

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

02 April 2023

A Man Passing Through the Crowd

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

No but we can place ourselves there as we read through the story of Jesus in Jerusalem.

If we had been there we would have been confused, very confused.

This Jesus was definitely a prophet, a man of God, with power like no other prophet.

But now they are killing him.

“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross”. *Mark 15*

I wish we knew more about this man’s life after carrying the cross of Jesus.

I’ll bet he has a good position in heaven.

What a privilege.

Just a man passing through the crowd and suddenly he was thrust to center stage of the drama of redemption.

Think about his thoughts at that moment.

A proud Jew entangled in the ugly proceedings of a crucifixion, a site reserved for criminals and slaves.

He was “forced” into service.

Rome did that whenever they wanted.

There were no “rights” for the territories they conquered.

He could not resist, Rome was in control, completely and absolutely.

The experience of Simon should have led to a complete turnaround in his life.

Not only did he bring relief to the weak and emaciated body of Jesus, his walk to “the place of the skull” took him to the Source of real life.

A Cyrenian with character.

Simon was probably a dedicated Jew.

Acts 6:9 notes that the Cyrenian Jews had their own synagogue in Jerusalem.

Simon’s presence in Jerusalem could indicate his commitment to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Simon was coming in from the country.

This very likely means he was an immigrant from North Africa who lived in the farming districts near Jerusalem.

Cyrene was noted for its farming.

As a farmer, Simon was accustomed to hard work, and his body probably gave evidence of physical strength and endurance.

The soldiers did not have time to waste to lay the cross on a man unused to toil and hardship.

Simon was “passing by”, going about his business.

No doubt he had left home early that morning and had many errands to run that day.

Simone was a marked contrast with the unruly mob moving from Pilate’s palace to Calvary.

They had been easily distracted from meaningful work and gave shouts of allegiance to anyone who could arouse their emotions.

This Cyrenian with character was on this way to accomplish something.

Caught in the clutches of circumstance.

The innocent suffer.

Simon's determination and purposeful journey was interrupted by circumstances not of his own choosing.

He had another's burden thrust on him.

He was caught in the consequences of another's sin.

Simon typifies the suffering of good people throughout all time.

His experience illustrates the widening circle of influence that individual decisions have on others.

"No man is an island", that is, it is not just my business what I do.

More than conquerors.

Simon's experience is an assurance of God's special concern for those who have to bear burdens they did not choose.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

In Vietnam a grenade exploded near Max Cleland, causing the loss of both of his legs and an arm.

He courageously faced this tragic circumstance and in 1977 was made head of the Veteran's Administration.

Cleland testified, "There is help available from God when we need it most."

He closed many of his speeches and interviews with this prayer written during the Civil War by a Confederate soldier.

"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve, I was made weak, that I might lean humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things, I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy, I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life, I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am, among all men, most richly blessed"

With Christ we can conquer the circumstances of life.

Converted at the cross.

Mark identified Simon as "The father of Alexander and Rufus."

These were men known to the readers of the gospel, evidently active in the fellowship of believers.

In *Romans 16:13* Paul sent greetings to "Rufus chosen in the Lord."

Is this the same individual, Simon's son?

Is this scriptural evidence that Simon was converted and established a Christian home that nurtured two Christian boys who became leaders in the church?

Maybe so, why not?

Did Simon and Jesus talk as the procession made its way to Calvary?

How was Simon changed by his encounter with Jesus?

Bitterness turned to belief, hatred became hope, shame moved to salvation.

He heard Jesus pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Simon saw Jesus willingly give himself, and slowly the hope of the prophets dawned into reality.

"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." *Isa. 53:5*.

Arthur Blessitt, chaplain of Sunset Strip, California, carried a ninety pound cross across America and many countries of the world.

Speaking at a national conference, he related how he had carried the cross across the newly opened border between Israel and Egypt soon after the historic Camp David peace treaty was signed.

The Arab commander at the border asked for a piece of his cross.

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

You may be passing by today, just a person in the crowd.

Maybe a jeweled cross hangs around your neck.

What does that mean to you?

Have you taken up the cross?

The way of the cross leads to the forgiveness of sin, abundant life, and the defeat of death.
Simon of Cyrene, a man passing through the crowd, found this amazing hope in the cross.
It is the same for you!
Do you accept it for yourself?
Jesus died for you!