

Good Friday 2017 – The Women at the Cross www.bible-sermons.org
(inspiration and material from Windows on Easter by Bill Crowder)

We are here tonight to remember what Jesus suffered on our behalf almost two thousand years ago. The Gospels show that Jesus deliberately chose to suffer the punishment our sins deserve so that we might be forgiven. Our sins, past, present, and future, were borne by Jesus so that we could receive the forgiveness He offers us and forever be in a right relationship with God. Jesus faced God's just wrath for our sins. This is one transaction that sounds too good to be true, but actually is. God has given us the gracious opportunity to exchange our sins for the righteousness of Christ. When we do, He also empowers us to reject sin and promises that He will make us into the image of Christ. That work begins when we accept that exchange, but it will be completed when we see Jesus face to face. That is the wonderful message of the greatest injustice in history. Jesus chose to pay our sin debt in His body upon the cross.

Tonight, I want to focus us on the women around the cross. The Scriptures tell us of six women of incredible devotion. Luke introduces us to some of them in Luke 8:1-3.

¹ 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.

Women of that day were not considered nearly as important as men. Jewish men would regularly pray a prayer of thanksgiving for not being made a woman. Religious education was for men. Women were completely dependent upon men for support. A rabbi would not consider allowing women to follow him or sit under his instruction. Jesus broke the mold. Among Jesus' disciples were these women who had been delivered of demons or cured of afflictions. In gratitude for their healing, they devoted themselves to serving Jesus and supporting His ministry.

Mary of Magdala was delivered of seven demons. She also appears at the cross and at the empty tomb. She is the first person to see the resurrected Lord. She obviously had great love for Jesus. She risked being associated with Jesus at His execution. Some people claim she had been a prostitute before Jesus set her free, but there is nothing to indicate that in Scripture. **What we do see is a devotion that is worthy of imitation.**

Joanna was the wife of Chuza, the primary household servant of Herod Antipas. This is the Herod who executed John the Baptist, who Jesus referred to as "that fox," and who humiliated Jesus when Pilate sent Jesus to him to be judged. We don't know what conflict her love for Jesus created with her husband, but it couldn't have been easy. Her husband would have had to have been grateful that Jesus healed her, but fearful of losing his esteemed position if Herod thought he sympathized with Jesus. If Joanna's devotion to Jesus risked her family's income, she didn't let it stop her.

We know the least about Susanna. Her name means "lily." We do see the passage says these women gave financial support to the ministry. Along with these women, Luke says, were many others who provided for the disciples out of their means. We wonder at all the gossip that must have taken place about Jesus and His men *and* women disciples. These women all risked their reputations to serve the One who had set them free from demons or illness.

Mary of Magdala was at the crucifixion. I would venture to guess that some of the other previously mentioned women were there too, but John picks out three other women in particular. ²⁵ *but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.* John 19:25 Some commentators say it was less dangerous for women to be there and so we can excuse the men. That may have been true to some degree, but anyone showing sympathy for a person who was considered an insurgent was suspect and opening themselves up to potential abuse and interrogation.

William Barclay wrote, "Some say that because women were so unimportant in that culture, that no one would really notice their presence - and they ran no risk of being there. In fact, it was always a dangerous thing to be an associate of a man considered so dangerous by the Roman government that he deserved a cross. It is always a dangerous thing to demonstrate one's love for someone the orthodox regard as a heretic. The presence of these women at the cross was not due to the fact that they were so unimportant that no one would notice them – **their presence was due to the fact that perfect love casts out fear.**"

Jesus' mother was the first of three mentioned. The prophet Simeon had warned her that a day was coming when a sword would pierce her heart. This was that day when a physical sword would have seemed less painful. Her love was so strong she could not be kept away. The only male disciple present was John the Beloved, who stood with her.

Mary's sister, Salome, was there. She is the mother of James and John. This means that James and John were considered cousins of Jesus, Mary's nephews. Salome had asked for her sons to have the honor of the thrones next to Jesus in the kingdom of God. Jesus rebuked her for making the request (Matthew 20:20-23). But here she is comforting her sister and grieving over Jesus' agony. That tells us that even through Jesus' rebuke, she could see that she was loved. It demonstrates her humility to receive the rebuke and yet continue to love to the extent of risking her safety to be there.

Mary, the wife of Cleopas was the mother of James the Less and Joses (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40). We learn from Matthew that Cleopas was also called Alpheus (Matthew 10:3). Some ancient records indicate that he was the brother of Joseph, and was therefore Jesus' uncle. His wife, Mary, was not only there to comfort family, but because of her devotion and faith in Jesus.

Here are these women and just one male disciple, John. Peter boasted that he would die with Jesus, but he is nowhere to be seen. It was the women whose love drove them

to fearlessly be identified with Jesus. I imagine their presence and seeing their expression of love and devotion was a comfort to Jesus in those hours of agony. They no doubt bore mocking and ridicule from some in the crowd. I can imagine the taunts were painful, but refuse to put them into words.

The presence of these women should encourage us to look on Jesus' sufferings and consider what He endured for us. I don't think they wanted to look, but they had to. We need to, for it causes us to love Him like they did. Look on Him and see Him bearing our sins, gaining for us cleansing, release from guilt, and eternal forgiveness. They wept, and so should we. Weep for the humiliation of sin, for the greatness of His love, for the agony He endured, but weep also with joy for such great grace that brings us salvation. There is God demonstrating His justice and His love in one marvelous act. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Let us also learn from these women that love can vanquish our fears, so that we can publicly stand with Jesus regardless of what others may say or the shame society might heap on us.

I close the message with a verse from Hebrews. *¹² ... Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*
Hebrews 13:12-15

Communion

On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus share His last meal with His disciples. He began by washing their feet. Then He said to them, *¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.* John 13:13-17 (ESV) He would have washed his hands as described in the Law, and then He began the Last Supper. At one point He took the bread, blessed the Father, and surprised the disciples by saying, This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. (distribute the bread and pray) Then Jesus took the cup and told the disciples it represented the new covenant in His blood. They did not know He was about to pour out His life blood on our behalf the very next morning under the Roman lashes and on the cross. (Distribute and pray) We take the cup in gratitude for the price He paid for our sins.

Let us stand sing a closing song. - As we go to our homes, let us take time to meditate on the love that would suffer the cross that we might have eternal life and renew our commitment to follow Him with our whole hearts. May God bless you as you meditate on the price He paid that we might be in His presence forever. – C U Easter!