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On the Cross

John 19:23-29

Intro: After officially declaring Jesus innocent several times, Pilate has now turned Him over to be crucified. In our last study we dealt with the practice of crucifixion, the fact that Jesus was crucified between 2 thieves and the significance of the placard that Pilate commanded to be fastened to His cross. Mark tells us in his Gospel that Jesus hung on the cross for about 6 hours. None of the Gospels elaborate on all of the details of that time frame but they each give a different perspective on a few of the things that occurred during that dreadful time.

We know from a survey of the 4 Gospels that Jesus made 7 statements why He was on the cross. Luke records 3; Matthew and Mark both record the same statement and John records another 3. We will look at 2 of those today. There were also some specific prophecies that were fulfilled during this time. As was stated last time, scholars have established some 20 different OT scriptures that were accomplished or fulfilled in the 24 hour period between the arrest of Jesus and His death on the cross. In this section of [ch19](#), John lists 4 specific OT passages that were directly fulfilled while Jesus was on the cross, both before and after His death. We'll also look at 2 of those today.

One of the most intriguing questions about Christ's death on the cross would be to discover what it was He thought about as He endure this tremendous pain, humiliation and suffering. A normal person could only manage to think of themselves because of the constant, unabated, agonizing pain; and who could blame them. But, as we will see in our text today, this is not what Jesus was focused on. His thoughts were on others and they were obviously on the Scriptures as well; particularly [Ps 22](#). This Psalm was obviously on His mind while He was on the cross because 2 of His most famous statements from the cross are both found in this Psalm; one's the 1st verse and the other is the last.

[Ps 22:1](#) says, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" The last verse of [Ps 22](#) is not so direct. "They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this" ([vs31](#)).

The meaning is not clear in the English translation but in Hebrew, the last phrase of that verse is literally interpreted, It is finished. All throughout this Psalm, there are direct references that parallel not only the events of the crucifixion but the mind set of the One who is suffering. There is a reference to a worm in **vs6**. Not just any worm but the tola: a worm that produced a scarlet dye. Their bodies were dried then crushed and the dye was extracted from their blood. In fact, the Hebrew word for scarlet literally means the splendor of the tola. **Vs16** refers to the act of crucifixion while **vs17** alludes to the great suffering it produced. If you want a glimpse into the mind of Jesus on the cross, **Ps 22** gets you pretty close.

23-24 – This is the 1st of 4 prophecies that John identifies as being fulfilled in and around the crucifixion. This one is a literal fulfillment of **Ps 22:18**. The next will be the offer of a vinegar solution for Jesus to drink in **vs28-29**. This is a fulfillment of **Ps 69:21**. 3rd is the fact that while the legs of the thieves were broken, not 1 of Jesus' bones would be broken in fulfillment of **Ps 34:20**. Finally, having His side pierced with a spear was prophesied in **Zech 12:10**.

Clearly, John mentions all these occurrences because he believes, as did all the writers of the NT and all honest students of the Word since then, that the Bible is God's Word about His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is where we meet Him, where we learn of Him, where we believe in Him and it's where we grow into the fullness of the faith. All of these things happen by studying and understanding of the Word of God. Without it, none of these things happen.

Of course, the soldiers were there to keep order and to make sure the condemned actually died. As part of the humiliation of crucifixion, men were normally crucified naked. However, Jewish sensitivities dictated that men should not be publicly executed completely naked thus, men who were condemned to be stoned were granted a loin-cloth. Whether the Romans bothered to consider the feelings of the Jews in this matter is not known. The Bible simply states that His clothes were divided amongst the 4 soldiers and since they didn't want to tear the seamless tunic, they cast lots for it. As God's Son died for the sin of the world, men carelessly laughed and played games at His feet.

But, in doing so, these careless soldiers unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy of **Ps 22:18**.

But, beyond that humiliation, consider this thought: on the cross, Jesus retained absolutely no material possessions. Even the clothes on His back were taken from Him and His tunic was the prize of a petty game of chance. What this shows us is the great distance Jesus had to come to accomplish our salvation. He came all the way down the ladder for us. He let go of everything – even His last bit of clothing – becoming completely poor for us so that we could become completely rich in Him (II Cor 8:9). And what riches! Living in the splendor of heaven, constantly surrounded by the glory, power and majesty of God, the riches Jesus enjoyed before coming to this earth make any amount of wealth on earth seem poor by comparison. But, because He became poor, we can become rich! We can share in His eternal, heavenly wealth because He came to earth and shared our poverty.

25-27 – There was a group of women who stood by and watched the agony of Jesus on the cross and it must have been agonizing for them, especially for one in particular. It's difficult to comprehend what Mary was feeling as she watched her Son be crucified. She was witness to His humiliation and shame, His pain and suffering and His death. When Mary and Joseph brought the newborn Jesus to the temple for dedication, they were met by a godly man named Simeon who saw the baby Jesus, recognized Him for who He truly was, took Him up in his arms and blessed Him. Yet, this same man also prophesied over Mary saying, "Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). How many times did Mary experience this during the ministry of Jesus as He was rejected, opposed, slandered and plotted against? Still, after all that, this was the ultimate fulfillment of that solemn promise. Of all those who witnessed the suffering of Jesus on the cross, none suffered as much as Mary did.

But there were others: Mary's "sister" is probably Salome (Mk 15:40) the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John). There was also Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. These faithful women were there with Jesus through His agony on the cross, to honor Him and to support His mother. Significantly, they were also among those first discovered the empty tomb, the evidence of His resurrection.

This is the 1st of 3 statements that John records Jesus making from the cross. You can't call these the last words of Jesus because they clearly weren't. He'll have plenty more to say in about 3 ½ days or so from this

time. But these are His dying words and it's not hard to see why John includes these words of Jesus to Mary and the corresponding words to that disciple into whose care she was committed. It's because John was that disciple! The charge Jesus made was his charge and it came home to him as no other charge would.

John's presence here tells us that there was at least one of His disciples who sought Jesus out while He hung on the cross. The cowardice of the other disciples was only temporary. They will all seek Him out after the resurrection and would speak boldly on His behalf. But John was here now, before the resurrection. But why? What brought John to the cross was the same thing that these other women – it was love, love for Jesus. Although they could do nothing for Jesus at all, they still wanted to be as near to Him as possible and stay with Him to the bitter end.

There are several important spiritual lessons we can learn from this scene. 1) In considering the great anguish of Mary, we can see that sorrow, even great sorrow, may come to even those who are greatly loved by Jesus. When sorrow comes our way, as it often does, we shouldn't think it's because God's upset with us. Lazarus and his sisters were greatly loved by Jesus yet, Lazarus still got sick and eventually died and the grief of his sisters was painful. Love and sickness are not incompatible in God's economy. God's favor and sorrow sometimes flow along together.

At the same time, we realize that although the beloved of God often suffer for His sometimes hidden purposes, we can still take comfort in the fact that He knows about our sorrows and He provides strength and solace for us in the midst of them. Jesus was keenly aware of the needs of His mother and even in the midst of His own suffering; He cared for her and acted to provide for what she needed. If there was ever a moment when Jesus deserved to be self-focused, this was it. But, He remained others-centered to the end. He knows Mary's sorrow and He knows John's love and now He speaks out of His own love to provide for each one.

2) It's amazing that the One hanging on the cross, even at this late hour, is still providing for others. He's stripped of everything, yet He leaves rich legacies. To His executioners, who even now stand guard over Him, He offers a prayer for pardon—"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" ([Luke 23:34](#)). To the believing thief He grants the promise of

salvation—“Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). In his words to John and Mary he grants a continuing legacy of the most tender love. By this word He gives a son to His mother and a mother to His friend. This truth leads to 2 very important observations:

A) Notice there was no specific direction given to John on how he was to care for Mary. Jesus didn't have to list all the things He expected John to do or feel compelled to remind John all the things he shouldn't forget or how long he was to care for Mary – no specifics, just a charge “Behold, your mother.” The implication was that John was to treat Mary as he would his own mother. That's exactly how John understood it, it's exactly how he accepted it and it's exactly what he did. This was both a sign of John's spiritual maturity and his great love for Jesus. He didn't need a laundry list of things to do or not do, a simple suggestion was sufficient to engender his faithful obedience.

How often do Christians fail to do things they should or freely engage in activities that detract from holiness simply because “The Bible doesn't explicitly say I should do this” or “The Bible doesn't say this is wrong.” Clearly, the Bible can't address every single scenario of sin or righteousness that we may encounter in our lives but it does provide a multitude of principles that can be applied to just about any situation. Would to God that we were always in such a state of heart that, like John, because of our love for Jesus and our maturity in His Word, we wouldn't need a list of specific precepts to guide us through this Christian life; simple hints from His Word and His Spirit would suffice.

B) Both John and Mary obeyed this solemn charge of Jesus from the cross, even though it was a remarkable thing that He commanded. Mary had other children born after Jesus who could have cared for her but despite this, Jesus left the care of His mother to John the disciple and Apostle. Why did He do this? It's quite possible that Jesus did this because at the time, His siblings did not believe on Him yet and He wanted to leave His mother in the care of a believer. What Jesus is actually doing here is bringing into existence a new family based on His atonement. He is bringing into being the brotherhood of believers. He is creating the fellowship of the household of faith. This is a new society that is no longer divided by race, nationality, gender or social standing. It is the fellowship of all those whose faith meets at the cross and whose experience of forgiveness flows from the cross.

This is the fellowship we belong to if we are truly followers of Jesus Christ. We should conduct ourselves as members of this fellowship by loving and caring for each other. Jesus Himself said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” ([John 13:35](#)). Those aren’t marching orders as much as they are the clear indication that we are truly members of the family of faith.

28-29 – [Ps 22:14-15](#) reveals that it was in the midst of this kind of suffering that Jesus cried out, “I thirst” and was given a sponge dipped in a cheap wine like vinegar. If nothing else, this reminds us of Jesus’ true humanity. Yes, Jesus was 100% God but He was also 100% man as well and His thirst was evidence of His humanity. God doesn’t thirst, neither do the angels. We won’t thirst in heaven; [Rev 7:16](#) tells us that. We thirst now because we are human and we live in a world of sorrow. Jesus thirsted because He was a man, He was made like us in all points.

But, there’s another lesson we can learn from this and it has to do with Jesus’ attitude towards the Scriptures and His conscious attempts to fulfill them. For the majority of the prophetic fulfillments that occurred during the crucifixion, Jesus had nothing to do with them: the false accusations, the trial verdicts, dying between 2 thieves, no broken bones. All these things just fell out in simple correspondence to God’s will. But, this incident of Christ’s thirst has a unique quality in that we are told that Jesus did this specifically so “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” This means, although the Scripture certainly would be fulfilled, Jesus didn’t take this as a reason to do nothing when it was in His power to bring about the fulfillment with His own actions.

The application for us who believe the Bible is simply this: if we believe the Bible is God’s Word, we believe that the prophecies it contains will come true. Now, do we sit back and do nothing? Or, do we actively seek to participate in fulfilling prophecy? This idea reminds me of Daniel’s prayer in Dan 9. Daniel realized from reading the Scriptures that Israel’s 70 yr exile was almost over. Did Daniel set back and wait for it to happen? No, he got on his knees and prayed for it to happen. He acknowledged and confessed the sins of Israel, sins that sent them into exile, sins that Daniel never committed – but he interceded for his country and his countrymen and prayed that God’s will would be accomplished in them and God’s promises would be enjoyed by them.

A NT example is found in [John 17:17](#), Jesus prays for the sanctification of His people, saying, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” We will be sanctified, that’s true. But, does this mean we’re to do nothing to seek to grow spiritually? Not at all! The means of our sanctification are specified in this verse. They’re the study of, meditation on, and memorization of God’s Word. This is our responsibility. So, although we will ultimately all be made like Jesus ([1 John 3:2-3](#)), in the meantime we’ll only be sanctified as we use the means God’s given us for that purpose.

Again, in [Matt 24:12](#), Jesus declares that the “*gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come*” ([Matt 24:14](#)). Nothing could be clearer: The gospel will be preached. This is the prophecy. But the prophecy doesn’t relieve us of the responsibility of participating in its fulfillment by becoming agents through which God will bring it to pass. We must work at the missionary mandate. Is prophecy a deterrent to human action? Not at all. It is a stimulus, for none are so bold in God’s service as those who know the outcome in advance and encourage themselves by claiming God’s promises as Daniel did.

John was there at the cross because he loved Jesus. Do you love Him? If your answer is yes, then come to Him; despite the bad things you may have done in your life or the good things you may have failed to do. John came to Jesus in spite of his earlier failure. Did Jesus rebuke him? No, He didn’t rebuke John any more than He did Peter or any of the others. Instead, Jesus gave John an unmistakable privilege. He committed His mother into his care. If you are one who’s deserted Jesus, do as John did and stop running and return to Jesus at once. He will greet you with a loving word of welcome; and who knows what kind of honorable commission He might bestow upon you!

Again, Jesus didn’t need to tell John, “Take good care of My mother.” All Jesus had to do was describe the new relationship and He knew the rest would properly follow. In the same way, there are many specific commands for living a holy life that Jesus shouldn’t need to give us. If our relationship with Him is ordered correctly, then proper, godly conduct will flow from that. If this is not visible in your life, maybe your priorities are not in proper alignment. 😊