

The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross

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“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother ... When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!”
John 19:25, 26.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother” (John 19:25). Like her Son, Mary was not unacquainted with grief. At the beginning we are told, “And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was *troubled* at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be” (Luke 1:28, 29). This was but the forerunner of many troubles: Gabriel had come to announce to her the fact of the miraculous conception, and a moment’s reflection will show us that it was no light matter for Mary to become the mother of our Lord in this mysterious and unheard of way. It brought with it, no doubt, at a distant date, great honour, but it brought with it for the present no small danger to Mary’s reputation, and no small trial to her faith. It is beautiful to observe her quiet submission to the will of God: “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; *be it unto me according to thy word*” (Luke 1:38) was her response. This was lovely resignation. Nevertheless, she was “troubled” at the Annunciation and, as we have said, this was but the precursor of many trials and sorrows.

What sorrow it must have caused her when, because there was no room in the inn, she had to lay her new-born babe in the manger! What anguish must have been hers when she

learned of Herod's purpose to destroy her infant's life! What trouble was given her when she was forced on his account to flee into a foreign country and sojourn for several years in the land of Egypt! What piercings of soul must have been hers when she saw her Son despised and rejected of men! What grief must have wrung her heart as she beheld him hated and persecuted by his own nation! And who can estimate what she passed through as she stood there at the cross? If Christ was the man of sorrows, was she not the woman of sorrows?

“There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother” John 19:25.

1. Here we see the fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy.

In accordance with the requirements of the Mosaic law, the parents of the child Jesus brought him to the temple to present him to the Lord. Then it was that old Simeon, who waited for the Consolation of Israel, took him into his arms and blessed God. After saying: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32) — he now turned to Mary and said: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,*) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34, 35). A strange word was that! Could it be that hers, the greatest of all privileges was to bring with it the greatest of all sorrows? It seemed most unlikely at the time Simeon spoke. Yet how truly and how tragically did it come to pass! Here at the cross was this prophecy of Simeon fulfilled.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother” (John 19:25). After the days of his infancy and childhood, and

during all the public ministry of Christ, we see and hear so little of Mary. Her life was lived in the background, among the shadows. But now, when the supreme hour strikes of her Son's agony, when the world has cast out the child of her womb, she stands there by the cross! Who can fitly portray such a picture? Mary was nearest to the cruel tree! Bereft of faith and hope, baffled and paralyzed by the strange scene, yet bound with the golden chain of love to the dying one, there she stands! Try and read the thoughts and emotions of that mother's heart. O what a sword it was that pierced her soul then! Never such bliss at a human birth, never such sorrow at an inhuman death.

Here we see displayed the *Mother-heart*. She is the dying man's mother. The one who agonizes their on the cross is *her* child. She it was who first planted kisses on that brow now crowned with thorns. She it was who guided those hands and feet in their first infantile movements. No mother ever suffered as she did. His disciples may desert him, his friends may forsake him, his nation may despise him, but his mother stands there at the foot of his cross. Oh, who can fathom or analyze the *Mother-heart*.

Who can measure those hours of sorrow and suffering as the sword was slowly drawn through Mary's soul! Hers was no hysterical or demonstrative sorrow. There was no show of feminine weakness; no wild outcry of uncontrollable anguish; no fainting. Not a word that fell from her lips has been recorded by either of the four evangelists: apparently she suffered in unbroken silence. Yet her sorrow was none the less real and acute. Still waters run deep. She saw that brow pierced with cruel thorns, but she could not smooth it with her tender touch. She watched his pierced hands and feet grow numb and livid, but she might not chafe them. She marks his need of a drink, but she is not allowed to slake his thirst. She

suffered in profound desolation of spirit.

“There *stood* by the Cross of Jesus his mother” (John 19:25). The crowds are mocking, the thieves are taunting, the priests are jeering, the soldiers are callous and indifferent, the Saviour is bleeding, dying — and there is his mother beholding the horrible mockery. What wonder if she had swooned at such a sight! What wonder if she had turned away from such a spectacle! What wonder if she had fled from such a scene!

But no! There she is: she does not crouch away, she does not faint, she does not even sink to the ground in her grief — she *stands*. Her action and attitude are unique. In all the annals of history of our race there is no parallel. What transcendent courage. She stood by the cross of Jesus — what marvellous fortitude. She represses her grief, and stands there silent. Was it not *reverence* for the Lord which kept her from disturbing his last moments?

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home” John 19:26, 27.

2. Here we see the perfect man setting example for children to honour their parents.

The Lord Jesus evidenced his perfection in the manner in which he fully discharged the obligations of every relationship that he sustained, either to God or man. On the cross we behold his tender care and solicitude for his mother, and in this we have the pattern of Jesus Christ presented to all children for their imitation, teaching them how to acquit themselves toward their parents according to the laws of nature and grace.

The words which the finger of God engraved on the two tables of stone, and which were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, have never been repealed. They are in force while the earth lasts. Each of them is embodied in the preceptive teaching of the New Testament. The words of Exodus 20:12 are reiterated in Ephesians 6:1-3: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it maybe well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth.”

The commandment for children to *honour* their parents goes far beyond a bare obedience to this expressed will though, of course, it includes that. It embraces love and affection, gratitude and respect. It is too often assumed that this fifth commandment is addressed to young folks only. Nothing can be further from the truth. Unquestionably it is addressed to children first, for in the order of nature children are always young first. But the conclusion that this commandment loses force when childhood is left behind is to miss at least half of its deep significance. As intimated, the word “honour” looks beyond obedience, though that is its first import. In the course of time the children grow to manhood and womanhood, which is the age of full personal responsibility, the age when they are no longer beneath the control of their parents, yet has not their *obligations* to them ceased. They owe their parents a debt which they can never fully discharge. The very least they can do is to hold their parents in high esteem, to put them in the place of superiority, to reverence them. In the perfect Exemplar we find both obedience and esteem manifested.

The fact that the last Adam came into this world not as did the first Adam — in full possession of the distinguishing glories of humanity: fully developed in body and mind — but as a babe, having to pass through the period of childhood, is a fact of tremendous importance and value in the light it casts on

the fifth commandment. During his early years the boy Jesus was under the control of Mary his mother and Joseph his legal father. This is beautifully displayed in the second chapter of Luke.

Arrived at the age of twelve, Jesus is taken by them to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. The picture presented is deeply suggestive if due attention is paid to it. At the close of the feast Joseph and Mary depart for Nazareth, accompanied by their friends and supposing that Jesus is with them. But, instead, he had remained behind in the royal city. After a day's journey his absence is discovered. At once they turn back to Jerusalem, and there they find him in the temple. His mother interrogates him thus: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee *sorrowing*" (Luke 2:48). The fact she had sought him "sorrowing" strongly implies that he had hardly ever been outside the immediate sphere of her influence. Not to find him at hand, was to her a new and strange experience, and the fact that she, assisted by Joseph, had sought him "sorrowing" reveals the beautiful relationship existing between them in the home at Nazareth! The answer that Jesus returned to her inquiry, when rightly understood, also reveals the honour in which he held his mother. We quite agree with Dr Campbell Morgan that Christ does not here *rebuke* her. It is largely a matter of finding the right emphasis: "Wist ye not?" As the aforementioned expositor well says, "It was though he had said: 'Mother, surely *you* knew me well enough to know that nothing could detain me but the affairs of the Father.'" The sequel is equally beautiful, for we read, "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, *and was subject unto them*" (Luke 2:51). And thus for all time the Christ of God has set the example for children to obey their parents.

But more. As it is with us, so it was with Christ: the years of

obedience to Mary and Joseph ended, but not so the years of “honour.” In the last and awful hours of his human life, amid the infinite sufferings of the cross, the Lord Jesus thought of her who loved him and whom he loved; thought of her present necessity and provided for her future need by committing her to the care of that disciple who most deeply understood his love. His thought for Mary at that time and the honour he gave her was one of the manifestations of his victory over pain.

Perhaps a word is called for in connection with our Lord’s form of address — “Woman.” So far as the record of the four gospels go, never once did he call her “Mother.” For us who live today, the reason for this is not hard to discern. Looking down the centuries with his omniscient foresight, and seeing the awful system of Mariolatry so soon to be erected, he refrained from using a word which would in any wise countenance this idolatry — the idolatry of rendering to Mary the homage which is due alone her Son; the idolatry of worshipping her as “The Mother of God.”

Twice over in the gospel records do we find our Lord addressing Mary as “Woman,” and it is most noteworthy that both of these are found in *John’s* gospel which, as is well known, sets forth our Saviour’s deity. The synoptists set him forth in human relationships; not so the fourth gospel. *John’s* gospel presents Christ as the Son of God, and as *Son of God* he is above all human relationships, and hence the perfect consonance of presenting the Lord Jesus here addressing Mary as “Woman.”

Our Lord’s act on the cross in commending Mary to the care of his beloved apostle is better understood in the light of his mother’s *widowhood*. Though the gospels do not specifically record his death, there is little doubt but that Joseph died some time before the Lord Jesus began his public ministry. Nothing is seen of Mary’s husband after the incident recorded in Luke

2 when Christ was a boy of twelve. In John 2 Mary is seen at the Cana marriage, but no hint is given that Joseph was present. It was in view, then, of Mary's *widowhood*, in view of the fact that the time had now arrived when he might no longer be a comfort to her by his bodily presence, that his loving care is manifested.

Permit just a brief word of exhortation. Probably these lines may be read by numbers of grown-up people who still have living fathers and mothers. How are you treating them? Are you truly "honouring" them? Does this example of Christ on the cross put you to shame? It may be you are young and vigorous, and your parents gray-headed and infirm; but saith the Holy Spirit, "Despise not thy mother when she is old" (Prov. 23:22). It may be you are rich, and they are poor; then fail not to make provision for them. It may be they live in a distant state or land, then neglect not to write them words of appreciation and cheer which shall brighten their closing days. These are sacred *duties*. "Honour *thy* father, *and* thy mother."

3. Here we see that John had returned to the Saviour's side.

Excepting, of course, the suffering of Christ at the hand of God, perhaps the bitterest dreg of all in the cup which he drank was the forsaking of him by the apostles. It was bad enough and sad enough that his own people, the Jews, should despise and reject him; but it was far worse that the Eleven, who had accompanied so long with him, should desert their Lord in the hour of crisis. One would have thought that *their* faith and *their* love was equal to any shock. But it was not. "They *all* forsook him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56) reads the sacred narrative. Unspeakably tragic was this. Their failure to "watch" with him for one hour in the Garden well nigh paralyses our minds, but their turning away from him at the

time of his arrest almost baffles comprehension. Almost, we say, for have we not learned from bitter experience the deceitfulness of *our* hearts, how feeble *our* faith is, how lamentably weak *we* are in the hour of trial and testing! But for the grace of God the veriest trifle is sufficient to overturn us. Let the restraining and upholding power of God be withdrawn from us, and how long would *we* stand?

The Lord Jesus had solemnly warned these disciples of their approaching cowardice: “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (Matthew 26:31). And not Peter only but all of the apostles affirmed their determination to stand by him: “Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. *Likewise also* said all the disciples” (Matthew 26:35). Nevertheless, his word proved true, and they all basely deserted him. And how this reflected upon his glory! By their sinful flight they exposed the Lord Jesus to the contempt and scoffs of his enemies. It was because of this we read, “The high priest then asked Jesus *of his disciples*” (John 18:19). It is not difficult to fill in the blanks. Doubtless Caiaphas inquired how many disciples he had, and what was become of them now? And what was the reason they had forsaken their Master, and left him to shift for himself when danger appeared? But observe that to this question, the Saviour made no reply. *He* would not accuse them to the common enemy though they had deserted him!

They forsook him because they were “offended” at him: “All ye shall be *offended* because of me this night” (Matthew 26:31): the Greek word here translated “offended” might well be rendered “scandalized.” They were ashamed to be found in his company. They deemed it no longer safe to remain with him. As he gave himself up, they considered it advisable to

provide as well as they might for themselves, and somewhere or other take refuge from the present storm which had overtaken him. This from the human side.

From the divine side their forsaking of Christ was due to the suspension of God's preserving and upholding grace. They were not accustomed to forsake him. They never did so afterwards. They would not have done so now had there been influences of power, zeal and love from heaven upon them. But then how could Christ have borne the burden and heat of the day? How should he have trod the winepress alone? How should his sorrows have been unmitigated if they had adhered faithfully to him? No, no, it must not be. Christ must not have the least relief or comfort from any creature, and therefore that he might be left alone to grapple with the wrath of God and man, the Lord for a time withholds his strengthening influences from them; and then like Samson, when he was shorn of his locks, they were as weak as other men. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" says the apostle — if that be withheld our purposes and resolutions melt away before temptation like snow before the sun.

Yet mark that the cowardice and infidelity of the apostles was only temporary. Later, they *sought* him at the appointed place in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). But is it not cheering to know that one of the eleven *did* seek him out *before* he rose in triumph from the tomb? Yea, sought him while he yet hung on the cross of shame! And who might it be supposed this one was? Which of the little band of apostles shall demonstrate the superiority of *his* love? Even if the sacred narrative had concealed his identity, it would not have been a difficult task to supply his name. The fact that the scripture we are now considering shows us *John* at the foot of the cross is one of the silent yet sufficient witnesses to the divine inspiration of the Bible. It is one of those undesigned *harmonies* of the word

which attests the super-human origin of the scriptures. There is no hint that any other of the eleven were around the cross, but the thoughtful reader would *expect* to find there “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” And there he was. John *had* returned to the Saviour’s side, and there receives from him a blessed commission. How artless and how perfect are the silent harmonies of scripture!

And now, once more, a brief word of exhortation. Is there one who reads these lines that has wandered away from the side of the Saviour, who is no longer enjoying sweet communion with him; who is, in a word, a *backslider*? Perhaps in the hour of trial you denied him. Perhaps in the time of testing you failed. You have given more thought to your own interests than his. The honour *of his* name which you bear has been lost sight of. O may the arrow of conviction now enter your conscience. May divine grace melt your heart. May the power of God draw you back to Christ, where alone your soul can find satisfaction and peace. Here is *encouragement* for you. Christ did not *rebuke* John on returning; instead, his wondrous grace bestowed on him an unspeakable privilege. Cease then your wanderings and return at once to Christ, and he will greet you with a word of welcome and cheer; and who knows but what he has some honourous commission awaiting you!

4. Here we discover an illustration of Christ’s prudence.

We have already seen how the act of Christ in committing Mary into the hands of his disciple was an expression of his tender love and foresight. For John to take charge of the widowed mother of the Saviour was a blessed commission, and albeit, a precious legacy. When Christ said to him, “Behold thy mother,” it was as though he had said, Let her be to thee as thine own mother: Let thy love for me be now

manifested in thy tender regard for her. Yet there was far more behind this act of Christ than that.

Of old it had been predicted that the Lord Jesus should act wisely and discreetly. Through Isaiah God had said, “Behold, my servant shall *deal prudently*” (Isaiah 52:13). In commending his mother to the care of his loved apostle the Saviour displayed wise discrimination in his choice of the one who was henceforth to be her guardian. Perhaps there was none who understood the Lord Jesus so well as his mother, and it is almost certain that none had apprehended his love so deeply as had John. We see therefore how they would be fit companions for each other, inasmuch as there was an intimate bond of common sympathy uniting them together and uniting them to Christ! Thus there was none other so well suited to take care of Mary, none whose company she would find so congenial, and on the other hand, there was none whose fellowship John would more enjoy.

Furthermore, it needs to be borne in mind that a wondrous and honourous work was waiting for John. Years later, the Lord Jesus was to reveal himself to this apostle in glorious apocalypse. How better, then, could he equip himself for this than by being constantly with her who had lived in closest intimacy and intercourse with the Saviour during the thirty years *he had waited* for the time to come when his work should begin! We can therefore see how that there was a significant appropriateness in bringing these two — Mary and John — together. Admire then the prudence of Christ’s election of a home for Mary, and at the same time providing a companion for the disciple whom he loved with whom he might have blessed spiritual fellowship.

Ere passing to our next point we may remark that this taking of Mary into his home throws light on an incident recorded in the next chapter of John’s gospel. In John 20 we learn of the

visit of Peter and John to the empty sepulchre. John outran his companion and arrived first at the tomb, but went not in. Peter, characteristically, goes into the sepulchre, and notes the orderly arrangement of the clothes. Then enters John and he sees and “believed” for up to this time their faith had not grasped the promises of Christ’s resurrection. Consequent on John’s believing, we read, “Then the disciples went away again *unto their own home*” (John 20:10). We are not told *why* they did this, but in view of John 19:27 the explanation is obvious. There we are told that, “from that hour that disciple took her *unto his own home*,” and now that he has learned the Saviour is risen from the dead, he hastens back “home” to tell *her* the good news! Who more than she would rejoice at the glad tidings! This is another example of the silent and hidden harmonies of scripture.

5. Here we see that spiritual relationships must not ignore the responsibilities of nature.

The Lord Jesus was dying as the Saviour for sinners. He was engaged in the most momentous and the most stupendous undertaking that this earth ever has or ever will witness. He was on the point of offering satisfaction to the outraged justice of God. He was just about to do that work for which the world had been made, for which the human race had been created, for which all the ages had waited, and for which he, the eternal Word, had become incarnate. Nevertheless, he does not overlook the responsibilities of natural ties; he fails not to make provision for her who, according to the flesh, was his mother.

There is a lesson here which many need to take to heart in these days. No duty, no work, however important it may be, can excuse us from discharging the obligations of nature, from caring for those who have fleshly claims upon us. They who

go forth as missionaries to labour in heathen lands, and who leave their children behind, or who send them back to the homeland to be cared for by *strangers*, are not following the steps of the Saviour. Those women who spend most of their time at public meetings, even though they be religious meetings, or who go down into the slums to minister to the poor and needy, to the *neglect* of their own family at home, do but bring reproach upon the name and cause of Christ. Those men, even though they stand at the forefront of Christian work, who are so busy preaching and teaching that they have *no time* to discharge the obligations that they owe to *their own* wives and children, need to study and practice the principle exemplified here by Christ on the cross.

6. Here we see a universal need exemplified.

How different is the Mary of scripture from the Mary of superstition! She was no proud Madonna but, like each of us, a member of a fallen race, a sinner both by nature and practice. Before the birth of Christ she declared, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Saviour*” (Luke 1:46, 47). And now at the death of the Lord Jesus she is found before the cross. The word of God presents not the mother of Jesus as the queen of angels decked with diadem, but as one who herself rejoiced in a Saviour. It is true she is “blessed among (not ‘above’) women,” and that by virtue of the high honour of being the mother of the Redeemer; yet was she human, a real member of our fallen race, a sinner needing a Saviour.

She stood by the cross. And as she stood there, the Saviour exclaimed, “Woman, *behold* thy Son!” (John 19:26). There, summed up in a single word, is expressed the *need* of every descendant of Adam — to turn the eye away from the world, off from self, and to look by faith to the Saviour that died for

sinners. There is the divine epitome [typical example] of the Way of Salvation. Deliverance from the wrath to come, forgiveness of sins, acceptance with God, is obtained not by deed of merit, not by good works, not by religious ordinances; no, salvation comes by beholding — “Behold the *Lamb of God* which taketh away the sin of the world.” Just as the serpent-bitten Israelites in the wilderness were healed by a look, by a look at that which Jehovah had appointed to be the object of their faith, so today, redemption from the guilt and power of sin, emancipation from the curse of the broken law and from the captivity of Satan, is to be found alone by faith in Christ, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14, 15). There is life in a look. Reader, have you thus *beheld* that divine Sufferer? Have you seen him dying on the cross the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God? Mary the mother of Christ needed to “behold” him, and so do *you*. Then look, look unto Christ and be ye saved.

7. Here we see the marvellous blending of Christ’s perfections.

This is one of the greatest wonders of his person — the blending of the most perfect human affection with his divine glory. The very gospel which most of all shows him to be God is here careful to prove he was man — the Word made flesh. Engaged as he was in a divine transaction, making atonement for all the sins of all his people, grappling with the powers of darkness, yet amid it all, he has still the same human tenderness, which shows the perfection of the man Jesus Christ.

This care for his mother in his dying hour was characteristic of all his conduct. Everything was natural and perfect. The

unstudied simplicity about him is most marked. There was nothing pompous or ostentatious. Many of his mightiest works were done on the highway, in the cottage, or among a little group of sufferers. Many of his words, which today are still unfathomable and exhaustless in their wealth of meaning, were uttered almost casually as he walked with a few friends. So it was at the cross. He was performing that mightiest work of all history. He was engaged in doing that, which in comparison, the creating of a world fades into utter insignificance, yet he forgets not to make provision for his mother — much as he might have done had they been together in the home at Nazareth. Rightly was it said of old, “His name shall be called *Wonderful*” (Isa. 9:6). Wonderful he was in all that he did. Wonderful he was in every relationship that he sustained. Wonderful he was in his person, and wonderful he was in his work. Wonderful was he in life, and wonderful was he in death. Let *us* wonder and adore.

The third of seven booklets.

