The Women at the Cross

In the four Gospels certain women are identified as being present at the Cross when Jesus was crucified. The specific women mentioned are:

- Mary Magdalene
- Mary the mother of James and Moses
- The mother of Zebedee’s sons
- Salome
- Mary, his mother
- His mother’s sister
- Mary the wife of Clopas

In addition, the Gospels tell us that there were many more women standing vigil at the Cross who remain unnamed. Interestingly, there are no named men at the cross. Certainly there were men there, but how many were the friends and disciples of Jesus Christ? We only know for sure that John was there, because Jesus refers to him in John 19, as he instructs him to care for his mother. Where were the other disciples?

And why were all these women there at this ugly scene? It was not a place for a woman; unless it was your close relative, no woman would have gone to such a horrible place. Yet these women were there at the cross of Jesus, watching the whole horrid scene.

This brief devotional will look at some of these women, as we put ourselves in their shoes in order to gain a personal, more intimate look at what our Savior did for us when he chose to become the sacrifice for our sins.
The Women from Galilee

Matthew 27:55-56: Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

In addition to the women who were named as being at the Cross, many other women were there, women who had followed Jesus into Jerusalem from the Galilee, and who had helped to support him and his disciples and to take care of their needs. That means they walked from Galilee to Jerusalem; there was no other way to get there. And it was up to Jerusalem—up many hills, an arduous walk that would have taken many days. And there they were at the cross.

As they followed Jesus to Jerusalem, they weren’t expecting to watch him die on a cross. They had much different expectations—that Jesus would be crowned the king of Israel, taking the throne of David, and he would save his people from the Roman oppression. I would love to have heard their conversation as they made their way to Jerusalem, no doubt filled with hope and excitement at the prospect of their Savior, Jesus, becoming the earthly king they so wanted.

Instead they were faced with the cruel reality of a crucifixion. They must have left that terrible site discouraged and disheartened, in great sorrow to watch their Savior die. But in a short three days, their hearts were again rejoicing as they learned that Mary Magdalene had been to the tomb and found it empty—and she had encountered the living Christ.

Encountering the living Christ is the most important event in anyone’s life because he has conquered death and therefore he can offer us eternal life. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that secures our salvation and guarantees us hope for eternity. Have you had such an encounter with Jesus? Has he forgiven your sins and redeemed you? He died for you, and if you don’t yet know him personally, what better time than this Easter season to enter into his joy through faith in his death, burial and resurrection?
Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

This mother was ambitious for her sons, and decided to help her sons gain the most favored positions when Jesus became king. You see, she expected Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom and save them from Roman oppression, and she wanted her boys to have a prominent place in the future cabinet of Jesus’ kingdom. This story makes you think of an ambitious Jewish mother, taking her two boys by the hand, and going right to the top—wanting to get these positions assured for her sons before the other disciples got to Jesus.

I wonder what she was thinking as she stood there at the cross watching Jesus die this cursed death. She had not envisioned this when she asked Jesus to favor her sons with the top two positions in his government. How could it be that he was now hanging on a cross? That cross changed everything.

And indeed, that cross did change everything. It changes everything for you and me. We now have hope because Jesus died and rose again, we have hope of Heaven and eternity with Jesus.
Mary Magdalene

Luke 8:1–3: After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Mark 16:9: When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.

Mary Magdalene was no stranger to Jesus. She traveled with him and his disciples, actually helping to support them. We know that Jesus had delivered her from seven demons. There have been some scurrilous writings and suggestions that Jesus had a romantic relationship with Mary Magdalene. That is a lie and totally unsubstantiated by Scripture or history. But for sure, this woman had deep feelings for Jesus because he had saved her from her past. And it was an awful past.

Can you even imagine being possessed by seven demons? No doubt she had been abused and suffered great harm from these demons for many years. No doubt she was full of guilt and despair, fearing she would live all her days possessed by these demons.

And then she met Jesus and he drove out those demons. We aren’t told when or how he did that, but it must have been dramatic, perhaps painful, but no doubt the best day of her life. She was set free from her past, her guilt, her shame.

And because Jesus is risen from the dead, he is able to do the same for you today. It may not be demons you are dealing with, but whatever it is in your past that haunts you, Jesus is a qualified Savior because he is risen from the dead, and he can deliver you, too.
The Daughters of Jerusalem

Luke 23:26–28: As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.”

Have you ever thought about these women who followed Jesus on his death march, mourning and wailing for him? It was customary to mourn and wail for the dead, but Jesus is not yet dead, and these women were sorrowful beyond words. After all, they had placed their hope in Jesus, that he was the promised Messiah, but they never ever dreamed that he would be marching to a cursed death on a cross. They truly did not “get it” at this point. They were baffled and distraught and hopeless.

Notice how Jesus addressed them, while he was on his way to Golgotha: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.” These are the only recorded words between his condemnation and crucifixion. He did not speak of his anguish or the violence that he was experiencing. No, but his pity for these women brought these words of sympathy and comfort. Not thinking of himself and what was before him, Jesus was touched with these women and their grief and he was thinking of them.

Isaiah foretells this suffering Savior:

He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

(Isaiah 53:3)

Jesus was a man of suffering; he is familiar with pain—your pain, your suffering. Maybe not audibly, but inwardly and silently you’ve been wailing and mourning. Whatever the source or cause of your pain, it’s real and you feel hopeless. Perhaps you’re not even able to share it with someone else.

As you focus on the Cross of Jesus Christ, look at him again and see this suffering Savior, and know that because he did suffer for you, he is touched with the feelings that you are having. Just as he saw and spoke to the wailing women following him to Calvary, so he would speak to you today: “My peace I give unto you.”
Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Luke 2:34-35: Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Put yourself in the shoes of the Mother of Jesus, standing at the foot of the Cross, watching her first-born Son die this cursed death—a death reserved for the most notorious criminals. No doubt as she stood there, she must have remembered this prophecy told to her by Simeon. That sword pierced her soul as she stood at that cross for hours and watched her son die in agony. She heard his cries from the cross; she heard the mocking voices of the soldiers who said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” She watched as Jesus cried out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”

No doubt Mary was a widow at this point, without Joseph to care for her any longer. She knew with absolute certainty that Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit—a virgin birth—and she knew that he was Messiah. Yet, she had to watch him crucified, wondering how a crucifixion could be part of God’s plan.

What kind of god dies on a cross? Jesus had declared himself to be equal with God his Father, and now here was God on a cross. What kind of god dies on a cross?

Dear friend, Jesus is the only qualified Savior because he did die on that cross to pay the penalty for your sins, which you could never pay. God demands a perfect sacrifice, and only Jesus meets that qualification. So, as your substitute he died on that cross, while his dear mother watched in bewilderment and great personal sorrow.

But here’s the good news: He rose from the dead three days later, and because he conquered death, he can promise you eternal life with him.