

BENEFICIARIES AND BENEFACTORS OF PRACTICAL MISSION WORK: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF LUKE 8:1-3

Promise Arinze Godwin,

Ph.D Student,

Department of Religion and Development Studies,

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

didaskalosredogap@gmail.com

08066225705

AND

J. Afolabi AMPITAN, Ph.D

Department of Religion and Development Studies,

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

08075380238

afolabiampitan@yahoo.com

Abstract

The growing body of research on the focal Bible text, Luke 8:1-3, has addressed the nuances of breaking cultural barriers, since Jesus elevated the roles of women in his ministry; and empowering women for Christian leadership position. Notwithstanding, there remains a notable knowledge gap in contextualising it to bear in the emphasis on lethargic attitude of certain Christians towards generous contribution and its adverse effect on mission efforts. The study argued that practical Christian mission works depend on divine provision to thrive, which is often facilitated through human charity and or generosity. Objectively, the study postulated that, the practice of harnessing, that is, pooling financial resources together, for the purpose of effective Christian mission work is biblical, and it remains the most viable, if not the only practicable means to fund effective Christian mission work. Utilising historical- critical exegetical method, the study attempted exegesis of Luke 8: 1-3. It analysed biblical model of giving, emphasising the women's transformation through healing, discipleship, and partnership in missions. Findings revealed that, purpose-driven mission work precedes material generosity, as the women in Luke 8:1-3 became committed followers of Jesus before releasing their resources. It concluded that, when people have the joys of the gospel, when they feel the consolations of religion themselves, they will somehow or another find means to contribute to the welfare of others. Recommendations included that present day gospel ministers should prioritise discipleship, addressing specific believers' needs, promoting sense of belonging and partnerships among believers. Present day believers in Christ should be more intentional and make deliberate efforts to support Christian mission works both in cash and kind.

Keywords: empowerment, leadership, partnership, transformation, purpose-driven.

Introduction

Giving to support Christian mission is an integral aspect of Christian service and stewardship. In Christianity, releasing one's financial or material resources for mission purposes is one of the ways to acknowledge the blessings and faithfulness of God in believers' lives. Releasing one's material resources for kingdom business is not just to receive blessing in return, in the first instance, it is a way of reciprocating the love and kindness of God to the ransomed. The focal Bible passage, Luke 8:1-3, records the provision Jesus' ministry enjoyed while on earth, through the liberal attitudes of certain women who were committed to meeting his financial and material needs. In the study, beneficiary and benefactor are used in the context of one who receives an advantage and one who gives a monetary gift to a charity, respectively.

There are nuances of breaking cultural barriers since Jesus elevated the roles of women in his ministry, and empowering women for Christian leadership as posited by many scholars, without dedicated efforts on the lethargic attitude of certain Christians towards generous contribution and its effect on Christian mission efforts. To fill this lacuna, the study argues that practical Christian missions depend on divine provision to thrive, which is often facilitated through human generosity. This brings about discussion on beneficiaries as a springboard to benefactors of practical mission work, stressing that, on the part of every Christian, the willingness to participate in generous contribution for the purpose of practical mission work should not be negotiable. The aim is to argue that practical Christian missions depend on divine provision to thrive, which is often facilitated through human charity and generosity. The objective is to clarify that, the practice of harnessing, that is, pooling resources together, for the purpose of effective Christian mission work is biblical, and it remains the most viable, if not the only practicable means to fund effective Christian mission work.

The study adopts the historical – critical method of running smooth biblical exegesis. It avails for in-depth and historical development analysis of the lexicosemantic range of certain significant words in the stock language. The event of Jesus Christ among human in the form and nature of man occupies a fascinating aspect in human history.¹ The grace to be part of the vehicles for carrying this historic event round the whole world means the greatest privilege that would be accorded to anyone. The women in the focal Bible passage defied all odds to give themselves to the services of Jesus and his disciples. The financial necessity to mission work actualisation cannot be overstressed. Mission work, either in the sense of helping believers to remain in faith or reaching out to those that are without, requires fund.

Biblical Basis for Mission Work

The concept of Christian mission has been a popular subject in the body of Christ, and it is one of the keen research interests to biblical scholars. Biblical scholars have from various times and through diverse approaches, attempted to explore the foundation of biblical description on the nature of Christian missions. This section reviews few of such scholarly positions regarding mission work.

There is a view that, God initiated mission from the beginning of creation and mission became significant since the time of Adam and Eve. God initiated and participated in mission activities that led to creation of the universe, and establishment of his relationship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Immediately after they had yielded to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden, mission activities to reconcile God with the created man continued. God searched, called and requested for man's whereabouts. Some scholars have argued that this is out-rightly against the omnipotent attribute of God. That he was probably ignorant of man's whereabouts. The question raised by God testified to his nature and attribute throughout all generations. He continued seeking, to initiate reconciliation between himself and the fallen creation.ⁱⁱ He did not want man to be destroyed but to be saved. For mission activities, God raised many prophets and priests in the Old Testament, for reconciliation and to retrace the fallen man's steps back to God. Oates submits that, starting from the day of man's fall, God had been searching and calling man, where are you? (Genesis, 3:9). The call was on repentance, unification of divided self, change of direction and act of surrender.ⁱⁱⁱ As God sought for Adam and Eve, he desired a workable relationship with the created man. In the opinion of Rheenens, God initiated reconciliation between himself and the fallen man.^{iv} It can be said that the whole Bible stood as a message of God, calling man to retrace his steps to him because he wanted the initial relationship to be re-established.

There is a position that, Christian mission was in the first instance, an effort to reconcile the unsaved to God. Mission engagement included the sender, along with the sender's purpose and authority in sending.^v There must be some on errand with the purpose of spreading the good news with authority that the sender has in Jesus Christ. Someone must surrender himself to the authority of Jesus Christ to be useful for the work of mission. Kaiser postulates that mission involved commissioning or authorisation that led to movement towards mission work with obedience as an agent for applying blessing of salvation to humanity.^{vi} He further argues that mission included task as in the New Testament, which focused primarily on the proclamation of words and deeds of God to save humanity. The mission concept had universal scope that involved how the kingdom of God advanced, how the church fulfilled her mission, and how were those successful mission's results accomplished?^{vii} Fuller reasons that, as people came out of the kingdom of darkness to light, the kingdom of God expanded.^{viii} He further states that believers

came together to engage in witnessing to those who did not know Christ. Their coming together was to have potential in effective evangelism because there was no amount of work a man can do than a group of people. In group, there was encouragement for sacrificial penetration of major human barrier to achieve communities of responsible converts, where there was none before.^{ix}

Adna and Kvalbein postulate that, mission work means a conscious, deliberate, extensive effort to convert non-fellow-religionists to one's religion.^x Don reasons that, approaches to totally get –man- back- to -God from the time of the fall in the Garden of Eden to the period immediately before Jesus Christ, did not work as God wanted it. Therefore, the coming of Jesus Christ was necessary at the time he came. As he came, the whole nature of God's approach to drawing men to himself, changed with the advent of Jesus.^{xi} Jesus took up the job with full force from age twelve and continued to the end of his life. Bultmann agrees that, the theology of the New Testament was centred on Christ's mission.^{xii} The twenty-seven books of the New Testament were all mission - inclined to fulfill the purpose of His coming to the world. Don refreshes that mission of Christ was disclosed in the Great Commission. The classic and comprehensive commission was found in Matt 28:18-20.^{xiii} The commands in the passage were *to go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things as commanded by Jesus Christ* (Matt 28:19-20).

The study's persuasion aligns with most of the reviewed authors who postulate that concept of mission is first introduced in the Old Testament where God called Abraham to be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1–3). It progressed to Israelites' election, where they were chosen to serve as light to the nations, embodying God's justice and righteousness (Isaiah 49:6). Mission theme continues in the New Testament, culminating in Jesus' ministry and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). Jesus' ministry provides the clearest example of practical Christian mission. His mission statement presents Him as the one sent to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the oppressed, and bring sight to the blind (Luke 4:18–19). His ministry was characterised by preaching, teaching, healing, and serving, demonstrating the holistic nature of mission work.

Thus, Christian mission has been projected as following Christ's example in proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations. The early disciples continued this mission, they preached, healed, and established communities of faith. The early church embraced the mission of Christ, spreading the gospel beyond Jewish communities to Gentiles (Acts 1:8). Apostle Paul's missionary journeys illustrate how the gospel transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. He often received support from churches, demonstrating that mission is a collective responsibility. The church's mission is not only to evangelise, it is also to care for

the marginalised. Jesus' emphasis on justice and compassion (Matthew 25:31–46) underscores that mission includes acts of service and love. The biblical basis for missions portrays that, true mission reflects God's true heart of love for the lost, the perishing and the suffering.

Exegetical Analysis of Luke 8:1-3

Luke 8:1 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ καθεξῆς καὶ αὐτὸς διώδευεν κατὰ πόλιν καὶ κώμην κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ δώδεκα σὺν αὐτῷ, 2 καὶ γυναῖκές τινες αἱ ἦσαν τεθεραπευμέναι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν, Μαρία ἡ καλουμένη Μαγδαληνή, ἀφ' ἧς δαιμόνια ἔπτα ἐξεληλύθει, 3 καὶ Ἰωάννα γυνὴ Χουζᾶ ἐπιτρόπου Ἡρώδου καὶ Σουσάννα καὶ ἕτεραι πολλαί, αἵτινες διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς.

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

The passage under consideration introduces a phase in Jesus' ministry where he is constantly on the move (8:1-9:50). It opens with the characteristic Lucan transitional phrase, **Καὶ ἐγένετο**, *and it came to pass*, a stylistic feature in Luke-Acts that conveys a narrative shift. Marshall notes that this phrase has special significance in Luke's Gospel, often marking a new development in the narrative.^{xiv} The phrase signifies a significant alteration in Jesus' way of life, he ceases to make Capernaum his base and instead embarks on an itinerant ministry.^{xv} The Greek word **καθεξῆς**, *afterward or in order*, suggests a purposeful transition rather than a mere chronological sequence. Jesus was carrying out his mission to proclaim the gospel universally (Luke 4:43). The Greek word **διώδευεν**, an imperfect active indicative of **διώδευώ**, *to travel through*, underscores the continuous and expansive nature of his missionary activity rather than a journey with a fixed endpoint.^{xvi} His travels consistently drew crowds (cf. 7:11, 24; 8:4, 18, 40, 45), reinforcing the widespread appeal of his message. The itinerancy reflects Jesus' unwearied diligence in doing good, even in the face of disbelief.^{xvii}

The primary actions in verse 1, **κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος**, *preaching and bringing good news*, define Jesus' purpose. These present active participles indicate that his preaching and proclamation of the **βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ**, *kingdom of God*, occurred simultaneously with his travel. This kingdom represents both God's salvific activity in the present and the eschatological reality to be fully realised in the future.^{xviii} Although it appears as if Luke focuses more on the message of the

kingdom rather than its immediate realisation.^{xix} It can be further argued that Jesus' ministry dismantles barriers, particularly the legalistic divisions between the righteous and sinners, emphasising the inclusivity of God's kingdom.^{xx}

Two groups accompanied Jesus on his missionary journey: **οἱ δώδεκα** *the Twelve*, and **γυναῖκές τινες** *certain women*. The Twelve, introduced in Luke 6:12-16, are identified here as companions and witnesses rather than active participants in preaching.^{xxi} Their role was primarily one of apprenticeship, preparing for future missionary work (Luke 10:2-3). The phrase **σὺν αὐτῷ**, *with him*, conveys their close association with Jesus, emphasising their role as learners. Verse 2 introduces the second group: **καὶ γυναῖκές τινες** *and certain women*, highlighting their significant roles in Jesus' ministry. Unlike certain of the contemporary rabbis who excluded women from theological instruction, Jesus welcomed them into his circle. Luke, more than any other Gospel writer, underscores the prominence of women. Jesus' teaching elevated women's status, making them *co-heirs*, in God's kingdom and challenging their traditional subordination.^{xxii} Luke devotes substantial attention to these women, emphasising their transformation through Jesus' ministry. The phrase **αἱ ἦσαν τεθεραπευμένοι**, *who had been healed*, affirms that they had personally experienced his healing power.^{xxiii} The perfect passive participle **τεθεραπευμένοι**, implies that their healing was a completed past event with enduring effects. Although it was highly unusual for women to travel with a rabbi,^{xxiv} yet, their gratitude for Jesus' ministry overrode cultural constraints.

These certain women had been delivered from **πνευμάτων πονηρῶν**, *evil spirits*, and **ἀσθενειῶν**, *infirmities*, Luke frequently associates afflictions with spiritual oppression, particularly in reference to women (cf. 4:38; 13:11; Acts 16:16). The **δαιμόνισμός**, *demonic possession*, in the Gospels is not limited to mental disorders but encompasses broader afflictions affecting one's entire well-being.^{xxv} Moreover, those with unclean spirits were often ostracised, further highlighting the social impact of their healing. A particular focus is given to **Μαρία ἡ καλουμένη Μαγδαληνή**, *Mary, called Magdalene*, from whom **δαιμόνια ἑπτὰ ἐξεληλύθει**, *seven demons had gone out*. The pluperfect **ἐξεληλύθει** signifies that her deliverance was a past event with lasting consequences.^{xxvi} The number **ἑπτὰ**, *seven*, is symbolically significant, often representing completeness, perfect or severity.^{xxvii} Mary's prominence in the resurrection narratives explains why she is singled out.^{xxviii}

The passage also mentions **Ἰωάννα γυνὴ Χουζᾶ**, *Joanna, the wife of Chuza*, a woman of high social standing. The name **Ἰωάννα** means *Yahweh has been gracious*, fitting to her role as a benefactor of Jesus' ministry.^{xxix} Chuza, described as **ἐπιτρόπου Ἡρώδου**, *steward of Herod*, likely held a significant administrative position in Herod Antipas' court.^{xxx} Luke mentions Joanna's connection to Herod's

household for multiple reasons, the most important being her financial contributions.^{xxxii} The third named woman is **Σουσάννα** *Susanna*, about whom little is known. Her mention alongside Mary Magdalene and Joanna suggests she was a notable figure, yet Luke provides no further details.^{xxxiii}

The phrase **καὶ ἕτεροι πολλοί** *and many others*, affirms that Jesus was accompanied by a significant group of female disciples. The feminine form of **πολλοί** confirms that these were all women. There should be caution against overlooking this larger group, as Luke's emphasis on women's financial and personal support is unparalleled in the Gospels.^{xxxiii} It is of note that in male-oriented literature like the New Testament, women are typically mentioned only when they are exceptional or problematic.^{xxxiv} Here, their exceptional nature is clear: they defied societal norms to support and accompany Jesus. Their participation in Jesus' mission prefigures the inclusive nature of the kingdom of God, where *there is neither male nor female*, in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

The last section of this peri-cope highlights the financial and material support that certain women provided for Jesus' mission. Their role as benefactors is underscored in the clause: **αἵτινες διακόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς**, *who were ministering to them out of their own means*. The main word **διακόνουν**, an imperfect active indicative, third-person plural of **διακονέω**, is crucial in understanding their role. Its noun form, **διακονία**, is a broad term in Greek, whose meaning depends largely on context. Luke is aware of the various nuances of this word and employs it differently in Acts 6:1-6, where **διακονία** refers both to serving tables (v. 2) and serving the word (v. 4).^{xxxv}

In Luke 8:1-3, another dimension of **διακονία** emerges; ministering through financial support. The Greek word **διακονία** appears thirty-seven times in the New Testament, with frequent occurrences in Luke-Acts (seven times in Luke, two in Acts), as well as in Matthew (five times) and Mark (four times). Sometimes, it retains its original sense of waiting on tables (Luke 17:8; John 12:2). For example, after Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, she immediately began *to wait*, **διακονέω**, on him (Luke 4:39). Her ability to resume service signified her restored health. However, Jesus' concept of **διακονία** extends beyond this, encompassing acts such as providing food, shelter, clothing, and visiting the sick and prisoners (Matt 25:44; Luke 22:26; Mark 15:41). Thus, the term is not restricted by gender, occupation, or social status but embodies the broader concept of Christian service, characterised by selfless love and true discipleship.^{xxxvi}

In Luke 8:3, **διακονέω** clearly refers to *financial and material support*, as indicated by the phrase **ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων**, *out of their possessions*. This phrase defines the nature of their service; it was economic rather than domestic. Like Simon's

mother-in-law (Luke 4:39), these women had been healed and responded by serving. However, their **διακονία** was different: it went beyond table service to sustained financial contributions. It is considered that Luke 8:1-3 is not a healing narrative but a summary passage. Therefore, unlike Simon's mother-in-law, these women are not mentioned to demonstrate the immediacy of their healing but rather their ongoing role as Jesus' patrons.^{xxxvii} Traveling missionaries required financial support, and in this case, Jesus and the Twelve depended on these women's contributions because they had abandoned their means of livelihood to follow him (Luke 5:11). Furthermore, Jesus' family was unlikely to be supporting him, as they had previously rejected him (Luke 4:16-30). Thus, in the context of Luke 8:1-3, the women's **διακονία** primarily involved financial sponsorship of Jesus' itinerant ministry.

A closer analysis of the prepositional phrase **ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς** reveals the depth of their financial support. The Greek word **ὑπαρχόντων**, a present active participle, neuter genitive plural of **ὑπάρχω**, meaning *to exist or to possess*, functions as a noun. It is frequently used in Luke's Gospel to refer to wealth or material goods. In Luke 8:3, it denotes personal financial resources, just as in Acts 2:45, where the early believers sold their *property and possessions*, **ὑπαρχόντων**, to support one another.^{xxxviii} In addition, **αὐταῖς**, the final Greek word in the sentence, possessive pronoun, feminine dative plural, meaning *to them*. This possessive pronoun clarifies that the resources belonged to the women themselves, rather than being derived from their relatives. The phrase **ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς** can therefore be literally translated as, *from the possessions belonging to them*. This construction suggests that the women were financially independent and had their own means of wealth, allowing them to provide for Jesus and his disciples.

Practical Application of Inferences from Luke 8:1-3 to Contemporary Christianity

The focal Bible passage presents a striking depiction of women in the role of benefactors; a position usually reserved for wealthy men in antiquity. Their financial and material support for Jesus' ministry demonstrates their commitment to his mission and reflects the broader inclusivity of the kingdom of God. The women were not merely passive followers; they were active participants, investing their personal resources to sustain Jesus' work. Their commitment challenges traditional notions of discipleship, showing that service, to Jesus, extends beyond preaching to include material and financial support as an essential component of Christian ministry. When people have the joys of the gospel, when they feel the consolations of religion themselves, they will somehow or other find means to contribute to the welfare of others. They will be willing to labour with reference to it, or they will find something which they can sacrifice or spare.

In contrast, there are wealthy men and women in present day churches with little or no concern for the work of God. Such individuals spend a lot on mundane things to the negligence of the Kingdom business. This study serves as an eye-opener and or a clarion call to all the beneficiaries of the Gospel to go a step further to becoming a benefactor as well, supporting the mission work with their material possessions. Following is the opinion that Christian ministry must be targeted to meeting the specific needs of the people. The women that voluntarily accompanied Jesus in his missionary journey were said to have been healed by Jesus. Their dire needs have been met. Though, the particular passage where the healing occurred was not recorded in the Gospels, the soundness of their mind made them fit to follow Jesus through the journey. Thus they were emotionally fit to carry out their ministry of providing financial supports for Jesus' missionary activities. Another position stresses that discipleship should be the hallmark of Christian ministry. It is noteworthy that the women in the text were first committed disciples of Jesus before they released their resources to support his ministry. Ministry should first focus on the heart of people and not on their purse.

Conclusion

Using example of the women in the analysed focal text, the study concludes that beneficiaries of the gospel ministry are expected to be pertinent benefactors of practical mission works as well. The women, having being healed of their diseases became followers of Jesus. They defied all odds to meet Jesus' requirements to follow him; and not only that, they made available their resources to Jesus in appreciation of what he had done for them. Effective Christian mission work thrives in an atmosphere of partnership. The women partnered with Jesus by using their resources to take care of his mission needs. Mission works will make tremendous progress when partnership is encouraged and embraced through generous contribution. Therefore, this study is recommended for Christians, Pastors, theological educators and all who in one way or the other have been beneficiaries of the gospel mission work. Concerted efforts should be made to continually support Christian mission work in cash and kind as exemplified by the women in the focal Bible passage, Luke 8:1-3.

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