

# The Faithful Witnesses: Women at the Cross

Well, good evening everyone. Welcome to the auditorium at Calvary Road Baptist Church in Monrovia, California. It is an absolutely beautiful day. I'm glad that you are here. I had a little bit of a testimony from one of our delightful church members a few moments ago who was involved in a vehicular altercation and indicated to me that the reason she's here tonight is because I have said again and again that it's better to ache at church than to ache at home. And so she's aching at church. And that's me too. I have had the outrageous banger headache all day long. And I decided I could either be miserable at home in my lounge chair or I could be miserable here in front of you. So I decided that I would forsake my lounge chair because all it is is a really really really bad headache. And that shouldn't keep anybody at home from church. Amen.

I remember Ibrahim Ag Muhammad when I went to preach for him in Mali years ago. I asked him if there is any way Western Christianity had influenced his congregation in Mali, located in Gao. Gao is the name of the city on the Niger River. And he said, "Yes, we had a woman from the United States in our city, and she was attending our church, and she missed a service one Wednesday night, and the ladies, our ladies, asked her the next Sunday morning, 'Where were you? We missed you.' And she said, 'Oh, I had a headache.'" And a couple of weeks later, she missed a Wednesday night Bible study. And the next Sunday, the women of our church asked her, "Well, we missed you Wednesday night, where were you?" And she said, "Oh, I had a headache." And then Brother Abraham looked at me and said, "Now our ladies know to stay home on Wednesday nights if they have a headache." And they never knew that before. So thank you for the influence of the West. So you don't stay home just because you got a headache. Amen.

Oh well, let's go to the Lord in prayer, shall we? Father, we come before you this evening and thank you for your goodness, your watch

care over us. We have matters of eternal import to bring to your attention, knowing that we don't need to bring them to your attention. You know everything. But the word of God says that we have not because we ask not. And so there are certain things that you will not do except you be asked to do so in prayer by those who are your children. So we pray for Ruby, as she is now in hospice care, 98 years, more than 71 years married to her wonderful husband who has predeceased her, and we pray that you might comfort her, that you might ease her pain and her suffering, that you might strengthen and encourage the family, and that her many many decades of Christian testimony will have an impact on those members of the family who want to live for you and will have an impact on those members of the family who need to trust Christ as their savior. We pray also for Tim. We pray for Fainine. We pray for Pastor Joe and Jackie. We're thankful for a good report from the surgeon. We pray for Sakura and for Nazarin. We pray for Brian and Jim. We pray for my friend Dan Lindseay and for Ronnie. We pray for Mrs. Kim's delivery. We pray for Greg Dixon's diagnosis of lymphoma, that you might give to the doctors great wisdom, that he might get the best possible medical care, and that there might be found very early on a bone marrow donor, and because he's of Middle Eastern descent, it might be challenging. So we pray your blessings upon him and his search. We pray for our sick loved ones and for our through-the-Bible reading program. Help us, Lord, that we might live for you, that we might show our love to you by our obedience. And for this we thank and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Want you to turn, if you would please, in your Bible to Matthew chapter 27. We have been, for the last several months, dealing with the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, his hanging on the cross. For the last several weeks, we have been dealing with the events surrounding his death, that moment when he gave up the ghost, when he yielded to death. No one took his life from him. No one killed him. He surrendered the spirit of God and left behind a physical body that was dead, and it was then buried.

And in Matthew chapter 27, verses 55 and 56, we see two verses that introduce information to us and provide a perspective for us that

sometimes people pay little attention to. I'm sure somewhere in the last 2,000 years of Christian history, I promise you I'm not the first one coming up with this, but I believe it'll be a blessing to you. It reads, beginning with verse 55, "And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's children." Interesting. These two verses comprise Matthew's first mention of a group of individuals who were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ since his public ministry began in Galilee, what, some three and a half years earlier, but who were not included among the previously mentioned apostles and other disciples. They were, of course, a group of women who followed the Lord and ministered to him.

Now notice, if you will, particularly in verse 56, that some of them are named or otherwise identified. There is Mary Magdalene. There is Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's children. Zebedee's sons, of course, were James and John, according to Matthew chapter 4:21. And so what I would like to do for a little while this evening is I would like to flesh out our knowledge of these women and then show their tremendous importance in the gospel record.

First of all, let's consider Mary Magdalene. I remember, I think it was the very first time I ever went to Israel, I went with a couple of preacher friends and a small group, and we were hosted in our 15 days there by several Israeli archaeologists. And among the several archaeologists was an archaeologist who was a serving officer in the Israeli Defense Force. And one of the cool things was when we were in the Judean desert to the south of Jerusalem. And, Brian, you'll like this. We got to see some live-fire tank exercises in the Judean desert as the IDF tanks were rolling from west to east and firing, and they were shooting at 55-gallon drums in the desert, and it's up on a plateau that could easily be seen from Jordan. And the tour guide, who was an archaeologist, who was also an IDF major in their intelligence section, he said they were doing these live-fire exercises out in the open in the daytime in full sight of the Jordanians because they wanted the Jordanians to see what they could do.

Well, at one point during that first visit to Israel, we got off a bus, and we walked about a half a mile up a steep slope. And after that first time, the next time I came to Israel, what we had had to walk up a steep slope and look out had become a nicely constructed tourist site. So the first time we went, it wasn't, it was a place where tourists went, but there was no road. We're traipsing through the mud after a rain. And we got up to a place called Mount Arbel. On both sides of the Sea of Galilee, there are these monster stone formations. They're just monoliths. And the Golan Heights on the east side, which would be on this side, is very elevated, very high up, so that anybody that commands the Golan Heights has a very strategic advantage over the Israeli farmers that are down below. And over on this side was a monolith that was kind of tipped up, and we had walked all the way up to the top edge of it. And it's called Mount Arbel. If you Google it or Grok it, A-R-B-E-L. And once you stand at the edge of Mount Arbel, you're looking down about 2,000 feet straight down. Over here is Tiberias at the south end of the Sea of Galilee, right next to the mouth of the Jordan River heading down south toward the Dead Sea. Straight across from you would be Gera, where the maniac of Gadara was indwelt by, you know, thousands of demons. And then, as you come around the Sea of Galilee, it had not been discovered when I was there the first time, but the city of Bethsaida has since been discovered and excavated there. And then Capernaum there, and just up over the hill, and right there is the mountain where the Sermon on the Mount was delivered. And then, right straight down at the edge, right on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, was a little village called Magdala.

And when the tour guide, whose name was Jackie Feldman, who had grown up in New York City, and when he said, "Well, that's the little village of Magdala," I said, "As in Magdalene?" He said, "Yes, that's where she was from." To refer to her as Mary Magdala means that she is Mary who is from Magdala. That is her hometown. That's her place of birth, and that's how she's so identified with people. And she is mentioned a dozen times in the four gospel accounts. But only once is she mentioned in the gospel accounts before the events related to our Lord's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. And that, of course, is in

Luke 8 and verse 2, where we are informed that she was a woman who was indwelt at one time by seven demons before the Savior encountered her. He addressed that problem. She became a follower, and she's one of the women who is barely mentioned and not mentioned frequently until the very end when he was crucified, when he died, when he was buried, and then when he rose.

Now, the other woman named Mary, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, might possibly be the mother of someone named Cleophas, John chapter 19, verse 25, or she might even be our Lord's mother. Why would you say that? Because if you go back to Matthew 13:55, at the beginning of our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, he went back to the region of Galilee for the first time, and they insisted that he work a miracle, and he wouldn't do it, and they got mad at him for it, and they said, "Is this not Jesus, and his father Joseph, and his mother Mary, and her sons James and Joseph and Simon and Judas, and his sisters?" So we know that Mary delivered at least six more children after she delivered the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that she had four more sons, a total of five sons, the Lord Jesus Christ being the first, and at least two daughters. So she had a large family, and so the fact that this is a woman whose sons were named James and Joseph means that it could be, it could be Mary, the mother of the Savior, according to Matthew 13:55.

Mary, just so that you'll know, you may already realize this, that Mary was a very common name given to females of that era, which explains why there were several named Mary who were associated with the Lord during his earthly ministry. Now, if you go to the Old Testament, and you translate from Hebrew directly into English, you get the name Miriam. That, of course, was the name of Moses's sister. But Miriam's name is exactly the same name as Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. Because if you go from Hebrew into Greek into English, it comes out Mary. If you go from Hebrew directly into English, it comes out Miriam. You say, that's ridiculous. Not so ridiculous. If you go from Hebrew directly into English, you get the man's name Jacob. But if you go from Hebrew to Greek to English, you get James. So somebody who's named James and somebody who's named Jacob would have exactly the same Hebrew name. It's

just, how does the translation get to us? Does it get to us from Hebrew directly to English, or from Hebrew to Greek, then to English? So that's what we have here.

And so that's two of these women named Mary. And then the third woman, we are told that she was the mother of Zebedee's children. Now, we know from Mark 1:19 and 20 that Zebedee was a fisherman. He had, according to that passage, men working for him. He also had sons working for him. By the way, guys, that's what your sons ought to do for you. They ought to work for you. You ought to put them to work. You say, "Well, my kid's little." Put him to work when he's little. Put him to work when he's little. I don't think my mother was a particularly unusual woman for a mother of that era. But before my brother and I started grade school, we knew how to cook. We could cook bacon and eggs and hash browns and stuff like that, and we did frequently. We could cook pancakes, and we did. We ran the vacuum. My mother didn't run the vacuum. We ran the vacuum. My mother didn't take clothes out of the dryer and fold them. We took clothes out of the dryer and folded them. She didn't trust us to put anything into the washing machine, 'cause, you know, we would mix whites and colors, and they end up grays, right? That's how you can tell when a guy's a single guy, is that all of his stuff is gray, is that he doesn't have a wife that knows what she's doing. And the towels and stuff were in the dryer. Almost everything was taken out back and hung on the clothesline.

And causes me to remember one time my brother jumped off the picnic table, and he wasn't paying attention to where the clothesline was, and he jumped out, and the clothesline hit him right here and just raked him, and so his neck looked like a turkey's neck, 'cause the wire scraped him. Anyway, he lived, and there was no Department of Children's Services to take him away, 'cause North Dakota didn't have such a thing, at least not on the reservation. And I recall that before my brother and I went to school, we knew how to wash dishes. We knew how to run the vacuum, we knew how to fold clothes, we knew how to make the bed, we obviously emptied the trash. And where we lived, you took it out and set it on fire. We just burned it, okay?

Because there was no trash collection on the rez. What else did we do? Oh yeah. You're not going to believe this, but it's true. We altered

our own clothes. My mother would always buy 501 blue jeans for us to grow into, right? And we were growing so fast that you buy them a couple of inches too big. And I was, like, everything bothered me, and I had to have everything in, you know, because it just, I, everything. And so, in order for things to fit just right, I had to fold things, and I had to sew them so that I wouldn't have to sew them again. My brother would go so far as to sew in cuffs and then let them out over time. We did all of that kind of stuff.

So it's no surprise to me that James and John helped out their dad in the fishing business. And Lord only knows, they started doing that when they were really, really, really young. Okay, and I'm of the opinion that boys, especially, ought to be worked and worked hard. I mean, you ought to work until they pretend like they're about to cry, "I'm really tired." And at that point, dad goes, "I'm really tired? Get to work." You know, I'm, I would bet beans to buckshot that's the way Brother Moyer was raised. I would bet beans to buckshot that's the way Tom was raised. That what boys do when they're growing up is not fiddle and piddle all the time, but actually do some productive work.

So, John, one of the sons of Zebedee, we know from other passages, was the youngest of the twelve apostles. It is likely, my guesstimation, because he had access to the high priest's home, Caiaphas's home, where they were not afraid of him serving as a witness against them. What they were doing meant that he had to be underage. He was under the age of 18. I'm of the opinion that the Apostle John might have been a 16- or 17-year-old guy about the time the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. And, of course, he was also the one who lay his head on the Savior's breast in the upper room the night before the Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion, during the Passover celebration. And I think of additional interest to us is that this was the mother who had been ambitious. Maybe the reason she's not named is because she was the ambitious mom. Oh, ambitious for her sons. Now, she would excuse her ambition by justifying it as being, well, I'm ambitious for my sons. No, you want the reflected glory of having really successful and prominent sons. That's what you're really after, mom. And she wanted them, if you recall, according to Matthew 20:20-28, she wanted them

to be seated on Christ's right hand and on his left hand in the kingdom. It's kind of aggressive, kind of bold, huh?

And, as well, there was that time, if you want to put it all together, might give us some indication of the kind of mom she was. I don't know. There was the time her sons asked the Lord to authorize them to call down fire from heaven to consume, which is a nice way of saying burn to death, the Samaritans for being unreceptive to the Lord's ministry. That's Luke 9:51-56. So, no mercy there. Let's torch them. Let's torch them. So, we want prominence, we want position, and we want to scorch our enemies. Okay.

I believe that by the time the Lord Jesus Christ is crucified on Mount Calvary, that's all behind her, as she stood with the other women at a distance. And it may have been more than just those two other women. There may have been more than three women. There may, for all we know, there may have been a half a dozen there. But these are the ones that the gospel writers named for us, with, obviously, her son was nearby. How do we know her son was nearby? How do we know the wife of Zebedee, that her son John was nearby on Mount Calvary? Why do we know that? Because we know that, you recall, that's right. Because the Lord Jesus Christ commended his mother to this son and commended this son to the Virgin Mary, who had been the Virgin Mary, his mother, of course. And this woman, along with the Lord's mother, along with Mary Magdalene, she had to be, there's no doubt that she was brokenhearted, that she was stunned into silence, in a state of shock, as she witnessed what was being done to her beloved Lord.

Now, as we read the Bible, we want to ask questions. Who, what, why, when, where, how, those kinds of things. Always, always, always, always. And with one of your fingers where the map is, the map section of your Bible. That's the way you want to read the Bible. Okay. Do you think it ran through those women's minds on Mount Calvary that, so far as we're told, does it cross a woman's mind in a situation like that, that none of the Lord's apostles were there with them, besides the youngest, whose name was John? When a woman is in a place where there's really serious wrong being done, major crime, inhumanity, disgusting, revolting, inexcusably wrong, does she notice



that her man is not there? Does she notice that other men are not there who ought to be there, who ought to be trying to stop this thing? But no, no.

Does it cross into the mind of a woman, you know, if my husband knew about that, he'd be there? Really? Because none of the men were there. I mean, Romans were there, the chief priests and the Herodians were there, the Pharisees were there, but they were calling for his crucifixion. There was no one on his side, was there? Except the kid who was so young, it required no courage for him to be there because he had not reached any age of accountability in their culture. So he would not be held accountable by anyone. Isn't that an interesting observation?

So, where are all these guys? Do you suppose that they had, in the first century, the same kind of crisis of manliness that we have in our culture today? A crisis of manliness. Yeah. Maybe, maybe they did. Maybe, maybe they did. I don't know. I don't know.

Anyway, this woman, yet here they are, the women are there, and they are there for an extremely important chain-of-custody-of-evidence reason. Okay, we have someone in our church who is an attorney. And this person who is an attorney, no doubt, had hours and hours of courses in law school having to do with evidence and the chain of custody that's required for evidence. Okay, once it's taken from a crime scene, you know, it's bagged, it's tagged, it has to be in someone's possession or in a police-supervised lockup and not taken out except by someone, and he or she writes their name down, so that there's a chain of custody. If you can establish that there is ever a break in the chain of custody, the evidence means nothing in court. It means nothing. Even if the chain of custody is broken for five minutes, it's not usable.

Okay, so the chain of custody of evidence is extraordinarily important if you're going to do things in a lawful way, in an appropriate way, if there is justice to be served. Okay. So, I'm going to insist to you that that's the reason these women were there. They were the chain of custody. Okay, you say, "Well, how were they?" Well, the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, Matthew 27:35. The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, Matthew chapter 27 and verse 50. The Lord Jesus Christ's

dead body was then taken from the cross and buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, Matthew 27:57-61. The tomb was then closed, sealed, and guarded by Roman soldiers, according to Matthew chapter 27:62-66. And when it was opened three days and three nights later, after having been sealed and guarded nonstop, 24/7, by Roman soldiers, those women witnessed the fact, because they had come back to the tomb. They witnessed the event of that tomb being opened. And they also witnessed the fact that the tomb, when the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty before the stone was rolled away by the angel, Matthew 28:1-6.

So, show that to the doubters. Show that to the Christ deniers. And if you are incredibly foolish, walk out of this auditorium tonight still lost in the face of that evidence. Because what is faith? Faith is the right conclusion drawn from circumstantial evidence. And I have just presented to you circumstantial evidence about the death, burial, and resurrection from the dead by the Lord Jesus Christ with an uninterrupted chain of evidence, useful in any court of law. But some people think, well, I don't, I'm not bound by what's required in a court of law. Oh, actually, yes, you are. Because God tells us, through the Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 2, that come judgment day, he's going to judge you according to the truth. Wow. Wow.

So, it was these women, particularly the three that are identified, Mary, Mary, and this woman whose name we don't know, but we know two of her sons became apostles. And one of them was the Apostle John. It was those women who were chosen by God to provide the chain-of-custody evidence that the resurrection of Christ's dead body had, in fact, been accomplished. Wow. What things we find in the Bible if we look for them. Amen. What things we find in scripture if we look for them.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness. Thank you for the opportunity to study the word of God. We pray your blessings upon us, that you might, by your precious Holy Spirit, minister to us, challenge those who do not know the Savior, that they would consider the claims of Christ and the claims about Christ that are made in the biblical record. And we will, for that, thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.