

A REVIEW OF JUSTICE BY FIVE VULNERABLE WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

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ABSTRACT: *There is a global outcry for justice with the increasing gap between the poor and the rich and acts of injustice especially directed to the vulnerable: women and children. Even in light of the changing roles of women, they are still the main victims of unjust actions. This paper therefore addresses this concern by reviewing the actions of five women in the Bible who did just actions and eventually brought justice to their communities. Rahab the Harlot, the widow of Zarephath, little girl in captivity, Dorcas and the Good Samaritan are looked at in this paper. These women, despite their vulnerability, went an extra mile to do just deeds even when it meant giving all they had. This understanding of the Biblical Icons who brought justice is expected to inform the changing role of women in the contemporary society as far as justice is concerned.*

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INTRODUCTION

The world we live in today cries for justice all the time. It is very interesting to hear how often the word unfair (unjust) is used by even children today when expressing their frustration to their friends or to adults. The phrase commonly used “this is unfair,” is in the endeavour to communicate to the other person or people that what is being done is unjust. Nations are crying for justice to be done to them, especially the third world countries when they communicate to the nations of the first world, their feelings about the world economic policies which adversely affect them for worse. In the poor countries, the oppressed and the marginal masses of people call for justice to be done to them by the privileged few rulers.

The implication is that those who are rich, whether in terms of nations or individuals, powerful in the society, are expected to show mercy to the poor and powerless by sharing some of their wealth with them. In this expectation, justice becomes a synonym of charity, yet it is a much broader term than charity. While showing justice may include doing deeds of charity, the one executing justice may do more than giving welfare to poor. Justice has to do with doing the right thing for each other whether rich or poor, young or aged, in power or common person, regardless of gender or religious background.

Modern society looks down upon women in more than one way. Indeed, women had to rise up and fight for their right to be recognized as important members in society, in the last quarter of twentieth century, due to an overwhelming suffering and oppression by a male dominated society. Up to now, in many communities especially among Islamic communities, women are considered as second class citizens who have no say and cannot contribute positively in their countries. In some communities, women are not allowed to speak in public or in the presence of men.

Looking into the Church, Groothuis observes that Male dominated communities in the world draw a line to mark how far a woman may go in expressing herself. He says:

The line that women are prevented from crossing may be drawn in different places at different times for different women; but always, it is drawn. And it is drawn not only in terms of official church policy and teaching, but also (and even more cruelly) in the usually articulated prejudices and unexamined assumptions that guide so many people's ideas about what women can and cannot do, and what the limitations of their "place" should be. . . A restrictive stereotypical view of womanhood remains entrenched in the evangelical Church because it is believed to be backed by biblical proof texts (1997, p. 12).

But can women, some of them discriminated, others displaced, and others associated with no significance in their communities, save nations from the injustice, famine, war and disease issues in Africa, as they share the love of God with different people in different communities?

While human communities have been discriminating against the feminine gender, God has demonstrated in the past that women are equal recipients of His grace and gifts to serve fellow humans. When God created Adam and Eve, He blessed them and gave both of them authority over the earth (Genesis 1:26, 27). Following the fall and the subsequent curse upon the earth (Genesis 3:6-24), the human race injustice came into every sphere of human life: family - Cain killing Abel (Genesis 4:3-8); social - the society was evil and violence was rampant (Genesis 6:1-7), something which led to the wrath of God through the flood (Genesis 6:13); and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah through fire (Genesis 18:10; 19:1-11); and religious - the worship of idols (Ezekiel 6:1-7).

Consequently, God called Abraham and Sarah to pioneer the new way of life that would bring justice upon the earth through their descendant, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1-17). The beginning of this way of life was a nation (Genesis 12:1-5), the nation of Israel, which would be built upon the holy laws given by God. In the process of building the nation of Israel, first under the Mosaic covenant and later under the new covenant of Jesus Christ through God's grace, some women surprised the world by bringing justice to individuals, communities and nations. These women, by any human standards, were insignificant, but God used them to surprise the world by their actions of justice.

This paper thus deals with vulnerable women in the Bible who surprised their contemporaries by bringing justice to communities and nations. Each of these women acknowledges God beyond their vulnerability. Three women in the Old Testament and three from New Testament will serve as examples of surprise of justice from women who are counted as "nobodies" in their communities.

The first woman, in the Old Testament, who surprised nations by hiding and protecting Israelites' spies, was Rahab the harlot. The second woman was a widow who fed the man of God, Elijah, until the time he went back to Israel. The third woman who surprised her contemporaries was a displaced slave girl who helped Naaman, the commander of the army of Syria, to get healed from leprosy.

In the New Testament the actions of two women stand out as surprise to their contemporaries. The first is the Samaritan woman who met Jesus accidentally at the well and tried to avoid Him because He was a Jew, later on ran in to the city and proclaimed to the city dwellers that she had found the Messiah (John 4). The second is Dorcas (Tabitha) (Acts 9:36-43), a

talented woman in art-craft. She became a source of hope to orphans and widows by sewing clothes for those who were naked.

RAHAB, THE HARLOT (JOSHUA 2:1-21)

Like our modern day living legend, Corie Ten Boom in Nazi Germany, Rahab chose to risk her own life in order to hide the people of God. She was almost the perfect choice of lodging for spies given her professional career, for her business thrived on the basis of foreigners who came and paid her for making love to her. However, this time she was up to something more substantial, rather than the common cheap price she asked to be paid for easy sex. She asked the men who lodged in her house to promise lifetime security, something which is offered to brides on the wedding day. She thought she must get from the men who were foreigners what is truly due to any woman who chooses to become one flesh with her lover - security and significance for herself and her household (Once one becomes a Christian, he/she becomes one with Christ and does the will of God. In Christ there is security and significance). When the two spies sent by Moses went in to her house, she made sure, as usual, that she did not waste any opportunity. Not knowing even what the men were up to, she let them into her house and entertained them to their satisfaction. But when she found out that they were Israelites who were spying on Jericho in order to invade it, through the tricks and tactics of the later Delilah who deceived the mighty Samson, she had them swear to protect her and her family when they get hold of Jericho. The protection of her and her family was in exchange of concealing their identity and hiding them from the city elders who had found out that those men were spies.

“The character she embodies is usually deployed for the interests of others, and it very often consolidates and mystifies an underlying economic system that does not benefit her or the wellbeing of women and children of the underclass, but the surplus value accrued to others” (Charles, 2011, p. 206).

Who was Rahab?

Just before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to Canaan, Moses sent twelve spies to the land in order that they may explore the land before they take possession of it. When they were there, God used a harlot, Rahab, to hide and protect them from the city authorities of Jericho.

The Bible describes Rahab briefly as a prostitute without explaining whether she made her living by selling cheap sex to passersby and to men who were out looking for such. If she was selling cheap sex, she was probably not as sophisticated as modern day “call girls” but her business was based on the same principles and operated on the same rules. Gray gives us three suggestions as to who Rahab was:

Rahab is designated *‘issah zonah*, which almost certainly means a secular prostitute. . . The presence of strange men in the house of such would attract no undue attention. The house of Rahab, on the other hand may mean ‘the family of Rahab’, possibly the name of the sole Canaanite inhabitants of the derelict site of Jericho, who had special privileges among the Israelites. Another possibility is that the tradition of Rahab as a harlot was an elaboration of the term *bet rahab* which . . . may mean ‘a brother’ (cf. Isaiah 57:8; Ezekiel 16:24) (Gray, 1986, p. 64).

Whatever the case, she was a lady of no significant value publicly. The first suggestion of Gray is what fits the assumption of the Bible story. In Joshua chapter two, the story assumes that she was not living with her parents or brothers in her house, since she was going to gather them into the house when the onslaught from the Israelites would strike the city. Rahab being a Harlot had a very evil character. Mackay says:

Indulgence in such courses as characterize the class of which she was one, of necessity petrifies the feeling, sears the conscience, and makes the heart as hard as the nether millstone. None are more inaccessible to good influence; cut off from all communication with the respectable; shut up to the companionship of the outwardly and defiantly profligate; they must wax worse and worse, getting further from the reach of all good. Hence there is no class whose case is more hopeless . . . Cruelty, hatred, deceit, murder itself, are the vile progeny of lust. Rahab belongs to this class, whose whole existence is a flagrant sin (Mackay, 1884, p. 73).

Having such history of life and probably more untold, she decided to hide the spies from the destructive motives of the Canaanites.

Distributive Justice from Rahab

Rahab did justice to hide the Israelites' spies so as to be able to view the land that God had promised to give them since the days of their pioneers. Mackay continues to say "the example of all her neighbours would encourage her in a path of unbelief" (1884, p. 74). Her choice to deceive her fellow people in Jericho, in order to hide the spies of Israel, showed that Rahab had lost faith in the gods of Jericho and had believed in the God of Israel, though in the stage of fear. She was already in a paradigm shift. She was already doing God's mission here on earth.

The fact that the Israelites were the enemies of Jericho could not stop her from acting justly and protecting the spies. Being a Canaanite, she had a reason to betray the spies and hand them over to the city authorities to be punished for spying on them, but she trusted in the God of Israel and chose to give up her allegiance towards the gods of Canaan. Through her new allegiance, she was promised protection by the Israelites together with her family. When Israel soldiers attacked Jericho (Joshua 6:22-25), Rahab and her family members were saved. This is an act of justice by Rahab to Jewish spies and to her family. Charles argues that "...she is a lady who stands tall, who is strong, who can lead, even when she is part of political and discursive powers that she cannot control totally" (Charles, 2011, p. 216), but makes a contribution that shapes the world's history then, now and forever. It is through her justice to the two men that made her to be recorded among the people of faith in Hebrews 11:31, reckoned as one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:8), and justified by her works (James 2:25).

A WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH (I KINGS 17:8-16)

Elijah the prophet of Yahweh who lived the same time with the king of Northern kingdom of Israel, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel, was opposed to the worship of Baal which was promoted by Jezebel and sanctioned by Ahab. Elijah confronted King Ahab on idolatry and pronounced drought on the land for three and half years.

While the Baal gods were unable to bring rain on the land after God, the creator, had shut the heavens, Elijah himself was faced with starvation because there was no food anywhere in the land. Even the Cherith brook that gave him water to drink dried up and the man of God was forced to flee the land to escape death. As Leo L. Honor says:

The growing intensity of the calamity is strikingly brought to the attention of the reader by this simple statement that the wadi near which Elijah was hiding became so completely dried up that despite the Divine succour which he was receiving, Elijah had to move on (Honor, 1955, p. 251).

God commanded Elijah to move to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there, because God had commanded a widow there to provide for him. Zarephath, as Honor tells us, “has been identified with the modern Arab village of Sarfend, a village between Sidon and Tyre located on the sea” (1955, p. 251). It was rather an insignificant village in the rural area of Sidon. Gray says “Zarephath, of which MT Sarepata in the locative of direction, is known in accounts of Assyrian campaigns as Sarpitu, modern Ras Sarafand some seven miles south of Sidon” (Gray, 1964, p. 380).

Therefore, Elijah had a long distance to cover, to a place which was not within Israelite territory. Elijah was obedient to God and he went to stay with this widow who was called by God to protect and feed him.

The Condition of the Widow of Zarephath

Brueggemann tells us that, “first, she is a nobody, a widow, who in that society had no standing, worth or significance. Second, she was not even an Israelite, but a foreigner” (1982, p. 81). Gray comments that:

The position of widows and orphans without a breadwinner or male protector was precarious. Levirate marriage, i.e. with the brother of the deceased husband, was not designed primarily to relieve the widow, but to provide an heir to the name and property of the dead man. Thus a childless widow was the responsibility of the family, but a widow - mother, as the woman of Zarephath, had no such provision, save by charity (1964, p. 380).

The law of Israel was providing distributive justice to the widow through levirate marriage but by the time of Ahab and Jezebel, injustice was rampant and people did not care about widows or the fatherless. In Luke 4:25, 26, Jesus said, “there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow” (All biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible: Reference Edition*. 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973). Jesus used this story of Elijah to illustrate the fact that “... no prophet is welcome in his hometown” (Luke 4:24b). He was teaching that the kingdom of God is for the gentiles as well and not for the Israelites alone; it is for all. God’s love for humanity is not only limited to the nation of Israel, neither to the wealthy materially, but it is also extended to all people of all nations in the world.

While that may be the case as to why Elijah was sent to the Zarephath widow, implicitly, Jesus was saying that justice is not only given to, and does not always come from, the socially significant people. God can use anybody or anything to bring justice wherever

needed. In Israel alone, we have the stories of the mother of Moses, who risks her life to hide the boy from the Egyptian butchers. Elijah was hated so much in Israel; it would have been fruitless to seek shelter in any of the homes of the widows in Israel. The reason to why there were “many widows” in Israel was the breakdown of justice in the land such that levirate marriage was completely abandoned.

In the days of Elijah, “widows were regarded as helpless, needy persons, unable to protect or provide for themselves; they were to be given special consideration and treated with justice” (Glasser, 1989, p. 78). Elijah is commanded by God to go for justice in such a place, from such a person. God’s command sends His faithful prophet for nourishment outside all the predictable places of well being.

Elijah’s Encounter with the Widow of Zarephath

When the brook Cherith on the eastern side of the Jordan river dried up, God said to Elijah, “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you” (1 Kings 17:9). When he came to the gate of the city he found a widow outside who was gathering sticks (fire wood). Being almost dehydrated and famished, he asked for a jar of water to drink first. Such a request was not hard to meet and she went in to bring the water to give to the man, who she probably thought was a passerby. On the way into her house, the man called her and asked for something more solid, a piece of bread!

In the culture of the people of Sidon, visitors were welcomed to eat and drink before they said a word about their hunger or thirst. This time there was famine and nobody could invite and entertain visitors. Food was scarce or all gone and the rivers were drying one by one. Northern Palestine, at least, was experiencing hydraulic drought and hope was gone. In response to Elijah’s request, the widow turned back, swore in the name of the Lord God of Elijah, to show how sincere that she was unable to help him with food. At that point Elijah broke the good news to her that the Lord his God was going to keep her and her son alive by making sure that the bowl of flour would not be exhausted and the jar of oil would not be empty throughout the drought season. The widow obeyed and did exactly what Elijah had requested, and God did exactly to the widow as He had promised (1 Kings 17:6).

In this story, who is the hero? The widow is the hero, not Elijah. The widow is the one who showed justice to the man of God and by faith shared the little she had in the beginning in order that she may have enough to keep her household alive during the years of the drought and famine. God brought retributive justice to Elijah and to the household of the widow through her. Elijah was not sent to the widow to stay with her so that he could provide for her, which could have been the thing the widow would have liked to see happen, but Elijah was sent to the widow to be fed by her. As Brueggemann puts it:

Elijah is not sent to help, but to be fed, not to give, but to receive. Elijah is sent by the Lord to submit to this Gentile widow, to depend on the gifts and resources of this nobody. There is an abrupt reversal of roles. The one whom we expect to be strong is needful and must submit to the wretched of the earth (1982, p. 81).

If there was any command this widow wanted to hear was probably, get, eat, and not give food. But God had commanded her to feed Elijah.

It is amazing how the widow, out of her poverty, gave Elijah the first priority to eat. She knew her chance of survival depended on doing justice to the man of God who had come to her gate. Today, the poor people sit and wait for someone else to give them food and social amenities in order for them to survive. In this case, we learn that even the poor have something to offer to a suffering world: their faith in the scarcity of their provisions. The poor are herein set up as doers of justice in the time of need. Giving charity may be a thing for the rich of good will, but doing justice is for all of us who believe in the just and righteous God.

Justice should not be dictated by our status. This fact was seen in this widow that, this nobody's woman finds the courage and puts her faith in God, moved on to make a decision to believe, and acts in the interest of life is extraordinary (Hens-Piazza, 2006, p. 167). Being able to conquer her status quo, she saved herself and her family. This happened because she 'feared not'. This is the Christian's victory for justice.

LITTLE GIRL IN CAPTIVITY (2 KINGS 5:1-14)

This little girl showed justice to Naaman. Naaman, as the Bible records, was "captain of the army of the king of Syria, a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. The man was a valiant warrior, but he was a leper" (2 Kings 5:1).

Gray says, "Naaman's leprosy was obviously not the kind which debarred him from society, so that it was an embarrassing skin disease, but not as serious as leprosy proper, for which ancient ritual law prescribed isolation (Leviticus 13:45f.)" (1964, p. 504). This period was a "period of uneasy peace between Aram, with its capital at Damascus, and Israel, which was liable to be disrupted by border raids by hands, probably by semi-nomad Aramean tribesmen, who sold their booty in the market of Damascus" (Gray, 1964, p. 504).

Naaman and the Captive Girl

It was at a time when Syria went out to war with Israel and had victory over the Israelites. The Syrian army was under the leadership of Captain Naaman. On their way home, the Syrian army took captive some Israelites. One of them was a little girl who became the slave of Naaman, the Captain. As we have seen above, Naaman was a leper with a strange skin disease with no cure. However strong and valiant he was, the mighty Captain was distressed by the illness.

Leprosy was a serious disease that in many cases caused excommunication from the community to ensure that the contagious disease does not spread to other people of the society. Although the type that Naaman had did not warrant exclusion, it was still shameful and displeasing to him and his family. Evidently, natural medication had failed to cure him and he had given up on healing. However, Israelites knew at the back of their minds that when natural medication failed to work and local deities could not help, their God, Yahweh, could heal any disease. The slave girl (Being an Israelite) suggested to her mistress, Mrs. Naaman - not even to Naaman himself, that shows how insignificant she was - that if the Captain could find a way of reaching the prophet in Samaria, capital of Northern Israel, he could be cured.

Israel and Syria were enemies but this did not stop the Jewish girl from showing justice and mercy to her enemy! She should have been angry for being displaced and probably her

relatives killed in the process, but she was not angry as to forget that she was the light to the Gentiles. Speaking from a human perspective, she could have looked for poison to kill this man and his wife who had raided her homeland, but instead she was positive and caring about him. This shows that she had accepted her current situation as her way of life and sought the welfare of her master. Her actions go a long way to demonstrate the teaching of Jesus many years later: “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27).

Naaman and Elisha

Following the suggestion of the little slave girl, Naaman was given permission by his king to go to Samaria and meet the prophet. He was given official credentials by the king of Syria to present to the king of Israel, King Jehu (2 Kings 10:32). The official papers were to tell the Israelite king that the coming of Naaman to Samaria was not a “pretext for resumption of hostilities between Syria and Israel” (Wifall, 1975, p. 109).

Naaman was told by Elisha, the prophet, to go and bathe in the river Jordan. The argument that the rivers of Syria were better than the water of Jordan may have been based on the point that he did not think that his sickness was due to lack of taking bath. In addition, Elisha did not treat him with the respect he expected. Elisha had sent a servant to him to tell him that he needed to go to the Jordan river and wash in there for seven times. Although he did not like at first, he obeyed after being convinced by his servants. The pompous arrival of the great Captain was met with the humiliating response of the servant of God, who was going to teach him that Yahweh was not another deity to try. One has to humble himself/herself to receive the blessing from heaven. Naaman was furious because he knew his problem was not that he did not bathe back home, and he at least expected Elisha to come out to him and do some form of a ritual, “wave his hand over the place” and pronounce his healing in the name of Yahweh. Naaman had his expectations - he “expected some physical gesture and an invocation of the name of Yahweh, a simple ritual and ‘myth’, with the principle of which he was familiar” (Gray, 1970, p. 506). Little did he know that the God of Israel is not bound to human rituals and formulas. He finally agreed to give the directive of the prophet a try and he was healed.

“When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, ‘Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now’ (2 Kings 5:15). The light of the slave girl had made its impact; the great Captain confessed with his own mouth as what the Muslims today call “the *sahada*, or testimony” (Gray, 1970, p. 507). Naaman’s confession is consistent with the *shema* of Israel: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Distributive justice brought the heathen Captain face to face with the God of Israel. The insignificant slave girl who was simply a captive brought the truth of Yahweh into the political and military leadership of the nation of Syria. Her small wish made a world of difference for her master and for the entire nation of Syria. Yahweh was believed to be the only God and the idols of the Syrians disbelieved. This means that God’s justice knows no political or ethnic boundaries.

As noted in the discussion, status in society, gender or age does not block us from showing justice to others. This little girl whose name is not even mentioned was the agent of hope to Naaman (Hens-Piazza, 2006, p. 259).

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (JOHN 4:1-42)

The Lord changed the scene of His ministry from Judea to go to Galilee, in order that He may avoid a premature collision with the Pharisaic party. Leaving Jerusalem, He passed through Samaria on His way to Galilee. The evangelist, John, tells us that He had to pass through Samaria, but He does not tell us exactly why. However, from the behaviour of Jesus when He met the Samaritan woman at the well, we can infer that He had the intention of preaching the gospel to the Samaritans. The only problem was that He had to find creative ways of crossing the three barriers between Him and His disciples as male Jews and the Samaritans. They differed based on cultural, social and religious backgrounds. Culturally, up to now, it is improper for a man to talk to a woman among the Jews or Arabs in public. "Jewish Rabbis did not enter into conversation in public with strange women" (Sanders & Mastin, 1968, p. 141). It was inappropriate for Jesus to talk to a woman alone, even if the woman was a Jew.

Understanding the Samaritan Woman

Most modern day readers of this passage see this woman as a prostitute who was living with men in the form of trial marriages. Sanders and Mastin say that this woman had affairs and was guilty of immoral behaviour. "The point of mentioning the exact number (five) is to emphasize Jesus' supernatural knowledge of the woman's affairs" (Sanders & Mastin, 1968, p. 144). Macgregor says, "owing to the frequency of divorce the woman may well have had five legitimate husbands; but her present consort is a mere lover" (1928, p. 101). This means that the woman, as a heathen, did not take marriage vows seriously and by this time she had even given up on trying to get legitimately married. Such promiscuity was Jesus' direct attack with His direct questions and suggestions.

William Barclay says that when the Samaritan woman was confronted by Jesus to go and fetch her husband "she was suddenly compelled to face herself and the looseness and immorality and total inadequacy of her life" (1975, p. 156). Barclay believes that this woman was a loose immoral person who needed to put her life straight. The Samaritan woman spoke the truth about her behaviour and Jesus appraised her honesty without condoning her vice in any way (Tasker, 1960, p. 76). Tasker argues that by speaking and believing the truth, the immoral woman was able to be set free. John Calvin interprets this statement of having no husband as a problem of sexual immorality and prostitution:

The woman does not yet understand this warning by which Christ wanted to pierce her heart unto repentance. And indeed, our self love so intoxicates, or rather stupefies us that we are not at all moved by the first pricks. But Christ has the right cure for this slowness too. He presses the ulcer harder, for He openly accuses her of her wickedness. I do not think He is referring to one act of adultery, for when He says that she has had five husbands, we may suppose it happened because she drove her husbands to divorce her with her wanton and stubborn ways. I interpret the words like this: Though God joined you to lawful husbands, you never stopped sinning, and at last your divorces cost you your reputation and you gave yourself up to prostitution (Calvin, 1959, p. 94).

The reasons leading to this interpretation of the passage are hardly found in the passage itself or its immediate context. By the time of reformation, the general interpretation of the passage maintained that the Samaritan woman was a harlot.

William Hendriksen said that the condition of the Samaritan woman was one of loose marriage and divorce regulations. The woman in this passage, according to Hendriksen, was particularly careless and had abused the institution of marriage through unwarranted divorces and at the time when she met Jesus she was treating marriage union to be some kind of good time experience by living with a man she was not legally married to (Hendriksen, 1953, pp. 164-165).

Sanders and Mastin give an alternative interpretation of the five husbands:

The five husbands are commonly taken to be an allegory of the gods worshipped by the five nations settled in Samaria by the Assyrians, and the sixth man either of the God of Israel, whom the Samaritans did not worship properly, or of some deity whose cult had recently been introduced into Samaria, as, for instance, by Simon Magus (Sanders & Mastin, 1968, p. 144).

The main problem with this view is what Sanders and Mastin point out in their immediate response that, "lawful wedlock is not an apt allegory for idolatrous worship, which figures in the Old Testament as adultery" (1968, p. 144).

Based on Jesus' words that the woman was living with a man who was not her husband, the most obvious problem from modern day readers of the Bible is that she was immoral. That she was living a loose life as a harlot or prostitute. There are two problems with this traditional western interpretation of the words of Jesus. First, is that Jesus does not condemn sexual immorality in His conversation with the woman and it is not in any way explicitly mentioned in the passage. Apart from this modern day implication of such a life style, based on our understanding of what marriage constitutes, there is no other clue in the passage which suggests that she was sexually loose. Secondly, this interpretation is based on what we think marriage should constitute today. We are thinking of two individuals who have taken vows to stay together until death do them part, which makes the involvement of another person within that relationship as adultery, as long as there is no death and another formal ceremony to join the two individuals.

Therefore, I suggest that though adultery and sexual immorality were probably two main problems of this woman, she was most likely not a harlot. The problem which had driven her to a questionable life may have been childlessness. In the culture of antiquity, marriage was not consummated only by the first sexual intercourse between a bride and her groom on the wedding night. Marriage in those cultures was sealed by the birth of the first child, especially the birth of boy who would be the heir of the family. From this point of view, it is possible that this woman was being divorced by men who married her because she was barren. Her lonely life is a confirmation because a childless woman was scorned by others and rejected as one who was cursed. "In the Old Testament, barrenness was looked on as a curse or punishment from God" (Genesis 16:2; 20:18; 1 Samuel 1:5-7) (Youngblood, 1995, p. 162).

It is important to note that although the story of the Samaritan woman was recorded in the New Testament, she lived and died in an Old Testament culture. In traditional Africa, if a man married and later found out that she was barren, her condition would force him to marry a second wife. This is because the important thing in the marriage relationship was the children who are born into that marriage.

In the Semitic culture the barren woman was normally given a certificate of divorce. In the culture of Jesus and the Samaritan woman the woman was the weaker party and she was the one who got kicked out of the relationship. In this case, the then relationship was not marriage because she knew she would not have children. In view of the foregoing, the woman was responsible for her behaviour but it is likely that she was simply a victim of circumstances.

Listening to the Samaritan Woman

The first request of Jesus - "Give Me a drink" - which He made to the Samaritan woman is nothing unusual. In Genesis 24, the servant of Abraham requested Rebekah at the well to give him water to drink and she happily lowered her jar of water so that he would drink. The unusual thing for Rebekah was that she offered to water his camels as well and that was the confirmation of the miracle he had just prayed for. We have seen in the story of Elijah and the Zarephath widow that he first requested her to give him some water to drink, and she gave Him without question (1 Kings 17:10-11). The unusual thing with the Samaritan woman was the time she went to the well to draw water; "It was about the sixth hour" (John 4:6). According to the Genesis account, women in that part of the world usually went in groups to draw water from the wells in the evening. "Wells were often situated outside towns, where they became local landmarks and meeting places" (Youngblood, 1995, p. 1311). Sanders and Mastin agree that "noon was an unusual time to draw water", but they don't think that is the main pointer to the problem of this woman (1968, p. 141).

The woman's problem could be barrenness and that is why she was lonely and embarrassed to meet any one at the well. A harlot would have responded positively to the request of Jesus and gone even further to capture his attention. Undoubtedly, a male stranger is a customer to a harlot. If barrenness was her problem, then she was a social misfit in the city of Samaria. She was cursed and no one would have liked to associate with her.

Jesus' vision was to penetrate the social and cultural barriers between the Jews and Samaritans in order to be able to preach the gospel to them. Jesus wanted to find a way in which He would be heard and believed as the Messiah of the world. Going to the religious leaders would have sparked an argument based on the past experiences and relationships of the Samaritans and the Jews which would have ended up in an impasse. She had been hurt by men and made a social reject based on her physical condition and she was willing to listen to a man who offered her something new, "water of life". Driven by her desire of being able, at last, to avoid the public eye every day when she went to draw water, she was led to discover that life is more than having physical and social needs met. The living God is Spirit by nature and those who believe in Him must worship in the Spirit and in the truth.

Though a Samaritan, she looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would declare everything to them. Jesus revealed His identity to her, something which was unusual with Him, and she suddenly abandoned her water project to announce to the city dwellers her new discovery - surprise! Through His revelation to her, Jesus restored her personal worth by making her the first person in Samaria to discover the Messiah and saviour of the world. He filled her with living water such that she forgot her physical thirst. The town was thirsting for the truth about God and they found it through the Samaritan woman who was thought of as accursed.

The city dwellers were surprised that Jesus would first reveal Himself to such a person. In an attempt to put her back to her humiliating social status, they said to the woman, “it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). While she could have kept quiet and enjoyed salvation alone, she chose to proclaim the arrival of justice in Samaria and called Samaritans to receive the good news. From then on, she was no longer an accursed woman, for she was blessed by the everlasting life of Jesus, and no longer the accursed Samaritans, for they have believed in the Saviour like the Jews. After her new found life in Christ, the Samaritan woman had to shed off her social and gender barriers, and become an agent of reconciliation, justice and a peacemaker between her people and the Jews by inviting them to come to Christ (Mukansengimana-Nyirimana & Draper, 2012, pp. 310-312).

DORCAS’ (TABITHA) JUSTICE

Dorcas (also called Tabitha and used interchangeably in this paper) was famous due to her deeds of kindness “Dorcas is the Greek’s equivalent of the Aramaic Tabitha; meaning gazelle” (Lee, 1985, p. 229). She was a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ from Joppa and she lived in the fear of the Lord. Joppa, where she lived, was eleven miles Northwest of Lydda where the apostle Peter was staying by the time she died. She adopted correct values concerning material things and went out of her way to provide clothing and other material goods to those who were poor in her home town. Like the late Mother Teresa, Dorcas spend her resources and her time for the benefit of the unprivileged.

Dorcas’ Deeds of Justice

The scriptures describe her as the person who was abounding in deeds of kindness and charity (Acts 9:36). These deeds included making tunics and garments for widows in her home town. From the biblical narrative, she is not listed as a wealthy person in material goods, but one who was rich in good deeds. She believed that all people had a right to decency and she made clothes for those who could not afford to buy. She did not try to begin a great Non Governmental Organization (NGO) which would go collecting throw away clothes from the closets of the rich to distribute later to the poor, but she used the gifts given to her and did what she could do for the few people she could reach. These deeds of justice had great missiological implications because they spoke about the love of God for those who were spiritually poor and naked, needing the clothing of His righteousness. In addition, by demonstrating the love of God through such good deeds, many people came to believe in Jesus Christ.

Today in Africa, we have many widows who have been left by husbands who die due to disease, famine and war. The women in the Church should follow the example of Dorcas and do good works of helping their fellow women without waiting for charitable organizations to do that using money from foreign countries. The Christians in Africa have a challenge to combat poverty but they cannot do that only by using foreign aid, they must be willing to dig deep into their pockets, like Dorcas, and help the poor surrounding them.

Impact of Dorcas’ Actions in the Church

Larkin says, “In Dorcas, Luke gives us a model of Christian charity to the marginalized in society. The orphans and widows were the most economically vulnerable (Luke 20:47). No government safety was there to catch them. . . . Christians must bring as much ‘shalom’ as

possible to those on the margins” (1955, p. 152). We do not have to ask millionaires to help a poor person; we need to love and care about them, and demonstrate our love and care by doing as much good as we can afford to do. “Tabitha’s example may have been instrumental in the development of Church offices that focused on service. Churches later commissioned a number of women to ministries reminiscent of Tabitha’s” (Grenz, 1995, p. 80). When God made her resurrect through Peter’s ministry, many people who heard about her life after death, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the recipient of a miracle, her testimony made a great impact in the area surrounding Joppa.

What Tabitha did was to be available and faithful to God. As Mackay says, “faith in the human heart is a divine work, and a divine wonder” (1884, p. 72), Tabitha’s faith became the wonder to her world, because she was willing to let God work through her. “Men and women were commanded by God to ‘open up’ the possibilities latent in the creation. Although sustained by and accountable to God, they were to use the intelligence God gave them to make good and steward focused decisions in all realms of human activity” (Van Leeuwen, 1990, p. 42). Dorcas opened up the possibilities and we are commanded to do the same. She demonstrated what Paul said in Acts 20:35 where he quotes Jesus’ teaching, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Implication to research and practice

The literature that has been intensively analysed both from the Bible and from the contemporary commentaries to the Bible with regards to the just actions of marginalized women in the Bible gives a broader understanding of the place of women in our society. For ages, women have been associated with low and undignified life, with no recognition or role attached to them. However, this understanding of women needs to change in response to fast changing role of women in terms of technology, socio-economic, political and religious perspectives. Thus, this paper gives an understanding of how women, despite their situation, can adopt to the changes through giving Biblical Icons who demonstrated exemplary actions with regards to bringing justice to their communities.

CONCLUSION

This paper is about justice shown by vulnerable women mentioned in the Bible. Their acts of justice were shown in different ways in different situations. Although vulnerable in different ways, each woman trusted God, and by faith, they surprised the world by bringing justice to their communities. As seen through out this chapter, some of them were ‘no bodies’ as per the judgements from their communities. But they first put their faith in God, acknowledged His greatness in the midst of their vulnerability in their communities, then moved by faith to act in just ways.

We are all vulnerable in one way or another. I do not know your vulnerability or situation right now, but what I know is that you can play a big role in bringing justice to the world that is so miserable for justice. I encourage you today to put your faith in Christ by acknowledging Him as the only Lord and Saviour and see His power in you beyond every situation surrounding you today.

From all those examples of people who surprised their communities by their deeds of justice, the basis for their actions was belief in the God of Israel. The God of Israel is your God if you

have put your trust in Him as your Lord and Saviour. Though you might seem insignificant before some people, you are very significant before God and He is ready to use you so that His power may be demonstrated in your weakness.

I am encouraging women who think that they are ‘nobodies’ to wake up and share their ‘power’ which is their faith in God, to the nations. In politics, they can choose the people they want in power, in religion, there is so much they can do in their religious circles, in social matters, they need to wake up and join hands with other women, both lowly and distinguished. In the economic sector, they have their hand and mind. Look around and see what you have and make use of it to bring justice to someone who is undergoing injustice today; be it a fellow worker, a servant in a particular house, a child in home or at school, a minister or a church member, a government officer, any person experiencing any kind of injustice. Do not look forward to doing something big in order to be recognized. I also encourage you to begin it now. Think of each of the women I mentioned in this paper and get encouraged and purpose to bring justice to your society. Remember, the victory of your justice to all is in the words, “fear not”. With Christ, you can make a difference in your society, yes you can and together we can. Therefore, fear not, stand firm and do justice to all, knowing that all people are equal recipients of God’s grace!

Future Research

This paper addresses the concern of justice to the world today by reviewing the act of justice from five women in the Bible that got spread out to their communities. The paper did not look at acts of justice from men, which is such a crucial thing in our world today. The paper also did not review the acts of justice from people in different communities of the world, but only from the Bible. It is of great importance to look into practical ways of showing justice from different people of different communities in the world.

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