



Father, we thank You for those beautiful words in song that reminds us that Your mercy seat is open to every mourner. We thank You that in our moments of greatest pain and trial, we find You to be our refuge and our strength, our very present help. As we gather in thoughts and minds about the cross and see there our Savior in the extremity of His pain and suffering, so full of mercy and compassion and attentiveness to the needs of others, we pray God that our faith would rise and lay hold afresh on You, Our great God, our Provider, our Protector, our Savior, our Keeper. We pray that You would give us ears to hear and eyes to see and give to me a mouth to proclaim Your Word. And give us all hearts that delight in what we find there in. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight, Oh Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. We pray, in Jesus name, amen.

Please turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John as we continue our series in the “Sayings of our Savior from the Cross.” We will read from John 19:16b, the account of the crucifixion:

¹⁶So they took Jesus, ¹⁷and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

This is the Word of God and we thank Him for it!

“[Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross.](#)” How often have you sung those words by [Fanny Crosby](#) who has been loved by Christians for many years? Yet we see here that for Jesus, the cross meant first of all being stripped of all His belongings, down to the very clothes on His body, so that He died unclothed before a watching world. And then having been stripped of His belongings, He was also severed from His dearest relations, including His own mother. And then stripped of His belongings, severed of His relations, He gives up His very life. And what does it mean for us to follow Jesus except the very same thing - to be willing to give up all we have, to part with all that is dearest to us and to give Him our very lives? I wonder if that is what we mean when we say, “Jesus, keep me near the cross.”

I read an old sermon by [Warren Wiersbe](#) that inspired me and some of what I’m going to share with you this morning comes from what I learned from him. He said, “If you and I had been in Jerusalem that Passover afternoon when Jesus was crucified, I wonder how near the cross we would have stood? It is one thing to sing ‘Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross’—it is quite another to actually stay there.”

When we come to this poignant narrative of our Savior’s passion, we discover how few of His followers actually followed Him all the way to the point of the cross. In [Matthew 26:56](#), we learn that after Jesus’ betrayal and arrest then “*all the disciples left Him and fled.*” All the disciples left Him. I assume that even means His beloved disciple, John. But if in a moment of panic, John fled from Jesus, we learn from John’s Gospel and the passage that we just read, that he was quickly brought to repentance and he returned, along with a few women, to the foot of Jesus’ cross.

Bible scholars differ as to how many women are spoken of here in John’s Gospel and depending on how you read it, where you place the commas in verse 25, the number could vary. But we do learn from [Matthew 27:55](#) that “*There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*”

The point is that it was slim pickings around the cross at the point of Jesus’ death. There were few who actually followed Him to that point and among those who did follow Him to the point of the cross, the women far outnumbered the men. And from those who are gathered there, we can learn something about what it means to stay near the cross ourselves. What does it mean to say, “Jesus, keep me near the cross” - what does it really mean to live near the cross of Christ, to stay there? I’d like us to look at five individuals who were gathered around the cross and see some lessons from them about what it means to live near the cross.

First, we'll look at Mary Magdalene, then at the mother of the sons of Zebedee who quite likely was the same woman who is spoken of in John's narrative as the sister of His mother. Then we'll look at Mary herself, the mother of Jesus. Then at Jesus and finally at John, the beloved disciple.

1. **Mary Magdalene—To Stay Near The Cross Of Jesus Means To Prize The Price Of Our Redemption**

First of all from Mary Magdalene, to stay near the cross of Jesus means to prize the price of our redemption. Mary Magdalene was a woman who had experienced Jesus' redeeming power. In [Luke 8:2](#), we read that she was one who, upon hearing the good news of the kingdom of God, was "*healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out*" and a similar statement is found in [Mark 16:9](#). She was a woman who had been under terrible bondage to the power of Satan. We can not imagine what it would be like to be under the control of seven demons but the mental anguish, the physical, emotional and spiritual anguish that this woman had endured was intense. She had been under the control of the evil one.

And she, upon encountering Jesus, met One who had said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." When she met Jesus, she was liberated from the power of Satan; from the evil one who had his dreadful grip on her mind and heart. She loved Jesus for freeing her from her captivity, but it wasn't until she came with Him to the point of the cross and gazed upon her dying Redeemer that Mary Magdalene began to realize the price of her redemption.

Here she discovered that in order for her to be brought out of darkness into the light of God, He who was the [Light of God](#) had to go into the darkness of the storm of God's wrath. Here she discovered that in order to be forgiven of her sins, He, the Holy One needed to be [forsaken by His Father](#). As she watched her Redeemer dying on the cross, she would have begun to perceive the price of her redemption. And that is partly what it means to be near the cross. It means to never stop prizing the price that was paid in order to redeem us from sin and from Satan; to never grow dull to the great wonder of our Savior's redeeming love and the costliness of His mercy to us. We've sung a song here that says, "[Your Grace Still Amazes Me](#)" and in order for that amazement to continually be cultivated, we've got to stay near the cross and if that amazement is being dulled it is because we are

drifting from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and the wonder of what He has done there. To be near the cross means to prize the price of my redemption.

2. **The Mother of the Sons of Zebedee—To Stay Near The Cross Of Jesus
Means To Pour Contempt On All My Pride**

Secondly, it means to pour contempt on all my pride. You can not stand at the foot of the cross of Jesus and consider Who is dying there so shamefully and why it is that He is dying for me and still have lofty, arrogant thoughts of yourself. The mother of the sons of Zebedee must have experienced something of this humbling as she stood before the cross. Do you remember what she was famous for? Back in [Matthew 20:20-21](#), we read: *“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’”*

She wanted her sons to be in a place of prominence; she wanted them to be lifted up. Verse 22 states: *“Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?’”*

In other words, before there will ever be a crown there needs to be a cup. Before there’s ever glory, there needs to be suffering. I must die before I can be exalted and likewise, whoever would follow Jesus must die, must humble himself, must become like that *“[grain of wheat that falls in the ground and dies before it can bear much fruit.](#)”* Jesus asks: “In order to be lifted up in My kingdom, you need to go down into the depths of death to sin and self. Do you understand this? Are you able to drink the cup that I’m able to drink?” And they said to Him with complete ignorance, *“We are able.”* Yeah, we can handle that. *“He (Jesus) said to them, ‘You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.’”*

As the mother of the sons of Zebedee (whom many people think was Mary’s sister) watched Jesus dying, I wonder what she thought of the way she approached Him not too long before. At how out of line her thoughts were, of herself and her sons, in light of the suffering her Savior was now experiencing. I wonder if she began to feel, as the apostle Paul did, *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* ([Galatians 6:14](#)).

Someone has said well, “The cross crushes self advancement.”

3. **Mary, the Mother of Jesus -- To Stay Near The Cross Of Jesus Means
To Part with All That is Dear to Me**

Thirdly, what does it mean to live near the cross? We go now to Mary, the mother of Jesus. We discover that to live near the cross means to part with all my dearest earthly goods and kindred. Like what we sing in that hymn, “[Let goods and kindred go](#)”—my dearest treasures, my dearest relations. To be willing to part with all of that in order to gain Him Who is my Treasure—Jesus. Now Mary is obviously one of the most central figures in this passage. We’re looking at the saying in John 19:26 and 27 where, “*Jesus 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!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*”

As we think about Mary, we think of the love that a mother has for her child; how no one needs to teach her this love. She bore that child in her womb for nine months; she nursed that child; she suffered pain for that child. She would stay up all night to care for that baby; she kept that baby with her all day long, caring for him, ministering to his needs. How a mother will wear herself out and even forget herself in order to care for her child.

We’re reminded, those of us who have had loving, tender mothers, even when we get older they don’t stop caring for us. I was just with my Mom this week and she’s offering to go to the refrigerator and get me things and make me things and serve me and...what a wonderful thing that I, at 40 years old, still have a mother who cares so tenderly for me.

We can understand why [Robert Murray McCheyne](#) said “You must break to pieces the mother’s heart before you can change her love to her child.” Every mother knows that loving a child can indeed break her heart to pieces. When they are sick, when they are wayward, when they grow up and move on. A mother’s heart is full of pain but no mother has ever felt the pain of loving a son the way Mary has. From Mary, Jesus received His humanity. I wonder if the color of His eyes was the same as hers and the shape of His nose looked like hers. There was no one on earth, no human relation, that was closer to Jesus than His mother.

[D.A. Carson](#) writes poetically:

“The mother changed His diaper, tied His shoe,
She wiped His grubby hands, caressed His face,
Surrounded Him with stories of their race
And listened to his prattle as He grew.”

And now she stands here in stunned silence, watching her Son die and not just dying, but dying a cruel death, the death of a criminal. Seeing how He dies. Of all the things going through Mary's mind, of all the things she is pondering in her saddened and sorrowful mind at this point, I'm sure the words Simeon came back to her and are now pounding into her soul. When she brought her baby Jesus to the temple for dedication back in [Luke 2](#), starting at verse 34, Simeon said, "*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed...*"

Then he looked at her and said, "*and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.*" And that sword is just piercing into her soul, deeper and deeper. With every jab she feels the pain and agony; she who had this immense privilege of bearing in her own womb the Son of God Who become a man. She now also experiences the incredible pain that only His mother could feel.

Many times her soul had been pierced: Surely when [Herod](#) massacred the infants and they had to [flee to Egypt](#), there was a piercing going on. Then as He grew up and her own neighbors and friends [despised and rejected](#) her faithful Son in Nazareth and [drove Him to the edge of the cliff](#) and wanted to throw Him down to His death, surely there was a sword piercing her soul. But no one can comprehend the agony she endured as she watched the [crown of thorns](#) be embedded in His head and there was nothing she could do to remove it. As she saw the [nails pierce His hands and His feet](#) and she could not pull them out. As His [back was torn](#), she could not sooth the pain. As His tongue was [parched with thirst](#), she could not give Him a drink. As she heard the [mocking voices of the crowd](#), she could not silence them.

Why could she not do this? Because to do so would be to sabotage the world's salvation and to sabotage her own salvation. As dear as her Son was to her, Mary needed a Savior more than a Son. Mary, too, like you and me was a sinner in need of a Savior. And that's why when we look at Jesus and His relationship to Mary, we see this gentle distancing taking place—all the way back to the beginning of His earthly ministry in [John 2](#) at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Remember how Jesus spoke to her and called her "[Woman, what have I to do with you?](#)" It wasn't a disrespectful term but it wasn't a familiar intimate term either, like a son would speak to his mother.

Jesus is distancing Himself from the earthly relationship in order to assume the heavenly relationship. He's removing Himself from being her earthly Son in order that He might be her Heavenly Savior. And Mary understands that in order to follow Him, in order to be His disciple, in order to receive the grace of His salvation, she needs to give up what is most precious to her on earth in order to receive eternal life in heaven. I think there's an appeal to all of us in this.

I read these words from [Phil Ryken](#): He said something to the effect that if Jesus' Own mother needed to bow as a sinner at Jesus' cross, then so do you and so do I. If His Own mother

needed Jesus to die for her sins, then I need Jesus to die for my sins, you need Jesus to die for your sins. If His Own mother needed to believe in Jesus for her salvation, then so do we. You see, Mary had to give up that which was dearest to her — her relationship to her Son. She's probably a widow as we haven't heard about Joseph, her husband, for a long time. She's relying on Jesus: He was a carpenter, He provided for her needs, He cared for His now aging mother and she has to give all that up in order to receive Him as her Savior. To follow Jesus to the cross, to be near the cross, means to give up that which is dearest to me.

4. Jesus -- To Stay Near The Cross Of Jesus Means to Partake of My Savior's Boundless Riches

Fourthly, and this is good news, it also means to partake of my Savior's boundless riches. You might wonder, "If I follow Jesus all the way to the cross and I give up everything in order to follow Him, will I not be left destitute and miserable?" And the passage before us is a comfort to those who would follow Jesus in discipleship because it is telling us, it is assuring us, just as we've sung this morning that "*No good thing does He withhold to those who walk uprightly*" ([Psalm 84:11](#)). Just as Mary was called to give up that which was dearest to her, Jesus also was attentive to his faithful Mother who was now His disciple and Jesus was careful to make sure that that which she needed most would not be lacking after His death.

Following Jesus requires that we give up everything but Jesus, Whom we follow, also makes sure we do not lack anything we need. He cares for us in our bereavement; He cares for us in our earthly needs; He ministers to us physically; He is attentive to our needs. We see in this beautiful portrayal of Jesus that to follow Him to the cross means to partake of His boundless riches. We see two aspects of Jesus' boundless riches in this passage: We see His active righteousness and His abundant resources. Let's look at both of these together -- Jesus' boundless riches which we see in His active righteousness and His abundant resources.

What is His active righteousness? Theologians have often distinguished between Jesus' passive righteousness and His active righteousness. His passive righteousness is Him submitting Himself to death for our sins. Giving Himself up to die for us. That's His passive righteousness.

Then there's His active righteousness which is His obedience to the will of the Father -- doing all God required of Him. Here in this wonderful passage we see both of these being wedded together. Even as He is giving Himself up to death for our sins, He is still actively obeying His father. He is obedient to the law of God in our place, as our representative. And how do we know that? Which commandment is He obeying here in this passage? Think of the Ten Commandments. Which one is

He actively obeying? The fifth: “[*Honor your father and your mother.*](#)” Jesus is attentive to that, even in the moment of His greatest extremity and suffering and need.

We sometimes excuse people if they have a big job to do in life. They are busy with a big task, a really important job that affects a whole lot of people. Though it is not excusable, sometimes we say, “You know, they might have to neglect their family in order to accomplish that mission.” And we look at all the good they are doing for humanity and say, “Well, they blew it with their family but we can understand, look at how busy they were.”

But here is Jesus, accomplishing the most incredible mission of love that any has ever done, redeeming the human race through His death on the cross. Here is Jesus in the time of His greatest suffering and He does not forget His earthly relationships. He does not neglect His mother in Her need. He is attentive to Her.

I don’t know what you’re like when you’re sick but ask your spouse how nice you are when you’re feeling sick. How tender and compassionate are you when you’re really sick at home. I would guess that a lot of you are probably a little bit grumpier when you’re sick and a little less caring to the needs of others and we excuse that in our humanity. But here’s Jesus, suffering like none of us ever has or will and He’s thinking about His mother, caring for her needs. This is His active righteousness.

And by the way, if we ever had any doubt that obeying and honoring your mother and father is important to God, look here at the cross. If you ever think, “Oh, it’s no big deal if I’m disobedient to my parents, if I’m disrespectful to them.” Look at your Savior in His dying moments – what is He doing? He’s obeying the fifth commandment, showing us how absolutely important it is to God. Listen to this verse to see just how seriously God takes the fifth commandment. It says in [Proverbs 30:17](#): “*The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.*” This shows us how seriously God takes our obedience to the fifth commandment.

Those of you who know Richard Owen Roberts, the current interim pastor at Grace Community Bible Church in Roselle. I’ll never forget him two years ago, preaching on this passage and he told this story of how, about ten years ago, he visited his mother in New York. He was then about 65 years old. She was 95 years old. He went to visit his Mom and as he was walking out the door on a spring day, he heard his mother yell out, “Put your coat on!” He said the first thoughts that went through his mind were, “Now I’m 65 years old and I’ve been managing for 50 years to figure out when I need to wear my coat and when I don’t need to wear my coat.” But then he said, “I’m so glad I didn’t say that to my mother because the second thought that went through my was how grateful to still have a mother who cares for me.” And he turned around and said, “Thank you,

Mom.” He went back in the house, put on his coat even though he didn’t feel he needed it, just to honor his mother. I thought that’s a great illustration.

We’re never exempted from this commandment. This isn’t something that just applies to us when we’re young. In fact, it probably applies even more when we’re older and our parents are aging and they are reliant on our care and attention and our Lord Jesus Christ shows us through His example how important it is that we obey this commandment. I’m also thankful that it’s not just an example but that He stands here as my representative in His perfect righteousness doing what you and I have failed to do in our own lives. If we were to review the story of our lives, I think one of the sources of shame and conviction for most of us would be instances, sometimes whole seasons, when we have failed to honor our parents and the Lord takes that very seriously.

How thankful we should be that we have a Savior Who died in our place, perfectly obedient to God’s law. His active righteousness to the law of God now gets imputed to me - credited to me - so that I can stand “[Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne](#)” of Almighty God. I fail - He fulfilled the law. In Jesus I see the abundant provision, the abundant riches that belong to the disciple who follows Him to the point of the cross. We also see His abundant resources in His church. When we follow Jesus and give up our all to follow Him, He is quick to repay us beyond what we could imagine.

Listen to these words from [Mark 10:28-30](#). It’s going to cost us something to follow Jesus in this world but it’s not without its rewards. “*Peter began to say to him, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you.’”* Look at what we’ve given up, Lord? But “*Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.’”*

So Jesus is saying, “When you follow Me to the cross it will demand that you are willing to give up everything just like it did for Mary. But I, out of My abundant riches, will make sure you are repaid with everything that you need.” That is what He is demonstrating here in this exchange. “Woman” he looks at His mother, now probably near 50 years old, dependant on Him for provision, grieving this great loss, and He sees John, His beloved disciple who has leaned upon His bosom, who has listened to His words, and He says, “I see a kindred spirit here -- Mary you love Me. John you love Me. You two now will be mother and son. I give you, Mother, John as your son. And John, I give you Mary as your mother.”

[John Piper](#) asks the question: “Where in this life are we going to receive a hundred children and a hundred mothers? Answer: In the church, the family of God. It’s a loving, encouraging, sustaining, sharing family.” And when we follow Jesus to the cross, He unites us to Himself and He

unites us to one another. He gives us the privilege of loving one another and serving one another and that's what we see here. He pays us out of His abundant riches all that we need.

4. John -- To Stay Near The Cross Of Jesus Means to Present Myself as a Living Sacrifice

And that leads us to the last example, that of the beloved disciple, John himself. What does it mean to follow Jesus to the cross? It means to "[*present myself as a living sacrifice.*](#)" A living sacrifice. It's an amazing thing that John, hearing these words, immediately obeys Jesus. Look at the end of verse 27: "*And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*" Some say he took her before Jesus breathed His last so she wouldn't have to endure the agony of watching her Son die. We don't know but we do know John counted it a great privilege to say, "Jesus, I'm Yours. Whatever You ask of me I will be glad to do." He took her in and at a cost to himself, ministered to the needs of Mary.

Do you know that when you come to the cross, when you follow Jesus there, He will also give you opportunities to serve Him? Opportunities to give of yourself for Him. You may find it within the church: older women, older men whose spouses have died, who very much need the care of a son or a daughter and you are there to minister to them. Or a child who has lost her parents. Or a single mother who needs you to be a father figure for her children. Or those who are ill and infirmed who need to be visited and cared for with the same love and compassion that Christ has for His people. To follow Jesus to the cross is to say, "Here I am, Lord. A living sacrifice. Use me, let me be Your hands and feet, let me represent You on this earth in Your absence, while You are at the right hand of the Father, let me represent You to others."

That's what John did and he did it because he loved Jesus, but even more so he did it because Jesus loved him. Don't you love how John always refers to himself in his Gospel as "[*the disciple whom He loved*](#)"? That's what John calls himself. He never calls himself John. "Who am I? Oh, I'm the one Jesus loves." I don't think John means it to be a comparison like, "Ha, Ha, Peter. He loves me, not you." No, it's that this is all I need to know about myself. This is the only identity I need. "[*Jesus loves me! This I know.*](#)" He loves me. That's the most amazing thing in the world to me. He loves me. And when John realizes that, He loved "[*me and gave Himself for me*](#)", it's as if he says in the words of the hymn: "[*Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.*](#)" Jesus, whatever You ask of me I will gladly obey!

What does it mean to live near the cross? It means the same thing it meant to Jesus. To be ready to give up all that you have. To be severed from even those who are most dear to you. To

yield Him your very life. That's what it means. And it will cost you, but in this passage your Savior assures you that He will make sure you do not lack anything you need. As you seek to follow Him as His disciple, "*[no good thing will He withhold](#)*" from you. That was Mary's experience. She lost a Son but she gained a Savior. And her Son made sure she had what she needed.

Will you follow Jesus? Will you say Jesus keep me "*[Near the cross! O Lamb of God, Bring its scenes before me; Help me walk from day to day, With its shadows o'er me.](#)*"

There near the cross may I prize the price of my redemption. There near the cross may I pour contempt on all my pride. There near the cross may I part with all that is most dear to me on earth so that there, near the cross, I may partake of my Savior's abundant riches. Near the cross, I present myself a living sacrifice to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, we would be Your disciples, following You not from a distance but near the cross. We see that this requires a costly sacrifice from us but it is nothing in comparison to the sacrifice that You have made and it is our joy to present ourselves as living sacrifices to You, Lord Jesus. We pray that You would help us live in the shadow of Your cross with that confidence that no good thing will You withhold from those who follow You there. We thank You for Your abundant riches to all who call on Your name. For Your unfailing kindness and care. For Your disciples. We love You Lord and we thank You most of all that You love us and so we say Jesus, thank You. Amen.

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