

## Sermon – 12/11/2006 am

### Words from the Cross

Study Text: John 19:25-30

They crucified Jesus between two criminals at a place called the Skull. The soldiers mocked him as they cast lots for his clothes. The Jews stood by mocking him. The chief priests cried out *he saved others, himself he cannot save* (Mark 15:31) and *if you are the Son of God come down from the cross* (Matthew 27:40). *He was despised and rejected by men* as the prophet had said (Isaiah 53:3). But there were a handful of women who stood by the cross in silence.

The scene at Golgotha on that Friday some 2000 years ago was strange and awesome. Men have tried to depict it on canvas, and in film, but the written account we have in the Scriptures cannot be surpassed. Here is the account of an eyewitness, an account inspired by the Spirit of God. Other accounts and depictions will of necessity add to, or subtract from, this true and beautiful account. Do not rely on the words of others, or on the depictions of men. Read the gospels for yourself. You will be strangely blessed when you meditate on the Scriptures and especially this scene at Golgotha.

Jesus was nailed to a cross and as he hung there being mocked and blasphemed he spoke a number of times. He spoke seven words from the Cross. He did not answer those who mocked him. He did not revile those who reviled him. He spoke to his Father asking forgiveness for those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). He spoke to the criminal who repented and believed in him (Luke 24:43). He also spoke to his mother and his beloved disciple as we see in the passage before us.

### Woman Behold Your Son

Jesus was born into a human family. He was born of the Virgin Mary. As the eldest son in this family he had the responsibility of caring for his mother after her husband died. Since Joseph is never mentioned during the ministry of Jesus it is assumed that he had died. Now Jesus is dying and from the Cross he sees his mother standing in a group of women.

From the Cross Jesus had already reached out to the dying criminal. Now he reaches out to his own mother. It is natural and right that we are concerned for our immediate family, especially when we are dying. Anyone who fails to provide for their own family is worse than an unbeliever the Bible says (I Timothy 4:8). Jesus was not guilty of such a sin, or of any sin. He made provision for his mother.

*Woman, behold your son!* (19:26). Jesus spoke to his mother in the same way at the wedding in Cana. Calling her ‘woman’ rather than ‘mother’ was not unloving or disrespectful. Jesus had reasons to distance himself somewhat from his mother. Firstly, a more intimate address may have caused her more intense pain and grief as she watched her firstborn die. She may well have recalled Simeon’s words when she presented her son at the temple all those years ago – *a sword will pierce through your own soul also* (Luke 2:35).

Secondly, Mary his mother must not cling to her son any more than Mary Magdalene wanted to at the tomb. While she saw him as her son dying on the Cross, she must also see him as her

Lord dying for her sin. She was not saved just because she was the mother of Jesus any more than his brothers were, just because they were his brothers. Every human being, including Mary, must believe that Jesus died for them if they are to be saved. *Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother* said Jesus when told that his mother and brothers were calling him (Mark 3:35).

Jesus turned to the disciple whom he loved and said '**Behold your mother**'. *And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home* (19:27). The beloved disciple John was standing near the cross with these women. Where were the rest of his disciples? Judas had betrayed him, Peter had denied him, and the rest had fled. Only John was there to watch his Master die.

Where also we might ask were the brothers of Jesus? If you think Mary remained a virgin and Jesus had no brothers (or half brothers) you have not read, or not accepted the Scriptures (Mark 3:31, John 7:5). But why did Jesus ask John to look after his mother at this time? Since his brothers did not believe in him, he was probably more confident in having John look after his mother.

John took Mary, the mother of Jesus *into his own home* ('home' is not in the Greek). John cared for Mary after Jesus died. 'Roman Catholic exegesis has tended not so much as to see Mary coming under the care of the beloved disciple, as the reverse; and if the beloved disciple is also taken as an idealisation of all true disciples, the way is cleared to think of Mary as the mother of church' (D.A. Carson).

Such contorted thinking has led to the heretical practice of praying to Mary. Far from offering protection or blessing to Christians, it is she who needed caring for, according to this Scripture. Jesus did not tell John to pray to Mary, but to take her into his own home where he could pray with her and for her.

Who were the other women standing with Mary watching Jesus die on the cross? Were there three or four in the group – the Greek is not entirely clear. After looking at the other gospels we can be fairly certain that there were four women, namely:

Mary the mother of Jesus; Salome, Mary's sister, wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John; Mary the wife of Clopas and mother of James and Joseph and Mary Magdalene. Jesus had cast seven demons out of this Mary who was from Magdala in Galilee (she was not the prostitute who came to Jesus). In fact they were all from Galilee and had followed Jesus to Jerusalem at this time of Passover.

These women followed Jesus and ministered to him. They loved Jesus and were devoted to him. By going to his crucifixion they also displayed considerable courage. In this volatile atmosphere the crowd could easily have turned upon followers of Jesus with ridicule and more. But these women stood there bravely. They were the last at the cross, even watching where they buried him. They were the first to his tomb after the Sabbath.

And so it has been down through the history of the church. Women have often been the backbone of the church, lovingly and bravely following Jesus Christ and serving him. Some cry out for more recognition in the institution of the church and in its world, but most prefer to be noticed by Jesus and to be commended by him.

## I Thirst

Jesus had been on the cross for more than three hours when he said *I thirst*. No doubt he would have been dehydrated as the midday sun beat down on his lacerated body. He would have felt thirsty. He had refused the offer of wine mixed with myrrh as he was being nailed to the cross. That cocktail was supposed to relieve the pain. At this later occasion the soldiers responded to his cry by offering him some of their sour wine or vinegar to drink.

*They filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop and put it to his mouth (19:29).* This hyssop was probably the flower stalk of a marjoram type plant. A long stick was not necessary since, contrary to popular depictions, the cross was not very far off the ground.

John emphasises that Jesus said ‘I thirst’, not because he felt thirsty but so that Scripture might be fulfilled. The end of his earthly life was very near, but he knew that *all things were now accomplished* (19:28). The word translated as ‘accomplished’ is exactly the same as that translated as ‘finished’ in verse 30. It can also mean completed. Jesus knew his Father’s will and was obedient in every respect. He had completed the will of his Father and so could say *it is finished*.

His Father’s will was declared in the Scriptures, even down to the minutest detail. It was written that he would thirst. Just which Scripture Jesus was referring to, we cannot be sure. Psalm 22 was the source of the previous prophecy about his garments. Verse 15 of this Psalm reads – *my strength is dried up; like a potsherd and my tongue clings to my jaws*. Alternatively in Psalm 69:21 we find written – *they also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me wine vinegar to drink*.

## It Is Finished

When Jesus had received the wine vinegar he said *it is finished* (19:30). This was not a cry of despair or defeat but of completion and of victory. Jesus lived each day in the will of his Father. He knew every word of prophecy that was spoken about him and knew that now all had been fulfilled. He had accomplished all that his Father sent him to do.

Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He was ready to give up his spirit and die. He gave up his life – it was not taken from him (10:18). As God the Son he accomplished complete redemption for sinners, and those who believe are made complete in him (Colossians 2:10). He obtained complete salvation for those who believe.

Jesus lived each day in communion with his heavenly Father and in the knowledge of his word. He resisted the devil by quoting from this word. ‘It is written’ he kept on saying. Scripture cannot be broken (10:35). Every word must be fulfilled. The apostles learnt this from Jesus. Their preaching after Pentecost was based on the fulfilment of Scripture in Jesus Christ. These men knew the Scriptures and were convinced that what was written was true. Scripture must be fulfilled.

Is it not the same for us today? God has given us the Bible and every word in it must be fulfilled. If you walk close to the Lord, and know his will as revealed in Scripture, then you also will be able to say one day ‘I have finished the race, I have completed the task given me by the Lord (II Timothy 4:7).

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