

Thorn-Crowned Devotions

Week Three

So Far

¹⁷and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹⁹Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’

²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”

²²Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’

²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,²⁴so they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.’

This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, ‘They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.’ So the soldiers did these things, ...

John 19:17–24

The Gospel of John is different from the other three Gospels. Mark, Matthew, and Luke take a similar viewpoint, *synoptic*, of the life of Christ following the same basic outline. Each one tells some unique story or event, but structurally they similar. John isn’t.

As we began this week of reading and meditating on Jesus’ death, it is good to read John’s account of these events *so far*.

Nothing is said of the events of the trip except to note that Jesus made it to the place of a skull, Golgotha. He places Jesus in the middle, but says nothing about the two men's crimes or their taunts.

In fact, the only outrage shown an innocent man being crucified is a squabble between Pilate and the chief priests over the inscription. To paraphrase the Roman governor's response, "We have crucified the King of the Jews so it's over!"

John does point out as an actual eyewitness that they took Jesus' clothes. Since he wasn't going to be needing them, the soldiers divided them amongst themselves as fairly as possible. The tunic was seamless, so to preserve its value they cast lots to see who would get it intact. Their attitude was, "we are in charge of this crucifixion and can do whatever we want!" But they weren't and even their behavior about Jesus' clothing had been scripted long ago by the God who controls even games of chance.

John records the words of prophecy from Psalm 22, a psalm of David where he looked ahead through the Spirit and wrote of this day,

"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

The Lord was in charge of his own crucifixion!

True, the Roman soldiers were acting according to their own character as underpaid warriors occupying a foreign country. They took his clothes because they wanted them without realizing he allowed them to do so and had foretold that they would. They would have laughed at the idea.

The Roman governor and the chief priests squabbled over the exact description of Jesus' crime written and placed over his head. Both arguing selfishly over stating correctly this injustice to put themselves in the most favorable light.

All were unable to change the truth.

God had chosen Jesus as King of the Jews!

The Women

... but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

John 19:25

There were four women standing at the foot of the cross: his mother, her sister, a woman who was married to a man named Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

It is an up close vigil that they are keeping. Others pass by, some taunt, others look on when at a safe distance, but they are there.

Mary, his mother, has been there from the beginning of his life and now stands here grieving over her son's impending death.

Likely Mary's sister stood by Jesus' manger bed in Bethlehem admiring her nephew with wonder and joy. Now she grieves for both nephew and sister.

Of the other Mary, the wife of Clopas, we know nothing more for certain than what is told. Her husband may have been a brother to Joseph. She could also be an aunt by marriage.

Mary Magdalene, Luke tells us, became a disciple after he cast seven demons out of her (8:2). Having gone from the horrors of demon possession, she sought to serve along with the other women (8:2-3). Death would not stop her work, she determined to put spices in the wrappings around his dead body as soon as possible.

All of were believers. All committed to the Lord and to helping one another. Each of the three, there to comfort Mary, his mother, in her hour of grief.

He wants us to stand together in times of grief.

Mother

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, ...”

John 19:26a

It is impossible to tell the story of Jesus without telling of His mother. She is foretold in prophetic Scripture, Isaiah 7:14,

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The miracle of His birth was prophesied, but not clearly understood until Matthew, looking back with opened eyes, cites Isaiah to explain fulfillment in virgin birth.

Luke tells us that Mary herself questioned how something so impossible would happen. Knowing that it would occur by the power of God, not through man, she believed and accepted His will.

She was richly rewarded for her faith, but it cost her dearly from that moment on. She was blessed and was a blessing to her relative, Elizabeth, who confirmed miraculous birth and the identity of her son (*Luke 1:42-45*).

It is her faith, prior to this confirmation, which is blessed. Believing God would do as He said, even if it was impossible.

Perhaps it was that faith which sustained her through the miserable trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the last weeks of pregnancy. She remembered the words in the agony of child birth.

With a mother's love, she treasured the report of the shepherd's regarding the announcement of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (*Luke 2:19*).

Later in the temple, she receives a prophecy from Simeon that Jesus was salvation. He also warns her that a sword would pierce her own soul (2:35). Now she feels the sword.

Travelling from Bethlehem she was taken by Joseph to Egypt escaping the slaughter of her infant son (*Matthew 2:13-14*). She would return to Nazareth with her husband and son (2:22-23).

It was she who would urge upon him to use his powers to demonstrate who he was before his time (*John 2:3-5*). Gently he would rebuke her and perform a stealth miracle. He knew the timing, she didn't.

Later she would join with his brothers and sisters seeking to remove him, for His own welfare from the crowds (*Mark 3:20-21; 31*). This incident reminds us that faith is more important than family, for it is faith that makes us part of his family. It is not physical birth and kinship, but birth accomplished by the Spirit which is vital to life everlasting.

She stands now nearby the cross upon which the Savior, her miraculous son, is dying in cruel torture.

What of this woman, ... mother.

Behold your Son

... he said to his mother,
 “Woman, behold, your son!”

John 19:26b

In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ relationship with his mother begins and ends with this title, *Woman* (see *Genesis 2:23*). In *2:4*, he addressed her with honor when she nudged him to do something about the wine failing. Now he uses this title of respect to care for her now.

Half of the blessing is now bestowed. Jesus is blessing his mother by putting her into a familial relationship with his beloved disciple (*13:23-25*). What was her role?

It was the role of any widow with a grown son, the role of the caregiver of childhood and youth now becoming the cared for by the one she raised. This is evidenced in the statement in the next verse that the disciple took her to his own home. Not to clean it and cook, but to be cared for and loved.

This points also to the compassion of Jesus, who is suffering horribly in the agonies of the cross. One indicator of the struggle to breath so as to sustain life is the ever increasing shortness of expression as breath is exhaled. In the Greek and English this is but six syllables. The subsequent words to the disciple is but four. In all that pain, Jesus was conscious of his responsibility to his mother and to her suffering. What agony to watch someone in such terrible torment whom she had carried, suffered for in birth, cared for and raised. The sword was piercing her heart (*Luke 2:35*) and Jesus spared her further pain. From that hour she was taken from this spot to a loving home.

Behold your mother

Then he said to the disciple,

“Behold, your mother!”

And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

John 19:27

Here is the other half of the blessing. The disciple is given the responsibility of Jesus’ mother. The time for motherly care was long past, but the time for caring for mother was still upon them.

We find this custom unusual now as it really was then. Keener in the IVP Bible Background Commentary writes,

Dying fathers could exhort sons to take care of surviving mothers (which they normally would do); for a disciple to be accorded a role in his teacher’s family was a great honor to the disciple (disciples sometimes called their teachers “father”).

This was a great honor to bestow upon a disciple, but it was not without expense and sacrifice. This is ever true in the service of the Lord, but what riches of reward both now and in the kingdom for this beloved disciple.

He is not named. This can be accounted for in the likelihood that it is John, the author of this account and associate of Peter (*13:23-24; 21:7, 20; Acts 3:1; 8:14*).

I think that Jesus’ words were intended to remove His mother from the scene to spare her further agony. It certainly was to provide for her the rest of her life which may have stretched on for decades. Jesus would rise from the dead, but He would not be there personally to care for her and to hold her hand as she breathed her last, but the disciple would.