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Q&A#111 Joanna the Wife of Chuza

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Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "Is there more significance than immediately meets the eye in the reference to 'Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager' becoming a follower of Jesus in Luke 8:3?"

Within this video, I mention Richard Bauckham's book, Gospel Women:
<https://amzn.to/2EFjYMh>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, is there more significance than immediately meets the eye in the reference to Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, becoming a follower of Jesus in Luke 8? The text in question, beginning at verse 1 of chapter 8, reads, Now it came to pass afterward that he went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him.

And certain women, who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza,

Herod's steward, and Susanna and many others who provided for him from their substance. There are several things that might be interesting about this figure. First of all, she seems to be well connected, which unsettles some of the suggestions that people have about the non-elite character of all of Jesus' disciples.

People have often suggested that Jesus' disciples were all non-elite, not really connected. But yet, within the Gospels and within the New Testament more generally, we see a number of Jesus' disciples who were well connected. Here we have a member of Herod's circle, someone who's the wife of his steward or one of his stewards.

We don't know if it's a steward or the steward, the person who manages all the finances of his kingdom or the person who's just managing a particular royal estate. We don't know. But whatever it is, this is an important figure and a figure who would have been well connected.

What we also recognise is that there were people who were supplying Jesus' support and the support for the disciples during their ministry. It's a question we might ask. Why were Jesus' disciples free to move around from place to place and to leave their homes and to leave their work behind them? Why could Peter and Andrew and James and John leave the Sea of Galilee, leave their fishing boats and their nets and follow Jesus? How could they be provided for? And here we have part of the answer, that there were some wealthy women, among others possibly, who were supporting them out of their substance.

Other things to recognise here is that these figures are mentioned perhaps in part because they were witnesses. And as eyewitnesses, their testimony and their connections are very significant. So we have within the rest of the Gospels references to people like Nicodemus, the fact that the disciple whom Jesus loves has connections with the high priest.

And these sorts of connections mean that people who are mentioned, people who are within those orbits, that they would be able to bear witness to certain things that others would not have seen. That they would be privy to certain conversations or pieces of information that others would not know. And as a result, they could serve as a source for the Gospel narratives.

So Luke had access, presumably, to someone like Joanna, who was present at the empty tomb, but also someone who had connections within Herod's orbit. And as a result, she could probably bear witness to some of the things that were said within that context, to certain things that happened and other things like that. And that is an important feature of the Gospels, that we recognise the presence of people within the orbit of the leading Jews, people like Nicodemus, and we recognise the presence of people like Joanna.

And as a result, the testimony of the Gospel is stronger when it comes to those issues

that concern the court of Herod or that concern the leaders of the Jews and their deliberations among themselves. These are not just imagined whole cloth from the imagination of the Gospel writer. There are probably sources mentioned within the text that back up these things.

And Joanna might be one of them. Further things to notice, how would she have supported Jesus and his disciples? What wealth would she have been using? Well, it depends. She might have been married and then Cusa could have died.

And in that case, she seems to be following Jesus around. So it's not just that she's providing, she's following Jesus around, which suggests that she is, that her husband has probably died. Then as a result, she would have the inheritance that she would gain from her husband's estate.

Now, that inheritance would come to her if she had no children, if they had no children for it to inherit. Also, she'd be she'd be provided for from her husband's estate, even if she did not have a direct inheritance. There would also be her dowry and bride price that's or the equivalent that would have come to her at that time after her husband had died.

Furthermore, if her parents, presumably who were rich, if she was married into, if she married a steward of Herod's household, it would seem that she would be well connected within Jewish society. And as a result, it's quite possible that her father gave her a deed of gift and that deed of gift would be an extensive estate or something like that, that she would have in her possession, even if she were married. And so we have examples here of forms of wealth that would belong to her if she were widowed and also some forms of wealth that would belong to her if she were married.

And so this gift that she might have had, it would have been hers and other ways that she would have had wealth, even if she was still married. But I think it's quite likely she was widowed by this point. If she was the wife of Kuza, we'd expect her to be settled in Tiberias or somewhere like that.

But she's moving around. Another thing to notice is that she's someone who's experienced either exorcism or healing. It's suggested by the context and that she is not just someone who's participating in Jesus' ministry as a follower and a disciple who believes what he's teaching, but someone who has experienced the power of the kingdom for herself in healing or exorcism.

She's also part of a group of women. She's not the only one. There are a number of women like this who are providing from their independent wealth.

And in some cases, these would be independent businesswomen who are maybe doing craft works, maybe in keeping whatever it was that they were providing in order to

provide for themselves. These women would be providing someone like Lydia, who was dealing in fabrics and dyeing. We have someone who has wealth who then uses that to support the church.

And a number of the early churches meet in women's homes. They're provided for by women's support. And there is a larger structure of patronage in which women are very prominent.

When we think about the early church and these houses, the house churches, the fact that many of those would have met in women's houses is an important factor to recognize that the church is not just an institution that exists out there in the public square, in the public realm. But it's also provided for and present within these realms that would be more closely associated with women. It's within the house.

It's within these large, supported by large estates and by women who would manage the affairs of their own household and also be able to provide for others outside with their independent wealth. Independent wealth that they would have even in some cases while married. This helps us to see something of a background.

It also helps us to recognize the importance that women could have to the ministry of Christ, even if they were not the direct teachers and leaders of the movement that the disciples were, as the apostles were, as the sort of backbone of that movement. These were people who were providing and making possible things that would not have been possible otherwise. There has also been the suggestion by Richard Borkham in his book *Gospel Women* that Joanna might be the same person as Junia and Junia is referenced in Romans 16.7. Now, that's a possibility.

It's speculative as is most of necessarily most of Borkham's account of Junia, his account of Joanna. His account of Joanna in his book *Gospel Women* is very extensive. It takes, I'm trying to remember, it's 70, 80 pages long.

And that's a lot to write on a figure that we only have a few scattered references to. But yet what he has to say is helpful if speculative. It provides a possible picture of what this woman could have been, how she would have managed her wealth, how she would have been connected to the ministry of Jesus and what her circle would have been and other things like that.

So I think there is an importance to this figure. There's more significance than meets the eye. It shows the importance of women within Jesus' early movement.

It shows the presence of women in the broader circle around Jesus. Although Jesus' core group of disciples, the immediate apostolic group, were all male, we do have a larger group of women who are very closely associated with Jesus too. Part of the larger orbit but not the great crowds or the multitudes.

These are consistent followers who follow Jesus around from place to place. And there is something very important in recognising the presence of such persons. It's also important in recognising the existence of elite figures among Jesus' disciples and rich characters that these are not just poor peasants among Jesus' disciples but they were rich and well-connected people.

These characters like Joanna could have been connected to figures like the rich nobleman or the rich young ruler or someone like in John 4, the royal official who is the recipient of the second healing. His son is sick and he's healed in Capernaum. So we have an example of a number of people who are well-connected who are in Jesus' orbit.

We have an example of women and we also have the answer to the question of how Jesus' ministry was supported. So I think there is more than meets the eye initially here. If you have any further questions please leave them in my Curious Cat account.

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