(Explain four women and John – Jesus’ cousin)

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

If you know the account of the crucifixion well, you will know that when you put the four gospel accounts together, Jesus spoke a total of seven times while He was on the cross. And these have come to be known as ‘the seven sayings from the cross.’

* The first ‘saying’ was “*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*.”
* The second ‘saying’ was when He said to the thief beside Him, “*Today, you will be with me in paradise*.”

And our text today is the third ‘saying’ from the cross; it is the words that Jesus spoke to His mother, Mary, and to the disciple whom He loved, who is John, the author of this Gospel. And I guess that the chief question in the minds of most who read these words will be What is this ‘saying’ all about? Why did John record this saying of Jesus?

Many Bible commentators view these words just as a moment of human compassion and tragedy.

1. They see them as just a moment of **human** **compassion** as a dying son makes arrangements for the care of His mother. So we are supposed to go, Aww, how nice. But for starters, we know that Jesus had brothers, so why did He hand over the care of His mother to one of the disciples? John would soon face persecution from the Jewish authorities himself and then He became a missionary to foreign lands, so it was not as if John could put Mary in a granny flat and give her the nice, quiet life for the rest of her days that Jesus could not. But also, if this was just about arranging care for His mother, then why was it done here at the cross? Jesus knew that He was going to die so wouldn’t it have been more compassionate to do this, privately, sometime beforehand? And of course, we also know that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven 40 days later, so wouldn’t it have been nicer for this to wait until after He rose? And so, while this was an act of kindness, as we shall see, there was more going on here than just that. And this is what we will explore within the sermon.
2. But another popular take on this passage is to view it just as a **human** **tragedy**. If you are a fan of classical music and especially choral music, you might be familiar with **Stabat Mater**. Stabat Mater is a Latin hymn of the 13th century that has found its way into many classical/choral compositions. It is a hymn written about our text. Stabat Mater literally means ‘the mother who stands there.’ And the first line of the hymn translates as ‘The grieving mother stood weeping beside the cross where her son was hanging.’ And the hymn goes on to explore Mary’s sorrow and torment, and it becomes a celebration of Mary and prayer to Mary that is very much in keeping with Roman Catholic theology. It is even said that when Jesus said to John, “*Behold, your mother*,” John was being urged, together with all Christians, to honour and worship Mary. But apart from the First Commandment issues here, I hope that you are shocked that anyone would see this text in that light. We know from **John 20:31** that John wrote his Gospel so “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name*.” The focus of our text is not Mary but Jesus! We are supposed to ask how this text reveals Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

So that is our chief question today: How do these words set Jesus before us as the Christ? How do they reveal Him as our Saviour? And what relevance do they have to the Christian life?

And we will seek answers to these questions as we consider this passage under the theme: **A Dutiful Son Prepares His People for the Risen Christ**. And that theme gives us our two points as we consider Jesus, **the dutiful Son**, and Mary and John as **His people** who are being prepared to receive Him and believe in Him as the **Risen Christ**.

1. So first of all we consider **Jesus, the Dutiful Son**.
   1. I said in the sermon introduction that it is wrong to view this episode as just Jesus the kind son making compassionate arrangements for the care of His mother. But a key word there is “just.”
      1. There is no doubt that this would have been a very painful moment for Mary as Jesus’ mother. Before Jesus was born, Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that her son would be called Holy – the Son of God. And Mary believed what the angel said. But soon after Jesus was born He was presented in the temple and there was a man there named Simeon who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before He saw the Messiah. And when He took Jesus in his arms, he said to Mary, “*This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too*.” So this would have been a soul-piercing moment for Mary. Here was her son, who she had been told was the Son of God, hours from death and dying in an agonizing and degraded manner.
      2. And notice that there is no mention of any other members of Jesus’ family being present. Bible scholars unanimously agree that Joseph, Mary’s husband, had died some time before this. And in the Gospel of Mark we read about a time when Jesus’ family heard about something Jesus was doing and “*they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, “He is out of His mind*.” So at that time at least, and maybe even still, Jesus’ brothers thought He was mad. There is every likelihood, then, that Mary was quite alone at the cross, which means it was kind of Jesus to make sure that His mother had someone who was there and who was able to give her emotional and practical support now and in the days that would follow. And so we read in v27 that “*from that hour the disciple took her to his home*.”
      3. I sometimes like to ask catechism students to give me **a definition of pure religion**. They usually talk about doctrines like the Trinity and Justification, etc, or the Apostles Creed. Is that how you would define pure religion? That’s very good. But **James 1:27** says this: “*Religion that is pure … before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction*.” As we have seen, Mary was Jesus’ mother and probably a widow also. And Jesus showed her kindness and practical compassion. And our Christianity, likewise, must be a Christianity of kindness and practical compassion, especially to those who have suffered loss and/or are in great need. So we too must literally visit widows and orphans in their distress. And we have widows and widowers in our congregation. Do you visit them? Do you look for opportunities to visit those who are in hospital or to prepare a meal or some baking for those in need? Is your Christianity a Christianity of kindness and practical compassion?
   2. But having said that, we need to note that what Jesus did here was *more* than just a kindness; it was also **obedience**. Can one of you boys and girls tell us the Fifth Commandment? “*Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you*.” God’s law requires children to honour their parents.
      1. And this is not just about an attitude of respect; it is also about practical care – things like money and clothing and housing. **1 Timothy 5:8** says, “*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*.” When people are in need, the first wallets that should be opening are the wallets of family members; this is a God-given duty. We must be the first to contribute to whatever practical needs our dependent family members might have.
      2. But the fact is that we often fail in this area of obedience, don’t we, whether it be through ignorance, or through things that we do not do that we really ought to do, or things that we think or say or do that dishonour our parents or other members of our households.
      3. So as Jesus honoured His mother, in this very practical way, He was obeying and fulfilling the Fifth Commandment. And that means that He was not just a kind human son but also her and our **Mediator**. With this act He was reconciling her and us to God by His suffering and His perfect obedience. You see, for us to be able to enter into God’s presence, we need the price of our disobedience to be paid for, and we need to receive a perfectly righteous nature. And we receive both of these things from Christ when we believe in Him – He takes away our guilt and He gives us His perfection.
      4. So with these words, as Jesus obeyed God’s law, He was securing our salvation; these words were not just the words of a kind son but also words from the Christ!
2. So Jesus truly was a dutiful Son. But in the second place we see that Mary and John are **His people** who were being prepared to receive Him and believe in Him as **the Risen Christ**.
   1. At this moment Mary was Jesus’ mother and John was Jesus’ cousin and friend and dearly loved disciple. But we have also seen how Jesus was their Mediator as He hung there on the cross. And this helps us to see that the relationship between Jesus and Mary and John was changing, drastically. This would be the last time that He spoke to them as one who appeared to be a humiliated, rejected human being. When He rose from the dead, He would be the risen and exalted and glorious Christ! So to put it in its simplest form, here He was still her son and John’s cousin, but soon He would be their Saviour! So while Jesus’ words were words to a mother and a cousin, more importantly than that they were words to Mary and John as **His people**; two of the first members of the church of Jesus Christ. And this comes out in several ways:
      1. First, how would these words have come across to Mary and John? Try and imagine seeing a dying Jesus and hearing Him say, Woman, your son, Disciple, your mother. Surely His words sounded like a last goodbye, right? Surely He was saying I can no longer be a son to you and a cousin to you, so farewell. And that was, in truth, what Jesus was saying. For when He rose they would need to receive Him not as son and cousin but as Christ! When He rose they needed to view Him with the eyes of faith and not the eyes in their faces. **2 Corinthians 5:16** speaks about this change. We read Paul saying this of Jesus, “*Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we do so no longer*.” All those who had known Jesus as Mary’s Son, including Mary, would soon need to know Him as the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour and Lord and King!
      2. And this is made plain also by what happened when Jesus rose from the dead. I know it’s impossible to imagine, but if you were to die and then rise again from the dead, who is the first person you would run to and tell? If you are married, I am sure it would be your spouse, and if you are not married, I am sure that your parents would surely be *among* the first, if not *the* first, that you would find and tell. Yes? Well, you can see the account of Jesus’ resurrection in the next chapter. But search it, as well as Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s accounts of the resurrection and you will not find a mention of Mary.
         1. When some women, who did not include Mary, found the empty tomb, the angels didn’t say, Go and tell His mother. What did they say? “*Go and tell the disciples*.”
         2. And the first person that Jesus appeared to was? Mary Magdalene. And did Jesus say, Go and tell my Mum? No. He said, “*Go and tell my disciples*.”
         3. In **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** Paul provides a list of those that the resurrected Jesus appeared to: *“[Peter], then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me*.” Who is missing from that list? Mary.
         4. You see, after He rose, Jesus was not first and foremost the son of Mary; He was now the Christ, the Saviour of the world!
   2. And that, congregation, is why Jesus said *these* words, and why He said them *here at the cross*, and why He said them to *Mary and John*. From this moment on, Mary needed to see Jesus as the Christ, her Saviour and Lord. And who was the best person to help her see Jesus in that light? John! Or on the other side of the cross, John became the apostle who wrote the Gospel that demonstrates and proves that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God! So yes, John would need to look after Mary’s daily needs, but more importantly than that, as an apostle of Christ, he would have to help Mary become a believer in and follower of the Christ!
      1. So Jesus spoke these words to Mary and John *as His people* to prepare them to receive Him and believe in Him as *the* *risen Christ*.
      2. Congregation, we are not supposed to read these words and go, aww, what a kind son. And we are not supposed to read these words and go, aww, that poor mother! And we are definitely not supposed to read these words and put Mary on a pedestal as though she were worthy of prayer and worship and honour. We are supposed to read these words and see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God!

And that, congregation, is why we read **Revelation 12** earlier in the service. We are actually going to say more about Revelation 12 this afternoon, because it deserves more explanation than we can give it at the end of this sermon, but Revelation 12 is about a woman. She is a personification of the whole congregation of God’s people throughout all of history – OT Israel and the NT church. And it is from her, as OT Israel, that the Lord Jesus was born.

And in this way Mary does have a unique place in the church of Christ. Mary was an OT believer. And she was the one who literally gave birth to the Messiah. And right now, as she looked up at her son through her tears, He was preparing her to receive Him as the risen Christ. But in **Acts 1 :14** we read that the disciples were gathered together, praying, with “*the women and Mary the mother of Jesus*.” So Mary also became one of the first members of the NT church of Christ. Her sorrow at the cross for her son was replaced with love for and faith in the Christ of God.

And that is where the Lord Jesus is pointing you today, my friends. He is speaking to you from the cross. He is calling on you to see Him with the eyes of faith. This death on the cross was not the end of Jesus. He rose and He lives and reigns in heaven as the Christ. Have you believed in Jesus as the Christ? Will you decide to believe in Jesus as the Christ today? I hope that you do! Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Amen.