

Mark 15:21-26

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. ²³ Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take *it*. ²⁴ And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. ²⁵ Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. ²⁶ And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

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. Normally a prisoner condemned to a crucifixion would be required to carry their own cross. It would weigh 30 to 40 pounds. Christ had probably carried lots of lumber heavier than this a carpenter. But we must remember what Christ has already been through. He has been scourged. Remember that this would have ripped his flesh from his back and sides to the place his internal organs would be exposed. He would have lost a lot of blood from this and the crown of thorns. He had also been beaten. And on top of that Christ had probably taken on the sins of all of His saints for all time in the garden. So, if ever there was a man who was suffering, it was Christ. He was suffering physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. And it was at a level we will never experience.

So as he was carrying his cross it became evident that He simply was not physically able to do so. And they had to get this crucifixion on the road. So they compelled someone else to do it.

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.

Have you ever felt like a happening in your life was untimely? Have you ever been just going along and something that appeared to just be time and chance happened to you? Maybe your car broke down or you hit a deer. Maybe someone was just plain mean to you. Or they did you a real kindness. Stuff happens all the time. But we do well not to jump to the wrong conclusions. Some of the most unfortunate things that happen to us often turn out to be good things. This quote is from facebook. It is about a bunch of people that did not die when the twin towers collapsed on 9/11.

The head of a company survived 9/11 because his son started kindergarten.

Another man was alive because it was his turn to bring donuts. One woman was late because her alarm clock didn't go off on time.

Another was late because of being stuck on the NJ Turnpike because of an auto accident and his life was spared.

One missed his bus.

One spilled food on her clothes and had to take time to change.

One's car wouldn't start.

One went back to answer the telephone.

One had a child that dawdled and didn't get ready as soon as he should have.

One couldn't get a taxi.

One that really struck me was the man who put on a new pair of shoes that morning. Before he got to the Towers he developed a blister on his foot. He stopped at a drugstore to buy a Band-Aid. That's why he is alive today.

Now when I am stuck in traffic, miss an elevator, turn back to answer a ringing telephone... all the little things that annoy me I think to myself, this is exactly where I'm meant to be at this very moment.

We, as Christians, are given some wonderful promises. We can know that God is working out everything for our good, even those things that appear to be time and chance. Even those things that we cannot imagine good coming out of. I can easily think of some things I thought were awful at the time, but now I thank God they happened. We probably all have things like this.

Well in our text we find Simon a Cyrenian in one of these moments. Do we really think that this guy was prepared for what was going to happen to him? Here he is in a thronging crowd, probably walking along as fast as he can to do what he has on his **to do** list. Maybe he is going out to purchase a lamb to slaughter. Maybe he is purchasing some of the supplies needed for the Passover. He probably has his mind set on his life and all the things he needs to do. He is probably just like us on most days. And then **this** happens.

He got picked to carry someone's electric chair. That would be our modern day equivalent. That is how we would have felt if we were in his shoes. He was asked in this day of celebration, this day of family closeness, this party day, to carry the

instrument of some stranger's death. He was just passing by. He was just minding his own business. And then this. Talk about out of the blue. This is it. He had to feel like- why me? I don't need this today. This is going to mess up my schedule. I hope they still have supplies when I get where I am going. If he had a watch he would have been looking at it at this point. He did not intend this. He didn't plan it. It was a massive interruption. And we find out it was probably the greatest blessing of his life. It was more important than anything he would do in the rest of his life. And he had no idea. This was the interruption of the sovereignty of God in this human's life. Talk about being chosen. This man was chosen.

Why do I say all this?

The Roman guards had the right to compel people of the land to do certain things. This was one of them. This man could not say no. He could not bow out. So when this says he was compelled, he was really compelled. It isn't the kind of thing where a person sort of expects us to do something so we feel compelled to do it. No these guys had weapons and could use them on him if he did not comply. So he was compelled.

Now, this is what gets interesting. His name was Simon and he is a Cyrenian.

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.

Cyrene was a port city in modern day Libya. It is on the North Africa coast. There were a lot of Jewish people living there. And it was a trade center. So this is probably a Jewish person who made a long trip to come back to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

But think about this. Why would Mark identify Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. Why would we do it? We would usually only do it for one of two reasons. The first would be that the children are famous and most people would know about them. But the second is more likely. The people who he was writing to know Alexander and Rufus.

Mark was writing to the gentile church in Rome. Most likely these men were either **part of that church** or **well known to that church**. Look at Romans 16:13, a book also written to the church in Rome.

Romans 16:13

¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

We can't know for sure, but the evidence here is pretty strong. Rufus, Simon's son and Simon's wife probably both came to Christ. And it is likely that they came to Christ as a result of this run-in that Simon had with these Roman soldiers. This unlikely event probably led to the salvation of this man and his family.

It is interesting when we read how unbelievers evaluate God. If anything bad or painful happens it is just more proof to them that there is no god or that God is not good. But look at this event. It was certainly a profoundly painful interruption in this man's daily grind. It was the kind of interruption that no one would welcome. It is like the interruption that Mark and Angie experienced when they drove up to an auto accident where someone just died. This is something that affects you. It puts a damper on your day.

But in our text today it appears to have directed this man to look to Christ. It caused him to redirect his attention. It caused him to think about things he may not have noticed had this not happened to him. He met Christ on the way to Christ's death. And that even eventually brought Simon and his family **life forever**.

Do not be quick to evaluate God by the events that happen in your life. It is too soon to do so. They may be painful. They may feel devastating. But the story is not over yet.

I read a book that profoundly affected me. It is called *A Severe Mercy*. It is told by Sheldon Vanauken. The book tells of a man who deeply loved his wife. In fact he had idealized the relationship to where he essentially worshipped it. But his wife had a run in with evil in New York city that left her desperate for spiritual answers. She escaped the evil men without incident but her view of the world was shaken. She was driven to spiritual answers. As a result both Sheldon and his wife began communications with CS Lewis. Then Sheldon's wife died of a disease, cancer I think. He was devastated.

The point of the book is that CS Lewis pointed out to Sheldon that what God had done in Sheldon's life was likely a **severe mercy**. He had drawn Sheldon out of a world that would have **distracted him from** eternity, and had drawn him into a **desperate need for a heavenly solace**. The harm he suffered saved his soul. That is often what God is up to. Weaning us from love of this world doesn't always come easy. But God will do it if we are His. It doesn't look good. It doesn't feel good. It doesn't sell as being good. But **it is** for our **good**. It does **good**.

It is very hard to trust God when he shocks us out of our day to day routine and presents a problem that we can neither avoid nor understand. But **trust** we **must** if we are to grow from the experience.

Here is a quote from that book

"That death, so full of suffering for us both, suffering that still overwhelmed my life, was yet a severe mercy. A mercy as severe as death, a severity as merciful as love."

— [Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy: A Story of Faith, Tragedy and Triumph*](#)

Now as Christ was walking to his crucifixion Luke tells us this:

Luke 23:27-31

²⁷ **And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him.** ²⁸ **But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.**

²⁹ **For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!'** ³⁰ **Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"** ³¹ **For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"**

What Christ does here is amazing. When you are suffering, who do you think of? Doesn't your world wrap around yourself? Isn't your primary preoccupation with you and your pain? But look at Christ. Christ thinks of the people who are following Him. They may think it is **Christ** who has done **something evil**. It is **He who is cursed** as He will soon be hanging on a tree. But Christ turns to them, he redirects His attention. He looks at them and He warns them. He warns them of the suffering that is coming. It will be so bad, your children will suffer so severely, that you will wish you never had them, as that would save both you and your children from the suffering.

History tells us that this is exactly what happened. When Jerusalem was cut off by the Roman army the suffering was unlike most things experienced in human history. It was awful, just like Christ said. His followers likely followed Christ's instructions and got out of the city before this happened. But most of the people He addressed on the street probably would not escape it. So it is not Christ they should be mourning because Christ's death was serving a necessary purpose. It wasn't a sign of **Christ's sin** that He was dying. It was a sign of **our sin**. But the generation who Christ was addressing would die as a result of the judgment of God upon them.

When these people say to the mountains, "fall on us" this is probably for protection. If you were in Jerusalem when the Romans invaded, all you would have wanted was a place to hide where you were safe. That is probably what they are asking for.

³¹ **For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"**

I don't understand Greek well but the they in this sentence may not be necessary. It could be He. Anyone who has a wood stove knows that dry wood burns much easier and hotter than green wood. That is what this is referring to. What Christ may have been saying is that if this is the judgment of God to an innocent Son on behalf of the sins of the people, just imagine what God will do to those who will not receive that forgiveness. In this case Christ would be the wet wood and the unrepentant would be the dry.

²² And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. ²³ Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.

The word for skull in the latin is the word calva. Calvariae locus means place of the skull. That is where we get our word Calvary from. It is where Christ died. This area probably looked like a skull somehow. Archeologists tend to believe they know where this place is. It is likely that the church of the Holy Sepulchre is the actual location.

Once Christ arrived at His execution spot, someone offered him wine with myrrh. This was very likely a drink that was known to deaden pain. I doubt that any of us here would have refused that drink. But Christ, for whatever reason, wanted to keep his mind sharp and was willing to experience the most severe of pain for us.

²⁴ And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.

This is from MacArthur's commentary-

Apparently originating in Persia, crucifixion was later used by the Romans as a brutal means of inflicting death on its victims while also deterring other would-be criminals. It is estimated that, by the time of Christ, Rome had crucified some 30,000 people in Israel alone. After the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, so many Jewish rebels were killed by crucifixion that the Romans ran short of lumber to make crosses.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Mark 9-16.

Notice here what Mark doesn't say.

Mark doesn't go into the excruciating means of Christ's death.

What took place physically is vividly described by Davis ("Crucifixion of Jesus," pp. 186-87)

8: Matthew, Mark, Luke.

Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backwards with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes [the vertical beam]....

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The Victim is now crucified As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are

putting pressure on the median nerves As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward.... Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen.... Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber: Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart....

It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level—the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues—the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air....

The body of Jesus is now in extremis and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues....

His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally he can allow His body to die.

All this Mark describes with the words "And they crucified him"!

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke.

they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.

Evidently traditional Jewish apparel included an inner garment, an outer garment (or tunic), a belt, sandals, and a headpiece.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Mark 9-16.

John goes into greater detail on the garment distribution

John 19:23-24

²³ Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. ²⁴ They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the

Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

The tunic, evidently, was a valuable garment. It was likely given to Christ by a wealthy follower or Jesus had saved up his carpentry money to buy it. The soldiers didn't want to tear it so they cast lots for who would win it by lot.

²⁵ Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. ²⁶ And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

The third hour- This doesn't fit any of the other records. It could be that the crucifixion started at 9 in the morning, the third hour, but it is unlikely. It is likely a mistake by a copyist. Evidently it would be an easy mistake to make.

Remember that our belief is not that every copy of the Bible has no errors. We believe that the original contains no errors. So either way Christ was Crucified.

²⁶ And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Above the head of every crucified criminal would be a board that listed his crime. As we look at other gospels we find that it read "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". It was written in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek.

John 19:19-22

¹⁹ Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. ²¹ Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews." ' " ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

It is ironic that it is Pilate who stated the spiritual truth about Christ. Pilate was an evil godless politician. It was the Jewish leadership that wanted that truth removed. God will receive Glory. Even if takes rocks to cry out in praise. God will not be deprived of glory. Men may try to silence the truth. But it cannot be silenced. God's truth will prevail.

Jesus had a sign that proclaimed who He truly was. And it was put there by a wicked Roman politician.

Pilate's motives for doing this weren't at all good. He was trying to punish the Jewish leaders. Paybacks can be nasty. But even through Pilate's evil motives God got that sign hung over Jesus's head proclaiming His true identity.

Don't ever get the idea that God can't get a job done. He can get His truth proclaimed any way He wants it, anywhere He wants it. We have the glorious opportunity to be part of that process. But never get the idea that without you the job won't get done. You will just have missed the opportunity to glorify your Lord.

We started with the application that **life's interruptions** often serve an eternal purpose in our lives. We are wise to greet them trusting our Father that He **knows what is best for us** and is acting accordingly. What unexpected thing has happened in your life that you are fighting against? Consider that there is much that you don't understand. Consider how God might be using this in your life. It might very much change the attitude with which you deal with that interruption or nuisance.

We also see in Christ our perfect example in suffering. Even though He is headed toward his crucifixion, he puts his attention on those around Him who need to hear the truth. And He proclaims it. Are you suffering? Are there those around you who need to be ministered to? We do well to follow Christ's example and do what we can for those people He has surrounded us with.

And then one more application- Pilate was the one who identified Christ for who He was better than all the Jewish experts combined. And Pilate did it for selfish motives, but the sign was perfectly accurate. The Messiah died with a sign telling all that He was the Messiah. God will be praised. And His truth will be proclaimed. Consider this week how fortunate we are to be given the job of proclaiming to those around us who Christ is. We don't need to fear that God cannot get this job done. But we should be in communication with God about how we can do that job better.

Sing "Count it all Joy"