

Woman Behold Your Son, Behold Your Mother

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Date: 19 February 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Can we open our Bibles again? John 19, reading in verse 25. Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved, standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother.

And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. These words of Christ from the cross, Woman, behold your son. And then saying to the disciple, John, Behold your mother.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is of course someone in our own tradition who does not really receive an awful lot of attention.

Perhaps we have overreacted to other traditions which perhaps emphasize Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, by anyone's reckoning, Mary was one of the most outstanding believers who ever lived.

[1 : 3 2] To be chosen by God, to be the bearer of the Son of God, was indeed a tremendous privilege. And I suppose one legitimate reason for not emphasizing Mary all that much is that the Bible says very little about Mary herself.

There is very little recorded of Mary and the information we have about her is all very scant. And that is entirely appropriate because, of course, the emphasis is not on the mother.

The emphasis must, of course, be on the son. And so we come this afternoon to John chapter 19. And we begin, I think, by way of an introduction, by noticing two ironies right away.

Notice there's an irony surrounding the clothing here. The soldiers were engaged in a cruel and humiliating act. There was a lottery going on.

There was a sort of gambling game, some sort of a poker game one imagines. When they had the Lord's clothes before him, and to fulfill the prophecy that we've been singing about, they cast lots for the clothing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 4 5] He had no more need for them. But you see the irony there. They were clothed in his physical clothing, but they really needed to be clothed in his righteousness.

They, in a sense, got it half right. They knew that they needed or wanted his clothing, but they saw it just in material terms.

They wanted his physical clothing, but all of them, except perhaps one, ignored the fact that he needed to be clothed in his righteousness. And even within the clothing, there's an irony itself, a double irony.

They didn't want to tear the clothes. And yet, wasn't there other material ripped that day? Wasn't the curtain of the temple ripped from bottom to top?

And so you see there's that idea of tearing going on, and tearing of clothes. No, the clothing of Jesus was not torn, but we see that the whole religious system was torn.

[3 : 50] The whole Old Testament paraphernalia was seen for what it was. It was a signpost pointing towards Christ. The temple, which had all these keep-out signs, was ripped apart, and the keep-out signs were torn down.

Instead, the sign was put up, Come near, all you who are weary and are heavy laden. And so there we have, and the soldiers, we have cruelty beside compassion.

We have their indifference besides the care of Christ. And so we see there's irony going on among the clothing. I think there's irony also going on with the idea of the wine.

You see that in verse 28 and 29. And I mention the wine because Mary is often, or at least on one occasion, linked to the whole wine idea.

Well, there we have in John chapter 2, you know the story, the very first miracle that the Lord Jesus Christ performed, the turning the water into wine.

[5 : 00] And you remember there, it's one of what we call the signs of John's Gospel. It is pointing towards who he is, that he is the Messiah. And there in John chapter 2, the wedding in Cana of Galilee, he produces the very best wine.

Remember, the scripture says, and most party hosts leave the cheap stuff until the end, when the guests wouldn't notice their palates have been dulled.

But he leaves the best wine until the very end. And so we've got that image, don't we, of kingship and redolence, and the one who brings the best wine.

The irony is here that he is on the cross, given the worst wine. And so we see that in an even greater display of his glory, it is not the best wine, but it's the worst wine.

He declares his glory in a greater way, hereby imbibing, eventually, the cheap wine. Because remember, of course, he had refused it a few moments before.

[6 : 04] And so again, this morning, just we're lightly noting these two ironies, the irony of the clothing, the irony of the wine, just to sketch in a little bit of the background here, surrounding the third of the seven sayings of Christ on the cross.

Those of you who were here last night, remember they're not the seven last words of Jesus. Up from the grave, he arose. He is not there. He is risen. He is king of kings and lord of lords.

And so this morning we come to what I think are strange words. They are enigmatic words. They are words which really, one would almost say, do not fit into the pattern of the other words on the cross.

At a communion service, we would maybe look for, I thirst. And we would maybe look for, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We would maybe look for today. You will be with me in paradise.

But these are perhaps, some people would say, not me, but some people would say, that these are the least of the spiritual, overtly spiritual, of the seven words of Christ from the cross.

[7 : 18] These words are enigmatic. They require a little bit of unpacking. Behold your son. Behold your mother. If you'll pardon me a little bit more of introduction, because I think we have to set the scene here before we unpack the text a little bit more.

A little cultural insight. Imagine the scene on the cross here. Now, there's a lot going on. It's a military operation. There's a heavy military presence.

It is a man's world. The scene around the cross was very tense. It was very macho, very militaristic.

I would not say sober, at this point anyway. There was a lot of laughing going on. There was a lot of jocular within the environment of the cross.

So what were these women doing there? Why were the women allowed so near the cross? That's a question that many of the scholars will ask.

[8 : 24] And what one leading New Testament scholar says is the answer is very simple. In terms of the New Testament, women were frankly nobodies. The authorities did not see them as threats.

Women were invisible. And so the fact that we had these women, plus John, at the cross is absolutely interesting.

Now, the Lord Jesus Christ was never, ever patronizing towards the women. Remember, we saw it last night. He saw it to other women there.

Do not weep for me, but weep for yourself. But what the Lord Jesus Christ did was that he transformed the experience of these women.

They were nobodies. They were invisible. Read Acts 8.3 when you get home. And you read there that the women were no longer invisible.

[9 : 27] Acts 8.3 says this, men and women were dragged off into prison. And so what the gospel did was, the gospel turned these invisible women into threats to the very power blocks of the Roman world.

These women, as they spread the gospel, speaking to people informally, along with the men who preached the word of God authoritatively, the Lord Jesus Christ turned these people into folk who would be responsible for, in their own unique, informal way, spreading the message of the gospel across the entire Roman world.

So that's the introduction. So what do we notice in these words? Well, it's one of the seven sayings that a lot of writers call it as the word of affection.

I think that's what Arthur Pink calls it in his interesting book, The Seven Sayings of Christ on the Cross. I think that's rather too sentimental.

I think it's much more than a word of affection. It is that, but it's so much more than that. As we look at this verse, I want us to notice I think four things that the verse is saying.

[10 : 51] Women, behold your son, behold your mother. Number one, following Jesus means a changed relationship to trouble.

We got that. Following Jesus means a changed relationship to trouble. A great thing about the scriptures is that the scriptures are real.

It's a real book about real people. Beloved, do not buy into the mythology that when you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ that your life at every level will appear to be better.

Do not buy into the mythology that following the Lord Jesus Christ leads to a charmed life where troubles and afflictions all fly away.

There are I'm sure people in this room this afternoon who have found the very opposite to be the case that it's since they followed Christ that their lives have suffered problem upon problem and difficulty upon difficulty.

[12 : 12] And even today as they go to the Lord's Supper they're having problems reading the signs. they believe that the signs are perhaps saying that they are being disobedient they are experiencing so much trouble in their lives that they are saying there must be something wrong with me I must be following the wrong path.

Especially when we live in this world of pretense. Shakespeare said all the world's a stage and we are actors on it and isn't that no more true than in the church of God?

Here we are we're all looking fine we're all smart we're all looking very together we are all looking as if life is going fine and yet the reality is that there is in our hidden lives things which are falling apart.

There are marriages that are screaming there's personalities that are disintegrating there are bodies which are breaking down there are relationships which are tense and we are saying what sort of a monster am I?

Has God abandoned me? Well look at the whole Mary story here is Mary the mother of Jesus simply because she had followed Jesus and indeed even more than that was the mother of Jesus simply because of that yet again she is at this place of trouble she is at the foot of the cross seeing her son being impaled before a sniggering world.

[13 : 47] You remember the Mary story? It's reckoned that Mary when she gave birth was 15 16 years of age that's what the scholars tell us a pregnancy which was unexpected a birth which was less than ideal giving birth in a buyer amongst stinking animals the reaction of unbelief from her fiancé when she tells him the story an angel came and said that I was going to give birth the religious leaders of the day accused her of illegitimate behaviour the religious leaders were sniping at her the religious leaders were saying you are an immoral woman the son is born not for her a retreat back to the home not for her a little cradle and pink or blue wallpaper in the wall not for her domestic bliss but they had to flee to

Egypt because the king wanted to kill her son and then she heard him preach she heard him preach in the synagogue and how proud she must have been her boy preaching at the synagogue imagine the pain look for they wanted to stone him and throw him over a hill and there she stands now at the foot of the cross witnessing the humiliation of her son there is only a pain that a woman can feel there are only emotions which are particular to the feminine psyche and there we have this dear woman seeing her son being mauled by the mob her boy her firstborn son and all that she could offer at that time was the comfort of her presence yes following

Jesus means a changed relationship to trouble following Jesus means that when we are close to him he is outside the camp bearing our reproach but we are so often connected to that same reproach in the life of any believer the cross looms in the life of any believer we have the paradox of the cross the paradox of the cross is this there is reconciliation with god there is forgiveness of sin and there is freedom and joy that we have never known but there's also the hatred and animosity of this world oh beloved the hatred and animosity of the world is enough for the believer to to bear but as Mary stands there there is a fortitude as Mary stands there yes her heart was breaking but there is a new relationship to trouble she knows that beyond the cross there is a crown she knows that beyond the mess there is a mess she knows that beyond the hell there is hope and that's true for us in our own situations in life whatever situation we are in the cross is there and the cross is a whole story there is pain but there's also power isn't there you see she's not there as his mother she's not there totally as his mother as she said at the water into wine do as he tells you yes fallen

Jesus gives us a new relationship to trouble but the second thing the verses tell us is this that fallen Jesus means a changed relationship to family now this is where this saying becomes somewhat non-spiritual here it is some would say that I wouldn't it says woman behold your son then he said to his disciple behold your mother isn't it interesting that here as he hangs on the cross he is even then the man under the law and that's the thing about the cross he is under the law he is bearing the curse of breaking the law it is for Christ on the cross it is all law he is bearing the law and it is honour your father and your mother now I don't know about you but that is one of the commandments which we are a little bit more casual about honouring our father and our mother are we bought into the philosophy of our culture our culture is casual and dispensable maybe someone needs to prepare for the

Lord's supper tomorrow by healing a relationship with their parents again I don't know what's going on I don't know most of you here and I'm out of here on Monday morning but is there someone here who's got a tortured dysfunctional relationship with their parents and I don't know your story has it been brought about by egotistical self centred sin maybe we have to restore that relationship email the phone call the apology before we sit at the Lord's table the Lord who on the cross said and was fulfilling this commandment honour your father and your mother he is seeing his mother and he is honouring her he's arranging care for his widowed mother from the cross now why not his brothers and sisters why did he say to

[20 : 21] John here is your mother the answer I think is this that and we'll unpack this a little bit later his brothers and sisters were not believers at this point James Joseph Judas Simon and his sisters he marked six three for the whole list but in John he sees a kindred spirit he wants his mother to be looked after because he's going to die he's going to be raised again 40 days later he's going to ascend but he wants John to look after the mother now in the most reverent terms I can think of did he not have more important things on his mind here he was bearing the sins of his people this is the apex of history there he is hanging atoning for sin he is experiencing and he is about to experience even more the wrath and curse of

God here he is arranging care for his mum as he hangs there a figure catches his eyes this tells us many things but one thing it tells is this it's more than a hint that Calvary was not a defeat for him but rather Calvary was a victory because he was not dispossessed of his faculties he wasn't merely floating along the stream of something that he could not control Calvary was a victory here and the Lord Jesus Christ was one who not only paid a price for broken commandments ours not his but here he is even to the end keeping the commandments meticulously you see that was his relationship to the law he kept the law at every single point even right up to his death on the cross and he kept what many of us regard whether we articulate it or not as one of the less important commandments and again as we prepare for the

Lord's supper tomorrow maybe it's intensely practical maybe it's over practical again some writer says that our spiritual relationships must not ignore the responsibilities of nature do some of us spend more time at church meetings than we do in our family do some of us spend more time cultivating our own spiritual lives going to every single meeting in the planet rather than investing in our families honour your father and your mother but I move on thirdly to a third point here from the text and that says that following Jesus means a new perspective on failure new relationship to trouble new relationship to family thirdly a new perspective on failure woman behold your son

Matthew 26 56 tells a story all the disciples had fled all of them and now we find here that all the women were there and one of them had come back John now all the disciples had fled that must have been an absolutely bitter blow for Jesus yes it had to fulfill prophecy the prophet said he shall tread the wine press alone he had to be there on the cross of Calvary absolutely alone his friends his supporters his colleagues his disciples who said master we will follow you wherever you go and now they'd gone and this was the one he expected to be there John the disciple whom Jesus loved the one who was the inner of the inner circle the one who was his closest emotional spiritual ally the one who was with him through thick and through thin gone they slept in the garden they fled at the cross beloved this is the measure of us let's not come with our sense of power our sense of prestige and stickability

John and the disciples are typical of us we flee this is a picture of us how feeble our faith is would we be any better the Bible actually says Matthew 26 31 that they were scandalized because of him the message was so offensive the message was so brutal the message was so counter cultural it went against everything that society believed at that time that they couldn't stand it are you embarrassed about the gospel his message can be so radical his message is so counter cultural and against the flow in a era of self-help pop psychology when we are king the gospel says no all our righteousness are as filthy rags the gospel says that

[26 : 33] Jesus Christ is Lord the gospel says that there is one mediator between God and man the man Christ Jesus the gospel says Jesus is the way the truth and the life the gospel says that there is one way God said to get to heaven Jesus is the only way and here we are in our multi-faith multicultural world yes we could easily run away we can be like Samson without hair without power but that's not the point following Jesus means a new perspective on failure John is back he's back are you back this afternoon are you back or do you want to come back maybe the folk who ought to hear this word aren't here because they're frightened they're frightened of the church they're frightened of the reception they'll get they're frightened of the perceived judgmentalism they're frightened of yes they've been in the world yes they've back slid yes they have been weak what do we do with our weak people in the church of

God do we remember their failures forever and ever and ever do we remember yes that was a person who at that very point when the pressure was on like John fled do we laugh and say what sort of a person are they yeah told you so there's one of those weak Christians yeah we knew it would happen what about you so someone here who just in their own lives is aware of so many secret sins and even doesn't want to go to the Lord's table tomorrow there may even be some of you and what you'll do is you'll put the cup to your lips but you wouldn't take it you'll go through the motion with the bread and everybody thinks that you've taken communion but you really haven't because you know your life's not right with God what message do we have for the johns for the people who have fled him it's come back it isn't this fascinating what does

Jesus do with failures I think of two big failures number one is Peter he makes him the key preacher in Acts chapter two which builds the church he preaches what does he do with this man john he entrusts his mother into her care that's what Jesus does Christ does not rebuke him he takes him in to be of a culture in this congregation it takes in failures because I don't know about you but when it comes to failing our hands are up yes there's a new perspective in failure the gospel perspective in failure is that repentant failures who come back in weakness are taken in by the church of God and the reception they get is come on in we know how you feel we've been there we have been there

I don't know who I'm talking to but the very nature of the case but I am saying come back tomorrow come back and Christ will take you fall in Christ means a new perspective on trouble new perspective on family a new perspective on failure but from these verses fall in Christ means a new perspective on Christ himself here is little known fact number six Jesus in the whole of the Bible never ever refers to Jesus as his mother and here we have it again woman behold your son now it's not a impolite phrase woman it sounds a bit if you young people called your mother woman it's a little bit cheeky but in that culture it's more like you know if you come across some of our friends from the southern states of America they say ma'am they call ma'am it's a very polite word ma'am behold your son now why does

Jesus never refer to Mary as his mother why does you not do that we'll come to that in a minute but what we see here is woman behold your son now John was not her son John was not even related to Mary and yet from the cross he's saying to Mary woman behold your mother isn't this the birth of the church here on the cross when was the church born there's an argument for the church was born in Eden born and demolished and reborn again within seconds the church when was it born was it born in Abraham Abrahamic covenant your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heaven circumcision was the church born then was the church born when

[33 : 11] Jesus took his disciples together was the church born in Acts 2 the day of Pentecost take your pick when was the church born here we see a picture of the church of God that relationships change that the intimacy of church relationships are deep woman behold your son because of the change in which I have affected in humanity I am forging together new relationships relationships which will be deep relationships which will be close he uses this picture we have that picture just now in our own church our own churches wherever we come from whatever denomination we belong to whatever tradition that because of what Christ has done there are new relationships within the family of God and that's what we are beloved we are family we are together we are in the most intimate in the church of God the most intimate beautiful closest family that you could ever imagine the relationships of the world have been recreated because this recreates the relationships and they are in a new level is that the perception people have in Scotland that this family of the church of God in a wonderful way have been recreated but we see here that Mary is given dignity not deity that's important it's all myself evident dignity not deity she is highly favoured yes queen of heaven no she knew as well as anyone did that there was no fast track to heaven yes she bore

God in the flesh but at this point she is with everybody else she's depending on Christ for everything you see there's a change in her relationship if there ever was not a change in her relationship she needed to see him as saviour his title the son of God is above every other relationship this is not Mary the Madonna this is the sinner who needs a saviour and so tomorrow God willing when we come together round the Lord's table what are these verses saying to us we sit down and we take the bread and the wine and from this passage we see number one trouble has purpose it's not random it's not a mess trouble has purpose we see number two our relationship to our families is different is different because we've got to obey our own earthly families yeah but we're also at a family meal and that's what we're having tomorrow it's a family meal we're all there

I don't know what family meals are like in your home they're not all sweetness and light sometimes there's tensions sometimes there's undercurrents resentments tense affairs sometimes family meals are disasters but that's not going to happen tomorrow is it because what a good father does is a good father loves to see his family together a good father presides around the table and all the children are there that's what's going to happen tomorrow isn't it our father in heaven is hosting a meal and there's going to be all sorts at that table there's going to be the the John you know the black sheep the awkward one but they're going to be there because they want to be there and they love the father he's a good kid bearing in mind that none of us are good going to be there tomorrow's a gathering of the awkward squad we're not all the same but we're all the same in this respect we all have the same father and we're in a new relationship brother and sister how do we leave Mary well we don't hear much of

Mary but the last word about Mary isn't in Acts 1-4 in the upper room there and who's with her her family they have been changed by Jesus his brothers and sister changed by Jesus they have all become followers of their crucified and risen brother they're in the upper room and they're praying and they're waiting for the Holy Spirit to come that's what the family does whenever it gathers waits for the Spirit to come is that what tomorrow's going to be is it going to be some tense religious ceremony like the parading of the guard run like a swizz clock in a military operation or is it going to be a more messy affair when the family get together and revel in that one member of the family who's not there the elder brother not there he is there he's at the very center of it let's thank

God for these new relationships can we just bow our heads as we pray our gracious God we thank you for these words the fact that the Lord said to his mother woman because the great relationship was that she was a sinner coming to a savior thank you for the new relationships which the gospel give may we enjoy these new relationships tomorrow as we sit together around the Lord's table brothers and sisters in Christ we thank you for the example of Mary who met trouble because of her love for Jesus the servant is not greater than the master prepare us tomorrow to come together for the family meal with all our sin with all our mess with all our inadequacy depending on nothing apart from

[42 : 21] Jesus and his righteousness be the host at the meal forgive us our many sins Amen and thank you in in ■■■■