

## Scripture Reading:

**Luke 23: “24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus. 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?" 32 There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.**

# "Taking Up the Cross of Jesus"

We consider this morning a short passage from Luke as Jesus makes His way from the judgment seat of Pilate to Golgotha, the place of His crucifixion, outside the city gates where the sin offerings were burnt and accused things were taken! [*Mention Abraham going to mount Mariah in Genesis 22 as homework*]

What we see this morning is a man named Simon and some women who will teach us great lessons regarding our obedience and about the compassion shown by our Lord, even as He takes upon Himself the wrath of God that was due our sin.

- We are told by all three synoptic Gospel writers that Simon of Cyren carried the cross as Jesus made His way to the place of a skull

Mark tells us that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus reminding us again of how our God loves the details of His covenant faithfulness.

Simon was coming from the county side and was compelled to carry the cross somewhere along the journey because John tells us in His Gospel that Jesus, “bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.”

- John makes no mention of Simon carrying the cross of Jesus, and John’s Gospel also does not include the various discussions that Jesus had with His disciples and others about taking up a cross to follow Jesus.

I want to take a moment to review these passages because what we see here with Simon being compelled to carry the cross of Jesus is a graphic illustration of what Jesus was teaching...

- It is NOT the typical picture that we have in mind when we quote those verses where Jesus says to ‘take up your cross and follow me’

The image should not be of taking up some challenge we might have or going through some suffering that we need to do for Jesus, but rather the image should be of Simon, who is called on to carry the cross of Christ which is the source of our Lord’s suffering and victory.

Luke, along with Matthew and Mark, gave us the account of Jesus asking the disciples who the people say that He is back in chapter nine: When Jesus asked them who they think He is, they rightly answer “The Christ of God”

- Jesus then goes on to teach them about the very time we are now studying, AND a truth that is graphically illustrated by the image of Simon carrying the cross of Jesus:

**Luke 9: 22** "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." **23** Then [Jesus] said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. **24** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. **25** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? **26** For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

- Luke gives the second account of Jesus giving instruction about carrying crosses in chapter 14 when He tells them they must be willing to put Jesus above all else:

**Luke 14:25** "Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, **26** "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. **27** And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. **28** For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- **29** lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

- Mark relates at least one other account where Jesus talks of carrying a cross:

**Mark 10:17** "Now as [Jesus] was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" **18** So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. **19** You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" **20** And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." **21** Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

- In the other accounts Jesus said take up 'your' cross and here He says take up 'the' cross which we must see in the Christian walk as one in the same.
- This is what we have illustrated for us in this morning's text with Simon carrying the cross of Jesus

We don't know if Simon came to Jerusalem as a disciple of Jesus or was converted by this experience, but Church history records faithful service by he and his sons in the Church and they might even be those mentioned in Acts and Romans.

When Jesus tells us to take up our cross, He is not encouraging us to establish a works oriented religion where we strive to please God:

- He is telling us that the way of salvation comes through the cross upon which He was crucified:

That is the cross that must be carried if we are to properly follow Jesus, and this is why the picture of Simon is so important...

Simon has been compelled to carry the cross, just as we are commanded to do, BUT it is not Simon who will be crucified on that cross, but Jesus.

This is why in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus could say, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- From a human standpoint we see Simon coming along to assist a helpless Jesus who is no longer strong enough to carry His burden
- From the divine perspective the Father is showing us how we must carry the cross of His Son if we are to be true followers of Jesus:

There is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved, and those who confess Jesus must confess Him as both the crucified and risen Lord! We see this beautifully illustrated with Christian in Pilgrim's progress where his burden of sin piled up on his back does not fall off when he tried to climb Mt. Sinai or any of his other efforts:

- But it falls to the ground when he comes to the cross of Christ.

Paul proclaims in Romans chapter six that we are dead to sin and alive to God BECAUSE we are united to the death of Jesus: Romans 6:3 "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

- What it means to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son & Spirit

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin."

- There is no 'new life' no 'Christian walk' no sanctification unless we FIRST carry the cross and are crucified with Christ Jesus!
- But there is abundant life, that Jesus came to bring if we do!

8 "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, & your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

- This is truly the JOY that was set before Jesus as He approached the hill of a skull with Simon carrying the cross on which He would die.

It is then Luke alone who tells us of the compassion of our Lord as He walks toward His place of execution.

- As we noted last week, at this point Jesus has been up all night, beaten at various trials, scourged by the Roman soldiers and tormented by a crown of thorns.
- Isaiah says Jesus was marred beyond recognition, picturing what our fall into sin had done to the image of God in man!

- So it is not surprising that we see some woman along the way weeping over what they see and feeling sorry for Jesus.

We're not told if they are faithful women or just some who were there & overwhelmed by all these events, but I think it is important to note that they ARE women!

- All of the feminist study centers in the 'great' universities of our land decry the fact that the Bible and Christians are male chauvinists who are hell-bent on keeping women down!

I would like to politely disagree:

- There is a reason that Christians do not burn widows at the time of their husband's death like some in India
- Christians do not hide their women under burgas and have them walk behind the animals like the Muslim cultures.
- It is Christians who oppose the degradation and exploitation of women through pornography or physical abuse and slavery.

And the reason for all of this is quite simple:

- The Bible holds women in VERY high regard and to the degree that Christians are faithful to the Bible, they will hold them in high regard as well, as opposed to ALL the pagans cultures in ALL of human history.

We see this in classic tales of Knights defending women down to the almost forgotten customs of opening a door or giving up a seat for a lady. Our passage this morning should remind us about how women are presented in the Scriptures and especially in the New Testament.

- Men, you should pay special attention here because it will remind us to respect and treat our help-meets properly because we desperately need their help
- For you young men who are not yet married, it should remind you about how important your search for the right help-meet really is.

OK, now you are saying John how do you get all this from these verses...

- The important thing to note is that they are WOMEN!

Since His arrest in the Garden and through all the trials, Jesus has been mocked, accused, beaten and disgraced by men!

- There is no record here or in any of the Gospel accounts of a woman speaking against Jesus!

IN FACT it is just the opposite: It is women who play an important role in the ministry of Jesus.

- It begins with His faithful mother Mary, who unlike Zacharias believed the Angel, submitted to the Lord's will and faithfully raised Jesus.
- Throughout the time of Jesus' earthly ministry we see a group of women who give of their time and possessions to care for Jesus and the Disciples.
- A faithful woman washes the feet of Jesus at a Pharisee's house
- Mary anoints Jesus for burial at Bethany, an act that will be remembered for all time
- During all the trials it was only Pilate's wife, a women ☺, who tried to save Jesus!
- We will see the faithful group of woman who had followed and cared for Jesus present at the cross

- These same women will be the last to be at His grave site AND the first to be there again on the morning of His resurrection.
- And finally, it was to women that Jesus first appeared after His resurrection and it was the women who believed.

The men who saw the empty tomb, either doubted like the Disciples or told lies like the Roman soldiers!

**Men, we need good helpmeets!**

- And so we see these women are weeping and lamenting...
- Jesus in the midst of His suffering shows them compassion and gently reminds them that they should be weeping for those who will reject the work that Jesus is now doing to save His people from their sins!

He tells them that if what is being done to the Son, the green wood, is enough to cause weeping...

It would be hard to imagine what will happen when God's wrath is poured out on Jerusalem, the dry wood! We have covered this coming judgment at length, but we should take special note of the curse Jesus points out because it may not be as shocking to us as it should be: Again, thanks to all those feminist studies!

- Jesus tells them they should "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!'

- This would have been a shocking statement in the Hebrew culture: Children were seen as a gift from God and a barren womb was often considered a curse:

Think of Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist or Hanna the mother of Samuel.

Jesus says the barren womb would be looked upon as a blessing during the coming judgment and a lack of mothering would be a good thing.

Sadly in our age, the childless woman who can join the Marines or be a successful career woman is considered the one who is blessed and who would want the burdens of childrearing...

- This is why we needed abortion-on-demand so women would have a choice.

And sadly we have chosen very poorly...

- We have sought and praised things that should be a blessing only if we are in the midst of God's judgment!  
We as Christians are to stand against this 'wisdom' of our age...

We do so by seeking God's blessings as we take up the cross upon which Jesus bore the penalty for our sins & claiming His promise of salvation.

- We are to claim it for ourselves, our children, and their children.
- We are to proclaim it to the world believing that God will save all those who are called into His Kingdom, just as we saw Simon compelled to carry the actual cross of Jesus on that terrible day.

The writer of the Hebrews in chapter 13 calls us to obedience;` to the fruit of the Spirit, as does all of the New Testament, by reminding us of what happened that day:

**1 “Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. 3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them--those who are mistreated--since you yourselves are in the body also. 4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. 5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.**

➤ **We are then told why we should strive to do all these good works...**

**“For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"**

➤ **Then we are given some more commands...**

**7 “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. 9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. 10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”**

➤ **Then we are reminded that WE must carry our cross...**

**13 “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”**

➤ **The City of Jerusalem would be judged and destroyed, but we seek and serve in the New Jerusalem, the Church by which the Kingdom of Jesus is filling the whole earth!**

**15 “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**

**17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”**

➤ **We are to live the JOY that was set before Jesus that day!**

**The disciples walked in the presence of Jesus for over three and yet they are now scattered and defeated. In the Book of Acts we will see them empowered by the Holy Spirit and serving faithfully because they now understand what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus!**

**Such should be the case with us:**

➤ **May we take up the cross of Jesus, so that we may live in the joy and power of His resurrection!**

**Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55: “1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David.”**