

Christ's Relationship to Mary (John 19:26-27)

Text: John 19:26–27

When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

Introduction

This morning, beloved, we come to our Saviour's third word from the cross. The first word was uttered soon after He was nailed to the wood: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do in crucifying Me and putting Me here (Luke 23:34). The second word was spoken to one on a nearby cross: "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The third word was spoken to two people below and nearby the cross: "Woman, behold thy son!" To Mary, and "Behold thy mother" to John. It is the only word or saying from the cross which is actually two words or sayings.

Of the first three words from the cross, the first was to God: "Father, forgive them;" the second was to a stranger, a man whom Jesus had never met before, yet for all that a sheep, the penitent thief, whose request He heard: "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise;" and the third word, our subject this morning, was to his closest relative, Mary, from whom he derived, we could say, His genes, and His closest disciple, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. He spoke to them when He *saw* them, so obviously this was before the three hours of darkness, and He spoke to them because they were the two who seemed to be losing most from an earthly perspective.

You may have noticed that while the first two words from the cross are recorded only in Luke, the third word is recorded in John alone. That is very appropriate because John refers to himself—not directly as such, but discreetly and movingly—as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

There are several spoken of in John 19:15–27, particularly in verse 25, but we are not going to deal with all of them for it is not our text this morning. It is Christ's relationship to Mary which is most in view. Of the women listed in verse 25, she is mentioned first: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother" and others. "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved" (v. 26), He spoke first to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" before saying to the disciple: "Behold thy mother! And from that time that disciple took her unto his own home."

This morning, we are going to consider Christ's relationship to Mary: first, in terms of the law; second, in Roman Catholicism; and third, in redemptive history.

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- I. In Terms of the Law
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I. Christ's Relationship to Mary in Terms of the Law

Christ's third word from the cross must be seen in terms of the law and, specifically, the fifth commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

This is Lord's Day 39 of our *Heidelberg Catechism*:

Q. 104. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?
A. That I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

Here we see that Jesus did not only fulfil prophecy at the cross, for example, we read about the soldiers not dividing an item of His clothing but casting lots for them in verse 24. Jesus not only fulfilled prophecy at the cross but He also fulfilled the law at the cross, particularly here the fifth commandment. In His third word, Christ fulfilled the fifth commandment by honouring His mother. His adoptive father Joseph, by this stage, was dead. After all, he is never mentioned as being alive anywhere in the Lord's public ministry and all would agree that that is because he had already gone to heaven. Christ fulfilled the fifth commandment here by honouring His mother when even when He is a fully grown man of roughly 33 years old. He is still honouring his mother here when she is older. Depending, of course, on when Mary miraculously conceived the baby Jesus, she is probably about 50. Christ is here honouring His mother when He has left home. He has not been living with her for some three years or so but He is still honouring His mother.

This is God's Word to sons and daughters: obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Eph. 6:1). The children are hearing this right now, I take it. Obey your parents in the Lord! Got that! Even when you are an adult and even if you have left your parents' home, you still must honour them. You are not under as many parental commands as you once were, for your father and mother are not around so much to tell you what to do anymore. But even though it is not so much obedience now, you still must honour them.

Here are a couple of relevant proverbs:

Proverbs 20:20: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."

Proverbs 30:17: "The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

Something to think about!

What form did Christ's keeping of the fifth commandment take in his third word from the cross? It was that of providing for the needs of His mother. Providing for her needs (remember, she is a widow; Joseph is already dead).

The classic passage on this is I Timothy chapter 5. Here is the calling of God's people:

Verse 3: Honour widows that are widows indeed (honour includes providing for them materially) and provide for widows that are widows indeed, that is, truly widows, those who cannot provide for themselves, who are godly.

Verse 4: But if any widow have children or nephews (grandchildren, says the margin) let them learn first to show piety at home and to requite or repay their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God.

Verses 5-6: Now she that is a widow indeed and desolate trusteth in God and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day; but she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

Verse 7: These things give I in charge, that they may be blameless.

Verse 8: But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.

The Lord Jesus keeps the fifth commandment in providing for His mother as per I Timothy 5.

Christ's third word on the cross also accords with His own teaching regarding the fifth commandment in His public ministry in Matthew 15. Jesus says to the religious leaders of his day, the scribes and the Pharisees:

Matthew 15:3-6

Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? He notes: God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother, and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honour not his father or his mother, shall be free.

This is a reference to the Jewish idea that if you had the financial responsibility of caring for your parents—it was a hefty amount and a continuous burden—they had devised an easy way out of it. All you had to do was give some money to the church, probably much less than the cost of caring for your parents, and the church would say to you: that is enough, you do not need to look after your mother at all. So it was a nice little way around that burden, as the person saw it.

Thus Jesus rounds on them: You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying: This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Since you do that, you cannot worship God—remember, to obey is better than sacrifice. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men—getting around difficult words of God by dreaming up their own inventions (vv. 7-9).

This teaches us that we need to provide for our parents, including paying when that is necessary, if they are sick or elderly, or else we become hypocrites and our worship is useless, for then we are placing the commandments of men above the commandments of God, including the fifth commandment.

Jesus Christ not only keeps the fifth commandment and I Timothy 5, which was written after the events of our text. Thus He is not a hypocrite for in John 19 He observes His own teaching in Matthew 15.

Jesus Christ did not pay financially for the support of His mother after His death because He cannot. He was not affluent for there were times when He did not even have anywhere to lay His own head (Luke 9:58). On the cross, He even lost the clothes on His back for they were taken from Him by the soldiers! Jesus kept the fifth commandment by providing His mother with a son to care for her after His decease and a house for her to stay in: the home of John, the beloved disciple.

This is the idea in our text. Jesus, seeing His mother and John, says to His mother, “Woman, behold thy son!” The beloved disciple is going to take My place, for Jesus was the oldest of

the brothers in His earthly family. Then He says to the disciple: “Behold thy mother!” You must look after her. John and Mary understood: the disciple took her unto his own home from that hour.

This teaches us that we are doubly engaged to show gratitude to the Triune God in keeping the fifth commandment: because, number one, it is written in stone at Sinai, and number two, it is beautifully exemplified by our Saviour at Golgotha. Our Lord also demonstrates here the love that is the keeping of the commandments of God.

This third word of the cross is frequently called the word of affection (e.g., A. W. Pink), because the Lord shows affection for His mother, or the word of compassion. The idea is that, in love and affection and compassion, Jesus provides His mother with someone to look after her and a place for her to stay, after His death. In Christ's wise love for her, He chooses John, the disciple whom He loved, to care for Mary. He did not put her under the care of any of His brothers. Maybe they were not converted by this stage; we are not told precisely why. Jesus knew best and He nominated John.

We notice when He did this: it was on the cross, while He was suffering agonies in body and soul for our sins, that He thought of her and her needs in His absence—this widowed mother of his—and provided for her as His last filial duty.

Preachers can go wrong here regarding Christ's third word from the cross with respect to the fifth commandment. One German dispensationalist I read omitted all reference to the fifth commandment in his chapter on this passage. Why? How could he have missed it? Well, he is a dispensationalist and dispensationalists have little place for the law as a standard for godly living in the New Testament age. On the other hand, one English Puritan whom I read so emphasized the fifth commandment in this third word on the cross that he actually never mentioned the cross itself. That is, he took this Word of God as if it were only a great example—certainly it is that—for keeping the fifth commandment, and the great fact that Christ was on the cross here was left out entirely!

The truth about this third word is that it definitely is about the fifth commandment but it is not only about the fifth commandment. There is more to it than that. Jesus keeps the fifth commandment but not merely as if he were only a man obeying a divine precept. As He keeps the fifth commandment as a man, He also reminds us that he is *Lord*. He is under the law, for God put Him there during His earthly ministry according to Galatians 4:4, but He is still Lord. He says: “Woman, behold thy son!” He makes John her son, not physically but as one who is to act as her son. He says to John, Look, she is your mother.

He states these things, and both of them understand and acquiesce in this new relationship which Jesus Christ forms by speaking to them from the cross, for we read, “from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” As Lord, even though He is under the fifth commandment, Jesus has the right to dispose of all things. In effect, He tells Mary, “John is going to look after you as if he were your son,” before adding “You must look after her, John, as if she were your mother.” Christ is disposing and determining new relationships. Christ is under the fifth commandment but he is still Lord.

Jesus is keeping this fifth commandment also, I remind you, as one who is on the cross. It is not here merely a matter only of obedience to one of the Ten Commandments. Our Saviour is bearing the punishment for all the sins of God's elect, including our sins against the fifth commandment. He is not only setting us an example regarding the fifth commandment; he is, through the cross, empowering us to keep the fifth commandment by breaking the dominion of sin over us and obtaining for us the quickening Spirit.

Notice specifically one of the words used in this fifth commandment: “Honour thy father and thy *mother*.” But how does Jesus address Mary? He speaks to her these words: “Woman”—not mother—“Woman, behold thy son!” He says to John, “Behold *thy* mother!” He tells John that she is *his* mother. But Christ Himself does not call her “mother.” We will say more about that later. So here is Christ's amazing obedience to the fifth commandment—His thoughtfulness, His compassion, His selflessness—and yet, even when He keeps the fifth commandment, it is never as a mere man but as One whom the passage reveals to be Lord, the Lord on the cross, for He addresses Mary as “woman,” not “mother.”

II. Christ's Relationship to Mary in Roman Catholicism

As I said, there is more to this text than the consideration of Christ as the one who keeps the fifth commandment and Roman Catholicism emphatically jumps in on the “more,” both historically and even to this very day. Roman Catholicism appeals to Christ's third word on the cross to teach that Mary is the mother of the church. Rome has many idolatrous words for Mary but, largely from this passage, Mary is called the mother of the church.

As mother of the church, both collectively as a body and individually in terms of all its members, Roman Catholics are to honour Mary as one must honour their own mother, as per the fifth commandment and then some and then a lot: “Honour Mary as your mother and the mother of the whole church!”

Since Scripture gives no warrant for this, this is not Mariology (the study of Mary), a neutral term, but Mariolatry: Mary plus idolatry, because this is idolatrous worship of an invented Mary. Mary the mother of the church must be looked to, and sought for, mercy, succour, help and deliverance, because, after all, children look to their mother for such things.

Roman Catholic spokesmen hasten to add, if you press them, that Mary is to be looked to for mercy and salvation *in connection with Jesus Christ*, not apart from Him. But this does not make things any better, because the Word of God does not join her and Christ in this way, and that too is Mariolatry, an idolatrous veneration of an imaginary Mary.

Let us look at whose mother she is said to be in the text. In John 19:26, Jesus addresses her thus: “Woman, behold thy son!” In verse 27, He says to John, “Behold thy mother!” According to this Word of God, from that point onward and while she lived, Mary was the mother of John. John, behold thy mother; think of her as your mother and treat her as if she were your mother.

Child of God, Mary is not your mother or my mother. She is not the church's mother. Moreover, the apostle John, the beloved disciple, does not represent the church. In saying to John, “Behold thy mother!” it is not that John is a picture of the church, the body of Christ, so that the church has Mary as mother. That is an instance of the worst sort of allegory. There is no Scripture for that notion whatsoever, that John represents the church and, if John has Mary as his mother, then the church has Mary as the church's mother. That is flat contrary to biblical doctrine!

Let us ask two more questions of the text. First, whose house did they go to? They did not go to Mary's house; they went to John's house: “from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

Second, who especially cares for whom here? Remember, John is a grown man. John is the one who is active; Mary is the one who is passive: “from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home,” so that he might care for her as an aged woman, looking after her in her

widowhood. Mary is not presented as if she were looking after a man in his 30s as if he were a helpless child. John is a grown man who takes Mary into his house to look after this widow as if she were his elderly mother. I even have a quote from even one Roman Catholic commentator who recognizes this. He rejects Rome's idolatrous interpretation of our text at this point, though he remains, sadly, a Roman Catholic.

Clearly, this scene beneath the cross is utterly unable to carry the burden of proof of Mary's motherhood of the church. The main point remains that Mary is entrusted to the disciple John, who receives her as his own in his home.

Besides all of this, the church has no mother, unless God could be said to be such figuratively, because he cares for his church better than any mother cares for her child, according to Isaiah 49:15, for example. The church as such does not have a mother. The church has a Father: the Triune God. The church has a Husband: Jesus Christ. The church has a Head: Christ, again. But the church does not have a mother.

The church itself in the Bible is said to be a mother: there is Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26). We are the children of the church; the church is the mother of her individual members. We are children of the church. We are not children of Mary because the church does not have Mary as its mother.

Such an idea, that Mary is the mother of the church and that our care is entrusted to her, is injurious to the glory of the Triune God and Jesus Christ. It is also destructive of the church because it involves her in idolatry by taking the work of the Triune God in Christ and ascribing it to this lady. It is, of course, a great dishonour to Mary herself, who is a godly woman who would be totally appalled at the idea of people praying to her and looking to her for salvation, as totally appalled as you would be if we were to say of Elizabeth or Susan or Amanda or any other believing woman, "She is the mother of the church," and that everybody in the world must look to her for their salvation and the mercy of God. What would Elizabeth or Susan or Amanda or any other believing woman think of that? Mary is similarly disgusted.

If someone responds, "Well, what about Mary *as the mother of Jesus*?" We reply that that is not even stated by the Lord Himself in our text. There Christ refers to her as woman: "*Woman*, behold thy son!" We will say more about that later.

Besides falsely claiming Mary as the mother of the church—the categories are totally mixed up and confounded here—since the Bible especially here places her near the physical cross, Roman Catholicism also seeks to use this Word of God in support of other errors in its Mariolatry.

According to Rome, Mary is redemptrix or co-redemptrix with Jesus (redemptrix is the female of Redeemer). Rome points out that Mary suffered. We agree that she did suffer at the cross, according to the inspired words of godly Simeon to her: "a sword shall pierce through your own soul" (Luke 2:35). Mary suffered as a mother seeing her son being rejected and crucified. The other godly women at the cross suffered too. Who would not suffer if they beheld a friend in such agony? In fact, all the saints at the cross suffered as they witnessed that disgusting, horrible injustice. Mary suffered. Salome suffered. John suffered. They all suffered.

But none of their sufferings were redemptive. None of them, and not Mary either, suffered for even a single sin. For someone's sufferings to be redemptive, blotting out and putting away sin, that person needs, first of all, to be sinless. But Mary rejoiced in God her Saviour (Luke

1:47)! She was a sinner like any other. Yes, she was a godly woman by God's grace alone but, like us, she was also sinful.

For someone's sufferings to be redemptive, that person would also need to be God, coming into the world by an act of will and placing himself under the law, so as to be able to provide salvation for others. Such was not Mary, any more than James or John or Peter.

Moreover, for someone's sufferings to be redemptive they need to be put into a distinct salvific office by God, to have a specific calling as the deliverer of the church. Mary's office was that of giving birth to Jesus, not of atoning for anybody.

The Lord Jesus is the only sinless divine Redeemer, who was appointed and equipped by God as the Christ, as the One anointed as the highest prophet, only high priest and sovereign king of the church. It is Jesus Christ's suffering that is the point of our text, for "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24).

Rome tries to work in the idea not only that Mary is co-redemptrix also but that Mary offered up her son. Think about that. But Mary could not have done that because she did not have the authority to offer up her son as a propitiation for sins. Mary did not do that, even if she could have, because at the time she did not understand that Jesus was bearing away our sins on the cross!

Scripture teaches that God offered up his only begotten Son: "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). Jesus Christ offered Himself up as a sacrifice to God. But, in the idolatry of that false church, Rome claims that Mary offered up her son. Mary did not offer him up. John did not. Paul did not. You did not. I did not. God offered up his own Son, and Christ offered up Himself once and for all as the only perfect and complete sacrifice for all our transgressions.

Roman Catholicism makes Mary out to be a redeemer and it presents her as one who offered up Jesus. It also presents Mary as a mediator or a mediatrix (the female of mediator) or a co-mediatrix with Christ. Thus, according to Rome, there are two mediators. But God has provided only one mediator, so the true church knows only one mediator. Thus I Timothy 2:5 proclaims, "for there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

Rome says, "Jesus is the one mediator but Mary takes us to Jesus." No. Jesus takes us all the way to God without the need of anyone else to contribute in the slightest, because he is the full, complete, all-sufficient mediator, so there is no need for any helper and other alleged mediators only detract from His office as mediator.

Rome looks at our text and says, "Oh, look at Mary's immaculate heart," but this is sheer invention. Our text concerns the heart of Jesus Christ: caring for his mother by providing for her and caring for us by dying for our sins, as well as her sins.

Rome says, "What we have here at the cross is cooperation: Mary is cooperating, working with and alongside Jesus." No, Jesus Christ, "by himself, purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3)!

Mary's role in this passage is that of listening to Christ's word to her: "Woman, behold thy son!" and to hear what He says to John: "Behold thy mother!" She listens to Christ, and she leaves: "from that hour that disciple took her unto his own house." This is Mary's place, as explained to her by the Lord Jesus Christ. She must see it and she did. John must see it, and he did. And the church must see it, because God's Word, the Bible, tells us her function, her position, her place in the mystery of the salvation that is in Christ alone.

III. Christ's Relationship to Mary in Redemptive History

This brings us to our final point: Christ's relationship to His mother in redemptive history. There is something more in our text than His wonderful example of keeping the fifth commandment. We must understand that all of redemptive history is centred on Jesus Christ our Lord, and now especially the parts of it that involve Mary in some way, because she does have a role in the story.

There is, first of all, Christ's birth. She is rightly called the blessed Virgin Mary. She is the blessed Virgin Mary not because she is the Queen of Heaven or the mother of the church or a co-redemptrix or a co-mediator or anything like that. She is the blessed Virgin Mary because, out of all the millions and billions of women in the history of the world, God elected her in His grace to bring forth His Son, who must be a true man. Of all the women in the world, she was the one that He chose and made blessed above all women (Luke 1:28, 42).

Likewise, Jael is called blessed above all women (Judg. 5:24) because God said, as it were, "I am going to give you victory through the hammer and the tent peg, so you, unlike any other woman, will have the joy, privilege and honour of striking through the head of wicked Sisera, that enemy of My church!" Mary had an even greater honour in conceiving and bearing the Son of God!

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 14 explains:

Q. 35. What is the meaning of these words (from the *Apostles' Creed*)—"He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"?

A. That God's eternal Son, who is and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted.

Q. 36. What profit dost thou receive by Christ's holy conception and nativity?

A. That He is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness, covers in the sight of God my sins, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.

Christ's sinless conception and birth addresses and deals with my terrible misery of original sin!

If we move from Christ's birth to His ministry, Mary occurs in a few places. Here is the first one I am going to treat: Matthew 12:46–50. In this passage, Jesus is casting out demons and teaching the people. His mother and His brethren stand outside the group, desiring to speak with him. Word gets back to Jesus: "Look, Your family members want to talk with You."

So Jesus asks this question: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Stretching forth His hands to those who listened to him and believed the Word of God, He said, "You are My mother; you are My brothers. If anyone does the will of God, the same is My brother and My sister and My mother."

We are all part of one great family. This is what Jesus does in this Word of God: He relativises His relatives. He relativises His earthly relatives because being related to Jesus Christ is only through faith. To those who believe and do the will of God, Christ declares, "You are My mother and brothers and sisters." He spiritualizes these relationships.

In John chapter 2, near the very start of his public ministry, when Mary says to Him, "They have run out of wine. Is there anything you can do to help at this wedding reception?" Jesus

says to her: “Woman, my time has not yet come. It is not your place to be telling me what to do.” He does not call Mary “mother”. He is now in His public office as the Messiah. He calls her “woman,” though not in any derogatory sense. He is pointing out to Mary that she is to Him in His office as the Christ a “woman” rather than His mother. Jesus is telling her, in effect, that she is not over Him any longer as His mother. That is how Christ starts His public ministry in John 2.

Here He is at the very end of His public ministry in the Gospel According to John with His third word on the cross in John 19. Again Jesus addresses her as “woman”: “Woman, behold thy son!” He is not being rude. He is in His office as the Messiah, dying for our sins on the cross. “You, Mary, must not think of Me as if you are over Me as a parent. That has passed away.”

This brings us to this key point, without which the third saying on the cross does not make much sense: Death changes relationships.

Death changes the relationships of human beings in general. The great marriage vow in the English language typically includes this line: Until death us do part. God parts a husband and a wife at death. At death, he is no longer married to her and she is no longer married to him. That is what alone allows remarriage (Rom. 7:2-3 I Cor. 7:39).

You will remember the scenario painted by the Sadducees in Matthew 22 of the woman who seems to have given a kiss of death to seven different husbands, as it were. She marries one and he dies; she marries his brother and he dies; and so on to a total of seven husbands. “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife is she?” they asked Jesus, thinking that they had Him stumped.

But Christ explained to them that, in the resurrection, in the world to come, there is no marriage. Therefore, there are no husbands, there are no wives. The woman in question will not be married to the first husband or the second one or the seventh one or any of them, or all seven of them together, for she will be married to nobody. There is no marriage in heaven or in the new heavens and the new earth. Former things will pass away.

It is similar with children for, when you die, you will no longer be the father or mother of your children. If you meet your children in heaven or in the new creation, you are not their father or mother and they are not your sons or daughters. Likewise, your current parents are not your parents in the world to come. Fathers and mothers, and children and grandparents—these relationships will have had their day; they will be gone forever.

But you should conclude, “Oh, I really like being the son of my father; I think it is awful that I am no longer going to be the brother of my sister; I really think a lot of my grandchildren and I thought heaven was going to be wonderful, enjoying it with them. Are we going to lose all that?”

No, no, no! You have got that wrong. Life in the new creation that awaits us will be far, far better than any earthly relationship. There is no marriage in heaven because Christ will be supremely evident as our Husband and we do not need a husband or a wife when Christ is our Husband in the great consummation of the New World. This will be the only thing that fills your heart and soul. So you will not be interested in an earthly husband. It would be absurd. You have the highest and heavenly Husband: Christ. The whole church is married to Him and every day is your wedding day, because there is the everlasting marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

You must not say, “But I would like to have children in the world to come!” No, no, no! That is not Christianity; that is Mormonism, a cult. We are the children of God in the consummation of the world to come: God is our Father. You will not have children anymore and you do not need to care for children anymore. Besides, we will all be adults, for we will all be fully mature physically and spiritually.

If you say, “But I would still like my family” you must understand that you will have a far better family, a massively bigger family in the world to come: the family of all those who believe in and honour Jesus Christ. This family will be far closer and more intimate. It will be the family of the elect, all those for whom the new heavens and the new earth have been prepared.

Death changes everything, including these earthly relationships. Death also—and this is the key point with this third word from the cross—changes relationships for the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what he is getting at in our text.

His life on earth was in His state of humiliation. He was legally guilty for all of His elect people’s sins. Because He was legally guilty, His condition was wretched. God treated Him as the One great sin bearer and punished Him for our sake.

When He dies and is glorified, He entered into a state of exaltation in heaven. Legally, He is righteous so His condition is that of perfect blessedness. When He was on earth was He is a man among men. If you had walked past Him in the street, you would not have known that He was different from anybody else. But now He is Lord: Lord of heaven, Lord of earth, Lord of man, Lord of angels, Lord of the wicked (whom He punishes) and Lord of the righteous. He is the Governor of the nations according to Psalm 22, and He is the sole King and Head of the church.

This Christ is going to return in the clouds with all the holy angels in great glory. He is going to speak a word and raise the dead. He is going to judge all men, and usher us into the new heavens and the new earth.

It is within this framework that our text, including what it says about Mary, is to be understood. “Woman, behold thy son!” John is now going to be looking after you. Mary is not to be viewed as the mother of the Lord.

Mary is a member of the church. As such, she entered heaven at death, and will be resurrected with an inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth. This is bliss enough for Mary. This is greater blessedness for Mary than conceiving and giving birth to the Son of God, than having Him in her home for many years and hearing this third word of His from the cross. Like all the saints, Mary’s glory is to be with Christ, not as her little boy or even as her grown-up son or even as the adult son to whom she looked up that day at the cross. Like all the saints, Mary’s glory is to be with Christ as her Lord and Saviour, and the great God and Redeemer of the whole church for ever!

Mary is not the Queen of Heaven or the mother of the church or anything like that. She is the handmaiden of the Lord (Luke 1:38)—the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us and our salvation! Amen.