

# SheBrew final\_12-20-2022

Tue, Dec 20, 2022 6:26PM • 1:02:58

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

women, jesus, new testament, people, read, luke, text, story, church, scripture, gospel, disciples, paul, centuries, translations, apostles, men, mary, work, phoebe

## SPEAKERS

Tony Chvala-Smith, Josh Mangelson, Karin Peter, Charmaine Chvala-Smith

### **Josh Mangelson** 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

### **Karin Peter** 00:33

Welcome to "New'Brew", the *Project Zion* series that takes us through the New Testament by explaining, exploring and experiencing the New Testament texts. Our guides through the New Testament are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith and I'm your host, Karin Peter. Now, before we begin, I'd like to remind listeners that you can view all the "New'Brew" episodes and see Tony and Charmaine's slides on the *Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube Channel*. Now faithful "He'Brew", "New'Brew", "He'Brew (Old Testament)", "New'Brew" (New Testament) listeners, remember that we did a "She'Brew" for the Old Testament to talk a little bit about women in Hebrew Scripture. And so, our episode today is a "She'Brew" New Testament where we're going to get to know a little bit about women in the New Testament and their contributions to the early church. I'm not sure who we're going to be talking about, and I'm okay with that, but I did want to ask a question, and if you've listened to some of the "He'Brew", "New'Brew" episodes, you won't be surprised at this question, but Tony, Charmaine, isn't the New Testament just a series of misogynist books?

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 01:41

Good question.

### **Tony Chvala-Smith** 01:41

I'm glad you refer to it as a series of books because it is a library, and I think we can say, no, if you're referring to the whole series, no. But the real issue will be that there are misogynist readers and misogynist traditions of reading the New Testament and so we have to distinguish between how an ancient text, embedded in its worldview, explained or described reality, versus how people, shaped by misogynist traditions, read and not read things. So, that, I think that's where we would go with that, so.

### **Karin Peter** 02:16

Okay, fair enough, although at some point, I'm going to call you out on the "well, not all the books" comment that you just made, because I'm going to play a Thomas Jefferson and just cut out the ones that I don't like. So, you know, you let me know which ones I need to do that with.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 02:27

There you go. Well, in effect, many people do that so, you're realistic about it.

**Karin Peter** 02:34

Alrighty, so let's begin.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 02:37

So, one of the things that we realize when we're talking about women, especially women in ancient times, that we in our time really have very little conception of, very little experience with, even those who study it deeply have a difficult time imagining what was life like for women, because we don't have many women writers. In fact, from this time period, we don't have any, and in the New Testament, we don't really have any. And so, it takes some research and some digging, but also connecting with our basic human nature. And one thing that hasn't changed is that deep longing that people have to be understood, and heard, and seen, and valued, and respected, and given dignity, and all of those things. That has not changed. And so, we can take that thing that we all understand with us back into the text, and then focus on a particular group of people, and in this case, we'll be looking at women. So, we have a lot of misconceptions about women in the Bible. I, as a young adult, may have said this many times before, but it's my starting point, and that was, I'd heard the stuff about a group of old white guys deciding what books were going to be in Scripture, and they made sure that there were the ones that would keep women in their place, and I was familiar with some of those passages, and so, I was pretty quick to believe that. And so, it's like, why would I want to read Scripture? It's manipulative. It's already been shaped. And so that was kind of my approach to it as a young adult. And then I actually started reading it and studying it and ran into this guy. And what was really fascinating for me, was actually to see how much women are there in the New Testament and it's really, kind of, it startled me. And it's like, oh, my goodness, why did I not see that before? And so, one of the things that we keep trying to do is help people: A) get into Scripture, actually, for themselves, and not just listen to what everybody else says, but B) is to untrain ourselves because our cultures have trained us how to read the Bible, and what to ignore. There's stuff, it's like, oh, that's there but nobody's ever stopped there and explained it or looked at it. We just go over to the things that we've always heard. And so, in lots of ways, people have been trained out of seeing women in the New Testament, and they're everywhere. And so that, then, became, my new goal was not to dismiss Scripture, but to say, "Wait a minute. What can we tell about the women that are mentioned, especially since this is written in a patriarchal society, a hierarchical society, and the writers are men? What does it mean that there's women embedded in this story all the way along? What can we see? And so, one of the things that I've become sensitive to, and I think we will often verbalize, is that, in some ways, the Church, over long periods of time, was kind of uncomfortable with the dangerous, egalitarian tone of many of the New Testament writers, and that they did skip over. And when we recognize that, for much of history, most people were not educated. They could not read the Bible themselves or it was not even available to them. And so those who were in charge use the parts that made the most sense for them.

**Karin Peter** 06:37

I just want to stop there so our listeners really hear that, because I think that's a piece that we really forget. People didn't read. People were not literate. There weren't books for people to read. All of this was oral. I mean, we all know that we stick to what we know and what we feel comfortable with. We do it in our hymnal all the time. So, I just wanted to make sure people heard you say that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:00

Well, and you think about the generations of people passing on the story. And if nobody's ever pointed out to them the role that women have played, or what it means, they don't have that to draw from. They don't have research, or things that they can research and say, "Oh, what was the situation women in that time? I mean it's for centuries and centuries, people taught what they had learned, and there wasn't ways to go deeper. So, we're in a unique time in history in lots of ways.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 07:30

And if people got their knowledge of the Bible through privileged men leading churches...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:37

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 07:37

...privileged men who would not have been able to see this from their, because their own privilege had blinded them to it, then it just, it's duplicated over generations and over generations. And so, it's taken some revolutions in Biblical studies in the last 50 to 60 years to help us get some new lenses, right, to see what was always there, but we just couldn't see it...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:55

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 07:55

...because tradition, and patriarchy, and the way institutions work had just simply created blinders for people.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 08:03

And well, this is what we all do. When we come across stuff in scripture that we don't understand we kind of skip over it to the things that we do know we can understand. And so, I think, if you think of over time, ink fading on a page, that's kind of what has happened for the visibility of women in the New Testament. And then, in this last century, writers, biblical scholars have been able to re-ink the text, and help us to see what is actually there. So, we're kind of excited about being able to help bring that back into focus.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 08:40

So, it, we'll just focus for a few minutes on some things that we've generally been blinded to that are right there in the New Testament, but we've not been able to see them because of the cultural constructs and lenses, and the theological overlays we've put on Scripture. So, for example, in the New Testament, Luke, Acts, a two-volume work by a single author, it's a major literary work. It literally takes up 1/4 of the volume of the New Testament if you're counting words. And so, the whole narrative, the

whole of this important narrative, as it starts, it focuses significantly on women, right, and on women's experience: Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, at the start of the Gospel of Luke, and so they're the ones who see and understand what's going on. And yet, it's so easy to just skip by that, or read about it at Advent, and then forget about it, but it's hard for us to get the revolutionary impact of a major literary work, spending, the two initial chapters focusing mostly on women's experience, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 09:38

And childbirth, something that typically was behind the screen, right, not something that was public discussion, whether in Greek culture, well, especially in Greek culture, and Luke is writing from that. So, begin to get a sense of, that there is a radical sense here, that women's, not only their roles that they play in the storyline, but the experience, the physical, the sexual experience of women is attended to in some way. And it's what makes the story human in Luke.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:14

And then another thing that we've been blinded to, until the last 50, 60 years, is how important a role women played in Paul's missionary work, right. We've done some segments on Paul. We've tried to help Karin get over her Paul allergy. But in the authentic Pauline letters, women play a significant role in his ministry. And it's only been in the last 50 or 60 years that we've had the lenses really to see what's always been there in the text. That's another place we've been blinded to the high value and significance of women in the New Testament.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 10:47

Other things are women are the ones who were there at the crucifixion, except for the Gospel of John where the beloved disciple is there at the foot of the cross. In all the others it's only the women who hang around, who see, and in some cases, the ones who see where his body is laid. They're the ones then who come. In all the Gospels, it's women who are the first observers of the resurrection and the first proclaimers of the resurrection. And, and that's in all four Gospels, even in John that, John is, he's not as inclusive as far as women's stories.

**Karin Peter** 11:29

He's the one I'm cutting out then.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 11:33

He's not as intentional, let's say, as Luke is...

**Karin Peter** 11:36

Alrighty.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 11:37

...in the telling of the story. But all of them, it's women, it's women who are the ones who recognize what has happened in the resurrection and who proclaim it even if they're not heard. And that's another place for women to connect, is that in that time, as often in this time, we are not heard. Our personhood is not authority enough for what we say and proclaim.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:05

Yeah, if you want to see misogyny across the centuries, in the Emmaus story in Luke, there's a reference to some women. Some women went to the tomb and had a vision, and Jesus wasn't there, and he was raised, but we thought it was an idle tale, right. So that's the first century but...

**Karin Peter** 12:22

'Cause you know, women just get around and gossip.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:24

Exactly, exactly.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 11:24

Yeah, yeah.

**Karin Peter** 12:25

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:26

Gender stereotyping in the ancient world, as well as now. By the way, St. John Chrysostom, one of the greatest preachers in the history of Christianity, who was a Archbishop of Constantinople in the late three hundreds, he referred to Mary Magdalene as the apostle to the apostles, because she's the one who's named, who took the message to the apostles, that...

**Karin Peter** 12:44

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:44

...Christ is risen, so.

**Karin Peter** 12:45

Right. The first Apostolic witness.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:47

Yeah, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 12:47

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 12:48

Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 12:49

And the fact that women are where they are in this story, we often don't realize what risks they are taking, what risks they are taking to be that close to what's happening at Jesus' crucifixion, to Roman soldiers, to being associated with this person who is seen as an enemy of the nation, and who is also seen by the religious community as an enemy. And so, they're risking a lot simply to be present, even if

it's from a distance in some of the Gospels, and then to be present with the body at the resurrection, especially in those gospels, where it's like, they're convinced his disciples took the body away. And they are the ones who were there. And so, there's all these levels of risk that they take to follow Jesus. So, I think those are the pieces that we may not always see.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 13:45

Another thing...

**Karin Peter** 13:45

Well, and women had more at risk at that period of time than men had. Women were terribly vulnerable.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 13:51

Absolutely. And unless they were wives of high-ranking men, they often had no rights over their own bodies, or even over their property.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 14:00

Yeah. Another story we're blinded to, it's a little segment in the book of Acts. It's about the story of Lydia in Acts, chapter 16. She owns a business. She's a business woman. She sells purple cloth. She's a merchant. She also is an immigrant. You can tell that because the name Lydia was not a woman's name. It was a nickname based on where she came from. It means the Lydian, right. She came from Asia Minor, and she's a Gentile attracted to Judaism. And she is the first person in Europe to respond to Paul's message, right? She's the first convert in Europe.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 14:35

And she's the head of her household. So, when she is baptized, her whole household is baptized as well. And if you remember the story of the Macedonian call, come over and help us. She is the first representative of those who responded once Paul did go into what is now Europe.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 14:54

But I mean, whoever notices this, right? We do, we don't, don't pay attention to this and yet it's a really significant moment in the book of Acts. So not a lot of attention is drawn to these kinds of facts. And there are others. We'll bring up some other things as we go today. But we want to take a closer look then at women who are easily read over, or not paid attention to, in our use of the New Testament, in church life. We've been taught to look past them, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 15:21

Or through them.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 15:21

Or through them.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 15:22

Or assume them in the background...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 15:26

Which...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:26**

...probably cooking and cleaning.

**Karin Peter 15:29**

And tending, and nurturing, and yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:31**

Yeah, all that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 15:32**

Right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:32**

But they have very different roles than that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 15:35**

And sadly, this is not unlike the experience of lots of women still, not only in developing cultures, but in cultures that claim to be developed, like American culture, the idea that women are looked past and through and ignored, so. So, we're going to take a look at some New Testament texts, and just focus on some of the women figures in these stories.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:54**

And it's not just that women feature prominently if we can see it in the New Testament, but also in the early church. We have evidence that the church leaders in places were women. And so that is a further witness that women had authority, had presence, were important in the earliest church.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 16:16**

And then near the end of this, we'll talk about how, in some of the later New Testament writings, there was a rebound, a kind of movement, a movement back towards the cultural norms. That's what unfortunately stuck in, in the Christian community more than the early egalitarianism. So, we'll just take a look at some of the women that are named, and a good place to start is in Luke's Gospel, right, with...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:40**

Okay.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 16:40**

...Elizabeth and Mary and...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:41**

Yeah. What an interesting way to begin a Gospel. Yes, there's Zechariah, having his experience in the temple and the angel, but then, the real action takes place with Mary and Elizabeth. And the angel comes in this Gospel in Luke, the angel comes to Mary. In Matthew it was Joseph who kept having visions and, and hearing from God, but in Luke, unequivocally, it's Mary. And it's Elizabeth who

recognizes what's happened in Mary's life. She knows how to interpret it. She recognizes that God is the source of all of this. And you step back and think about the story of Elizabeth and Mary, they are willing to do the hard work of carrying and birthing the message of the Gospel before John and Jesus are there in form. So, this story in Luke can't happen without women being willing to bear children, and to be there as mothers and nurturers. So, but they're more than that, as well. So, the whole idea of Elizabeth understanding, interpreting what God is doing, is another piece. And then Anna, Anna, the prophet in the temple, who knows what is happening as well, and tells anyone who is present what this child means to the future.

**Karin Peter** 18:16

The story of this Mary and Elizabeth in Luke, I just looked it up to make sure it was Luke, because I don't know how many times you've told me, but anyway, it was Luke, are some of the indicators there about women's lives as well that go unnoticed. Even in a story as familiar as Mary's experience with the angel in the Magnificat, the whole thing that happens. And one of my favorite things in that particular part is they send her to the hill country when they find out she's pregnant. They send her to the hill country. Because we were just making like, oh, and then she went and talked to Elizabeth. No, no, no, no, no, no. They sent her away, because she was pregnant.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 18:58

Yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 18:58

Yeah, yeah.

**Karin Peter** 18:58

And, not married. Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 18:59

Whose reputation are we worried about here? Yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 19:02

Yeah, we, the readers of the story, have privileged information that the people in the story don't have, right, right. So, and I really think it's interesting that Luke starts his Gospel off by quickly silencing Zechariah, right. We, there's a man, a priest, he's a faithful priest, and when he has this vision, he's like, what? And then, sorry, you're out of this story for a while now, so I think...

**Karin Peter** 19:27

Fade to black. There we go.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 19:30

That's right. It's lovely, lovely. But, but as we were reflecting on this, Charmaine says, "For Jesus to be the incarnation of God required gestation", right. Jesus isn't just zapped as a fully formed human being into human experience like a magic act. No, there's gestation, and that requires a woman's body.

**Karin Peter** 19:47



Yeah, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 19:49

And a willing woman's body.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 19:51

Right, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 19:52

In this story, it is emphasized.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 19:55

And so unlike in lots and lots of angel literature, the key women in this story are not anonymous. They're named. I think that's really, really important in, in Luke's Gospel. That's kind of literary recognition that what's starting up here has a transforming positive impact on the lives of women. So that's important to know. And Luke carries that through in the Gospel.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 20:17

Right. You know, I think, again, just to see how radical this is, you just have to contrast Luke and John. In John, Mary is mentioned, but just as the mother of Jesus. She's never named in the Gospel of John. And here she is the primary actor from the beginning of the story, and then you see her and other women throughout.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 20:41

And also, it's really important to notice that Anna, the figure Charmaine mentioned, you know, Luke unflinchingly calls her prophet, right. So that then harks back to figures like Deborah in the Hebrew Bible, right. And so, I don't like it when translations render that prophetess, right. They try to put a feminine ending on it.

**Karin Peter** 20:59

Lesser than prophet.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 21:01

Right, right, right. We'll see the same thing with the word deacon. Deaconess has a less-ness to it. And so, one has to be careful about that, because it's not what the Greek text says, right. So, but Luke is trying to say, the prophetic Spirit that functioned in ancient Israel is alive again. And the first person it's alive in, that we see here, even before there's a John the Baptist, is Anna, the prophet in the temple. So, I think that's really a significant moment that's easy to just skim over in text. One of my favorites is the Mary and Martha story in Luke, at the end of Luke 10, where Mary is sitting with the male disciples at the feet of Jesus, and Martha's busy trying to get food around for them. And Martha calls Jesus in, calls the male in, to say, she's not helping. Go tell her to help me. And Jesus says, basically, no. She's chosen the better thing. I couldn't take it away from her. It's a fascinating story. It's actually a remarkable story when you think of the wider cultural context, the narrower Palestinian context, the wider Greco-Roman context. Here we have Jesus, whom we the readers of the Gospel of Mark already know is Christ, Lord, Son of God, and he refuses to play into the cultural gender role-ing that Martha is

trying to uphold there. He doesn't criticize Martha. Sometimes when we've taught this text in groups, people say, "I feel so hurt, because I'm like Martha." And it's like...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:28

You're missing the point.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:28

...this is not about you. This is about Jesus saying, following me is the most important thing. And there's no gender barriers to that, right. And so, Mary's chosen the better *[inaudible]*.

**Karin Peter** 22:38

Although, you know, Jesus missed an opportunity there to tell one of the male disciples to get up and go help in the kitchen. That would have totally negated the whole poor Martha thing. Yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:48

Peter, James, John, you're useless. You're, get out in the kitchen.

**Karin Peter** 22:53

Especially Peter. Absolutely.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:56

Love it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:58

I mean, right there we have a little glimpse in the Gospel of Luke, written in the late first century, that Jesus rejected the idea that social constructs were immutable, unchangeable, that, somehow, they were eternal. No, they're not. Jesus simply rejects the social construct because there is a greater thing, and gender identity has nothing to do with it.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 23:20

Right, and that's the thing Jesus keeps trying to point to, you know, this whole kingdom of God thing; it allows people to see each other and the world differently.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 23:29

So, we'll take a look at some Pauline texts now, and these are easy to bypass. We'll look at two of them in Romans, and Romans is a giant letter that's 16 chapters. I refer to it as Paul's magnum opus. But this is a passage that's easy to skip by, and I'll say something about how it's been translated at times, too. This is Romans 16. He's come to the end of this huge, magnificent exposition of his message. He's never been to the church in Rome. He's got a lot of colleagues who have gone on ahead of him there. He's never been there. He's trying to get the support of the church in Rome to fund him for a mission westward to Spain. And so, in a sense, he's writing Romans to say this is what you'd be paying for, to put it crassly. But this passage, at the start of Romans 16, is absolutely phenomenal. "I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, a deacon..." deakonon, deacon el servant, "...of the church at Cenchrea..." which was the port city near Corinth, "...so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting of the saints." What is he doing here? Well, this is what's called a letter of recommendation. And why he's

saying this here is because Phoebe almost certainly is the carrier of the letter. She's carrying the most theologically weighty text in the New Testament. She's carrying that to the Christian communities in Rome. She is going to read the text and interpret them and tell them what Paul meant. This is a major thing, right. And so, he's saying, welcome her. She has standing in the church. She's a deacon. Now, in this early period, offices are fluid. There's nothing like structured offices. And by the way, the term priesthood doesn't apply anywhere in the New Testament to offices of ministry. It's a later construct. But he uses the term deacon for her, same word used for Steven in Acts, same kind of word that used elsewhere, with no differentiation. She is a leader of a church, and she is his delegate and representative to the church in Rome. And then he goes on to say, "...help her in whatever she may require from you." Basically, you take care of her and take care of her good.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 25:44

But, but, more than that, I think it's not just take care of her; help her in whatever she may require from you. She's giving the orders...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 25:53

Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 25:53

...and they're to follow them.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 25:55

Exactly.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 25:55

I mean, I think it's not so much about helping this poor woman...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 25:59

No, I didn't mean that. Psychol...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 26:00

...but, I know, but it sounded that way.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 26:00

It's hospitality. They've got to show hospitality.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 26:03

But more than that, to listen to what she requires of them.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 26:06

Yeah. "...for she has been a benefactor..." That's the NRSV's word. But the Greek word prostatis means a patron, a protector, a guardian, and it comes from the verb which means to stand in front of. She stands out in front of, meaning she is a leader. She has been the prostatis, ..."of many and of myself as well." Here's the Apostle Paul referring to Phoebe as his own protector, guardian. It's a major thing. It's so easy to skip over it and also to skip over in the rest of this text, the high number of

references to women that have apparently gone on ahead of him as part of his missionary group, to Rome.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:47**

At the end of Romans, there's greetings to all of these different people, and I think we counted one time there were like 10 Women who are mentioned as leaders in different of the churches that he mentions.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 27:00**

So later, let's go on to the next text, Charmaine. This is a reference to Junia and this is 16:7, "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me. They are prominent among the apostles." [Episēmon entos apóstolos (sp)], distinguished. [Episēmon (sp)] means distinguished. And it's interesting, some translations have tried to soften the implication that Junia was an apostle by translating this, they're considered prominent by the apostles, right. Ah, well, no, it doesn't mean that. Literally in Greek, entos means among, so she is one of them. Andronicus and Junia, probably in this text, are a married couple, both of whom are apostles. And Apostle for Paul is a broad category. He doesn't refer just to the twelve. For him, the term twelve refers to the historic group that traveled with Jesus. But the term apostle then is also broader for Him, those who have had an encounter with the risen Christ, an Easter encounter that has turned them into emissaries, right. Apóstolos means somebody who's sent as an emissary. And he says, "...they were in Christ before I was." Well look, Paul's in the first generation, his "conversion", we'll say his call experience, it's like two to five years after the time of Jesus. And so that means, Andronicus and Junia were already Christians, while Paul was still Saul, persecuting Christians. Oh, by the way, speaking of blinders, the word Junia, manuscript copyists in the textual tradition, were perplexed because they read Greek, they understood Greek, and they couldn't understand how a woman could be an apostle.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:44**

It's obviously a feminine ending to the name.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 28:47**

So, they put an S on it, Junias, which is a name found nowhere in ancient literature, anywhere, in order to try to masculinize it and make it sound like this is two guys. So, there's different ways people have tried to soften these texts. But hey, wait, Phoebe's a deacon, Junia is an apostle, and this is in the first generation.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:07**

And sometimes that softening or that blotting out of women was intentional, and sometimes ignorance. If they'd never been told that there might have been women in these kinds of roles or situations, they would have assumed that whoever copied before them must have made a mistake or left a letter off. And so, yeah, it could come in different ways, a lack of imagination.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 29:32**

So, the next one we'll look at, it's in Philippians, reference to the two women, Euodia and Syntyche. And Paul says, this is near the end of the short but beautiful letter, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion..." who he's addressing there is not clear. It could be someone who's like the overseer of the congregations in

Philippi, "...help these women for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel..." That's the NRSV. And the Greek verb, [syn āthlēcons (sp)], that word athletics comes from it. They've taken part in the contest with me. In other words, they're my team members. They've struggled with me as my equals as we've tried to spread the Gospel. This is a high thing to say of them. And then he goes on to say, "...together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers..." synergon, those who work with me jointly, right. So, in this earliest era of Christianity, men and women worked side by side in a way that was utterly remarkable. And Paul was part of that. And so, we have these glimpses of how his missionary and pastoral work, women were part of his team, and he saw them as co-. I think that's really important. He saw them as co-, coworkers, co-leaders, and so on. So those are things that are easy just to miss when you're reading through the New Testament, and sometimes translations obscure what's there, whether intentionally or no, alright. So those are just some things to note. And then finally, we'll just, we'll move on just to what happens then, right. So well, in later New Testament traditions, so first generation now to second generation. So, Paul is first generation The author of Matthew, and Mark, and maybe John, these are second generation. And then we get to third generation texts, like 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, and 1 Peter, later texts. What feminist scholars noticed, when they started studying these texts carefully, is a backtracking, right, right. And so, one would be careful about calling the texts like 1 Peter, and 1 Timothy, misogynist, but at the same time, how they've been used has been horrible in the life of Christians. The texts represent a new situation in the Church's life, when there's no longer apostles around, when you're...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:05**

Christ hasn't returned.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 32:06**

Christ hasn't, oh, my gosh, yeah. You're...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:07**

And living this really strange way in a culture that has very strong expectations of men and women.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 32:17**

And the Roman authorities have begun to take notice of the church. And so, you want to not draw attention to yourself. And so, the backtracking is represented in things like women must be silent in 1 Timothy, and women are the weaker sex in 1 Peter. And so basically, Greco-Roman gender ideology, which is everywhere, starts to backfill in those spaces. I refer to it as the empire strikes back.

**Karin Peter 32:46**

Well, gaslighting is the word of the year for 2022, so.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 32:50**

Okay, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:51**

Works, too.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 32:51**

So anyway, we've just kind of walked through some New Testament texts, and we can begin to see, you cannot paint the whole New Testament as misogynist. Actually, a number of texts and books throw out a vision of a kind of equality, kind of gender equality that is utterly astounding in the first century. And it was so astounding, that Christians for a century after were like, well, that's too much for us. It's taken a long time to get back...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:19**

To want to go back...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 33:20**

Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:19**

...to that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 33:20**

Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:21**

So, you know, we've been talking mostly about New Testament evidences, but what about what was happening in the early Christian church? And do we have other evidences of this strange behavior of women in the early church? And we do. There's very few historical pointers from that time, but there is a letter from Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, and he's asking, what do we do about these Christians? Their groups are expanding, people are starting to notice, that people are starting to notice that these people are maybe not going to the Roman festivals, and supporting the national gods. And it's, they're like, well, they're not causing big problems, but this is subversive, this could catch on. And what about their neighbors who's now like, well, I didn't go and they, you know. So, there's starting to be suspicion about them. So, this would be a letter roughly somewhere between like 100 to 117 CE, and in it Pliny is telling the Emperor Trajan what he has found out about this group, and just going to read you a little bit of it. "They..." meaning those charged with being a Christian, "...are taken into custody and interrogated, affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error was that they met on a stated day before it was light and addressed a form of prayer to Christ as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purpose of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word nor deny a trust, when they should be called upon to deliver it up, after which it was their custom to separate and then reassembled to eat a common meal, a harmless meal." After receiving this account, he obviously didn't believe. This was way too good to be true, that they weren't really wanting to cause any problem. "I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious rites. But all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition." So, you know, we've, we have other evidences that the earliest church, there were a lot of women and slaves. Think about the message, this message of freedom in this life and beyond, but that you could live a different kind of life right here. And here, those that they chose to torture, because they were seen as officiants at their rites were two women who were also slaves. And I think that's kind of a cool piece of evidence to have that's outside of the faith itself.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:20

And it's interesting that this letter comes from that third generation period where we are seeing some backtracking, right, in like, 1 Timothy and so on. And yet, in the wider Christian experience, there are women officiating in, very likely, Lord's supper services, is what is meant...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 36:37

Is what's probably intended.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:40

Yeah, so.

**Karin Peter** 36:41

Well, not just women, but slaves, indentured women.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:44

Right, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 36:44

Exactly.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:45

Women who had zero social cred or power, are functioning as...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 36:52

Representatives.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:52

...representatives of Christ at the table. They are the clergy. We'll use that term. That's just really astounding when you think about it. And so that's why it's important to read some of the wider literature from the period, not just the New Testament, to get a sense for what was going on here. So, I guess we're now ready to go on to explore and we always start explore with Karin.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 37:12

Any questions you might have? You've already raised some really wonderful ones.

**Karin Peter** 37:17

So, what you've shared has been helpful in this and my only question had to do with helping people discover women in the New Testament that reflect themselves. And so, women, particularly who read the New Testament, women are portrayed to them in our cultural way of looking at them, is meek, women are meek, women are gentle, women are nurturers, et cetera. And so really courageous or fierce women, or single women, or assertive women, tend to have a hard time seeing themselves. I mean, there's all kinds of male characters in the New Testament for men to find themselves in Scripture, but not so much for women. And so, my question is, what are some ways for women to discover more about women in Scripture and now we talked about commentaries and, and kind of in

general, but are there some things for women that are helpful for them to find themselves in the New Testament texts?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:10**

I think there's probably a few ways. First of all, reading, reading aloud, the women who are there. And for the experience part, we're going to be looking at some women who aren't connected to men, at least in their role as disciples of Christ. Their fathers aren't mentioned; their husbands aren't mentioned if they had any. These are women who sensed a very strong call, and acted in ways that would have been frowned upon at least and used to judge them roundly, as well. We'll look at some of those texts. And hopefully, people might be able to find some other images as well. Other suggestion?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 38:55**

So, first of all, you need to learn how to do exegesis, right. You need to learn how to read the text critically, and learn the steps and the methods for doing that. Secondly, there are plenty of feminist biblical scholars who have written commentaries. There are feminist companions to the Bible, and so on. And those, those are gonna be written by women. Sometimes they're written by women from various cultures. And so, those will give you eyes to see what's in the text that centuries of male overlay and male reading of the text has obscured. So, you've got to find the right tools for that. So, I also get to pay attention to translations. The NRSV is pretty darn good when it comes to this. You have to be careful of translations that expressly come from conservative religious traditions like The New International Version, because the translations are going to reflect evangelical, or fundamentalist, or conservative Protestant or Catholic pre-understandings and so they're going to translate deacon, not as deacon for Phoebe. They're gonna translate it as servant or helper or something like that. They will do what they want to do to play down what's actually in the text. So, you know.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:59**

Be careful in the Bible you choose.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 40:01**

Right, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:02**

Take a look through and see. If you're looking at a Bible, go to chapter 16 of Romans. See what they say about Phoebe. See what the commentaries say about Euodia and Syntyche. These are just two women who are squabbling, and Paul is trying to address it, you know. That's not what the text is saying. So those are places to...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 40:24**

Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:25**

...get a measure.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 40:26**



And find reference tools, Bible dictionaries and commentary series, that have women on the editorial board, right. That's really important too, because of gender biasing that sometimes is not intentional, but sometimes it is. So, yeah, those are the kinds of things you can do.

**Karin Peter** 40:44

So, we are to be informed consumers of Scripture as we are to be informed in other aspects of our human experience.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 40:53

Exactly. We need to disabuse ourselves of the idea that goes back to the Protestant Reformation, that Scripture is just plain to whoever reads it, right. Because no, it's not plain. It's reading literature that's centuries and centuries old from other cultural contexts, and we're always reading it in translation, and the translators are not neutral on stuff. So no, the Bible is just not, in fundamentalist, evangelical circles, they have this doctrine of the perspicacity of Scripture, that Scripture is just perfectly clear to anybody who reads it. It's like, I don't know what Bible you're reading when you say that, but it's obviously not true. And so, you have to be careful of that assumption that somehow because we're literate in English, we should just be able to understand what's there. No, we don't. We need some training and background and context. Nobody dives into Chaucer just thinking, I speak English. I totally understand this. I remember as a teenager in high school English classes, reading Shakespeare's plays. I had no idea what language this was, right. So, so, in other words, we have to learn to read responsibly, and not accept this default assumption that Scripture is just, whatever scripture says is plainly true. It's not so.

**Karin Peter** 42:03

All right, so let's get to exploration.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 42:06

All right. We're going to take a look at two passages. And, as always, we talk about as we enter Scripture, to open ourself to possibly experiencing it, seeing what's there, that we approach Scripture, not as dictated from God, but as human experience, people trying to write about their experience with God, Christ, the Spirit, to pass that on. And that these are not God's words dictated that we need to pummel each other with, or take in as though this is God speaking, but that this is a human set of writings. And because they are, we may be able to find ourselves there. We may be able to identify with some of the experience there, recognizing that Scripture has been misused, and it has abused many people because of how it's been used, but invitation to enter the Scripture, perhaps with some new eyes this time. So, with our new eyes for seeing women, as we read the New Testament, what do we see? We'll look at a passage; we're gonna start with one from Mark. This is near the end of Mark. This is as Jesus is dying. This is who's looking on. So, just read it, and then we'll go back through it to see what it's helping us to see if we will look. "There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James the younger, and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow Him, and provided for him when he was in Galilee. And there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem." So, says at the end of the story, the crucifixion, no male disciples in sight, but here are these women, and first of all, they are disciples. They are those who have been following Jesus. And as I said, there's no mention of any male disciples being around. And the women are named, at least three of them are named, and only one of them is identified by her relationship to a man. So, Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses. What else can we see

here? Well, we can see that they are financial backers or supporters of Jesus, and they have been doing that since he was in Galilee. One of the things to remember in the Gospel of Mark is that there's only one trip to Jerusalem, and that's where it ends with Jesus' crucifixion there. And so, these are women who have been supporting him all of his ministry, about a year probably, in Galilee. And they've come along with him to Jerusalem and not just these three, but many other women who had also come. There are many other female followers. And this gives us just a little snapshot that we should expand, and superimpose over all the stories that we hear about Jesus, and what's happening with His disciples. Because there's a bunch of women who not only have been following Jesus with the other male disciples, but they've probably been buying the food. They've been paying for accommodations. They've been paying for other needs, extra sandals, whatever it is you take when you go on a long trip. And I think that's really important to realize, that in some ways, they are the ones that are making happen this trip. And more than that, that they are the ones who are making sure that this movement can go somewhere. So, first question, I would say, as we take this little snapshot, how might we reimagine different scenes in Jesus' life? Palm Sunday, you know, sometimes you see these pictures of Jesus coming into Jerusalem, and these men striding alongside him as he goes into his glory. And, but what if we saw women disciples, confidently accompanying Jesus into the city, part of the entourage, but also part of the women who have leadership roles in this group? Then again, if we take this little snapshot and say, Wait, this has been put into the background, but it really is telling us a whole lot about who is this group of people who is with Jesus. Then we start asking ourselves on Palm Sunday, let's go the next day after Palm Sunday, when Jesus goes to the temple and causes a stir, what was the reaction of the women? Were they afraid? Were they embarrassed? Do they applaud him? We've talked about how vulnerable women would have been in this culture. And here they are following this person, who is creating a lot of tension and stress for the Jewish leaders, for the merchants who are there. He's destroying stuff. He is making a mess. What might they have thought? What might they be questioning? Or might they be, yes, you've got it, Jesus. You show them, you know, that what this temple is about is not this. So, if you think about Jerusalem is church headquarters, right, the temple is the focus of Jewish worship. And here's Jesus making a lot of people really, really uncomfortable. So, much of the patriarchal weight of faith is in this place, where this is happening. Are they thinking, oh, my goodness, what is the high priest thinking about this, and us hicks from Galilee, coming into Jerusalem and making trouble. Or are they? How many waves have these women already stirred up back at home just to be here? There's not indication that they're there with their husbands or brothers or male members of their family? What did this trip cost them in all the ways that cost can have meaning here? So, a couple of questions for us then, to consider now, that might be related to this little glimpse that we get in Mark. In what parts of the Jesus story do I need to make more room for the women who were obviously there? And how might it change the story for me? And I'd encourage you to take some part of the Gospel story, of Jesus' story, and look at it. Just take some time to reread it and imagine women followers of Jesus, possibly Jesus' group of disciples having more women in it than it did men. And imagine how that story might look different or feel different. Or to hear Jesus talking to His disciples and thinking about, he's talking to women, as well as to men. How would I hear it differently? What might it mean to me? So, we're going to go on to another little bit' this is in Luke. So, whereas in Mark, the author doesn't mention that women were prominent parts of Jesus' entourage, until the last couple chapters, but here's Luke, this is about a third of the way in, and he's quite proud of the fact of this, I think. "So soon afterwards he (Jesus) went on through cities and villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God. The twelve, were with him..." So just previously, a couple chapters back, the twelve were named as apostles. But it says, "The twelve were with him, as well as some

women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities...” again, naming, “...Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna...” this is very interesting, “...Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.” So, there's even more. It's kind of reinforcing what we heard from Mark, but this even more here. Again, remembering that this is the Gospel that begins with the life experiences of Elizabeth and Mary, and the prophet Anna. Mary is constantly seeing and pondering the things that are happening around her as well as being the one who, I love this, it's Mary who gives Jesus what for when he's 12 years old, and stays behind in the temple. Joseph doesn't say anything. It's Mary who says, what are you doing to us? So, she's the one who's taken the responsibility there. This is also the Gospel that tells of the argument between Martha and Jesus about what's appropriate for Mary, her sister, to be doing. I'm calling it an argument. They definitely had different views. In this Gospel there's care for and healings of women. Some of these are similar or the same as other Gospels, like Mark and Matthew, but there's additional ones in Luke. And so, it's richly woven with stories of women. So, there's unique things in Luke that he's added as well. So, what can we gather from this one? Well, we can see Jesus is traveling through cities and villages, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. That his 12 apostles and some women are there. I had not thought about this until I was preparing for this today, is it possible that this group of men and women traveling with Jesus, who are not married to each other, may not even be related to each other, that this is actually a symbol, is symbolic of what the kingdom of God, that he's preaching about, looks like? These are real, concrete ways that you can imagine, and even work toward the kingdom of God, is to have equality between men and women. Some of these women have been healed. Some of the men are fishermen and tax collectors, but all have been invited to be part of Jesus' ministry of proclaiming a new way of being in the world, where peace and respect and justice are for all people. What an interesting way to think about what this group signifies to the villages and the people that they meet. They are the visual, and Jesus' words are about the Kingdom of God, are the explanation. So, some of these women are named, again Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza. So, Herod has really mixed feelings about Jesus. He's really making Herod's life complicated with religious officials and the Romans. Try to imagine the conversations between Chuza and Joanna. What does Herod think about the fact that his steward's wife is traveling around with this guy? And then they're Susanna, and then many others traveling with the group. So again, how does this change our image of what it is that Jesus is doing? He's not just out there preaching. He has this whole group of people, this whole community, that is also learning and perhaps evidence of what it is he's saying. And here in Mark, they are providing for Him, for Jesus, out of their resources. Here they're providing for them. So that's for the whole group. There's a dependence on these resources that these women are bringing. And I think they are the financiers of this enterprise. And I think that's really important to acknowledge. So, another thing to think about is that Jesus' male followers would have gained prestige from being disciples of a rabbi. People would have understood that and they would say, oh, this is a wise man who has called these men to follow Him, and there would have been some respect for them. But women would be leaving their households, that sphere of appropriate activity, according to the culture and the religion. And they're challenging the conventions of their day by being there, just being present with Jesus, going to other villages, traveling in the countryside, sleeping where? You know, eating with whom? All of those kinds of things, oh, scandalous. Some of these women have means and status. You know, you see Joanna, for instance. What have they given up to do this? Have they given up respectability, or their reputation? Has the sense of call, I would put that word on why these women are following. This is not some, oh, let's go do this for the afternoon. This is a huge commitment because their lives have already been changed, but they are willing to let them

continue to be changed. So, this sense of call, has it caused distress in their family and in their family relationships? What about their fear of what the Romans might do? How are they dealing with that? Again, the Joanna and Chuzza thing, has it caused marital tensions? And again, to remember that in this culture, being connected to a man is often your only source of security, and even connection with your children and your family. And then, is this causing family financial stresses? You know, are the kids having to wear their shoes longer? Or sandals, or whatever? Are there arguments about where you're spending your family's, whose money is it? Is it their own? Is it their families' that they came from money? Is it their husband's money? Is it the household finances? So, there's all of those questions. So, these women are examples of those who've been ignored, or treated like background noise for centuries, when in fact, they're major players. They're the ones who kept the movement solvent, the ones who stayed with Jesus, kept vigil at his death, visited the tomb. They're the first to see and talk to and touch the risen Jesus. And they are the first proclaimers of His resurrection. So, what are the questions that we might let that passage leave us with? Who am I being called to see? And what help do I need to imagine them being part of Jesus' crowd of disciples? As I consider the stories history or Scriptures bring us, who have I ignored? Or who have I not wanted to see? That might be another way to go with it? And then, what can it mean today, for us to be willing to find and see those in our cultures or societies who have been made invisible, whether that has been for decades, or for hundreds of years? And just to take a few minutes to think about who are those who we've invisibilized, on purpose, or unintentionally, or just because the people before us did? And let that be a place to ask the Spirit to open our eyes and our hearts. Amen.

**Karin Peter 59:02**

Thank you for that experiencing the text. It brings it beyond just a gender issue. It takes it into all the ways different kinds of people have been excluded from the story, not just the biblical story, but the Christian story. So, are, do you have any last thoughts that have come to you that we need to share about the "She'Brew" today before we close our episode?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 59:26**

I have one last thought to share. So, a common reaction to learning about stuff like this is that, oh, well, you're just using current cultural trends to read the Bible, and you're not really being honest to it and so on. And my reaction to that would be, actually no, we're trying to pay attention to what was always there, that we haven't been able to see. And let me give you a case in point. When we talk about the Church wanting to be fully inclusive, we could say, look, our charter for full inclusion was already in Galatians, where Paul says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In other words, we're trying to live out what was already implied or expressed at the very beginning of the movement, but has been silenced, side railed, backtracked, and ignored for centuries and centuries. So, we're trying to be faithful to what's actually there. And thank heavens, the Holy Spirit works in culture too. And we have lenses that have been given to us to find what was always there, because we couldn't see them. So.

**Karin Peter 1:00:35**

Yeah. I found a closing thought for today's episode, and it goes right along with that. It's from a woman author and poet, named Sarah Bessey, who's from Canada, Charmaine so, there you go. And she was an evangelical, and she found herself to be too liberal for the conservatives. But she said she also found herself at times to be too conservative for the liberals. And so, she's navigating her own kind of

way to be. But her scripture exploration opened her in the way that we've talked about today to the reality of women, and the inclusion of women, and the importance of women in Scripture. And so, this is what she says. "I saw how Jesus didn't treat women any differently than men, and I liked that. We weren't too precious for words. We weren't dainty like fine china. We received no free pass or delicate worries about our ability to understand or contribute or work. Women were not too sweet or weak for the conviction of the Holy Spirit, or too manipulative or prone to jealousy, insecurity and deception, to push back the kingdom of darkness. The lack of women among the twelve disciples isn't prescriptive, or a precedent for exclusion of women, any more than the choice of 12 Jewish men excludes Gentile men from church leadership." So, with those brave words from Sarah Bessey, I think in the tradition of Phoebe there, or maybe some of the others we talked about, perhaps even Lydia, with that, this has been our "She'Brew" episode for "New'Brew", our New Testament series. I'm Karin Peter. I'm with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, and we thank you so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:02:32

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast. Project Zion Podcast is a Ministry of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze