

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #80: WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WOMAN?

By John Temples

Proverbs 31:10 reads in the KJV, “Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.” The word “virtuous” means morally excellent, having great power and strength. The words “who can find” suggest that such a woman is rare. Who would a virtuous woman be? Let me describe her for you.

SHE WOULD HAVE THE EARS OF MARY, SISTER OF MARTHA AND LAZARUS

Luke 10:38-42 tells us, “Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’ And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’”

This text describes a very human situation. Martha was anxious to set a bountiful table for Jesus and His apostles. Mary had been listening to Jesus’s teaching and not helping Martha. Jesus tactfully told her, “[Only] one thing is needed.” Meaning either (1) Mary was preparing many courses or dishes, but one dish would suffice; or (2) The most important thing--the one thing--is to hear the word of God. Mary recognized that she could eat physical food anytime, but spiritual food is more important. She epitomized the Lord’s saying, “Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.” Someone has said that the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work!

SHE WOULD HAVE THE EYES OF PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER

The Bible says, "Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'" Upon seeing the baby, her natural maternal instincts prevailed. What a pity this "natural affection"--this instinctive parental love--has been suppressed and perverted in our time. This incident reminds us that we should always be looking for opportunities to serve God.

SHE WOULD HAVE THE HANDS OF DORCAS

"At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord" (Acts 9:36-42a).

Dorcas was said to be full not just of good *wishes*, but of good *works*. Hands are our "doing" extremities, and Dorcas put hers to good use making clothes for the needy. Dorcas epitomized the saying, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

SHE WOULD HAVE THE FEET OF MARY MAGDALENE

John 20:1-2 says, "Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away

from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.'

Mary, along with several other women, had tended to the body of Jesus on Friday, but because of the onset of the Sabbath they could not finish the job (Luke 23:56). As soon as the Sabbath was over, she hastened to complete her service to Jesus. Seeing that the tomb was empty, she ran to tell the news. May our feet be as swift to do God's will and to tell others of Christ!

SHE WOULD HAVE THE MOUTH OF LEMUEL'S MOTHER

The book of Proverbs contains "the words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him" (Proverbs 31:1). "The words" are a reference to the following description of a virtuous woman (verses 10-31). Now you know that these marvelous words were spoken by a woman!

SHE WOULD HAVE THE LOYALTY AND DEVOTION OF RUTH

To escape a famine, a Jewish couple--Elimilech and Naomi--went to Moab to live. Their sons married Moabite women. All the men died, and Naomi decided to return to Israel. She told her daughters-in-law to go back to their own people. But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17). For her loyalty to Naomi, God blessed her with a Jewish husband, Boaz, and a place in the lineage of Christ.

SHE WOULD HAVE THE OBEDIENT HEART OF SARAH

1 Peter 3:1-6--"Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or

putting on fine apparel — rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.”

Submission of women to their husbands is viewed today with contempt, but this obedient submission to Abraham was not degrading or humiliating to Sarah; rather, it was to her honor.

SHE WOULD HAVE THE COURAGE OF DEBORAH

Deborah was a judge of Israel during the chaotic times following the death of Joshua. She inspired Barak to lead the army of Israel to victory over their enemies (Judges 4:5-9).

SHE WOULD HAVE THE FAITH OF THE POOR WIDOW

Jesus observed a poor widow putting her entire daily allotment or sustenance into the treasury. He told His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood” (Mark 12:43-44). This woman gave all, knowing that there would be no more until the next allotment. That is faith!

SHE WOULD HAVE THE DETERMINATION OF HANNAH

1 Samuel 1:10 says, “And [Hannah] was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish.” Why? Because she had no children. How completely upside down are the attitudes of many women today! “Then she made a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life,

and no razor shall come upon his head" (verse 11). Samuel was born because of her prayer. Notice how bold and specific that prayer was--"give me a *male child*."

Hannah's boldness and determination are further seen in that she dictated Samuel's whole career for him before he was born. What might Samuel have said about that? But she resolved to train him to accept what she had vowed.

SHE WOULD HAVE THE UNQUESTIONING TRUST IN GOD OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

An angel came to Mary after she was betrothed to Joseph the carpenter. He told her she would conceive and bear the Messiah. Consider what thoughts must have run through Mary's mind:

- How will I be able to explain this pregnancy to Joseph?
- What will the neighbors say?
- I could be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:23ff).
- My life will be completely changed.

We could understand perfectly if Mary had said to the angel, "I need some time to think about this." But what was her response? "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! [We would say, "At your service.]" Let it be to me according to your word'" (Luke 1:38). Presumably, at the instant she said those words, the Lord was conceived in her womb.

"Let it be to me according to Your word" is the proper response of every believer to every promise and command of God. It might be called "Mary's amen." (The word "amen" means "so be it, let it be so.") Her humble response ranks with "not My will, but Yours be done." What a great example for us!

SHE WOULD HAVE THE INDUSTRIOUSNESS OF LYDIA

This wonderful businesswoman heard Paul preach in Philippi, obeyed the gospel, and became a helper of Paul in his missionary journeys. Her record is found in Acts 16:11-15--"Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to

Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us." Sounds like a woman that even Paul could not say "no" to!

SHE WOULD HAVE THE COMMITMENT TO HER HUSBAND OF PRISCILLA

Aquilla and Priscilla, husband and wife, were tentmakers. They helped Paul in his work, and also took Apollos aside and taught him the way of the Lord more accurately (Acts 18:24-26). Aquilla and Priscilla are mentioned some six times in the New Testament, and they are always mentioned together. They shine forth as fine examples of a husband and wife helping each other to serve God and to become heirs of eternal life.

CONCLUSION

These are only a few of the marks of true greatness and only a few of the godly women recorded in Scripture who exhibited them. Truly, a woman with all these characteristics would be a virtuous woman, worth more than fine jewels. May all women strive to achieve these marks of virtue. Lemuel's mother's words ring true: "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). --John Temples

