

THE WOMEN AT CALVARY

by Martha Sliter Sheeran



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The Women at Calvary

by MARTHA SLITER SHEERAN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

UNKNOWN WOMAN
MARY CLEOPHAS
MARY OF MAGDALA
MARY THE MOTHER
EXTRAS (Woman 1, 2, 3)

PASTOR'S PREFACE

As we approach the climax of our Lenten observance, it is fitting that we concentrate our thoughts on the reality of Good Friday. And we have a unique opportunity today to increase our understanding of the passion and death of our Lord as we listen to a presentation called "The Women at Calvary." Have we ever thought how few of his followers journeyed with him to the crucifixion hill? Have we ever seriously asked ourselves whether we would have been among those faithful few who made that dreadful journey with him or among the many who abandoned him that day? Do we abandon him today or are we staunch and fearless followers of Christ in a world that often rejects his teachings? These are the questions that will surely come to mind as we listen to the voices of an unknown woman and the three Marys who remained at Jesus' side to the very end of his life — the voices of "The Women at Calvary."

1 **UNKNOWN WOMAN:** Afar off we followed him — not close
 2 enough to touch the Master as he made the dreadful
 3 journey to Calvary, but near enough to keep him ever in
 4 sight. We were only a handful of Galilean women, just a
 5 few of the hundreds who sat on the banks of the Lake of
 6 Genesereth many times in the past three years to listen
 7 to him preach.

8 Once there were scores like us, mothers of tall sons,
 9 young maidens, old and feeble widows, who trudged
 10 along the dusty roads of Galilee to follow his footsteps.
 11 But today only a few of us followed his bloodstained path
 12 to the crucifixion hill.

13 Some, like myself, had children who had sat upon
 14 his knee. Others had been honored by his presence in
 15 their homes. Still another had been cured by the touch
 16 of his hand to her sightless eyes.

17 But where were the rest who had listened to his
 18 Word and evidenced their deep belief in his teachings?
 19 Where were those who so shortly before had hailed him
 20 as their King and led him triumphantly into Jerusalem,
 21 singing their hosannas before him? Where were those in
 22 whose behalf he had performed his wondrous miracles?

23 With all Jerusalem ringing with the story of his
 24 capture, what paltry excuses kept those hundreds of
 25 women followers from rushing to their Master's side?

26 **1st WOMAN:** I was busy with the preparations for the feast,
 27 and therefore I could not leave my home.

28 **2nd WOMAN:** My children required my constant attention,
 29 and therefore I could not come.

30 **3rd WOMAN:** My husband deemed it unseemly for a wife to
 31 be seen in public places, and therefore I kept to my house.

32 **UNKNOWN WOMAN:** And this excuse — "I was afraid of
 33 what might happen to his followers. Therefore I
 34 barricaded my dwelling and knelt inside and prayed for
 35 him." For fear of bodily harm or personal inconvenience,

1 all but a handful of women missed sharing in the Passion
2 of their Lord.

3 But what of the men? What of the scores who had
4 talked boldly of establishing his kingdom? Why did they
5 make no attempt to rescue the man they had acclaimed
6 as their King not five days before?

7 Were they also too engrossed in the business of
8 procuring unleavened bread and preparing supper
9 rooms for the Passover feast that night? Were some at
10 the marketplace? Or had terror seized upon all hearts?

11 Those were thoughts that puzzled us as we trudged
12 toward Calvary. And where were the twelve Apostles
13 whom we expected to see in the very shadow of the cross
14 itself? Only John was visible, with Mary the mother
15 leaning sorrowfully on his arm.

16 True, the story was passing wildly through
17 Jerusalem that Judas the Iscariot had betrayed Jesus to
18 the high priests in the Garden of Olives, but where were
19 the other ten? At every moment we expected them to
20 appear, possibly with a troop of Galileans who would try
21 to save our Master. Hopefully, we scanned every
22 crossroad, but far or near, not one Galilean, not Simon
23 Peter, nor any other Apostle showed himself. Only
24 women followers made up the mournful column behind
25 the cross-bearers — Mary, his mother, Mary of Magdala,
26 Mary Cleophas, and we faithful Galilean women.

27 It was Mary Cleophas who kept looking down the
28 streets we passed, vainly searching for the help we
29 wanted so desperately for the Master. We could see from
30 the anguish in her face, as she kept looking backward
31 through the ever-growing crowd, that she still clung to
32 the hope of seeing at least one familiar Galilean face in
33 all that mob of pushing men.

34 **MARY CLEOPHAS:** Where are my sons? Where are my
35 kinsmen? For three years men of Galilee have gathered

by the scores at our house in Capernaum to listen to the Master's words. They have crossed after him into the hill country and into the cities, helping him, ministering to him, believing in him. But today, when he is falsely condemned to death on a cross, only John is by his side. Judas, they say, has betrayed him. Simon Peter has denied him. And the other nine have deserted him in the hour in which they could have finally proved their great faith in him.

Three times he has fallen on this hot and dirty road to Calvary. And there have been none of his man-followers to lift him gently to his feet. Even the Roman centurion realized that Jesus could no longer carry the cross alone. And it is a Cyrenean named Simon — a stranger — who now bears that burden. Where was the believer to rush up and seize the cross from that bleeding shoulder? Oh my sons and my kinsmen, why have you deserted him?

The number of jeering and curious men has multiplied again and again as we travel toward the hill, but not one friendly man has joined our sorrowing retinue. It is only the women who meet the Master with compassion.

Except for John, it was only women who were with his holy mother when he met her at the outskirts of the city on the first lap of this dreadful journey. It was a woman — Veronica they called her — who darted from her home and fearlessly stopped the procession to wipe the blood and sweat-stained face of Jesus with a linen cloth. The impression of that sweet and anguished countenance was instantly imprinted upon her towel, but there were only women to bow their heads before it.

Farther along the way, the Master was stopped again, not by friends or relatives, but by a group of weeping woman of Jerusalem who openly lamented the

1 disaster that has befallen him. "Weep not for me," Jesus
 2 told them, "but for yourselves and for your children." Ah
 3 yes, weep for Jerusalem this unhappy day that is bringing
 4 the Son of God to his death. Weep for those who accuse
 5 and slay him, but weep again for those who heard his
 6 words and turned away. Their names are legion, and the
 7 names of the faithful are few, but those few names shall
 8 ring throughout the centuries to come.

9 UNKNOWN WOMAN: At last we reached Golgotha, our
 10 sorrowing little group and the mocking crowd of
 11 unbelievers. Ahead were Jesus and the two notorious
 12 thieves who were to be crucified on either side of him.
 13 There was great confusion on the hill. Everything was
 14 done in frantic haste as the high priests had insisted that
 15 the Master die before sunset since the next day was the
 16 Sabbath.

17 We had great difficulty in reaching the spot where
 18 they prepared to crucify him, but somehow John and his
 19 blessed mother and the other Marys managed to get near
 20 enough that he could gaze upon them. We could see Mary
 21 of Magdala kneeling on the ground, almost prostrate in
 22 her grief.

23 MARY OF MAGDALA: They are nailing him to a cross, and
 24 it is I, Mary of Magdala, who is driving every nail. For
 25 my sins, he will hang in agony above the ground until
 26 his body succumbs to death. For my willfulness, he was
 27 scourged and mocked. For my vanity, he was spit upon
 28 and blasphemed. For my base pleasures, he still wears a
 29 crown of thorns. Though he has forgiven the iniquity of
 30 my pleasure-driven days at Magdala, still he must suffer
 31 this ignominy to expiate them.

32 I, and all the other sinning men and women for
 33 generations past and generations yet to come, have
 34 brought my Lord to this hill of pain and humiliation.
 35 There are hundreds of thousands, yes, even millions upon

1 millions of sinners for whom this precious blood is being
 2 spilled, but oh so few of us are here today to share his
 3 agony and to ask for his forgiveness. All about him, men
 4 he is dying to save are mocking and cursing him. "Bah,"
 5 they shout, "He claims to be King, yet he cannot even
 6 save himself. Let him come down from the cross if he be
 7 King."

8 The thieves on either side are writhing and howling
 9 in agony, and the Roman soldiers go about their ghastly
 10 business of nailing Jesus to the cross with a total lack of
 11 humanity. But from my Lord comes only these tender
 12 words, "Father, forgive them! They know not what they
 13 do!" He, who readily forgave the sins of a scarlet woman,
 14 can just as readily grant forgiveness to the men who
 15 cause his death. The litany of human sins is long, but his
 16 forgiveness extends to all.

17 Oh, world, will you not learn a lesson from this bitter
 18 day, and cast out sins of lust and greed and inhumanity
 19 that nailed him to a cross? He hangs there now, raised
 20 with a jolt that rocked the hill. His eyes are glazed, his
 21 head is bent, his blood is staining the ground at my feet.
 22 Oh, world, think often of this blood-stained hill of
 23 Golgotha!

24 UNKNOWN WOMAN: A great darkness descended at noon
 25 on this terrible day just at the time the cross was raised
 26 to the sky. It was as though it were midnight instead of
 27 midday. Some of the crowd became frightened and ran
 28 away and it was easier for us to push our way through
 29 the soldiers and onlookers to the very foot of the cross,
 30 just behind Mary the mother, John, and the other Marys.
 31 We could do nothing but watch his agony which became
 32 more and more intense as the hours passed. His mother
 33 stood upright the entire time, never taking her eyes from
 34 the sacred, bloodstained face of her Son.

35 MARY THE MOTHER: Oh, my Son, I know it was for this hour

1 you came into the world; for this hour you were born of
 2 my flesh. In a little while your mission here on earth will
 3 have been fulfilled and the redemption of mankind
 4 accomplished. Your agony and the anguish of those here
 5 who love you are necessary for that accomplishment, and
 6 to that end I humbly submit myself to the will of God.

7 My mother-heart grieves for your agony, my Son,
 8 and it grieves for all mankind who has brought this agony
 9 upon you. A few moments ago you looked down upon me
 10 from that cross of pain and spoke through your parched
 11 lips, "Woman, behold thy Son! Son, behold thy mother!"

12 As I stand here, watching the last drops of your blood
 13 stain the ground at my feet, my Son, I suddenly know
 14 what you would have me become. A bridge between the
 15 world and you. The time for asking myself "Why me?" —
 16 as I have for nearly thirty-four years — is past. The time
 17 for complete acceptance of your plan for me in relation
 18 to you and your world is at hand. I wish all men to come
 19 could see that plan as you are revealing it to me in this
 20 darkest hour of my heart. But they will not. Some will
 21 venerate me for your sake. A few will make the terrible
 22 error giving me the adoration that belongs to you alone.
 23 Other will repudiate me, even as they have this day
 24 repudiated you. Many will continue to refuse to believe
 25 in the power and the glory of the Son of God who dies
 26 today for all mankind on this cross at Calvary. Blind men,
 27 for unborn generations, will refuse to accept you though
 28 you die this hour to save them from the eternal
 29 damnation of hell. Nevertheless, my dearly-loved Son, at
 30 your word let me help lead them to everlasting union
 31 with you in heaven.

32 **UNKNOWN WOMAN:** From the foot of the cross we watched
 33 with him — Mary his mother, the other Mary, and a
 34 handful of nameless Galilean women. Powerless to do
 35 more than offer him the comfort of our presence, yet we

1 remained on the hill even after that beloved head
 2 dropped and became lifeless. Our place was at his feet
 3 though the earth quaked and great fissures appeared in
 4 the ground. Long after the fleeing crowd had carried its
 5 terror into the city of Jerusalem, we remained to watch
 6 and pray and minister to his bruised and broken body.
 7 And when they laid him gently in the tomb, we still stood
 8 by — the mother, the penitent, and the sorrowing women
 9 who shared — for all the world — the bitter Passion of
 10 their Lord.
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33 *NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the left margin*
 34 *of each page of dialogue are for the convenience of the director.*
 35 *With these, he/she may easily direct attention to a specific passage.*



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