
Standing By Jesus

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Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25b).*

Just prior to His arrest in the garden, Jesus had told His disciples that they would forsake Him and flee. Matthew said that He used Zechariah 13:7 as the wording for His prediction: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, “I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered”’” (Matthew 26:31). Peter refused to believe His words, adamantly declaring, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away” (Matthew 26:33). Hearing such a declaration by Peter, all the other disciples joined in and pledged their faithfulness to whatever tragedy might come (Matthew 26:35b). However, despite their protests and promises, the prophecy of Jesus came true. After a brief skirmish with the arresting party, Matthew said, “Then all the disciples left Him and fled” (Matthew 26:56b). Jesus was friendless and alone when He was led away to His trials.

After concealing themselves from the soldiers among the trees or in the darkness, Peter and John eventually showed up in the courtyard of Caiaphas’ house. John said, “Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple” (John 18:15a). When John saw Peter at the gate, he went out and got him. Relying upon his relationship to the high priest, he brought Peter inside the court (John 18:16). After Peter denied our Lord three times and was smitten in heart by a look from Jesus, he left the court and hurried back into the darkness, weeping as he went (Luke 22:62). We do not hear anything further about Peter until late Sunday morning, when

Jesus appeared to him (Luke 24:34). So far as we know, he was not present at the crucifixion or burial. Apparently, he passed through Friday and Saturday as a broken man, distraught and heavy in heart over what he had done.

We do not see John again until the crucifixion. He indicated that he was at the cross, but he referred to himself with the phrase “the disciple whom [Jesus] loved,” not by his name (John 19:26). Therefore, as we look for Jesus’ disciples at the cross, we see only a small band made up of John and some women. The Gospel of John tells of three or four women who were present: “But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25b). Luke pictured the group as being a little larger in number. He said, “And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things” (Luke 23:49). Mark wrote, “There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome” (Mark 15:40).

As Jesus looked down from the cross for His apostles, He saw only John. It is written, “When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’” (John 19:26). The Gospel writers, in total silence, passed over any account of where the other apostles were at the time of Jesus’ death. We deduce from this fact that they did not come to the crucifixion.

Evidently, the disciples who were present stood near the cross at first and then later—maybe because of fear or because of the difficulty in handling the horror of it—pulled back and watched from a distance. At the beginning of Jesus' agonizing sacrifice for us, His eyes searched the crowd below Him for someone who could render a service for Him. Inasmuch as eleven of His apostles and His half-brothers were absent, His eyes, weakened with pain, focused upon John. With a brief command, He took care of His final earthly responsibility: "He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!'" (John 19:27a).

John was standing by when Jesus needed him! How comforting it must have been to John through the years that followed to remember that when Jesus asked for someone to serve in His place, he was there to give Him the help that His circumstances required.

John had prepared himself through a spiritual transformation to stand by Jesus and be ready when Jesus called upon him for assistance. James and John were at first known as "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). One time they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy the village that had rejected them (Luke 9:54). However, in the company of Jesus, these two hotheaded men grew into spiritual giants. The presence of Jesus transformed them. James became the first apostolic martyr (Acts 12:2), and John became the apostle of love.

As John developed from a son of thunder into an apostle of tender love, he did not know that he was preparing himself to be the gracious heart whom Jesus would call upon to care for His mother during this dark day when a sword would pierce her soul. Servants are not born; they are made through the transforming fellowship of Jesus. God faithfully prepares us for the work that He will ask us to do for Him tomorrow. The only way we can be ready to stand by Jesus when the time comes is to allow our lives to be transformed into the image of Jesus today.

There may well be times when we can do something for Jesus that no one else can do for Him. Was there anyone else beneath the cross who could have fulfilled the role that Jesus was asking John to fulfill? It seems that he was the only one who could appropriately handle this task.

In the mixture of events and circumstances, the moment came when John was asked to be the caregiver for Jesus' mother. No one else could have provided the same kind of assistance for Jesus.

It is so with us. Every person finds himself in a circle of influence in which he, and only he, can make a certain difference. No one else can have the exact same influence upon those within that circle. In the passage of time, we often come into arenas in which there are deeds to be done, services to be rendered, or works to be completed that only we can do. John was standing by; he was *at the right place*. He was at the right place *at the right time*. He was at the right place at the right time *with the right heart*. He was present and ready for duty when Jesus needed someone to help Him. Will this be the case with us?

As Jesus works out His great plan of salvation, He will need others to help Him. He could not come down from the cross and provide for His mother. The cruel crowd had asked Him to leave the cross in a display of His power, saying in bitter mockery, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him" (Matthew 27:42). However, the only way He could give His salvation to the world was to stay on the cross. Someone other than Himself would have to handle details at the foot the cross. Because His redemptive work was requiring the totality of His heart and life, He asked John to stand in for Him and provide care for His mother.

Jesus can no longer be in the world as He once was. He has a mediatorial work to do at the Father's throne. He "stands by" His people to intercede for us. "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," John wrote (1 John 2:1). He has left His earthly work in the world in the hands of His people. He has asked us to be His church, His spiritual body, His hands and His feet in the world. He has given us the responsibility of magnifying His influence and doing His work upon this earth. Looking down upon us from His throne on high, He has said to us, "Behold, your mother!" That is, "Look at your task. Take notice of the mission I have given you!" He has further said, "Since I cannot come down

from where I am, I must ask you to help Me. I am putting My work into your hands.”

It should be our highest aspiration to stand by Jesus. We have seen the beauty of being ready for service in the person of John, who had prepared himself for this opportunity. He stood close by His Savior in His dying moments, ready and willing to do whatever Jesus might ask him to do. When His grand moment came, he did what he could do for the Christ. He will forever be known as the apostle who stood by Jesus when He needed someone to carry on His work in the world. Let us follow in John’s footsteps.

Eddie Cloer



Teresa of Avila, Spain (1515–82), beautifully expressed some reasons and some ways for us to make ourselves available to serve Jesus:

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks com-
passion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do
good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all
the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks com-
passion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*