

“WOMAN, BEHOLD YOUR SON”
JOHN 19:26-27

When you talk about Jesus Christ you must talk about the uniqueness of Christ. He is different from every other person that has ever lived. There *are* similarities between us and Him — He was born, He developed intellectually, physically, and relationally like all others, He experienced physical pain and hunger and weariness, and He had normal human emotions like joy and grief and anger.

And yet there was much about Christ that set Him apart from all others in very unique ways.

- ✓ His teaching amazed His hearers because He taught with an authority that no other teacher did (Mk. 1:22)
- ✓ He forgave sinners (Mk. 2:5-12)
- ✓ He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and made the lame to walk
- ✓ He fed 5000 men and their families and then 4000 men and their families from the most meager of provisions — creating food in His hands as He handed it to His disciples
- ✓ He demonstrated power over storms on the sea that even made His disciples ask, “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mk. 4:41)

But of all the things that made Christ unique one series of events towers above the rest; and that is the cross and the resurrection. Nothing so demonstrates the authority and power and uniqueness of Christ as these events. The cross and resurrection are the singularly most unique events in the history of the world and they reveal the nature and character of Christ in a singular way. It wasn’t just that Christ died for sinners — others have died and been martyred also (though without any saving benefit) — no, the uniqueness of Christ on the cross was in *the way* He died.

And we see the way He died in the words that He spoke from the cross.

On seven occasions while He hung on the cross, He made particular statements that revealed the uniqueness and greatness of who He was and is. As we listen to these words from the cross, we hear the richness and wonder of who He is:

- ✓ To the soldiers crucifying Him He offers a word of forgiveness (Lk. 23:33-34)
- ✓ To the thief on the cross He offers a word of grace and salvation (Lk. 23:39-43)
- ✓ And to His mother He offers a word of compassion (**John 19:26-27**)

You know the account and the story well. Jesus has been nailed to the cross and it has been raised and dropped into the hole in the ground to keep it steady. He has been beaten and bystanders are mocking and jeering, taunting Him to save Himself. The soldiers have taken His garments and have torn apart the seams of the outer garment and distributed it amongst the four of them; and they have taken His inner tunic, a seamless garment and gambled for it.

Matthew tells us that there was a large group of women watching these events from a distance (27:55); and this passage in John tells us that there was a smaller group of four women who were near the cross —

- ✓ The mother of Jesus, Mary
- ✓ The sister of Mary — and comparing this list of women to the ones in Matthew and Mark it appears that this woman is named Salome (Mk. 15:40), and she is also the mother of the disciples James and John (Mt. 27:56). (And that means that James and John were cousins of Jesus and their mother was also His aunt.)
- ✓ Mary, the wife of Clopas, of whom we know very little.
- ✓ Mary Magdalene, who had seven demons cast out of her (Lk. 8:2) and who would have a prominent role in the resurrection account (Jn. 20:1-18).

Say what you will about these women, but they were there. Given the closeness of these women to Christ, it is likely that one of them sewed and provided the garments for Christ that were being torn up and gambled for by the soldiers. They heard the taunts being hurled at Christ and saw the agony of His gruesome beatings and death. Of the Eleven disciples, only one was at the cross; but these four women were there because of their love for Christ.

And John tells us in v. 26 that He **saw His mother** —

- ✓ He was *looking* — while on the cross, He was attentive to her need. In physical pain and anticipating and experiencing the wrath of God against sin, He is looking to meet her need. Said one commentator, “...the beauty of the Savior’s love and compassion for His widowed mother, in the midst of His own excruciating pain, reflects His love for His own (cf. **John 13:1**).” [MacArthur]
- ✓ Further, on the cross, He is still fulfilling the Law. The Law required Him to honor His mother, and in looking to her need and providing someone to care for her in His absence (Joseph also was likely dead by this time), He fulfilled the requirements of Ex. 20:12. Christ was perfectly righteous and kept every aspect of the Law all through His life and even while on the cross. And it is this perfect righteousness that is then imputed to us who believe in Him for salvation.
- ✓ And in fulfilling the Law on the cross, Jesus is making double provision for His mother; He is meeting her physical need and He is also providing the righteousness she needs to stand before God in Heaven.

And Jesus also saw **the disciple whom He loved** (John).

- ✓ John was one of the Eleven (after Judas left to do his traitorous deed). Jesus had prophesied in the upper room that all the disciples would forsake Him. It wasn’t just that Peter denied Him three times. *Everyone* left Him (Mt. 26:31). Including John.
- ✓ But John (alone) returned to the cross. The one who was closest to Jesus, who was the beloved disciple, could not stay away from his Master for long.

Having seen His mother in need and His disciple in devotion, Jesus spoke to His mother. **Woman, behold your son.** Some have noted that Jesus' words are short and concise; there is no lengthy explanation in what He says to them. Surely that is due to the suffering He was enduring on the cross.

When we read this passage, we must notice the way that Jesus addresses Mary. It sounds wrong to our ears. Certainly Jesus isn't speaking disparagingly of His mother is He?

- ✓ Don't misunderstand Jesus' intent with the way He addressed His mother. While **woman** is a different kind of address than "Mom" or "Mama" or "Mother," it is still a term of endearment. One commentator has rightly rendered it as "dear woman." It is affectionate. And it was a normal way of addressing a woman in public.
- ✓ But it is true that it is different than acknowledging her role as His mother. Interestingly, Jesus never addresses Mary by the term "mother" (cf. also [Jn. 2:4](#)). By addressing her as **woman** and not "mother," Jesus is emphasizing that He has a new relationship with her; more than her son, He is her Savior. And His fellowship with her will forever be as Savior more than son. (And it also emphasizes that she has no dual role with Him as Savior and Redeemer; she is subservient to Him and dependent on Him and His work on the cross.)

"At the same time He broke His ties with Mary as her son, He established a new spiritual relationship with her as her Savior. Mary first met Jesus at the manger. She was the first person to meet Him. She felt Him stirring in her womb, gave birth to Him, held Him in her arms, and nursed Him at her breast. Mary met Jesus as her son at the manger, but she did not meet Him as her Savior until she met Him at the cross. *Mary needed to lose Jesus as a son in order to find Him as a Savior.* Mary needed to take her place with the other disciples, standing as a sinner at the foot of the cross. She needed Jesus to die for her own sins." [Boice, *14 Words from Jesus*; my emphasis.]

What then shall we make of what Jesus said to Mary — **Behold your son...**?

- ✓ First and foremost, this is Jesus' provision for His mother. His father had likely died by that time; as the oldest child it was His responsibility to care for her. And that's what He was doing in entrusting her to the care of John.
- ✓ Why did He choose John? He had other brothers — why not one of them? Because they had rejected Christ ([7:5](#)). Mary obviously still loved and believed in Jesus as the Christ, but the rest of her sons did not. We don't know this for certain, but it is likely that this caused family conflict — "Mom, forget about Jesus; He's crazy..." And when she persisted, they may well have rejected her as well. It could be that Jesus had to turn to John because the other sons were not interested in helping. And John was a natural choice because he was Jesus' beloved disciple and he may well have also been a family member, the nephew of Mary (the son of her sister, Salome). As one writer said, "There was a sense in which Mary had to go to the home of this beloved disciple. There

simply was nowhere else for her to go.” [Chappell]

- ✓ So John now had responsibility for Mary both as a biological “son” and as a brother in Christ. He had both physical and spiritual reasons to care for her.

And when Jesus spoke to John, there were further implications for both John and Mary:

- ✓ John has a new responsibility. The Master has called him to a new duty and he is to be submissive to the call of Jesus his Master and Savior. And he was. The text tells us that he obeyed immediately — ***from that hour the disciple took her into his own household***. One word from Jesus, and John immediately obeyed. Though the implications for him were significant and the nature of his life would have changed dramatically, he did not hesitate, but immediately began fulfilling the obligations Jesus had laid on Him.
- ✓ This also reveals the subservience of Mary to Jesus. In the courtyard of the Church of Mary Major in Rome there is a crucifix that has Mary hanging on the cross, back-to-back with Jesus, depicting her as co-redeemer with Christ. But by this word from the cross, Christ demonstrated the difference between the Savior and the earthly mother of the Savior. She is no longer His mother, but simply a woman in need of redemption — a redemption that she could not attain on her own, but one that He could accomplish for her. Mary is not a co-redemptrix. She not only is not capable of atoning for the sins of others, but she is submissive to Christ and is dependent on Christ for His care for her both physically and spiritually.

What we have in this simple statement of Christ from the cross is a demonstration of the significance of Christ and the gospel. The gospel divides. And it divides families, as Jesus Himself said: “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51–53). And that certainly was the situation in Mary’s home.

But because of the division over Christ in Mary’s family, Mary now has a new family. She has been embraced by John and would receive care from John through the remainder of her years. She had a new “son.” This is the compassionate power of Jesus’ word at work.

But the story doesn’t end there. In Acts 1 after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples gather together to plan for the future. Listen to what Luke writes: “When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son* of James. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, *and with His brothers.*” [Acts 1:13–14] Just weeks after the resurrection, all Jesus’

brothers are in the room. They've been converted. Those who hated Him as an earthly brother have now embraced Him as their heavenly brother (Heb. 2:11). This is the compassionate power of Jesus' word at work.

When Jesus was dedicated in the Temple shortly after His birth, Simeon prophesied of Mary, "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed — and a sword will pierce even your own soul — to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed'" (Luke 2:34–35). Certainly that was most evident at the cross; what suffering did Mary endure as she watched her son and Savior being crucified? She watched him being beaten, whipped, slapped, mocked, and crucified, and as she watched his pain and rejection, her heart was pierced with a sword also. But could her grief have been even greater? Could she also be grieving the death and absence of Joseph? Could she be grieving the rejection of Jesus by her other children? Could she be grieving the breakup of her family and home? And would not all that culminate at the cross?

And yet in that same event at the Temple, Simeon also prophesied, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel'" (Luke 2:30–32). At the same cross that pierced her soul with grief, Mary also saw the fulfillment of the salvation that was promised to her through the angel's announcement at her pregnancy and then affirmed by Simeon's prophecy. Without the cross, there could be no salvation, but with the cross there is salvation for Mary, for her sons, and for us! And notice, now as a result of their repentance, Mary now has five sons (the four, plus John), and John has four new brothers. This is the compassionate power of Jesus' word at work.

So Jesus' word to Mary is a compassionate word. It is a word of compassion that meets the real physical needs of her life. And it is a compassionate word by which He anticipates the provision of her spiritual needs as well. This is the son of Mary. This is the unique Son of God, Jesus Christ — the Savior of Mary, the Savior of His brothers, and the Savior of all men everywhere who will believe in Him.