

1. Introduction

Last message's theme was thinking about Jesus Christ's Cross in four elements.

1) Do you feel intimate about the Cross? The Cross is not some object on a wall of a church, but a bridge between God and us, which we feel most intimately.

2) Jesus' seven words on the Cross

1) Luke 23:34

2) Luke 23:43

3) John 19:26-27

4) Matthew 27:46

5) John 19:28

6) John 19:30

7) John 23:46

3) "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only one who can reconcile God and humans. He is also the only one who can have an influence on God, the Father, and solve the problem of sins for humans.

4) "I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

At the end of his life, one of the criminals repented of all the sins he committed and accepted Jesus as his personal savior. Jesus, who was also on a cross along with him, declared this word. Indeed, God speaks and gives salvation to those who accept and believe in Jesus as their savior.

Today, let us focus on one of the seven words, John 19:26-27.

2. "Woman, here is your son," ... "Here is your mother." (John 19:26-27)

Read John 19:26-27

Jesus' words in the books of the Gospel are sometimes easy to understand and other times hard to understand. For example, the conversation with Nicodemus seemed to be a very difficult and hard one for Nicodemus. Let us

read John 3:1-15 although it's a bit long.

When I started reading the Bible, I couldn't understand any part of Jesus and Nicodemus' conversation. It seems that this conversation is not in the simple question and answer style but it shows Nicodemus what he needs to know, understand and accept right at that moment through answering his questions. Giving him what he needs instead of giving him what he wants is very symbolic of Jesus being not just human but God. Nicodemus, a Jewish leader and Pharisee, appears in the Bible several times after this episode. Among them, John 19:39 tells how he brought a seventy-five pound mixture of myrrh and aloes to bury Jesus in accordance with Jewish burial customs, and every time I read this scripture I think that although he didn't have courage to declare his faith in Jesus Christ as the true God, he did accept Jesus. In John 3:1-15 when Nicodemus was shown what he needed in order to believe and accept Jesus, he really didn't understand what was shown to him. Thus Jesus had some thoughtful intention for Nicodemus.

With this in mind, let's look at what Jesus said to Mary and John in John 19:26.

3. ... "Woman, here is your son," (John 19:26)

The relationship between Jesus and Mary had various aspects different from that of a normal mother and son. Because Jesus was a savior, Mary's life was greatly affected, and after 33 years the end was the cross. Even after that Mary had to live with the fact that she was the mother of Jesus who was crucified. We can easily see how heavy her burden was by just knowing this fact.

At the foot of the Cross, looking up at her own son nailed in hands and feet, bleeding all over his body, and dying, as his mother what was Mary thinking and how was she feeling? One of the criminals on a cross insulted him, and the crowds jeered while nobody cared to help Jesus. Mary must have felt helpless. Let us imagine how Mary felt in this dire situation.

And to her, Jesus had one thing to say: "Woman, here is your son."

More than a mother and a son, Mary and Jesus were a savior and a sinner. Mary must have considered Jesus in two perspectives; her son and her lord. And what Jesus had to say at the end of his life was deep: Jesus didn't call her mother but called her woman. This may sound cold, but Jesus showed Mary what was most important about their relationship; a savior and a sinner. Jesus revealed to Mary that he was her lord and also showed her John as her "son" after Jesus passed. Mary was the only woman to whom Jesus needed to show who her son was. Jesus gave the responsibilities as her son to John at the end of His life. Mary probably couldn't accept it emotionally right away, but this word has everything Jesus needed to tell Mary. As her son and her lord, Jesus solved Mary's confusion about His existence by uttering this word in the end.

At the same time, John, who was probably the only one of his disciples that came to the foot of the cross, is told to accept Mary as his own mother out of the blue.

4. ... "Here is your mother." (John 19:27)

John probably never imagined Jesus would make Mary his mother. He also had his own mother, shown in Matthew 20:20, which tells us how his mother asked Jesus a favor of having her two sons, James and John, sit next to Him in His kingdom. The Bible doesn't tell us if parents of other disciples got to meet Jesus, but Jesus healed Peter's in-law, so his parents may have met him.

To John it must have been a burden to have Mary as his mother. John used to be a fisherman but gave up on it when he became Jesus' disciple. His own mother is still alive. Of course he surrendered his life to Jesus and was determined to live as his disciple, but Jesus was about to be crucified in front of his very eyes. He doesn't even know how he would live his life after Jesus passes. In Israel, nobody was supportive of Jesus at that time, and moreover His life was about to end on the cross. In that kind of situation, John was about to have Mary become his mother. John must have been very confused! Accepting Mary as his mother was an unimaginable, heavy and confusing burden for him.

However, if we read through the Bible, we see that John played a very important role in the early days of the first church period. Unfortunately, Israel and Romans were very hostile toward Jesus, and the first disciples and people who believed Jesus as God like Paul were persecuted at that time. They were crucified and beheaded. Among them, however, John survived all the persecutions and lived a long life. He didn't just live a long life, but we should understand that he was protected in order to teach next generations about Jesus, build and nurture churches, and spread the Gospel. In order to evangelize Jesus' teachings, it was a very important mission for John to have Mary as his mother since Mary knew intimate details about Jesus nobody else knew. The angel Gabriel came to her with the Annunciation. By meeting a priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth who also received a baby from God, Mary learned how important the baby she was given was through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was born, Magi from East and shepherds came to worship the baby. She knew how he had to escape from King Herod to Egypt, and how Jesus disappeared in Jerusalem when he was twelve and was found sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions: These things are taught in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but John was able to hear all these stories directly from Mary. Because of the important mission he was given, which was to build the foundation of the first churches and spread the truth about Jesus and the Gospel throughout the world, having Mary as his mother had such deep meaning for John.

5. Mary and John learn something later.

John may have learned the deep meaning of his mission later. It may have been a heavy burden first, but we see the importance in Jesus's word in John 13:7.

We want to know now and by knowing we can have peace. If we know now, we can believe. We tend to think this way, but Jesus tells us, "...late you will understand." If we can learn everything now, we don't need to have faith. However, even when we don't know anything, believing in God and accepting what it is now is faith. God always does great things for us. Even when we are suffering, in God's perspective, hardship is a necessary process in order to receive a great joy. We may question God in sufferings, but we need to accept everything, believing someday we'll be able to understand everything, which is faith.

I don't think John expected to live a long life while his brothers, friends and fellow disciples among others had been persecuted and killed. Late in his life when there was nobody left who had seen or known Jesus in person, he must have realized how important it was to have lived a life with Jesus, have had Mary as his mother, and have experienced it all. And he couldn't have known this at the beginning. He realized it later. John was a rare person to have been able to receive Jesus' words, have faith in His words, and realize what it was to have faith through his long life.

Not only John, but also Mary repeatedly experienced this kind of faith throughout her life.

Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem for Jesus' purification rites and met Simeon who was righteous and devout. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and prophesied about Jesus' life.

Read Luke 2:34-35

Knowing the gospels and New Testament, we are able to understand what he said, but it is rather harsh for a week-old baby. However, Mary probably had this prophesy in her heart until it became reality when Jesus was crucified on the cross. In our worldly perspective, Jesus' crucifixion is a nightmare, but Mary accepted this fact. Mary realized it later, and what she realized was brutal, but she accepted it in God. To Mary, Jesus' crucifixion didn't happen at random but it was the Simeon's prophesy made 33 years before it became reality.

There are so many things we want to question in life. Unfortunately, our sufferings come to us out of the blue. We don't understand the meaning of those unfortunate happenings now, but some day we will, and even these sufferings will result in good things because God never abandon us. Thinking this way and accepting everything is faith.

In his long life, John experienced hardship and sufferings. Nobody escaped persecutions during the first church era, and John must have been tested his faith in Jesus over and over.

Do you still believe in Jesus? Is Jesus still your savior? John's answers to these questions appear in John 20:29-31 and 21:24-25.

To Thomas, Jesus said "blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed." In addition to this Jesus' word, John teaches there are others not recorded in this book of Gospel. Then he teaches what is written is for us to believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and have life in His name. "Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed." Believing without seeing is, in other words, without understanding now but believing we'll be able to understand it later. Someday we will be able to experience what we can't see as if we were seeing it. If we can see and understand it, of course we are at ease, but even when we don't see or understand it, we are still at ease; that is a life with faith in God.

I would like to close by praying that today will be the day when you start a life at ease even without seeing or knowing everything.