

Good Friday—2018

“The Cross-Road of Life”

(3/30/18)

Mark 15:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. ²² And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.

It’s interesting how a person’s life can change when they least expect it.

They get up one morning and start the day like they have every other day of their adult life—when suddenly something happens that changes them in a way they never could have imagined.

This was the testimony of a man named Simon who lived in Cyrene—a city in North Africa in what is now the country of Libya.

Simon was a common Jewish name, and in all probability this man was a pilgrim who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

What Simon couldn’t have known when he got up that morning was how, before the day was done, he was not going to be the same man.

Something was going to happen that day that would forever change him—profoundly and irreversibly.

You see, his path that day was going to intersect with the path of another Man, a Man he probably never heard of—a Man named Jesus of Nazareth.

It would happen suddenly and without warning—but the end result would be that Simon’s life would be totally transformed.

I have called this message—“*The Cross-Road of Life*”.

The dictionary defines ‘crossroad’ as: “*The place where roads intersect; A point at which a vital decision must be made.*”

Now let me give you some background to set this message up.

As I just said, Simon was probably a Jew who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

It was the dream of every Jew to be able to go to Jerusalem once during their lifetime to observe the Passover—and he had probably scraped and saved for many years in order to make this trip.

While he was there taking in the sights he suddenly heard a commotion and when he turned to see what was going on—he saw a crowd and leading the crowd was a Roman soldier holding a placard that read: “*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*”.

Whenever a person was condemned to die by crucifixion the soldiers would make a procession to where the execution was to take place.

Making up this procession there would be four soldiers—one in front holding the sign that had written on it the crime or crimes the person had been convicted of (in Jesus’ case that He was the leader of an insurrection proclaiming Himself King of the Jews).

So, one soldier in front holding the sign, two on either side of the prisoner who was carrying his cross and then one soldier behind the prisoner.

The soldiers would purposely take a circuitous route through the city to where the crucifixion was to take place.

They did this so that as many people as possible would see the prisoner, the crime he had been convicted of and the punishment that was about to be carried out.

This was designed by the Roman government to strike fear in the hearts of others and cause them to think twice before going against Rome.

No doubt by this point Jesus was already physically drained—remember He had been up all night.

Furthermore, He had been beaten unmercifully the night before by the guards of the priests and then by the Roman soldiers—not to mention the tremendous amount of blood He had lost thru the scourging.

All of this combined to rob Him of His strength so that it wasn't physically possible for Him to carry that 150 to 200-pound cross up to Golgotha (Mount Calvary).

And so as Simon stood there watching this death march, he saw the soldier marching with the sign, "*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*", he saw Jesus stumble under the weight of His cross and when He could no longer carry it—he suddenly felt one of the soldiers lay the flat part of his sword on his shoulder.

Roman law stated that if a soldier laid the flat part of his sword upon your shoulder he could "*compel*" you (press you into service) to carry either the soldier's gear one mile or in this case—a condemned criminal's cross.

That was Roman law and you couldn't argue or refuse.

It was based on this law that Jesus said, "*If they compel you to go one mile, go two*" (Matthew 5:41).

In other words, you must go one mile by *compulsion* go another mile for *compassion*—compassion for a lost soul—in other words as a witness to him. (Explain)

And so, this Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Christ—a tremendous imposition to say the least!

And at that moment, Simon must have bitterly resented it—he must have hated those soldiers and hated this criminal whose cross he was being forced to carry.

It was probably his intention, when he got to Golgotha, to fling the cross down on the ground and leave as quickly as possible so he could resume his life and get back to what he wanted to do.

However, I don't think that's what happened—I believe he stayed.

I believe something about Jesus compelled him to stick around—something about Jesus caused Simon to *want* to stay with Him.

How interesting that Simon had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (Acts 2:10; 6:9), and he ended up meeting the Passover Lamb!

This was a meeting Simon hadn't planned on but as his path crossed with Jesus' path—his life would be forever changed.

In many ways the Holy Spirit is holding up Simon as an illustration of how a person's life can suddenly intersect with Jesus when they least expect it and at that point—the Holy Spirit will seek to compel them to take up the cross and follow Jesus (unlike Simon who had no choice—we do).

Mark tells us that Simon was “... *coming out of the country and passing by*” (Mark 15:21).

It's interesting to me how Simon was going about his business not knowing how dramatically his life was about to change as he was suddenly introduced to Jesus.

This was the spiritual turning point in Simon's life.

No one can bear the cross of Christ without experiencing a radical change in the direction of their life. (Mention my testimony)

Luke 9:23 (NKJV)

²³ Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Simon's desires and plans had to be denied for Jesus sake—but bearing the cross always means saying no to self and yes to Him.

And even though Simon only carried Jesus' cross literally that day for an hour or two—he wound up carrying the cross figuratively for the rest of his life.

Jesus said that before we take up the cross and seek to follow Him—we must count the cost.

It begs the question—what has it cost you and me to carry our crosses for Him?

When James Calvert, the Methodist missionary, went out to cannibal Fiji with the message of the gospel in the 1800's, the captain of the ship in which he traveled sought to dissuade him—*"You will risk your life and all those with you if you go among such savages,"* he said.

Calvert's reply was priceless—*"We died before we came here."*

When native missionaries in India attempt to reach a new village they always dig their grave on the outskirts of town before going in to preach the gospel. (Explain)

In China believers are martyred all the time but the song that Chinese believers sing in face of this kind of persecution is *"How glorious it is to die for Jesus."*

In fact, a person can't even be a pastor of an underground church in China until they have been—

1. Imprisoned for preaching the gospel publicly.

2. Preach in prison and start a church there.

Only then, when released, are they ordained as a pastor.

So let me ask the question again—*"What has it cost us to follow Jesus?"*—and have we paid the price with joy?

Why *did* Simon stay when he got to Mt. Calvary?

Why didn't he throw the cross on the ground and leave to carry on with his life and plans—I personally believe it was because Jesus had talked with him.

I mean—can you even imagine that Jesus wouldn't have talked with Simon about Who He was (Messiah) and why He had come into the world?

I believe the Lord told him that even as Simon had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover—that at that very moment, Jesus, the true Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, was on His way to die so that the judgment of God upon guilty sinners would 'pass-over' all who would receive Him as their Savior and King.

How *could* Simon leave after all that? How could he go back to *his* plans?

When a person truly has an encounter with the living Christ—he or she can never go back to the way things were—they can never leave the presence of Jesus to go back to their old life.

We have good reason to believe that Simon trusted in Jesus as his Savior that day and went home and led his whole family to the Lord.

This man was so transformed by the cross of Christ that the blessing of the cross overflowed onto his entire family.

He is described in Mark's gospel as "*the father of Alexander and Rufus*".

Simon and his family must have been so well-known to the Christians Mark addressed in his gospel that they would have known immediately who he was referring to by simply mentioning his sons—Alexander and Rufus.

It is most likely that *Mark's* gospel was first written for the Church at Rome.

If you look at the closing benediction of Paul's letter to the Romans, in 16:13 we read, "*Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine*".

Rufus was such a strong Christian that Paul singles him and his mother out for special mention—in fact so dear was his mother (Simon's wife) to Paul that he referred to her as his *own* mother.

Simon's encounter with Jesus on the road to Calvary not only saved him but his wife and his two sons—and Lord knows how many others.

What a home this must have been!

Today, the only answer to the problems in the home is cross-bearing.

Only when the power of the cross penetrates the relationships of husband and wife, parents and children, is there authority, stability, and security in the home.

And when I talk about the power of the cross I'm talking about the sacrificial love of self-denial. (Explain)

In Acts 13:1 there is a list of the men of Antioch who sent Paul and Barnabas out on their first missionary journey—the name of one is *Simeon* who was called *Niger*.

Simeon is another form of *Simon*. *Niger* is a word that means 'black' and was the regular surname given to those with dark skin who came from Africa—and Cyrene is in Africa.

This could very well be the Simon that carried Jesus cross to Golgotha—he not only got saved but became a leader in the church in Antioch and instrumental in the first missionary outreach to the Gentiles.

Could it be that we Gentiles in this room are in some way the fruit of Simon of Cyrene's ministry?

All because one day, to his bitter resentment, he was forced to carry the cross of a condemned Roman prisoner named Jesus?

The lesson is this, when you pick up the cross and follow Jesus—not only will your life be forever changed, it will impact and change those around you—especially your spouse and your children.

Jesus said that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies (germinates) it stays a single grain of wheat—but if it dies it produces much fruit. (Explain)

Conclusion

Jesus is still looking for “Simon's” who will take up His cross and follow Him to Golgotha (Calvary).

To heed His call is to become a blessing to your generation in your home, in the church, and in the world.

We cannot adequately present a crucified Christ without a crucified life—which means absolute surrender to His will and purposes.

Young people can I encourage you to fight the temptation to approach your Christianity with a “*What's in it for me?*” mentality? (Elaborate)

Don't just sing about the cross. Don't just wear a cross—bear the cross of Christ!