

# ***Places Of The Passion: Golgotha***

**Mark 15:16-32**

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Some days you just can't predict.

Events come out of the blue and wallop your best laid plans, sending them skidding across the road and into the ditch.

Whatever you had in mind.... forget it. Just ain't going to happen!

Know the feeling?

Simon sure did.

Something he had hoped and longed for and dreamed about for years, got turned on its ear, and transformed into at once something absolutely HORRIBLE and yet at the same time powerfully LIFE CHANGING.

Join me as we witness the most amazing day that ever occurred in the life of Simon of Cyrene.

### **MARK 15:21-32, p.54 (New Testament)**

To understand this event you need to remember that travelling to Jerusalem for Passover was the desire of every Jew who lived outside of Judea.

Similar to Muslims who make the Hajj, the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca, and go to enormous lengths to do so - so ancient Jews would travel enormous distances under often dangerous circumstances in order to get to Jerusalem and celebrate Passover at the Temple.

That included Jews in Cyrene, an ancient Greek colony on the northern coast of what today is called Libya. Some 100,000 Jews lived there.

Travel from Cyrene to Jerusalem took a month or more, and was potentially dangerous. Jews that travelled that kind of distance took a big risk due to unpredictable weather conditions, desert marauders, wild animals and other perilous circumstances.

So for Simon of Cyrene and others, seeing the city walls coming into view offered relief and a sense of accomplishment. There it was Jerusalem - the city of David, the city of the Temple, the city where God dwelt.

And to be here for Passover, the greatest religious festival for the Jews.

What a lifetime highlight moment!

All of that would have been coming together for Simon as he joined the stream of humanity moving towards the gates.

Soon he would be there.

Soon he could enter the temple.

And find a lamb to sacrifice. And worship.

Like I said - that was the plan.

The plan he'd been dreaming and praying about for years.

The plan that he had carefully worked out, and saved for.

But.....

Well, some days you just can't predict.

Events come out of the blue and wallop your best laid plans across the ears, sending them skidding across the road and into the ditch.

Whatever you had in mind.... forget it. Just ain't going to happen!

Simon sees the detail of soldiers, with three prisoners.

Each of the prisoners carrying a *patibulum*.

And Simon immediately knew what was happening.

The *patibulum*, you see, was a heavy beam, often weighing some twenty kilos. Anyone carrying such a beam would soon be dangling from it.

It was the crossbeam used in crucifixions, and condemned prisoners were forced to carry their own cross to the site of their execution.

Usually, to carry such a beam you'd sling it over your shoulders and cross your back. Others would often strap it in place.

Two of the prisoners were carrying it that way.

But the third one lagged behind. He was dragging it beside him. Staggering under the weight. Trying to hug it and tug it along. Stumbling as he did.

Simon saw that he had been flogged - beaten within an inch of his life by a whip with shards of metal in the ends.

The group is coming closer.

Simon, like others nearby, presses up against the wall.

He stands as far away as you can in a three metre wide street, houses right up to the curb, filled with people.

But

not

far

enough.

The prisoner falls. And lays motionless. He can't go further. The Romans won't help. That's beneath their dignity. Nobody else offers.

Why, if a Jew picked up that blood-soaked *patibulum* beam they'd be declared "unclean" and barred from participating in the Passover. Their trip to Jerusalem would have been in vain.

So one of the soldiers stretches out his hand.

Simon squeezes to the side.

But he feels the tug on his sleeve. And sees the spear levelled at his throat. His hopes of Passover fade.

He stoops.

Picks up the beam.

And now ceremonially defiled - unclean - he begins to walk.

And what he witnesses at the end of the walk - well, Mark 15 tells us.

He doesn't know it, Simon doesn't - but he ends up witnessing the greatest Passover sacrifice in the history of the world.

The great divine Passover Lamb is sacrificed for the sins of not only one pilgrim. But for the entire world. Including Simon.

And though his contact with the blood of Jesus would render him unclean in the eyes of the religious authorities,

ironically

that is the very blood that washes away all his sins.

that makes him clean in the eyes of God in heaven.

He is an unwilling, reluctant participant in the death of Jesus.

And his hope of a great spiritual experience in the Temple is dashed.

But - as he comes to see later

Simon

reluctant and unwilling though he was

ends up with the greatest honour of all

he is able to carry the cross of the Great Passover Lamb.

Somehow, some time later, he apparently does get it.

The Gospel of Mark gives a hint of that. Did you notice that it names Simon as “*the father of Alexander and Rufus.*” Apparently these two boys were known to the Roman church, to whom the gospel of Mark was first written.

AND

If you read Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 16, you read “Greet Rufus.”

Simon of Cyrene and his family became followers of Jesus.

Though he was taken prisoner, and forced into a sort of temporary slavery, and declared unclean as a result,

Simon found eternal release from an even greater slavery and prison and uncleanness through that very act, through the death of the Son of God on that cross which he carried.

He is saved from his sin and guilt and from damnation.

Get it - it wasn’t his carrying the cross for Jesus that saved him.

It was faith in the one who died there.

The one who died for him, for Simon.

And who died for the entire world.

That’s another element of this little passion scene

an element far deeper and more mysterious than just this one person.

It’s this -

Ask yourself this - why did God, who guided every act in this passion account, make it so that a man from Northern Africa should carry the cross?

Why is he part of the drama, along with the Roman soldier from Europe, and the Jew from Asia? Together before the cross of Jesus?

Why?

The answer lies back in the hazy early history of humanity.

Watchmen Nee suggests that we look to Genesis 9 & 10. In Genesis 9, after the devastation of the flood, sin once more rears its ugly head in the lives of Noah’s sons. And the family of Ham is cursed. Condemned to slavery. Present at that curse are also Shem and Japheth. If you accept the table of nations from Genesis 10, those three represent the peoples of Asia, Europe and Africa. The table of nations present at the time of earth flood & destruction, at a time of sad cursing into slavery

is the

***same group of nations***

that now stand before the cross!

And there, in the mystery of God’s saving plan, all of them find salvation.

Simon of Cyrene becomes a believer. Representing the family of Ham.

Later a Roman Centurion will declare Jesus as the Son of God. Representing the family of Japheth.

And Joseph of Aramathea will come out and publically declare allegiance to Jesus, wanting his body to bury. Representing the family of Shem.

All families of the earth

find their salvation

in the One on the cross.

Now it is our turn.

Along with Simon,

and the centurion,  
and Joseph.

From whatever part of the globe we come from,  
whatever our family heritage,  
recognizing that we,  
like them,  
find salvation at that cross.

At that cross  
that is both horrible,  
and yet most amazingly wonderful!

At that cross  
that is death,  
and yet most amazingly  
brings life to us all.

Will it be a comfortable encounter?

Nobody said that!  
It wasn't comfortable for Simon.  
He had to let go of all the hopes and dreams he had been treasuring as he pilgrimaged to Jerusalem.  
And he was stained by the cross.  
And he had to watch a most horrible scene.

It may not be comfortable for us, either.  
God sometimes will insert very uncomfortable moments into our path, perhaps forcing to make a U-turn of one sort or another.  
Perhaps he will force us to relinquish a hope or dream we've been treasuring for a long time.

And perhaps he will call us to bear a burden for him -  
- perhaps a burden from the life of a suffering person whom the Lord brings into our lives,  
and about whom Jesus says, "*As much as you do this for one of these, you do it for me.*"

Are you ready?  
Will you join Simon?  
Will you follow this Jesus?  
Will you give him your life?

PRAYER:

Great Passover Lamb -

We bow before you, the one in whom all the nations of the earth are reconciled to God.

The depths of that mysterious work of salvation - the full scope of it - we can scarcely begin to comprehend.

We sit, amazed, before the truth of it.

And even more amazed that you gather us in, too, as a congregation that has people from different nations of the world. You gather us in as individuals from so many different places and backgrounds.

You reconcile us to the Father. And to each other as brothers and sisters.

And, now Lord, you call us to step in beside Simon and bear your burden.

So, dear Jesus, give me a willingness to help carry other people's burdens, and to do so in deliberate service to you. Grant me the heart of Simon each time I do a cleaning chore carry an object for someone, listen to someone patiently, fetch something from the shop, or pray for someone.

Yes, Lord - you are the one I help when I feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick.

And, Lord, we also want to say –

for the times that I have not helped someone in need to carry their burden: Lord have mercy.

Please - Lord have mercy.

And, Lord, for the times I have been unwilling to share my strength, my goods, or my talents: Christ have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

And, Lord, for the times I have not shared your truth and love with others. Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

So, Jesus - here we are.

Call us. And in this new week we will follow.

Call us, Jesus. Show us a burden.

For we are ready to carry it, Lord. We are ready to follow you, Lord. No matter how unclean it may make us before the world.

We are determined to do it.

In your name,

and for your glory. Amen.