

Talking Points_1: “Attention is the beginning of devotion.” Mary Oliver

Who do we “see” or not “see”?

Some historical and cultural clarification:

“Readers of the Bible may wonder about the status of Jewish widows. Many assume that the lives of Jewish women were more restricted than their Greek and Roman counterparts. It can be difficult to understand the specific situation of Jewish women in the New Testament period because direct evidence is sparse. However, the evidence that exists suggests that their lives were similar to those of non-Jewish women. For example, one archive of papyrus fragments from the Judean desert records a dispute by two women over property. Papyri also suggest that Jewish women inherited property from their mothers or husbands. These women weren’t governed by Roman law in particular, but they still seem to have legal ownership rights according to local customs.”

“Widows lived under a variety of circumstances in the ancient world, and ancient readers would have had many different experiences of and conventions about widows that they drew on to understand the stories of the Bible. Modern readers of the biblical texts should bracket their expectations of widows’ distress in order to look for the signals the text includes about a particular widow’s status. Doing so may lead us to new insights about the variety of resources available to widows of the period.” *Widows in the New Testament Period* Susan E. Hylen, Professor of New Testament, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Georgia, February 2019

Roman Law provided for women’s independence, property ownership, inheritance, etc., but only applied to Roman citizens.

It was not Jewish law that resulted in ill-treatment of women, but social status, wealth, nature of family relationships and the like. Naomi & Ruth are examples of widows owning land, as are other widows in Hebrew scripture and New Testament stories.

As it is true today, note “Life for Widows in Tanzania” (in today’s study notes), and other third world countries, widows are more vulnerable to injustice, poverty, and violence, than women who have strong family ties and wealth. Here are two examples:

Afghanistan: “A few years ago, one of our neighbors in Afghanistan fell from his roof during the winter. He got injuries and lost his life. After his passing, his wife’s life changed drastically. A few days after his funeral, his mother took his kids and kicked out his wife out. His family firmly believed that she was the reason for his death because she had brought bad luck. After few days, the widowed woman had to move to Iran to live with her brother because she had no means for economic self-sufficiency.”

“According to the United Nations, there are an estimated two million women widows in Afghanistan. They account for about six percent of the population and face a wide range of issues including legal discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and stigma. Too often when a man dies, many of his wife’s rights do as well. There is a tradition of marrying widowed women, often without their consent, to their brother-in-law. This is done partly so they have someone to financially provide for them and partly to maintain familial rights and ownership over the children and inheritance of the woman. In addition, Afghan women don’t have custody rights over their children after the father passes away. Often

grandfathers or uncles on the side of the father receive custody over children. This is partly due to lack of economic opportunities for widowed women. When they can't afford to provide for their children, their deceased husband's family is more likely to take over custody." *What Life Is Like for Afghan Widows* Zahra Wakilzada, contributor, Free Women Writers
<https://www.freewomenwriters.org/2017/06/23/life-afghan-widows-afghanistan/> June 23, 2017

Iraq: "...in 2009, one of the grounds for the Minister for Women's Affairs resignation was that she had no resources to register and address the needs of what she called "an army of widows". Nothing has changed since then, and Iraqi widows are living in extreme poverty, fear and vulnerability to violence, sexual violence, abductions, forced remarriage, honor killings and trafficking. Few widows actually are able to access the pensions, which in any case are derisory in value and inadequate to support minimal living costs." *Issues Of Discrimination In Widowhood In Iraq* Margaret Owen, WPD (Widows for Peace through Democracy) Director

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Tell the story: Luke 7:¹¹ Soon afterwards^[a] he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. ¹² As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴ Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus^[a] gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" ¹⁷ This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Points of view: Read the story through the eyes of the widow, the crowd (& disciples), and Jesus
How do you react, according to your point of view?

From our study, p. 2 & 3: Jesus gives the young man to his mother. Why is this significant?

Luke 7:13 When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her. Telling her not to weep, Jesus touched the bier, and the pallbearers stopped. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

"In Jesus' time, a woman's children were not her own. The children of a couple, like all property, belonged to the father. This is what made divorce so ruinous to women. Divorce, almost always initiated by men, resulted in devastating levels of loss for a woman. A divorced woman lost a place to live, and if her father was not willing to take her back, she became homeless. On top of this, divorced mothers lost their children as well."

Does this give insight to God's opinion about divorce?

Malachi 2:¹⁶ For I hate^[a] divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless. NRSV

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From our study, p. 3:

“A clear and direct line can be drawn between the story in Luke 7 of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain and the story in Acts 6 of decision-making processes about how to deal with and resolve conflicts about food distribution for widows.”

Can you think of other things Jesus did/taught that have woven themselves into our lifestyle as Jesus-followers?