

Seven Words From the Cross - Compassion

by Warren Wiersbe

The sermon emphasizes the significance of the cross and the importance of being near it, experiencing redemption, rebuke, reward, and responsibility through faith in Jesus Christ.

Duration: 38:14

Scripture: Matthew 6:21, Luke 6:38, Luke 9:23, Acts 1:8, Philippians 3:10, Hebrews 13:13, 1 Peter 4:13

Topics: "The Cross", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being near the cross, both spiritually and in our actions. He highlights the theme of giving and challenges pastors and church leaders to lead the way in giving. The speaker also discusses the responsibility that comes with being near the cross, as Jesus has entrusted us with the task of spreading His message and love to others. He encourages listeners to not take their relationship with God lightly and to embrace the rewards and challenges that come with being near the cross.

Transcript

And we read about the Lamb in John chapter 19, beginning at verse 17 and reading through verse 27. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, where they crucified him and two others with him, on either side, one and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross, and the writing was Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

This title then read many of the Jews for the place where Jesus was crucified was near to the city, and it was written in Hebrew and Greek and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, write not the King of the Jews, but he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written.

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts to every soldier apart, and also his coat. Now the coat was without seam woven from the top throughout. They said, therefore, among themselves, let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be, that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, they parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.

These things, therefore, the soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciples standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son.

Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother. And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. If you and I had been in Jerusalem that Passover afternoon when our Lord Jesus was crucified, I wonder how near we would have been to the cross.

It's one thing for us to sing, Jesus keep me near the cross, and it's quite something else to practice it. It took some courage for those people to be near the cross. The soldiers were there out of duty.

The four women and John were there out of devotion. And it wasn't the easiest place to be, and it wasn't the most popular place to be. But it's the place where their hearts took them, near the cross.

What kind of a place is that? Of course, I'm not talking about geography. No one today can stand near the cross because the cross is not there. Were you to make a trip to the Holy Land, they would show you two locations, possibly one of them is the correct one.

But no one has a spiritual blessing from a geographical position. We're talking about spiritual geography. We're talking about a step of faith that takes us near to Jesus Christ.

We're talking about what it means spiritually to be near the cross. I think this third word from the cross, woman behold thy son, behold thy mother, helps us to understand the distinctives of this place near the cross. And I'd like for us to interview four of these persons who were standing near the cross, and I want to ask each of them one question.

What kind of a place is it near the cross? What are its distinctives? Let's begin with Mary Magdalene. And we ask her, Mary, what kind of a place is it near the cross? And Mary Magdalene looks at us and she says, to me, it's a place of redemption. What do we know about Mary Magdalene? Well, not a great deal.

We're told in Luke chapter 8 and verse 2 that Mary Magdalene at one time had been possessed by seven demons. There was a time when modern society raised their eyebrows and smiled at things like demon possession. Now they don't do that anymore.

We're having a multitude of books come off the press written not by evangelical Christians, but by people who make no pretense of evangelical theology talking about demon possession. Mary Magdalene at one time had been the home of seven demons. And one day she came to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ set her free.

He redeemed her. And someone is saying, oh, I'm glad that I'm not the home of seven demons. And yet I read in Ephesians chapter 2 that all of those who have never trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior are indwelt by and possessed by the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

In other words, it's possible that someone is listening to me right now who is in the same condition spiritually as Mary Magdalene was, and you desperately need to come near the cross because that is the place of redemption. A modern world sometimes laughs at a concept of Satan, but I would read to you from Acts chapter 26 verse 18, what our ministry is today, what Jesus does for people like Mary Magdalene. God said to the Apostle Paul, I'm sending you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Now, this verse describes for us what happened to Mary and what happened to many of us and what can happen to some of you. There was a time when she was blind, but then her eyes were open and she could

see. There was a time when she was in darkness, but then she was translated out of darkness into light.

There was a time when Mary Magdalene was possessed by Satan, but now by faith in Jesus Christ she experiences the power of God. There was a time when she was weighed down by the guilt of sin, but she's been moved from guilt to forgiveness. There was a time when she was poor.

Satan always makes people poor. The thief cometh not but for to steal and to kill and to destroy, but there was a time when Mary trusted Jesus Christ and she was moved out of poverty into the inheritance that belongs to those who are Christians. And all of this happened by faith.

Someone listening to me right now is guilty in darkness. Your eyes are blinded. Satan has enslaved you.

Guilt has weighted you down and you're getting more and more spiritually poor. Your spiritual investments are zero and the only wages you are receiving are the wages of sin. And I say to you, why don't you come to the cross? Mary says that near the cross is the place of redemption.

And if the Son shall make you free, you will be free indeed. No wonder Luke chapter 8 verse 3 tells me that after Mary was redeemed, when her eyes were opened and her burden was lifted and she moved into the light, no wonder she ministered to Jesus Christ out of her means. I don't know what means she had, but everything she had she gave to Jesus Christ because he'd redeemed her.

And her unsaved friend said, Mary, why are you doing that? Because I'm not my own. I've been bought with a price. But Mary, why are you giving him that? Because it's his.

He redeemed me. And when Mary stood there near the cross, she saw her redeemer and she realized that for him to be able to deliver her, he could not be delivered. He saved others himself he cannot save.

Mary's eyes were opened, but our Lord's eyes were blindfolded. Mary was moved out of darkness into light, but Jesus went out of light into darkness. Mary was moved out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God, but Jesus had to have all the waves and the billows of judgment go over him.

Mary's guilt was washed away, but Jesus bore on his body our sins. Mary became rich because Jesus Christ became the poorest of the poor on the cross. Near the cross, it's a place of redemption.

Let's talk to Mary's sister who was standing there. Her name was Salome. She was the mother of James and John, the wife of Zebedee.

And she was standing there with Mary. And we say to her, two of your sons are disciples. Yes.

They forsook all to follow Christ. Yes. You're standing here near the cross.

Is it because you want to be near your sister Mary? Well, partly. Why are you standing here? What is this place like near the cross? And Salome says to us, to me, it's a place of rebuke. Rebuke.

Yes. Do you remember one day this woman came up to the Lord Jesus and she bowed before him and she said to him, I would that you'll give to me whatever I ask. And Jesus said, what do you want? She said, Lord, I want that these two sons of mine, James and John, sit on either side of you on thrones in the kingdom.

Now let's give credit where credit is due. She believed in a kingdom. She believed in prayer.

She believed that Jesus would one day reign. But it was a very selfish prayer. Now, don't criticize her.

You and I have prayed selfish prayers. You and I have lived long enough to be thankful for unanswered prayer. Lord, I will that you put my two sons on thrones.

And when the other disciples heard about it, they were angry and there was an argument. You know why they were angry? Because they didn't think of it first. And Jesus said to her very quietly, you don't know what you're asking.

Can you drink the cup that I'm going to drink? That's how you get to the throne. Can you experience the baptism that I'm going to experience? That's how you get to the throne. James, you want a throne? Then go find a cross.

John, you want a throne? Go find a cross. And as Salome stood there near the cross, it was a place of rebuke. As she saw Jesus wearing a crown of thorns, as she saw the Lord Jesus reigning not from a throne, but from a tree, she must have shed some very hot, bitter tears and said, Oh God, how selfish I've been.

James indeed did drink of the cup. He was the first of the apostles to be slain. John did indeed go through the baptism.

He lived the longest and spent his latter years in exile on the Isle of Patmos working in the Roman salt mines. Salome tells me that near the cross is a place of rebuke. And we need that rebuke today.

Salome could have stood there and sung, When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the young prince of glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, And poor contempt on all my pride. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the cross of Christ my God. All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

The cross rebukes our worldliness. It rebukes our cheap values. It rebukes our selfish ambitions.

It rebukes our Christian competition. It rebukes our blessed bragging. Near the cross is a place of rebuke.

And whenever you hear someone telling you how great he is, you mark it down. He's not been near the cross. When you have someone showing you all that he has accumulated and all that he is worth, you mark it down.

He's never been near the cross. Much that passes for glamour in our evangelical world today would disintegrate into garbage if we would just get it near the cross. Let's talk to Mary.

Our Lord Jesus did not speak to Salome and he did not speak to Mary Magdalene, but he spoke to Mary. Mary, you're standing here near the cross. What kind of a place is it? What are the distinctives of this place where you're standing? And Mary quietly says, it's a place of reward.

Reward, yes. John begins his gospel, chapter two, with Mary and Jesus. And John, as he draws his gospel to a close in chapter 19, brings us Mary and Jesus.

And what a contrast. Chapter two, a wedding. Chapter 19, a funeral.

Chapter two, joy. Wine is flowing. And to the that was a symbol of joy.

Chapter 19, sorrow and blood is flowing. You first meet Mary in the gospel of John, and there's a miracle and he reveals his glory. There's no miracle.

There's weakness, not power. There's shame, not glory. In John chapter two, Mary speaks to him.

In John chapter 19, Jesus speaks to Mary. The silence of Mary at the cross is significant. The only person in all of Jerusalem who could have delivered Jesus from the cross was Mary.

All she had to do was walk up to the priests and the leaders and say, I am his mother. What he has told you is not true. But she didn't say that.

She knew he was the Son of God. She knew he was the Messiah of Israel. She knew who he was and what he was and what he came to do.

And her silence says to me, I can believe who he is and what he is. Now she was not standing by the cross to assist him in redemption. She was standing by the cross because years before a prophecy had been given.

Do you remember when Joseph and Mary took Jesus into the temple to have him registered and they met Simeon? And Simeon took that baby and he said, Lord, now permit your servant to depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. And he looked at Mary and said, yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also. And it did.

From the very conception of Jesus through to the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary was experiencing that sword of sorrow, the shame of his conception. Mary and Joseph had to get married. And then when he's just a little infant, because of him, innocent babies were killed in Bethlehem.

When Jesus was 12 years old, for three days he stayed away from his mother and foster father. They found him and Mary said, why is it we have been seeking you sorrowing? And then he came down to the Jordan River and he was baptized and he left the carpenter's shop. And his brothers thought he was crazy.

One day Jesus was teaching a group of people and the room was so jammed nobody else could get in. Someone said, your mother and your brethren are outside. And Jesus said, who is my mother? Who are my brethren? Whoever does the will of God, the same as my mother and my brother.

And she was seeing a growing alienation from her firstborn son. Psalm 69 puts it, I have become an alien unto my mother's children, a stranger unto my brethren. Now he's dead.

The last of the cords is going to be cut. The sword is going to pierce deeper than ever. Now he's dying.

It's bad enough that he's dying, but where he is dying, out in public, how he is dying, on a cross like a criminal, why he is dying, because his own people are so ignorant. And Jesus, in all of his agony and pain, notices Mary. That's unusual.

You know, when you're going through pain, you are selfish. Did you know that? We're all made this way. When you and I have pain, we don't care about anybody else's problems.

We hurt. Jesus hurt, but he had shown love to his enemies. Father, forgive them.

They know not what they do. And he showed love to a repentant sinner. Today you'll be with me in paradise.

And he showed love now to his own family. And he rewarded Mary. He said to her, woman, now that was a title of address.

He was not being disrespectful. It's a good thing he didn't say mother, because someone would have caught that and said, you are his mother. Hey, there's his mother.

He would spare her the shame and the pain. Woman, behold thy son. He wasn't talking about himself.

He was talking about John. And then he looks at John and says, behold thy mother. Salome could have raised her hand and said, Lord, I'm his mother.

But she kept quiet. It was all part of the rebuke. You know what he's saying? He's saying, woman, John is the closest thing to my heart.

This is the disciple that I love. He's the one who was always close to my heart. Now I'm going back to heaven.

And you can no longer know me after the flesh. All physical human relationships now end, and we move much higher into spiritual relationships. But Mary, woman, my brethren don't believe in me.

I can't turn you over to them. And so I'm giving you John. All of her suffering was rewarded.

I would love sometime to talk with you about the greatest gift that God can give us next to salvation. You know what that is? People who love us. When you've got that, you've got everything.

The greatest gift in the world is not riches, it's relationships. And Jesus said to her, woman, I'm going to establish from this cross a whole new relationship. Here's a whole new family.

Here's my choice disciple. He'll care for you. To Mary, being near the cross meant being in a place of reward.

You've suffered. You felt the sword. You misunderstood.

You've questioned. You've wondered. But you're standing there by the cross.

And I say to you, don't get bitter. He'll reward you. He felt the sword.

Near the cross is a place of reward. Now let's talk to John. John, you're the only one of the disciples standing here.

Yeah. We all forsook him and fled. Oh, he told us that we would.

He said this night they're going to smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered. This night, all of you are going to be scandalized because of me. But where's Peter? Peter had said, Lord, I will go with you to prison and to death.

Oh, says John, I didn't say that openly, but we all said that in our hearts. Don't criticize Peter. All of us are to blame.

But John, you came back. Yes, I came back. John, what kind of a place is it that you're standing at near the cross? To Mary Magdalene, it's a place of redemption.

And to Salome, it was a place of rebuke. And to Mary, it's a place of reward. What is it to you? It's a place of responsibility.

He has asked me to take his place. He was the son who was caring for the mother. Now I am the son who's caring for the mother.

He has given to me the greatest responsibility anybody ever could have. I am taking his place on this earth. And so we glibly sing beneath the cross of Jesus, I fain would take my stand.

Don't you sing like that unless you know the feeling of responsibility. Many Christians today don't know the meaning of responsibility. Fun? Yeah.

Enjoyment? Sure. Praise? Yes. Responsibility? No.

We're paying other people to do it. I'm not responsible to witness. We pay people to do that.

One of the great weaknesses in the evangelical church today is that Christians don't get near enough to the cross to feel their responsibility before God. I'm not responsible to pray. I'm not responsible to witness.

I'm not responsible to give. When I was privileged to minister in Kenya a few weeks ago, I sat and listened to a national evangelist, one of the converts in the Kenya church, give a message. I do not understand Swahili.

I don't know one word he said, except that the fellow sitting next to me was quickly and occasionally giving me highlights. I said, what's he talking about? He's so enthusiastic. And the other man, there were five or six hundred of them were saying, hey man, how are you? They were happy with the message.

And he's talking about giving, giving, giving. He's saying to these pastors and church leaders that if they don't lead the way in giving, nobody can. I looked at the crowd and nobody was well dressed.

Nobody looked as though he had very much to give. And yet he gave a message on giving that brought revival to the conference. That man had been near the cross.

He knew the meaning of responsibility. You say I want to get near to the cross. All right.

Expect responsibility. Our Lord is going to say, I've got something for you to do. You're going to take my place.

I'm no longer there on earth. I'm up here in heaven. I'm going to give you the Holy Spirit's power, but I can't go to those neighbors.

You go. You're taking my place. I can't go to Nigeria, but you go.

By the way, right now they're crying for thousands of teachers to come to Nigeria to help. Responsibility. Our response to his ability near the cross.

And sometimes I think the heart of our Savior must be broken the way we flippantly, joyfully, carelessly glide through life and let everybody else carry the burden. Jesus Christ gave to John the greatest privilege

anybody could have, the privilege of taking his place in the world. And we beseech you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God near the cross.

That's an easy theme to sing about. It's a difficult experience of faith. How do we get near the cross? I don't mean geographically.

I mean spiritually. Perhaps you need redemption. You've never been saved and you say, I want to get near the cross.

I need a Savior. What do I do? You reach out by faith and you say, look, you died for me. I am a sinner.

It's hard to find guilty people today. Very few people want to admit that they're sinners. And so if I speak to a lost sinner and you say I need redemption, I say to you, reach out by faith, come by faith and receive Jesus Christ and you'll be near the cross.

That is the place of redemption. I speak to some selfish saint. This last week you were hurt because you had selfish plans and it didn't get fulfilled and you're hurt.

Somebody hurt your pride and somebody stuck your ego and you need rebuke. I would just simply say, come to the cross. Come to Jesus Christ by faith.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast. I speak to some Christian who's been suffering. You've been faithful.

You've been true to God, but you've been suffering. And Satan is saying to you, oh, you're one of God's children. How come you're suffering so much? I say to you, by faith, come near the cross.

That's the place to come. Share in the fellowship of His suffering. It's a place of reward.

Now, if you've never experienced it, don't criticize it. But if you've known the fellowship of His suffering, you also experience the power of His resurrection. Don't ask me how.

It's the strange chemistry of the grace of God that you come to the cross and suddenly suffering turns to glory and burdens take wings and become blessings. It's a place of reward. Perhaps you're a careless, indifferent, lazy, undisciplined saint and God wants to put some responsibility on you.

Then come near the cross. You say, that's a place of shame. Yes.

Let us therefore go without the camp bearing His reproach. But I'd rather share in His shame today and have His praise tomorrow than have the praise of men today and be ashamed before Him tomorrow. And so would you.

You come near by faith. The Lord's Supper doesn't bring you near only as you apprehend Jesus. My sermon doesn't even bring you near.

It's possible for someone to have a sentimental, emotional kind of an experience that will just evaporate when it hits the cold air. The thing that brings us near the cross is honesty and submission and surrender in faith and a willingness to bear His reproach and feel His sword. But oh how wonderful it is when He speaks to you.

He reigns from the cross. He was running their lives from the cross and I want Him to run my life from the cross. He's the Lamb upon the throne.

He bears upon His body the marks of Calvary. He has a right to run my life. How near are we to the cross today? Heavenly Father, I pray that these next minutes will not be dissipated by distraction, will not be wasted by argument, and will not be poisoned by disobedience.

Father, may these next minutes bring about spiritual revolution in our lives. Help us by faith to come to the cross. Help that lost sinner to come.

Help, oh God, those of us who are Christians who are selfish and irresponsible to come. Help the suffering to come to the cross. And I pray, Father, that as a result of our faith and obedience, you might use us to accomplish the work that you have for us to do in this world.

For Jesus' sake, amen.

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