

On the Way to Calvary

Matthew 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-33; John 19:16-17

“What happened is important: Why it happened is also important, if you hope to go to heaven.”
Warren Wiersbe

“Today we think of the cross as a symbol of glory and victory, but in Pilate’s day, the cross stood for the basest kind of rejection, shame, and suffering. It was Jesus who made the difference.” Warren Wiersbe

“We speak so often of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that it becomes almost trite for the average believer. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is one of the most dastardly, infamous points in history. Yet, this is our redemption. We need to pause here and look at it from various points of view.

From the standpoint of God, the cross is a propitiation (action to appease our guilt). It is the mercy seat where God can extend mercy to you and to me. It is the place where full satisfaction was made so that a holy, righteous God can reach down and save sinners. The very throne of God, the place of judgment, is transformed into the place of mercy where you and I can find mercy instead of the judgment we deserve. Jesus Christ bore our guilt, and God is satisfied.

From the standpoint of the Lord Jesus, it is a sacrifice. He is the Savior, and He makes Himself an offering for sin. He is a sweet-smelling savor to God. It is also an act of obedience for Him. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:8 that he became obedient to death even the death of the cross.

From the standpoint of you and me, believers in Christ Jesus, it was a substitution. He took my place and He took your place. He was the sinless One suffering for the sinner. He was the just One suffering for the unjust. “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” I Peter 2:24

From the standpoint of Satan, it was a triumph and also a defeat. It was a triumph for Satan to bruise the heel of the woman’s seed as had been foretold way back in Genesis 3. It was a defeat because the head of Satan is yet to be crushed: “...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Hebrews 2:14” J Vernon McGee p. 491-492

On the Way to Calvary – Three Events

I. Simon, a Cyrenian This event is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

“And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple (“robe” Matt. 27:31) from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him. (“And he bearing his cross” John 19:16) (“they came out, they found a man” Matt. 27:32) And they compel one (“laid hold upon” Luke 23:26) Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, (“him they compelled” Matt. 27:32) to bear his cross (“after Jesus.” Luke 23:26) Mark 15:20-21

“led him out to crucify him.” – Crucifixion was passed down to Rome from the Persians, Phoenicians, and Carthaginians. It was a lingering doom by design, a slow and painful torture. Many were simply eaten alive by wild beasts and birds. The Romans biggest feature was the disgrace attached to death on a cross. (Gal. 3:13; 5:11; Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:8) Warren Wiersbe says, “Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful way to execute a criminal. Jesus did not simply die; He died “Even the death of a cross.” p. 82 Crucifixion was not only used as an execution but a very visual deterrent to crime and rebellion. Usually two days would pass before executions and probably had for Barabbas and the two criminals with him, but not in the case for Jesus. This scheduled crucifixion had to be done in a faster time frame than most. Normally victims would literally

hang on a cross for days before succumbing to death. But these crucifixions had to be done within about six hours because of the “high Sabbath” the next day.

“he bearing his cross” – Gk – personal death instrument Those to be executed would be tied to the cross bar and then made to carry it to the crucifixion sight. These could weigh as much as 200 pounds and part of the disgrace was having to carry your own form of execution. A placard with the indictment would be hung around their neck or a soldier would carry it before them. John, most likely an eyewitness to this event, tells us that Jesus started to carry the cross. It seems by the time they arrived at the city gate His strength was gone. The trip to the execution sight probably was up to a mile. The beatings, dehydration, loss of blood, exhaustion from the last hours had taken it’s toll even for a young man in His prime!

“Simon, a Cyrenian,” – Colonies of Jews lived throughout the known world. They had their own neighborhoods, synagogues, elders, and held their cultural events. During religious festivals many would seek to travel to Jerusalem to take part in the Holy Days at their beloved temple! A large group of Jews were in North Africa in the area of Cyrene. We can even surmise that when Joseph and Mary fled Bethlehem when Jesus was two years old, they stayed those years in a colony such as the one in Cyrene. Apparently, some of these Cyrenian Jews had migrated back to Jerusalem but because of their unique culture and bond, they had their own synagogue within Jerusalem. (Acts 6:9)

Simon of Cyrene is an obscure man mentioned in three gospels. It is not too much speculation to say that he would have been a highly religious man, for he had made the 800-mile trip from North Africa to Jerusalem to enjoy the Passover that year with other Jews. That alone would have been quit an undertaking! We know the city was packed with visitors and many stayed outside the city in small camps or area villages. Careful reading of the passages indicate he was coming into the city, perhaps to be part of the daily morning prayer to be offered at the Temple. Mark 15:22 reads, “And they bring him (Gk – carry, supported, bear) unto the place Golgotha,” this indicates Jesus was no longer able to carry the cross, or perhaps he couldn’t carry it fast enough! This verse in the Greek tells us that the soldiers had to help Jesus to the place of execution. Remember, there was a tight time period to get these executions carried out!

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus referred to the Roman practice of “compelled force service” in the aid of carrying a load. Matt. 5:41 Jesus’ heart in this matter was to go twice as far! So the saying, “Go the extra mile” when given a task! The Greek terms are exactly letting us know the Roman soldiers had randomly taken Simon from the crowd to carry the cross of Jesus! (“found a man”- randomly, “compelled”- requisitioned, forced to carry book of Matthew; “compel” – forced book of Mark; “laid hold upon”- seized book of Luke) Simon of Cyrene would have seen this as a terrible fate. What made this man stand out in the crowd? Was it his size, age, color? Some have thought he could have been a black Jewish proselyte. (Acts 13:1) A native of Cyrene converting to Judaism. Perhaps, but most theologians don’t believe it to be so. But whatever his background or color, the beauty of the Passover season, the joy he had found in his pilgrimage, the anticipation and wonder of the day was just stolen from him by the soldiers! This was a humiliating nightmare on the most holy of days! But we all know, that in reality, it turned out to be a wonderful privilege! Simeon Peter had boasted to Jesus that he would go with Jesus to prison and to death! But it was Simon of Cyrene that actually did! He had contact with the real Sacrificial Lamb!

The book of Mark was written to Roman audience and Mark is the gospel writer who mentions Simon being, “the father of Alexander and Rufus”. The text treats the readers as ones who knew of whom he wrote. Rom. 16:13 Theologians agree, Simon’s sons must have been well known in the early church! Acts 11:19-20 also speak of a great missionary effort by the Jews from Cyrene! That day in Jerusalem it seems that Simon had religion and devotion but after Jesus he had Truth and Salvation! Only a few minutes of Simon’s life is known, but yet, it seems that in those few humiliating moments, he came to know the Lamb of God. And took home to

Cyrene the truth of the real Sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the world! Warren Wiersbe said, “God can still use unexpected and difficult situations, even humiliating situations, to bring people to the Savior.” p.220 What a wonderful glimpse that the Gospel writers gave us 2000 years later, about a random, religious man who seemingly came to know Christ on the way to Calvary!

II. Daughters of Jerusalem This event is unique to the book of Luke.

“And there followed him great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” Luke 23:27-31

“great company of people” – As we learned with Simeon of Cyrene, the city was awake and moving. People were coming and going through the city. As the ugly procession made its way to the place of execution a large group followed Jesus—not just saw, stopped, or gazed but specifically tells us that they “followed him”. I think it would be safe to think that this group would be like any group that followed Jesus throughout the past three years---a mixed group! And if we look ahead to the people at the foot of the cross, we can get a good idea of who was following the procession that morning.

- Religious Leaders – They would continue their mocking and now gloating at the accomplishment of seeing Jesus crucified. Remember, they had worked very hard to get Him there! They would not miss any part of this triumph! Also, they would need to do damage control to the placard Pilate wrote.
- Curious Spectators – They were always with Jesus! Ready to see or hear what He might say. This was a high-profile execution. Even the bandits hanging with Jesus were notorious in the area of Jerusalem.
- Followers/Sympathetic People – Jesus had preached to thousands, healed the ill, and battled the Religious System for three years. People knew of Him. That week He had come into Jerusalem in a triumphal parade; He had preached and taught in the temple—after He had cleansed it! The city knew Jesus! And now He was on His way to a cross---orchestrated in the night by the Sanhedrin! People turned out!

“Daughters of Jerusalem” – The Scripture simply identifies “and of woman”. Who were they? We really don’t know. They are not named as those with John at the foot of the cross. All four Gospel books name those women, eyewitness of His death. Here they are just called “and of woman”. But their reaction “bewailed and lamented him” certainly makes it seem that they were sincere women who knew of Jesus or were followers.

Rebekah Montgomery writing for Crosswalk.com said this about the incident, “The event puzzled me. Why did these women weep when everyone else was howling for His blood? These were His last recorded words before being hammered to the cross: What was so important that He would muster strength to prophesy? And what meaning does His prophecy have to those following the cross today?”

I believe we see one of the great heart beats of Jesus here on the way to Calvary---His love and compassion! Remember the commentary of John in John 13:1 as he sets up the teachings of Christ in the Upper Room followed by the betrayal, trials, and crucifixion? “he loved them unto the end.” We see that love here on the road to Calvary. Pentecost, the writer of The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, said of this incident, “This multitude was preoccupied with His sufferings, but Christ was concerned about their forthcoming sufferings.” p. 478 Jesus’ eyes viewed the future!

Jesus calls these women “Daughters of Jerusalem”. This seems pretty straight forward, like saying, “woman of Whitewater” “Ladies of Chicago” Here they wept over Him, don’t forget, Jesus had wept twice over Jerusalem, but now He employs these women to not cry for Him but to cry for themselves and their children! There is something in their future that is worth weeping over!

“the days are coming – Israel is God’s chosen people!

Near Future - God is not mocked! He judges sin and rebellion. Jesus had already alluded to the fact of a great judgment that was coming on Jerusalem when no stone would be left on top of another. (Luke 19:37-44) In 70 AD, when Rome had enough of the rebellious, troublesome small province of Israel, they wiped them out, slaughtering a million Jews in just a few days, crucifying thousands of the leadership both religious and political, and scattering the rest of the people throughout the empire! For several years Jerusalem was under siege. It was a terrible time of starvation and hardship. The greatest sufferers were the woman and children. Cannibalism was normal in the last days of the city. And then the soldiers broke through and real ravaging began! The Romans were done with dealing with Israel and God punished their unbelief through it. But God did not forget them! He never has, God has a promise made with Abraham, Isaac, and David, and God keeps His covenants!

Jesus’ heart was to see Israel gathered to God. But the reality was that they rebelled and went their own way. Here Jesus turned to these women and prophesied this terrible event that would happen to them and their children. Being childless was a great shame for Jewish woman, but here Jesus says it will be a blessing! Oh, not to have to see your children suffer! Jesus quotes from Hosea 10:8 to say that they will rather have natural disasters happen or have a place to hid rather than to see your children suffer and die!

Distant Future - But we can also see this prophecy looking ahead to the Great Tribulation. Another time when the nation of Israel will be under great attack! Jesus sees it all and lovely warns the “Daughters of Jerusalem” not to weep for Him but for the great troubles coming.

“For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” – This is a Jewish proverb and cannot be separated from the context where Jesus is using it. It is commonly understood that Jesus was referring that if the Romans did this to Him, who is innocent of rebellion and insurrection, what will they do to a whole nation that is guilty!

III. Rejected Drink

“And there were also two other, malefactors (Gk – “brigand” – gang members known for ambushing and violence robbing openly; armed robbery), led with him to be put to death.” Luke 23:32 “And they bring (Gk – carry, supported, bear) him unto the place (“which is called in the Hebrew” John 19:17) Golgotha (“which is called Calvary.” Luke 23:33), which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.” Mark 15:22 “They gave (Gk – desired, were going to give) him vinegar (“wine” Mark 15:23) to drink mingled with gall (“myrrh” Mark 15:23): and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.” Matthew 27:34

“the place of a skull” – “Golgotha”/“Calvary” These two terms are synonymous . It was the public execution sight in Jerusalem! Why is it called “place of a skull”? Two possibilities: First, because of the use of this land--death and torture. Some books talked of the probability of human bones being scattered about. But that is unlikely for Jewish law strictly forbid human remains not being buried or burned. To touch a dead body/bones made one unclean! Second, the formation of the land. The identity of Golgotha is not known. When traveling to the Holy Land you will be shown two possibilities. Gordon’s Golgotha has an eerie look, almost like a skull---and is near where ancient gardens and tombs had been found. We must remember, in the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD the topographical lay out of all of Jerusalem was messed up. A couple things are sure: It was visible. That was the nature of crucifixion, so near a highway, but outside the city gate. An execution of this type would never have been done within the sacred city of Jerusalem! (Heb. 13:12-13) On a hill? Tradition and songs certainly say so, and that would aid it being visible, but you will not find “Mount Calvary” in the Scripture. We can never know for sure where Jesus was crucified... but we can know for sure He was!

“drink mingled with gall/myrrh” – It seems the main objective of this drink was to make these prisoners easier to handle and to deaden pain. It was a drug (myrrh), narcotic bitter (gall) potion mixed with a cheap acid wine (vinegar; cooking wine) designed to put the prisoner into a “stupor” for the last moments before putting them on the cross. It has been written that it was a Jewish mercy drink for those to be executed (Prov. 31:6); perhaps, but these thoughts are hard to prove. The Greek seems to indicate that they repeatedly offered this drink that would seem to indicate a “mercy” drink. We know later during the crucifixion Jesus was offered the drink again.

More importantly it was a fulfillment of prophecy. Ps. 69:21

“he would not drink” – I love the fact that Jesus in His humanity would not take anything to deaden His senses. He had not resisted throughout the whole arrest, trials, or beatings. Why would He start now? But as importantly, there was a plan for Jesus as He hung on the cross. He had to speak seven times: forgive, the thief next to Him of faith, to His mother and John, and to His Father. Jesus was not serving Himself in this act, or even protecting Himself in the smallest way. Jesus was fulfilling every detail of the Father’s plan! He needed His full capacities to do so!

Believer’s Application:

When God brings us sudden, unrequested burdens to bear. How do you react to those unexpected hardships that come from the hand of God? Knowing He has all things in His power, how do you respond when life’s burdens start to overwhelm? Simon of Cyrene found himself suddenly carrying a burden that he did not expect. He saw it as a nightmare, but the God of the Universe saw it as a privilege!

This reminds me of another incident in Jesus’ life. (Matthew 8:23-27) Jesus and the disciples were traveling across the Sea of Galilee after a long day of preaching. The Bible said, “there arose a great tempest in the sea,” the ship was literally covered with waves and the verse finished with “but he was asleep”. After the disciples woke him with screams and cries of “Lord, save us: we perish.” He calmed the winds and waves and then rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith! Don’t miss the fact that the disciples were right where God wanted them, matter of fact, Jesus was in the boat with them! This storm was the plan of God for their lives! Yet their faith was so small they screamed and cried in fear! How about us when the storms and burdens begin to cover us!? Do we remember this verse, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Rom. 8:28 or “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith

worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”
Jam. 1:3-4

This difficult situation for Simon of Cyrene certainly turned out for the good of himself and his family. For us, God still uses hard times to teach us faith and build in us our trust in His plan. 2 Cor. 4:17 “For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;” Even as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, don’t complain, just go the extra mile and trust God. Don’t cry and rebel against the pressures and uncertainties of life, realize they have a purpose, you have things to learn and others need you to be an example on how a mature Christian woman bears the unrequested burdens that come from the hand of God.

Blessed Redeemer

Words by Avis B Christiansen

Up Calvary's mountain one dreadful morn
Walked Christ my Savior, weary and worn
Facing for sinners death on the cross
That He might save them from endless loss.

Blessed Redeemer, precious Redeemer
Seems now I see Him on Calvary's tree
Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading
Blind and unheeding, dying for me.

'Father, forgive them, ' my Savior prayed
Even while His lifeblood flowed fast away
Praying for sinners while in such woe
No one but Jesus ever loved so.

Oh how I love Him, Savior and friend
How can my praises ever find end
Through years unnumbered on Heaven's shore
My songs shall praise Him forevermore