

John 19:25-27
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Hampton Baptist
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Seven Last Words of Christ Sermon Series

“Woman! Behold your son . . . Behold your mother.”

We learn volumes of the character of Jesus from his statements from the cross. Despite the excruciating agony of crucifixion, recognizing that the salvation of this world burdened his shoulders, wondering if God was even watching, in that appalling responsibility, Jesus smothered his pain by serenely and calmly thinking, praying, and planning for others. This is evidenced in his first three sayings from the cross, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do”; “Today, you shall be with me in Paradise”; and “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.” We can learn much about a person by the way that they live, but even more so by the way that they die. Today’s focus is a story of responsibility and family ties.

The apostle John must have been a modest man; he referred to himself in his signature gospel as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He was one of the inner circle; Peter, James and John were privy to certain instances of which the other disciples were unaware.

In our passage, Jesus gave John the responsibility of caring for his own mother. Oddly enough, John only mentions Mary twice in his gospel account; obviously this is one of the instances, but the first is the initiation of Jesus’ public ministry, which happened to be at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. You remember the story from John 2: weddings were festive events in first century Palestine. Jesus and his newly called disciples were invited guests to the wedding, and after a while, the wine was gone. How could the celebration continue without the wine? Jesus’ mother came to him and said, “They have no more wine.”

Jesus replied, “Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.” I find it interesting that Jesus referred to his mother as “dear woman” in both the wedding and crucifixion accounts. In *his* gospel account, even *John* did not call Mary by her name. Mary was fully aware of Jesus’ identity; before her pregnancy, she had consented to giving birth to the Son of God. She had raised him accordingly, knowing that he was special, knowing that he was the Promised One of God, the Messiah, the Christ. We don’t know who was getting married; the names are not given, and really are inconsequential. What *is* important was that this was the first miracle that Jesus performed.

His mother knew he could help; she was so proud of him. She told the servants to do whatever he asked them to do. Mary was assertive and confident; she knew Jesus *could* and *would* help. Jesus noticed six stone water jars that held 20-30 gallons each. He instructed the servants to fill the jars with water, and they filled them to the brim. He then told them to take some to the master of the banquet. Not knowing the origin of the wine, the master of the banquet pulled aside the bridegroom and said, “Everyone else brings out the best wine first and then later, when the guests have been affected by the wine, serves the cheaper wine, but you have saved the best for now.” This was Jesus’ first miracle. Mary is not mentioned by John again until our passage today. We find other stories of Jesus and his mother in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but John does not mention her again.

At the *wedding*, Mary was involved in the *joys* of a feast; at the *crucifixion*, Mary is involved in the *sorrows* of an execution. At the *wedding*, Jesus displayed his power and glory by turning the water into wine. At the *crucifixion*, Jesus died in weakness and shame as he drank the cup of sorrow.

Warren Wiersbe, in his book The Cross of Jesus, chronicles Mary’s experience as Jesus’ mother. “Consider the pain that Mary experienced because she was chosen to be the mother of our Lord. When she was discovered with child, she began to suffer shame and reproach. Her pregnancy was misunderstood, and the neighbors gossiped about her. She married Joseph, a poor carpenter. Mary gave birth to Jesus in lowly circumstances, with a manger used as his crib. Then she, Joseph and Jesus had to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt to escape the sword of Herod, yet innocent children died because of her son Jesus. I wonder how Mary must have felt when she heard that report. She rejoiced that her child had been delivered, but she must have felt pain deep in her own soul, knowing that

innocent children had died. When Jesus was a youth, he said to her and Joseph, “Do you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” This began an experience of painful separation between Mary and her son. Mary suffered as she watched her son die in public, crucified between two thieves, treated like a criminal. All kinds of people walked by and hurled insults at him. It was such a cosmopolitan crowd that Pilate had to write the accusation in three different languages. Jesus wasn’t crucified in a hidden corner on a side street, but outside the city gate where the crowds moved in and out. He died *publicly*, on a day when thousands of visitors had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. And Mary stood at the foot of the cross watching her son die. Jesus saw her and assured her of his love.” (Warren W. Wiersbe. The Cross of Jesus. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House. 1997. p. 83)

All had deserted Jesus, except John and these faithful women: Mary, her sister, Mary wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. All the previous followers, all those who had been healed of disease and heartache, all those who had marveled at his teaching, even his disciples had deserted him, all except Jesus’ mother, his aunt, Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and John. Four women, three of whom were named Mary, and one man stayed until the end; the rest ran or turned their backs on the one who had brought them such joy and fulfillment.

It was always a dangerous thing to be an associate of a man whom the Roman government believed to be so dangerous that he deserved a cross. The presence of these women at the cross was not due to the fact that as women, they were so unimportant that no one would notice them; their presence was due to the fact that perfect love casts out fear. While the majority had abandoned Jesus, these faithful few stayed with him until the end.

I cannot think of anything more horrible than a parent losing a child, whether the child is young or old. Parents have an understanding that they will always be there for their children. Mary had already lost her husband Joseph and now this. I cannot imagine her pain, as she watched her son, the Chosen One, die. The One who was promised to set the *captive* free was now *captive* himself and dying. Her grief was unimaginable. How could this happen? Could she have done something different? *Why* was this happening?

As she stood and watched her son die, maybe Mary could not *understand*, but she could *love*. Her presence there was the most natural thing in the world for a mother. Jesus might be a criminal in the eyes of the *law*, but he was *her* son. When Jesus saw his mother, he could not but think of the days ahead. He could not commit her to the care of his half-brothers for John wrote in 7:5 that they did not yet believe in him. There is something infinitely moving in the fact that Jesus, in the agony of the cross, thought of the loneliness of his mother in the days ahead. He never forgot the duties that were his. He was Mary’s eldest son, and even in the moment of this cosmic battle, he did not forget the simple things that lay near home. Even at the end of his life, despite being on the cross, Jesus was thinking more of the sorrows of others than of his own. (William Barclay. The Gospel of John, vol. 2. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1975. p. 257)

Jesus had now taken upon himself the cares of the *world*, yet he was still concerned about the cares of his *mother*. He refused to let personal agony distract him from the practical duties of a son. He asked John to act as Mary’s son, the one who would take *his* place in *her* life, and to the disciple he presented Mary in her new role as his mother. (William E. Hull. Broadman Bible Commentary Luke, John vol. 9. Nashville: Broadman Press. 1970. p. 360)

Jesus’ statement on the cross should communicate how important our families *are*. Each of us has responsibilities and roles to play within our families. I have a role as a husband, a role as a father, and a role as a son. These are to be taken seriously. In his death, Jesus was thinking of others and spoke specifically to his mother. He must have realized how difficult it was for her to see her son die.

In his first statement, Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified him. In his second

statement, he assured the penitent thief of an eternal reward. Now in this third statement, Jesus remembered his mother. His was a statement of love.

There is a true story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease from which the boy had recovered two years earlier. Her only chance of recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was an ideal donor.

“Would you give your blood to Mary?” the doctor asked.

Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, “Sure, for my sister.”

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room. Mary, pale and thin. Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny’s smile faded. He watched the blood flowing through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, Johnny’s voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. “Doctor, *when* do I die?”

Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip trembled when he agreed to donate his blood. He thought giving his blood to his sister would mean giving up his own life. (David C. Needham. Stories for the Heart. Sisters, OR: Questar Publishers. 1996. p.129)

The love exhibited by Johnny toward his sister is only a fraction of the love shown by Jesus in dying on the cross for all of humanity. He gave his life for everyone, including his mother, and with that weight on his shoulder, he remembered his responsibility as her son.

Many of you have faced days of unimagined grief and bad news, days when you wondered if life was worth it, nights when the minutes ticked slowly by. Many of you have had family members remember you in times of distress, and you have been blessed by knowing this kind of love. In hindsight, Mary could remember Jesus’ words from the cross with thankfulness, although at the time, the pain was excruciating. Family ties are important, even in the dark times.

We *all* have responsibility to our families. Rather than waiting until the end to make those arrangements, I encourage you to be thinking of your family *today*. What changes do you need to make in the relationship you have with your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings? How do you need to prepare for *your* last days? Making preparations *today* will make a better *tomorrow* for your families. Life’s too short to wait; your family responsibilities are too important to procrastinate any longer. What decisions do you need to make? What relationship needs to be made right? Even in his pain, Jesus thought of his family. Don’t wait until a critical time to prepare for the future of your family; don’t wait any longer to enjoy your family. Children grow up; family members move, and all of us have limited time on earth. Take advantage of the day. Jesus took the initiative in taking care of his mother. His statement from the cross continues to communicate to us the importance of responsibility and family ties. Regarding your family, what do you need to do? Regarding your family, what responsibility do you need to take?