



Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby... (Jn.19:26).

Imagine we were present in Jerusalem on the day Jesus was crucified. I wonder if we would have stood at the foot of the cross. How near the cross would we have been if we were there to witness Calvary? The Roman soldiers were there, but they were there not out of love but out of duty, and so had no heart for Jesus. Many today go to church out of duty but have no real heart for it. Out of duty they wear the cross, hanging around their neck without true heart for the Son of God hanging on the cross. Most of His followers forsook Him and fled, and if they watched the crucifixion, it was from a distance.

Would you have hidden, unable to see what was going on? Would you have watched from far away, gazing straight at that hill on the horizon? Or would your proximity to the cross have forced you to look up, because you were with Him all the way...so close that drops of blood spattered upon you? If we were there at the foot of the cross, we would have heard things no one else did.

Hammer on nails.

The Centurion's whip.

A dense thud as the cross was dropped into a deep hole.

Intense, anguished moaning and screams of unfathomable pain.

Mocking and taunting.

Cursing and reviling.

We would hear the 7 words of Jesus, so profound we could ponder each for a lifetime. We would have heard one of the thieves express his belief in Jesus, and like him, we would have heard the Lord's affirmation that he was about to wake up in paradise!

Let's consider these five people who out of love for the Savior stood near the cross. In them, we understand what it meant to them to be near the cross and possibly connect their lives, experiences and situations to ours.

First is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is the mother of Jesus and He did not ignore her while He was on the cross. For Mary, it was a place of sorrow and consolation. Sorrow because her son was taken away from her and consolation because the Lord shared His beloved disciple with her, "Woman, here is your son." Mary is truly the 'Mother of Sorrows' as her life was interspersed with sorrowful moments during the earthly life of Jesus. These moments of suffering are chronicled as the "7 Sorrows of Mary." Beginning with the prophecy of Simeon in Luke 2:35 — "a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" — Mary passed through other painful moments including the flight into Egypt, the loss of the Child Jesus, and the Crucifixion of Jesus (which is the climax of her suffering, an event we commemorate today).

Countless times over the years she had held the hands that now were held in place with nails. She had bathed and caressed the skin that now hangs in ribbons. She would remove every splinter He got in the carpenter's shop, and now large thorns have been driven into His skull. She would do her best to clean her boy's teeth, which now have been knocked out by the cruel blows of sadistic men. She was, for years, privileged to gaze into the eyes of the Son of God for hours on end, and now she couldn't even identify Him as her son if she had to.

But Jesus saw her, had compassion on her and assured her of His love for her. Jesus felt her sorrow, He knew her loneliness, and He consoled her by giving to her the disciple who loved the Lord so dearly. Jesus didn't have any possessions to give to anybody. The soldiers had gambled for His clothes. What could He give Mary? He gave John to Mary. And from that very hour John took her into his own house (Jn. 19:27). For Mary, to stand near the cross was to stand at a place of reward. Ultimately, God consoles those who suffer or have suffered for His sake. Jesus knows our trials and our needs (Matt. 11:28) and "He is close to the broken-hearted and saves those crushed in the spirit (Ps. 34:18). Jesus knows our struggles and will reward our faithfulness. God cares for us as much as He did His own mother.

For Mary Magdalene, it was a place of redemption and deliverance. Luke 8:2 tells us that Mary Magdalene was a woman out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons. She had been in bondage to Satan for a long time. Those demons made her do horrific things. The devil was at work in her life to destroy her, wreak havoc, and wreck her physically, emotionally and spiritually. Mary was in a hopeless and helpless situation. Then Jesus came along and cast out the demons. He delivered Mary from her bondage and set her free. Mary Magdalene was miraculously saved from her fearful dilemma. She was redeemed and bought back from bondage. She was delivered through a powerful encounter with Jesus.

When we talk about the deliverance that Jesus provided for Mary Magdalene I think of what Jesus said in Acts 26:18 "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." When a person trusts in Christ for deliverance from the bondage of sin, these same marvelous changes take place in their life. They go from darkness to light. They go from the power of Satan to the power of God. They go from being guilty to experiencing forgiveness. They go from being spiritually impoverished to becoming spiritually wealthy.

This is what Jesus did for Mary Magdalene. He redeemed her and bought her out of her miserable condition. But redemption is a costly thing. When Jesus delivered Mary Magdalene, it cost Him something. Standing there at the cross she saw the price being paid. Jesus had to die that she might be spiritually redeemed and bought back from sin's bondage. Yes, redemption is a costly thing: free but certainly not cheap! Jesus paid for it!

It is no wonder Mary Magdalene was standing there near the cross. It is no wonder that she was there at His burial. It is no wonder that Mary Magdalene was there at His resurrection. She had experienced redemption and she stood near the cross because it was the place of redemption! If you have never trusted the Lord Jesus, the cross is the place to start. Like Mary Magdalene, you can be set free from anything, and join God's team.

Standing near the Cross was Salome (Mark 15:40) and for her it was a place where she would understand the rebuke of Jesus. Who was Salome? She is the sister of Mary (John 19: 25), the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20-23). As the mother of James and John she was the one who once asked Jesus a very selfish request, "Can my two sons have places of honor in glory?" She wanted one of them to sit at the right hand of Jesus' throne and the other to sit on the left. She wanted the best for her two sons. But what she asked of Jesus was very selfish and ill-advised. Jesus responded by saying that she didn't know what she was asking. "Can they drink the cup that I'm going to drink?" (Referring to his death).

Did her two sons deserve thrones? Thrones are not given away; you have to earn them. Salome had forgotten the true cost of reward. She did not realize that suffering comes before reward. There is no crown without a cross. There is no feasting at the Lord's table without the drinking of His cup of suffering. Even Jesus Himself did not return to the throne of heaven except by way of the cross. She did not realize the price that her two sons would have to pay. Salome must have been greatly rebuked while standing at the cross, realizing what it cost Jesus, the Son of God, to make heaven possible. Jesus gave up His glory above and became a servant for us by giving his life for us below.

As we contemplate the cross, I wonder if we stand rebuked because of our selfish desires. Jesus says to us, "Are you willing to drink this cup?" We say, "Oh no, Lord, we just want blessings and answers to our prayers!" Jesus continues, "Are you willing to suffer for me?" We respond, "Oh no, Lord, I just want things to work out for me, not the suffering!" The cross is a place of rebuke. When we think about what Jesus gave up for us, and what He endured and suffered in our place, the foot of the cross becomes a place of correction from our own selfish desires and ambitions. Remember, He purchased us, our life is not our own ... we are His. He is the Lord and Master, and we are the servants! A place of rebuke – all of our pride and selfishness just fades away as we stand at the cross and see the Lord Jesus suffering for us. Like Salome, we can be reminded of what it's truly all about.

Mary the wife of Cleophas equally stood near the Cross. Yes, a third Mary! And she's probably related to Jesus by family. It's not clear who she was. But she is the 'other Mary' also present at the empty tomb three days later. (Mark 16:1) Whoever she was, all the possibilities say she was a relative. Even if not, she still was spiritually a part of the family of God. And so are we. The bride of Christ! Are we a faithful bride? Do we serve our love? Would we be there, standing by His side, near the cross? We're part of the family too ... by adoption, and by blood - the blood of Christ. Let's be a faithful bride.

For John, to be at the cross was to stand at a place of responsibility. John stood at the cross restored. He, along with the other disciples, had forsaken Jesus and fled for his life at the garden of Gethsemane. But John came back to the cross. He was restored and forgiven there. Christians may stray and deny our Lord, but we can still come back to the cross. It doesn't matter what we've done. The cross is the place to go for forgiveness, deliverance and restoration. For John to be near the cross was probably not the safest or easiest place to stand. It would have taken courage and great love for John to come back to the cross. Remember what John wrote years later in 1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Jesus not only restored John but He gave him some responsibility. "John, I will no longer be on earth to watch over my mother, so you are going to take my place. You are going to take care of my mother, and you are going to be a son to her." For John, the cross was a place of responsibility. All believers today are taking His place here on earth. "As my Father hath sent me, even so, send I you" (John 20:21). You and I represent Jesus to others. To acknowledge the cross is to acknowledge our place of responsibility. If you and I have come to the cross, we have a huge responsibility to carry the cross ... to love the Lord Jesus (because He has first loved us), to love others (just like John loved Jesus' mother), and to love others the same way Jesus loves us. The cross is indeed a place of responsibility. When we come to the cross through faith, we cannot hide ourselves, but we must go and do the work He has called us to do. We are now His mouth and hands and feet on earth!

"Near the Cross" – that is where the Lord wants us to be. If you've never been truly repentant, then you might as well be one of the soldiers hammering the nails. It was our sins that fastened Him there (Is. 53:4)! But one of those soldiers believed in the Son of God. That could be you today!