



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

Woman, Behold Thy Son...

John 19:26-27

^{ESV} **John 19:23**...When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

Our subject this morning is, **“Woman, behold your son...Jesus’ Third Word from the Cross.”**

During the six hours our Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He spoke or cried out audibly seven different times. Those seven words or seven sayings have come to be known by all that love Him as the “Seven Sayings of Our Savior from the Cross.”

Now none of the four gospel accounts contain all seven of the seven words or sayings of our Savior from the cross. The reason for that is because the individual gospel writers were moved to include or omit different words or deeds of our Lord according to the literary or spiritual purpose of their works. Because each writer was moved by the Spirit of God to their own particular literary or theological intention it makes perfect sense that their accounts would differ in regard which details they chose to include.

Now the Gospels of Mark and Matthew are the closest to being parallel. They both contain only one of the seven sayings and it is the same saying. Matthew and Mark contain the fourth or middle saying of our Lord from His cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, contains three separate or independent sayings not found in Matthew, Mark, or John. Luke contains the first, the second, and the seventh or final saying of our Lord from His cross.

The Gospel of John, on the other hand, contains three completely different sayings...three independent sayings not contained in the other three gospels.

John, for example, contains Jesus' wonderfully compassionate word regarding the care of His mother. We'll be looking at that this morning. But John also contains two other words or sayings. John contains the enigmatic utterance "I thirst" and it contains Jesus' next to last word from the cross, "It is finished". That means that John contains the third, the fifth and the sixth sayings of our Lord from His cross.

Now in November when I last preached to you, we considered together Jesus' first word from the cross...that word where He said, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**"

You will remember, I hope, that Jesus cried out to the Father asking Him not to break out in judgment against those who were unjustly crucifying Him. Jesus in a marvelous word of mercy and grace appealed to His Father over and over again to forgive the ignorant hatred of those who conspired together to take His life.

It is worth noting in that context, I think, that the first three words of Jesus from His cross concerned others. The first word, the one I covered last November, concerned the welfare of His enemies. The second word, the one we looked at last week, concerned the welfare and future life of one of His friends...one who turned to Him in faith in His last few hours on the cross. The third word, the one we'll be looking at this morning, concerned the welfare of Mary, His own mother according to the flesh. It is addressed both to her and to one of his disciples, John the Beloved.

Now in contrast to the first three words of Jesus from the cross, His last four words concerned his own person and relationship to the Father. We'll look into those four sayings...Lord willing...at some point in the future.

Now, as I said, this morning we will be focusing on the biblical text found in John 19:26-27. Let me read it in your hearing once again.

^{ESV} **John 19:26**...When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

The first thing I want you to notice is the immediate context in which Jesus speaks this wonderful word of love and concern for His mother. The immediate context is one comprised of extraordinary physical pain and suffering. Our Lord, you see, was at the time of this particular word in the last few minutes of His life.

He had already suffered untold misery and pain at the hands of his captors.

The night before, he had exhausted Himself in anguished prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. During the darkness of the early morning, a number of Jewish religious leaders and a contingent of guards had come with lanterns and torches looking to arrest the Light of the World. They seized Him in the Garden and hurriedly rushed Him off to trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin.

That was where the physical abuse first started. They blindfolded Him there and repeatedly struck and beat Him. They mocked Him and spat upon Him and urged Him though blindfolded to prophesy as to who had struck Him.

The Jewish leaders, of course, found Him guilty of blasphemy. They did so with manufactured evidence and with the testimony of false witnesses. But because they did not possess the authority to kill Him themselves they sent Him off the next morning to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Pilate interviewed Him himself but couldn't really decide what to do with Him.

Because Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate decided to send Him off to Herod Antipas, the contemptible governor of Galilee, who just happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. Luke tells us that Herod had wanted to see Jesus for a long time because he hoped to see Him do some sort of miracle. But Jesus wouldn't even to talk to Herod, and so Herod and his soldiers treated Him with contempt. They mocked Jesus' supposed royalty by dressing Him in a purple robe and then sent him back to Pilate.

When Jesus came back under Rome's care, Pilate reexamined and ultimately pronounced Him innocent. Still, in the end, Pilate bowed to enormous political pressure and condemned Him anyway and during all of those proceedings Jesus had been kept awake and beaten and flogged and cursed and spat upon.

Matthew reminds us about what Pilate did next.

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:26**...Then (Pilate) released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. ²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.

³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

Now I am making a point of Jesus' suffering here to make clear to you the context in which Jesus says what He says in His third word from the cross. You see even before Jesus was nailed to the cross, the cruel treatment He had received had already no doubt pushed Him to the limits of mental and physical exhaustion.

Not only would our lord have been struggling with fatigue, and dehydration, and blood loss, and the dreadful wounds He had received at the hands of His enemies but He would have no doubt been struggling to draw in each new breath He took.

You already know that when people were crucified they most often died not from their physical injuries but from fatigue and asphyxiation. That is, when someone crucified hung on a cross the weight of their body pushed down against their lungs and diaphragm and made each new breath torturous. For a crucified person to take in a breath they had to push up with their legs and pull down with their arms in order to free the muscles in their lower chest to draw in air. Most people that were crucified were simply lashed or tied to their crosses. And sometimes a really strong person could last for two or three days before their strength gave way and they died of suffocation. And sometimes the Romans squads actually grew tired of waiting for someone to die and would they break their lower legs so that they could no longer push up and draw in breath.

Of course, Jesus was nailed to His cross.

Each time he pushed down against His feet or pulled up with His arms to draw in a breath...his whole body would have recoiled in searing pain from the damage the Roman spikes had done to the muscles, nerves, and tendons in His precious hands and feet.

Our Lord, our precious sinless Savior, would have been locked in a torturous cycle of having His body sag under the weight of gravity until His burning lungs desperate for oxygen compelled Him to push down against the nails that fastened Him to the cross.

It was in that context, the context of excruciating pain and suffering, that our Lord spoke this word to His mother and His friend John. It is in that context that He spoke these wonderful words of love and concern for the woman whose very soul was being pierced by the sight of seeing her eldest son's body being pierced by the Romans. In the midst of extraordinary suffering and anguish, our Lord Jesus took the time to care for the woman who had borne and raised Him.

Now that was the context or occasion of Lord's third word from the cross. But to rightly understand why our Lord said what He said in His third word from the cross, we ought to take a moment and look at the other characters in the scene.

The first thing you ought to note is that John contrasts the four self-centered, self-serving soldiers mentioned in the beginning of the passage with the four broken-hearted women at the end of the passage.

^{ESV} **John 19:23**...When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the

tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things,²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Verse 23 tells us there were four soldiers assigned to Jesus' execution but it does so in a periphrasis or round about sort of way. By custom it was the perquisite of the execution squad to keep the clothes of anyone they executed. John tells us there were four pieces of clothing which I take to mean included His outer garment, His belt, His sandals and so on and that those four pieces of clothing were divided between four soldiers. Now the four soldiers decided to divide up everything as equally as they were able but they didn't want to tear his seamless tunic. It is the one thing that Jesus possessed that was valuable and so rather than destroy it or try to cut it up and ruin the overall piece they decided instead to leave their good fortune to chance and cast lots to see who would get it. You will notice that they were willing to leave to chance the thing that they saw as valuable.

Now John purposely contrasts the fact that there were four soldiers at the crucifixion by telling us that there were also four women there. Now these four women don't want any of Jesus' clothing or possessions...instead they wanted only to express their love and devotion to Him. They just wanted to be near Him. The four women are identified as our Lord's mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and finally Mary Magdalene.

Now none of the other gospels mention the fact that Mary, our Lord's mother, was at the crucifixion...only John does that. And none of the other gospels mention the fact that Mary's sister or our Lord's aunt was at the crucifixion.

Now the other gospels do mention the fact that Mary Magdalene was there. They also mention the fact that a Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, was there. And they mention the fact that the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, was there. But they all say that the women that were there watched from a distance. Listen to how Matthew puts it:

^{ESV} **Matthew 27:55**...There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Only John tells us that they came right up to the cross. I take it that they were all far away until Mary, our Lord's mother, arrived on the scene and that when she did she could not be kept away from the cross and from her son and that the other women rushed up to be with her. I take it that that occurred late in the crucifixion of our Lord.

Now notice also that John does not mention his own name or even tell us that he was there. Instead he says that the disciple whom Jesus loved was there by Jesus' mother.

Now there are a couple of important observations to be made...a couple of important conclusions to be drawn...based on what John says. The first observation is this. That even though all the disciples including John had fled

early on after the arrest of Jesus (Matthew 26:56) John had slowly made his way back to the Lord. Jesus was on the cross for some six hours from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon and sometime after noon when darkness closed upon the scene of the crucifixion...John made his way back into his Lord's presence.

Now there is one other observation...perhaps a little less clear but helpful I think.

If you try to match up the identity of the women in Matthew's gospel with that of those in John's Gospel something striking pops out. Mary Magdalene is mentioned in both places...and her name is so distinctive that she is the first and easiest person to match up. It seems likely too that Mary, the wife of Clopas, mentioned in John is the same woman as Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, mentioned in Matthew. As I said earlier, Mary, the mother of our Lord, is only mentioned in John. That only leaves one woman to match up...the sister of our Lord's mother...our Lord's aunt. And the only other woman mentioned in Matthew to whom she can be matched is the mother of the sons of Zebedee. And if that is indeed the case, that would mean that John...the disciple whom Jesus loved...was both His friend, His disciple, and His first cousin. I think that fact helps explain out Lord's special affection for John.

Now we have looked at the context or setting of the scene when our lord spoke this third word from the cross. We have looked also at the characters or people involved in the scene when He spoke it. Now let's come at last to the content of what our Lord actually said. Look with me again at John 19:26-27.

^{ESV} **John 19:26**...When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Now if Jesus had stopped with the phrase "Woman, behold, you son!" we would all be inclined, I think, to believe that Jesus was calling Mary's attention to His dreadful state on the cross. In other words Jesus would be saying, "Women look at me you son. This is what has become of me." But because the second phrase "Behold, you mother!" is there, it is quite clear that Jesus is directing Mary's attention not to himself but to John. And in the same manner, Jesus is directing the attention of John to His mother. What He is saying is this, "Dear woman, from now on this man will be to you and care for you as your son." Notice Jesus does not refer to her as mother because here He is not speaking to her here simply as her son but rather as her Lord. And to John He says much the same thing. Jesus does not call him John or even brother. He speaks to him not as his friend, or as his disciple, or even as his cousin. He speaks to John instead as his Lord.

You see Jesus is not leaving what is important to Him to chance. He is not like the Roman soldiers...He is not inclined to cast lots with His mother's care. Rather, He entrusts her care to someone He knows will keep coming back even in adversity. I mention that because Jesus had at least four brothers according to the flesh. But they are not at His crucifixion. Oh, they will come to faith after the resurrection...they will become great stalwarts of the faith. But at that moment, Jesus entrusts his mother's care to someone He knows will care for her because of their love for Him.

Now early on in the history of the church, the church tended to make the application here quite symbolic. The church argued that John represented the Gentile church and Mary the Jewish church and that because that was true the Gentile church ought to nurture and care for the Jewish church. The problem with that view was that both John and Mary were Jewish and there is no reason to see John as any sort of symbol of Gentile Christianity.

Later on the Roman Church would see John as a symbol of the Church caring for and protecting the Queen Mother of the church and such a view would spawn all sorts of idolatry and superstition.

You see what was really happening is that Jesus was fulfilling all righteousness by obeying the law of God right up to His death. He is fulfilling here the fifth commandment. He is honoring His father and His mother by caring for His mother even as he hung dying on the cross.

Theologians often called this wonderful obedience of Christ to the law His *active obedience*. They call His actual dying on the cross His *passive obedience*. Listen for a moment to what theologian Wayne Grudem writes:

If Christ had only earned forgiveness of sins for us, then we would not merit heaven. Our guilt would have been removed, but we would simply be in the position of Adam and Eve before they had done anything good or bad and before they had passed a time of probation successfully. To be established in righteousness forever and to have their fellowship with God made sure forever, Adam and Eve had to obey God perfectly over a period of time. Then God would have looked on their faithful obedience with pleasure and delight, and they would have lived with him in fellowship forever.²

For this reason, Christ had to live a life of perfect obedience to God in order to earn

righteousness for us. He had to obey the law for his whole life on our behalf so that the positive merits of his perfect obedience would be counted for us. Sometimes this called Christ's "active obedience," while his suffering and dying for our sins is called his "passive obedience." Paul says his goal is that he may be found in Christ, "not having a righteousness of [his] own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3:9). It is not just moral neutrality that Paul knows he needs from Christ (that is, a clean slate with sins forgiven), but a positive moral righteousness. And he knows that that cannot come from himself, but must come through faith in Christ.¹

You see Christ in caring for His mother unto death obeyed the law of God fully that you and I might be clothed in His perfect, borrowed righteousness. He cared for His mother because He loved her and we ought be inclined to care for aging parents in the same way. We ought never to snap at them or grow impatient with them but instead ought to help provide for their well-being and care. We ought to care for them when their hearts are breaking or they are lonely or they just want to be a part of our lives. We ought to be all the more inclined to do so if we name the name of Christ.

But Jesus was not just providing us an illustration or example here of what we ought to do with our own parents. He was in fact obeying on our behalf...obeying in our place...obeying the very law that He knew we would not and could not fulfill because of our own inherent sinful self-centeredness and in doing so He won for us a righteousness that has been imputed to us or put on our account. It is a borrowed righteousness that He has earned with His precious, active obedience and it is a righteousness that satisfies wholly the unrelenting requirement of a Holy God.

Who is like unto our Savior?

Who is like unto our great Redeemer King?

May His name and dominion and glory and honor be spread world without end,
Amen.

Let's pray.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 570-1.