3-8-20

John 19:25b-27

The apostle John records for us the third thing that Jesus said from the cross. Just from these few verses there is much to consider in His words and in the life of Mary and in the fact that John was even there at all.

Think about Mary’s life. As a young girl, she was visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she would bear the Son of God; the Messiah. It is to her credit that she referred to herself as the Lord’s handmaid and accepted what God wanted her to do. Now, you would think, that if anybody deserved an easy life here on earth, it would be Mary. She would give birth to the Son of God; she would be responsible for raising the Christ through childhood. Surly, God would give her an easy path; surly, God would reward her in this life with all good things.

But we know that this is not the case. To begin with, she is unmarried and pregnant. That was a big deal back then. She lived in a small town and everyone would have known. Because she was engaged to Joseph at the time, she could have been stoned to death for adultery. She had to explain all this to Joseph. It is reasonable that he had to be visited by an angel to convince him of the truth of Mary’s story.

Well into her eighth month, she had to make a seventy-mile journey to Bethlehem, probably walking. She ends up giving birth to her firstborn child in a stable; and then has to put Him in a manger for a bed. For a time, she is forced to leave her homeland and live in Egypt, before she is able to return to her hometown of Nazareth; a town looked down on by all of Israel.

Now, she stands before a cross that her dearly beloved son has been nailed to. The words spoken to her by the prophet Simeon must have come to her mind, “and a sword will pierce even your own soul”. We can imagine her going back in her mind to holding Him as her baby, to watching Him play as a child, to see Him grow into a young man. Perhaps she thought back over the past few years and all the fear she had for His safety as He called out religious leaders in their hypocrisy. Now that sword cut through her soul as she saw Him hanging there and all the people savagely mocking and tormenting Him.

There is something very important for us to learn here from Mary’s life: To follow Jesus is no guarantee of an easy life; in fact, it almost guarantees the opposite. The very example of Mary’s life demonstrates the hypocrisy of those who teach that following Jesus leads to health and wealth and no problems. These are false teachers and they are led astray by satan. Unfortunately, there are many who have itching ears and want to have them scratched by these teachings; these, too, have allowed themselves to be seduced by satan.

Part of our sanctification process leads us to an understanding of how sinful we are; how much we have turned against God. Part of the process is also learning how evil sin is and how repulsive it is to our holy God. Hopefully, we come to the point that we realize that we don’t deserve anything good; not in this life or the one after. The more we realize this, the more we can appreciate how merciful and loving our God truly is. One of the amazing things about the Christian life is the knowledge that even the suffering works out to our benefit. Our Christian life should lead us to depend on God in all things, because He does care for us, and He is the One who can bring us into eternal life.

We read that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” was also standing nearby. This was the apostle John. Remember how before Jesus’ arrest, all the disciples declared their loyalty to Jesus; that they were ready to die with Him. Remember also that when the moment came, they all ran and left Jesus to the soldiers.

All of these disciples were brave and loyal men or they wouldn’t have stayed with Jesus throughout His ministry. They stood by Him in the face of the powerful religious leaders; they went with Him to Jerusalem even though they understood that it might cost them their lives. When the soldiers came, they were ready to fight, as Peter demonstrated when he drew his sword. But, at that crucial moment, they fled, leaving Jesus alone.

Two things happened here that almost seem contradictory. When the disciples fled, it was their decision to do so. They were fully responsible for abandoning Jesus. At the same time, this took place according to God’s sovereign will. Jesus had already told them what would take place as recorded in Matthew 26:31, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.’” In saying this, Jesus quoted a prophecy from Zechariah.

God removed the grace that strengthened the disciples temporarily so that Jesus would be alone. Jesus had to bear the weight and consequences of sin by Himself. In this way, we see again that God is the Saviour of His people; no human-being can claim any part in salvation. Additionally, God had other plans for the disciples; they still had work to do. Once filled with the Holy Spirit, they never turned their backs on Christ again. They glorified God in the rest of their lives and also in their deaths.

Christians are still called to glorify God in our lives. Once we accept Jesus as Saviour, we become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. He will not leave us, which is why we must be so careful to not grieve Him. Every day of our lives ought to reflect Christ, whether we are at work or school or some social gathering. Christianity is a way of life, and a way of looking at the world and what takes place in it. Make it a point to never be guilty of turning our backs on Jesus; it is for Christians to stand by Him now no matter what.

While Jesus was crucified, John came back. We refer to John as the apostle of love; here his love for Jesus draws him out of hiding to be near His Messiah. This is a wonderful lesson for us: For those times when we fail; for those times when we forsake Christ, we need only come back to Him. See how Jesus accepted John and didn’t scold him for running away. In fact, John was then given a very important work to do; Jesus made him responsible for someone very precious to Him; His own mother. When we turn back to Jesus, He will lovingly take us back without rebuke; perhaps He will even give us an important task for His glory.

In Jesus’ words, we find not only the fulfillment of one of the ten commandments, but also Christ’s concern for basic human need. The last time we read of Mary’s husband, Joseph, was in Luke 2 when Jesus was 12 years old. It is most likely that at this time, Mary was a widow. A widow in these times was in trouble unless she had a son to provide for her. As eldest Son, Jesus provided for His mother.

Earlier, we considered how Jesus, while in physical and spiritual torment, still heard the request of a single sinner; the thief crucified beside Him asking forgiveness. Here, while still carrying the weight of all these things, He performs the duty of a Son to honor His parents by providing for His mother.

Jesus again sets a perfect example. He did so earlier when praying for those who persecuted Him. Now, He does so again in obeying Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and mother”. Considering what Jesus was going through, we might consider Him excused from this command at this moment; but Jesus did not consider Himself excused. He honored His mother by seeing to it she was provided for. We don’t know why Jesus didn’t leave her in the hands of His brothers, but we know that He did what was best. He always does.

Jesus said to John “Behold, your mother.” By saying this, John was to hold her in the same esteem and respect as he would his own mother, according to the commandment. Think about John’s life now also. He was soon to become an apostle, filled with the Holy Spirit, and given great responsibilities in the new church in Jerusalem, and later in Asia. From this we learn that our God given family duties are not to be neglected no matter what our Christian duties are. We must do our best to balance so that we fulfill all that we are called to do.

Both Jesus and John did the work that God had for them to do. But Jesus did not neglect Mary and provided for her in His death. John took Mary into his own household from that time on, while ministering as an apostle of Christ. In John chapter 20, we read of Peter and John running to the tomb after Mary Magdalene reported it empty. We are told that when John entered the tomb and saw it empty except for the grave clothes, he believed. Verse 10 tells us that the disciples then went to their own homes. Why? Surly, John went home to tell Mary that her Son had risen from the dead.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the master who went away leaving his slaves in charge of his money; his talents. Upon his return, those slaves who had done well with what the master had given them were rewarded. Part of their reward was greater responsibility in the master’s kingdom. John did well with what Jesus had given him to do. Look at what he got to do at the end of his earthly life; the revelation. The last book of the Bible records what God allowed John to see and write down for all the coming generations of believers. What an awesome privilege to see these things and record them for future millions.

We notice that Jesus addresses Mary as “Woman”. This is the same way He refers to her at the wedding in Cana. It is a term of endearment. Throughout the Gospel accounts, Mary is referred to as Jesus’ mother, but Jesus never calls her that. These things show us that we must be careful here. Mary is sometimes called “the mother of God”. But God, even God the Son, existed since eternity past; existed long before Mary was conceived. So, yes, Mary gave birth to the man Jesus and was his mother; but God Himself already existed having life in Himself, without father or mother.

From the cross, Jesus said to Mary, “Woman, behold, your son.” Obviously, Jesus was speaking of the apostle John. Mary knew that Jesus was providing for her and that John would take care of her from then on as if she were his own mother. Her heart was broken at the sight of her Son on the cross, but she didn’t have to be concerned about her own future. How kind and caring and loving is our Saviour; always, He puts others ahead of Himself.

There is another dimension to what Jesus said; Woman, behold, your son. Mary was indeed blessed among women; she was certainly favored by God; all generations count her blessed. But Mary was also a sinful human-being. She was a person under the curse of original sin from the Garden of Eden. Her heart was rebellious against God; her natural tendencies were toward evil. She needed salvation.

She needed to behold her son, Jesus. She needed to look upon Him for salvation. She needed to depend on the work He was doing there on that cross for the forgiveness of her sins and to restore her fellowship with God the Father. She needed exactly the same things that each of us need.

Her understanding of these things was probably only dim at best. But we read in Acts 1:14, that she was with the disciples and many others in the upper room in prayer. John was keeping her with them. She would have been there when the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost and she would have received that wonderful gift. Along with that, she would have received full understanding, just as John did. All these good things, Jesus gave to them, in love and grace and mercy. All these good things, Jesus offers to us, if only we will accept Him as our Saviour and King.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we praise You and are astounded at the grace You were able to show on the cross. The suffering You endured on our behalf is beyond our ability to comprehend; yet in the midst of it, You showed compassion to both a thief and Your mother. We rest assured now that You have that same compassion for us: You will forgive us and You will provide for us.

Lord, we ask for the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit. For those of us who still have parents living, that we would honor them. That the young who are living with parents would honor them by obedience. For those of us who have left home that we would honor out parents with kindness and continued prayer. For we who have children and grand-children, keep forefront in our minds our responsibility to teach them about You.

Merciful Father, in our minds, we gaze upon Your only begotten Son, hanging on that cross. He is there because of the sin of each one of us. And still, He calls to us; You call to us; to come to Him and accept the gift of undeserved forgiveness. Glorious Lord, You are worthy of all praise and glory.

We pray these things in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ

Amen