

Mary's Surrender

Today we finish up our Advent series on the life of Mary, Jesus' mother. We are going to look at a series of events in the life of Mary that forced her to relate to Jesus differently. Instead of being His mother, Mary had to learn how to be His disciple. She had to lay aside the normal expectations of a mother and adopt the unqualified surrender of a disciple.

It's hard for us to appreciate how difficult it must have been for Mary to make the transition. All parents have to learn how to relate to their growing and grown children differently. You start out doing everything for them and telling them what to do; then you give more and more freedom, letting them make more decisions on their own; eventually you relate to them as adults. I assume that Mary went through this natural progression. But Mary's transition was unique. She had to learn to surrender her desires and her ways of thinking. It's not that her desires and ways of thinking were unreasonable or bad; they were just different than those of Jesus. And so she had to surrender to Jesus.

Mary serves as a model of surrender for us. Many times we're in a position analogous to that of Mary: it's not that our desires and our ways of thinking are horrible and bad; it's just that they are different from those of Jesus. We have ideas about how things are going to turn out in relation to career, marriage and children, leisure time, money, and ministry.

But things hardly ever turn out the way we expect them to. And it's not that our circumstances are always worse than we'd hoped for; they're just different. When things are different than we expected, we have a choice: we can either resent our circumstances and mutter under our breaths the rest of our lives, or we can surrender to God and live the life He has given us. When I say "surrender" this morning, I'm not talking about being passive and fatalistic about our circumstances. I'm talking about submitting to the will of God as it unfolds and actively pursuing God in the midst of our circumstances. That's what we see Mary doing. And so let's consider four different events in her life in which she demonstrated a lifestyle of surrender.

Jesus (age 12) in the Temple (Luke 2:41-51) Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover. Luke recounts what happened the year when Jesus was twelve years old. That year after celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem, they began the long journey home, assuming that Jesus was somewhere in the caravan (that could have consisted of a hundred or more people). After the first day's journey home, they began looking for Jesus but didn't find Him among family and acquaintances. Let's pick up Luke's account in Luke 2:45.

45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Mary and Joseph found a striking scene in the temple – the same temple where they had dedicated Jesus. They found Jesus *sitting* in the midst of the teachers. He had the posture of one having authority; in that setting the teacher didn't stand but sat. They found Jesus listening,

asking question, and giving answers to others' questions. They found that all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. The teachers in Jerusalem had never encountered a twelve-year-old boy with the wisdom and understand that Jesus had.

Notice how Luke focuses in on Mary's interaction with Jesus. Mary was clearly hurt and disappointed with Jesus.

48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

She wasn't so impressed that Jesus was amazing to all who heard; she felt mistreated by Jesus. She felt what every parent would feel in such circumstances. Most parents know the fear and panic of realizing that their child is missing; Brenda and I experienced that panic in WalMart and at a K-State football game when our kids were small. Mary wanted Jesus to appreciate that He had caused her and Joseph great anxiety/fear. But notice how Jesus responds to the statement, "Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

If they were expecting an apology, they were sorely disappointed. Not only did they not get an apology; they got questions that implied that they were the ones who lacked understanding. "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" Mary, more than anybody else, knew Who Jesus' *Father* was – and it wasn't Joseph. Jesus was saying that His relationship with His heavenly Father took precedence over His relationship with His earthly parents. On one level Mary probably knew this; but it was a shock that Jesus' identity as the Son of the Most High God would mean that she would need to relinquish some normal expectations that mothers have.

50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Notice that Mary didn't understand the statement Jesus had made to them. And yet she continued to "treasure all these things in her heart." Following Jesus isn't always well-defined; the path isn't always clear. There will be times when we don't understand what Jesus is saying to us or what he is doing in our circumstances. I routinely talk with people who have problems that have no apparent solution. They don't normally come looking for easy answers – which is good because there usually aren't any. Mary teaches us that in such circumstances, we shouldn't give up in frustration. We let the word of Christ richly dwell within us (Colossians 3:16) so that we might one day have clarity and understanding. Sometimes it's enough to hang on.

The second incident we're going to consider today takes places at the wedding at Cana, a small town about eight miles north of Nazareth, where Mary had raised Jesus.

The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) Later in the passage (vv. 9-10) we learn that this scene took place at the home of the man getting married, the groom. Jesus is approximately 30 years old, has already begun His public ministry, and has chosen His twelve disciples.

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; 2 and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

Joseph is nowhere mentioned during Jesus' public ministry. Most scholars conclude that Joseph had died by this time. In verse 3 the focus turns to Mary's interaction with Jesus.

3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

We aren't really sure why Mary took it on herself to address the lack of wine. Perhaps the groom was a relative; perhaps she was catering the wedding banquet. We just don't know. But she turns to Jesus and says, "They have no wine." Clearly she is expecting Jesus to address the situation. We don't know if she expected Him to perform a miracle and produce more wine or if she expected Him to go buy more wine or if she expected Him to inform the guests that the wine had run out. But Jesus' response makes clear that she was expecting Him to do something.

4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."

Calling His mother "woman" isn't as harsh as it sounds to our ears. The terms woman and mother were often interchangeable. But the question itself must have brought Mary up short. Regarding the fact that they'd run out of wine Jesus responds, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." The NIV translates the first line, "why do you involve me?" Jesus made clear that Mary had stepped over a line she shouldn't have. We don't know if Mary had any way of knowing ahead of time that she shouldn't make this request.

Jesus also says, "My hour has not yet come." In the gospel of John, the "hour" was the time when Jesus would be crucified (see 4:21-23, 5:25-28, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 12:27, 13:1, 17:1). We read in John 13:1 that Jesus knew "that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father." I think that Jesus' point is that Mary's ignorance about "the hour" suggested that she shouldn't be giving Him instruction. Since Jesus alone knew the hour of His sacrifice (the timing, the circumstances, the whole plan), it wasn't appropriate for her to give Him instructions. Jesus' words had to be difficult for Mary to hear, but notice how she responded:

5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Mary was learning discipleship – what it means to follow Jesus' lead. Mary deferred to Jesus; she submitted to Jesus; she acknowledged that He was the One who should be calling the shots and driving the action. Mary's comment to the servants was, "Whatever He say to you, do it." What Jesus told them to do was fill six stone water pots (holding 20 or 30 gallons each!) full of water. He then told them to draw out some water and take it to the headwaiter. And the water had become wine. When the headwaiter tasted it, he called the bridegroom over and commented

how people normally serve the best wine first and “when the people have drunk freely” they then serve the poorer wine. But the good wine was served last at that wedding.

John calls this miracle a “sign” (v. 11) to indicate that it pointed to deeper realities. For example, using the water pots normally reserved for Jewish purification rites, Jesus was indicating that the new covenant was replacing the old. The quality of the wine pointed to the superiority of the covenant Jesus had come to establish. Scot McKnight makes this comment:

That sign was triggered when Mary said, “Do whatever he tells you.” We often forget her role here. Jesus did not perform the miracle-become-sign, the water-become-wine, until Mary directed the servants to do whatever Jesus said. Mary meddled in Jesus’ business, Jesus revealed to her that he did only what the Father told him to do and only when the Father wanted it done, and Mary trusted those words of her son. By trusting Jesus, Mary unlocked the doors to a mighty miracle. But, Mary first had to surrender her own honor to her son. The Gospel of John suggests Mary stumbled into this, the way many of us stumble into faith. (*The Real Mary*, p. 70)

That’s the way it happens for us isn’t it? We find ourselves in situations in which our will bumps up against Jesus’ will. Then we have to decide whether we are going to defer to Jesus, submit to Jesus, and say, “Let’s do whatever He says.” For example, perhaps you’re in the midst of a conflict or disagreement with another person. Whether you’re right or wrong, the will of Jesus is that you speak the truth in love, that you are gracious and kind, that you prefer to be hurt rather than hurt others. Those are difficult things, but they’re the will of God. Like Mary, you have to decide whether you’re going to do things Jesus’ way or not.

“Who are My mother and My brothers?” (Mark 3:20-21; 31-35) Here we find a couple of passages that highlight how confusing and difficult Mary’s transition must have been in going from being Jesus’ mother to being Jesus’ disciple. We read in Mark 3:20-21:

20 And He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. 21 And when His own people heard *of this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

Jesus’ “own people” – His family – were so concerned about His mental condition that they set out to take custody of Him. They were intending an intervention of sorts because He was running at such a fast pace and because He was making so many people upset by doing things like healing on the Sabbath and by confronting the Pharisees. “Taking custody of Him” had to be an especially difficult course of action for Mary to land upon because she still believed that Jesus was the Son of God who would sit on the throne of David. But she still believed that she knew better than Jesus what was good for Him. Notice what happened when they finally arrived (Jesus was in Capernaum).

31 And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him, and called Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."

Remember that they have come to “take custody of Him.” Jesus took the opportunity to make a point that emphasized the chasm that existed between Mary’s understanding and His own.

33 And answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" 34 And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! 35 "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Mary needed to know that Jesus’ family wasn’t defined by physical birth. Jesus’ family was defined by “doing the will of God.” Ultimately Mary needed to understand that she needed to be related to Jesus in the same way that all the disciples were. She needed to become His disciple and pursue the will of God as He taught it. As we’ve seen in the Sermon on the Mount this fall, the will of God isn’t always what seems right/fair to us and it doesn’t always correspond to what we’ve always heard.

Let’s consider one more incident: **At the Cross of Jesus (John 19:25-27)** This is the next time we read about Mary – when she is standing at the cross of Jesus.

25 Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

Here we have solid evidence that Mary was at the cross both as His mother and as His disciple. We would have expected Jesus – as the first-born son – to entrust His mother to one of His younger brothers. In John 7 we read that Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe in Him (John 7:5). By entrusting His mother to John’s care, it’s as if He is acknowledging that she is now part of His family (i.e., those who come to the Father through Him, those who do the will of the Father). Jesus had grown up in Mary’s family; now Mary was part of Jesus’ family. Letting go of her maternal desires to protect Jesus and keep Him home proved to be the best thing she could do.

No mother could be asked to submit to anything more difficult than Mary. She had to surrender to the reality that it was the will of God for her son to suffer and die on the cross. A sword pierced her own soul (as Simeon had predicted 33 years earlier). Mary submitted to it all. In Acts 1:14 Mary is listed among the disciples who gathered in the Upper Room. She persevered and modeled a life of surrender.

G.K. Chesterton told a parable about a young boy who was given a choice: “he could be gigantic, or he could be miniscule.” The boy made the choice that almost any little boy would make. He chose to be gigantic – really gigantic. He’s a retelling of Chesterton’s parable by Mark Buchanan.

His head brushed the clouds. He waded the Atlantic like a pond, scooped gray whales into his hand and swished them like tadpoles in the bowl of his palm. He strode in a few bounds from one edge of the continent to the other. He kicked over a range of mountains like an anthill, just because he could and he didn't feel like stepping over it. He plucked a California redwood and whittled its tip for a toothpick. When he got tired, he stretched out across Nebraska and Ohio, flopped one arm into the Dakotas and the other into Canada, and slept in the grass.

It was magnificent. It was spellbinding. It was exhilarating.

For about a day.

And then it was boring. And the gigantic boy, in his boredom, daydreamed about having made the other choice, to be miniscule. His backyard would have become an Amazonian rain forest. His gerbil would hulk larger than a woolly mammoth, and he could ride the back of a butterfly or go spelunking down wormholes. A tub of ice cream would be a winter playground of magic proportions.

Life would have been so much more interesting had he chosen smallness.

(Mark Buchanan in *The Rest of God*, p. 99)

Since God is big, choosing the path of surrender is to choose smallness. When we let go of our grand schemes for how our lives ought to go and our thoughts about what would be best, we enter into this vast reality called "the will of God." John the Baptist understood this. He understood that he had a limited role as the forerunner of the Messiah, and so he said of Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease." This is the life that Mary understood as well.

What issues in your life can be informed by Mary's lifestyle of surrender? Are the relationships in which you need to surrender to the will of God? Maybe you've stumbled into circumstances that you didn't particularly want; now you need to surrender to what God wants. As we enter into our time of response, I'd encourage you to talk with God about the ways in which you need to actively surrender to His will.