

The Gospel according to Mary

Mother's Day

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You know, today is kind of one of those days that's a paradox. You know, we celebrate those who we have so much admiration for. When is the last time that you watched a high level sporting event and the star of the game went to the camera and thanked his dad? You know, they always recognize mom, yet at the same time it's probably the one person in our life that gets overlooked the most. So we know we couldn't do life without them, yet at the same time so much of the selfless sacrificial acts go unnoticed. But when we talk about moms whether biological or not, when we talk about those who have mothered us and cared for us and loved us, we talk about all the ways in which they have nurtured us physically, nurtured us emotionally, but I think at the end of the day the reason that we have such a heart for moms is because of the words of wisdom that they've given us, a word that was rightly spoken or a time in life when they said something that we needed to hear, just a few words that were just perfect for the situation and the setting.

Today, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 2 and we're going to look at the words of wisdom from one of the most famous moms in the history of the world, we're going to look at the life of Mary, the one who cradled the Messiah Jesus Christ, the one whom there was no room in the inn when she went to what we know as that ancient hospital visit, and as we look at her life and the things that took place, I think there are two great errors that we can make when it comes to looking at the person of Mary. One of the errors is we think so highly of her we make more of her than we should. There are some who elevate her to such a status that she is almost equal or even sometimes greater than her son, Jesus Christ. But on the other side of the equation I think we'd have to admit there are a lot of us who give so little attention to her, it's almost as if she didn't exist in the biblical narrative. Today, hopefully we'll find the happy theological medium there.

In John 2, Jesus is performing what we know the first of his public miracles. This is the turning of the water into wine. Now today we're not going to study that miracle, per se, but we know that they have run out of wine, we know that everybody is kind of frazzled not knowing what to do, and in John 2, Jesus and his mom, Mary, have a conversation about what to do and in verse 5 of John 2, Mary gives not just the servants at this situation but gives every single one of us probably the greatest piece of motherly advice that we could ever receive. In fact, we're about to read the Gospel according to Mary.

John 2:5,

5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

There could not be greater motherly advice in the history of the world than what you just read. Here is a mom, here is a mother figure who comes to whomever and says, "Whatever Jesus says, do it," and on this day where we celebrate those in the earthly realm who have meant so much to us, maybe we ought to heed the wisdom, the advice and the Gospel according to Mary, that maybe whatever Jesus says, that's what we ought to do.

Now, there are lots of statements and lots of stories and messages of which Jesus spoke in the Gospel account but today I just want to focus on four of them. We could go through all of them but for the sake of time just four, and for those of you who like to see with your eyes and feel with your hands, we've given the Scriptures for you on the outline, but real quickly today, the first one comes from the very next page, at least in my Bible, in John 3. John 3, Jesus is having a conversation with a man whom we know as Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a whole lot like you and I in our culture today: he had an education, he had compared to the world, he had amassed a fortune of wealth. He was one of those individuals that seemed to have it going on in every capacity of his life except he comes to Jesus and he wants to know what happens after this life, and what Jesus communicates to him is the importance of not just the decisions of life but the decision of life. Every single one of us will make hundreds if not thousands of decisions every day in our life and over the course of our life, we will make millions of decisions. Some of them are as menial as, "What am I going to have for breakfast?" And some of them are as significant as, "What will I do with my future?" But here in John 3, they're not dealing with his business, they're not dealing with his family, they're dealing with what happens the first moment after I breathe my last breath here? I want to know what's on the other side. What happens then?

Notice what Jesus says to him in verse 7 of John 3, he says, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, You must be born again." Now, Mary told us whatever Jesus said we ought to do it, correct? Jesus told this man, "You must be born again." Not you ought to, you should, if you need a crutch to lean on, he says, "You must be born again." Why? Because very single one of us has a natural gravitation not for the things of the Lord but for the things of this world.

Now, I know today is the day that we celebrate Mother's Day and oftentimes we love to say, "Well, my baby or the baby's first word was 'momma' or 'mom.'" We all know the truth. The first word that ever came out of our mouth was, "No." That's the first word that came out and so we understand the Bible is true when it says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death. That's why Jesus said, "You must be born again."

Now on this day known as Mother's Day, I want to give you an account of something that happened in my life some years ago. When I was a child, I had an obsession, I had a passion in my life, it was baseball. I mean, I ate baseball, slept baseball, drank baseball, thought baseball. That's all I cared about and one day my mom and I were traveling out to West Texas to see some family. Now if you've never traveled out to West Texas, let me give you a visual here: we got to see a multitude of the official tree of Texas. You say, "What is the official tree of Texas?" The telephone pole. I mean, that's what it is out there. We got to see both seasons of Texas on that trip: light brown, dark brown. I mean, they're both out there.

But it was just one of those long desolate West Texas trips and my mind got to turning and those of you who have gotten to know me, you know I'm not right in the mind and I know that, and so I got to thinking about the sport that I loved, baseball, and this message of Jesus in heaven that I had heard of from my upbringing and I found myself in a quandary and I began to vocalize this to my mom and we dialogued as we were driving. I said, "Mom, do you think there's baseball in heaven?" She said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" I said, "Well, I'm just struggling reconciling that." She said, "Why are you struggling?" I said, "Well, in baseball, a pitcher has got to make a mistake. That's how they throw a ball. A batter can't hit every single pitch. I mean, there has to be errors and you can't play baseball without mistakes. There's no sin in heaven, how can we have baseball?" And this went on for several minutes. She tried to be nice. She tried to be cordial. Finally in a fit of motherly love, she pulled over on the side of the road and she said, "Jeff, let's settle this here and now." I said, "What is it, mom?" She goes, "There's a heaven. There's a hell. You pick."

What great motherly advice. Don't make decisions about eternity based on a game or based on a business or based on anything else. And that's what Jesus said to Nicodemus, he said, "You must be born again." The most important thing that Jesus ever told us is that there is an eternity, there is something past the grave, and there is a place called heaven, there is a place called hell, and only a relationship with him makes the difference between the two. He says, "You must be born again."

The second thing that Jesus shared with us, I mean after all, Mary said, "Whatever he says, do it," is found in Matthew 6. In Matthew 6 we find ourselves in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. It begins in chapter 5 with, "Blessed are these and blessed are those." It ends with Jesus' famous story and parable about two men who build an identical house, one is on a rock and one is on shifting sand, but in the course of all of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is sharing with us about morality and about ethics, about decisions and such, but what we discover in the middle of chapter 6 is he deals with the desires of our heart, the desires of our life. Beginning about verse 25, he talks about this desire to have food and to have shelter and to have clothing and to have the things and the trappings of this world. Notice what it says in verse 33, Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all of these things will be added unto you." Notice that word "all." In other words, we've got to go back into chapter 6 and find out that there are some competitors to our relationship with the Lord. The stuff of this world, the materialism of the world, the success of this world, all the trappings of this world, they

compete for our attention with the Lord but there are consequences to that. Did you know it doesn't matter how successful you are, no matter how many awards, no matter how many dollars you amass, that none of that goes with you into eternity. None of it. In fact, I would dare say we pay more attention and get caught up more with stuff on this side of eternity than that which is important on the other side and here's what Jesus said, "Put God first and everything else will line up." In other words, in our life it doesn't matter if it's business, sports, school, whatever it may be, Jesus is saying the desires of your heart. Do you desire to have nice things? That's fine. Do you desire to have a successful career? That's great, but just don't make your career, don't make that stuff in the place that is the Lord's rightful place. He should be the primary place. Everything else should follow suit.

Mary told us whatever Jesus said, we should do it. He told us that we must be born again. He told us that we should seek the kingdom of God and everything else will fall into place. The third thing that I want to address today is an issue of discernment. Now this comes from Mark 8. Now the issue of discernment, discernment is knowing what is right, what is wrong, what's the things of God versus the opposite. Now Mark 8 is a very specific place in Scripture, in fact it's one of my favorite places because what we're going to address in verse 16 comes on the heels of two of the most famous ministry activities in the life of Jesus. 1. He's just fed the 5,000. You know the story. He takes a couple of loaves and fish, one basket, one sack lunch and according to the Bible, he feeds 5,000 men, which when you include their spouses, their children, their dogs, their cats, their chickens, whoever came, would have been 20-25,000 folks.

So he's just fed 20,000+ people, then he sends the disciples on their way across the water and he walks on the water. You say, "Well, what's so significant about that?" When we get to the middle of chapter 8 of Mark, I want you to hear what's happening in the disciples' lives. Jesus has just fed 25,000 people with a sack lunch, he's just walked on water and they ask him, "Hey, where are we going to find breakfast?" Now, I know this isn't a good theological term but could they have said anything more idiotic? I mean, seriously. He just fed 25,000 people with a sack lunch and you're worried where he's going to find eggs. He just walked on water and you're worried where your next meal is going to come from.

So Jesus takes them to the side and he begins to talk with them about what they've seen and what they've heard and here's what he says in verse 15 of Mark 8, he says, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Now this is significant when it comes to discernment because all throughout the Bible leaven is a symbol of sin. In fact, in Exodus 12 when the Israelites were coming out of the bondage of Egypt, we know the story, the Lord said, "Don't make the bread with leaven. It needs to be ready to eat. It needs to be on the fly." And later as the Jewish families would celebrate Passover, not only would they remove the leaven from all the bread they would eat, but the ladies of the house typically would take a piece of leavened bread, they would place it in a strategic cabinet or drawer or whatever it may be, and the husband and the children have as their task, this is what they do during Passover, they go throughout the entire house to remove this one piece of leaven because they figure if you can find that piece, you've found all of it, right? Did you ever wonder how we got the idea of spring cleaning? It actually comes from the

Jewish Passover. They were so concerned of making sure there was not a picture of sin in their lives that they cleaned the house from top to bottom so that when they celebrated the Lord's deliverance there was no leaven.

Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." You see, but the Pharisees, weren't they the good guys? Weren't they the guys that were in power? Weren't they the guys that had all the money? Yes, and they were the same guys who according to throughout all the Gospels, they cared more about the commandments of men and the traditions of men than anything else. They cared more about how it's always been done and should never be done than what Jesus was doing right in front of them, and I've got news for you: we need some discernment today. Just because it's a best seller doesn't mean it communicates the truth of God. Just because everybody on social media likes it doesn't mean it's of God.

You say, "Oh, but they go to church. Oh, but this. Oh, but that." He said, "Aha, the Pharisees go to church, the Pharisees are religious, and the Pharisees have missed everything because they are so concerned with how popular it is, how powerful it is, and how it's reaching the 'masses.'" Jesus said, "Beware." Let me remind you Jesus was known as the rogue rabbi from Nazareth. Mary told us that whatever Jesus said, do it, so beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.

Fourthly, we go to the end of the Gospel of John 21. Let me set the scene here. Jesus has risen from the grave so everything he shared, "We must be born again. Seek first the kingdom of God. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees," it is validated by his resurrection. You get to chapter 21 of the Gospel of John, the tomb is empty and the disciples are exactly where Jesus told them to be, they're up in Galilee. This is important to the story. Notice what it says in verse 1, Peter says, "I go a-fishing." Alright, they go fishing, him and all the disciples, and it says they toil all night and they catch nothing. Now just in case you didn't know this, you know they call it fishing, not catching, right? I mean, so there are times that you don't, but let me give you two qualifiers for John 21: these men that were fishing were educated and experienced not on just this body of water but on the time of day, the time of season, and exactly what to do. Those of you that are expert fishermen, you know based on the time of the day, the type of water, the season of the year, you know the exact kind of bait to use for the kind of fish that you're catching and yet it says they caught nothing? These men made their entire living by catching fish on this lake. They knew every aspect about it but their education, their experience was to no avail.

The second thing I want you to notice about this is that Jesus does not condemn them from being on the lake. He doesn't say, "Why are you out there fishing?" He doesn't say, "Aren't you supposed to be somewhere else?" I want you to look at verse 6 of John 21. Notice what Jesus says, "Cast your nets on the other side." And it says that when they did so, it was so full, it was bigger than ever before. Now a couple of things I want you to notice about when it comes to the direction of our life. 1. They weren't in the wrong place at the wrong time because he didn't condemn them for doing that. 2. When Jesus gives us a different direction, it doesn't mean that we put the pedal down and hammer down in the one we're already on. Guys, I'm speaking to you. We don't ask for directions, do we? So

what do we do? If our GPS says that we turn right but we turn left, we think that driving faster the wrong way will get us there quicker, don't we? But it won't.

So they didn't say, "Well, hold on. We're going to cast three more times." And the last thing I want you to notice is later on in this chapter, it says they caught exactly 153 fish. I know what you're thinking, "Why do we have that exact number? That's odd." And for those of you that are mathematicians, it's one of those great numbers that's out there. I'll tell you why: because experienced, educated, doing everything they know to do for the Lord fisherman did exactly what Jesus said and they counted every single one of those to say, "Wow! When we do what he says, it's better than we could ever imagine."

Today's the day that we celebrate those who have loved us tirelessly, those who have educated, those who have nurtured us, and those who have given us wisdom. Maybe today is the day that we should respond to the wisdom of the mother of Jesus. She simply said, "Whatever Jesus says, do it." Maybe today it's direction that you need and wherever he tells you to cast the net, just cast the net and trust that he knows what he's doing. Maybe it's discernment. Maybe you need to be aware of the masses and their opinion and just follow what he said. Maybe just maybe it's the desires of your heart. Maybe the Lord hasn't had the primary place in your life and you know it and it's time to allow him to do so. Or maybe you're that individual today throughout all the course of life and whatever it has brought, you've never really dealt with the decision for eternity. Jesus made it clear, "Marvel not, you must be born again." Whatever Jesus said, we ought to do it.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today that for whatever reason and whatever the circumstance may be, either A, you never got around to it, or B, you just didn't think it was that critical, or C, you just didn't want to listen to others speaking into your life. But maybe you're that person who you realize today you've never made that decision for Jesus Christ, you've never heeded his words that you must be born again. I've got great news for you. 1. It's not too late. 2. You don't have to become religious, start taking classes and checking off boxes. 3. The Bible makes it clear, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

So maybe you find yourself in that position today, let me just encourage you to have that conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have it out loud, in fact you don't even have to say the same words I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to admit, I want to admit about myself what you already know about me. I'm the problem. God, I've messed up. I've been places I shouldn't have been. I've done things I should have never done. I've said things I should have never said. And I've thought things that I should have never thought. Lord, I've tried to mask it, I've tried to cover it, I've tried to do a bunch, I've even tried to justify it but, God, today I realize that the only one that can do anything about it is Jesus Christ and I believe today, I believe he's the only answer to my sin problem. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on Calvary and three days later he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved.

God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today, maybe in this room or on the other side of the camera, maybe you're the person that has had that conversation with the Lord. We just want to celebrate with you and we just want to converse with you, we just want to hear what the Lord has done in your life. Maybe today it begs a conversation or maybe you had that prayer with the Lord years ago, decades ago, and today is not about expressing your need to be saved but maybe walking out of here in a few moments living like you are.

Lord, as we come to this time, so grateful on a day that we celebrate selflessness and love and nurturing, that you were so selfless, so nurturing and so loving by sending us Jesus Christ in the flesh to give of his flesh and his blood for our sins. Lord, I pray we wouldn't take it for granted and we wouldn't dismiss it but we would heed the words, "We must be born again." It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you stand with me as our team lead us. Any and all decisions, I'll be down here at the front.