

The Soul-Piercing Sword Removed

Lk 1:26-38; Lk 2:25-35; Jn 19:17-27 (text: v.25-27)
19 April 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:00
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due
acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

At the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are standing five people who are close to Him...

- His mother, *Mary*
- Mary's sister, *Salome* (in other words, Jesus' aunt) who is also the mother of John & James.
- Then there is also *Mary*, the wife of Clopas. And fourthly, there is...
- *Mary* Magdalene from whom Jesus has once driven out demons.¹
- Lastly, at the cross stands also John, the apostle whom Jesus loved. Indeed, of all the apostles, John is the only one whose love for His Lord was strong enough to have moved him to be here in His Lord's darkest hour! Of course, because John is the son of Mary's sister, Salome, he is not just one of Jesus' *disciples* – no, he is also Jesus' *cousin* – i.e. of Jesus' extended family!²

So, let us say it this way, then: At the cross are standing...

- 1) Jesus' mother
- 2) Jesus' aunt, Salome, with 3) her son John who is Jesus' cousin (and the apostle whom Jesus loved)
- 4) Mary, the wife of Clopas, and...
- 5) Mary Magdalene

Now if we understand the four gospels correctly, it seems that, at first (perhaps while there was great tumult on Golgotha as the three crosses were put up) this group of five

¹ See Mark 16:9 *Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.*

Also, Luke 8:1-3 (especially v. 2) *Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.* (Emphasis mine)

Mary Magdalene literally means, Mary from Magdala – a place just north of Tiberias on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee (cf. **Burge, G. M. (2000). *John* (pp. 522–548). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).**

² "John's reference to Jesus' "aunt" is most intriguing. In an impressive study, Brown has analyzed the names of each person at the cross in all four Gospels, showing not only the consistent report of who was there but identifying many of them. The most important feature of the study is his compelling argument that "Jesus' mother's sister" is the same as Matthew's "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Matt. 27:56). John and Matthew say that these women are both at the cross and *they may well be the same person, thus making Jesus and the sons of Zebedee cousins*" (cf. **Burge, G. M. (2000). *John* (pp. 522–548). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).**

stood at distance,³ but, now, during His hours on the cross, they have moved closer to be nearer⁴ to their suffering beloved Lord!

Well, what can these five do? They cannot free Him! They don't have that power! But they can communicate with Him (and He with them); and their sheer presence can comfort Him!

And, these five persons are seeing everything unfold...

- How He is stripped from all His clothes and left naked⁵ to be shamed on the cross of pain & shame, while the soldiers are dividing His clothes and casting the lot over His tunic!
- And they're seeing & hearing how He suffers
- And they are hearing all seven words (sayings) He is saying from the cross!

Well – talking about those seven words – in this sermon I would like to focus on the *third* word, the one by which our Lord said...

“Woman, behold, your son!”
“(John), Behold, your mother!”⁶

Question: What is the significance of this third word from the cross? What does it reveal to us?

Well, at least the following three things (also the three points of this sermon):

- Care
- Vision Lifted
- Sword Removed

Care

Indeed, in the first place, this cross word reveals the deepest care.

³ Cf. Matt. 27:55, 56 ***There were also many women there, looking on from a distance (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν), who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him,*** ⁵⁶ ***among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*** (Also cf. Mark 15:40, 41; Luke 23:49 which also say “from a distance”).

⁴ Cf. Jn 19:25 ***“...but standing by (παρά) the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”***

⁵ For the fact that Jesus was totally naked on the cross, cf.

- Sproul, RC – audio sermon at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/crucifixion-2/>
- My beloved – and universally trusted – commentator, Hendriksen, says about John 19:23-24, ***“The clear implication of the passage which we are studying must not escape us. It is this: Jesus bore for us the curse of nakedness in order to deliver us from it!”*** Then Hendriksen refers to Gn 3:9-11, 2 Cor 5:4, and Rv 7:13-14 to show how our nakedness (literally & spiritually) needed to be covered. Then Hendriksen continues, ***“Surely if what Ham did to his father Noah is singled out for special mention because of its reprehensible character, what the soldiers did when they disrobed Jesus and then divided His garments among themselves, casting lots, should cause us to pause with horror. Such a pause is suggested by the words: **These things, indeed, the soldiers did.** They did that which was shameful. Yet, by means of that shameful deed God’s eternal plan (hence, also prophecy) was fulfilled. Hence, we pause in abhorrence... and adoration!”*** (cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. *Exposition of the Gospel according to John* (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. *New testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.430).

⁶ [***The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.***](#) (2016). (Jn 19:26–27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Yes, in His pain – as He was hanging on the cross – and seeing His mother with her sister (Salome) and the other two Marys – and seeing the apostle whom He loved standing with His mother – our Lord’s heart went out to His mother; yes, her who had given birth to Him!

And it was *suffering* for Jesus to see His *mother* among those who dared to come watch such a cruel & gruesome scene!

Yes, *He* suffered to see *her* suffering for Him!⁷

So, even in His pain, yet out of deepest kindness, compassion, and care, His heart goes out to her!

Says He: “*Woman, behold (i.e. there is) your son!*” “*(John), behold (i.e. there is) your mother!*”

Yes, Jesus chose John, the disciple whom He loved, to, from now on, care for Mary – indeed, John, whose love for Christ caused him to seemingly be the only one out of all the eleven who was not too scared to come near the cross!

Of course, John was also Jesus’ cousin. So, seeing that Christ’s own brothers did not yet believe in Him,⁸ and seeing that Mary has supported Jesus all along (and now with his death, a woman in her culture would be bereft and at risk) – Jesus now conferred her care to John.

Then we read (in v.27) that, from then on, *the disciple took her to his own home.*⁹

Well, for how long Mary still lived, we do not exactly know, but some early church historians have said that she still lived for another eleven years in Jerusalem under John’s care before she passed away.¹⁰

However, even *that* we do not know for sure!

But we see our Lord’s compassion & care for His mother even here in His darkest hour!

Well, is not His care/concern/compassion for His mother ‘s physical care – moving as it is – but a small token of the reason why He so willingly took up the cross!?

Yes, was it not His care for *all* His loved ones of *all* ages and places – yes also His care for you & me – which drove Him to the cross!?

But, my brother & sister, look! It was not just care which sat in our Lord’s third word from the cross!

No, by this third word, He was also *lifting his mother’s vision* – and yours and mine – to higher thoughts, and to a higher understanding of what’s going on here!

So, here is point 2...

Vision Lifted

Did you notice how Jesus does not use the word *mother* when He addresses her from the cross?

⁷ My adaptation of the well-said words of Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to John (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.433).

⁸ Cf. Jn 7:2-5 (especially v.5), **Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand.** ³ **So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing.** ⁴ **For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.”** ⁵ **For not even his brothers believed in him.** (Emphasis mine)

⁹ Jn 19:27 **Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.**

¹⁰ Cf. Nicephorus Ecclesiastical History Book 2 Chapter 3 referred to by Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 2045–2048). Peabody: Hendrickson.

No, quite significantly, in handing her over to the care of John, He says *woman* –
“***Woman, behold, your son!***”

Now *that* was not a derogatory way of speaking!

Yes, in *our* culture it may be (e.g. “Woman, listen to me!”), but in that culture, it was a term of *respect!*¹¹

You ask, but what’s the significance of Jesus calling her *woman* and not *mother*?

Well, here’s the bonus. You see, in calling her *woman*, Jesus is raising her vision away from seeing Him as *her Son*; yes, He’s raising her vision to a higher level – indeed, to see (and look at) this gory scene, as it were, *from God’s perspective*.

Mother would have made her look at His pain from a *human* perspective! Yes, *mother* would have been a *cutting word* to her who was already wounded to the heart with grief;¹² *Mother* would have pressed that soul-piercing sword even deeper into her heart! It would almost have been like Isaac who, when Abraham was preparing to sacrifice him, asked, “*My father (!), where is the lamb for the sacrifice?*”¹³

Yes, *mother* would have rubbed it in for Mary that it was her *son* whom she *gave birth to* – whom she *nursed* and *cuddled*, the One who is her own – who is now dying so gruesomely on this cross!

So, in using *woman* rather than *mother*, it was as if Jesus was saying to Mary, “Dear *woman*, lift your vision! Look higher! Remember how it all started some 33 years ago! You, of all people, will be the one to know my identity! Yes, you, of all people, will be the one to remember how you came to conceive Me! *You* will know that I was born from you and the *Holy Spirit*! So, *woman*, see again My identity and let your vision be lifted! Look high! Yes, at the time, the people in your town – and even Joseph at first – thought that you were unfaithful, but *you know* My identity, and *you* know what I came for! So, yes, *woman*, remember what the Angel of God told you – what My Name should be – *Jesus*, which means “He saves!” “He saves” from what? From the Roman oppression? No, “He saves” His people from their *sins!*”

“So, *woman*, lift your vision! See that, as I am hanging here on this cross, I am fulfilling the task my Heavenly Father gave Me to do! Yes, look at Me here on the cross, and see I’m the sacrifice – the sacrifice for even My mother’s sins! But not yours alone; no, the sacrifice for all God’s loved ones’ sins! So, *woman*, lift your vision! See (that) I’m carrying God’s wrath/anger! Yes, don’t think of Me in the first place as your Son! No, see Me now as your Saviour and Lord!”

My brother & sister, see what our Lord is doing here?

By calling her *woman*, He is helping Mary to not see her trial in an under-the-sun way – in a way that has forgotten that God steers every event – yes, even Christ’s cross as well as ours!

Yes, from staring at her pain in an under-the-sun view, He is lifting her vision to seeing things through the “eyes of God” (as it were)!

My brother & sister, Christ does the same for everyone who walks with Him – yes, for everyone who seeks His face during their time of trial.

Well, what happens to you & me when, in our trials, our Lord lifts our vision?

¹¹ Christ used the same word when He addressed His mother at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn 2:4), ***And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”***

He also used “woman” when He addressed the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:10), ***Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”***

¹² Words well-said by Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (pp. 2045–2048). Peabody: Hendrickson. (Emphasis mine)

¹³ Cf. Gn 22:7 ***And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”***

The same as what happened to Mary in her pain when Jesus lifted her vision, which brings us to point 3...

Sword Removed

My brother & sister, do you remember what the aged Simeon said to Mary when Jesus was still only an eight-day-old baby!?

And do you remember that, *what* Simeon said, he also said *by the prompting of God's Holy Spirit?* – the Bible is clear on that!¹⁴

This is what he said (in Lk 2:34-35): “***Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel... and a sword will pierce through your own soul also....***”¹⁵

Well, here she stands next to the cross – she who gave human birth to Jesus.

And as she watches her suffering Son, that prophecy gets fulfilled! Yes, that sword, prophesied by the Holy Spirit, is now piercing her soul!

But look! Is it not so that when her Son called her *woman* (and not *mother*), He not only *raised her vision* to see from God's perspective, but in doing that, He also *lifted that sword* from her soul!?

Yes, watching Him suffer *still* causes her to suffer, but now that He Himself has lifted her vision, He has eased her pain; yes, He has – at least to some degree – removed that soul-piercing sword.

Well, I can't describe it better than this old hymn...

*At the cross her station keeping
Stood the mournful mother weeping.
Close to Jesus to the last;
Through her heart, His sorrow sharing.
All His bitter anguish bearing.
Now at length the sword had passed.*¹⁶

¹⁴ Lk 2:22-35 (especially verses 25,26, and 27), **And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord** ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Emphasis mine)

¹⁵ Lk 2:34-35, **And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”**

¹⁶ Copied from Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.171).

My brother & sister, here our Lord has given us something beautiful – something that you and I can take strength from.

You see, when Mary's Lord lifted her vision so that she could see with the eyes of God, literally nothing physical has changed. Jesus was *still* her Son, and He was *still* being crucified! Yet, in lifting her vision for her, although nothing physical has changed, *everything* has changed, because now – now that she can see her pain from an above-the-sun perspective – that soul-piercing sword is lifted from her heart!

Is that not the same with every child of God – even with you & me?

You see, I don't know all the trials every one of you might be suffering through, at this moment. Perhaps, some of you are suffering great emotional pain as you're wrestling through some or other big hardship.

So, as with Peter, your sea waves may still be there, but with your vision lifted, you now focus on your Lord and you walk on those waves! Yes, as with the Apostle Paul and Silas, your prison walls and chains may still be there – and your “wounds” might still be aching – but, through Bible-reading and prayer, you see again your Lord, and despite your circumstance, your face shines and you sing, because your Lord has lifted that soul-piercing sword from your heart, and this now drives you to *adoration* and *worship*.

My brother & sister, look! Is not adoration & worship the last word the NT gives us regarding Mary, the mother of our Lord?

Indeed, there in the days immediately after her Lord's ascension into heaven, where do we find Mary?

Well, Acts 1:14 helps us find her filled with joy and worshiping in the midst of about a hundred and twenty believers – yes, amidst that small number the early church was made of.

This is my prayer for you – that, in your pain/trials, our Lord's Word will lift your vision, remove that soul-piercing sword, and cause you/me to stand in awe of Him our Maker and Saviour; and sing – sing His praises for as long as we have breath!

AMEN (2058 words excluding footnotes)

But also cf. Godsongs.net at <http://www.godsongs.net/2016/03/at-the-cross-her-station-keeping-stabat-mater-english-language.html> for...

“This hymn is a translation of the 13th century Latin hymn “Stabat Mater Dolorosa” which is variously attributed to the Jacopone da Todi and to Innocent III. The version presented here is an adaptation of a translation by English clergyman Edward Casswall (1814-1878), to fit the 887 meter of the original text. It is most frequently sung to the tune STABAT MATER by Mainz (1661), although many composers have published settings / variations of this.”