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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**November 4, 2018**

**Jesus Comforts His Mother**

**John 19:25-27**

**Prayer:** *Father, once again we thank you for this day, we thank you for this day that we set aside to focus in on you, on the cross, on what you've done for us at the cross. And so I pray, Lord, this morning that you would give us your Holy Spirit's presence, your Holy Spirit's power, the ability to focus in on that and by the grace and unction of your Holy Spirit to have it move our lives in a permanent way, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is the day that we remember Christ and his cross and Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and celebrated a Passover supper with them for the last time. Matthew 26 describes it, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink*

*it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* So Jesus takes the bread and he takes the wine, he offers them up as the symbols of his flesh and blood and he asks his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. Then he asked them to remember this on a regular basis, this is what we do, this is what we do every month, we call it "the Lord's Table," and we celebrate it each month by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, that is asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, we have been working our way through the Gospel of John and we've thus far worked our way up to the 19th chapter. Last time out we were we were looking at the actual event of the crucifixion. We were at *John 19:17-18* which says: *And he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.*

I want to bring you back to where we were. It was two months ago when we were actually looking at the crucifixion. I want to

reprise what we covered back then to kind of put into focus what we're going to be looking at today. And what I was talking about two months ago the last time is, what I was talking about is a large part of the crucifixion is about shame. Jesus's crucifixion was designed by the devil to include the most intense physical agony a human being could bear and along with that, numerous areas of shame. We mentioned five in particular: There was the shame of expulsion, there was the shame of association, the shame of identification, the shame of poverty, and the shame of nakedness. And just to kind of go over again what those were, understanding that in each case the devil made his move and his move was in order to maximize Jesus's shame. And God demonstrated over and over again that he was in complete charge of each and every event that was intended to bring shame and that he was capable of turning each one into an object of glory and honor for his Son. And we saw that's precisely what God did.

Shame number one was the shame of expulsion. Jesus was being cast out. And the first thing we noticed about Jesus's execution is that it takes place outside the city. *John 19:17* says: *And he went out, bearing his own cross.* Well "out" means outside the city. It means outside the camp. Jesus was crucified outside the city. That's where the sacrificed animals were carried. *Hebrews 13* says: *For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought*

*into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Outside the camp is where the garbage is dumped. It's where the refuse is placed. It's where the devil had the crucifixion take place. What the devil intended for evil, God superintended for good. The shame of expulsion which brought Jesus outside the camp for his execution, that shame actually identified Jesus with us as sinners cast out from God's holy presence by our sin. Hebrews 13 tells us: So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*

Now shame number two was Jesus's association and it was an association with common criminals. *Luke 23* tells us: *Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.* Well that was the devil's script for this and once again we see God manages to flip the script. This shame of association which places Jesus between two common criminals actually associates him with us as law breakers.

Shame number three, that's the shame of identification. *John 19:19* says: *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many 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. Now Pilate, actually Pilate and the devil himself*

recognized that putting this sign over the broken, bloodied and naked Jesus, Jesus hung in between two common criminals was really shouting out in three different languages: This, this is your so-called king. The Jews knew all too well that that's exactly what Pilate was trying to communicate. And so they said to Pilate in verse 21: *"Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.'"* Pilate answered, *"What I have written I have written."* See, Pilate insisted on a public display so that every local tribe and tongue would understand exactly what was taking place there. He wanted that insult to sink in. Little did he know he was doing exactly what God's sovereign hand had designed. I mean this sign over Jesus was God's own pronouncement that Jesus was willingly identifying himself as a crucified king.

Shame number four, that was Jesus' extreme poverty. Jesus owned nothing but the clothing on his back, and even that was taken away. And for the shame of that, God used that to demonstrate his kindness. You see the shame of poverty which took the only possession that Jesus actually had actually showed him to become willing to become poor to make us rich. *2 Corinthians* says: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

Shame number five was nakedness, being completely exposed to the world, to the crowd, to the entire universe in this state of abject shame. God himself says in *Psalm 22*: *They look and they stare at Me.* I mean Satan probably thought he had succeeded in publicly humiliating the King of the universe. Well that profound shame actually demonstrated a love for us that was so deep that Jesus was willing to identify with us in the nakedness of our own sin by becoming naked before the world. So Jesus is humbling himself over and over again through expulsion, through association, through identification, through poverty and through nakedness, and it gives new meaning to God's charge to us in *Philippians 2:5* where he says: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

Well that was last time. This morning I want to talk about yet another shame, and it may well have been the worst. It's our next reading in John 19. Let me just read it to you. This is *John 19:25-27*. It says: *Standing by the cross of Jesus where were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When 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 into his own home. The shame we're going to speak about this morning is the shame of having to encounter his mother Mary face to face while he's undergoing this torture. While Jesus is actually hanging on the cross, while he is in the midst of absolute physical, psychological, and spiritual agony, I mean even while hanging nailed through his hands and his feet, he's not thinking of himself, he's not thinking about the deep shame that he is bearing, instead he's thinking about his mother Mary. He's thinking about her shame and her pain. See for her this long awaited sword, this sword that she had pondered and dreaded had finally come to pierce her. See, some 33 years before, Mary was told about a sword. She was told it would one day come to pierce her. 33 years previously there was an incident that took place at the temple. Mary and Joseph had gone there, and they had gone there with a baby Jesus to complete her purification and to offer up sacrifice. And so they're there at the temple and while they're there at the temple, they're approached by an elderly man named Simeon. Simeon's just a simple layman, he's somebody who deeply loved God, deeply loved the nation of Israel but somebody that God had chosen to by the power of the Holy Spirit speak prophetically into that moment. This is how the Bible describes their encounter. This is *Luke 2:25*. It says: *Now there was a man*

*in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

Well the sword, the sword that Simeon is speaking of has to do with the role that one day Jesus would take on. But this was not the first prophetic revelation about Jesus that Mary and Joseph had received. There was an angel who came and announced the coming of the Savior to Joseph, and he clearly revealed in that announcement what the purpose of this Jesus would be. This is what he says in *Matthew 1:20*, he says: *Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to*



him -- this is Joseph -- in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." So the angel tells Joseph right off the bat the role that Jesus is going to have, he's going to save his people from their sins. Well there was another angel who told Mary that she herself would be blessed. This is Luke 1:26. It says: *In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."*

Now Mary truly was favored of God, but right from the beginning Mary understood something, she understood that she, too, needed a savior. Mary acknowledged as much in her statement known as the Magnificat. This was a prayer of praise that she stated when Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist at the time when Elizabeth came to visit her during her pregnancy with Jesus, and that's described in Luke 1. It says this, it says: *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in*

*Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. This is John the Baptist leaping in the womb of Elizabeth over the presence of Jesus in the womb of Mary. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Now I want you to consider carefully that statement that Mary has just made. I mean if Mary was truly sinless and spotless, she would have no need of a Savior, and yet she exclaims, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." You see, even if Mary was a highly favored obedient servant of God, she was still nevertheless a daughter of Adam and therefore a sinner like us, someone also in need of a Savior.*

You know the scripture doesn't give us a lot of details about the life of Mary and as a result we all know there's a large division in Christendom centered about how we are to relate to Mary. In 1854 Pope Pius IX declared according to papal infallibility that all Catholics must accept as absolute truth the doctrine of the immaculate conception. Now I bet you -- almost every one of you, if you hear that, you think that's the doctrine that states that

Jesus was conceived without sin. Well that's clearly a doctrine that Protestants and Catholics could easily agree on, but that's not what the immaculate conception is all about. It's not about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary, it's about the conception of Mary herself in the womb of her mother. I mean among the prayers that I was taught as a young Catholic was the prayer that states: Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us. I believe that was a serious error. You see, Catholic theologians reason that for Jesus to be flawless, for Jesus to be perfect, he would have had to have had a flawless, perfect vessel to come into flesh through. Therefore they reasoned that Mary through the merits of Jesus was given the grace to be flawless as well. Protestants find no place in scripture that backs up that claim. And again we differ with our Roman Catholic believers who believe that Mary was ever-virgin. According to the Roman Catholic view, Mary remained a virgin for her entire life. She had no other biological children. Well, according to the Protestant perspective there's ample evidence that Mary had other children through Joseph because the scriptures describe multiple encounters not just with Jesus but with his siblings. Now one such encounter occurs in Mark's gospel which describes what happens when there's this large crowd around Jesus and the crowd is so large his family can't get near him. This is *Mark 3*. It says: *And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called*

him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." Well, Jesus is, he's obviously making a distinction between his actual brothers and mother and a spiritual brother and mother. I mean he's saying spiritually speaking, anyone who does the will of God becomes my brother, my mother, my sister, but that makes no sense. It makes no sense to make that kind of comparison unless his actual brothers and mother are there with him. There's other scriptural evidence as well. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul says: Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? In Galatians 1 he says: Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. Matthew gospel makes the case through people who are obviously no fans of Jesus. This is another incident that took place in the gospel of Matthew. It says: And coming to his hometown he -- that's Jesus -- taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and

*Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. These folks were clearly not fond of Jesus. I mean these are folks who are astounded that Jesus is assuming a position of spiritual authority since he and his family are so well known. These are the folks that are insisting that Jesus had James and Joseph, Simon and Judas as his brothers and sisters as well thus far unnamed. Now we don't know much about Simon and Joseph but we do know that James and Jude went on to each write a book of the New Testament. We also know that they were nowhere to be found while Jesus is hanging on the cross. And this kind of brings us around to this awful connection that Jesus is making with his mother while he's hanging on the cross. Again, John 19:25, it says: *Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When 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.**

Well this should raise some pretty obvious questions. The very first question is why didn't Jesus give over the care of his mother to James or Jude, to his half brothers? Why isn't Jesus turning the care of his mother Mary over to the rest of his family? I

think we have a hint as to the reason why but it's found earlier in the seventh chapter of the gospel of John. This is the discussion that's taking place between Jesus and his siblings. It says:

*After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him.* I think that's our answer.

Jesus's own family didn't believe in him. The disciple John did.

I mean it's apparent that Jesus made the decision about his mother's welfare based on John's relationship to the kingdom rather than Mary's blood relationship with her own children. I think the facts are that Mary knew Jesus as Lord and Savior and her own children did not. And that, too, must have been part of the sword that was piercing Mary's heart. See, part of the sword that Mary faced at the foot of the cross was the fact that her own children were still mired in unbelief. I don't believe that was the case with Mary. And whether or not Mary fully understood all of the ramifications of the cross, she clearly understood that she was a sinner in need of salvation, and at this point in time her other children didn't have that understanding. In fact we know that Jesus's brother James came to saving faith only after the

resurrected Jesus appeared to him. This is a statement made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. He says: *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. It took an appearance by the resurrected Christ to turn James around.*

You know, if you ever wonder about the parents of children who have walked away from the faith, perhaps if you feel inclined to judge them for where their children are spiritually, just consider Jesus's brothers. I mean they were arguably raised by the most godly person who ever lived. They were half brothers to God himself and yet still until God did a work in their hearts they remained in unbelief. God says the cross is foolishness to them who are perishing. And whether it's Jesus's own brothers or your brothers or sisters or mother or father or friends, it's really all the same. Until God opens eyes and ears, people will be forever blind and deaf. That's why I emphasize over and over again how critically important it is to recognize that sharing the gospel is first and foremost a spiritual endeavor that must be bathed in

prayer. I mean, I say it all the time, I tell people there were only two people in the world who have access to the inside of your loved one's head: One of them is your loved one and the other one is God. It is far better to spend time on your knees pleading for them, that God would give them the mercy of eyes that see and ears that hear, and then presenting the gospel is simply a matter of speaking the truth in love.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I'd like us to just take a couple of moments to consider the shame that mankind and the devil hoped to heap on the flawless Son of God and to consider God's wisdom turning that shame into glory and to consider also in some of these minor details of the cross, the unique pain that Mary and Jesus shared at the cross.

Consider also as the elements are being distributed God's warning about taking communion. It's found in *1 Corinthians 11*. It says this: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* I repeat this warning



every month. I tell you communion is such a serious business that to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. I mean if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you're not absolutely certain that by faith you've trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then do not participate in the elements, just pass them on. And again, like I share every month, you can also make the mistake on the other side of thinking, well, I have to be perfect, flawless, in order to be worthy to receive communion, and the devil loves that mistake as well. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin, it doesn't mean that you don't ever fail. And if you are a child of the King, you recognize that your salvation is a gift given to you by God, a gift that no one is ever capable of earning. And I repeat this quote each month, Dane Ortlund puts it so well, he says: "In the kingdom of God the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." Now that also means that when you do fail, when you sin, you know that you have a Savior, you know that you have Christ in heaven advocating on your behalf. You also know that God's Spirit is within you convicting you and so you grieve as children who know that you have a Father who wants to forgive and cleanse you, because God says: *If we confess our sins, he is*

*faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so when God speaks to us about the beauty of confession, we have to agree with him, we have to agree with his Holy Spirit as he's convicting us, recognizing that we have an advocate in heaven itself. 1 John 2:1 says: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. And so it's because we know that we have his righteousness, Jesus's righteousness and not our own that we now realize that we are free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. You know, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we deserved to die in our place, so that we could be made worthy of heaven, and because of that, we can eat at his table. And before we do, I'd like us to focus this morning on the deep shame that God sovereignly turned into profound glory and the unique pain shared only by Mary and Jesus.*

*1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take and eat.*

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I want to focus again a little bit more on Mary. Mary was a uniquely chosen and favored vessel for God's glory. It was her cousin Elizabeth speaking through the Holy Spirit who said to her, "*Blessed are you among women!*" And it seems to be often the case with much blessing comes much heartache. See, Simeon's prediction was that a sword would pierce Mary's soul, and that was given to her at the very, very beginning. It was something she carried with her her entire life. For 33 years Mary lived her life as a mother awaiting Simeon's prediction to unfold. I believe Mary knew from the very beginning that Jesus was the Messiah. I mean she clearly knew from the very beginning of his public ministry that Jesus was capable of the miraculous. I mean it was Mary, if you recall, who asked Jesus to intervene at this wedding that had run out of wine. It was Mary who asked for and saw Jesus's first miracle. And no doubt she was highly aware of all of the other miracles because we know that Mary was a person who thought very deeply about spiritual things. When the shepherds came to Mary, they explained how the angels had appeared to them and they said: *For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* Well scripture then says *But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.* Years later Mary and Joseph went through the trauma of thinking that Jesus had been lost or kidnapped because he was no longer to be found in their caravan and

so they're frantically backtracking, and they're doing this for a couple of days and eventually they find him in the temple at age 12 or 13 and he's amazing the teachers of the law. It's described in Luke 2:47. It says: *And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them, and his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.* You know Mary, she finds her 12-year-old son in the temple and he's astounding the great teachers of Israel. And so what do we find? We find Mary taking these things in and she's pondering them and she's treasuring them in her heart. And then there's the obvious issue of Jesus himself. How could Mary not know who Jesus was? How would you like to raise the only perfect child who's ever existed? I mean I don't know how a perfect infant behaves. I mean is there such a thing as the terrible twos? Probably wasn't, I mean, I don't know. I don't know what it was like for him as an adolescent either. I mean the only information we have about young Jesus is this incident that takes place in the temple. Clearly Mary had an enormous amount of things to ponder in her heart about

Jesus. And no doubt she pondered often what Simeon actually meant by telling her that a sword would one day pierce her heart. And now standing at the foot of the cross she knows precisely what Simeon meant. Here was her beloved flawless son and he's naked and he's bleeding, and he's hanging crucified before her. All of the agonies that Jesus endured seeing his mother's soul pierced by this sword had to be unbearable.

You know, it's so often said that vicarious pain is the worst pain there is. If you ask any couple who's been going through the agony of having a spouse dying of some disease, you quickly learn that there are two very different types of pain that they are suffering. There's one set of pain for the spouse who is dying and yet another one for those -- for the one who is witnessing it. I've heard dying spouses sometimes say that their role was the easier one to bear, that witnessing a loved one's pain is more painful than actually enduring it. We can only guess at the exchanged agony that took place as Jesus's eyes lock on to his mother Mary.

But you know she wasn't the only one who met Jesus's gaze during the crucifixion. We know that Jesus at one point during that whole process locked eyes with Peter. We also know that it happened at the worst possible time for Peter. I mean a servant girl had accused him of being with Jesus in the midst of his third denial

that he even knew Jesus, this last denial accompanied by cursing. We read in the scripture, it says: *The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."* So Peter went out and wept bitterly. Peter was overwhelmed with shame. Well once again Jesus has locked eyes but it's with someone who has done no wrong and yet still is touched deeply by shame. I mean it's very difficult to put into words what must have transpired between Jesus and Mary while Jesus is hanging on the cross, but we do know once again that shame is at the center of it. Jesus's own mother had to see him naked, panting, bleeding, and dying but at the center of her agony was this overwhelming shame. I mean I don't know what it's like for a parent who has to go through the agony of having a child who brings them deep shame. I don't know what it's like to have a son who's convicted of rape or a daughter of prostitution or drug dealing or murder or slander or something like that, I can only imagine the deep shame that attaches itself to a parent in those circumstances. Mary was confronting the deepest shame a parent would ever confront, and she's confronting it because her son was now profoundly guilty. Both Peter and Mary locked eyes with Jesus but their circumstances although altogether different had one common theme. It took one look from Jesus to a guilty Peter to have him absolutely collapse in sorrow and grief. Peter was caught by Jesus in the very act of

denying his Savior, an act accompanied by curses. I mean in the middle of his cursing Peter looks over and locks eyes with Jesus and that connection changed his life for the rest of his life. Just imagine what it would be like to be caught in the very act like Peter was. I mean to be caught gossiping or lying or cheating or lusting or stealing and you look up and you're locked into the eyes of your Savior and they're boring into you. Jesus no doubt locked eyes with his mother, but unlike Peter she was not cursing or lying or cheating. She was instead aching the deepest ache a human being could ever ache. She was seeing her son hanging there not just accused of rape or gossip or stealing or slander or lusting or any other sin but guilty on all counts. God says: *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* The spotless Lamb of God, the Son of God is hanging on a cross literally becoming sin for us. And while he's hanging there naked, bleeding and absorbing all of the evil sinful humankind could produce, he has to see his mother in this state and he has to comfort her. The sword is now piercing her heart, and he knows it. And we know for a fact that Jesus knows how painful vicarious pain is because only weeks previously he was at a scene of deep grief and mourning as his dear friend Lazarus has died. We read the story with the benefit of knowing that Jesus is very God and that he has the power and he has the will to raise Lazarus from the dead, but I think we miss out on the

fact that Jesus as one hundred percent man identified thoroughly and vicariously with the pain that Lazarus's sisters were going through. I mean he identified so much so that John's gospel said that Jesus began to weep. The human part of Jesus cries out at the pain of death itself and the fear and despair that the gaping hole of grief is creating in Lazarus's sisters. Jesus knew full well how deeply that vicarious pain cut, so much so that he not only wept, scripture says he wailed. Now that very same pain he saw written all over the face of his mother and unlike Lazarus, there wasn't a thing God himself could do about it. You can't quantify the pain that Jesus had to feel seeing the look of abject horror on his own mother's face as she reflects back to him the horror that Jesus had become. The prophet Isaiah a thousand years earlier had described what Mary would see when she looked on her Son. Speaking of Jesus as he hung on the cross, this is what Isaiah said: *His appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form did not resemble a human being.* Mary's sword had finally reached its mark. You can't quantify that kind of pain between a mother and a son because you can barely even describe it, and that's only a part of what Jesus went through for you and for me. And that's why every single time we begin to doubt God's love, God's care or God's concern for us, God tells us over and over again, go to the cross. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not*



*perish but have everlasting life. Think on the depth of that love. His profound shame, our profound gain.*

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take and drink.*

We now are at our heart, hands and feet, the part where we try to have some kind of practical representation of what it means to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. Again I want to go back to Mary. I think we protestants don't know what to do with Mary. We think the Catholics honor her too much so we honor her not at all. I mean she is and she always has been a model of what faithful obedience is all about. There's one thing that Mary did her entire life that made a huge difference in how she handled the sword that came into her life. See, Mary was a ponderer. She was a thinker, a meditator. She treasured up things in her heart about Jesus.

You know there's so much talk today about how incredibly important it is to feed your body the right things and that's a good thing. But it's far more important, far more important than feeding your body is what you feed your head. It's what you meditate on. It's what you ponder. It's what you treasure. You see in the end what

you feed your head is still going to matter long after your body is dead and gone. *Philippians 4* says: *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things.* The Lord Jesus Christ is the essence of all of those things. He is the essence of what is true, what is noble, what is just, what is pure, what is lovely. So you ask yourself, okay, how do I do that? How do I meditate on Jesus? It's not easy, I agree, but I think what you need to do is just grab ahold of some things and just kind of chew on them. To meditate means to chew like a cow chews its cud, to run a thought over and over into your mind.

I know sometimes one of the things that I think of is, you know, the very first time I heard that Jesus was on the cross for six hours, in my cynical days I'd say, oh, big deal, six hours and he pays for everybody's sin, he's done. It's over and done with. It was awful but it was only six hours. And then I thought of the verse in 2 Peter which says: *Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day.* And the literalist, mathematical part of me said, well, let's see, that's one-fourth of a day, one-fourth of a thousand years, that means that Jesus was on the

cross for 250 years, if you want to be mathematical about it. Then I started to think, well, wait a minute. God is in control of time and God is perfectly just and so there must have been some kind of transaction in which Jesus is hanging on the cross, paid the full price of an eternity in hell for every single person he's paying the price for, and could it be that God could fit eternity into six hours? Could he fit hundreds of millions of eternities into six hours? Could Jesus have entered into a time where he eternally -- I don't know. But that's the kind of things that I wrap my mind around when I'm trying to meditate about what Jesus did on the cross. I mean literally what you're doing is you're trying to fathom the unfathomable. But the more that you do it, the more you realize the depth of what it is he did for us. When I grew up, I'd say, Oh, Jesus went to the cross and he opened up the gates of heaven. Big deal. Well, the more you look at it, the more you realize it's a huge deal. You know it says: "*For God so loved the world,*" and everything hinges on that little tiny word "so," because the deeper you go into the cross, the more that word becomes "so loved the world." And so what I'm suggesting that we do is that we imitate Mary in the way she pondered, in the way she treasured.

My job, as I said, my job description is very simple. It's my job to make you fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus Christ. And

the way you do that is you recognize what it is he's done and the way you do that is you think about it, you meditate on it, you chew on it. And so my suggestion for us is to pick a verse. Just pick any verse from the gospels, anything that has to do with the cross, and just think about it and ask God to give you the ability to just kind of mull it over. Just run it over in your mind over and over again, see if God won't give you the ability to grow and deepen your love because when that love gets deeper and deeper, it reaches a certain point where it can't be contained in you any more and you've got to share it. That's how the whole process works. Let's pray.

*Father, I just again, I thank you for what you've done in your Son on the cross. I thank you, Lord, that we can examine it over and over and over again and never even begin to plumb the depths of what you've done for us. I thank you that it is unfathomable. I pray that you would give us the ability to fathom tiny, tiny pieces of it so that we might grow in our love for you, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*