

John 19:23-30

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn back to the chapter, the second chapter that we read, John chapter 19 and verse 25. We're gathering around the cross this evening. We're watching that terrible sight of Jesus hanging in agony on the cross. And we're also taking note of other people who are nearby.

Verse 25, near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, dear woman, here is your son. Those of you who are familiar with the Old Bible, I don't suppose there are many of you who grew up with the King James Version like I did, but in the Old Bible it makes use of the word behold. Those of you who read the ESV, the ESV uses that word as well, behold, which is a slightly more accurate translation than simply here is. It's behold, there's an intensity.

Of course, it's not a word that we use in the modern English language, is it? We don't say to each other, well, did you behold that clock? I mean, you just don't use that, do you? Because it just, it's lost its, it's lost its use in common English parlance. But we've missed something by, by, by losing this word because there's an intensity about it. Because when you behold something, you're giving it your attention, your undivided attention. It's not just glancing at something, you're focusing all your attention on it. And so that is what Jesus told his mother to do, behold your son. Here, look at your son. I want us to focus our attention this evening on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Because I think I said to you this morning that we're connecting because we're so near that time of the year when lots of people celebrate the birth of Jesus and yet at the same time in communion we're celebrating the death of Jesus. We're looking for passages and verses in the Bible that connect the two events. Well, here's not only a passage, but here is a person who connects the birth and Jesus. In fact, to my reckoning anyway, here is the only person who was both present at the birth of Jesus and present at his death at Calvary. Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary, the mother of God. Kind of jars, doesn't it? There's something quite awkward about that title, mother of God. It's a kind of contradiction that becomes immediately apparent.

[3 : 38] It's also used as a profanity. It might interest you to know that the title, mother of God, did not originate with Ted Hastings in line of duty. The phrase actually goes back centuries. And it was at one time the center of deep controversy within the Christian church, so much so that in the fifth century an entire council had to be called to try to decide whether this title, mother of God, was a legitimate one or not. They decided that it was, but not without fierce opposition. Is it correct to call Mary the mother of God? It's a bit like saying God died on the cross at Calvary. Is it right to use that kind of expression? Well, of course, it depends on what you mean.

It needs explanation. If by saying God died at Calvary, you mean that God went out of existence. Of course he didn't. God cannot go out of existence. But nonetheless, Jesus, who died on the cross, was God.

He was very God, as we saw this morning. In fact, I think it was the apostle Peter that accused the Jewish ruling leaders on the day of Pentecost of putting to death the Lord of glory.

In other words, you put God to death. You put the Lord of glory to death. It doesn't seem to make sense though, doesn't it? It's a contradiction. And it's the same with mother of God. That too needs explanation. In the fourth century, a man called Nestorius disagreed fervently with the use of the title. If you really want to be academic about it, it was a Greek title called Theotokos, mother of God or God bearer. And he maintained, you can't call Mary the mother of God. That's absurd.

So he coined the phrase Christotokos, which means the bearer of Christ. Nestorius was afraid that if we joined the divine and the human, then the human nature would be consumed so much by the divine that we would lose sight of Jesus' true and complete human nature. And the rest is history. I'll leave it to you to study. So if we think that it means that Mary was the source of God's existence

from all eternity, then of course that's entirely wrong. But if it means that when God became one of us, when he became human, when he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and she went on to give birth to him, then it is entirely correct to say that Mary was the mother of God. Indeed, the blunt title brings the incarnation into sharp focus. But it also means that Jesus had a real mother.

[7 : 06] And he enjoyed real human family relationships, including the devoted love of a mother that followed him his whole life. Which meant that Jesus loved Mary, not just one of his people, but he loved her as his mother. And he knew the love of a mother, which of course made it all the more agonizing for both of them as Jesus hung and suffered at Calvary. It was immensely agonizing for her. I mean, we always say this, that no parent ought to witness the death of their child. And I know what we mean by that. It just goes beyond our most horrific imagination to lose. It's your worst nightmare. But all the more so when you're watching your own son dying in agony on a Roman cross. But it was part of his suffering as well for him to hang on the cross and to see his mother there, the mother who had brought him into this world and who had given him her love and her devotion his, her whole life. He knew from his own upbringing how much she loved him. But he also knew from his own nature as God how much a parent loves his child. Like in Psalm 103, we read such pity as a father or a mother hath unto his children dear, like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear. What pain. We can only imagine the pain that she felt within herself, not only seeing her son dying on the cross, but in the horrendous way that he was suffering. The last thing that we ever want. We would do anything to protect our children. We would do anything. We would lay down our lives for our children. And I'm sure Mary would have done the same thing had she had the choice. But now she is now watching her son and she knows she can't do a thing to help him or give him relief in any way.

But a hundred years ago, there was a writer, a very influential writer called Arthur Pink. And some of the older ones will have read some of his writings. And he wrote a comment. He had a particular style of bringing things to life. And this is what he says about this awful, horrific scene around the cross. What sorrow it must have caused her when because there was no room in the inn, she had to lay her newborn. Of course, he goes all the way back to the beginning of Jesus' life, which is what we're doing this evening. What sorrow it must have caused her when because there was no room at the inn, she had to lay her newborn babe in the manger. What anguish must have been hers when she learned of Herod's purpose to destroy her infant's life. What trouble was given her when she was forced on his account to flee into a foreign country and sojourned for several years in the land of Egypt.

What piercings of soul must have been hers when she saw her son despised and rejected of men. What grief must have wrung her heart as she beheld him hated and persecuted by his own nation. And who can estimate what she passed through as she stood there at the cross? And this is what he says, if Christ was the man of sorrows, was she not the woman of sorrows?

But not only was there natural anguish in Mary watching her son being put to death, but there must have been confusion as well because if you remember all the way back to when he was born, the angel promised this. Listen to the words of the angel.

[11 : 38] She must have remembered that promise. And it's very likely that the promise came back to her at that moment when she's watching Jesus dying and she must have wondered, well, where is the fulfillment of this promise? The promise that he will be great?

Well, that came true for a while. The promise was that he will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

What kind of throne is this? Where he's hanging on a Roman cross in agony and where in the next few hours he is going to die.

But the fact is that from the very beginning, that moment when the angel announced that she would become pregnant by the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit, a moment that we celebrate as part of our Christmas festivities, festivities, she wasn't celebrating. Luke tells us that she was greatly troubled at the saying.

And as time went on, other things deeply troubled her as well. Like, for example, a few days later after the birth of Jesus when she went to Simeon and Simeon said to Mary, a sword will pierce your own soul also.

[13 : 21] The fact is, it can't have been easy for Mary to be the mother of Jesus. There was this birth, as we've just thought about, the attempts that Herod made to destroy him and the fear that there must have been in Mary and Joseph.

There was that prophecy of Simeon, a sword will pierce your own soul also. But as time went on and as Jesus grew up and as the reality of having the Son of God growing up in your household, have you ever thought of how difficult it must have been to have the Son of God as one of your children?

Just imagine it for a moment. As a parent myself, I've lost count of the number of times I've had to apologize to my kids for having lost my temper or having said the wrong thing or having been unfair. And the amount of times that you have to say to your kids, that was wrong of me. And they tell us in all the books that parents, it's important to say you're sorry to your kids. Well, she would have had to be saying her sorry all the time.

She would have because it's not even as if there was ever a time when he did anything wrong. Can you imagine that? Not even once. In fact, if there was ever any dispute about who was in the right and who was in the wrong, as there often is in a household, she was always wrong.

[14:57] And he was always right. I'm not sure if there would ever have been dispute. I'm not sure how he would have managed these kind of scenarios. I'm not sure what would have happened when there was conflict between him and his brothers and sisters.

And by the way, there were brothers and sisters. Mary was not a perpetual virgin. She was not immaculately conceived. Mary was as we are. Though she was greatly favored by the Lord, we thank God for her example and for her righteousness and for all the legacy that she leaves us. But she was a sinner. She was not assumed miraculously. Now, the more reason why we should follow her example of obedience and submission to the will of God.

But can you imagine what it would have been like? Can you imagine someone in your class and school who's perfect? Who's the Son of God?

He never, ever, ever does anything wrong. Never does anything sinful. Can you imagine how he would have stood out? And that would not have been easy.

[16:08] You know, people talk about Jesus' sufferings beginning at Calvary. No, they didn't. Jesus' suffering began way before Calvary. They began into his childhood.

It would have been really... I don't remember that time. We don't know much about his childhood, but we know one thing. When Luke talks about when he was 12 years old and they took him to Jerusalem, to the temple, and they lost him when they were going their way home, and they had to go all the way back.

And they looked everywhere for him, and they found him in the temple, and they were annoyed at him. There must have been several times like that, when his life, when his conduct, when his patience would have been a rebuke to them.

And I don't know about you, but I hate being rebuked. We all don't like, none of us like being rebuked. We love to say to the other person, who do you think you are?

Telling me what you're... But this is Jesus. He's the Son of God, and he has every right to rebuke us. So what I'm trying to say is that it must have been incredibly difficult for Mary.

[17:28] We always think, oh, I wish I had the model child. Do you? Do you really wish you had the model child? No, you don't. Because we kind of like our children to be normal, don't we?

We kind of like our children. We expect them to get it wrong and to do bad things. I better watch what I'm saying in case I'm giving anybody any encouragement.

But I'm not trying to do that at all. But you know what I'm saying? You know what I'm saying? It must have been hugely difficult for Mary and Joseph until he died.

We know that Joseph died earlier on, which of course must have added to Mary's grief and her trouble. It must have been hugely difficult. And it must have been difficult for her to get her head around Jesus teaching.

In fact, it kind of, there was that sense of who does he think he is? Remember the time that, you know, he had to say himself, a prophet is not without honor except in his own country.

[18:32] And that reflected on his family as well, to the extent where they actually came to a house where he was. And Mark chapter 3 tells us that his mother and his brothers came to the house in order to take him home.

Because of how awkward they felt about, you know, this is our son and people are saying, well, who does he think he is? He's only a local youngster.

He's only, he's one of our own people. But they knew that he wasn't, but yet they're still trying to, trying to wrestle with, with, with giving him his place as the son of God.

So they came that, that time to take him home. And it was reported to him. Remember Mark chapter 3, your mother and your brothers are outside waiting for you. And he said, who are my mother and my brothers? Those who do the will of God, those who listen to God and to do the will of God.

These are my mother and my sister and my brothers. So it would have been difficult for them to accept him as a rabbi, but not only as a rabbi, but as the son of God.

[19 : 41] And now, now at the cross, she is seeing the culmination of all the hatred that she has sensed for these years.

Particularly amongst the Jewish ruling community. And that has culminated in his arrest and his trial and his death.

And there's not a thing she can do about it. She has to watch him, watch him dying. And one of the, I'm amazed that Jesus, in all his agony, I can't imagine what it would be like to, to be crucified.

I cannot imagine. And I suppose few of us can. I don't, I don't know how I would have the presence of mind to even think straight in all the agony that you would experience.

But Jesus somehow did. And he said seven things on the cross. And one of them was to his mother. He said, woman, here is your son.

[20 : 43] Or behold your son. And then immediately afterwards, John is standing next to her. And immediately afterwards, he says to John, here is your mother.

And we read then that from that time on, this disciple took her into his own home. And so, the upshot of what Jesus is saying is that John kind of adopts Mary as his mother and makes provision for her from then on, the kind of provision that Jesus was no longer able to make.

Now, the question is this. When Jesus says to Mary from the cross, woman, behold your son, who's he talking about?

Is he talking about himself? Or is he talking about John? And I have to be fair here. And I have to confess that some people think that Jesus was talking about John.

So that when he said, woman, here is your son. He's actually saying, I want you to consider John to be your son from now on. In the same way, as he says to John, I want you to consider Mary to be your mother and adopt her as your mother and make provision for her.

[22 : 02] I can understand that makes very good sense. But I can also understand why it makes equally good sense to think about it as himself.

So that when he says to Mary from the cross, woman, behold your son, he's asking her to look at him and yet in a different way than perhaps she has ever regarded him in the past.

And that's the kind, that's the way I want us to look. Now, of course, you might disagree with me and that's absolutely fine. Come to me afterwards and tell me that you disagree. But that's the way I'm going to think about this statement this evening.

When Jesus said to Mary, here is your son. He's talking about himself. He was her son. And he's drawing her attention to him as never before.

Now, I'm not going to get into the questions of why he used the term woman rather than mother. But I am going to say this.

[23 : 20] That if he is talking about himself, I believe that what he was saying to his mother was two things. That he is saying to her that this is a gospel command.

That up until this moment in time, that he has always been her son. And those of us who are parents, we can understand that.

You know, even when our kids have grown up, it's so hard for us to speak to them as adults, for us to treat them as adults. You have to tell yourself, this person, this boy is no longer a boy.

He's a man. This girl is no longer a girl. She's a woman. And it's very difficult psychologically for a parent to ever, ever get rid of that image of your baby.

Even if the baby is now 40, 50 years old, he's still your baby in a sense. So there's that sense in which, which perhaps Mary has spent her whole life and Jesus has always been the baby in the manger.

[24 : 33] But there is also that sense in which Mary has to regard Jesus, not as her son, but as her creator, because that is what he was.

I know how ironic that is. But isn't that the irony of Bethlehem, that she holds her newborn baby, who is helpless, in her arms.

She feeds him. She changes him. And eventually she'll teach him everything he knows. And yet that baby is her creator. That's what it means that he was God.

We thought about that this morning. And that's the wonder of the birth of Jesus. It's not an ordinary birth.

It is an extraordinary, miraculous birth. A miracle that has never taken place before. And a miracle that will never take place again.

[25 : 39] So Jesus is drawing her attention with these last breaths before he died to call her and invite her to look at him, to regard him, to believe in him as never before, as her creator.

But not only as her creator, as her savior. He was drawing attention to the fact that his death was the reason why he had been born in the first place.

And that his death was not an unfortunate accident. It was the plan of God that he die in such agony. Because only in such a death could she be saved.

There's two things that come out of this. And with this I'm going to close and we're going to go to communion. There's two things that come out of this. One is that Mary was one of us. She was as much in need of salvation as anyone else.

She was as much in need of salvation as anyone else. You perhaps say, well, hold on a minute.

This is the Virgin Mary we're talking about here.

[26 : 53] I mean, I remember what you read in Luke chapter 1 where the angel said to her that she had found favor with God. I mean, what greater... How can you say that she needs to be saved from her sin when she was chosen to be the mother of God?

Because being the mother of God doesn't save you from your sin. Imagine that. Being the mother of Jesus does not save you from your sin.

Being the mother of Jesus does not qualify you to heaven. The only way to be saved from our sin is faith in Jesus as our Savior in His death on the cross.

So that's the first thing. That being Mary is not good enough. She has to rest in Jesus as her Savior. Same as everyone else. We have to rest in Jesus as our Savior. The second thing that arises out of this is the fact that the life of Jesus the birth of Jesus the miracles of Jesus the parables of Jesus the teaching of Jesus will not save us.

[28 : 36] But the death of Jesus will. And I say this particularly at this time of year when there's so much attention on the baby in the manger.

And when everybody celebrates the birth of the manger and you have nativity plays and you have carols and you have all the festivities and the trappings and the decorations and everything else and then everybody just puts everything away and forgets it.

The birth of Jesus by itself will not save us. the reason that Jesus was born was for this moment this moment of agony and darkness and dereliction this moment where Jesus says to his father my God my God why have you forsaken me?

This moment where Paul tells us that he who knew no sin that's Jesus was made to be sin for us so that we would be made the righteousness of God in him.

It is Calvary that saves us not Bethlehem. Bethlehem of course was the forerunner of Calvary if it hadn't been for Bethlehem there wouldn't be a Calvary so you have to have the two things there has to be the birth in order for there to be the death but let's make no mistake it is the dying Lord Jesus that saves it is his death because like we saw this morning his death was the ultimate sacrifice where Jesus took our guilt on himself and became sin for us so that by his death and of course his subsequent resurrection in which it was impossible for the power of death to maintain a hold over him but it was his death on the cross that was the sacrifice for our sin so even

[30 : 52] Mary must place her trust entirely upon that death and all that it represents and all that it means so Jesus is telling her to look at himself her Messiah not as her little boy but her Messiah he is laying down his life for her so that she by believing in him will have everlasting life same way as we by believing in Jesus are forgiven cleansed and washed from all of our sin and tonight we are going to like we did this morning we are going to remember that death that moment in the particular way that Jesus left with his disciples so that by remembering it we will be strengthened and nourished and so that we will never forget what Jesus has done for us our father in heaven we come to you as needy broken guilty sinners but who have rested and trusted in the

Lord Jesus Christ and we want now to do what you have commanded us to do in love and in adoration for what he has done and we pray that you will make this act of remembrance a moment

where we meet with you we've already met with you in your word now we pray that you will meet with us in the sacrament in Jesus name Amen