

Marys Grief, Jesus' Love

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[0 : 00] We'll turn again to that portion of scripture that we read, the Gospel of John chapter 19 and reading it verse 25 we read.

Standing by the cross of Jesus, where his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clovis and Mary Magdalene, Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby and he said to his mother, woman behold your son and then he said to his disciple, behold your mother. Particularly these words, he said to his mother, we woman behold your son and then to the disciple behold your mother.

Many years ago when I first became a Christian I'm not sure if I shared this with you before at a previous time or not but at one of my first fellowships that I was at in November time or December time, 91, maybe it might have been January 92.

I was at an elder's house and we were having a time of fellowship and being a young Christian and being whose life had just been transformed I heard the elder say, you know it's not so much that the Lord came into my life that amazes me today.

[1 : 52] He said what amazes me today is the way that the Lord has kept me and provided for me.

And I listened to these words as a young Christian and I thought what an awful thing to say. But on earth can be more amazing than becoming a Christian.

But I know now what he was saying. I realise now the wisdom in his words of how the Lord provides for us and how the Lord keeps his own people from the point of conversion.

And I wrestled very much before to speak on tonight after the last time I was here and we looked at the first two sayings on the cross and I wondered whether I should speak about the third saying on the cross on the altar.

Maybe find something more fitting for this time of year. Maybe to do with the birth of Christ or his first coming into the world or his second coming into the world.

[3 : 03] But I rested on coming towards the end of the year with us being able to look back at how the Lord looks after his own people.

And hopefully there will be something in this to encourage the Lord's people of the awesome privilege that they have in the life of Greece.

And hopefully there will be something in this to that will make those of us who may not yet have committed our lives to Christ be able to understand not just the wonder of being born again but the awesome experience of being kept by the Lord no matter what we go through in life's journey.

So with that in mind we look at this portion of scripture under two headings. We shall look first of all at it under Mary's grief for her son and then we shall look at Jesus' love for his mother.

We have heard much in past days of the love of Mary for her baby, for the Christ child and the world to a degree at least accepts this but then they leave Christ in the manger and they want Christ to stay in the manger.

[4 : 37] But what we are looking at tonight is Christ out of the manger, not just Christ in birth but Christ in death. So then let's look at this then, Mary's grief for her son.

It's interesting to read that this portion of scripture that all four of the gospels make mention of these women that are found gathered round the cross.

But the gospel of John is the only one that makes specific mention of the mother of Jesus being there.

Why these four women are mentioned by name is not revealed unto us. We can only put assume that there were people that had a wonderful relationship with our Lord in and through the life that He led.

And these four women were the only people that were there at the cross, along with John who returned after fleeing with all the other disciples.

[5 : 53] These were the only five people that we can imagine as it were that were supporters of our Savior whilst He was being crucified.

And the first time we meet Mary in the gospel of John is in chapter 2 at the marriage ceremony in Canaan where He turned the water into wine.

And we don't read of Mary anymore in the gospel of John until we read of her found at the cross where Christ is being crucified.

And we read in this account that John names two of the four women and the other two He doesn't name.

John does this a lot in his writings. John for example is somebody who never mentions in this gospel the name of Mary as the mother of Christ.

[6 : 59] John is somebody who also doesn't name the half brothers of Jesus Christ. And John is also somebody who doesn't name himself in the entire account, the entire gospel that he wrote.

And in verse 26 where we read that Christ says to the disciple whom he loved.

John does not mention that that is not himself. That is how he words it, the disciple whom Jesus loves. So let's at the beginning name the unnamed people.

And by the cross we read of Mary and we know about Mary the mother of her savior.

And I'm sure we have heard much of the birth story at this time of year and we won't go into that just now. But there's another interesting person here who is unnamed and she is his mother's sister.

[8 : 12] Her name is not given here. We read of there at the cross was of Jesus where his mother and his mother's sister.

His mother's sister Mary's sister is a woman by the name of Salome. She is married and we read in scripture to Sebedee.

And in the gospel of Matthew and in chapter 27 we read that there she is the mother of both James and John.

In verse 55 of chapter 27 we read there were many women there looking on from a distance who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministering to him.

Among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph. And the mother of the sons of Sebedee.

[9 : 15] And of course we know that John and James were both at a later date going to become amongst the twelve disciples of the Lord.

So what we have here is what we would call in our own day to day understanding as we would think of Christ having half brothers or step brother as we would call today.

It would also seem that there was a blood relation between Mary and Salome and between our savior and also James and John.

What's really interesting when you look at the life of Salome is that here is a woman who in a previous part of scripture in chapter 20 she is somebody who has been rebuked by the Lord.

Because in chapter 20 of Matthew we read of a mother's request and we read in chapter 20 verse 20. And then the mother of the sons of Sebedee came up to him with her sons and kneeling down before him.

[10 : 24] She asked for something and he said what is it you want? And she said that these two sons of mine are to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom.

And Jesus answered her saying you know not would you ever ask me. So here is one who has been rebuked by the Lord and yet she is somebody who is now amongst the few people who are found gathered at the cross.

I wonder what her thoughts are there and then as she remembers the rebuked from the Lord. I wonder what is going through her mind but her presence at the cross tells us much about her and her presence at the cross also tells us much about Christ.

She has long since learnt from her rebuked. She has long since moved on from it and in humility she now stands before the cross of Christ and this I think is very fair and very true that we can learn from today and we can learn this of Christ that Christ had a way of rebuking people in a most loving and gentle manner.

And we can of course put that to ourselves when we need to rebuk somebody. Is it with anger that we rebuk somebody when they go wrong or do we do it in a compassionate way in which love

shines through that Christ did to this woman on a previous occasion?

[12:11] Salome's presence at the cross is a lesson to us all on not just how to receive a rebuked but also how to give a rebuked.

And there are two women here that are also mentioned by name and they are Mary the wife of Clothus who only appears here and here alone in the entire New Testament and we also have Mary Magdalene of whom we know much.

She is one that is featured in all four of the gospels. She is one who is not only found at the foot of the cross but she is one who is also found at the resurrection of Christ.

We read in Mark chapter 16 and in verse 9, now when he arose early the first year of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom?

He had cast out seven devils. Here is a woman who never ever ever forgot what Christ did for her. And perhaps we will never understand how important her role was in the life and ministry of Christ and how supportive she must have been to him that she would be amongst those who were found gathered there at the cross that day.

[13:49] It's not surprising that we would find her there knowing that she never forgot what the Savior did for her. I wonder when we look back upon this year how quickly we forget what the Lord has done for us in the past.

I'm not just talking about his goodness and his mercy but I'm talking about the fact that he came into our lives in the first place and how he has kept us since then.

They're so easy to forget what faithfulness these women have on the cross, what remarkable courage they have, what a witness they are.

When all the disciples are gone forsaken the Lord, here stands a small band of women and one disciple who has returned from backsliding when he fled with all the other disciples.

And they are there in that crowd, caught up in all the venom, caught up in all the hatred and yet they are not to be charred by the mocking fury of all those that are found gathered there.

[15:06] Yet they still stand and yet they stand there in the midst of that horrific sight of Christ being crucified. Yet they are there to encourage our Lord, the only ones in such a large multitude of people, of Jewish people and Roman people and yet so few people that are there on the Lord's side.

And it's interesting for us to understand that they're there yet there's nothing they can do. They can't rescue the Saviour, they can't go and give them any form of aid, they can't do anything to ease us pain.

They're there simply as a heaven sent encouragement to our Lord and to our Saviour. Out of all the people that the Lord had touched in the three years of ministry, this is the few that are found gathered to support them as they have been crucified.

And they are an example to us all of never to be ashamed to be followers of Christ.

You know if we're spared to see the New Year there's probably no better thing that we could aim for than to make that our New Year's resolution.

[16:41] To seek to never to be ashamed of Jesus Christ. Wherever we are, whoever we're with, wherever we're working, no matter where we go, to stand alone even if it's in silence like these people are, they're still witnessing for the Lord.

And it's quite remarkable and I don't mean it to sound in any way sexist in any way at all.

But it's quite remarkable when we picture this scene and when we picture these women, it's quite incredible that they do not come across as people who are fainting under the horrors of what they are seeing, neither do they, are they represented as people who are screaming and shouting by the awfulness of what they are seeing.

They are in no way hysterical, they are in no way making a scene. In silence they stand. Or should be, the Lord.

The power of divine grace is supporting these women at this time. Of that there is no doubt what's the weather. And it's always the power of divine grace that supports us when we are going through trials and tribulations.

[18:08] Christian brother and sister, when you look back on heartaches that you've endured, pain, ill health, the loss of loved ones, what has helped you to endure these trials and these tribulations other than the power of divine grace supporting you.

And is there experience here? And if that is the experience of Salome and Mary, the wife of Clover and Mary Magdalene, what does that say to us today, of the experience of our Savior's mother? What is going through her mind? We don't find her raising her fist and shouting. We don't find her screaming. We find her calm.

I was thinking about this earlier on. And for those of us who are blessed to have a family, is it not true that we would do anything to protect our own children?

Is it not true that I wonder if it meant that in order to, that our son would not die, or in order that our daughter would not die, in order to keep them alive in this world?

[19 : 39] And if we were able to do that by telling a lie, I wonder how many of us would grab that lie and tell a lie in order that our son or daughter wouldn't be put to death?

Have you ever thought that Mary had the ability to rescue Jesus Christ from the cross?

As the mother of her Lord, she could have come to the front and she could have said, everything this man is saying is a lie.

Everything he is saying is untrue. He is not a savior. He is not king of kings. He is not the Messiah. And by doing so, perhaps it is possible that Christ might have not endured what he endured. But she didn't do that.

[20 : 35] Remarkable woman, Mary, standing there, witnessing her son being tormented in such a way.

What a testimony for the deity of Christ this woman is. She is going through something that the other three women in Johnland, she is somebody who is heartbroken.

Try and picture her in your mind's eye, if you can. As difficult as it is, picture the thoughts and emotions of a mother's heart, seeing her son being put to death.

There on the cross hangs her child. There on the cross hangs her miracle child. And she is health-bless.

And yet she is this dying man's mother. I have to be very careful what I say here. I know that there are many horrendous trials and tribulations that we go through.

[21 : 46] And I know that greater the afflictions of many people through pain and suffering. But I don't think, and I have never experienced, and I hope and pray I never will, I don't think that there is any experience in life's journey that is as painful as seeing your own children die before yourself.

Whether it be in young years, whether it be in teenage years, whether it be in your 20s or in Christ's case in his 30s, there can surely be no more harder providence than that.

And it is one thing for a mother to hear news that her son has died in a tragic accident or something like that. And to stand there and witness it in the midst of all the spewings from the mouth of hell and all the mockery and all the hatred.

How remarkable that this woman acts the way that she does. This mother and those of you who are mothers yourselves, you can picture it.

The one who once kissed his tiny eyebrows, now watching with a crown of thorns on his head. The one who guided his hands and feet.

[23 : 15] Now she sees him with his hands and feet nailed to the tree. In her silence she is broken.

And yet she is being appalled by divine grace. What piercing of her soul must have been her experience at that moment in time as she watched her son be persecuted and put to death by his own people.

And she looks around and the disciples are there. And she looks around and she thinks, this is all there is. Why so few?

And you know as Christ is being tortured on the cross. So too is Mary being tortured.

And she looks upon her own son and Christ sees the pain in his mother and that only adds to the pain that he is going through himself.

[24 : 36] Yet this remarkable woman doesn't sink to the ground. She doesn't collapse. She doesn't start shouting or anything.

Instead we read that she stood but standing by the cross. It's not remarkable. There is so much in scripture that we just don't fully understand even with the crucifixion of Christ.

But this woman went through. It had been prophesied many years prior to this when both herself and her husband Joseph to Christ, to Simeon, to the temple.

We read in chapter 2 of Luke and verse 34. And Simeon blessed them. And Simeon said to his mother, and it's interesting that it's to his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and the

rising of many in Israel.

And assign that he is oppressed, and a sword will pierce your own soul also, so that your thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

[26 : 04] Simeon singled out Mary, not Mary and Joseph, but Mary alone, and will come to that again.

And the sword surely did pierce her soul that day as she looked on at her son. How can we even begin to imagine that?

Mary would have known that great would have been her afflictions, and great would have been her trials and tribulations with Christ as her son, but what on earth could possibly have prepared her for what she was going to endure here.

But it's remarkable, isn't it, when we look at the third saying of the cross? It's remarkable that Jesus' last thoughts were not for himself, but they were for others.

Jesus' last thoughts included in his prayer. Father, forgive them. And Jesus now in his last thoughts has also given a promise to the thief on the cross today that they shall be with me in paradise.

[27 : 24] And now here Christ is giving the promise of his protection. He's about to give it to his mother, and to his beloved disciple whom he loved.

Remarkable that in all that he is going through, he still doesn't forget these two very special people too, his own mother and the disciple whom he loved, John.

No one at Calvary knows what Mary is going through. Nobody knows that her soul has been purged. No one knows, no one understands, but there is one.

And he knows. The eyes of Jesus look into the eyes of his mother, the very first eyes that he ever saw when he opened them as a child in this world.

And his mind is made up that as his time comes to an end, he is going to make provision for his mother and for John.

[28 : 50] And with that in mind we look now at our second headache, Jesus' love for his mother.

And that is evident in what we read here as he looks upon the sorrowing sight of his mother and sees all that she is going through.

She knows that he knows perfectly well that despite the fact that she is a most holy woman, he knows that this is going to crush her.

He knows that this is going to break her, because he knows full well that his death is something that is going to deeply affect Mary for the rest of her life.

The mother's born was very close to the human heart of our Saviour. We should never forget that.

[29 : 49] So Jesus on the cross, in the midst of all the pain and affliction that he is going through, he finds time to address both his mother and to address John.

And he assigns the protection of his mother to his most caring and most loving disciple in John.

And he said to his mother, Behold yourself and to his disciple, Behold your mother. What forgetfulness of himself he had as he nears death on the cross, as he seeks to make provision for those that have loved him and those that have honored him.

And that's what he does. We're concentrating on John and on Mary tonight. But I'm bringing this to your attention because what Christ does for them, he does for all his own people.

He does it for you and he does it for the people beside you in Christ. And this is where we differ from the teaching of other faiths with regard to Mary worship, because here Mary is somebody who is broken.

[31 : 21] And here somebody is, here Mary is somebody who has been commended to John in her brokenness. And Mary was never ever meant to be somebody that was meant to receive divine honour or to be worshipped in the way that she is by other faiths.

The gaze of Christ now falls upon them both as he is hanging there on the cross, as he struggles for breath, as he nears the end of his life and he is still making provision.

And notice he now brings also his attention to John and Christ is fully aware of the fact that John has just returned.

Christ is fully aware of the fact that John is the only one of the disciples who is not there, who is there. But Christ is very aware of the fact that here is a man who has backslidden and has not been somebody who stood up for Christ but fled.

You would see the welcome he receives from Christ. Do we find a rebuke to John now? What do we find? We find John being given this incredible commission from Christ to look after his mother

from here onwards.

[33 : 04] Does an art bring encouragement to you and I today? I am alive, I can't believe that I am still making the mistakes I am making in the life of grace nearly thirty years on.

Things that I should be, that are tripping me up, that shouldn't trip me up, that in many ways didn't used to. But are we not thankful that when we take our eyes of Christ he doesn't rebuke us when we are able to return and that he is willing to take us back.

Our Saviour doesn't say, no I've had enough of you, I've had enough of your fallings and your stumblings, I want nothing else to do with you.

He doesn't keep tabs of the amount of times we let him down. But he restores us each time and he lovingly accepts us every time we backslide.

Why is it that the Lord gave John this responsibility? Have you ever wondered that? Why John?

[34 : 21] Is it because he was the only man there? I don't believe it was. What about Joseph? Where was Joseph?

We haven't heard of Joseph since Luke chapter 2 when Christ was twelve years old and it is the common belief of commentators and theologians that Joseph died before the public ministry of Christ began and before the crucifixion.

Joseph had gone home to be with the Lord. What about his half-brothers?

We have to remember that they are not even there because they are a people who do not fully believe Christ to be who he is until after he was from the dead.

So Joseph commits, Jesus commits his mother into the care therefore of this disciple, his most loved, his most trusted disciple of all.

[35 : 44] Yet every single one of the disciples would fail and would make mistakes. Yet there was something different in the eyes of Christ with John with all the others.

So much so that he commends him to look after his own mother.

And it's quite incredible that when you think of it, here if we go with the line and with the teaching that there was a blood relative there with John, how appropriate it would be that Mary would be taken back to spend time with John and with Salome and with Sebedee at the time when Christ was crucified and when he would die.

And there's another thing we need to ask here when we read and he said to his mother, woman, behold your son.

As far as we can tell from any of the four gospels Christ never called his mother, mother. At any point.

[37 : 03] As far as we can tell that was not how he worded his relationship with her. Now in a few days time many of us are going to gather for New Year meal and I'm the most blessed man in the world because I've still got my wife and my children and my mother and my children, but I wouldn't dream of calling my mother woman in front of people.

To me it would be a mark of disrespect. It would be wrong to call her anything other than mom or mom, but not so with Christ.

What would be a disrespect for us was not a disrespect for him and I say that because the reason that he called her woman instead of mother would have only added to her pain and the anguish that her soul was going through.

And that is why he addresses her as woman and he also does so to protect her. J.C. Ryle writes with regard to this.

He says I firmly believe that even on the cross Jesus foresaw the future heresy of Mary worship therefore he said woman and did not say mother.

[38 : 31] That is the view of J.C. Ryle. That there's something else here too by calling her woman instead of mother he was protecting her from the wrath of the people.

The many people there that would not perhaps have known and realised that this was his mother found gathered here. See how he protects his mother from mockery, from pain, even from death had they known that the mother of Christ the Saviour was there present.

But even more importantly than that there's something else. Christ is here now bringing to an end the relationship that they had and it's as if he is saying to her, thou art my mother, but now as I die you will no longer be my mother.

But my daughter in Christ. Though she was always a daughter this is a new relationship now and something new is beginning in her relationship with Christ as Christ's life is coming to an end.

Those of you who are in here tonight as women and you are daughters of Christ. Those of you who are believers in here are men, are sons of Christ and Mary too was a daughter of Christ.

[40 : 18] And then he goes on to say to her, behold your mother and this is her reference to John, not to Jesus himself.

And he's saying here that John is to be as it were as we would understand in our language as what we would say today that from this moment on John was to be her adopted son, the one who was going to be with her, to look after her and to provide for her needs.

Here Christ looks after his own people. And here we see a new relationship begins by grace between a beloved mother and a beloved disciple.

Do you see what Christ is doing? Do you see how he is pulling these people together and what he is teaching us tonight and reminding us of the fifth commandment that we have way back in the book of Exodus where we read, honour your father and your mother.

Well Christ of course only had another and this is exactly what he is doing in his human nature, honouring his mother.

[41 : 51] We live in a day and age where my generation don't honour their mother and father in the way that previous generations do.

I mean that from the point of view that when they get old and frail it seems to be so easy to put people into care homes rather than what we saw growing up with parents looking after grandparents.

And I am sure you have all witnessed in the past as I have myself the greatest tragedy of all in people coming and people just at a time of near death seeking to come to families and things in order to gain what they can out of it.

You know what I am talking about but there is none of that here with Christ. Behold your mother. Christ is now saying to John, John you lover as though she was your own mother and John all that love that you have for me now you pour it out on my mother.

God and honour was bestowed upon John this man who had back slidden and fled. It's remarkable and what could have been a burden to John became nothing but a privilege and it became his honour to look after Mary the mother of Christ and notice in doing so John receives to a double reward he receives now a new nearness to Jesus when the time comes when Jesus will die he has a new nearness to Jesus because of his relationship now with Mary and not just that he has in Mary a confirmation of his faith forevermore.

[44 : 04] We go back very often for a confirmation of our faith to the time when we became Christians especially those of us who had a dramatic testimony and it is right to do that but here is John who is the disciple that was loved by the Lord who will never doubt again because of the great privilege that is being placed on him he will have this with him forevermore the privilege of looking after Mary and this will always be to him a reminder that he is a son of God one of the Lord's own children.

What a son Jesus was then in conclusion both to his father in heaven and also to his mother on earth for a saviour he is to lost sinners.

Jesus still cares and provides for his own people today exactly as he did then all those years ago. The wonder of being a Christian is not just about being born again but it is about being kept and it is about the Lord providing for us and that's what keeps us going and that's what I want to bring to your attention at the end of this year how good the Lord has been to his own people how he has kept us how he has provided for us but what of you in here tonight can you begin to understand now what you are missing out if you are still in here tonight and you are not a Christian do you understand what you are losing out on that you are losing out on salvation and you are losing out not just on salvation but you are losing out on walking with the Lord and you are losing out on his keeping and you will eventually lose out on glory if you don't make your calling sure in Christ.

So what are you going to do tonight my friends for those of us who are Christians we leave here tonight rejoicing because we are his and he is ours and we are kept but what about you my friends can I plead with you not to make it your new year's resolution to make things right with God can I plead with you to make this your top priority tonight never mind even eating anything when you go home never mind even going to bed to sleep never mind any of these things make your calling an election sure and plead for the Lord to come into your life my hope and prayer and conclusion is that by honouring the Lord in this world that it will be the experience of every single one of us that he will honour us at the judgment seat of Christ where he says to the Father that's my son that's

one of my daughters as we are found gathered here tonight worshipping him may God in his mercy grant that none of us will be lost but that we will all be found gathered in glory at the end of life's journey we have seen enough of tragedies in this past week that ought to warn us all that we are in no control of our own lives even just with a few days left of this year may the Lord bless to us these thoughts shall we turn now in conclusion to singing in Psalm 23 and as we find this and I take this opportunity once again of thanking you for the privilege of being here and I do hope and pray that if we are all spare to see that we all have a happy and blessed new year and that we have that each year for us, in Christ.