

“The Last Words of Jesus: #3 - Affection”

Γύναι ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου. . . ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου.

“Woman, here is your son” . . . “here is your mother” (John 19:25-27).

Matthew 12:46-50; John 19:17-27 ¹

Love that’s real reaches beneath and beyond the wreckage that is sometimes all that’s left of a human body to care for the person who is still within. And so it was that love brought Mary, the mother of our Lord, to the foot of the cross where the brutalized and barely recognizable body of her oldest son hung in shame and disgrace between earth and sky.

We don’t know a lot about Jesus’ earthly family—certainly not as much as we’d like to know. We know a little about His birth in Bethlehem, and we know that His family lived for several years in Egypt to escape Herod’s efforts to kill Him.

We know that Jesus grew up in Nazareth, that His father was a carpenter, and that His knowledge of God and the Scriptures amazed the leaders of the Temple when He was just twelve years old. Since Joseph is never mentioned again after that Temple visit, we assume that Jesus’ father died at some point between the times when Jesus was twelve and thirty, leaving Jesus to manage the shop, care for His mother, and provide for His siblings.

We know that Jesus had four younger brothers, with James probably being next in line, and that He had at least two sisters (Mark 6:3). We know that as Jesus began His public ministry, His family thought He had lost His mind (Mark 3:21), and that when Jesus prepared to journey toward the cross, His brothers mocked Him (John 7:1-5).

We know a quite a bit about the last three years of Jesus’ earthly life. We know a great deal about His last week, and we know more than we want to know about His final hours. So it is that we find ourselves this morning at the foot of the cross once again.

Mary, Jesus’ mother, is at the foot of the cross, too, her hot tears giving quiet vent to her anguished heart. She and her son have always known this moment was coming, but it is more horrible than imagination had ever allowed her to foresee (Luke 2:34-35).

Although Mary grieved with the lonely pain that only a mother’s heart can know, Mary did not stand alone. We know that at least three other women and one man wept at her side. One of these was her sister, Salome, the mother of the disciples James and John. There was a second Mary, the wife of Clopas, and also a third, known as Mary from Magdala, or Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had once cast out seven demons (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40, 16:9; Luke 8:2; John 20:1). The man was Salome’s son, Jesus’ cousin, John, “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 13:23, 19:26-27, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20).

The Bible says that *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home* (John 19:26-27). We call these two statements, taken together, Jesus’ Third Word from the Cross. This is the Word of Affection, the Word of Love.

Even as He bled to death, beaten and tortured nearly beyond recognition, Jesus’ love reached out to His mother, this woman of deep faith who as a teenager had said to the angel Gabriel, “*I am the Lord’s servant . . . may your word to me be fulfilled*” (Luke 1:38).

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on March 11, 2012.

We have no indication that any of Jesus' brothers and sisters were in Jerusalem at the time of His death. In asking John to care for Mary, Jesus commended His mother to His nearest male relative who believed in Him, His cousin who knew Him to be not just Yeshua, Joseph's son, but also the Lord Christ, whose birth the prophets foretold and the angels sang, by whose word all that is was created, and by whose power all things are held together until this very moment.

Jesus' third Word from the Cross teaches us some things about what it means to be family. While the Bible states very clearly that God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman committed to each other for all of life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5), there is no one model for a family. A family can be one person living alone. A family can be persons who are related by blood or adoption. And a family can be persons who covenant to live together as family. The Family of Faith, the church, is a primary example of such a covenant family (Galatians 6:10; 1 John 4:10-11).

I want to make three points this morning about families; first, the Bible teaches us that we have a spiritual responsibility to care for our biological families; second, Jesus taught us that our spiritual family sometimes takes precedence over our biological families; and third, we need to pray faithfully for all of our family members, believers or not, because there's just no telling what God may yet do in their lives.

First, with respect to our biological families, Jesus chastised the Pharisees and the teachers of religious law for allowing people to avoid their obligation to care for their needy parents by making contributions to the Temple instead (Mark 7:9-12). And Paul wrote that *"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"* (1 Timothy 5:8). Almost literally from "cover to cover," the Bible clearly teaches us to care for our families—especially our parents, our mates, and our children, though the circles of our care are frequently larger than this.

In the Old Testament, one of the many pagan practices God condemned was the sacrifice of children to Molech (Leviticus 20:1-5). These human sacrifices involved burning infants alive to appease this angry Canaanite god.

While we're not usually so blatant about sacrificing our own children, we often do sacrifice them, nonetheless. Many years ago, I had a counseling client who was a young woman in high school. Her behavior was becoming more and more uncontrollable, and her parents, who owned several large radio stations, brought their daughter to me to have her "fixed." After several sessions with this young woman, I told her parents that their daughter's behavior seemed to be primarily a protest against being sacrificed on the altar of their businesses; and I'm afraid that it's becoming easier and easier for us to make this mistake.

As we Americans become accustomed to higher and higher standards of living, with more and more expensive "toys," both of us as parents tend to work outside the home, and to work longer hours, not to provide the necessities of life, but to have playthings and pleasures of one sort or another. There are many exceptions, of course, but it does seem to me that our "desire for nice things" (Mark 4:19) frequently leads us farther and farther away from God's plan for "abundant life" (John 10:10).

While we surely do want to offer such advantages to our children as we are able to do, the reality is that it's far more important for our children to develop biblical character grounded in love and in time spent together as a family than it is for them to develop skill in sports, dance, music, or anything else. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse has done an extensive study that indicates that drug-free teens have parents who know

what they watch on TV, what they do on the Internet, what CDs they listen to, where they are, who they're with and what they're doing, and how they're doing in school.

These "tough love" parents also arrange to be home when the teens get home from school, and they eat dinner with their teens six or seven nights a week.² That's a tall order these days, but the truth is that **it takes time to build character**. Unfortunately, the more we're seduced by the values of the world, the more we tend to give our kids stuff instead of time.

The 1958 film, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is based on Tennessee Williams's play by the same name. In one poignant scene, the father, known as Big Daddy, and his estranged son, Brick, get into an argument that resembled Tennessee's relationship with his own father:

"Brick, I'm worth ten million dollars in cash and stocks, and I own 28,000 acres of land."

Brick answers cynically, "Well, that's pretty rich to be."

Big Daddy responds in anger, "What was there that you wanted that I didn't buy for you?!"

"You can't buy love!" Brick retorts. "You bought yourself a million dollars worth of junk! Look at it! Does it love you?!"

"Who do you think I bought it for? Me? It's yours! The place. The money. Every rotten thing is yours!"

"I don't want things! Can't you understand? I never wanted your place, or money, or to own anything. **All I ever wanted was for you to love me.**"³

We see a very different picture in the film *I Am Sam*, a story about a mentally handicapped father whose mind functions like that of a six-year-old. Although his daughter, Lucy, has been taken away from him by the courts, they still get to spend time together. In one conversation at the park Lucy asks, "Daddy, did God mean for you to be like this, or was it an accident?"

"Okay, what do you mean?"

Lucy gently continues, "I mean you're different. You're not like other daddies."

Sam thinks about that for a moment and answers, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Lucy takes his hand. "It's okay, Daddy. Don't be sorry. I love you. Nobody else's daddy ever comes to the park."

Sam's face lights up. "Yeah. Yeah. We are lucky. Aren't we lucky? Yeah."⁴

So which father was really rich? I'm afraid that many of us make some pretty serious mistakes in how we invest our time. I know I did as our children were growing up. Sometimes I still do. But by God's grace you and I can live differently in the future than we've lived in the past.

Second, while Jesus taught us that we have both the responsibility and the opportunity of caring for our biological families, Jesus also taught us that our spiritual family sometimes

² Pete Hartogs, "Study: Rules Improve Parent-Child Relationship," CNN Online, February 21, 2001.

³ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (MGM, 1958), screenplay written by Richard Brooks and James Poe based on the Tennessee Williams play, directed by Richard Brooks.

⁴ *I Am Sam* (New Line Cinema, 2001), written by Kristine Johnson and Jessie Nelson, directed by Jessie Nelson.

takes precedence over our biological families. I think Jesus' cousin John may have been "the disciple whom Jesus loved" because John was His only relative besides His mother who truly understood who He was. John was a part of Jesus' spiritual family as well as His biological family.

"Who is my mother?" Jesus asked, "and who are my brothers? . . . Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50). Jesus' words to His Mother and to John demonstrate both His commitment to His blood kin and the reality that spiritual connections are sometimes stronger than biological ones. It was for this very reason that Jesus said, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).*

Please listen closely here. Jesus didn't mean for us to literally hate our families, and Jesus wasn't saying that biological family is unimportant. God created the family, after all! But Jesus did mean that where there is tension between competing loyalties, being obedient to God is more important than our commitment to our families—so much more important that even our love for the dearest persons in our lives pales into insignificance in comparison with our passionate love for Him.

Finally, there are two surprising words of Hope that grow out of this Third Word from the Cross. Jesus entrusted His Mother to John because John understood who He was, and Jesus' brothers and sisters did not . . . at least not right then. But within several years, and perhaps even within months, Jesus' next brother, James, did come to understand and to believe that His brother Jesus was indeed the Christ, the promised Savior.⁵

James, the scoffer became James, the leader of the Jerusalem church and author of the New Testament letter that bears his name. Josephus wrote that James was eventually stoned to death in A.D. 62 because of his testimony that his brother Yeshua was the Christ.

The first word of Hope I want you to hear this morning about your biological family is that we do well to be faithful in prayer for our family members who have not yet come home to faith. Even though our loved ones may seem to be in "the far country of the spirit" at the moment, God's work in their lives may yet be incredibly fruitful!

The second word of Hope we find in this anguished scene is that God often adds members to our spiritual family from the most unexpected places and in the most unlikely ways. The Bible tells us that the Roman soldiers forced one Simon from Cyrene, a city in North Africa, to help Jesus carry His cross (Mark 15:21).

Simon was on his way into the city to do business when the Romans commandeered him and pressed him into their service. We're also told that Simon had two sons, Alexander and Rufus, who may have been with him when this happened. From what the New Testament tells us, it appears that Simon later became a believer, together with his wife and both of his sons.

The Bible tells us that Simon's son, Rufus, later worked with Paul, and Simon's wife became like a mother to Paul as well (Romans 16:13). The Good News of redemption is that even in the times of our own greatest stress and trial, God can still work through us to change other lives! And the changes go on . . . and on . . . and on, multiplying into that great host of witnesses who cheer us on today and with whom we will share the New Creation God has promised! (Hebrews 11:39-12:2).

⁵ And after James, Jesus' brother, Jude, came to that same conclusion.

Jesus' third Word from the Cross is about love, and some children defined love this way: "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth."

"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

"Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well."

"You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget."⁶

This week marks the sixth anniversary of my Dad's resurrection, and this time, Mom and Dad shared it together. Jesus' third Word from the Cross is about love, and Dad's favorite hymn was a hymn that tells the story of God's love. I invite you to sing it with me, now. It's called *Love Lifted Me . . .*.⁷

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more;
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me, now safe am I.

Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help, Love lifted me.
Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help, Love lifted me.

All my heart to him I give, ever to Him I'll cling,
In His blessed presence live, ever His praises sing;
Love so mighty and so true merits my soul's best songs;
Faithful loving service, too, to Him belongs. (Chorus)

Souls in danger, look above, Jesus completely saves;
He will lift you by His love out of the angry waves;
He's the Master of the sea, billows his will obey;
He your Savior wants to be, be saved today. (Chorus)

⁶ "What Is Love—From a Kid's Point of View," *LightSinger*, March 13, 2002.

⁷ Words: James Rowe, 1865-1933; Music: Howard E. Smith, 1863-1918