
What Mary Saw

“But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then 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!’ From that hour the disciple took her into his own household” (John 19:25b–27).

When Jesus was just a baby, a little over a month old, the prophet Simeon approached Mary and Joseph, took the babe into his arms, and declared through the Holy Spirit that Mary’s heart would one day be crushed by the heaviest of sorrows. He said, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34b, 35; emphasis mine).

Surely, every Jewish girl longed to be the mother of the Messiah. Perhaps part of her ritual in preparing for bed at night was offering up the prayer “Dear God, I can think of no greater honor than for You to allow me to cradle the Messiah in my arms as His mother.” However, with the greatest of privileges came not only the greatest of responsibilities, but also the severest of pain. Shortly after Jesus was born, Mary was told that she would be honored as no other woman would be honored, but she would also suffer as no other woman would suffer.

Most of those who stood beneath and around the cross were anything but sympathetic to Jesus as He died for them and for us. In fact, they came to mock rather than to mourn. They lashed out at Him in scorn instead of lamenting this miscarriage of justice that was taking place before them. They were vicious, jabbing Him with their words and cutting Him with their cries. The only encouragement and tender understanding Jesus received as He bore the weight of the world’s sin came from a small group of women and one lone apostle, the

disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:25, 26). Jesus faced almost alone the greatest ordeal that history will ever record.

One of those who was at the cross, perhaps from the start, was His mother, Mary (John 19:26, 27). She stood at the foot of the cross during the early part of the six hours and perhaps during the latter part of it withdrew to a place farther away. Matthew said that “many women were there looking on from a distance” (Matthew 27:55a). Mary is assumed to have been in that group, although she is not one of the three women specifically named. Therefore, it is possible that John took her home when the small group withdrew to witness His death from a distance.

As Mary, the mother of the Messiah, stood near the cross, what did she see? Can you imagine what the cross looked like from the viewpoint of a mother?

She saw her Son suffer the excruciating pain of crucifixion. No doubt, this is what Simeon’s prophecy meant: A sword pierced her soul. Jesus had been, in the highest sense, the perfect Son to her. He had never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21). No curse word had ever fallen from His mouth; His heart had never entertained a sinful thought.

At the cross, she had to watch Him die the most painful, public, and shameful death that man—in the dark recesses of his soul—could devise. It must be that Joseph had already died and Mary had chosen to come to the cross with a few of her friends. Her other children were not with her. Joses, Simon, Judas, and James

did not accompany her; they were not present to hold their mother in their embrace as she witnessed this tragedy (Mark 6:3). Even more surprising, her daughters did not accompany her so that they could assist her in bearing her intense sorrow. We are amazed that her heart and body could carry such a weight of grief. It is for this reason that John, after Jesus spoke from the cross to both of them, may have taken her to his home, away from this awful scene.

How meaningful it must have been to Mary for Jesus to speak to her from the cross. John wrote, "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). She had come to share His pain, and Jesus *saw* her. He pushed the great pain that He was experiencing to the back of His mind and provided for the future care of the one who had borne Him, carried Him, and encouraged Him into manhood. The last earthly responsibility that Jesus fulfilled was that of providing care for His mother.

She saw her Son die for the sins of the world. Surely, Mary had some understanding of what was actually taking place. At Jesus' birth, shepherds had come to the manger and reported the appearance of angels who were singing, "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Luke said, "Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She had seen the magi worship Jesus, presenting Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). She had heard Simeon's and Anna's prophecies concerning Him (Luke 2:25–38). She had beheld His miracles (John 2:5–10), heard His sermons, and scrutinized His life as only a mother could. She had watched the growing tension and rejection between Jesus and the religious authorities. She had probably asked Him about many of these things, and He had told her what He thought she could and should understand.

Mary may not have understood everything about what Jesus was doing; but, as He approached the cross, His mission must have become clearer to her. Surely, she had flashbacks and remembered the appearance of the angel as he announced that the Messiah was going to be born to her. The angel's words were too

pointed for her to misunderstand:

Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:30–33).

Perhaps she said to herself, "I knew something was going to happen, but I did not know the details. I did not envision the agony and shame of it. I now see what all the prophecies meant."

She saw Jesus become her Savior. The angel had said to Mary, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). When the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, he told him, "[Mary] will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Surely Joseph and Mary compared what had been told them by God's messenger. Perhaps they talked over the meaning of the phrase "for He will save His people from their sins."

How comforting it must have been to Mary to think that Jesus was dying so that she and the people of all the earth might have a Savior! We do not know how much she understood or how many of these truths she had processed in her mind; however, she must have grasped some of them and hugged them to her heart as she watched Jesus die.

The resurrection confirmed the validity of everything that she had come to comprehend. When the disciples gathered in the upper room and prayerfully waited for the coming of the Spirit, Mary was among the group of "one hundred and twenty." Luke, after listing the apostles, said of this gathering, "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (Acts 1:14, 15). Although her daughters were not mentioned, the phrase "and with His brothers" may be an inclusive expression referring to the entire family.

Mary did give birth to the Messiah, but at the cross He became her Savior, who was dying

so that she could be saved from her sins. Russell Bradley Jones put this thought in the form of an illustration:

The biographer of the English poet John Milton (1608–74) wrote that blindness fell upon Milton at the age of forty-three like a sentence of death. He thought that he had reached the end of everything, that life had nothing left for him. His heart was broken. His only comfort was the fact that, in his years with eyesight, he had written a pamphlet on the English Civil War between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists (1642–51). “He could not foresee,” the biographer remarked, “that in less than ten years his pamphlet would be merged in the obsolete mass of Civil War tracts, and only be mentioned because it had been written by the author of *Paradise Lost*.” The darkness proved to be a blessing; it gave birth to the great poet. So it was, in an even greater way, with Mary when she lost a Son to find a Savior.¹

Mary was truly one of the greatest women

¹Adapted from Russell Bradley Jones, *Gold from Golgotha* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945), 51–52.

of all time. How grateful we are to her for providing the motherhood that Jesus needed as He grew up! God needed a good home for His Son; He chose Joseph and Mary to provide it, and they did. However, Mary eventually had to recognize that Jesus had moved from being her Son to being her Savior. She saw this come to pass in the fulfillment of all the truths that she had pondered in her heart and perhaps in the words Jesus uttered from the cross: “Woman, behold your son!” (John 19:26).

Eddie Cloer



Mary “made up her mind concerning the way that she would go, and she went that way even though her journey went through Golgotha where her Son was crucified before her journey got to the sunlit morning of the resurrection. A faithful mother stays with God’s mission trusting in the faithfulness of God all along the way.”²

²Eddie Cloer, *Unto Us A Child Is Born*, unpublished manuscript, 23.