

Crucifixion Love (Jn. 19.25-26)

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Introduction

In this text (Jn. 19.25-26), we have an embodiment of the fifth commandment. One way to view the text is to place the obedience of Christ in the background as a basis for a sermon on our duty to the fifth commandment. We might do that in a regular weekly sermon but today we gather to observe communion and the sermon will therefore reverse that order. With discipline of mind and focus, we will place the obedience of Christ in the foreground. We want to remember Him in a distinct and concentrated way. To do that we must do some forgetting, forgetting of ourselves that is. We face our duty here unquestionably. However, attention to duty best arises as a response that is rooted in a special focus on the Lord Jesus in terms of His person and work in both humiliation and exaltation. We do that this morning by narrowing down to this "third" saying from the cross.

To get our perspective, consider the text in light of this question: what do these words reveal about our Lord? Notice that this question directs our attention away from all the people around the cross (our Lord's mother, His aunt, Mary Magdalene, and the Beloved disciple, vs. 25-26). Jesus is God and so Mary is the mother of God but nothing along this line of thought is central or important. What is all-important is the speaker who sees these people and what He says. Although remarkably brief, His words must have great significance as the words of sayings during the death that is like none other in all of history. Thus, we want to know what these words reveal about our Lord. Because of the call to communion remembering, we want to emphasize this point all the more.

The initial answer seems so obvious. These words reveal the loving heart of Christ. What we have here is crucifixion love that is unselfish, obedient, saving, and authoritative.

1A. Crucifixion Love is Marvelously Unselfish

The words to Mary and John are the first words of Jesus from the cross that John's Gospel records. We need to ponder these words in the context set forth by John. Here is Jesus crucified at the place of a skull, Golgotha, between two thieves (v. 18). An inscription on the cross reads, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (v. 19). The inscription was in three languages for all to read (Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, v. 20). The soldiers divided His garments and cast lots for His clothing (vs. 23-24).

We read nothing about the suffering of Christ. Nothing here speaks to the gruesome details of the crucifixion. We have no indication of what Christ experienced or how He responded to what He saw. The words from the cross (vs. 26-27) give us our first glimpse of His perspective, of what He saw and how He responded. We might be surprised at what we hear. We hear nothing from His lips like might be expected. There is no groaning in pain or complaining of injustice.

What did He see and say? Of all that He saw, what is recorded? We are told that He saw "his mother and the

disciple whom he loved standing nearby" (v. 26). Then He spoke to them. He said other things. He may have groaned in pain and other words from the cross were spoken before this "third saying" ("forgive them" and "Today...you will be with me in Paradise"). Whatever else He may have said, John records these words: "Woman, behold your son" and to the young disciple, "Behold your mother."

We might expect a man on his deathbed to do what any man might do if he saw his mother nearby. Knowing that his death was near, my brother Bob looked out for his mother. Do we expect this from someone who *suffers* at the threshold of death? In his last days, my brother was not able to do anything. When he could see me, he could not speak and soon he just looked and stared but did not even see. We do not expect deep, thoughtful, and rich displays of love from someone in deep suffering.

Let me qualify that point. We do not expect such things unless the person who suffers is the Lord Jesus Christ. His life is marked from beginning to end by love. This is the Lord from heaven, the Lord of glory. His love from the cross may amaze us but it does not surprise us; indeed, it is fitting that His love is crucifixion love, love that the cross cannot stifle. Although caught in a whirlwind and swept away to the place of a skull, there in crisis, He was conscious of the presence of His mother and He spoke *to her need*. He did not look at Himself. He did not consider His own needs or protection from suffering.

What kind of words are these? These are words of love, dying love, or crucifixion love. At a very human and fundamental level, these words reveal something of the love of the Lord Jesus. It may sound like an understatement (words always fail us when speaking about the cross) but we must still state it, the love of the Lord Jesus was marvelously unselfish. Selfishness involves considering the prosperity, health, well-being, comfort, and the good name of oneself exclusively. Thus, selfishness is pointedly a matter of exclusiveness. We consider others only when it serves social pressures or personal interests. There is a proper love for oneself, a proper self-preservation and looking out for one's own things. We are selfish when we are concerned with our own families or ourselves alone to the exclusion of heartfelt and active concern for other people.

When we look at selfishness and unselfishness in this way, it magnifies even more the super-abounding unselfishness of Christ in His crucifixion. His unselfishness comes to expression in His love for Mary. He looks at her needs. Of course, He is suffering but He knows that a sword pierces her heart (Lk. 2.35). He is sensitive to her feelings (cf. not calling out to her as mother but distancing Himself by the use of the word woman). He is active, even from the cross (!), in looking out for her good: "Behold your son, and John, behold your mother." He unselfishly concentrates on her suffering as a mother at the loss of her son. He sees to it that a new son will stand in the place of Christ and care for her. Jesus is marvelously unselfish in His crucifixion love.

2A. Crucifixion love is humbly obedient

It is evident that the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments is guiding the actions of Christ. He is not in the first place honoring Mary in some unique way as the mother of God. He honors her in a way that every mother ought to receive honor. As the image of God in a place of parental authority, honor belongs to her because of the goodness and blessedness of the law of God.

How do we know more specifically (versus intuitively) that what Jesus is doing flows from obedience to the commandment of God? Consider the third saying from the cross in its larger context. What brings it about that they crucified Him before the eyes of Mary and John? In John 19 and before the crucifixion, the last recorded words of Christ are His words to Pilate regarding the authority given to Pilate from above (v. 11). Without a God-given authority, Pilate could not have crucified Christ. Attention is not on power but on authority.

Jesus is telling us that He goes to the cross according to the authoritative will of the Father in heaven. Otherwise, Pilate could do nothing. Therefore, Jesus is there on the cross near Mary and John in loving obedience to the Father. Being on the cross is due to His submission to God. Everything He does on the cross is in every detail under the umbrella of heavenly authority *The act of honoring Mary is a matter of humble obedience to the Father in heaven*. He is not looking on His own things; He is not promoting His own health and well-being. However, He could have looked out for Himself. He could have protected Himself but He knows that Pilate is God's unwitting servant who can only do what he does by the gift of authority. Thus, the love that expresses itself on the cross is humbly obedient.

He did not make His way safe and secure because His attention was on the Father rather than Himself. He is on the cross with Mary, John, and others watching the event at close proximity because He emptied Himself. Being God He thought equality with God was not a thing to grasp and hold without self-surrender. He took the form of a servant and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross (Phil. 2). His love is unselfish because it is rooted in humble obedience to the will of another, to the will of the Father in heaven. He is humbly obedient in His crucifixion love.

3A. Crucifixion love is graciously saving

In the big picture, the crucifixion was unnecessary. Jesus stood on trial twice: once before the religious court, the Sanhedrin, and once before the civil court before Pilate. He was condemned in the ecclesiastical court because He spoke the truth (for example, they called it blasphemy that He made Himself equal with God). He was condemned in the civil court because he was innocent. Pilate repeatedly pronounced Him innocent and tried to release Him but to save face he sentenced Jesus to death (cf. Jn. 18.23, 38). Neither the power of man nor the demand of justice necessitated the crucifixion of Christ.

In this context, when we narrow down to the words to Mary, we have to see His unselfish love even more clearly and fully. He gave Himself, the just for the unjust, the sinless for the sinful. It is unselfish because He seeks not His own will but the will of the Father. It is unselfish because it is not necessary (He is innocent (?), crucify Him!). All goes against His own well-being. He is on the cross for others. His love for His mother represents His loving obedience to the heavenly Father. Here is obedience that looks away from self. Love, duty, commandment and obedience, all merge. He loves Mary. He loves her according to the commandments of the Father. We have a miniature of the big picture.

Jesus dies in obedience to the Father *to complete His work as a sacrifice for sinners*. He fulfills all righteousness by perfectly obeying the will of God in order to give us His righteousness. He obeys all the commandments. Obedience to the fifth commandment is a case in point of all that Jesus did to save the guilty by His innocence. Unselfish, humble, and obedient love is saving love.

4A. Crucifixion Love is gently authoritative

Jesus on the cross not only submits to authority but He also exercises authority. He lives and dies under the authority of the Father in heaven so that He may exercise authority over the new covenant community on earth. This comes out in the radically new relationship that emerges between Christ, Mary, and John from the words, "Woman-your son- [disciple] -your mother."

There is more here in the use of the term woman than sensitivity to the struggles of a suffering mother. It is a command. It is intrusive interfering in the affairs of John's home life on a very practical level (it affects the structure of his household and the fullness of his pocket book). Mary has no choice before her. John does not

come to a fork in the road; it is not the case that he has this option versus that option before him. This marvelous act of crucifixion love is a command; there are no options.

What do we learn from this? We learn that by crucifixion love Jesus authoritatively inaugurates the new covenant church family. In a very important sense, Mary will no longer be the mother of Jesus. She will have another son and that son will have her as his mother. Jesus does not call her mother in relation to Himself but he calls her mother in relation to John (John, from now on she is *your* mother *not mine*). A radically new order of things will result from crucifixion love. This has to be in line with His teaching that those who do His will are His mother, brother, and sister (Mat. 12.46-50).

Notably, by this saying from the cross Mary does not become the mother of us all, not in a way that is different from any other mother. The point is that Mary becomes His mother in a new relationship, like all mothers who submit themselves under the authoritative love of Christ (as was anticipated when He called her "woman" at the wedding in Cana). In other words, she is His mother because she is His and she is a mother. Just as it is the case that all who are mothers who belong to Christ are His mothers. There is no parental authority here, not even uniqueness. *That Mary is the mother of Christ means that she is in His family and under His authoritative love. Mary and John are the first members of the new covenant community in a very practical sense.*

What it means to be the mother of Christ and the brother of Christ is that we are family to one another in Him and under the banner of His saving love. For example, because our elderly sister, Louise Brown, is a mother that belongs to Christ then she is His mother. This means that she is family to us; she is a spiritual mother to us. Likewise, the believing women of this church are our spiritual sisters and the men are our spiritual brothers. Now we have another look at crucifixion love. It is authoritative saving love that builds the church that He obtained with His blood (Acts 20.28).

Conclusion

What can we say in response to these things? In our very partaking of the bread and wine, we are saying:

a) I need Him, I need the love of the cross because I am guilty but He is innocent. I need the marvelously unselfish, humbly obedient, graciously saving, and gently authoritative love of Jesus Christ the Lord of glory. I need crucifixion love. I need His body and blood. I need Him. O Lord Jesus, I need you!

b) I own this loving Savior as my Savior, as my prophet, priest and king (I cling to Him; I cling to Him as my mediator, my teacher, and my king. I will learn from Him, and I will serve Him in all things. O Lord Jesus, I place myself at your feet for I own you as my Lord.

c) I own the family that He loves as my family. How can I do anything less in light of the fact that He gave His own body and blood on the cross for His brothers and sisters, for us making us brothers and sisters in Him? Therefore, starting right here in this expression of the covenant community, I want to love as you love me. O Lord Jesus, I own your family as my family.