

### Exegesis

**Vs. 25** – The *four* soldiers, utter strangers to Jesus, who oversaw his crucifixion, stand in stark contrast to the *four* women, close companions of Jesus, who witnessed it.<sup>1</sup> How intriguing that in a moment when most of the male disciples were absent, the Lord's female followers were close at hand. This is yet another way the NT elevates the station of womanhood.<sup>2</sup> As we'll see, these ladies were close enough to Jesus that he was able to converse with him (cf. Matt. 27:47), which isn't a contradiction of Mar. 15:14 since the attendees gathered around the cross would've fluctuated, mixing friends and family with foes throughout the execution (cf. Matt. 27:39-40). Furthermore, while there are accounts of people being rescued from crucifixion,<sup>3</sup> and so the presence of these women so close to Jesus might appear surprising; in reality, those crucified were often visited by those closest to them.<sup>4</sup> Also, it is doubtful that a group of mourning women would've been considered a threat to the Roman soldiers, even if they were accompanied by *one* of Jesus' followers.

Though not explicitly named, the first woman was, of course, Mary, Jesus' "mother." The second woman is likewise unnamed, but since she is "his mother's sister," this unidentified woman would also be Jesus' aunt.<sup>5</sup> Comparing the synoptics, we learn that this woman was, *possibly*, named "Salome" (cf. Mar. 15:40), who was the mother of James and John, aka, the "sons of Zebedee" (Matt. 27:56; cf. Mar. 3:17).<sup>6</sup> If this connection is correct, this means that the two apostles were Jesus' cousins and Mary's nephews. Though, given the fact that Mark tells us "many other women" were present at Jesus' crucifixion as well (Mar. 15:41), it is unwise to be dogmatic about such things. The third woman mentioned is "Mary the wife of Cleophas"

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<sup>1</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 548, explains that "the Greek word allows for the reference to indicate the presence of two, three, or four women" but, agreeing with Carson (1991), p. 615, he says the most likely conclusion is that there were four distinct women, two unnamed and two named.

<sup>2</sup> Keener (2003), 2: 1142, "Given general perspective on women's courage, however, this emphasis probably shames Jesus' male disciples, calling for greater courage in the future. Women were normally viewed as unequal to men in internal fortitude and hence unfit for activities that required courage, such as war. Granted, ancient texts regularly praise women's courage when it appears but usually remark on how unusual it is or depict it as "manliness;" conversely, cowardly men were taunted as "women.""

<sup>3</sup> Carson (1991), p. 615.

<sup>4</sup> Keener (2003), 2:1141.

<sup>5</sup> As read in the KJV, "Mary the wife of Cleophas" *seems* to be an explanatory statement for the phrase "his mother's sister." And while syntactically this is possible (Klink (2016), p. 798), it is unlikely that siblings would share the same name—i.e., "Mary" (Morris (1995), p. 716-717). Thus, the phrases "his mother's sister" and "Mary the wife of Cleophas" refer to two separate women.

<sup>6</sup> Morris (1995), p. 717, thinks that this second woman's anonymity proves that she was the mother of Zebedee's sons since John also fails to mention himself by name, as well as his brother James. Not naming himself or anyone in his immediate family is John's signature.

(cf. Lu. 24:18), and, again, using the Synoptics, we learn that this was the mother of “James the less and of Joses/Joseph” (Matt. 27:56; Mar. 15:40).<sup>7</sup> According to Church tradition, Cleophas was the brother of Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father; thus, Cleophas' wife would've not only shared a name with Jesus' mother, but the two women would've been sisters-in-law.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, the fourth woman present at the crucifixion was “Mary Magdalene,” the same “Mary” who had seven demons exorcised from her in Lu. 8:2-3.

That John gives minimal commentary on the identities of these women implies his readership already knew about whom he spoke. For example, although John did not mention her before, Mary of Magdala is introduced succinctly here and reappears later in 20:1-18. He does not establish who she is or why she should be believed simply because his audience is already familiar with her story and her credentials. The same applies to the rest of these women. By the time John wrote, the gospel tradition was already well-known and corroborated by trusted eyewitnesses whom everyone knew. As it is, even in this circle of four women, the credentials are quite impressive: the first woman was the mother of Jesus and James (the first pastor of the Jerusalem church); the second woman was Jesus' aunt on his mother's side and the mother of two apostles; the third woman was Jesus' aunt on his adoptive father's side and mother of one apostle; and the fourth was a well-known associate of Jesus, having not only followed him since the early days of his ministry but someone who had supported him financially throughout his career (cf. Lu. 8:3).

**Vs. 26-27** – John's mention of these four women isn't only to establish credibility to his account but to introduce new information to the well-known crucifixion narrative. He says, “When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved...” The phrasing, “the disciple standing by whom he loved,” not only refers to the disciple who leaned on Jesus “bosom” (cf. 13:23) but it refers to the same man who wrote this account (cf. 21:24), aka John the Beloved Apostle. Our faithful narrator has witnessed all the events in the Passion since Annas interrogated Jesus in 18:15, and now he'll be entrusted with a special task.

Jesus said to Mary, “Woman, behold thy son!”<sup>9</sup> The Lord then looks at John and says, “Behold thy mother!” According to Catholic doctrine, this passage establishes Mary as the mother of the church. However, the Beloved Apostle immediately explains what Jesus meant when he says, “And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” Jesus' words didn't establish

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<sup>7</sup> According to church tradition, “James the less” is equated with “James the son of Alphaeus,” who was one of the twelve apostles (cf. Matt. 10:2-3). However, that is difficult to square with the fact that, according to John, she was the wife of “Cleophas,” not “Alphaeus.”

<sup>8</sup> Klink (2016), p. 798.

<sup>9</sup> See notes on 2:4 for an explanation of why Jesus referred to Mary as “woman” rather than “mother.”

some new church doctrine but established the care of his mother. Even the terminology of Jesus' words is reminiscent of adoption procedures.<sup>10</sup> Jesus wanted John to not just provide a roof for Mary but take full custody of her. To insist otherwise, one would need to explain why "Woman" is interpreted literally, referring to Mary, but the phrase "the disciple standing by whom he loved" is interpreted symbolically, referring to the church and not to the Beloved Apostle.<sup>11</sup>

Given that Jesus even brought this issue up, it is safe to assume that Joseph was dead by this point; otherwise, why would the Lord feel the need to do this? As the eldest son, it would've been Jesus' responsibility to care for his mother. But, with his death drawing near, the dutiful Son needed to ensure that his mother would be taken care of after he was gone (cf. Ex. 20:12; Ac. 6:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:4; Ja. 1:27).

But why did Jesus pick John? Considering that his brothers have been openly hostile to his mission, the Lord likely didn't want to entrust his mother into the hands of those who, at the time, were unbelievers (cf. 7:5; Ac. 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7). Nor could Jesus assign responsibility to the other women. This was a man's world. They would have little to no means of securing his mother's well-being. John was the best choice because he was a.) a man, b.) a disciple, c.) an apostle, and d.), if the interpretation above is correct, a close relative of Jesus. However, one of those qualities, which is that John was a believer, made him most qualified. According to the NT, the ties of faith ought to be stronger than those of family (cf. Mar. 10:29-31).

Ultimately, this passage illustrates Jesus' compassion and care for Mary. Jesus had been betrayed, deserted, denied, ridiculed, beaten, scourged, and, finally, crucified. Yet, despite being in a most miserable state, to say nothing of bearing the wrath of God due to humanity's sin, the Lord focused his attention on his earthly mother. As Keener puts it, "[Christ's] only earthly inheritance to his disciples is his responsibility to care for his mother."<sup>12</sup> The lesson here is simplistic, but this makes it no less powerful: even at the most demanding moment of his life, a son put his mother's needs above his own. Morris quotes Barclay as saying,

"There is something infinitely moving in the fact that Jesus in the agony of the Cross, in the moment when the salvation of the world hung in the balance, thought of the

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<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 549.

<sup>11</sup> Carson (1991), p. 618, "To argue, then, that this scene is symbolic of a continuing role for Mary as the church comes under her care is without adequate contextual control. It is so anachronistic an interpretation that is difficult to imagine how it could have gained such sway apart from the developments of centuries of later traditions."

<sup>12</sup> Keener (2003), 2:1145.

loneliness of His mother in the days when He was taken away. Jesus never forgot the duties that lay to His hand."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Morris (1995), p. 717.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

### **Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 89 | John 19:25-27**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Tonight, we'll see the care of a son for his mother. The Lord Jesus Christ, though he was the Messiah, was also the child of Mary. And just as he would not turn his back on his duties as a savior, neither would he turn his back on his responsibilities as a son. Whether in his relationship with his heavenly Father or his earthly mother, Jesus epitomized what it means to "honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12).

**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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