

Series: The Seven Sayings of the Cross, Part 4

Title: “Woman, Here Is Your Son...Here Is Your Mother”

Text: John 19:26-27

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Last words of famous individuals often invoke interest. Those of “Pistol” Pete Maravich provide an example. He was a professional basketball player for ten years in the NBA. Making the All-Star team five times, he was known for his flashy gamesmanship and his remarkable scoring ability. To this day, he holds the NCAA Division I record for scoring with 3,667 points and an average of 44.2 points per game. What makes Pete’s records even more staggering is the fact that they were all set prior to the creation of both the three-point line and shot clock.

Despite his athletic abilities, and his apparent excellent physical conditioning, Maravich died young. Ironically, he passed away while playing a pick-up game of basketball. He was with a group of men at a church in Pasadena, California. One of those individuals was James Dobson, a well-known Christian psychologist. According to Dr. Dobson, Pistol Pete’s last words, before falling dead from a congenital heart defect, were “I feel great.”

Perhaps Maravich’s last words said more about the state of his soul than the condition of his physical body. At a ceremony in which the Atlanta Hawks of the NBA retired “Pistol” Pete’s jersey number, Maravich’s son paid tribute to his father. The younger Maravich focused on his dad’s faith. He told of the way in which Jesus was more important to Pete than basketball. Pete had professed faith in Christ later in life, after having fought alcohol addiction for years. In his own words, Maravich said, “I want to be remembered as a Christian, a person that serves Him [Jesus] to the utmost, not as a basketball player.” Pete’s last words — “I feel great” — seem strange when we consider the way in which he died, but we could regard them as being completely true. Pete felt “great” because of the peace of Jesus in His soul.

The Third Saying from the Cross

Final words are often remarkable, but not are so compelling of the last words of Jesus’ from the cross. Let’s now consider our Lord’s third statement from Calvary. They were directed toward two special people who were very close to him — His mother and the disciple He loved. John’s gospel records:

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. (John 19:26-27).

According to the gospel writer, three women and the disciple whom Jesus loved (John) stayed near the cross during Jesus’ crucifixion. Seeing them through blood-encrusted eyes, Christ uttered words of love, intended to provide care for His mother after His death. He also gave a directive to His most-beloved follower. Let’s examine Christ’s saying. In doing so, we can learn several lessons related to gospel truth.

A LESSON CONCERNING THE LAW OF GOD

In saying “Woman, here is your son” and “Here is your mother,” our Lord used technical jargon often employed in first century legal proceedings. It was special terminology implemented in cases regarding adoption and family responsibilities.¹ By uttering such words, Jesus fulfilled his

¹ Borchert, Gerald L. *John 12–21. Vol. 25B. The New American Commentary.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), [CD-Rom].

obligations as a first-century son. In His world, the eldest son of a Jewish family was responsible for the care of his mother, if no father remained to fulfill such duties.² It seems that Joseph, the earthly “half-father” of Jesus, had passed away prior to Jesus’ earthly ministry. As a result, in His dying breaths, Jesus took measures to ensure the care of His mother.

The Messiah had four half brothers — James, Joses, Simon and Jude — and two sisters (cf. Matthew 13:55-56), but it was his cultural responsibility to arrange for the care of his widowed mother. History attests to the fact that dying father’s often made sure that eldest sons cared for the mother of the home.³ This was important, because to be husbandless was a difficult burden to bear.

A Widow with Genuine Need

At the time of her son’s death, Mary was like 40 years of age.⁴ Quite possibly, she was past the age of child-bearing, so few men would be interested in marrying her. She would have no one to support her. This was tragic for a first-century woman, since it was nearly impossible for females to make any type of living. The lot of the widow was the worst of all. It’s no wonder that the early Christian church focused on ministering to such women (Acts 6:1).

Because of the burden associated with widowhood, it was customary for sons, and even family members, to provide for widowed women. In fact, the Old Testament, Mosaic Law had a number of requirements concerning this matter (cDeuteronomy 25:5-6). Bible stories associated with women like Tamar (see Genesis 38) and Ruth (see Ruth 1-4) show how important it was for widowed women to secure a guardian.

Jesus’ compassionate regard towards his mother was a way of fulfilling a cultural requirement. In a day of retirement plans, social security, pensions, and a multitude of career opportunities, the needs associated with widows are not the same. There are not as many “widows who are genuinely in need” as there were in Jesus’ day. In a first-century world, it was imperative that the eldest son look out for the needs of His mother. To an extent, things are different nowadays. Regardless, Jesus fulfilled His cultural obligation toward Mary. By assigning her to John’s oversight and care, He made simple, financial provision for her.⁵

Not Just A Cultural Requirement or Kind Deed

In all of our talk about Jesus’ third saying from the cross, it is really important that we don’t reduce His words to a mere kind gesture. Jesus indeed intended to take care of His mother, but he meant to do much more as well. His care for Mary was a fulfillment of God’s Law, that Moral Law that hangs over all of by virtue of the Creator’s character (Romans 2:14-15). God’s Moral Law is perhaps best stated in the Ten Commandments, the famous Decalogue of Exodus 20:1-17).

In saying, “Woman, here is your son...Here is your mother,” Jesus showed regard for God’s Law. He also kept and fulfilled God’s Law. In particular, he observed the fifth of the Ten Commandments, the commandment that said, “Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

² Borchert, [CD-Rom].

³ Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), [CD-Rom].

⁴ Keener, [CD-Rom].

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 224.

As a pastor, I have seen the need for children to honor their parents by providing assistance in the waning years of life. The advanced nature of twenty-first century society may not require as much as it did in Jesus' day. Children may not need to house their parents or provide for them in a strict financial sense; however, but some sort of care is often needed. At the cross left an impression concerning the importance of such matters. Other passages of Scripture elevate the need to for God's people to fulfill the fifth commandment. See David's example in 1 Samuel 22:3 and Solomon's admonition in Proverbs 23:22. Though social security, pensions, and the like may excuse children from financially providing for their children, a responsibility to show honor and give the necessary care is still required. One has rightly said, "It is too often assumed that this fifth commandment is addressed to young folks only. Nothing can be further from the truth."⁶

Despite the requirements the Law gives to children, Christ's words to Mary were not just the obligatory offerings of a polite son. He did fulfill a cultural convention in His final words, but He did much more. He fulfilled God's Law. In honoring His mother with His dying breaths, Jesus observed the fifth of the Ten Commandments. Understanding this fact is important to Christian doctrine. If our Lord didn't wholly live up to the Heavenly Father's moral standards, He wouldn't have been an effectual sacrifice for people like us, people who have consistently failed to fulfill God's Law.

A Savior and A Substitute

All of us are marred and marked by sin. Scripture says, "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). Solomon rightfully inquired, "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am cleansed from my sin?'" (Proverbs 20:9). Each of us, even the most Christlike, stumbles into sin from time to time (James 3:2). All are guilty of violating God's Law. Even after conversion, we struggle to keep it perfectly. Our only hope in life and death is Jesus Christ.

Thought we are sinful, Jesus was sinless. He fully obeyed all of the Heavenly Father's commands. He never had a sinful thought, spoke a hurtful word, or committed a selfish deed. He was perfectly perfect. Such righteousness was needed in order to pay the penalty for humanity's perfection. His obedience to God's Law demonstrated that He was a perfect sacrifice for humanity's sin.

The prophet Isaiah foretold how the Messiah would provide such a sacrifice for sins, "But He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on Him, and we are healed by His wounds" (Isaiah 53:5). In one of his letters, Peter said, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm" (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus' third saying from the cross of Calvary reveals how He was a perfect sacrifice for sin. He was one who obeyed all of God's commands and then died as a substitute for imperfect, fallen people. Our only hope of being accepted by God is found in Jesus. Though we are perpetual lawbreakers, He was a perfect law keeper. He lived and died to secure our salvation from sin and death. Neither religious devotion, human behavior modification, or well-intended acts of charity can deliver. Mankind's only hope is the sacrifice of the sinless, spotless, Son-of-God who died for humanity's sin.

Is your trust in this truth? Or, is your spiritual security grounded in your performance for God? Has there been a time in your life in which you have accepted Christ's work as payment and provision for the penalty your transgressions deserve? If so, are you living with an abiding confidence in what Christ has done on your behalf?

⁶ Pink, 59.

When we lose sight of how Jesus served as our substitute, our Christian life becomes all about what we can do for God, instead of being focused on what He has done for us. Spiritual drudgery and discouragement follow those who forget that Jesus has paid for everything their sin requires. Those who live joy-filled, vibrant Christian lives have a steady sight on Christ's perfect, atoning work.

A LESSON CONCERNING THE LOVE OF GOD

Not only did Jesus' last words to His mother fulfill Old Testament requirements, they also demonstrated His caring regard for all humanity. At the hour of His greatest trial, He demonstrated tender consideration for another.⁷ He, as said Jesus, "...yearned over the mother whose heart was being pierced by agony."⁸

When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple. There they dedicated Him to the Lord. A man named Simeon happened to enter the temple complex that day. Moved by the Spirit of God, he prophesied to Mary concerning the sorrow she would experience in reference to her baby boy. He said, "a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35). The words of that prophecy told of Christ's crucifixion and the salvation Christ would bring. However, those words also acknowledge the gut-wrenching pain Mary would experience at Golgotha.

Jesus knew the pain Mary felt. With kindness and compassion, He acknowledged her from the cross. He cared for her needs. He let her know He loved her.

Controversies Concerning The Third Saying

Some don't see Jesus' words as being concerned primarily with the care of Mary. Catholic doctrine views our Lord's third saying differently. It says Jesus gave Mary governance over the church with His words. The apostles were placed underneath his leadership. She, in effect, became the new head of the church. Such a perspective is misguided. It is an attempt to align Christian doctrine with the old mystery religions of Rome. Additionally, it is erroneous because of Jesus' instructions in Matthew 16:18 and John 16:13-15.

Other's view Christ's speech to his mother as harsh and demeaning. Some see Jesus' term as address ("Woman...") as being a bit misogynistic. It is important to understand the differences in culture and language. In Jesus' day, it wasn't an insult to use the word "woman" as a term of address. Even in other modern languages, it is still considered appropriate to use such a title. Our Lord wasn't demeaning toward Mary. In fact, the opposite was true. He should veneration and respect through the way He talked to her. The title "woman" was one of love, honor, and respect.⁹ Christ frequently referred to Mary with the term in John's gospel, showing His kind regard for His mother (John 4:21; 20:13).

Comfort and Care for Us

Jesus' compassion toward His mother reminds us of His compassion for all. In Christ, humanity has a caring, comforting Savior. The apostle Paul remarked on our Lord's love by saying, "Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all

⁷ Carson, D. A., R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), [CD-Rom].

⁸ Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. *St. John. Vol. 2. The Pulpit Commentary.* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), [CD-Rom].

⁹ Spence-Jones, [CD-Rom].

comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Christians are recipients of a love similar to the one Mary experience at Calvary. Matthew Henry has said that Jesus’ actions towards His mother are “an instance of Divine goodness to be observed for our encouragement.”¹⁰

Since our Lord was careful to care for His mother, we can be confident that He will care for us. When we, like Mary, are overwhelmed by the cares, confusion, and controversies of this world, we can rest assured of His comfort and care for us. Scripture says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:6). Whenever hardship and hurt knock on the door of your heart, turn your eyes to a hill called Calvary and meditate on the love of Christ!

A LESSON CONCERNING OUR LOYALTY TO GOD

Christ’s otherworldly, supernatural comfort towards Mary, and towards us, should motivate us to fervently follow Him in faith. At Jesus’ darkest hour, one lone disciple stood at the foot of the cross. His name was John. He was, as John 19:26 tells us, “...the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

It may have seemed a bit braggadocios for John to refer to himself with the aforementioned title. Did he attempt to shine a positive light on himself? Not at all. John didn’t mean to exalt himself. He intended to extol the love of Christ. He wanted to explain why he lived with deep devotion to the Lord. The Lord’s care for him drove him to care for the Lord. It also led him to care for others, namely Mary. In effect, the love of Christ moved John to fulfill the great commandment, to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, and mind; and to love his neighbor as himself (Matthew 22:37-39).

A Love for God

All the other disciples ran and fled at Jesus’ arrest (Matthew 26:56). Peter had even denied Jesus three times, even swearing as he did (John 18:15-18). Mark’s gospel reveals that John apparently deserted the Lord initially (Mark 14:50), only to return to the crucifixion scene later. All of this happened in accordance with the Lord’s prophecy (Matthew 26:31).

Though all others fled, John stayed by Jesus’ side. A perfect participle verb within the original language of the text painted a vivid and picturesque scene.¹¹ John’s presence at Calvary was risky business. Jesus was a condemned criminal, guilty of conspiring against the Roman Empire (John 19:12-16). One has remarked, “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.”¹² Without a doubt, “it took courage to stand there in the midst of such hatred and ridicule.”¹³ Though he surely had a degree of fear concerning reprisals and punishment for appearance at the cross, John was bold, unflinching, and resolute in his devotion to the Lord.

What made John find his way back to the cross after initially deserting Jesus? The love John had experienced beckoned him to stay by Jesus’ side. Earlier in John’s gospel, the apostle depicted the companionship and camaraderie he enjoyed with Jesus. In telling of the

¹⁰ Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), [CD-Rom].

¹¹ Robertson, [CD-Rom].

¹² Barclay, William, ed. *The Gospel of John. Vol. 2. The Daily Study Bible Series*. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), [CD-Rom].

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), [CD-Rom].

events surrounding the first Lord's Supper, he said, "One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus" (John 13:23). Jesus' love for John compelled John to stand with Jesus at Calvary. Years later, that same love would drive him to the Island of Patmos to suffer as an imprisoned exile on behalf of the gospel (Revelation 1:9-10).

Jesus' love that moved John to the foot of the cross. A lesson is found here for us. When one really grasps the grace of God, he or she will be similarly motivated to stay by Jesus' side. Deep and unwavering allegiance to Christ grows from hearts that are convinced of His love. A deeper comprehension of God's love will fuel a greater fire of love for Him in our hearts.

If you are spiritually apathetic and anemic, take time to reflect on the Lord's love for you. Spend time studying passages of Scripture that deal with the subject. Use a journal to log all of the ways in which he has shown you great mercy and grace. Commit to praying prayers of praise and thanksgiving for His goodness. Make requests and supplications, asking the Lord to give you a heightened awareness of His love and mercy. When you grasp even a smidgen of the depths of God's grace, you will be compelled to follow Him faithfully.

A Love for Others

Not only did the Lord's compel John to care for Jesus, it also led him to care for others. From the cross, Christ instructed John to care for Mary, saying, "Here is your mother." As custom would dictate, someone needed to take care of the woman. Her Son was about to die and she needed a caretaker. Though Jesus had four half brothers and two half sisters (Matthew 13:55-56), He was the one with legal responsibility. For reasons not completely known to us, our Lord entrusted Mary to John.

Maybe it was because the apostle was actually present at the time of His death, so he was the only one available for the legal transfer. Both Scripture and history attest to the fact that Jesus' siblings were skeptical of His ministry for a season (Mark 3:21). Maybe Mary converted before prior to the crucifixion, while the other children remained hostile to gospel truth. This could have prompted Jesus to leave Mary to John's oversight.

Another possible scenario could have been this — John was a cousin of Jesus, so he did have familial connections to his aunt.¹⁴ Or, John might have had more resources and greater ability to care for the woman. Some attest that the apostle had homes in both Jerusalem and Capernaum.¹⁵ Maybe none of these things were in play. It could be that Jesus did what He did for the sole purpose of communicating glorious gospel realities for years to come. Whatever the case, history attests that Mary lived with John at Jerusalem for eleven years before passing away in her early fifties.¹⁶

John's provision for Mary is later see in Acts 1:14. While caring for Jesus' mother, John most likely had to care for his own mother, Salome, as well (Mark 15:40). John's example shows that careful consideration of other should adorn the lives of God's people. The experience of Jesus' love should move the Christ follower to love others (John 13:34-35). Matthew Henry has said, "Those that truly love Christ and are beloved of Him, will be glad of an opportunity to do any service to Him or His."¹⁷

True Christianity serves, cares and loves. According to James, a half-brother of Jesus who wasn't at the crucifixion scene (and who was yet to be converted), such compassionate

¹⁴ Robertson, [CD-Rom].

¹⁵ Spence-Jones, [CD-Rom].

¹⁶ Henry, [CD-Rom].

¹⁷ Henry, [CD-Rom].

regard for others is a mark of real religion: “Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27). Perhaps it was through the pain of his past negligence to take care of his own mother that James spoke those words. He had to learn a hard lesson that action-oriented love towards others is a hallmark of true spiritual maturity. As believers live in a close relationship with Christ, He empowers them and fills them to care for others (2 Corinthians 1:4; Romans 5:5).

To whom are you showing love? Are there any helpless people you are helping? Do you have family members — parents, siblings, in-laws, cousins, widows — who are in need of a family member’s aid? Is there someone in your Sunday School or small group that could benefit from support? Are your neighbors in need of love and encouragement?

God has placed you within a specific circle of influence. Within the parameters of your life location, He wants to use you as a light of His love. Like John, are you making yourself available to the Lord’s will? Do you aim to see others through the compassion and care of Calvary? Or are you too distracted by your own pursuits and priorities to have any concern for others? Remember — loving God and others is the essence of Biblical Christianity (Matthew 22:37-40). Christ’s third statement from Calvary teaches us much about loving God and loving others.