



Lucas Cranach the Younger and workshop, *Christ Blessing the Children*, 1545–1550, oil on beech, 16.5 x 22.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

MATTHEW 18; LUKE 10

JESUS EMPOWERS CHILDREN, OUTCASTS, AND WOMEN

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Introduction

Many of the Lord's teachings and behaviors were radical in His culture. As Christians, we are so familiar with them that we may not realize how revolutionary they were in His day. This week's scriptural sections demonstrate Jesus making sweeping departures from the perceived norms regarding children, shepherds, Samaritans, neighbors, women, and teachings on forgiveness, learning, service, and even ownership.

Not only did Jesus think differently from His culture but He also taught with very innovative methods that pioneered a new life for those who followed Him. Interestingly, the teachings in the Book of Mormon seem less trapped by the traditions that developed after the Jewish Babylonian captivity (ca. 597–538 BC) and are more in keeping with Jesus's teachings (for example, the worth and place of children in the kingdom of heaven; see Moro 8:10–23).

Being Great in the Kingdom of God

Jesus's standard for greatness—Mt 18:1–5; Mk 9:33–37; Lk 9:46–48

Mt 18:1 (Mk 9:34; Lk 9:46). “*Who is the greatest . . . ?*” Jesus and the Twelve returned to Capernaum and returned to “the house” (Mk 9:33). We are not told whose house this was, but it was possibly Simon Peter’s mother-in-law’s home (Mk 1:30).¹ The Gospels of Mark and Luke record that the Twelve were embarrassed to tell Jesus that they had been debating who was the greatest among them. But He perceived their thoughts. There was an enormous disparity between the Lord’s thoughts and the disciples’ thoughts.

Mk 9:35. “*If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*” Jesus’s kingdom turned the social hierarchy upside down; humble servants, not the smartest or richest or those most closely related to royalty, are to be the most honored. Jesus explained that in the kingdom of heaven, the highest rank goes to those who will serve the most. His consistent message honored the lowly humble servants—including children and women—in various settings across each of the four Gospels.

- “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Mt 23:11)
- “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Mk 10:45)
- “But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Lk 22:26)
- “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (Jn 12:26)

The fact that the early Christians recorded these sayings and included them in the Gospels shows that they also wanted to emphasize and incorporate Jesus’s message encouraging servitude.

In contrast to Jesus’s desire for all to love and serve, the ancient world had a hierarchy that placed the wealthy, the educated, and those who owned slaves and servants on top and then those in slavery and servitude on the bottom. In the rabbinic literature of the day, women, children, and enslaved people are often lumped together in this class of servants.² But Jesus attacked this misconception here by teaching the true value of children.

Mt 18:2 (Mk 9:36; Lk 9:47). “*Jesus called a little child.*”³ Jesus made seismic changes to how children were treated. He acknowledged and welcomed them in public, encouraged them to come to Him, and honored them as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Understanding children’s role in ancient Jewish culture can help us appreciate what a drastic change this was in their society.

Mt 18:3. “*be converted, and become as little children.*” Little ones seem to have an innate gift to believe, which is at the root of conversion. When Jesus asked His disciples to humble themselves like children, He was explaining our need to become more trusting, teachable, transparent, innocent, loving, and forgiving and to lose our prejudices. These positive traits are childlike, not childish.

Mt 18:5 (Mk 9:37, Lk 9:48). “*whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*” This is thought provoking—and it extends to all who interact with children in love, from babysitters and teachers to parents and grandparents.

Children in ancient Jewish culture

In ancient Jewish culture, children were welcomed as blessings from God and fulfillments of the commandment to “be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen 1:22). Half of the children born alive died by age ten. In contrast to these two realities, children were often seen as a public nuisance and thus were expected to be unseen and unheard. Girls especially were kept indoors “for modesty’s sake.”⁴

Fathers dictated how their children were educated, where they went, what they ate, and what they vowed, and they also collected all payments their children earned or found. Many children were harshly disciplined: “Stripes and correction are at all times wisdom. . . . Loving fathers . . . [do] not spare the rod” and “break him in and beat him sound while he is still a child.”⁵ Guardians kept strict control over children up until age twelve. By age twelve girls were no longer minors, and at twelve and a half and one day, they were considered adults and thus could marry.⁶

Children shared the work of enslaved people (in fact, one of the Greek words for young child, *paidon*, can also mean “servant, slave”). Both washed the face and feet of their father or master, dressed and fed him, waited on him, and took orders from him.

Girls were not educated beyond learning domestic skills at home, except in rare cases. Jewish boys began their formal education by age five or six. However, “90–95 percent of the population of ancient Palestine would have been rural peasants”; hence, both boys and girls were often needed to help contribute on the family farms.⁷ Even very little ones helped in vegetable gardens, with gathering firewood, and with other chores.

God’s care of children—Mt 18:6–9; Mk 9:42–50; Lk 17:1–4

Mt 18:6 (Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2). “whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me.”

Jesus vehemently denounced anyone who hurt children. The word for “offend” here in Greek is *skandalizó*, or “scandalize,” and means “to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way.” The definition, in addition to being “to hurt someone physically,” can be “entrap, i.e., trip up . . . entice to sin, apostasy.”⁸

In addition speaking on abuse, Jesus also referred to those who cause a child to lose their innate faith or to distrust God. In this context, being a parent or caregiver of children is like being on a full-time mission with a golden contact. The Lord still asks that those who work with children never discourage the faith of these young investigators. Intentionally teaching children falsehoods and extinguishing their faith is a serious sin.

Mt 18:7, 9 (Mk 9:43, 45). “Woe unto the world because of offences! . . . Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off.” Jesus felt so strongly about protecting children from abuse of any kind that He used language that would have been extremely offensive to the Jews. Dismembering one’s body, or any form of harming the body, was very offensive to the Jews. Killing oneself was perhaps the worst thing one could do. Jesus used these strong words as an alarm to let His listeners know how serious it is to hurt little children.

Mt 18:10. “*their angels . . . behold the face of my Father.*” Jesus explained that angels are given charge over children. Jews believed that God gave “his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Ps 91:11; see Dan 6:22). Although we do not know whether God sends each infant to its second estate with angelic protection, we do know that the light of Christ is given to all who are born on the earth (D&C 84:44–48; Moro 7:12).

Modern prophets have discussed the idea of guardian angels:

Heber J. Grant said, “[Children,] the Lord loves you. His angels are always near to help you. Your guardian angels stand by you to see that no harm shall touch you, no evil thought disturb you.”⁹

Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “We have often heard of guardian angels attending us and many patriarchs have spoken of such protection. There are times no doubt when some unseen power directs us and leads us from harm. However, the true guardian angel given to every man who comes into the world is the Light of Truth or Spirit of Christ.”¹⁰

Harold B. Lee taught, “Those in the spirit world may be guardian angels to those in mortality. Who are guardian angels? Well, someone who is quickened by some influence, not yet celestialized, is permitted to come back as a messenger for the purpose of working with and trying to aid those who are left behind. . . . It isn’t your [departed] father and mother who will be far away from you, children; it will be you who keep them far away.”¹¹

Teachings on Repentance and Reconciliation

The parable of the lost sheep—Mt 18:10–14; Lk 15:3–7

Mt 18:11 (JST). “*come to save that which was lost, and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them.*” The JST adds a helpful transition between Jesus’s teachings on children and the parable of the lost sheep.

Mt 18:12 (Lk 15:4). “*a man [has] . . . sheep.*” Jesus described this shepherd as a brave, mountain-climbing, self-sacrificing man. Yet in the Jewish world at the time, shepherds were considered socially unclean. They were not allowed to stand as legal witnesses in court. This tradition developed because some shepherds let their flocks graze on others’ property. Jesus, however, used this pastoral imagery to describe Himself because He was despised by many. As the Good Shepherd, He knows His sheep by name (Jn 10:14). A thousand years earlier, King David also described the Lord as an attentive shepherd: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (Ps 23:1).

The Gospels include thirty-seven verses about sheep (mostly found in Jn 10:2–27). It is interesting to consider the parallels between fallen humans and sheep:

Of all the animals in God’s kingdom, sheep rank among the most vulnerable. They are largely defenseless, lacking claws or most other means of warding off an attack from predators. They cannot even run

quickly for very long. And not only can a lamb become lost, but because it lacks any homing instinct, it is quite helpless in finding its way back to the flock or the pasture. And once lost, it will frequently simply sit down and wait, not even bleating in distress. The best protection for sheep is to stay together in a group. Even then, the slightest noise can send them into a panic or cause a whole herd to stampede, sometimes to their death. The presence of their shepherd exerts an immediate calming effect on the sheep.¹²

Lk 15:7 (Mt 18:14). *“likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”* Jesus used the parable of the lost sheep to describe the importance of finding and leading sinners back to God’s fold. God finds joy and celebrates with every individual who is carefully brought back.

Reproving others—Mt 18:15–18; Lk 17:3

Mt 18:15. *“between thee and him alone.”* Jesus taught that the best way to approach a disagreement is for the involved parties to privately discuss the offense (see Mt 5:25–26). Rabbis taught that even if full restoration were made, forgiveness could not be obtained until the offender asked for it from the person wronged. This is consistent with Jesus’s teaching.

Mt 18:16. *“But if he will not hear thee.”* If the offender refuses reconciliation, the Mosaic law called for two or three witnesses (Deu 17:6; 19:15). Christians, too, are familiar with the Lord using two or three witnesses to establish His truths.¹³

Mt 18:18. *“bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.”* This verse does not seem to belong. Right in the middle of a discussion on forgiveness, we find a word-for-word repeat of Mt 16:19. It may have been a scribal error. Yet the Gospel of Matthew often repeats phrases as dividing points or organizational markers.

If this phrase was intentional, Matthew may have wanted it in the context of Jesus speaking to the Twelve about their service. Perhaps it has to do with the returning sheep being sealed or the keys that were given on the Mount of Transfiguration in Mt 17. Perhaps the Twelve received instructions on sealing ordinances. Joseph Smith taught that the apostolic church knew “all the Ordinances and blessings were in the Church—Paul had these things and we may.”¹⁴

“There am I”—Mt 18:19–20

Mt 18:19 (JST). *“if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, that they may not ask amiss, it shall be done for them.”* Returning to the theme of two witnesses, the Lord promises the Twelve that if two of them ask for what is right (the stipulation added by the JST), the Lord will answer them. Interestingly, in the Restoration context of binding and loosing, sealings are done in the presence of two witnesses.

Mt 18:20. *“where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I.”* The Lord expanded His direction to include all His disciples who came to worship in His name instead of only two or three of the Twelve. When we gather in unity and truth, our Savior (or His Spirit) can be in our midst.

I love this promise, especially in light of the parable of the lost sheep and Jesus’s teachings on forgiveness. The two or three gathered seems to be parallel with the two or three witnesses needed for reconciliation. Even a few who act in harmony with God’s will are blessed with His Spirit.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie saw this verse as referring to those who have the gift of the Holy Ghost:

All of those who have made covenant in the waters of baptism to serve the Lord and who have, as a consequence, been promised the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Such great blessings as are here promised are not given automatically or promiscuously; they are reserved for those who through faith and obedience are conforming their lives to the divine standard.¹⁵

Teachings on Forgiveness

Peter’s question on forgiveness—Mt 18:21–22

Mt 18:21. “Lord, how oft shall . . . I forgive him? till seven times?” According to the Jewish rule, people needed to offer unconditional forgiveness only three times.¹⁶ This came from a reading of Amos 1:3: “For three transgressions . . . and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.” The Lord also gave instructions to the Missouri Saints during their persecution to forgive and not fight back four times (D&C 98:41–44). These examples make Peter’s offer to forgive seven times a very generous one.

Mt 18:22. “seventy times seven.” This number is both symbolic and real. It is a whole, complete, perfect level of forgiveness. Literally, seventy multiplied by seven is four-hundred and ninety, which was a number known at the time as “ten jubilees (or seventy weeks of years).”¹⁷ I think it is significant that Jesus used this number since Dan 9:2 used it in association with the Messiah’s arrival. Now that Christ was on the earth, He implemented the higher law of forgiveness that His Atonement can offer. We are eternally indebted to our Redeemer and can become more patient and forgiving toward others as we follow our Savior’s example of forgiving. It is a very different principle here than Peter understood: “Forgiveness from Jesus is qualitative not quantitative.”¹⁸ Jesus illustrated this important lesson with another story that Matthew alone recorded.

The parable of the unforgiving servant—Mt 18:23–35

Mt 18:23. “a certain king . . . take[s] account of his servants.” The law of Moses allowed the poor who needed room and board to sell themselves or their family members to work as servants for a few years: “If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing” (Ex 21:2, 7). This obligation was extended for female servants or slaves (*lā·’ā·māh*) who became concubines and bore their master’s children; they could not leave as the men could.

Many of Jesus’s parables refer to servants using the same word for “male bondslave,” or *doúlos*. Jesus, instead of getting rid of slavery and servitude, worked to rid the culture of harsh masters, hatred, prejudice, and class systems. Anyone who sought a position of domination over another with power-hungry or money-thirsty motives was not welcome in His kingdom. Everyone in His kingdom serves in humility and love.

Jesus's parable again seems to use exaggerated numbers, but these numbers provide significant meaning. The first man owed the king ten thousand talents—equivalent to billions of dollars today—in a day when *no one* had that kind of money. That is like saying one person was in debt for the gross net worth of all the companies of Silicon Valley combined. The price does seem to be significant because it relates to the Jewish nation. Josephus recorded that the entire temple treasury was worth ten thousand talents. Jesus contrasted that price—one that was unimaginably large—to one hundred pence, or the value of one hundred days of labor at minimum wage. John W. Welch suggested another view:

Thus, the unforgiving servant may in fact represent the king or the temple high priest into whose hands God had entrusted the keeping of that huge amount of sacred wealth. No one else in Judea could conceivably have held that kind of money. Thus, the political upshot of the parable may well be this: despite the great debts and offenses of the rulers of the temple against God, they can be readily forgiven by God, so long as they beg his forgiveness and worship him. When asked, however, to be generous to a commoner in need of a small amount, the rich rulers of the temple will be unmoved, and as a consequence, they will be held personally accountable for the loss of the entire temple treasury.¹⁹

Jesus used the temple as a reference to value, but the main message establishes the relationship between God's forgiveness and our need to forgive others. Elder Robert E. Wells interpreted this parable thus:

We're often critical of others but easy on ourselves. We often see clearly the faults of others but find it difficult to see our own. We say we're frank and honest when we speak critically of someone else, but feel offended, claiming that they are unfair, not tolerant or understanding, when others do the same about us. If we fail in anything, we produce half a dozen valid reasons why, which in others would be feeble excuses. The important lesson we learn in the parable of the unforgiving servant is that unless and until we have shown forgiveness to our fellowman, we can't receive forgiveness of God.²⁰

I presume that this parable would soon mean more to Peter when he would need the Savior's forgiveness desperately. Jesus gave another parable that speaks to humanity's need for a Savior and Redeemer. It outlines the plan of salvation. It is found only in the Gospel of Luke.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan—Lk 10:25–37

In many Gothic cathedrals, stained glass windows tell biblical stories. Some windows connect Old and New Testament stories. Since accounts from Jesus's life often parallel or fulfill Old Testament stories. For example, Noah's flood is often positioned next to Jesus's baptism, and Moses's manna is placed with Jesus's feeding of the five thousand. In a few cathedrals in France, the parable of the good Samaritan is paired with the story of Adam and Eve. After researching this, John W. Welch found that many early Christian fathers

and theologians throughout the Middle Ages interpreted the parable of the good Samaritan as an allegory symbolizing Christ Himself saving fallen humanity from their sins and the effects of the Fall.²¹

In this parable, Jesus again used images that would have startled His listeners. Historically, inns were filthy and unhealthy. Jews saw Samaritans as their enemies, and they thought them unclean, evil, and selfish. At the time of the New Testament, the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous. Robbers lived in the limestone caves that pockmarked the hillside. No one with any sense would travel the road alone because of the robbers waiting to attack. Jericho was a famous resort town—even Herod the Great built a palace there (and stayed there while on his deathbed). The highway between the resort town and the big city was well known.

When we consider these details and read the parable as instruction on how to be a good neighbor, it becomes an example of kindness, acts of service, and not judging. This is certainly good, but if that is all we see, then we miss the symbols of God’s plan of salvation that are tucked into its message.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught how to find hidden meanings in parables or scriptures: “I have a key by which I understand the scripture. I enquire what was the question which drew out the answer.”²² With this parable we often only see the last question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29), but this was asked only to justify the lawyer. The question asked first, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 10:25), is also answered in the parable, but it takes a deeper level of understanding to find. The allegorical view that the early church fathers had of this parable can help us find the answer.

Allegorical view of the text

Lk 10:30. “A certain man went down from Jerusalem.” In the allegorical view, the man is either Adam or all humanity. The word “man” in Hebrew and Aramaic is *adam*. The emphasis is on “coming down” from the holy city Jerusalem, or heaven. Jerusalem is always higher spiritually than any place in the world to a Jew, so it appropriately can represent heaven, the residence of God. The person the man represents leaves the presence of God with promises conferred from that holy setting. In the allegory the man goes from God’s city or a premortal realm in heaven to life on earth. The man also comes voluntarily and alone.

Lk 10:30. “Jericho.” The city of Jericho, along with Babylon, Egypt, and Sodom and Gomorrah, is used to symbolize worldliness. Opposite to the heavenly city, Jericho represents the world. It is the lowest city on the planet at 825 feet below sea level. In the allegorical view, it represents the Fall or a fallen world.

Lk 10:30. “fell among thieves.” The man fell, *peripipto*, meaning “to fall in with” or “to fall into misfortunes,” not *pipto*, “to fall down.” The early Christians saw the thieves as “opposing forces or evil spirits of false teachers.”²³ In the allegory, the thieves are not random attackers but a deliberate pernicious group with a concerted intent, devils with a plan. Similarly, all mortals on earth are faced with the opposition, temptation, and false teachings of the devil.

Lk 10:30. “stripped him of his raiment.” Early church fathers (including Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine) saw the man’s loss of his raiment as the loss of his robe of immortality or robe of

obedience. The thieves did not rob him of any money but of his garment. When this raiment or robe is taken away, the man is wounded. What state do humans have in heaven that they lose in coming to earth? Perhaps the wound is spiritual death and the man is left without his spiritual awareness or memory of his life before he came to earth.

Lk 10:30. “wounded him . . . leaving him half dead.” The wounds can be wounds to the spirit of humanity, but they do not kill the man—he is only half dead. Something happened when leaving his heavenly home that hurt him so that on earth, he is missing his spiritual knowledge and now must walk by faith. However, the thieves can torment him only within certain bounds and cannot kill him (1 Cor 10:13). To compare this to the plan of salvation, think of our first and second deaths (spiritual death and physical death) as this imagery of being half dead (see Alma 12:31–32). We are born into a fallen world. Furthermore, the sin that we engage in as fallen mortals does leave us spiritually dead.

Lk 10:31–32. “a certain priest . . . [and] a Levite.” The early church fathers saw the priest as representative of the law of Moses and the Levite as representing the other sacred Jewish text, the Prophets. (Levites were lower-class temple workers—they helped as the butchers, janitors, policemen, and if they were lucky, musicians at the temple.) In the allegorical view, neither the law of Moses nor the other scriptures had power to save. The law and the sacred texts were ultimately impotent.

Lk 10:31. “passed by on the other side.” The priest and Levite came close to the wounded man but kept their distance to retain ritual purity for their work in the temple. In the allegorical view, these men don’t convert to the gospel but remain on their Mosaic course, unable to heal or help with eternal salvation because they do not accept the higher law.

Lk 10:33. “a certain Samaritan . . . had compassion.” The Samaritan was seen by most of the early church fathers as representing Christ. In Jn 8:48, antagonistic Jews referred derogatorily to Jesus as a Samaritan. Even though Isaiah’s chapters on the suffering servant describe the Lord as an outcast, the Jews were not expecting their Messiah to share those traits.²⁴ In this parable, Jesus chose this image for Himself, speaking to how His colleagues thought of Him. He equated Himself with some of the Jews’ worst enemies. Yet *this* Samaritan (Jesus) has compassion.

Lk 10:34. “bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.” The Samaritan came up to the injured man and bound up his wounds—a representation of a divinely compassionate God. Clement saw God’s healing skills of faith, hope, and charity as the “ligatures . . . of salvation which cannot be undone.” John W. Welch pointed out that as Abraham bound Isaac, our souls are bound to the Lord through covenants. The Lord begins to replace the lost garments by rebuilding spiritual protection with wine and oil. These represent the wine of Jesus’s atoning blood spilt in Gethsemane and on the cross and the healing that the Anointed One, or Messiah, administers. The ordinances incorporating wine and oil become part of the healing process the Savior employs. Another translation reads that the wine and oil “gush” into the wound to disinfect and cleanse it.²⁵

Lk 10:34. “set him on his own beast.” The Samaritan carrying the wounded man on his own beast reflects the image of Jesus as our Redeemer carrying humanity on and in His body. From the pains that caused Him to bleed from every pore to the wounds in His hands and sides, His body carried the debt of sin for each of us.²⁶

Lk 10:34. “brought him to an inn.” The inn has long been interpreted as the Church. Jesus carries us to salvation through His ministers and missionaries who work at the inn, or Church. The Samaritan takes care of the wounded victim himself for the first night and day.

Lk 10:35. “on the morrow.” After His Resurrection, Christ leaves the work of careful healing to His established Church. The innkeeper may represent Church workers, Apostles, and others assigned to minister in the Church.

Lk 10:35. “two pence.” Several allegorical interpretations of the two pence work here: the Father and Son, two instructions on charity, two days’ wages (symbolizing adequate provisions), the didrachma temple tax (suggesting fulfilled ritual obligations), and the time established by the Lord when He would come—after two more days Christ arose on the morning of the Resurrection.

Lk 10:35. “when I come again, I will repay thee.” The workers at the inn will be rewarded for their service to wounded humanity. Jesus promises that whatever you spend in service will be returned. The workers will be amply reimbursed for their sacrifices for the Church and fallen humanity at either the Second Coming or when they meet the Lord on Judgment Day.²⁷

Jesus’s parable of the good Samaritan beautifully illustrates the plan of salvation. The early Christians’ allegorical interpretation fits nicely with the restored understanding of Adam and Eve’s Fall and our journey on earth and return to heaven. This interpretation answers the lawyer’s first question, “What is needed to inherit eternal life,” by showing the need to receive Jesus as our Redeemer and exemplar in carrying out His work of healing and building the Church.

Teachings on Loving God

Martha and Mary—Lk 10:38–42

Luke placed the stories of the good Samaritan and Mary and Martha next to each other as supportive theological messages (and both take place near Jerusalem). S. Kent Brown sees Luke using the preceding parable on the good Samaritan to show how to love one’s neighbor and this story to show how to love God.²⁸ Luke also used both stories to break down other societal norms. Jesus’s restoration saw the good in both Samaritans and in educating women.

Lk 10:38. “Martha received him into her house.” Martha’s name means “mistress” (the feminine of “master”), and Martha lived up to that name by welcoming the group traveling with Jesus to her home (the JST adds that “they,” the disciples, entered too). Luke did not identify the village, but the Gospel of John records that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, a village just two and a half miles

east of Jerusalem. By connecting this information, we find a hint in Luke that Jesus had traveled down to Judea to stay with His friends.

It is unusual that the home was Martha's, as women did not typically own property at the time. It suggests that perhaps she was a widow and her husband left the house to her or perhaps that her husband was Simon the Leper (see Mt 26:6; Mk 14:3). Simon the Leper also had a home in Bethany where Jesus came to eat. Perhaps it is the same home but Simon was absent due to his illness, which removed him from the public (perhaps to a leper's colony), and thus Martha was left in charge of their home.²⁹

Lk 10:40. “Martha was cumbered about much serving.” With the large group gathering for the dinner party in Jesus's honor, Martha was distraught. Luke portrayed Martha as an upright Jew trying to prepare her home and a meal for her many honored guests. Her workload and the fact that her sister was not helping led her to become frustrated. Even if she had servants or children to help (which she probably had even though Luke says she had been left to “serve alone”),³⁰ as the hostess, Martha carried most of the workload, which would have felt overwhelming. The Greek word for “cumbered” is translated as “diverted” and “kept distracted.” This detail brings the story into our lives because we, too, experience stress that can alter our perspective and distract us from the good.

Lk 10:40. “my sister hath left me to serve alone.” It is as if Martha was saying, “Jesus don't you see how burdened I am?” From the perspective of most Jews of the day, Mary—not Martha—was out of line. She sat at Jesus's feet to learn from Him, thus breaking two laws: women were not to speak to men, and they were not to learn the law. Some rabbis believed that for a woman to speak to a man was so egregious that it was sufficient cause for a divorce.³¹ Further, it was obvious that Mary neglected her domestic responsibilities before the dinner. Yet, Jesus did not agree. This became a perfect setting for Jesus to knock down another erroneous cultural practice.

Lk 10:41. “thou art careful and troubled about many things.” Jesus noticed that Martha was frustrated and even “anxious” about her sister's lack of help (ESV). His response to Martha sounds like a reminder of priorities to the modern reader, but to that ancient society, His response would have been completely shocking. In Greek, it communicates that she is anxious and distracted *of mind*. The problem was not the serving but rather the timing and divided priorities.

Lk 10:42. “But one thing is needful.” When we look at life from an eternal perspective, the mortal fluff falls away and we are left with the need to “come unto Christ and be perfected in Him” (Moro 10:32). Even daily bread and shelter are superfluous compared to our relationship with our heavenly parents and the Savior. In this way, Jesus emancipates those burdened by the cares of the world.

Lk 10:42. “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Jesus's last remark is especially touching in the context of the era. Jewish women owned nothing—everything they owned belonged to their fathers or guardians before marriage and then to their husbands after. That included their clothing, food, and children. Even they themselves could be sold into slavery if their father or husband thought it necessary.³² Jesus's statement shows that women can own what they learn.

Mary's experience will help her develop more faith and knowledge and give Mary (and by association, Martha) a richer life, for she will own her knowledge beyond this life: "Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection" (D&C 130:18). What Mary learned and experienced will be hers for eternity. This principle also applies to all of us and the learning and experiences we may carry into eternity.

Jesus's revolutionary endorsement of interacting with women and encouraging their learning was radically innovative. Jesus was not speaking against the need for service and household duties. Rather, His message was that learning of Him should be our priority. He also demonstrated that women may join in the world of the spirit and mind. By including this story in his Gospel, Luke shared this message with the early Church and preserved it for generations to come.

Notes

1 Capernaum, a city of one thousand people or fewer at the time, became Jesus's home base after He was rejected in Nazareth (Mt 4:13). The scriptures do not tell us where in Capernaum the home was located or to whom it belonged. For more on Capernaum, see my discussion of Mk 1:21–22.

2 Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.25; Jacob Neusner, *The Economics of the Mishnah* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27 ("One should train for the job all those who are employed on the estate, whether slaves or children or women"); Marguerite Deslauriers, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Slaves and Women," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 25 (Winter 2003): 213; Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 1.29.

3 According to tradition, the little child Jesus called to come to Him was the three-year-old St. Ignatius (Catholics claim he followed Peter as Bishop of Antioch until his martyrdom in Rome under Trajan).

4 Philo's Flaccus: *The First Pogrom*, trans. Pieter W. van der Horst (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 70: "[Women] were always kept in seclusion and did not even appear at the house-door, and their unmarried daughters, who were confined to the women's quarter, women who *for modesty's sake shunned the eyes of men*, even their closest relatives" (emphasis added).

5 Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus* 22:6; 30:1, 2, 12: "He who disciplines his son will find profit in him."

6 Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1980), 217. Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 682, claims "thirteen and one day" as the age of adulthood. On the powerless state of children, see Richard Nietzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 117.

7 Reta H. Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 100. Also see Daniel Sperber, *Roman Palestine 200–400, the Land: Crisis and Change in Agrarian Society as Reflected in Rabbinic Sources* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1978).

- 8 “Skandalizó,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/4624.htm>.
- 9 Heber J. Grant wrote an official First Presidency statement to children included in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965–1975), 6:134.
- 10 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1954–1956), 1:54.
- 11 *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1996), 58–59.
- 12 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 97.
- 13 See Mt 18:16; Jn 8:17; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19.
- 14 “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842] [addenda],” p. 12 [addenda], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/547>. See also Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1980), 9–10, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.
- 15 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965), 1:427.
- 16 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 223. This is quoting a later work, the Babylonian Talmud, compiled after the time of Jesus but claiming ideas from the second temple period.
- 17 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 114.
- 18 Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 3rd ed. (1838; repr., Mclean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 125.
- 19 John W. Welch, “Herod’s Wealth,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1996–1997), 81–82.
- 20 Robert E. Wells, *The Mount and the Master* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1991), 165.
- 21 John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1999): 50–106. Some of the early church fathers include Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Isidore, and Eligius.
- 22 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1459, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/102>; spelling and punctuation modernized.
- 23 John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1999): 76.
- 24 The Suffering Servant passages are found in Isa 49, 52, 53. Collections dating from the first and second centuries BC, including the eighteen *Psalms of Solomon*, record the social expectations the Jews had for their promised

Messiah. No references to Isaiah's Suffering Servant passages (or any other sign of a Messiah who will be rejected) are found in those collections. A suffering Messiah was not something the Jews were expecting.

25 Welch, "Good Samaritan," 82.

26 See Mosi 3:7; D&C 19:18; 1 Pet 2:21–24.

27 Welch, "Good Samaritan," 82, 86, table 1.

28 S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 542.

29 Another overlapping evidence that Simon the Leper was part of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus's family is found at the supper in Bethany recorded in Mt 26:6. In Mk 14:3, a woman anoints Jesus's head with pure spikenard, while Jn 12:3 speaks of a dinner at Bethany with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, at which Mary uses pure spikenard to anoint Jesus.

30 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chap. 8. The average middle-class household in the Greco-Roman world at the time had eight servants or slaves. Jewish households probably had fewer.

31 Mishnah, Ketuboth 1:8.

32 Jesus's example honors women in their education and respects them as equal partners with men. The same stance has been taken by modern Apostles like Elder Richard G. Scott: "In some cultures, tradition places a man in a role to dominate, control, and regulate all family affairs. That is not the way of the Lord. In some places the wife is almost owned by her husband, as if she were another of his personal possessions. That is a cruel, mistaken vision of marriage encouraged by Lucifer that every priesthood holder must reject. It is founded on the false premise that a man is somehow superior to a woman. Nothing could be farther from the truth." Richard G. Scott, "Honor the Priesthood and Use It Well," *Ensign*, November 2008, 46.