

Encounters with Jesus

Week 8: An Encounter at the Cross

John 19:25-27

Dr. Kevin Maurice ---- March 3, 2024

Good morning, Grace. My name is Kevin Maurice. I'm one of the pastors here on staff, and I'm excited for us to continue in our time together by studying God's Word. So, if you would, please open your Bible to John 19—the Gospel of John, chapter 19.

And as you turn there, let me tell you a quick story. Toward the end of his life, a professor named Karl Barth embarked on a teaching tour of the United States. Dr. Barth is one of the preeminent theologians, maybe in history, and certainly in the twentieth century. He wrote extensively on every topic you can imagine. He wrote twelve volumes, over 10,000 pages, just on systematic theology.

And on this teaching tour at a seminary, at the very end of a question-and-answer time, a first-year seminary student stood up and raised his hand and said, “Dr. Barth, you've written about every aspect of theology and church history. I'm wondering, could you sum it all up for us in a short sentence or two?”

The room got kind of quiet. I mean, that's a freshman question, right? Reducing all the Bible, all of church history, all of theology, to a single sentence? That's unreasonable, right? But Dr. Barth just stood there. He smiled and he said, “In the words of a song that I learned at my mother's knee, ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’”

Jesus loves me. That truth is the simple truth is the summation of the entire Bible. Those three profound words are the pinnacle of all theology: Jesus loves me. That truth altered the course of human history, and also, human eternity.

Now since January we've been in a teaching series called *Encounters with Jesus*, and we've studied Jesus' interactions with people—how He spoke to them, how He treated them, what He said and what He did and what that means for us.

And every single one of those encounters was between Jesus, the Son of God, Creator of all things, and someone whom He loved. He meets the woman at the well and He loves her. The

rich young ruler comes and asks Him a question, and the Bible says that He looked at him and loved him. Even the Pharisees, even the religious types—Jesus loved them.

Last week, Pastor Matt taught us from an encounter that Jesus had with the ruling and the religious authorities of His day, and we saw that Jesus' list of enemies is growing and they've begun to work together to kill Him. And they finally succeed--at least, they think they do—in getting their man. The religious leaders and the Romans host this sham of a trial, and they sentence Him to death.

And as Jesus goes to the cross to be crucified, He has an encounter with two people—two of the people whom He knows best and loves most in the entire world.

And you can find that this takes place in John 19, verses 25 through 27. And if you're able, would you please stand with me as I read from God's Word?

“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.”

Please be seated.

Three Truths About Jesus' Love

Today, from this encounter we're going to explore—this encounter at the cross—we're going to see three things about the love of Jesus—three truths about Jesus' love for us.

And so, let's just return to the scene, because on its surface, this passage seems almost inconsequential. It appears that Jesus is just taking care of one last item on His to-do list before He goes into the grave.

He's on the cross and He looks down and He sees these four women. The grown men, almost all His disciples, have run away. They're in hiding. But not these women. And standing there, in this most vulnerable place, one of these women is watching her son die. It's Mary, Jesus's mother.

Standing right next to her is, actually, one disciple. He's the only one of the twelve there at the cross. It's the disciple whom Jesus loved: John. John experienced this depth of relationship, this closeness with Jesus.

And Jesus looks at Mary and He said, “There’s your son now.” And He looks at John and He says, “She’s your mom now.”

And at face value, that’s all there is to it. This is the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. It’s the final words of a dying man. It’s a footnote in the rest of the story. He’s just making sure His mom is cared for after He’s gone, right?

But there’s so much more that’s going on here, because the moment matters. The context of this conversation is so significant. So, let’s just consider that for a second. Where is Jesus, and what is He doing? What kind of condition is He in? As Jesus is saying this on the cross, He is absolutely exhausted. He’s completely spent. He hasn’t had anything to eat or drink in over twelve hours. He hasn’t slept in over twenty-four hours. He was betrayed by one of His close friends. All the rest of His friends have abandoned Him.

Jesus has been mocked and insulted. He was interrogated, He was beaten, He’s punched in the face repeatedly, He’s whipped over and over and over again. His persecutors, just to really get at Him, craft this crown of thorns, and they cram it down on His skull. And it tears into His flesh and into His eyebrows. And He’s marched through this city of people who are taunting Him. And He’s made to carry this wooden beam on His back.

He’s so tired and He’s so weak hiking up the hill to where He’s going to be executed, they have to get someone else to carry the wood for Him. He can’t do it anymore. But there’s no rest for Him—not when He reaches the top of the hill. Because when He arrives, He’s stripped naked, to humiliate Him, to expose Him, to shame Him in front of this crowd that’s gathered to witness this grotesque scene. And then soldiers drive nails into His hands and into His feet, and they affix Him to that piece of wood. And then, when He’s secure, they lift Him up in the air for people to gawk at and revile.

And in that moment, Jesus is experiencing excruciating physical pain. And He’s undergoing this emotional torment. And Jesus is also in that moment in actual spiritual agony because He is taking on the sin of the world.

Jesus, one of the three persons of the triune God from eternity past, is in this moment feeling and under the weight of the consequence of sin. And He is separated from God the Father. He’s in absolute anguish.

1. Jesus' Love Is Powerful

And He's going through all of it. He's undergoing all of it. He's suffering all of it because of love—because He loves us. His love for us is that powerful. His love is powerful. That's the first truth we see in in this encounter.

Years later the disciple who was there witnessing this, John, will go on to write in one of his letters to the church, “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only son into the world that we might live through Him. And this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10)

John was there. And he looked up and he saw what love—real love—looks like: Jesus, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The love of Jesus is so powerful. It's a love that sacrifices to save its beloved.

During the seventeenth century in England, the ruler at the time, a guy named Oliver Cromwell, condemned a man to die for crimes that had been committed. And the sentence was to take place. The man was to be executed by gunfire at the chiming of the evening church bell. And so, as the sun is going down, the whole town is filled with this sense of tension and dread, because they know that as soon as they hear that bell, then they're going to hear a gunshot. So, as the sun goes down, they wait. But the sun goes down and the bell doesn't ring.

So, Cromwell dispatches a couple of soldiers to go in the belltower to see what's happening. And inside they find the man's fiancée. She had climbed up the church steps into the steeple, and then she crawled into the bell itself and then clung to the metal weight inside so that the sound wouldn't strike. And every time the chime was supposed to ring, that metal weight would slam into her body instead.

Soldiers dragged her down to account for her actions. They throw her before Cromwell and she's crying and barely able to stand. And he looks and he sees her body. It's beaten, it's bruised, she's bleeding. And immediately his heart softens. And he forgives the man's crimes and he releases him to her. And he tells the young woman, “Your lover shall live because of your sacrifice. Death shall not ring tonight.”

That is powerful love. That's a powerful love. And yet, as beautiful as that story is, it's just a shadow. It's a ripple, it's an echo of a far-off church bell compared to the love that Jesus

has for us and the pain and the agony that He endures on the cross for us. “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the cross tells me so.” And because of His sacrifice, death does not reign over us. His love is absolutely powerful.

And it’s not just powerful. Because, in the midst of all of this pain, in the middle of everything that Jesus is accomplishing for us ... as Mary’s son is dying to become her Savior and the sacrifice for her sins and our Savior and the sacrifice for the sins of the world, what does He do?

In this moment, Jesus stops and He looks at His mom, and He makes sure that someone in her life is going to take care of her. Mary is in her late forties. At this time she’s very likely a widow. And she lives in this society that is often unjust and unfair to women, especially widows.

And with what little air is left in His lungs, Jesus takes time to push himself up on that cross and say this so that His mom will have someone in her life to make sure she’s getting enough food to eat and that she has a roof over her head. And He says this to make sure that she’s going to stay warm in the wintertime—because He loves her.

As Jesus is hanging there and His arms are stretched tight and He’s struggling to breathe, He pushes himself up seven times to speak. On the cross, before He dies, Jesus makes seven statements. And here they are.

He says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:24)

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34)

Jesus, says, “I thirst.” (John 19:30)

“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

And “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46)

But right in the middle of these statements, Jesus looks down at Mary and He looks at John, and He says, “Woman, behold your son! Behold your mother!”

Now just look at this list. Of all these things that Jesus says on the cross, why does He say this one while on the cross? Everything else that Jesus says at the crucifixion belongs in that moment:

“Father forgive them”—that’s what He’s doing through His death.

“Today you’ll be with me in Paradise”—He says that to the thief on the cross next to Him, the one who puts his trust in Him.

When Jesus cries out about being forsaken by God and His thirst, those are fulfillments of prophecy, and they're specific to this time on the cross. The work of salvation being finished, His final words—all those things had to be said right there in that moment.

But what about this one? “Behold your son. Behold your mother.” He has had three years with both of these people. Why not tell them this before? The night before makes a lot of sense. John is sitting next to Jesus at the Last Supper. He's actually close enough that he's able to whisper to Him. They're eating bread and they're drinking the wine. Why not then with that closeness does He not say to John, *Hey, take care of my mom when I'm gone*.

Or, even better, what about three days from now? Because we know this isn't the end of the story. He's going to see them again. Jesus is coming back. He's getting out of that grave. So why not in the days after the resurrection doesn't He pull John and Mary aside and say, *I'm about to ascend into heaven. John, take care of my mom*.

Why doesn't He do that? He chooses to make this statement on the cross because He wants to. It's a choice.

And the reason, I believe, that He says this on the cross is because it's not only for Mary, and it's not just for John. It's for us, because it's meant to show us what His love is like. It's for us.

2. Jesus' Love Is Personal

Because His love is powerful, absolutely. But it's not only powerful. It's also personal. The love of Jesus is so personal. And that's what we see. Jesus is on the cross, taking care of His mom. He is a God who loves us powerfully and personally.

So, His love doesn't only cover our salvation—as if that weren't enough. His love also covers our circumstances, our needs, our lives.

Jesus doesn't just love us so that when we die we get to go be with Him in heaven. He also loves us here and now, in the meantime, in the mundane little stuff of our lives—those little details.

Now please hear me on this because it's so important. It's so crucial that we understand both of these aspects of His love. Because if we only see one and not the other, then we're going to have a distorted view of who Jesus is. We're going to have a funhouse mirror of this distorted image of His love.

Because if we only think of His love as personal, then we miss out on the weight of what He did for us, the power of what it takes to suffer the shame and the humiliation of death on the cross, and the redemption that is achieved on our behalf by the shedding of His blood. That is power.

But on the other hand, if we only see His love as powerful, then we're left to wonder what love actually looks like and what it really means.

Because God, in His love, is cosmic. But is He close? His love is divine, but does He care about us? He's an almighty King, but is He kind? Is He a loving king?

And I'll just tell you, truthfully, this is a struggle for me. Because so often, the way that I think of God is that He's God, and yes, He's big, and yes, He loves me. But His love is mostly focused on dealing with all my sin. Not to mention He's got a whole live world out there to worry about. He's got His hands full. So, when I think about the love of God, it's more of this global thing. He's loving but He's very distant.

He's like a grandfather that I never see who sends me a birthday card once a year with a little bit of cash in it. I know He's out there, and I'm pretty sure He cares about me. But He doesn't feel very close.

Have you ever felt that way? Is that your view of God, that He's too busy or too worried or too preoccupied with paying the penalty for your sin, and so He can't be bothered with the things that are troubling you today?

So, are there portions of your life that you're holding back or that you're keeping away from Him, things you don't pray about and you don't entrust to Him, because deep down you're not sure He cares?

Think about your life. Think about the things that you pray for and pray about. Or think about the things you don't pray about. What are the things you don't talk to God about? Things at work or in your family, with your kids or all your responsibilities. What are the things that are starting to feel really heavy on your own?

But instead of talking to God about them you just keep carrying them all by yourself. And you invent reasons to not pray about those things, because you know God is big and mighty, and the things you're struggling with kind of seem petty in comparison to Him.

Or they feel trivial compared to what someone else is dealing with, what other people have going on. And so, you're struggling at work, but you don't pray to God about it, because,

hey, at least you have a job. Your friend just lost her job. You're wrestling with illness and sickness in your family or in your life. But you don't pray about it because that family down the street has a child battling cancer. And someone out there has it more difficult than you, and so you presume that God cares more about that. So how dare you pray for little stuff?

I know some of you in this room are entering a phase in life where you're taking care of your own mom or your own dad as they approach the end of their life. And it's hard. And it's not what you were expecting this season to be. But you soldier on, as a good son or a good daughter. But you're just taking it all on you. It's not something you bring up with God. You just imagine it's your burden to bear.

Or maybe you're lonely. You're just lonely. You're single and you don't want to be. Or you're divorced and you didn't want to be, or you're married but something there's been lost. Or you're searching for deeper friendships and relationships. You keep looking, but you can't find them. And you're lonely, but you just keep it to yourself. Because that's not the kind of thing to bother God about. In fact, it would be ungrateful to trouble God who died for you with your emotions.

This is the grave danger of only believing that God's love for you is powerful and not personal. It is both. It is absolutely both. And He shows us this on the cross: He says, "Behold your son. Behold your mother."

Jesus said this to Mary and to John and for us, so that we might know that Jesus' love is enough to save us and take away our sin, and Jesus' love is deep enough to care for us in our needs and in the things that are going on in our lives, and to be present with us. That's the love of Jesus.

Look what John goes on to write about what it means to be loved by Jesus. This is 1 John 3. And John writes: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1)

We are not only saved from sin. We are adopted as children—because He loves us.

So, here's what that means for me. As I've been studying this passage, I've been convicted this week that I need to repent of my theology of a God who is powerful but not personal; of a God who loves me but doesn't really love me.

I need to stand at the foot of the cross right there next to Mary and next to John, and I need to look up, and I need to see what love looks like and believe this truth: that Jesus loves me. That Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.

So, I can talk to Him like a child talking to a loving father. I can tell Him what's going on in my life. I can bring Him the things that are troubling me. And I can trust in Him to care, because He loves me.

So, what about you? What are the areas of your life that you're holding back from Him? Where do you need to apply this truth or lean into this truth that Jesus loves you?

Jesus' Love Has a Plan

His love is powerful. It's personal. The third truth about the love of God, one final thing we see in this passage, is that His love has a plan. In His love for us, Jesus has a plan.

Let's just ask the question—Why John? Why does Jesus choose John? Of all the people to care for His mom, it doesn't make sense.

For one thing, Mary has other children. Mark 3, Matthew 12, Luke 8—the other gospels describe a moment in Jesus' life when He's teaching this large crowd of people and His mother and His brothers come to find Him. And the crowd says to Jesus, “Hey, your mother and your brothers are looking for you.”

So, we know that Jesus has siblings. Mary has other children. Why doesn't Jesus ask one of His brothers to care for mom? Why John?

Because He has a plan for John. Jesus loves John, and this is part of His plan in John's life.

Even if it's not the plan that John would have for his life—taking care of an elderly widow—I don't think that was John's plan, goal, or hope for himself. This is not what he saw himself doing.

This is the same guy, remember, who once had his own mother go to Jesus and ask for a special seat and a superior station in Jesus' kingdom. Because John just knew that he was destined for great things.

He's bold and brash, he's pretty arrogant, he's angry. There's a time when a group of people don't welcome Jesus into their village, and so John asks if he's allowed permission to

burn these people to death. Jesus gives John and his brother James a nickname—they're the Sons of Thunder.

And that's the guy you want to take care of your mom? Jesus says, *Yes, absolutely*. Because Jesus loves John and He's got a plan for him.

You'll see that plan unfold in what takes place after...after Jesus' death, after the resurrection, after Jesus ascends to heaven, after the Church is born out of Pentecost, after the flame of the Gospel spreads around the globe.

During this time Peter is leading the Church in Jerusalem and Paul is preaching to the Gentiles, and all the other disciples are taking the Gospel around the world.

And where is the disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who asked for a seat of glory in the new kingdom? Where's the Son of Thunder? Where is John?

He's taking care of Mary. He's helping her with her laundry and her taxes. He's cooking her meals. John is taking care of Mom as she grows older.

And then, years later, after many of the other eyewitnesses to Jesus' life have died, after most of the other disciples have been murdered for their faith, likely after Mary herself has passed away, John sits down and he writes a biography about Jesus. He's inspired by the Holy Spirit. And John writes down what he saw and what he heard and what they did. John describes Jesus' life in a way that the other Gospels just don't. Matthew, Mark, and Luke—we call them the synoptic Gospels because they are very similar in structure—they're comparable to one another. They're distinct, absolutely, but they're similar.

John's Gospel is just different. His introduction, the first chapter, doesn't start with Jesus' birth or His family history. It starts with "In the beginning ..." of the universe.

And then John focuses more on conversations and people rather than the events or the sermons themselves. He zooms in on certain moments and he lingers there. It's unique.

In fact, here's a list of things that took place in Jesus' life that we would not know about if not for John's Gospel. Here are just a few of the stories that we wouldn't know:

- The wedding miracle, Jesus turning water into wine
- Jesus meeting with Nicodemus and telling him, "You must be born again."
- The encounter with the woman at the well
- Jesus healing the sick man at the Pool of Bethesda
- Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead

--Jesus washing the disciples' feet

--Almost everything we know about what Jesus said at the Last Supper and how Jesus prayed for His disciples and for us.

--In the final chapter of the book of John there's this restoration barbecue. Jesus cooks fish over a campfire and He restores Peter. And He asks him three times, "Do you love me? Then feed my sheep."

We don't know about any of these moments without John.

And then on top of that—I love this—this is how John concludes His Gospel. This is the final verse in the Gospel of John. He writes, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself count not contain the books."

Even John says, *There's a bunch of other stuff that we got up to ... but this is sufficient.*

Do you know how Bible scholars refer to the Gospel of John? They call it the Gospel of Love. You want to know John's nickname throughout church history? He's known as the Apostle of Love.

Jesus loved John and He had a plan for him. And it was a plan to show off His love to the world. And now you and I are part of this history, this lineage that knows more about the love of Jesus because of John. *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.* And that Bible is not complete without John's writing.

But before the Holy Spirit inspires and empowers him to write, before Jesus entrusted John with His message, He first entrusts him with His mother. It's all part of the plan.

Jesus had a good and a loving plan for John. And Jesus has a good and a loving plan for you, for your life. It may not look the way that you thought it would look, and it might not be what you think it ought to be. But Jesus loves you. And His love is powerful and it's personal. And the plan that He has for your life is better than anything you'd come up with on your own. Because He loves you.

As Jesus is being crucified, He looks down at His mother, Mary. And He looks at His disciple John. And He tells one to take care of the other because He loved them. And Jesus said that on the cross so that we would hear it too, so that we would believe it, so that we would know it, so that deep in our core, in our bones, we would believe this truth, that He loves us.

Jesus loves you, powerfully, personally. And He has a plan for you.

In 1943 in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in the middle of WWII, future president John F. Kennedy was serving on a Navy PT boat that was rammed and then sunk by an enemy ship. And famously, Kennedy swims himself and an injured crew mate to shore. He saves him. What's not so famous is what happened next.

Because when they reached land, the survivors are in this terrible condition. They're half-drowned, they're all alone, they're in the middle of an ocean in the middle of a war. But they were rescued by these native islanders. These islanders who brought them in fed them and took care of them. They actually grew fond of these men and had affection for them.

A few days later a rescue boat was spotted off the coast. And so, overjoyed, two islanders put their arms around one of the injured sailors and they hike him to the top of this hill so that he can look out on the horizon and see this boat that's coming to save the stranded men.

And as they're crying tears of joy to celebrate the moment, the islanders begin to sing a song. It's a song that was taught to them in English by missionaries years before who had come to that island to bring them the Gospel. And on that island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean these two men began to sing. And then the sailor joined in:

*Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong, we are weak, but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me—the Bible tells me so!*

Jesus loves you. Don't ever forget it.
Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we come before You as adopted sons and daughters because of Your love for us, and we thank You for that. We thank You that You love us enough to send Your Son for us to live and to die and to rise again so that we might be brought into this kingdom—God, not just as saved individuals, but as adopted sons and daughters of a loving King. Thank You for Your love toward us and for us.

We pray that this week we would see that love made clear in the little things in our life; that we would pray about the things that are troubling us, or just invite You into the moments that we're celebrating. God, we pray that You would be with us and lead us and guide us, and

that we would always remember Your great love for us. We pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.