

## A Preview of Coming Attractions

John 19:25-27

Previews of coming attractions are a source of perpetual irritation at our house, but only because I'm dumb enough to always fall for them. No matter how wretchedly bad a movie is, the trailer usually convinces me that it will be cinematic magic. I drag a DVD home from the video store that's supposed to be hilarious according to the trailer. Often, it doesn't quite meet expectations. I try to salvage the situation as we watch it – laugh out loud, carry on like it is comedic brilliance. Then, I peek over at the wife to see if she's buying the act – listening for a little chuckle, watching for a hint of a grin. She's a hard lady to con. Lately, I'm not allowed to go to the video store by myself.

As the story of Golgotha unfolds in the pages of Scripture, the women who had been standing at a distance from the cross have ventured nearer. John, one of the Twelve, is with them.

<sup>25</sup>Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup>and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. – John 19:25-27

On the one hand, Jesus does something that is fairly predictable. It only makes sense that He would be concerned about the care of His mother after He was gone. But, is there more to this scene than meets the eye? Might this be some sort of a preview of what the community of Christ would look like after Jesus laid down His life, took it up again and returned to His Father's side?

If you will, consider these words of Jesus to be His "Last Will and Testament," at least insofar as earthly matters were concerned. There were no physical assets to speak of. He had no material possessions to distribute. By Roman law, His clothing was the property of His executioners, who divided his garments four ways, before casting lots for the remaining, seamless undergarment (John 19:23, 24). As a rabbi, Jesus drew disciples to Himself, but some of the things He had said regarding possessions actually sounded more like disincentives for following Him, such as: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

Fully God and fully man, Jesus had perfectly identified with our human condition - our suffering and grief as well as the things that bring joy to our lives. He knew temptation but He never gave into it. Now, Jesus was dying for all of us who have. His work in human flesh was being played out to its necessary end. He would walk out of His tomb in three days and return to heaven to reign there as King. A new order to things was required for what we now call the age of the Church. Now, in this gentle scene from Golgotha, I believe more was happening than is obvious at first. I submit for your consideration that Jesus was providing us with three early glimpses, sneak previews into the Church age.

### I. An Early Peek at the Family of Christ

#### A. Why Would Jesus Not Simply Call His Mom, "Mom"?

Jesus addressed His mother as, *gunai*, "Woman". One commentator says the term is more respectful than "mother" and the next says it is less so. Some say that Jesus was distancing Himself from her for her safety. Catholic scholars claim that "Woman" is a term of universal motherhood. The translators of the *New International Version* seem disturbed by the original language. They render Jesus' words, "Dear woman." However, *gunai* implies none of these things. It just means, "Woman."

We cannot sever this event at the end of Jesus' life, from another event at the very outset of His ministry. Jesus worked His first miracle at a wedding feast in Cana when His mother requested that He do something about a wine shortage. He said, "Woman, (same word) why do you involve me? My time has not yet come" (John 2:4). Jesus seemed almost reluctant to kick-off His ministry with a miracle. Of course, His miracles did tend to distract some hearers from the content of His message.

What truth did Jesus want His disciples to grasp that He would twice refer to His mother as "Woman"? Might it have simply been to remind everyone, Mary included, that He had come to this world on a mission to accomplish the business of His heavenly Father? A time would come when His work was done. He would no longer be Mary's little boy or the carpenter's son. He would be their Lord and Savior as He is ours. "Woman" is neither a title of honor nor of insult. It is not significant at all in how it describes Mary, but in how it clarifies Jesus' role as the Savior of all mankind.

We can make too little of Mary. She is a supreme model of Godly womanhood. When Gabriel told her she would bear God's Son, she responded, "I am the Lord's servant" ... "May it be to me as you have said." I doubt that anyone in Bethlehem besides Joseph believed that the child in her womb was conceived of the Holy Spirit, but she joyfully embraced God's role for her. Of course, some have made far too much of Mary. She appears in Scripture only once after the Resurrection and is never called "Mother of God" nor "Intercessor with Christ." In Acts 1:14, she is simply numbered with Jesus' disciples. If anything, Jesus' use of the term, "Woman," delineates her humanity from His Own God nature.

## **B. Jesus Specifically Chose John to Care for Mary**

The Bible identifies four brothers of Jesus by name; James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. He had a plurality of sisters who are not named. Why did Jesus, as the oldest Son of Mary not entrust her into the care of one of her own children? Might He have had more than just her physical well-being in mind? At one time, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him. In fact, sometimes they saw their big brother as a bit of an embarrassment. The Gospel of Mark records an occasion when the family "went to take charge of him" after Jesus had been accused of being "out of His mind."

I believe the main reason Jesus united Mary with John, this "disciple whom he loved," was because they could console one another in a fashion that the natural brothers of Jesus could not. They were kindred hearts. The text literally says, "The disciple took her to his own." Translators supply the word, "home," a reasonable assumption, but the phrase is not limited to that meaning. John certainly took Mary to his house, but he must also have taken her into his family, his life and into his heart as well. Jesus couldn't have meant anything less when He charged this beloved friend with the care of His mother.

Something eventually made an impression on the brothers of Jesus. Probably, it was the Resurrection itself. After Jesus had returned to His Father, the brothers are numbered with the disciples. In fact, many scholars believe that James, the elder of Jerusalem introduced in Acts 15 and who wrote the New Testament letter of James was Jesus' brother, James. Many also identify Jesus' brother Judas as the author of the letter of Jude. But, for the moment, John needed Mary, and Mary needed John.

## **C. Christ's People Have a Unique Ability to Minister to One Another**

Many professed believers today suppose that they can walk with Jesus without being closely connected with His people, the church. The church is the community of Christ. Much of the ministry that Jesus personally promised to His disciples in His absence would come by way of the Holy Spirit. But, the work of the Holy Spirit is largely administered in the church, the community of faith. We hear much rhetoric about Jesus as a personal Savior, but that is not terribly biblical language. The New Testament speaks far more often about the risen Jesus in terms of His relationship with His Body, His community, His church. No Christian grows in Christ properly apart from the church.

In community, we are nurtured by Christ in a way that we cannot be nurtured alone. The church is spoken of as God's household and family. Jesus alluded to this. In that story we referenced earlier, when Jesus' brothers went to "take charge of him," do you recall how He responded? He said:

<sup>33</sup> "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

<sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." – Mark 3:33, 34

Speaking on the rewards of those who would follow Him, Jesus spoke of a vast household:

<sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. – Matthew 19:29

Jesus joined John and Mary together as family. It was a practical way to handle an immediate need. But, can you also see why I call it a glimpse of things to come? The Church is one Family of God. No one can minister to your grief as effectively as a fellow Christian who has been shepherded through grief. No one can speak peace to your heart quite like a brother or sister who knows God's Word, not just academically, but as a balm of healing. There is no joy greater than shared joys among believers. Jesus calls us to walk with Him, but He has also placed us into His church to walk with others. In the Upper Room, Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another" (John 13:35). Love is the Royal Law of His Kingdom, an essential for the Church. Clearly, the command to love is a bit difficult to work out at arm's length.

## **II. An Early Peek at the Body of Christ**

### **A. Jesus' Beloved Disciple Became His Proxy in this Matter**

As regarded God's scheme of redemption, to Jesus Mary was, "Woman." However, in the heart of the man, Jesus, she must still have been "Mom," and on a very human level, He cared about what would become of her. John must care for Mary, for Jesus would soon only be present with His loved ones by His Spirit. Might John have heard in Christ's simple words a message to this effect?

"John, my hands are tied. I cannot embrace my mother. I cannot provide for her physical needs. I must return to my Father. I am filling your shoes in regard to God's judgment of your sins. Will you now fill my shoes in regard to those that I care about? Will you be my hands by my helping little ones? Will you share their joys and help them to bear their sorrows? You can start now. 'Behold, your mother.'"

I suspect that John turned out to be a fine son to Mary, but I also think he saw his responsibility as extending beyond her. Years later, John, as an old man, would address others in the language of family, calling them, "Dear children." As a young man, Jesus had given John and His brother James the moniker, "Sons of Thunder." On one occasion they suggested calling down fire to destroy a Samaritan village that had snubbed Jesus and His companions. Needless to say, John mellowed over time. The epistles that bear his name earned John a new nickname, "the Apostle of love." Did the heart that would one day minister so tenderly begin beating this day at the foot of the cross?

## **B. When We Miss this Point, We Bind the Hands of Jesus**

Paul writes, "Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you has a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). It's not a difficult metaphor. Your own body is the instrument of your will. Without it, you could not so much as lift a pencil. When a body part does not respond to the will, we use the term "paralysis." When a part is severed from the whole, we use the term "amputation." When rebel cells wage war against normal cells in the body, we use the term "cancer."

The Church must respond to the will of the Head, Who is Christ. Any other relationship would be described as medically abnormal in reference to a physical human body. If Jesus is to minister from Heaven as He did in the flesh, His Body, the Church must be responsive to His will. He cannot be down here walking about in the flesh ministering as He once did. He works now as His Spirit moves and empowers His Church. How can Jesus heal a hurting world if we deny Him the use of His Body?

## **III. An Early Peek at the Ambassadors of Christ**

### **A. Jesus Fulfilled Every Responsibility of the Flesh**

Jesus was born a Jew so He accepted every demand of His heritage. He never missed a religious celebration, a sacrifice or any other act of adherence to God's law. On the subject of taxes, He taught His disciples to render "to Caesar what is Caesar's." When His followers seemed prone to revolt against Rome, He raised their vision to the Kingdom of God, so that in this world, they would live as peace-loving citizens. Now, from the cross, He fulfilled His final earthly duty. As Mary's oldest son, it was His responsibility to provide for her care, given the likelihood that Joseph was dead.

Jesus' first-century disciples never used "spirituality" to avoid civic or social responsibilities. Paul told Christians to be good, hard-working and productive citizens. He told wives to be submissive wives. He told children to be obedient children. He even told slaves to be the best slaves they could be. In Thessalonica, certain persons were so intrigued by the Second Coming of Christ and other matters spiritual that they were not taking care of day to day responsibilities. They were bleeding the rest of the community for their provision. It was God's Apostle to the Gentiles that coined the rather hard-nosed phrase: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (11 Thessalonians 3:10).

### **B. Our Christ-like Values Speak Well of Christ to this World**

Christ-like character includes good works. Paul taught us that while we are not saved by works, that we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). James adds, "faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26). Deeds prove our devotion to Jesus before a watching world.

Christ-like character includes wholesome speech. We are responsible in God's eyes to build God's people by the things we say. Paul wrote: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). This particular teaching is intended for the church, but the world takes notice of how gently or how brutally Christians speak to one another.

Christ-like character includes authentic contentment. Some believers, simply because they are not content, like to infuse intense spirituality into every mundane issue of life. They come across not simply as pilgrims in this world, but as weirdly "other-worldly." They speak of finding God's "perfect plan" for their lives, which coincidentally, usually reflects their own aspirations. For example, some Christians believe that God has for them some perfect job. It is never wrong to improve one's station in life if one can, but God expects us to be grateful in whatever job He has provided and to work at it as if we were working for Him. To be productive and responsible, to live a life of grateful contentment – these attitudes are a far more effective witness for Jesus than engaging in a bunch of intense spiritual jargon that smacks of phoniness or pining for prosperity and blessing beyond what God has sovereignly provided.

Christ-like character includes purity of life. Peter taught:

<sup>11</sup>Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. – 1 Peter 2:11, 12

The objective in each of these areas is two-fold. First, embracing the mind and character of Jesus is essential if we are to eventually be transformed into the holy nation He desires that we become, a people fashioned for eternal fellowship with their Creator. The second objective extends outward, to the world. Good conduct, good speech, good citizenship, fulfilled responsibilities, engagement in works of kindness – these are things that offend no one and that, in fact, enable us to function as God's light in a world that desperately needs to behold its Maker.

<sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:20

Two thousand years ago, as a crucified man hung dying, He was concerned about what would become of His mother. It was the most natural human concern in the world. But, in this instance that Man was God's Son and the Savior of the world. Might it be possible that Jesus also intended to teach those gathered at His cross what it meant to be the Church in this world - the Family of Christ, the Body of Christ and the Ambassadors of Christ?

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