cloak” scene had unfolded, Jairus receives word that his daughter has died. Jesus tells him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” They arrive to a scene of mourning, with wailing and the playing of pipes. It was important in Jewish culture to have a large group of mourners to demonstrate the great sadness at the loss of a loved one. These would have included not only family and friends, but

also professional mourners, who had been summoned when the moment was imminent. Jesus, still looking to comfort Jairus, says, *‘Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.’* All three Gospels record the laughter of the crowd at this outrageous statement. Dead is dead, as they know all too well.

Nevertheless, Jesus clears the area, leaving only himself, the parents, and Peter, James and John. Taking the dead girl by the hand, Jesus says to her, *“My child, get up!”* Mark records the original Aramaic, and the translation: *‘Talitha koum!’* (which means *‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’*). The healing is immediate. Jesus order the parents to tell no-one of this – the complete revelation of his power and person is still for the inner circle only – despite which, Matthew adds, *“News of this spread through all the region.”*

Both Mark and Luke record the wonderful little detail, *“Jesus ordered them to give her something to eat.”* Why this detail? Perhaps as in the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus, when he asks for and eats a piece of fish to prove he is not a ghost (Luke 24:36-43), giving the girl something to eat proves that she is indeed alive, as only the living can eat.

