

WHY DID JESUS CALL HIS MOTHER "WOMAN"?

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Some time ago, someone sent me a piece of email in which they  
asked me the following interesting question:

----- Begin Quote -----

Why did Jesus call his mother "woman"?

----- End Quote -----

To express the above more completely, the underlying thought  
in this person's question was really the following:

Why did Jesus address Mary as "woman", instead of as  
"mother"? Was Jesus showing disrespect for His mother for  
some unknown reason?

If this were indeed the case -- which I will hopefully prove  
it is not -- then Jesus, who Himself tells us in Matthew 5:17  
that He came to fulfill, or complete, the Mosaic Law, would  
have been doing something which was totally contrary to the  
Law. Why? Because the Law repeatedly states the following:

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long  
upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

Exodus 20:12, KJV

Therefore, we must conclude that there must be some other unseen reason regarding why Jesus treated His mother in that fashion on that particular day.

As I have stated a few times before in my articles, there are instances when I simply don't know how to respond to a certain question. Sometimes, this is because the question has never been presented to me before, and thus I have never been forced to give any thought to that particular subject. In such cases, my natural reaction is to pray in my heart, and then to begin searching the Scriptures in order to find a valid response to the question. While our human thoughts may sometimes lead us into error, a diligent study of God's Word will eventually, and always, lead us to the truth. As Jesus Himself said, and as the Apostle Paul would later be inspired to write to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy:

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."  
John 17:17, KJV

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."  
2 Timothy 2:15, KJV

Quite often, what happens is that once I begin to give my attention to a particular matter, certain verses will begin to enter my head. We Christians like to refer to this kind of experience as listening to the "Voice of the Spirit". As Jesus stated in the Gospel of John:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."  
John 14:26, KJV

So again, quite often, the Voice of the Holy Spirit will provide me with just the right answer that I -- and some of my readers -- both need. Such is the case with this current question concerning Jesus and Mary. I hope that you will be satisfied with my response.

One clear example where Jesus refers to his mother, Mary, as

"woman", is found in John chapter two, where we witness the Lord performing His very first recorded public miracle, in Cana of Galilee. As many of you will no doubt already know, it was on that occasion that Jesus converted plain drinking water into top quality wine, so much so that the host of the marriage feast was amazed that they had held the best wine until last of all. After His mother presents the problem to Him -- that is, a shortage of wine -- Jesus responds to her in the following manner:

". . . Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

John 2:4, KJV

In saying this, my impression is that Jesus may possibly have been testing His mother's faith, just as He likewise did with other people prior to healing them of a certain affliction. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that, even though He had just told Mary that His time to be revealed to Israel as the Messiah was not yet come, He went ahead and performed the miracle anyway.

In the previous verse, the word "woman" is translated from the Greek work "'gune". Pronounced 'goo-nay', it means a woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow, a wife, or a betrothed woman.

Obviously, Jesus loved His mother, Mary, very much. So why does He refer to her as "woman", instead of calling her "mother", which would surely have been more indicative of His personal love and respect for her?

My personal thoughts regarding the matter are the following. Upon reading other Scriptures, we come to understand that, being the Son of God, who had come to the Earth in order to fulfill a very specific purpose -- that is, to complete God's Plan of Salvation and Redemption -- Jesus had a much greater vision. That is, He had a vision for His Father's worldwide spiritual family. This family is comprised of the billions of souls, who throughout time, have come to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior; thus fulfilling the Will of God in their lives, by becoming the adopted sons and daughters of God. This is a subject which I discuss more fully in articles such as "Is Jesus the Only Begotten Son of God?" and "Not Everyone Is A Child of God". For the time being, however, please consider

the following verses:

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."  
John 6:40, KJV

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"  
John 1:12, KJV

"And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."  
Luke 20:34-36, KJV

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."  
Romans 8:15-17, KJV

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."  
Galatians 3:26, KJV

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,"  
Ephesians 1:5, KJV

This radical concept of a worldwide Spiritual Family of God taking precedence over individual human families is further substantiated by the following additional verses found in the New Testament. It is interesting to note, that in the first group of verses, the Lord's mother is again the topic of the conversation:

"Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Matthew 12:47-50, KJV

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"

Ephesians 2:19, KJV

As can be seen then, the private human family is required to take second place to God's "Universal Family", which has been founded upon the precious Blood of His own dear Son. While it may be difficult for some people to understand, it may also be for this very same reason, that Jesus likewise made the following startling remarks found in the Gospels:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

Matthew 10:34-38, KJV

"And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Matthew 19:29, KJV

"Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death."

Mark 13:12, KJV

"Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell

you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law."

Luke 12:51-53, KJV

The previous verses make it quite clear, that in matters of faith and allegiance, our Heavenly Father expects each of His born-again children to be true to Him, as well as to our Universal Spiritual Family, first; even above our loyalty to our flesh families. In fact, Jesus makes it very clear, that in some cases, our very own families will literally fight against us, because of our faith in Him. In the case of the first Jewish Disciples, they were literally disowned, and pronounced "dead" by their parents, if they embraced the young, new Christian faith. Have we not seen this very same thing occurring in our own time as well, in both Jewish and Gentile families alike? Some parents would prefer that their children were strung out on drugs, rather than have them embrace Christianity. It is truly a sad, blind world in which we live.

In spite of the fact that Jesus taught such strong doctrine, and in spite of the fact that He had a far-reaching vision for the Universal Family of God, or "household of God" as Paul calls it, nevertheless, one of His final actions prior to His death on the Cross, was to pronounce something which would fully reveal His deep love and concern for His own dear mother, Mary.

You see, from the very moment that Jesus was conceived in His mother's womb, God knew that Mary was destined to face a life filled not only with intense joy, but also with intense personal suffering, as her son went about fulfilling His Divine Mission. It is for this reason that God inspired the old man Simeon to say the following to her in the Temple, eight days after Jesus had been born:

"(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Luke 2:35, KJV

Some thirty-three years later, just prior to a Roman spear being thrust into His own side, as He hung on the Cross dying for the sins of the world, in a symbolic sense, Jesus finally removed the sword from His mother's sad heart. While Mary was temporarily losing her physical son, in order that He might fulfill His Father's Will, Jesus did not want her to be left alone. He wanted to fill the aching void in her heart. Thus it is that He spoke the following words to Mary, and to the young disciple who was standing next to her at the foot of the Cross, who many Christians assume was the young disciple John:

". . . 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."

John 19:26b-27, KJV

Here again, we see Jesus addressing his mother as "woman". Yet it is very plain to see that rather than being intended to express disrespect towards Mary, it is used to express His deepest love and compassion for her. That love is fully manifested by His giving her another son to take His place: the young disciple John. It is because of this great love and compassion which Jesus bestowed upon her, that Mary was probably able to endure her grief. And who knows; perhaps deep in her heart, in spite of her great sorrow, she also felt a certain degree of personal satisfaction; knowing that she had played an integral part in helping to fulfill God's Will for the ultimate benefit of all of humanity.

But Mary's grief was indeed very short-lived; because only three days later, her deep sorrow was converted into truly unspeakable joy, when she learned of the Risen Saviour. In describing Mary's wonderful encounter with her risen son, the Apostle Matthew describes her as "the other Mary". This seems to be a reference to something he said ten verses earlier where he describes her as "Mary the mother of James and Joses". As I point out in the article "The Family Life Of Jesus Christ: Did Jesus Have Siblings?", we also know from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, that Jesus had four brothers, and at least two sisters. Two of those brothers were named James and Joses.

Thus, putting all of the following verses together, we are given the impression that not only was Mary present at her

son's Crucifixion, but that also, along with Mary Magdalene, she was one of the very first people to see Jesus following His victory over death; and how appropriate indeed. Consider the following verses:

"Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?"

Matthew 13:55, KJV

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him."

Mark 6:3, KJV

"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 Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children."

Matthew 27:55-56, KJV

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre."

Matthew 28:1, KJV

Following Jesus' Ascension to Heaven, which is described for us in the very first chapter of the Book of Acts, we discover that, despite her advancing age, Mary apparently continued to participate to some degree in the ministry of the Apostles, first begun by her son. The Apostle Luke writes for us the following account:

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

Acts 1:12-14, KJV

Thus, truly, through both unimaginable pain, and joy beyond



all measure, Mary was indeed blessed above all women who have ever lived on the face of the Earth. To this day, she remains for us an excellent example of love, dedication and faithful perseverance. Yet, as I also point out in such articles as "Mary Worship, Roman Catholicism And Christianity", we must also guard ourselves against setting her up as an idol, or worse yet, referring to her as some sort of "Co-Redemptress" or "Co-Mediatrix", as the Roman Catholics have erroneously done. Mary was undoubtedly a wonderful woman, to have been chosen by God to be His vessel. Yet still, we must remember that she was only a woman like any other. She was a fellow human being born in sin. Thus, in no way can she merit by her own works, the title of mediator between God and man. That title is reserved alone for the Lord Jesus Christ, as we are told by the Apostle Paul in this verse:

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;"

1 Timothy 2:5, KJV

Jesus paid for our Salvation with His Blood. Therefore, He alone is our Eternal High Priest and Advocate before the Throne of the Father in the Heavenly Courts. Let us not forget that. As we are told in the Scriptures:

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, KJV

"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men."

1 Corinthians 7:23, KJV

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:28, KJV

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

1 John 3:16, KJV

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8, KJV

By believing the Angel's words, and accepting her son as the Saviour of the world, Mary became a part of God's greater Family; His Spiritual Family, His Divine Household, which is comprised of born-again believers the world over. This great family knows no genetic boundaries, or national borders. For we are all one in Christ Jesus, because we are each covered by His Blood. As the Apostle Paul also wrote:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:28, KJV

So in conclusion, this may be why Jesus constantly referred to Mary as "woman", and not as "mother" in the Scriptures; because while He loved her dearly, He viewed her as a part of God's greater Universal Family.

With these thoughts I will bring this article to a close. I hope that you have found it informative, and I pray that it has been a blessing and an inspiration in your life. If you have enjoyed reading this article, please consider sharing its URL with your online friends. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or with any other social network, I would also appreciate if you would take the time to click on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of them are also located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server:

Abortion: The Slaughter of the Innocent

Biblical Marriage Ceremonies

Cain's Wife: Where Did She Come From?

Five Foolish Virgins: Don't Procrastinate!

Mary Worship, Christianity and Roman Catholicism

Not Everyone is a Child of God

Remember Lot's Wife: What Was Her Fate?

The Family Life of Jesus Christ: Did Jesus Have Siblings?

The Fruit of the Womb

The Heavenly Vision: Have You Got It?  
Women in the Lives of Jesus and the Apostles

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