

A New Family

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some of us have had the awesome experience of being with someone when they died; and so, some of us have had the opportunity to witness the dying person's last acts and final words. We tend to put a lot of stock into someone's last utterance, and every once in a while, we hear dramatic stories about a word of forgiving grace being spoken to an estranged son or soaring words of hope as the dying person testifies to seeing Jesus waiting on the other side. Very often, however, the final words are directed to loved ones, to simple yet utterly moving affirmations of love. Of course, when it is the death of God's own Son you are talking about, you expect the final words to be ever and only weighty and theologically loaded up with meaning; but today on *Groundwork*, we will hear a final word from Jesus that looks completely domestic, intimate, familial; but might it also say even more than we think? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now on program two of a seven-part series; a good thing to reflect on during Lent, or often on Good Friday afternoon they will take all seven words in a row at sort of long church services, but we are looking at those seven last words that Jesus spoke from the cross. In the previous program, we looked at what is often considered the first word: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Today, we are going to look at one that is found only in John's Gospel. We mentioned earlier that not all of the seven sayings are in any one gospel. They are scattered about. This one is only in John 19.

DAVE BAST

Right; and as we consider these seven words, it is more than just a way of sort of following the action of Good Friday, and seeing what happened or what Jesus said during the course of basically three hours, from noon to three period, when he hung there dying, maybe a little longer than that; it may have started in the morning already; but what we really see in these words as we put them together is an explanation of what it meant that...what was going on there...the deeper meaning...the spiritual meaning; and we saw last week that it is both an example to us—Jesus' forgiveness of his enemies—so, we ask: Has anything worse than that happened to us that we say, oh, I can never forgive that? And our hope. He still prays: Father, forgive them; when we so often act ignorantly or wrongly or badly toward other people, you know, our hope is in God's forgiveness, as the Son asked the Father.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and today we are going to look at one again that, as we said in the intro, doesn't look quite...on the surface of it doesn't look quite that theologically robust, and we will see why that is. Again, it is only in John's Gospel; and maybe as we get started, we can just remind ourselves: John's Gospel kind of stands apart. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the *synoptic* gospels from *synopsis* in Greek, which means seen together; because Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar to each other; they follow a similar timeline; there is a lot of overlap; they tell parables; many of the same miracles. So, Matthew, Mark, and Luke kind of jibe together very well. We think Mark was written first. We think Matthew and Luke probably had access to Mark when they wrote their gospels. We think John was written last, and probably knew of all three of the gospels as they had already been written. So, he set out to write a very different kind of a gospel.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. John is sometimes called the gospel from above—the gospel that takes a God’s eye view of Jesus—that shows him clearly, maybe most clearly, as God; that quotes many of his statements where he claimed...I mean, John is the gospel where Jesus says: I and the Father are one. Before Abraham was, I Am, using the personal name of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, there is that strong theologizing of Jesus the Son of God, and...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And John often even calls a timeout as he goes along with these parentheticals: Oh, by the way, Jesus here was referring to the temple of his body, but they didn’t understand...so, he is doing that...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There are no parables in John, but we do have the “I Am” sayings.

DAVE BAST

And big sermons, too. I have always liked to point this out when people say: Yeah, you should just tell stories, like Jesus. Well, Jesus, in John, does some heavy-duty preaching. So, you’ve got these long discourses, like the bread of life in Chapter 6.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, or the upper room, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17...I mean, huge, long discourses—the theology of the Holy Spirit. So, it is a very heavy duty, theological gospel, and yet, at the beginning and at the end, we get this brief, little familial insight. Mary is not in this gospel a lot...the mother of Jesus...but she is in the first story...the first big story that gets told in John 2, at a wedding in a place called Cana.

DAVE BAST

¹On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” ⁴“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Now, that’s an odd little exchange.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and he’s going to do whatever she tells him. When your mother tells you to do something, you better do it. So, he ends up making the wine after all. So, it is kind of this intimate, little portrait; this little back and forth between Jesus and his mother.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

She kind of fixes Jesus in one of those motherly stares that says: Do this; I told you to do this; and so he does; but again, so, Mary kind of bookends the gospel, because here she is in John 2, and we see this

mother/son exchange, and then she is not really mentioned much until you get to John 19...

DAVE BAST

Not at all! She totally drops out...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I think she is just gone.

DAVE BAST

Of the whole gospel. The synoptics do have here and there a vignette where Mary appears, and they have, of course, the birth stories, a couple of them; but, the key thing is, at the end of the gospel Jesus announces, in John Chapter 12: Now my hour has come. My hour...so, this idea of his hour...the hour of his glorification...the hour of his death has now arrived, and now Mary suddenly reappears, and there she is at the foot of the cross.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is very, very poignant...you know...this isn't in John's Gospel, it is in Luke 2, but the old man Simeon at the Temple predicted to Mary when Jesus was 8 days old that: A sword will pierce your soul, too, my dear; and indeed, we see that here; because, you know, I remember the movie *Terms of Endearment* came out years ago. It's about a young mother stricken with cancer. There are a lot of gut-wrenching scenes in the movie, including when the mother says good-bye to her two young boys; and when she dies—just her husband and her mother are with her—and when she dies, they are both convulsed with grief, but it is the mother who says over and over: There is nothing harder...there is nothing harder...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, talk to any parent who has lost a child and they will say there is no grief like the loss of a child because it is so unnatural for the young one to die before the old one; and so, here is Mary now, back in the gospel in John 19, watching her baby boy die.

DAVE BAST

Yes; clearly, John says, Mary is at the foot of the cross; several other women as well. None of the male disciples, with one exception, as we will see; but there is Mary; and again, you just think, as you said, Scott, of that early prophecy. In fact, I ran across the words of a hymn from the Middle Ages called the *Stabat Mater*, which became a very popular hymn in the Catholic Church. It literally means standing mother; but the lyrics go like this: At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful mother weeping; close to Jesus to the last; through her heart his sorrow sharing, all his bitter anguish bearing; now at length the sword has passed. So, there is that reference: A sword will cut you to the heart.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and indeed, it does. So, it is very, very, very painful. Yes, we know Jesus was the divine Son of God who always existed, and Mary probably knew that, too; but, humanly speaking, this was the only life she had ever known Jesus to have, and it is a life he took from her when he was conceived in Mary's own womb. So, there she is, and of course, you know, what Jesus was doing on the cross...it was cosmic and it is galactic and it is history shattering...it is the most important theological thing that ever happened; but in just a moment we will see that Jesus wasn't so heavenly minded as to ignore the things of earth. His own words prove it; and we will look at that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, let's get right to the last word of Jesus from the cross. That is the focus of this program. Many of us know this saying well. We will set the context a little bit by reading also the earlier verses, where we read in John 19, beginning at verse 23:

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. Now that garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ²⁴“Let's not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let's decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said: They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. So, this is what the soldiers did.

DAVE BAST

²⁵Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷And to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

So, there is the word. It is a word sort of taking care of Ma, you know?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly.

DAVE BAST

Like you said, it is so human despite the fact that, at this moment, the weight of the sin of the whole world is on Jesus' head...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he is engaged in offering the ultimate sacrifice. I mean, words cannot explain how significant that is; and yet, Jesus has time to think about his mother, who is going to be left alone; and it is the age-old question that many of us struggle with, with aging parents: What are we going to do with Ma? And Jesus has a solution here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and so, again, as we said in the last segment, a wrenching, wrenching scene for any mother to have to witness. How awful! I mean, it doesn't get any worse than this. Jesus is naked, by the way. I mean, the artists quite literally cover that up for us, but they've got everything. They've got his clothes; they've got his underwear; he is hanging naked on the cross, which is further humiliation...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And also, I would think a deep embarrassment for any adult person to be in front of their mother naked.

DAVE BAST

And also some theology going on there when you think about the fact that he took our shame upon him. When you go back to the Garden, and suddenly Adam and Eve realize they are naked after their sin. Jesus

paid it all, as the old hymn says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but of course, the main thing we are looking at here is what you just said, Dave, that Jesus, in the midst of searing physical and spiritual agony, too, still manages to see his mother down there and wants her to be taken care of; and we are going to talk a little bit in the last segment here about kind of the implication of this saying also for us, but first we should just maybe note that it is the beloved disciple...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or, the disciple whom Jesus loved to whom he says this; and who is that? That is sort of a quirk of John's Gospel that...

DAVE BAST

That is a great point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We think he is referring to himself, but it is always just "the beloved disciple," or "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Well, didn't he love them all?

DAVE BAST

There are tons of ink been spilled on that question: Who is the beloved disciple; and traditionally it is John, the brother of James, one of the sons of Zebedee, and the writer of the gospel that we've been calling John; and why he refers to himself this way, hard to say, but there was apparently a special relationship; even though Jesus did love all the disciples, we know that there was an inner circle of Peter, James, and John; and even in that inner circle John and Peter almost had a kind of friendly rivalry going...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

For who was closest to Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is such a funny aspect of John, because whenever it is just Peter and John, in John's Gospel, there is always a little competition, and John always comes out on top. It is like when they race to the grave, John outruns Peter. He gets there first; you know, the beloved disciple gets there first; and then in the very last chapter, Jesus restores Peter: Feed my sheep, feed my lambs—good, Peter's restored; and then Peter sees the beloved disciple and says: Well, what about that guy? What about him, you know; and Jesus said: Don't worry about him; you just worry about yourself. So, there is kind of a funny rivalry there; but, indeed, as you said, we do think the beloved disciple refers to himself that way. Who knows why; maybe a closer family member, maybe they did have some special bond, we don't know, but...

DAVE BAST

Well, you notice, too, that John says: Jesus' mother and his mother's sister were standing there...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And there is a scholarly book that I have read and I found very interesting that suggests that Jesus' mother's sister was in fact John's mother. That this was a family deal and John was Jesus' cousin; and if you think about the fact that none of Jesus' brothers were believers at this point...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

They had rejected him. Later, after the resurrection, they would come to believe, but...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; they thought he was crazy.

DAVE BAST

So, there is a certain sense in Jesus entrusting his mother, Mary, to John's care, who was a disciple, because Mary was a disciple as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, he entrusts his mother to John. He said, you know, take care... It is almost...there are only nine words in the original Greek here, and the sayings of Jesus tend to get a little shorter as his death draws nearer, which makes sense; he can hardly breathe on the cross...so, it is sort of like, you know, woman...son...son...mother...you know...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is just kind of rasping it out; but it is a very...Frederick Dale Bruner again, the Bible commentator, said that Jesus is preaching sermons from the cross in these words; and in this particular saying, Jesus does two things at once. One, he fulfills the fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother, right? He is the Son of God so he fulfills the law. So, he is honoring his mother; but at the same time, Bruner points out, he is creating a *new* nuclear family based on faith; a *new* family of God where water is thicker than blood...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The water of baptism is going to be thicker than blood; and so, two things are going on at once: Sort of the traditional honoring of your parents, as the fifth commandment tells us we must do, but also creating this new family, which is going to be the family of God, the Church, the body of God—the body of Christ on earth.

DAVE BAST

Well, and then go back and connect it to the first story of Mary in the Gospel of John...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And the turning water into wine at Cana, and Mary's key phrase to the servants: Do whatever he tells you. That is the definition of a disciple of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is one who does whatever he tells—whatever he commands—and that becomes the new family relationship of the family of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Whose job it will be to continue the witness.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a big, key theme in John, that he is writing this whole gospel so that you will believe. You know, Jesus is creating kind of a new family unit who will be the key witness to the truth of his being the Messiah.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, there is a lot more going on here than just what are we going to do about Ma? And it is a beautiful thing that Jesus does; it is amazing that he thinks about it here at this moment, at this time of agony and suffering; but it is more significant that he is creating the kind of family that anyone can belong to. Anyone can be brought in and made part of this, as you say, the family of water not of blood.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And yet, having said that, we want to come back again to this wonderful act of love from Jesus toward his mother; and we will conclude with that in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this second program in our seven last words from the cross series; and today we are looking at the saying where Jesus says: Woman, your son; son, your mother; where Jesus is commending to the care of his disciple, John, the beloved disciple, as we were just saying, care for his mother.

We said earlier in the first segment, Dave, that John is such a theological gospel. It gives us Jesus from above; in fact, I always like Dale Bruner's way of characterizing the four gospels. He said Mark is Jesus from below, looking at the very human nature of Jesus; John is the gospel from above, very theological; Luke is the study...

DAVE BAST

The divine nature. especially, comes out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes. Luke is the study of Jesus' hands, like a Rembrandt painting, the hands of a healer; Matthew gives you Jesus in profile as we look at his head and really focus on his teachings and so forth. So, John is the most theological—the most overtly theological of the gospels—and yet, here at the end we get this very lovely, human moment between mother and son.

DAVE BAST

Right; maybe at this point we should say a little bit about the sort of ambiguous way in which you put the gospels together. They show Jesus' relationship with his blood family. Of course, the blood belonged to Mary; he inherited his human nature from her; his blood ties to his siblings through her, but there are several incidents in the course of the gospels where Jesus seems to distance himself from them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very much, yes.

DAVE BAST

He is told at one time that his family is outside asking for him, and he looks at the crowd who are listening and says: These are my brothers and sisters.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, right.

DAVE BAST

The ones who hear me and listen to my teaching.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then his family, when they hear that he had said that, they said: He is out of his mind. He's off his rocker. So, you know, he seems to kind of write them off at times; they seem to write him off at times...

DAVE BAST

They seem to write...yes; but here we are shown again...we are brought back and we are rooted still in this wonderful relationship of mother/son.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and you know, it is also the case that the New Testament makes clear that water is thicker than blood, and if your earthly, biological family gets in the way of the faith, as sometimes happens in the world yet today where people will threaten their own children if they turn to become Christian, well then, you have got to stick with the faith family above all; that is true; but all things being equal, this tender moment between Jesus and Mary also shows there is nothing wrong with absolutely being fiercely committed to and loving toward a spouse, your parents, your children, your siblings, your cousins. That is a deep part of what it means to be a follower of God, too.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and you know, it is one of the marks of a cult, I would say, that insists that you cut all ties—all natural ties—with your family, with your relatives, for no good reason. That is just sick, and that is not what the gospel teaches. So we, as followers of Jesus are right to love our families, to care for them, to provide for them, provide for our children, provide certainly for our aged parents, as Jesus does here; and that is a beautiful thing. Nothing wrong with it, as you say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; and you know, Dave, all of these seven words...and we can say this on each of these seven programs in this series...but all of these words from the cross are like a distillation...a boiled down version...a condensed version of everything Jesus had been in his life. What we hear from the cross is just a super magnified version of everything that Jesus had been all along; and in addition to his natural love for his mother in this particular saying, another thing I think we want to say that this shows in a magnified way was Jesus' lifelong ability to spy the lonely, the marginalized, the vulnerable. He always had such good spiritual eyesight, and was always able to pick out the person who most needed his love and his forgiveness; and it was very often the people that everybody else overlooked.

DAVE BAST

Well again, just go back to the record: John's description of those people standing at the foot of the cross—mostly women; and throughout the course of his ministry it was women who really hung in there, and many of them helped him, provided for the needs of the disciples; so, there is the beloved disciple; there is Mary, his mother; there is her sister and Mary Magdalene—another one of those outsiders—a woman from whom he had delivered from bondage to the demonic. So, yes, Jesus even at this moment...maybe especially at this moment...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

As he is bleeding for the sins of the world still has eyes for the lonely, the lost, the outcast, the outsider.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, the playwright Arthur Miller was briefly married to the actress Marilyn Monroe, and in Miller's memoirs he said Marilyn in her life knew the experience of being an orphan; and he said it was uncanny, no matter where they went, even in very crowded rooms, she could always spy the other orphan in the room; I mean, it was like there was something in their eyes that they would connect; and you know, Jesus was, in a way, that way. I mean, in John 1 we are told that Jesus became the ultimate stranger in our midst. He was in the world and the world knew him not. Nobody accepted him...

DAVE BAST

He came to his own people and his own people rejected him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They knew him not. So, Jesus was an orphan; Jesus was the alien within our gates; the ultimate stranger among us. No wonder he had such an affinity for others who were vulnerable, marginalized. You know, that is good news for us today because often any number of us...we are Christians and all, but sometimes we feel lonely, we feel overlooked, we feel like nobody cares if I live or die; nobody cares what I do on my job five days a week. We feel like nobody sees us. We are invisible. I am invisible. You will hear people say that. Well, what this word from the cross says is that with Jesus you are never invisible. He will always see you in your loneliness, in your vulnerability. You are not invisible to him. You never will be. That is just who he is.

DAVE BAST

So, it seems on the surface with this word that we just have a kind of a very practical, almost matter-of-fact way of Jesus dealing with a problem—concern for his mother; he commends her to John, who was perhaps his cousin. John takes her in and we read that from that moment on she joined him, she went to live with him; but on a much deeper level, it speaks volumes, not just of our natural, human relationships and our need to love our family, but of the way God loves us. God sees us, God knows us, he reaches out to us in love. That is the gospel, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God. Well, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we always like to know how we can help you to dig deeper into the scriptures. We have a website, groundworkonline.com. You can visit it and suggest topics and passages for future *Groundwork* programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/a-new-family>

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