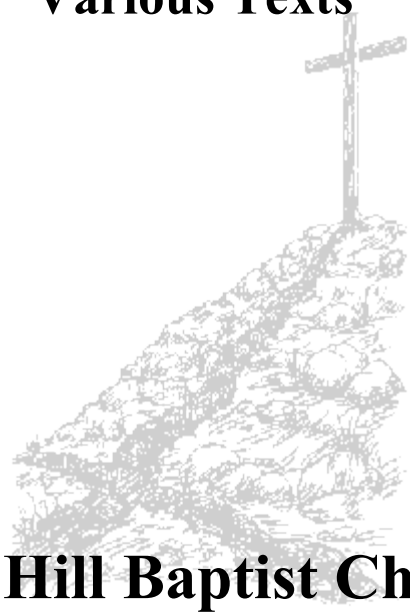


Seven Voices

Parts 1 & 2 Various Texts



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FOCAL Luke 23:34¹ ... Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

John 19:26-27 ... Woman, behold thy son! {27}
Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! ...

Matthew 27:46 ... Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

John 19:28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

John 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

The last words that people say just before they die tell us much about their character. For instance, before slipping into a coma *Winston Churchill* said "I'm bored with it all²." United States President *Grover Cleveland* said "I have tried so hard to do the right."³ When the *actress Joan Crawford* was dying, and her housekeeper started

1 all texts are King James Version, unless otherwise noted

2 Winston Churchill, statesman, d. January 24, 1965

3 d. 1908

to pray for her, she said "Don't you dare ask God to help me."⁴ The *inventor Thomas Alva Edison* said "It is very beautiful over there."⁵ *General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson* said "Let us cross over the river and sit in the shade of the trees."⁶ The *great film producer Louis B. Mayer* said "Nothing matters. Nothing matters."⁷ The *writer Edgar Allan Poe* said "Lord help my poor soul."⁸

Compare these words to the last *seven statements* that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ made from the Cross. As Jesus was first tormented, then tortured, He spoke not a word. The Bible says of the Messiah:

Isaiah 53:6-7 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. {7} He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

Jesus Christ, the **Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world (John 1:29)**, never offered up a word of defense for Himself. Yet He made seven statements - wonderful sermons - from the Cross that we need to look at. The *Holman Bible Dictionary* states:

4 d. May 10, 1977

5 d. October 18, 1931

6 Killed in error by his own troops at the battle of Chancellorsville during the US Civil War. d. 1863

7 d. October 29, 1957

8 d. October 7, 1849

"... Jesus' first three statements from the cross relate primarily to others, and Jesus spoke them between 9:00 a.m. and noon (Mark 15:25). First He asked forgiveness for those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). Then He promised to be with the penitent thief in paradise (Luke 23:43). Jesus' provision for the care of His mother by John comprised His third remarks from the cross (John 19:26-27).

Jesus' last four statements refer to Himself and were spoken between noon and 3:00 p.m. (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). He uttered the cry of desolation, quoting Psalms 22:1 in the Aramaic language (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34), expressed His thirst, (John 19:28) and issued the cry of victory, "It is finished" (John 19:30). In His final words, Jesus quoted Psalms 31:5 as He committed His spirit to God (Luke 23:46)."⁹

The words that Jesus spoke from the Cross not only show His character, but also shed light on the nature of mankind and our relationship to God. Let's look at the Master's words.

Part One

The First Two Voices Ask "Who Is Your Lord?"

1. "Father, Forgive Them"

The Lord of The Lost Are The Things of This World

9 online at <http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T5609>

The first statement the Lord made while on the Cross was:

FOCAL Luke 23:34 ... Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

J.C. Ryle said “While the blood of the greatest sacrifice started to flow, the greatest of all High Priests started to intercede.” Jesus Christ began to pray, not for Himself, but for those who stood mocking around the Cross. Jesus said:

Father, forgive them

What was Jesus referring to when He said, “**Father, forgive them**”? Was He asking the Father to forgive these people for crucifying Him? No, that wasn't it. Jesus said:

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd: **the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.**

It was our Lord's Will that He lay His life down for us. In fact, Jesus said, even more specifically:

John 10:17-18 Therefore doth my Father love me, because **I lay down my life, that I might take it again. {18} No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to**

take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

The Apostle wrote:

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as **Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God** for a sweet smelling savor.

Jesus was not asking that these people be forgiven for crucifying Him. He willingly laid His life down, that He might *save and sanctify* all who believe on Him. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is unique in that He offered *Himself*. He was therefore both High Priest as well as Perfect Offering. The Bible says:

Hebrews 10:10-12 By the which will **we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** {11} And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: {12} **But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever,** sat down on the right hand of God;

No, the crucifixion was not what Jesus asked that they be forgiven for. What Jesus referred to is what follows in this context:

FOCAL Luke 23:34 ... **they parted his**

raiment, and cast lots.

This is common among the unbelieving world. Here is the Eternal Lamb of God being offered for the sins of the world, and the world is more interested in the *clothes on Christ's back* than they are in the salvation which He offers. They took Christ's clothes! What value could be in these clothes? A peasant's clothing was usually woven in one piece. You had the tunic, or undergarment, then the outer jacket and perhaps an overcoat. They took the things of Christ rather than the *eternal life offered at the Cross*. They took the earthly baubles, the few possessions that Jesus had, rather than secure by faith the riches of eternal life.

It is no different today than it was when Jesus was being sacrificed. As a pastor I am many times called to the hospital to comfort someone who is suffering. This is understandable, and very human. But Beloved, we should never want the *things of God* apart from the *life of God*. God gave His life on the Cross for you and for me, so that we could be inheritors of Eternal Life. How awful to chase after the things of this life and lose out on all eternity!

Jesus warned in another place:

Matthew 16:25-26 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. {26} For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what

shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

That which has the *greatest value* in this world is something that you cannot see, but it is something that each and every one of you possess. It is *the human soul*. The soul of man is so valuable that God Himself took on humanity so that He could pay the penalty for your sins and for mine. The **Apostle John**, standing at the foot of the Cross, later wrote:

1 John 5:11-12 ... God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. {12} He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Listen Beloved: *Eternal Life* was being earned for us on that Cross, and these people are fighting over some ragged peasant's clothing. The best thing that was there was the purple robe that Herod gave Jesus, and this robe was stained with the Master's blood. What value could that have? None in comparison with the value of a life forever saved by faith in Him. Let's look at our focal text again:

FOCAL Luke 23:34 ... Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

The word **forgive**¹⁰ in this context doesn't mean to give

10 Aorist Active Imperative of G863, ἀφίημι, aphīēmi, af-ee'-ay-mee, From G575 and ἵημι hiēmi (to send; an intensive form of εἶμι eimi (to go)); to send forth, in various applications: - cry, forgive, forsake, lay aside,

these people everlasting life, but to *release them* from the wrath of God. God is love, but God is also *wrathful* when He looks on sin. God's wrath was poured out on Christ for us, for even those who stood at the foot of the Cross, and yet they stood far off and mocked the Savior. Jesus prayed that the Father would give them but one more chance for salvation, one more opportunity to be saved. If you do not know Jesus Christ as Savior this very day, then the wrathful hand of God has been stayed for a time. Yet, if you remain in your unbelief, please remember that there is coming a day when the wrath of God *will* be poured out on all who will not believe. God tells us:

Proverbs 1:24-31 Because I have called, and ye refused; **I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; {25} But ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: {26} I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; {27} When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. {28} Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: {29} For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: {30} They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. {31} Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.**

leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, suffer, yield up.

There comes a time, Beloved, when God ceases to call. There comes a time when the wrath of God is poured out. All of Israel came out of Egypt, and all of Israel shared equally in the blessings of God. Yet only two men - Joshua and Caleb - crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. When God the Son cried out to God the Father, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do**", the wrath of God was stayed. Jesus prayed for the mockers, prayed for the gamblers, prayed for the rich and the leaders who rejected Him, as Isaiah prophesied:

Isaiah 53:11-12 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. {12} Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and **he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

Jesus prayed for the unbelievers at the foot of His Cross, and prays for unbelievers now. It is His prayers that hold back the wrath of God on every unbeliever, giving every person an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

**2. "Today You Shall Be With Me"
The Lord of The Saved Is Jesus**

FOCAL Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Though Jesus prayed that the Father would stay His hand of wrath on all that were mocking, our Lord only offered salvation to one person - the unnamed thief that hung next to Him. When we look at this thief, and the exchange that occurred between him and Jesus, we are overwhelmed with the sheer majesty of God's saving Grace. Look at the thief's words prior to Jesus' pronouncement of Grace. He recognized his state of sin, recognized that he was a sinner, and repented of that state of mind. He said:

FOCAL Luke 23:40-42 ... Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? {41} And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. {42} And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

There is no merit in the thief. His salvation did not come because he did good works over a period of time. People who believe in good works and not in Christ think that, if they do good things for *most of their lives*, they will be in Heaven with God. Let me ask you, do you not think that many of those who stood jeering at the foot of the Cross did good works? Jesus gave us a parable on good works, and on self righteousness in

Luke 18:10-14 Two men went up into the temple to

pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. {11} The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. {12} I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. {13} And the publican {a tax collector}, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. {14} I tell you, this man went down to his house justified¹¹ rather than the other: for every one that exalteth¹² himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth¹³ himself shall be exalted.

The Pharisee, the worker of good works, was *not* justified or *declared righteous before God*. No, he who seeks self justification is condemned by his very works. The one who was justified or declared righteous (the Greek text says, *approved with the result that he keeps*

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- 11 Perfect Passive Participle of G1344, δικαιόω, dikaiōō, dik-ah-yo'-o, From G1342; to *render* (that is, *show* or *regard* as) *just* or *innocent*: - free, justify (-ier), be righteous
- 12 Present Active Participle of G5312, ὑψόω, hupsoō, hoop-so'-o, From G5311; to *elevate* (literally or figuratively): - exalt, lift up.
- 13 Present Active Participle of G5013, ταπεινῶω, tapeinoō, tap-i-no'-o, From G5011; to *depress*; figuratively to *humiliate* (in condition or heart): - abase, bring low, humble (self).

on being approved) was the one who *humbled* himself before God. The message of Christ in His second sermon to the thief is that **God expects a person to humble themselves before Him in order to be saved**. God does not *need* us, but we *need* Him. God wants us to work, but only within the framework of the valid Christian faith.

We have had a number of people come to our assembly over the past three years and talk to your pastor about Church membership. Many have left without becoming members when they found out that *we are faith based*. What does that mean? It means that a Christian is a person who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and because of that belief he or she *has been saved*. It means that a Christian is a person *surrendered to God*. A Christian is a person who calls *Jesus Christ "Lord"*, and is obedient to His Word and His leading. A Christian is a person who is Heaven bound - not because he or she is better than anyone else, but because he or she has surrendered their lives to Christ. Like the **Publican** of Christ's parable the Christian has said, **God be merciful to me, a sinner**. Like the **thief** who hung next to Jesus, the Christian has said:

FOCAL Luke 23:42 ... **Lord¹⁴, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.**

Did you notice that little word "**Lord**"? There is a rule in the Sacred Scriptures¹⁵, and that is "the very first use

14 G2962, κύριος, kurios, *koo'-ree-os*, From κύριος kuros (*supremacy*); *supreme* in authority, that is, (as noun) *controller*; by implication *Mr.* (as a respectful title): - God, Lord, master, Sir.

15 in this instance, I refer to the *original text of Scripture*, the Greek - Aramaic - Chaldean - Hebrew texts from which our Bible is translated.

of a word defines that word". Was the thief on the Cross using the word "Lord", the Greek **Kurios**, as a title of respect? Was he using it like we would use the word "Sir"? No, not at all. The very first use of the Greek **Kurios** in the New Testament is in

Matthew 1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, **the angel of the Lord** appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

An angel sent from God came to Joseph and told that dear man that Mary's pregnancy was orchestrated of God. I don't have time to talk about that, but I do want to note that the first use of Kurios is to *designate God Himself*. The second use is for God as well,

Matthew 1:22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled **which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet**, saying,

Now some may object, and say "Well, what about in the Book of Luke"? The first use in Luke speaks of John the Baptist's parents, and says:

Luke 1:6 And they were **both righteous before God**, walking in all the **commandments and ordinances of the Lord** blameless.

The word **Lord** refers to God, in particular to God's Law. The second use of Kurios is also a reference to God

(Luke 1:9). The the Greek word Kurios therefore is used to *designate or name God Himself*. The thief who hung next to Christ calls Him **Lord - God - Messiah - and Beloved**, this knowledge cannot come to any using facility of reason. Think on this - Does Jesus *look like God* as He hangs, wounded and bleeding, from this tree? Think about those words:

FOCAL Luke 23:42 ... **Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.**

To the natural eye Jesus could have no kingdom. He's nailed to a Cross, crucified for us in accordance with God's prophetic word. What do the Prophets say of Jesus. Read these words and think on them:

Psalms 22:14-18 I am poured out like water, and **all my bones are out of joint**; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. {15} **My strength is dried up like a potsherd**; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. {16} For **dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.** {17} I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. {18} They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

As Jesus hung on that Cross He looked to be a caricature

of a man. Crucifixion caused a person's bones to pull from the socket, for a person's bones to stand out. The rib cage was very pronounced. The person crucified had to pull themselves up on their wounded hands to breath, and to relieve the pressure of the tearing nails in their feet. A more hellish death could not be conceived by man, but it was made the more hellish still by the people who stood around Jesus and mocked Him. And yet, the **thief called Him Lord!** This is a perfect example of the Christian way of life. There is *no logic* to this, no *reasoning*, no *well thought out proofs*. God opened this man's eyes so that he could see the Savior. He saw - not a fellow man crucified with him - but instead the *Lord of all Creation dying for him*. The Bible says:

1 Corinthians 1:18 For **the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.**

Those who stood at the foot of the Cross mocked Christ, made fun of His suffering, and cast lots for His clothes. They wanted His possessions, but not that Greatest of His possessions, His ability to grant Eternal Life. The Pharisees came to Jesus in His earthly ministry and asked:

Matthew 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, **Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?**

They wanted to *earn* eternal life. They wanted to stand

before God one day, puffed up and proud, and boast on how good they were to get into Heaven's Gate. I tell you, unless you come through the Cross you will go to eternal burning! Unless you believe that Jesus - broken and bleeding - earned your salvation on that Cross, then you shall not be saved.

Like the thief who hung next to Jesus, you need to see Him as **Lord God, King of all**. You need to see Jesus as **King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the only Granter of salvation**. You need to realize that Jesus Christ alone is:

Revelation 1:17-18 ... the first and the last: {18} I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

A Christian is someone who has surrendered their lives to Jesus. This thief desired to be clothed, as he hung naked next to our Lord. He came to Christ and called Him Lord, and he was going to be clothed by God.

2 Corinthians 5:1-3 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. {2} For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: {3} If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

How was this thief clothed? By faith in Christ, dear ones, by faith in Christ alone. Look at Jesus' words - for time flies from us:

FOCAL Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, TODAY SHALT THOU be with me in paradise.

Here is my answer to those who feel that they must *earn* their way to Heaven, that one must be *good enough* to get into the presence of God. The **thief's hands were nailed to that Cross** - he could do no good work. Now let me hasten to say, I believe that he *would have* worked for God had he been able. Remember, dear Ones, that He called Jesus "Lord". He would have been baptized, would have witnessed, would have loved others, would have come to Church, would have prayed to God, would have done the things that every Christian quite naturally does. The Scripture says:

Ephesians 2:10^{HCSB} For we are His creation-- created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.

A Christian who does not do good works is an aberration, an oddity, a thing not fulfilling its function. The great **C.H. Spurgeon** wrote:

Oh! that some of you church-members would put in practice what you believe! Oh! sirs, it is well enough

to say that a Christian should be consistent, but if you are not honest in your business, what does your belief help you? It is well enough to say that a Christian should be godly, but if you are godless in your families, if family prayer is neglected, and private prayer given up, what is the use of your beliefs, what the use of your perfect creeds? You may talk until doomsday about what you believe or what you do not believe, but it is that part of your belief which gets interwoven into the warp and woof of your daily life, which affects your business, which really moves you, impels you, or restrains you, according to whether you would do right or wrong — it is ... Your living godliness, your vital godliness, the godliness that vitalizes you, and makes you live unto God and his truth — this it is to be sought after, and may God of his mercy grant it to each one of us. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”¹⁶

The Bible says:

Galatians 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Salvation by faith does not mean that you do not do good. But it does mean that the good you do *did not save you*. The thief's hands were unable to do good. Nailed to

¹⁶ KNOWING AND DOING. NO. 3348, PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 3RD, 1913., DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, SEP. 20TH, 1868.

the tree, he could not tithe. He could not bend his knees in prayer. He could not walk to Temple or to Church, for his feet were fixed. And yet Jesus said, **Today SHALT THOU be with Me in Paradise.**

Here is my answer to those who believe that - once you die - you sleep in the ground until a coming general resurrection Read the Master's words again:

FOCAL Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, **TODAY shalt thou be WITH ME IN PARADISE.**

What were His words? **TODAY shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.** TODAY - TODAY - TODAY - these words echo throughout eternity - TODAY! Where was that thief going to be that very day? Jesus said **with Me in Paradise.** The thief was not going to sleep in the grave until some future day, then go to Jesus. No, dear Ones, He was to be immediately with Christ **in Paradise**¹⁷. This is the promise the Master makes to all who believe. In a few moments this thief will die. Jesus will surrender His life to the Father, but the thief will die a brutal death. The Roman guards will come by with terrible clubs and break the kneecaps of those who are not dead. This thief will die terribly, executed by the state because he committed a capital crime. And yet, though tossed in an unmarked grave, his spirit will that very day be with Jesus Christ in Paradise. The thief chased treasures on this earth, and found that they brought him to this terrible

¹⁷ G3857, *παράδεισος*, *paradeisos*, *par-ad'-i-sos*, Of Oriental origin (compare [H6508]); a *park*, that is, (specifically) an *Eden* (place of future happiness, “paradise”): - paradise. *The Garden of God.*

end. Jesus warned us:

Matthew 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: {20} But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: {21} For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

His punishment, though cruel, was just. Yet he believed on Jesus - today - and was saved - today. Where is your heart, dear friends? Is it with Jesus Christ? Have you believed on Him and Him alone for salvation, or are you trusting to your own hand? Remember these words:

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

If Jesus is **Lord** to you, as He was to that thief, then no matter what might come your way your inheritance is sure. Those who dallied with God on that terrible day long ago fought over and gambled over the things of Christ. Where is the Savior's purple robe today? Where is the clothing that, though blood stained, they so wanted? **It is rotted - but thief is a thief no longer. He is with**

His Lord. Where will you be one day?

3. In The Third Word, Jesus Surrendered His Earthly Ties

In the third message that Jesus spoke from the Cross, our Master surrendered *all earthly relationships for us*. If you are a Christian, and I pray you are, this should be most precious to you! Let's **look at His third message**, found in:

FOCAL John 19:25-27 Now **there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. {26} When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! {27} Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!** And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

We might be tempted to pass by this Word of God from the Cross, but if we do we have done a great injustice. When we look at a text we should not merely look at the words and move on, but we should look further and ask ourselves WHY and WHO?



WHY did Jesus give His earthly mother Mary to a disciple to care for her? The Bible is very clear in stating that Mary had other children by Joseph her husband.

Right after Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana, we read:

John 2:12 After this {Jesus} went down to Capernaum, **he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples:** and they continued there not many days.

Jesus Christ was born of a virgin - this was a fulfillment of *prophecy* as well as *fact* (see **Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:20-25**). Though Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary did not *remain* a virgin her entire life. After the will of God was accomplished, as Mary was told:

Luke 1:35 ... The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Mary went on to have several other children - quite naturally - through the union she had with her husband Joseph. Though the *Roman Catholic religion* teaches that Mary was a *perpetual virgin*, there is nothing in Sacred Scripture that will support this erroneous teaching. The Bible says **Jesus, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples**. God's Word is sufficient - let's not mince words or add our own words to That Precious and Perfect Word. The great **C.H. Spurgeon** wrote:

"The Scriptures in their own sphere are like God in

the universe — All-sufficient. In them is revealed all the light and power the mind of man can need in spiritual things. We hear of other motive power beyond that which lies in the Scriptures, but we believe such a force to be a pretentious nothing. A train is off the lines, or otherwise unable to proceed, and a break-down gang has arrived. Engines are brought to move the great impediment. At first there seems to be no stir: the engine power is not enough. Harken! A small boy has it. He cries, "Father, if they have not power enough, I will lend them my rocking-horse to help them." We have had the offer of a considerable number of rocking-horses of late."¹⁸

Jesus was born - humanly speaking - through the supernatural intervention of God the Holy Spirit with a virgin woman. He was the *firstborn* of Mary, but not of Joseph. Jesus had several *named stepbrothers* and *unnamed sisters*. We read that our Master, when He attempted to work in Nazareth (His home town), was rejected with these words:

Matthew 13:55-56 **Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? {56} And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?**

Jesus had brothers and sisters. These were not cousins, as

¹⁸ THE GREATEST FIGHT IN THE WORLD, C.H. SPURGEON'S "FINAL MANIFESTO", page 6

some teach, but *stepbrothers and step sisters*. His Father was God, not Joseph. Their father was Joseph. Once you understand this you begin to understand more of the Scripture. Jesus' stepbrothers (and I also suspect His stepsisters as well) did not believe in Him during His earthly ministry. The Apostle John wrote:

John 7:5 For neither did his brethren believe in him.

Though there is no evidence that His brothers attacked Him, there is evidence that they *disbelieved Jesus* and *did not support His ministry*.

One day Jesus was teaching, and the Bible says that His mother and stepbrothers wanted to talk to Him. We read:

Luke 8:19-21 Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. {20} And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. {21} And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.¹⁹

We're starting to see something that is going to answer our initial question. **Why did Jesus give His earthly**

¹⁹ see also Mark 3:32-35, where the stepsisters are mentioned

mother to a disciple? Why didn't Jesus' brothers and sisters take care of Mary their mother? Few faithful and believing people stood at the foot of the Cross that terrible day. As we have already seen, Jesus' stepbrothers did not believe in Him while He walked this earth. There were two at the foot of that Cross who truly believed in Jesus. One was His mother Mary. She was there at the beginning. The Holy Ghost caused her to carry the humanity of Christ. She knew Jesus from the very beginning. She laid Him in a manger, watched the shepherds worship Him. As a young child Mary saw wise men from the east come to worship the Lord:

Matthew 2:11 And when they were come into the house {not a manger, but the house}, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Mary believed. Her other sons and daughters may not have believed, but Mary believed. She showed her belief when she asked Jesus to turn water into wine at Cana. She knew Who Jesus was.

And so did the one called

FOCAL John 19:25-27 ... the disciple standing by, whom he loved....

Though the disciple is not named, all conservative

scholars agree that this unnamed disciple is the **Apostle John**. Jesus, as the firstborn of His household, had the right to dispose of His estate as He saw fit. As He hung dying on the Cross our Lord had surrendered all - all wealth, all family, all ties whatsoever - in order to secure our salvation. As He walked this earth He walked it as a pauper, having only the clothes on His back. Jesus carried no money with Him - Judas kept the purse (**John 13:29**). The few clothes He had were taken from Him, and were being divided up among His persecutors. As Jesus said when He walked this earth:

Matthew 8:20 ... The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

His stepbrothers had abandoned Him. What did Jesus have?

He had a **believing mother** standing and watching Him die. Jesus looked at this believing mother, precious Mary, and looked to see the **believing Apostle John**, standing and weeping with Christ's mother. These two shared tears of sorrow. They believed in Jesus, loved Jesus, but I suspect that even they could not see the full scope of what the Master was doing on that Cross. Jesus looked at John and, exercising His right as Firstborn, said ...

FOCAL **John 19:25-27 ... unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!** {27} Then **saith he**

to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.



AN we learn a lesson from this? Absolutely! Jesus told us when He came and ministered among us that:

Matthew 10:35-39 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. {36} And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. {37} He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. {38} And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. {39} He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

If you want to live the *victorious Christian Life* then Jesus Christ must be first and foremost in all that you do, say, and live! In our day and age people are placing other people - whether they be wives, mothers, children, brothers, sisters, husbands, whatever, *before God*. This

we who are Christians *must not do*. If you belong to God then God must be your first priority! Though Jesus had four brothers (and an unknown number of sisters) that were yet alive, He entrusted His believing mother to the care of the faithful disciple John. Jesus' stepbrothers had abandoned Him, and did not actually begin to believe in Him until after the resurrection (see **Acts 1:14**). They, like Thomas, would not believe until they touched Him and *put their fingers in the nail prints* (**John 20:27**). Though John's faith was tested when Christ died on Calvary, he remained loyal to the Lord to the very end. Though it was dangerous, he stood at the foot of that Cross with Mary. He took Mary into his home, treating her from that moment on as if she were his own mother.

What are the obvious benefits of serving Christ, even when it seems to be *illogical* or *dangerous*. What are the benefits of keeping your eyes on Him no matter what your family or friends may say? Look at John's life! The following is from **Gregory Dill**²⁰:

"He, along with Jesus' mother moved from Jerusalem several years before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Between 65-70 A.D. they moved to Ephesus which was the central Christian church in the surrounding region. An interesting story long current amongst Eastern Orthodox Christians says that when Mary Magdalene retired she also accompanied the Apostle and the mother Mary to Ephesus as well. It was there where they resided until Peter was later captured and taken to Rome while under the evil leadership of Emperor Domitian. Like Nero,

Domitian also hated Christians and continued the ruthless slaughter and persecution of many followers of Jesus. According to Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History III, Domitian considered "himself the successor of Nero in enmity and hostility to God." Tradition states that John was thrown into a pot of boiling oil with the intentions of being killed. Instead he survived and went on to labor in the mines and was later exiled to the island of Patmos just 60 miles off the coast of Ephesus. It was there he received the visions that make up the book of Revelation. He resided on Patmos until finally, the Emperor Domitian who was assassinated by co-conspirators was then succeeded by the Emperor Nerva who then frees John from the danger and returns to reside in Ephesus around 97 A.D. According to Polycarp and Irenaeus, John continued to live in Ephesus until the reign of the Emperor Trajan began (98 A.D.). Trajan did not have the intense hatred towards Christians as Nero and Domitian previously had. He made no special commands and orders to hunt down and capture any remaining Christians scattered throughout the empire. However, in a letter addressed to Pliny, a governor of Bithynia and Pontus, he did state, "These people [Christians] must not be sought out; if they are brought before you and the charge is proved, they must be punished; but any of them who denies he is a Christian and gives visible evidence of that, by praying to our gods... let him be given a pardon for his penitence." (Pliny Letters X.97) It is in Ephesus that John finally dies a natural death around the turn of the century."

20 *Whatever Happened to the Disciples*, posted at <http://www.bibleteacher.org>

John dies a *natural death* - though he was afflicted along life's pathway. What about the other Apostles? Did they die natural deaths? The following is from a website called *gotquestions.org*:²¹

"Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound. ... Peter was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross, according to church tradition because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died. James the Just (the brother of Jesus, not officially an apostle), the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the temptation. James the Greater, a son of Zebedee, was ... beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian. Bartholomew, also know as Nathanael, was a missionary to ... present-day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia when he was flayed to death by a whip. Andrew was crucified ... in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported

that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired. The apostle Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the subcontinent. Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded. The apostle Paul was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67."

Of the Apostles, only John died a natural death! If we keep our eyes on God, we are blessed by God. If we keep our eyes on self, or deny our Savior by life, then we may bring certain destruction on ourselves! There is a great blessing in trusting and following Jesus, even when you don't understand. There is a great blessing in following Him above family, above friends, above danger, above self satisfaction, above all. In one of the most beautiful of the Psalms we read:

Psalms 91:1-16 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. {2} I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. ... {7} A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. ... {15} He shall call upon me, and I will

²¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/apostles-die.html>

answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. {16} With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

God extends the lives of those who serve Him, who focus on Him, who live for Him. Just as there is such a thing as *sin unto death*, there is such a thing as *service unto life*. John loved Jesus. He was not always perfect, for he slept in the Garden of Gethsemane when he should have been praying. John did not believe when he first heard from Mary that Jesus was risen. John was human. But he did what he could to follow Jesus.

This is what God asks of you, that you do what you can to follow Jesus.

May God touch your hearts with these words.

