The Strange and Wonderful World of Scripture… part 5. June 23, 2024

1. We've set this up over the last four weeks so make sure you are caught up. That's especially important today as we introduce a few new concepts (new to most of you but not to biblical scholars).

2. We've already seen that the Bible is full of arguments about what God wants from us. We've seen slavery, calls for genocide, and confusion woven throughout our stories and the relief the universe felt when God revealed Himself in Jesus, settling the arguments and showing us Who He really is.

3. And that relief is massive. We go from 611 (or so) laws in the OT to just a few in the NT: love God, love each other, worship God in Spirit and in Truth. We argue and divide and divide again over the things it doesn't say such as how and how often to take the Lord's Supper (interesting how we "take" it instead of "have" it), church governance, marriage and divorce, how old a leader should be and when are they too old, whether worship should be song centered or sermon centered or Lord's Supper centered….

4. But if you approach the Bible as a book of laws dictated by God directly to human writers, you have to decide which laws to follow, which apply to you: the slave rules in Exodus 21 or those in Deuteronomy 15 or the "no slave" rules in Galatians and Philemon. You have to also decide which laws were really just directives about a local, cultural issue in a particular place and which were given to all believers at all times in every location. THAT is why we have tens of thousands of denominations.

5. So, let's take a particular question and make a case study of it: the role of women in the new kingdom, the church, the kingdom of heaven on earth.

6. The Bible is full of our stories so we take it seriously. It brought us to Jesus, so we owe it everything…but not our worship. We are allowed to examine it, question it, and then search for the answers. When we start talking about women and their public place in the church, two passages are always brought up so let's go there first. 1st Corinthians 14:34; 1st Timothy 2:11,12.

7. For many, that is all they need to read. The Bible said it, I believe it, and that settles it! But that is helicoptering in to grab this verse and that verse written to two different people in very different locations and situations. Corinth was a mess, as a city and as a congregation. Even a quick read of First Corinthians, even without knowing anything about the city, reveals a congregation that was more an unruly mob than a church. Ephesus had many faithful Christians but they were vastly outnumbered by a cult that worshiped Diana/Artemis.

8. If we limit ourselves to these passages, we would assume that God has created man to do some jobs and women to do other jobs. To some degree, that is true. Men are men and women are women and no act of Congress or Parliament can change that. Every human being that has ever been born has been ushered into the world by a woman. Men are, with some exceptions, stronger and more capable athletically than women (a high school team in TX soundly defeated the USWNST).

9. But do our physical differences (including mental differences since so many of those are sourced in biology) make women incapable of public leadership in the kingdom of God, the community of faith? Reading our story, our Bible, it would seem not.

10. Here we find Miriam leading worship after the crossing of the Red Sea. We see Huldah, called a prophet, validating the reforms of King Josiah. Deborah was the nation's judge and military leader (both secular and religious leadership). In Micah 6:4, Deborah is listed alongside Moses as leaders of Israel.

11. There is the unnamed woman who saved Joab form a siege he had foolishly launched against Abel Beth Maacah (2 Sam. 20:22) and Abigail whom David said God sent ("a wise and prudent woman") to stop him from making a foolish and violent mistake. Or, when Joab got in trouble again, God sent him to Tekoah to help him negotiate himself out of it (2nd Sam. 14).

12. It was a woman who saved Moses's life and served as his nurse and teacher. In Psalm 68:11, we see God picking out women to

announce His Word among the people. Throughout Proverbs, wisdom is anthropomorphized as a woman.

13. When Jesus is born, he is taken to the temple where he is recognized by Simeon (who just happens to be there) and Ann, a woman prophet who lives at the temple.

14. We see Philip having four daughters who preached alongside him (Acts 21:9), a fact testified to by some very good historical evidence. We see Priscilla (aka Prisca) in a teaching role, almost always mentioned before her husband – and that was very unusual in a society in which the one who was mentioned first was the leader. Even when it came to teaching a preacher, her name is given first. Don't skip over that. To us, it is nothing but, to them, it was an announcement of who was driving.

15. We see Dorcas (aka Tabitha) who was so important to the work of the church that, when she died, Peter brought her back to life to keep the church from stumbling or spiraling down.

16. When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he closed out his book with mentions of important people who had helped the kingdom move forward. Over two dozen are named, Eight women are named but, if you look to see who gets the most credit, 7 of the women and 5 of the men get the bulk of the credit.

17. You also see Phoebe, called a deacon, in Romans 16:1. She is the only person in the Bible expressly called a deacon. The words used to describe her almost certainly mean that she read this book aloud to the church at Rome.

18. You also see Junia – about whom, much later. She is referred to as highly esteemed among the apostles. Early Christian writers almost universally considered her an apostle and one of the best apostles. Later, a lot of men would do a lot of work to the text to try to take that away from her. We will show their work and name names later in this series.

19. We see women in Jesus's life and ministry from day one. In Luke 8:1-3, we find a large number of women walking with him and

helping support him and his ministry (as a large number of women support mine). He saved his highest compliments for women and their faith. When churches met, they met in homes and when those homes are described in scripture they are most often the homes of women.

20. Believe it or not, there are dozens and dozens more women who held leadership, teaching, and prophetic roles in the Bible but we have been trained to skip over them, to consider them unicorns, or to relegate all that to the past and claim a new covenant has silenced them. But what do we do when we roll up on strange passages like those in First Corinthians and First Timothy? Do we assume all the previous times (and later) were…well, what do we do with that?

21. Stories and faith and life itself are a river. The general flow is seen, understood and felt but , from time to time, you come upon a rock or a small eddy or offshoot. You don't confuse the rock for the river. You don't negate the evidence of the flowing river just because you see a stagnant pool alongside it. You acknowledge the irregularities. You notice them and even study them but you can see the river flowing on.

22. We do not take one or two verses written at different times to different places and try to make them and all other passages agree with each other because that's not how the Bible was written. It isn't the Bible we have.

23. We talked last week about the argument between Deuteronomy and Job. We can also easily talk about the argument between the Books of Samuel and Kings and the Books of Chronicles (and we will). But the term I need you to learn is "multivocality." The Bible does not speak with one voice and I think we have shown that rather plainly – and we will show it again. We are to examine, study, and rightly divide scripture, seeking the voice of God as revealed in Jesus.

24. And that might take us closer to Jesus but away from our comfort zones. Let's pick this back up right here next week.