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The Seven Last Sayings of Christ: A Provision for His Mother

Scripture: John 19:26–27

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In the midst of His greatest anguish, Christ's attention was not on Himself and His needs. Even as He hung on the cross, beaten and bleeding to death, His focus was on all that His Father was accomplishing—we see that illustrated in each of His seven last sayings. Today we'll see how He made provision for His earthly mother.

A Scene No Mother Wants to See

Jesus' enemies were not the only spectators at the cross. As word got around Jerusalem that morning that Christ was under arrest and had been condemned to death by the Sanhedrin, some of His closest loved ones came to be near Him. John 19:25 describes the scene: "Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."

Some interpreters believe John mentions only three women, and that "His mother's sister" is the same person as "Mary the wife of Clopas." But that would mean these two sisters were both named Mary, and that seems highly unlikely. Instead, it seems John was saying there were three women named Mary present (Jesus' mother, Mrs. Clopas, and Mary Magdalene), as well as a fourth woman (Mary's sister) whose name is not given—but she might have been Salome, the mother of James and John. John also indicates in verse 26 that he himself was present, referring to himself the way he always did in his gospel, as "the disciple whom [Jesus] loved" (cf. John 21:20–24).

The pain of watching Jesus die must have been agonizing for His loved ones. But for no one was it more difficult than Mary, His earthly mother. Years before, at His birth, the elderly prophet Simeon had told her,

Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and *a sword will pierce even your own soul*—to the end, that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. (Luke 2:34–35, emphasis added)

The sword Simeon spoke of was now piercing her heart as she watched her firstborn Son die.

She had reared Him from childhood. She knew His utter perfection better than anyone. And yet as she watched, crowds of people poured contempt on her Son, cruelly mocking and abusing Him. His bleeding, emaciated form hung helplessly on the cross, and all she could do was watch His agony. The sorrow and pain such a sight would cause His mother is unfathomable. And yet instead of shrieking and crumpling in hysteria, turning and fleeing in terror, or falling into a faint at the horrible sight, she stood. She is the very model of courage.

Jesus saw her standing and grieving there, and His third saying from the cross reflects the tender love of a Son for His mother.

When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household. (John 19:26–27)

When Jesus said, “Behold, your son,” He was not referring to Himself. He probably nodded at John. He was making a gracious provision for Mary in the years to come. He was delegating to John the responsibility to care for Mary in her old age.

A Unique Relationship

This was a beautiful gesture, and it says a lot about the personal nature of Jesus’ love. Although He was dying under the most excruciating kind of anguish, Jesus, the king of love, selflessly turned aside to care for the earthly needs of those who stood by His side. Although He was occupied with the most important event in the history of redemption, He remembered to make provision for the needs of one woman, His mother.

He addresses her as “woman.” Nowhere in the gospels does He ever call her “mother”; only “woman.” The expression conveys no disrespect. But it does underscore the fact that Christ was much more to Mary than a Son. He was her *Savior*, too (cf. Luke 1:47). Mary was no sinless co-redemptrix. She was as dependent on divine grace as the lowliest of sinners, and after Christ reached adulthood, her relationship to Him was the same as that of any obedient believer to the Lord. She was a disciple; He was the Master.

Christ Himself rebuked those who wanted to elevate Mary to a place of extraordinary veneration: “One of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.’ But He said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.’” (Luke 11:27–28). Mary was blessed because she was obedient to the Word of God—the same as any other believer. Her position as Christ’s mother did not carry with it any special titles such as co-mediatrix, queen of heaven, or any of the other forms of deification medieval superstition has attached to the popular concept of Mary.

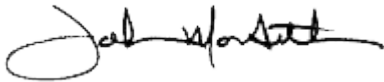
Let’s be perfectly clear: It is a form of idolatry to bestow on Mary honor, titles, or attributes that in effect give her a coequal status in the redemptive work of her Son or elevate her as a special object of veneration.

Nonetheless, Christ loved and honored His mother *as a mother*. He fulfilled the fifth commandment as perfectly as He fulfilled them all. And part of the responsibility of honoring one’s parents is the duty to see that they are cared for in their old age. Christ did not neglect that duty.

It is perhaps significant that Jesus did not commit Mary to the care of His own half-brothers. Mary was evidently a widow by now. Nothing is said of Joseph after the gospel narratives about Jesus’ birth and childhood. Apparently he had died by the time Jesus began His public ministry. But Scripture suggests that after Jesus’ birth Mary and Joseph had a marital relationship that was in every sense normal (Matthew 1:25). Despite the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, Scripture

does not allow us to believe Mary remained perpetually a virgin. On the contrary, the gospels clearly state that Jesus had brothers (Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21; John 2:12). Matthew even names them: “James and Joseph and Simon and Judas” (Matthew 13:55). They would have in fact been half-brothers, as the natural offspring of Mary and Joseph.

Why didn’t Jesus appoint one of His own brothers to look after Mary? Because, according to John 7:5, “His brothers were not believing in Him.” They *became* believers when Jesus rose from the dead, and therefore Acts 1:14 records that they were among the group meeting for prayer in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost: “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, *and with His brothers*” (emphasis added). But they were evidently not believers yet when Jesus died. So as He was dying on the cross, He committed His mother to the care of His beloved disciple, John.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur".

(Adapted from [The Murder of Jesus](#).)

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