**Womanhood in Jesus’ day** was very different from what we see today, at least in the western world. A woman was considered to be inferior to men. She was subordinate, ruled by the father and then by her husband. She had to give unquestioning obedience to the male in her family. Her principle function was to be a wife and a mother. The word ‘wife’ meant woman belonging to a man.

The social mores required her to always walk behind a man in public, and to never speak to a man in public. She could never be alone with a man, and he was never to look in public at a married woman. A man couldn’t give her a greeting in the street, and she had to keep her face covered when in public. A rabbi might not even speak to a woman if he saw her on the street. One of the first century rabbis, Philo, wrote, “Women should not leave their households except to go to synagogue; girls should not cross the line in their apartments from the women’s side, to the men’s side.”

She couldn’t bear witness in a court of law. Divorce was very easily obtained by a man, but a woman in Palestine was not allowed to divorce their husband.

In worship, a woman was allowed to attend the local synagogue, but she was never a part of the worship service. She had to be behind a lattice fence, or up high in the balcony, watching the men. She was not allowed to be taught the Torah or to recite the Shema twice a day, like a man. Rabbi Eliezer said,” Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman…and whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness.”

One of the much used Jewish prayers at the time, “Praise be God that he has not created me a Gentile; praise be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man.”

A woman’s whole status was determined by the birth of a male child. If she could not bare children, preferably male, it was thought to be a reproach from God, and she faced scorn, humiliation and ridicule. Sons brought prestige. Barrenness brought her bitter sorrow. She could even lose her position as a wife.

It was written, “At the birth of a boy all are joyful, but at the birth of a girl all are sad….When a boy comes into the world, peace comes into the world; when a girl comes, nothing comes.

The stereotypical woman was unable to think deeply, rarely taught or educated, and thought to not have a soul, they were emotional and liked to look back, they told idle tales, and like to gossip, and they were noisy, and indiscreet.

Jesus had a radically different viewpoint of womanhood. His view was from the divine standpoint and not from man’s cultural mores and customs. The Gospels were written by male authors, and their bias cannot be removed. They did not record word for word what Jesus said and did. Even so, Jesus’ enlightened understanding of true womanhood shines through their writings. Because the Gospels were written by a male point of view, and because of the cultural status of women in that day, any time a woman is mentioned in the Bible, it has extreme significance and if she is named, it is even more important.

Jesus saw womanhood as equal to men. He healed womanhood, forgave her, set aside numerous taboos and cultural restrictions to teach her and allowed womanhood to follow him. He saw womanhood as having dominion and not being dominated. Everyone was a child of God with equal standing and opportunity.

Almost every time Jesus broke new ground in his ministry, a woman was cast in a primary role. Women disciples followed him, traveled with his group, ministered to him, even married and unmarried women.

Luke 8:1-3

1 And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him,

2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

The only quality that Jesus required of his followers was receptivity. He didn’t care if they were male or female, slave or free, Gentile or Jew, but he had to have the quality of open mindedness and teachablity. There were no cast restrictions, no gender, no economic status or cultural taboos. He found the quality of receptivity in womanhood and that provided them with access to the divine. He taught them spiritual truths and scriptural revelations. Judaism considered it obscene to teach women the Scriptures. Jesus deliberately breaks away from that traditional viewpoint. Many left their homes to study and sit at Jesus’ feet. It also says that “they provided for them out of their own substance.” In other words, they ministered to him, which is the same word that’s used for a deacon in the church.