

A Biblical Portrait of Femininity

Mother's Day

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Before we get started in the message, I want just to mention a couple, make a couple of brief announcements. One, I want to remind you of our graduate recognition on Wednesday. Congratulations to many who are graduating, have graduated, will be graduating, and we'd like to recognize that as a body and we take a Wednesday evening each year to celebrate that together. So if you are a graduate or you have one in your family, please let us know. We'd like for your children to be able to participate with us this Wednesday at 7. Our regular Bible study will be devoted to that celebration.

Then one other celebration we're going to enjoy next week is we're going to be celebrating the ordinance of baptism Sunday morning during our worship service. Michael Williams and Rachel Bernatitus are going to be baptized and we're so grateful for what the Lord has done in their lives, this young man and young woman who have come to faith in the last year and then being discipled by one of our elders, James Rouse and his wife Erin, and they are going to be baptized during the service and then they're going to be married at 1 PM that day as believers in Christ. So next Sunday, you're welcome to stay after the service and join us for the wedding at 1 PM. So there will be a little reception afterwards and they're having family come in and so you'll hear their testimonies next week and hear how God has been helping them work through the issues that they need to to follow Christ. So we look forward to that with great anticipation.

Then we certainly need to say a word about today being Mother's Day and what a blessing our mothers are, the way God has made the family. What a gift it is to have the family at all, to be brought into the world through the God's appointed means of having a mom and then a mother especially who loves Christ, what a treasure that is. I'm so thankful for my mother and her love for Jesus and for me and for my wife, my precious wife and her love for our kids. And I know you are thankful and you should be thankful for your mother, even those that did not know the Lord, what a gift God has given you, someone bringing you into this life. So we want to take a moment to recognize the mothers. I ask you to stand if you're a mother, if you're expecting your first child, you count so please stand. All right, let's give them a hand. [applause]

Amen. Praise God. We do have flowers for you, roses for you as you leave. Please be sure and get your rose and you're welcome to take an extra one if you have somebody

you're going to go see. If you're going to go and see your mom, if you're a mom, take another one for your mom. But anyway, that will be after the service. So thank you.

I do want to this morning, I felt led to step back from Nehemiah for a week to talk about this important issue. The title of the message this morning is "A Biblical Portrait of Femininity." A biblical portrait of femininity. Now the history of Mother's Day goes back in America to 1914 when we made it a national holiday, and it certainly is appropriate and right to take time to celebrate the gift that God has given us in our mothers. But that is, it's amazing how this reality is under assault today, isn't it? You may have heard this week about the representative from Missouri, Cori Bush, who in Congress testifying before Congress spoke of birthing people and our babies, talking about, didn't want to use the word mother. So people who birth. She didn't want to use the word woman. Birthing people and our babies. I mean, it is laughable but it's so grievous and egregious but I was encouraged, in one sense, if you saw the Babylon Bee headline. Do you guys know the Babylon Bee? They had a headline this week, "Non-menstruating partner wishes menstruating partner a happy birthing person's day." Used to say husband wishes wife happy Mother's Day. It's amazing, isn't it?

So I want us to look at what the Bible has to say about femininity, what the Bible has to say about the genders that God created, the two genders, male and female. We're going to look today at what God says about the beauty of man, female. The female component of humanity. The female gender. Femininity. Before we do that, I want to just mention something that I think is really important and undergirds the way we think about life here as Bible-believing Christians here at Providence, and really there are two ways to live. There are two ways to live, you either live under the authority of God or you live under the autonomy of self. There's just really two ways. I preached on this on Wednesday night in summarizing Genesis 1 to 11. I encourage you to listen to that or go back and watch the Facebook feed or whatever if you would like to hear more about that. But there's really two ways to live, you live under the authority of God or the autonomy of self, the autonomy of man.

God's word calls us to the blessedness and happiness of walking in his truth. We need his word. It's so clear. The first pages, in fact, turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis 1. We're going to start there today. The first pages of Scripture set forth the design of God when he creates man, which we'll read in a moment. The first thing he does after he creates man is he speaks to him. Tremendous implications in that reality, that is, man, this is before sin entered the world, this is before sin darkened the mind or alienated the affections or bound the will. Man is in his pristine state sinless, able to commune with God face-to-face, and yet the first thing God does after he creates man in this sinless state is he speaks to him and he tells him his place in the world. The implication is man, even before sin, could not make sense of his own place in the world. God created man to need his word. He gives man a commandment in chapter 2, instruction. Man is made to live under the authority of God and the lie of the enemy is essentially this, when Satan, the serpent came, he basically challenged the woman and the man in turn to live under their own autonomy, to be a law unto themselves, to decide for themselves how they would live rather than to be submitted to the word of God, and their decision to listen to the

enemy, to the lie, you can be like God, you can determine your own good and evil, brought death, spiritual death, physical death, and the decay and destruction of all that we see in the world. There's still beauty in the world and yet it's all marred horribly, when you really look at parts of it, by sin.

So the same choice is there before people today. How do you live? How do you decide your place in the world, who you are, why you're here? Either you will do it according to your own thoughts and your own feelings and your own values, or you will submit to the word of God. And our confidence, our bold confidence is that life is found in submitting to the word of God. Misery is found in going your own way. A refrain throughout the Scriptures, this is clear. I mean, so many verses we could look at. Just a couple to mention. Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And lean not on your own understanding." The book of Proverbs all about wisdom, how to take knowledge and apply it to life, how to live in such a way that you have a life of blessing. That's what Proverbs is about largely. Proverbs 3:5, "Don't trust in your own understanding." Trust in the Lord, in his word. Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." To reverence God and to submit before God is the beginning of knowledge and that's where freedom is found. Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free."

The most loving thing we can do to any other person is to speak the truth to them. Now we should do it with compassion, we should do it with tenderness, we should do it with love, but the most loving thing we can do is speak the truth. So the people today who are confused by this all-out campaign of the evil one to distort and pervert God's design, to claim that there are multiple genders and pick one, you can be your own god, that's really what they're saying, all of that is a path to misery. It will be proven out, it is being proven out. And we as Christians need to have compassion for this real emotional struggle, the mental difficulties so often in situations like that, there have been real deep wounds in people's hearts. We should mourn with those that mourn but we must love them enough to speak the truth, that there is a better way, that we have learned as Christians, we can't live by our own understanding, and the mind of man is darkened, is darkened by sin, and we need the light of the word of God to lead us out into the light.

Let's read verses 26 to 31 of Genesis 1, then verses 15 to 25 of Genesis 2, and then we'll be going around to some other places but this is where we're going to start this morning. Genesis 1:26,

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is

on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. 31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Skipping down to chapter 2, verse 15, here we have the second chapter which begins in verse 4, is basically a second account of creation which is like a slow-motion instant replay almost like from a different camera angle, as it were, of the sixth day of creation from Genesis 1. Think about that and read it and I'll think you'll see that's exactly what it is. God is slowing things down and letting us look at part of the sixth day to show us the glory of how he made man male and female. In verse 15 we read,

15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. 16 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." 18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word and we come to You today acknowledging our need of Your grace to understand it and apply it. We pray that You would through this time send forth Your light and Your truth in the proclamation of Your word and let them bring us each one to Your holy hill, to the place of Your habitation, that in Your presence we might experience life abundantly. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

So a biblical portrait of femininity. You know, when we talk about this and we articulate the biblical picture, we need to be aware that because of what sin has done in the world,

we are proclaiming a message that the world desperately needs but which sounds so entirely foreign to it that it is difficult for them to even get a sense of where we're coming from, and part of the problem is because men have so deeply abused women through the years. That's true. Now it's not a one-sided affair as we might think as, you know, today with all of our intersectionality and all of that, it's all about the oppressor and the oppressed. It's a completely unbiblical way to think about reality and is leading to the death of our society. But nevertheless, there is truth in the fact that men have abused women throughout history. Now the reality is women have been sinning just as much as men just in a different way. God has made it so that men have more power, throughout history this is something that's just been a reality and it continues even today. So we can see as people look at the dynamics of what they see, they see sin wrecking everything, it's hard for them to see the beauty of the original design and we should understand that. But you and I are called to show them, not only to speak it but to show them the glory of the original design by living lives empowered by the Holy Spirit, informed by the Scriptures, that we would walk in a way that shows what biblical masculinity is and biblical femininity to the glory of God. That's what we're called to do, but we're not called to hide the truth. What the world needs in these confusing times is a clear articulation of the truth. The light shines brighter the deeper the darkness and that's what we're called to do.

So we want to look at what the Bible really says about woman, femininity, and we see the biblical portrait of femininity is one of beauty and glory and dignity. I mean, one of the things as you read your Bible carefully, if you read it carefully and you put it and you understand it in context, the Bible is really always elevating women from the place they were in society wherever God's people are at the time the Scripture is being revealed. It's doing so, though, in the biblical way and rightly related to masculinity, but it's elevating. We just read earlier from the gospel of Matthew and you remember reading about the women, the Scripture bothers to tell you that the women there were looking on at the cross, and there's a sense in which, the question is, where were the men? Seriously, that's what's going on there. And we'll see that as we look at the biblical portion of femininity, we see this is one of the ways God has made man male and female, each complementary, distinct, so much in common yet so many wonderful differences, and there's a balance about it, that it's a part of the beauty of how God has made things. There is a rhythm about God's creation that you read in Genesis 1 if you read the whole chapter, you'll see this, that, you know, you have this wonderful balance and you have heaven and earth. God creates the heavens and the earth. You have him filling the sky with the sun and the moon, the sun by day, the moon by night. You see, there's balance. Morning and evening. Day and night. Man, male and female.

That's how God has made the world and we resist his design at our own peril. We resent what he has done to our own misery, our own destruction. That's what we see around us, the world suppressing the truth in unrighteousness and reaping the benefits of what they are sowing, reaping misery and death. And the more they commit to these things, the more miserable they're going to become, and so rather than be angry with them because they're messing things up, I mean, I feel that temptation, they are messing things up. It messes everything up. There's going to be no comedy soon, did you realize that? You can't make a joke about anything. Humor, well-intentioned, good humor is now offensive

to somebody. So there will be no laughter. When the thought police reign, there will be no joy. So when we think about that, it's easy for us to have a sense of possession and be angry that they're doing it. But hey, blessed are the meek, they inherit the earth. A meek person knows he has no rights. "Lord, You're doing this. It's marvelous in our eyes. We know it displeases You, we know that You don't want it, and we know we're supposed to shine like lights but we're not to be feeling a sense of personal resentment and anger at unbelievers. We are to be concerned out of love for their souls." But we're to speak the truth. We are to speak the truth and as we do, to see God work through his glorious gospel.

So a biblical portrait of femininity. We begin to see it unpacked, God unpack this from the very first pages of Scripture as we just saw, Genesis 1:26 and 27, and I'm going to try to work through six points that are really six attributes of femininity. So a biblical portrait, six attributes of femininity that we can read out of the Scriptures.

The first is equality. Equality, value, worth, dignity, honor. Equality. It's right there in Genesis 1:26 when God says, "Let Us make man in Our image." In verse 27 it says, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." The repetition is saying he creates man in his image but when he says he creates man in his image, what he means is he creates man male and female in his image. The great dignity of man that separates humanity from every other creature is that we alone are created to image God. We are created to reflect his glory. We are created like him, the image and likeness of God. The words are basically near synonyms, image and likeness in the Hebrew. It basically means to replicate, to reflect. And so we are made to be replicas in some way of God. We are not God, we'll never be God but we're to be like God in such a way that as creation were to look at us, they're seeing some visual representation of God. Now this is mysterious, especially for sinners now, to consider these things we have to walk softly and carefully in the Scriptures, but the incredible nobility that God placed upon man is one of the first things we see as we see the creation account. The great value of man and it's not man male, it's man male and female. There's a sense in which the two genders together are reflecting. There's a complementary sense, complete. C-o-m-p-l-e, complementary. They complete one another and we see this even here. So the value of man male and female is equal in the sense of being and dignity before God.

I mentioned how you see really as you read through the Bible, you see the women continually playing a key role in being elevated in the Scriptures, especially compared to the contemporary situation. If you go back into the history of the various situations, the Bible is always elevating women because after what happens with sin in Genesis 3, is there becomes now the complementary beauty that God made is totally disrupted. When man tries to live for himself and both become autonomous and choosing for themselves what is right, there is no harmony, there is no peace, there is war. Women try to control men and men will not have it and they abuse women. I don't mean just physically, I mean there's an attitudinal neglect, abuse, lack of concern, lack of care, all kinds of things begin happening because of sin. And so because of that, what happens is over time, men, people use other people. This is what sinners do and this is why if you change the justice

around, whoever you put in charge is just going to use other people. So you have to try to have law restrain evil. That's what you need to have an ordered society.

So the history of humanity is a history that is checkered with male abuse of women. The more godless a country is, the more awful is the abuse. But you have in Scripture, though, as we see the word of God being given, you have women playing a key role over and over and over again. I mean, you read through your Bible and you have Tamar, an interesting account in Genesis 38, and then she gets into the line of Christ with her decisive action she takes. And it's an interesting story that's there but there's something there even commendable about this woman though she's doing something that is not commendable in its entirety. Rahab the harlot, Deborah, Ruth, Naomi, Hannah, Mary, Lydia, all the way through the Scriptures.

So the first thing we see is equality. The second thing we see about femininity from the very first pages of Scripture is strength. Strength. It is a different strength and a distinct strength but it is a strength nevertheless, and you might even say an empowering strength. It's there in chapter 2, verse 18 and verse 20, in the phrase that's repeated "helper suitable." I'm reading the New American Standard and the word "helper" is the key word here we want to look at for strength. It's the Hebrew word "ezer" which means "help; to provide aid." Interestingly enough, the noun is used 21 times in the Old Testament, 16 of them, the noun refers to God himself. It's help from God. Psalm 121:1 and 2, "I look to the mountain; From where shall my help come?" That's "ezer." "My help is in the LORD, Who made heaven and earth." Again and again in the Psalms you read this phrase "God is our help and shield." So when he says, "I'm going to make a helper," what he's saying is he looks at man and he says, "It's not good for man to be alone. I'm going to give him divine help." And the woman he creates is divine help for the man.

Now let me say, this is particularly applied in marriage but there's a sense in which what I'm talking about isn't just related to marriage, it's femininity because not every woman is going to be married, not every woman is going to be a mother, but every woman is a woman. That's profound, take that to the bank. Actually that is profound today, isn't it, surprisingly so. No, but God has made, if you're female, God has made you to be something distinct and unique, different from man, and that you can bring in every area of your life, in every relationship, in every situation you have something wonderful and glorious to bring by God's grace and his power, by his Spirit, not to exalt yourself, not to live in personal autonomy but to live under the authority of Scripture and you can bring something beautiful, and what he says here is you can bring strength. There is strength that you have that God has made you to have. It's the idea of aid. It's the right strength at the right time.

I want to mention something real quickly and I want you to look at this later. I can't unpack this like I'd like to because of time but there's something really beautiful about, in fact, I would encourage you to listen again to Wednesday night because I covered this a little bit on Wednesday night and it would help, but I'm going to try to summarize it so stay with me here. In the creation accounts, there is an interesting thing about the way the Lord reveals what he did in creation. I mean, if you read your Bible carefully and you are

asking questions as you read, you can't miss it. The problem is we don't do that enough. In Genesis 1, you have the creation account of the seven days of creation. Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:3. The first three verses of chapter 2 really belong in chapter 1, that's because the chapter and verse divisions weren't inspired. Moses didn't write verse 1, verse 2, chapter 1. He just wrote the whole book. They were added later. That's the seven days of creation. Then chapter 2, verse 4 to 25, is the second account of creation which I said is like a slow-motion instant replay of part of day six, the creation of the animals and the creation of man. What you have in the creation accounts is really something profound. In chapter 1, verse 2, you read this really interesting verse and you go, "Why is it here?" After God says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," verse 2, "The earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." Okay, now really stop and think about that. Why did God stop? What's happening here? Was there some primordial thing, did God not create everything out of nothing? No, he created everything out of nothing, Hebrews 11 tells us that and this is certainly in line with that. There wasn't a primordial mess that he just formed. No, he created everything out of nothing but he stopped in the middle and he left things kind of a mess and said, "Take a snapshot of this. Look at it." Why? Why not go ahead and finish it all and let me see the finished product? Why, Lord, why did you do that? Why did you bother telling us that the earth was formless and void, unformed and unfilled? Why did you do that? Because he's going to then in the rest of the creation account of chapter 1, he's going to solve the problem. It's not that there's any sin, there's no defect, it's just not finished. He starts into creation and he says, "Look, everything's unformed and unfilled." Now what he does, that's day one, he forms light. Day two, he forms the sky and the oceans. Day three, he forms the dry land. Day four, he fills the sky with light, he fills the heavens with lights, the sun, the moon, the stars. You see, he formed light, now he fills light. Day five, he fills the heavens with birds and the seas with fish and all kinds of sea creatures. You see, he formed the sky and the oceans, now he fills them. Day three, he formed dry land, day six, he fills the dry land with all kinds of animals and with man. So he stops, he says, "Look at the picture. Look at what a mess it is. Look what I do. I form and I fill." So he shows the glory of who he is and what he does and he makes us stop and pause and say, "Wow!"

Okay, in chapter 2 he does the same thing. It's really interesting, verse 5, he stops, now he's going back and he's giving us a slow-motion instant replay and he stops on day six and he says, "Hey, look, here's the picture." In chapter 2, verse 5, he says, "Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground." Well, he's already filled the world with plants but not these kinds of plants. The words there "shrub of the field and plant of the field" refer to garden plants. They are the kind of plants that you have to tend or they won't really do well. They need to be cared for. So he hasn't put any of those on the earth and so what you have here is the Lord on day six says, "Okay, look at everything I'm doing." And what did he say about it all along? It was good. It was good. It was good. It was good. But he stops and he says, "Look at day six. Things are not like they need to be because I don't have a garden. I don't have plants of the field, shrubs of the field, rain or a man. Stop and look at that." And now what he does in the rest of chapter 2 is he solves the water problem with rivers, he solves the garden

problem by planting a garden, and he solves the man problem, first of all, by forming Adam out of the dust of the earth and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, and then you think maybe the problem is solved but he does exactly the same thing in chapter 2, verse 18. He takes a snapshot again. "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'" Wait a minute. When you read chapter 1, the whole fast version of creation, "God saw all that He had made and behold it was good. God saw all that He had made and behold it was good." Six times it says that and the seventh time in verse 31 we read, "God saw all that He made and behold it was very good." So these words are jarring, they're shocking. Something is not good. It doesn't mean sin is there, it doesn't mean there is any imperfection and sense of God has not done anything wrong. God is saying, "It's not yet finished. It's not good because it's not yet finished." And here he stops, he stopped in the creation of the world and said, "Look, I want you to see it's unformed, it's unfilled. Watch Me form it and fill it." He stopped in the creation of the garden and man and said, "Look, it's not yet good." Even the world with all the animals in it, now think about this for a moment and let me say something about this. All of the animals, all the pristine nature, all of the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom with man not in it, God says it's not worth a toot. Do you hear that? Not worth anything. The world says we're the problem. God says, no, the world without man is nothing. That's what Genesis 2 says.

Now he does that, that's the snapshot. The third snapshot is, "Look at man without woman. Look at him. Man, that's not good. It is not good. He can't do what I've called him to do." Now is God making it up as he goes? Is he like, "Oh, I forgot to do part of this thing"? No, he is in a powerful way that especially you and I who are male here would understand this. He's saying, "Listen, I'm making man male and female in such a way that it would be easy for you to underestimate the value of the female because you're going to be physically stronger and bigger in general, you're going to be the one I've made to lead and to take the headship of situations, family and leadership in the church, and it's going to be easy to despise her and therefore I know you need Me to stop and kind of slap you upside the head and say, look, it's not good for you to be alone." Then he fixes that problem and he creates a helper suitable. He sends the strength, the empowering strength that the man lacks.

This is why when somebody gets married, a husband and wife, the husband needs to see your wife is a gift from God to you, not for your enjoyment but to help you be all that God wants you to be. Certainly, you will enjoy one another. You should serve one another. She's not to be used, she's to be served for the glory of God and she will help you be all that God wants you to be and accomplish all that God wants you to accomplish, and you will help her be all that God wants her to be and to accomplish all that God wants her to accomplish. So in the same way, the church needs women as well. It's not just a husband and wife thing. There are things that women bring to the body of Christ that men don't bring.

Now let's look at this, let's take the next point. I mentioned equality and strength. Portrait of femininity, the biblical portrait of femininity. Thirdly, discernment. I've been trying to think of the right word for this. Perceptiveness, intuition. But the fact that God makes a

helper suitable, he brings her to the man and she is there to complete the man. There is a sense in which the woman has an ability to recognize what's lacking and move toward it and you see this played out in Scripture. I mean, we just read Matthew's account. Let's look at Mark's. We read earlier Matthew's account in the Scripture reading time. In chapter 15, verse 40, this is at the cross. I mentioned the women were there. This is Mark's account of the same thing we read from Matthew. "There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him." Do you get that? That women were following Jesus and ministering to him. "And there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem." Luke 8 speaks of the same thing, that there were women who were supporting Jesus' ministry financially. They had means and wealth and they recognized the need. "Hey, He's not passing an offering plate when He's ministering. He's not making tents like Paul did to support His ministry. He's the Son of God. He needs financial support." They recognized it and there they are leading the way and doing it. Where are the guys? I don't know. I mean, there were probably some guys that were involved but Scripture tells us about the women because they see the need, there's perceptiveness.

Then the next thing is support. So equality, strength, perception or I said discernment. Equality, strength, discernment, support, to provide essential support. Once they see the need, there is an ability to meet the need. There is a God-given grace upon the feminine gender especially when it's under the control of the Holy Spirit to see a need and to meet the need. You're in Mark 14, just look back at the beginning of chapter 14. It's amazing how the Lord puts these things in Scripture and we can just miss them, or miss this part of it anyway. To me, it's just so illuminating. Mark 14:3, Jesus is in Jerusalem. It's the week before the crucifixion. The Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away. The chief priests and scribes are seeking to seize him and kill him, verse 1. Verse 3, "While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, 'Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they were scolding her." Now think about that. As men gather around the table talking and a woman comes forward and breaks a vial of perfume. 300 denarii is basically almost a year's salary, the better part of a year's salary for the common worker. And she takes that which is valued, you know, \$25,000 today, something like that, \$30,000, and she breaks it and she pours it on the head of Jesus as he is talking. Nobody asked her to. Jesus didn't say, "Hey, come and do this." She recognized a need and she moved with boldness toward it. The men who were there didn't recognize the need. They're the ones who have been told about the need most plainly. Jesus had been telling his disciples from time to time for months that he's going to Jerusalem to be handed over to sinners and crucified but they are not getting it. It's not computing. This woman gets it.

We know from John's gospel this is Mary, the sister of Lazarus. It's not long after Jesus raised Lazarus. She was the one who in Luke 11 was seated at Jesus' feet when her sister

Martha was so busy in the house. She had learned to sit at the feet of Jesus. She had listened to him teach and preach, then she had seen him come back and raise her dead brother. She knows who he is and she knows what's about to happen to him and she, in the moment, recognizes the need and moves with strength to support the need.

They were scolding her. Verse 6, "But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial.'" She recognized he needs to be anointed for burial. Look what he says in verse 9, "Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." What a moment. Nobody understood. The disciples are clueless and this woman sees the need and acts.

We looked at the cross, the women are there at the cross. It's the women who are going to the tomb on Sunday morning after the Sabbath is over to continue to anoint the body. They haven't fully understood that he's going to be resurrected and they know he needs to be honored, he needs to be worshiped, he needs to be glorified. But they're the ones taking care of everything. God has made you, as a woman, to see need, to have more sensitivity to it than men tend to have, and to be able to move toward it and to be able to help marshal resources to address it. It's true of every woman of God. That's what he wants you to be.

Fifthly, it's not just equality, strength, discernment and support, there's also clearly the idea in the Scripture of beauty, not merely physical beauty. There is that but there's beauty in general. I get this particularly from 1 Peter. I think you can infer it some from Adam's reaction when Eve is brought to him, Genesis 2:23. He's ecstatic. He knows this is exactly what was made for him. "This completes me." They don't have to have the conversation, it's not like he has to talk to her for a while to figure out if she has a good personality. "Thank you, Lord." He sees her and he knows. "It's exactly what I need."

1 Peter 3:3. I think this tells us that God made the woman to be the fairer sex, as we say. She's to exhibit more of the beauty of God than men tend to be able to do, or men should do. It's feminine to want to be attractive and beautiful. 1 Peter 3:3. Well, we'll read it in context. In verse 1, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses." Peter is not condemning those things. He's saying it's a given, of course you're going to do that but he says there's to be an appropriate balance, and what he's going to say is what you need to do is not just adorn yourselves merely outwardly but make your focus the inward adornment of the heart. That's what God sees as the ultimate in beauty. It must not be merely external, "let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God." He's appealing to the innate desire that he knows the female gender has to be seen

as beautiful and he says, "God, you want your Father to think you're beautiful? Cultivate a heart that is gentle and quiet before Him." God thinks that is beautiful.

So the Lord has given women the ability to exhibit the beauty of God in a way that men are not intended to and we're all different, we're all distinct, we are all made differently. God is the one who made us, we're to rejoice in how he made us. Too often women take this as other areas and they turn it into an idol and they resent the fact that they are not a certain way or they're different than they would like to be. No, accept how God has made you because you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and within that, do everything you can to exhibit his beauty, first of all in your character, but then also it's appropriate to think about how you look. Girls should be more concerned about how they look, I guess, than guys are. I don't want to get into this too much. I feel like my wife would say I'm not concerned enough about how I look sometimes, so there's a balance.

But there seems to be something clearly here. It's the essence of femininity to exhibit God's beauty and God's beauty, one of the most wonderful places it's exhibited, I think, is Luke 7. It's a passage that seems a lot like what we read. It's not the same passage at all, not the same person, but it is an amazing passage. Another woman who sees a need, responds with strength, and in doing so presents one of the most beautiful portraits of what it is to be a human being worshiping Christ in all of the Scripture. Luke 7:36, "Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume." Here she is anointing his feet and weeping upon his feet, washing his feet with her hair and wiping his feet with her hair. This is earlier in Jesus' ministry. What we read earlier is the last week of Jesus' ministry.

Verse 39, "Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.'" The Pharisee recognized a prostitute is doing this. "And Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.'" And Simon was just thinking that in his mind but Jesus says, "I have something to say to you." And he replied, 'Say it, Teacher.'" And he tells him a parable. "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And [Jesus] said to him, 'You have judged correctly.' Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon," he looks at the woman now who has been called out and chastised, in a sense, and embarrassed by this man who is not recognizing the need of the moment. Jesus looks at her as he's talking to Simon and he says, "'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is

forgiven little, loves little.' Then He said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.' Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man who even forgives sins?' And He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

This woman who had been saved out of incredible immorality, she saw a need. Jesus' feet had not been washed, a man of his esteem and honor should have his feet washed. This is back in the day when they walked on dusty roads, they didn't have sanitation and sewage and garbage pickup, and so when you walked on the streets of a city, you got your feet nasty, and so when you sit down to eat, you need to go in to eat, you need to wash your feet. But Simon, the Pharisee, doesn't recognize the need that he would give to most people, houseguests he would have, any houseguest he would have, you'd want to offer that but he didn't even offer it to this most noble houseguest who this woman knows is not just the most noble human houseguest you could have, he is the Son of God. She recognizes the need. In her brokenness over her forgiveness, she can't believe she's been forgiven. She is overwhelmed and she weeps at his feet and her tears provide enough moisture, and then with her hair she uses her hair to wipe off the dirt from our Savior's feet. She takes this little jar of perfume that she has, apparently not as big as the other, and she uses it to anoint his feet, to cleanse his feet, to make his feet smell beautiful. And it's not just a practical need, she's illustrating that the greatest tragedy at any moment is that Jesus Christ is not worshiped for who he is and what he's done, and this woman is used by God to see the need of the moment and to, with strength, move. I mean, she had to be bold. Can you imagine, she is a prostitute going into the home of a Pharisee. A woman going to the table is enough. That's improper. But a prostitute. But her love for Christ is so great that she knows she must worship him and we see in this what a beautiful picture of worship, what it is to know the forgiveness of our sins, to know and love our Savior and to worship him.

That's beauty. That is man as he is made to be. That's what every human being is made to do, to in brokenness worship at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth forever. That is it. This redeemed prostitute, this woman that her life was known by brokenness, misery, rejection, being used, when she encountered Christ and he loved her, everything changed, and out of that brokenness now a new brokenness, a brokenness over her sinfulness and an awareness of the incredible joy of forgiveness and righteousness, acceptance, the throne room of God, her heart welled up with worship and she gives us this beautiful portrait. What beauty.

The sixth thing. We said equality, strength, discernment, support, beauty, finally, glory. There is a glory about man male and female. God has given to us glory, in fact, history is going to end with our being glorified, sharing in the glory of our great Savior Jesus Christ. We are not God nor will we ever be but he will have us reign with him.

And one of the ways the glory of femininity is seen most beautifully is in Ephesians 5. The picture of the marriage relationship that's there in Ephesians 5:22 to 33 where wives are said to "be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the

body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." What you have here is this is a practical passage on marriage. How are we to live the married life for the glory of God. This is what the family is to look like. It's practical. It's like a marriage seminar that Paul is teaching except his seminar is not about how to, seven principles for being a good husband. His principle, his focus is if you want to be a good husband, you want to be a good wife, understand the glory of your calling and keep looking at Christ. The glory of your calling as man, male and female, who come together in marriage is that you have the opportunity to give a visible representation of the gospel in your married life, that wives are to be submissive to their husbands, they are to trust not their husband's ability, their husband's wisdom, but when there are disagreements, now remember, if you're the helper suitable, you've got empowering strength, you've got to come with your opinions and you've got to be clear and as articulate as possible, and sometimes as fervent as possible to get your point across to us hardheaded men. You have to tell us what you think is right because God gave you to your husband. But in the place where the man after hearing all of that says, "Listen, I'm going this way," or even if he doesn't listen like he should, at some point he's going ahead, submission, trust that the Lord is going to work through him and you line up behind him and you follow him and you don't hope for him to realize how wrong he is by falling on his face. You submit as Christ, as the church does to Christ. That is, you trust that, "The Lord's at work even in my husband's possibly bad decision. The Lord will work through this and I'm going to have a gentle and quiet spirit knowing that God's sovereign in this." And as you do that, what you as a woman are doing is you are living before your children and you're saying this, you're saying, "Listen, my children, you can trust Jesus Christ. I'm telling you by submitting to my husband, I'm visibly marking out for you, you can trust Jesus Christ even when you think he's doing something that's not good for you, when your life falls apart. You can trust Jesus Christ. My submission is testimony to that because I trust Jesus Christ." And as husbands, we have the opportunity to learn how to love sacrificially in such a way that we lay down our lives for our wives and we say to our children, "You can love Jesus because this is how He loves you. Look at how He loves you by looking at me love your mother." This takes marriage and lifts it up to the very highest level of dignity and beauty and glory, and how horrible and wicked it is that marriage is being attacked the way it is today. Now we can't fix all of that out there, we can fix it here and we can live it out there.

So the glory of femininity is in the same way the glory of masculinity, when we are who we were created to be, trusting God, living under his authority, submitting to his word wherever that means as we apply our lives, we're obeying his word, we're loving Jesus, then we somehow picture the mystery of Christ and the church. He becomes clear at the end of this passage. He's talking about in verse 28, he goes on to say, "husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body." He's saying, "Husbands, love your wives, serve your wives because in loving your wife and serving your wife, you're serving yourself. You're helping yourself because you're that connected." And he says it's just like Jesus and the church.

And look what he says in verse 31, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This next verse, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." He's talking about husbands and wives and here Paul says, "Listen," actually when that verse, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, the two shall become one flesh, the reason God created the man male and female to be joined forever for this life in a covenant of marriage to experience oneness physically and in their souls, the reason that God did this was to be a picture of the gospel. That's why he created marriage. Marriage is not the prototype for the gospel, the gospel is the prototype for marriage. Marriage is made to pattern after the glorious wonder of the gospel which is the way that you're saved is union with Christ, that to become a child of God, you become united to Jesus in a way that is a oneness like the oneness of a man and a wife. Jesus becomes everything to you. He lays down everything for you. You submit to him. You follow him. You love him. And there's a mysterious union that happens so that everything that he accomplishes now are yours and he becomes your life. That's the gospel and that is preached every day by married couples either accurately and truthfully or blasphemously. The way you love your wife is preaching something about Jesus. Are you preaching truth or are you preaching lies? The way you respond to your husband in submitting to him in a godly way or not, is preaching about Jesus. Are you preaching the truth or are you preaching lies?

But when the Lord has a woman who follows him and who loves him and who knows him, then she can understand that she's made with equal dignity to every man though there are authority structures in the home and the church and men are to be in those leadership positions. Yes, yet there is value, incredible value that women bring throughout the pages of Scripture and continuing until Jesus returns, unique contributions and without women, the church is a mess. And when they bring their equality, their strength, their discernment, their support, their beauty and their glory, the world sees something of the image of God. That's what God has called us to.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word and that You spoke to us and did not leave us to ourselves and our own autonomy. We rebelled against You in the garden, we threw off Your reign, and each of us have shared in that ourselves. We don't deserve Your mercy. We have spurned Your love. We marvel that You are a God who saves. You are a God who saves those who have rebelled and You did it by sending Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ as a Savior of sinners. He laid down His life so that we could be made righteous. Father, the design that You have is wonderful and beautiful. You do all things well. We look around the world and we see so much confusion, so much that displeases You, and we, Lord, we are tempted to despair, we are tempted to just be angry and resentful of what we see around us. Help us seize the moment and fulfill the calling. Help us to be the people You want us to be. For every woman here, Lord, may You grant them grace to know and love Christ and to be what You have called a woman to be more and more every day. For every man, Lord, teach us. Show the glory of biblical femininity and

the glory of biblical masculinity in our homes, in our church interactions, in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces and let the world see Your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.