

24 Hours – Simon of Cyrene

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Bible Text: Mark 15:16-22

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We find ourselves in this 24 hour time period at about nine o'clock in the morning, give or take a few moments. We are in the early hours where the day in the city is about to begin. It is bustling. What is significant, though, is that the event that we look at today, the person that we address today, the events, probably take no more than about 15 minutes. You know, 15 minutes is a period of time that became very famous in our culture in 1968 when a very iconic pop artist by the name of Andy Warhol made a statement that in the future everybody would have 15 minutes of fame. Little did we know that this man would be somewhat prophetic as we look at a world today of reality television and YouTube and posting of videos. You know one of our favorite commercials and our boys absolutely love it, you have seen the two guys who are tailgating at the football game and the guy comes out and says, "Guys, did you know that this has occurred?" And they hold up their phones and say, "That was so 17 seconds ago." everything in life is moving at such a rapid pace. Andy Warhol was looking at the media and the ability to make people famous. when he said everybody is going to have a little bit of fame at some point in their life. Now over 40 years later we use that phrase in our current culture all the time, their 15 minutes of fame.

What we are alluding to is a time period in somebody's life. Maybe they were a one hit wonder in the music industry. Maybe they had the opportunity to share the pedestal in a famous stage for a brief period of time. But we know in our culture that that time span could have been a couple of years or a couple of months. We just say that must have been their 15 minutes.

Today when we come to Mark chapter 15 we are literally dealing with 15 minutes, the time period that a man by the name of Simon of Cyrene would have taken him to carry the cross of Jesus Christ from the door of Pilate's palace to a hill called Mount Calvary it is only about a 15 minute walk the slowest of circumstances, 15 minutes that would change the world, 15 minutes that would change this man's life.

And what I want us to see today is that when we experience the cross of Jesus Christ it changes us. It changes those around us and it changes our future. It changes generations. The cross of Jesus Christ changed Simon and it can change you as well.

We turn to Mark chapter 15. I want to look at one single verse, verse 21. This is pretty much all we have of a man named Simon in the gospel of Mark. It says:

“And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.”¹

There is no elaboration. There are not fine details given. It just says that there is a man by the name of Simon who has two children and is from North Africa. They compelled Him to bear the cross of Jesus.

So that we can get more of a picture of this, I do want to go back up now in verse 16. I want to read this passage in context.

It says:

And the soldiers led Him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed Him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute Him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote Him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon Him, and bowing their knees worshipped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took off the purple from Him, and put his own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him. And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

And they bring Him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave Him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.²

In the midst of all that is taking place with the cross and in the midst of being betrayed by Judas, in the midst of being denied by Peter, in the midst of being tried by the Sanhedrin, tried by Pilate, tried by Herod, by Caiaphas, by Annas, all these different folks, we have a man by the name of Simon who just pops up on the scene, almost out of nowhere. Yet we find Him at the center of all the activities because no other human being can say about their life what Simon could say about his life. No other human being could say that they literally carried the cross of Jesus Christ across the road.

What happened in this passage? How does it affect us? And, most importantly, how does the story of Simon change your life today as you depart this place in a few hours?

Because he is an obscure character, because we do not know much about him, because oftentimes tradition says more than the Bible actually does, I want to just address a series of questions about verse 21 when they talk about Simon of the Cyrenians.

The first question is this. Who was Simon? Now there are all kinds of different theories. There are all kinds of different ideas. What the Bible shares with us are two significant things. The first is that he is a Cyrenian, which is basically northern Africa, just east of

¹ Mark 15:21.

² Mark 15:16-23.

Egypt. It is a place that doesn't exist geographically as it did in Jesus' day. Nevertheless he is from North Africa.

The other thing that we know about him is that he is in Jerusalem. He is in Jerusalem at the holiest of all weeks. Why would he be there?

Now if we were to go back in Jesus' day, do understand that Jerusalem was the focal point of the world. It was the intersection. It was spaghetti junction of the continents. If you wanted to get to Europe from Africa, you had to go through Israel. If you wanted to get to Asia from Africa, you had to go through Jerusalem. It was the great turnpike. It was the great spaghetti junction, whatever terminology you want to give. Many have said that this was a man who, though he was from North Africa, just happened to be on his way somewhere else to conduct business. It was just happenstance that he was there.

But you and I are wiser than that, because you and I live in a major metropolitan area and every one of us knows that between certain times of the day there are roads you just don't drive down, right? We have apps that we put on our phones. We check websites because we know when we see that there is a traffic congestion area, you do not go on that road during that time of the day. Let me tell you. Any wise individual living in the world in Jesus' day would have known. You don't go through Jerusalem during Passover. Why? Because it is there are great human traffic jams. Every Jewish individual from all over the world congregates on this city in particular, the temple mount, where we will see that Simon is in just a moment.

So he is there for a reason. He is there for a purpose. Most likely the purpose is that he was a Jewish individual that had some reason... maybe it was because of business. Maybe it was because of family. He had been relocated to North Africa.

And just a few days in the biblical context there is a celebration known as Pentecost. It takes place in Acts chapter two and there in verses four and five it says that Jews from all over the world, from every nation, were present when they heard Peter tell the truth of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what that means? That in Acts chapter two and what we know as Pentecost, there were some Jewish individuals that were Cyrenian there. And so the possibility that we have is this was a man who was faithful on his face. This was a man who had been relocated. This was a man who had somehow been displaced to northern Africa who was returning with his family; notice Alexander and Rufus, to celebrate what we know as the Passover, the Jews being released from Pharaoh and from Egypt.

What is the conclusion of this question of who is Simon? Let me tell you who Simon is. He is a normal man. He is a normal person just like you. He was not some wealthy entrepreneur who found himself stuck there in Jerusalem during a very busy season. He was not a religious hierarchy. He was at a part of none of the trials. He was nobody as far as the world is concerned, which means he was somebody to all of us because he represents who you are. He represents who I am. He was normal. He got up every day

and he went and did his business. He took care of his family. He went to work and, yes, at the Passover, he went and celebrated his religious and spiritual heritage.

Who was Simon? Just a normal person like you and I.

Which leads to the second question that verse 21 asks? When did this happen?

Now I have already mentioned that it was Passover season. I have already mentioned that this was that critical time when the Jews from all over the world congregated. But more specifically it was about nine o'clock in the morning. If I take you back a couple of weeks, the Jewish trial took place all night. Pilate received Jesus early in the morning. You remember he was warned by a dream that his wife had had. He tries to pass Him off to Herod. That didn't work. He comes back. He trades Jesus, or should I say, Barabbas for Jesus.

Remember the crowd saying "Crucify Him, crucify Him. May his blood be upon us and our children," one of the worst things that was ever said in public, by the way.

And that is that point. Jesus is beaten. As it says here in this passage, they took Him out of the praetorium. They beat Him. They mocked Him. They falsely worshipped Him.

In just a few weeks we are going to find ourselves with Jesus on the cross. The Bible makes it very clear that from what we know as between noon and 3 PM was total darkness. Most likely it was about nine, maybe 9:30 in the morning.

You say, "Why is this so critical?" Because it was that time of the day where he and his two sons had gotten up and decided to do what they were going to do that day. You say, "Now what were they going to do that day?"

Now this is very important to the context of the cross event. This was the preparation day. This was the day that the Jewish individuals who condemned Jesus would not go into Pilate's place, because they did not want to defile themselves so that they could have the Passover that evening. This was the day that technically on the calendar is called the 14th Nisan, the 14th of the first month in the Jewish calendar which meant this was going to be the day that those who had come to celebrate the Passover would come and, "kill the lamb" that they had prepared.

You say, "Well, that is a very special day in the life of a Jewish man."

Yes, it was. But do you know what Simon had to do on this day? He had the same thing that you have every day of your life. He had a schedule of events. He had a calendar. He had in his mind what the day would hold. And, oh, how the day changed. See who was Simon? He was just a normal man. When did this event occur? It was just a normal day.

You say, "But it was the Passover. It was a special day."

Yes, but just like we do at Christmas, just like we do at Easter, just like we do on birthdays, Independence Day, we have plans of where we are going to go, what we are going to do and how it is going to look, right? Well, so did he. It was a normal day that turned very abnormal.

So he was a normal man on a normal day which leads to the third basic question. Where did this happen?

If you were to draw a map or a diagram of what we know as the temple mount, let me give you some direction/guidance here. What we know is that famous Jewish temple, now where that Dome of the Rock sits, faces due east. It faces what we know as the Garden of Gethsemane. It faces what we know as the Mount of Olives. If you were to look at it from above, from God's perspective in the temple mount, the man whom we know as Pilate, the man who we studied last week who washed his hands of Jesus, the man whom allowed the crowd to convince that Barabbas was better than Jesus as far as the trade was concerned, his apartment, where he was during Passover, was on the northwest corner of the temple mount.

You say, "Well, why is that significant to know?"

Because it says that Jesus was crucified at Golgotha. Jesus was crucified in a place called Calvary. Whatever words you want to use, it is the same place. Here is what is so significant about that. If you were to go where Pilate's dwelling place was; and by the way, if you have the privilege of taking a tour to the holy land, to Israel, there is a lot of stuff that you see that your tour guide says, "Well, we think it might have been here. We hope it might have been here." But when you come to the archway on the porch that was Pilate's apartment, there really is no question. As you sit there and realize this is where the Roman governor would have been, this is most likely where he beheld Jesus to the crowd. We were literally sitting where most likely they were standing saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

You say, "Why is this so significant?" Because Golgotha, Calvary, the place in which Jesus was crucified where, Simon would take the cross, was right across the street. You say, "Why is that so significant?"

Because lying on the western edge of the temple mount which Pilate's apartment would have been adjacent to, was one of the busiest, most frequented traveled roads in Jerusalem.

You realize Simon was a normal man going through a normal day. Listen to this, in a normal place.

When we look at a character such as Simon and we look at a passage such as this, we say, "Wow. What a man that God used. What a man."

I want you to understand that Simon's day started out the way your day did today. He got up with plans. He got up with an agenda. How many of you already have on your agenda what you are going to eat for lunch? How many of you already knew last night what you were going to wear today? How many of you are already thinking about where you are going to go when the preacher finally gets quiet? How many of you have plans to do things today? And yet his plans got messed up.

See, what we are going to discover is any time that we encounter the cross of Jesus Christ, it takes whatever we plan and completely messes up.

And so Simon is just a normal guy going about a normal day in a normal place which leads to our fourth and final question. So what happened? Anything but the normal. This was not on the Excel spreadsheet. This was not on his calendar. This was not on his agenda. And it says there in verse 21. It says that they compelled him to bear the cross.

Now, before we deal with some details here, I do want to dismiss something that, unfortunately, has become more tradition than it is biblical. You do know that, nowhere in the Bible does it ever say that Jesus fell under the weight of the cross, much less three different times. It doesn't say it. That is a tradition that people have attributed to this story years and years. And if you say, "Well, what is the biblical evidence for that?" Supposedly they go back into Isaiah 53 talking about the suffering servant that surely he would have fallen.

Let me make a statement very clear to you. If Jesus can bear your sin, he can bear a piece of wood. If Jesus can keep you from going to hell, he can walk across the street, okay? He has got that part covered.

So Simon did not have to bear it because Jesus somehow had lost his ability to do so. In fact, nowhere in Scripture does Jesus fall. Nowhere in Scripture do you get the idea that Jesus looked at him and said, "Whoa, I couldn't have done it unless you had shown up, brother." Nowhere does that happen.

So how is this story able to be our story? And this is where I want to make a shift. This is where I want to make a change. To realizing what happened to Simon you have the ability to experience every day of your life when the cross of Jesus Christ becomes very real to you.

So what is it that occurred? Several things. The first thing is this that Simon realized or understood or experienced the fact that he was "in the minority."

You say, "How do you get that, Jeff?"

Notice what it says. Now they compelled him.

Now I was not an English major in college, but they are plural, he is singular. There were more of them than there were of him.

In this passage that we read in context it says six times they mocked Jesus, they took His clothes off, they put the crown of thorns on Him and here it says and they compelled him.

Do you understand that when we speak about carrying or bearing the cross of Jesus Christ, walking out of this room into the “market place,” you will by faith, by belief, by conviction and by lifestyle find yourself in the minority. If you find yourself in the majority, you are not bearing the cross, you are bearing the culture is what you are doing. He found himself in the extreme minority. They compelled him. There is a distinct difference between who they are and who he is. He finds himself small in number just like you do in the work place, just like you do in the school house, just like we do in our communities.

Have you ever had those thoughts? And I have them regularly. Am I the only one who thinks this way? Am I the only one who believes this? Am I the only one who wants to take a stand on this? Welcome to Simon’s world. He was in the minority.

But there is a second thing that is very abnormal. Not only was he in the minority, he would have been and he was mocked. They mocked Jesus. They are going to mock him, too. Why did they mock him? Yes, He professed to be and was and is God in flesh. Yes, He was and is and always will be Messiah and Savior. But do you know whether the Romans knew or not, Galatians 3:13 and Deuteronomy 31:23:

“Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”³

To bear a cross, even the Romans believed that if someone was sentenced to death by crucifixion they were cursed. The Jews believed they were cursed. The whole world believed they were cursed. Do you realize? You live a life for Jesus, you bear the cross for Jesus, you are distinct for Jesus. Listen, you will not win most popular at your office Christmas party. You will not be voted whatever you want to be voted for. You will be mocked because you will be different. The moment that cross was laid upon his back, he was mocked, he was made fun of. He was ridiculed. He was harassed. Guess what? They spit on Jesus. They spit on him.

You know, Jesus said in the gospel of John, “Marvel not if the world hates you. It hated me first.”

If we are Christian, that means follower of Jesus, should we not even expect the world to treat us the same as it treated Jesus? And yet we walk around so many times and we want to be put on the pedestal. We want to have the power. We want to have the authority. Listen. They didn’t do it for Jesus. They are not going to do it for you. They didn’t do it for Simon. He was mocked. But finally he was “smarter.” And I put that in quotations because when we hear the term martyr we think of one put to death. A martyr is someone who is put to death, but a martyr is also someone who is condemned. A martyr is someone who is convicted based on what they proclaim, what they believe or what they stand for.

³ Galatians 3:13.

Now I would not and I do not and I will never advocate what I call a martyr syndrome. That is just doing something called stupid and getting drunk. He wasn't doing anything, "stupid." He was doing what he was compelled to do. And it is that word compel that I want to address for just a moment. It says that the world who mocked him, who was in the majority, when they compelled him. Let me tell you about that word compel. It is used a lot in the Bible.

In the gospel of Matthew chapter five and what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is talking about the Roman soldiers, the same men who captured Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the same men who put Him in the cross, the same men who compelled Simon to bear the cross. It says if they compel you to go one mile, go two.'

Do you think they were nice about it? Do you think they were sweet about it? I don't think so. When we get to the book of Galatians chapter two the apostle Paul is talking about Titus and Timothy and these guys, these young men whom he is mentoring, he says that they, being the Jewish Legalists, compelled them to be circumcised, but they did not fall for it.

In Acts 26:11, Paul who used to be Saul in the process of killing Christians said, "I used to go into their assemblies and I used to compel them."

Do you think Paul was a nice man in those days? Do you think the Roman soldiers were nice? Do you think the Legalists who came to Titus and Timothy were sweet about it? Listen to me. The world will do anything and everything it can in its power to talk you out of living a life for Jesus Christ. It will compel you that it is not worth it. They will compel you that you shouldn't do it. They will compel you that it is not worth the risk; it is not worth the life. And what happens? Often times we just take the cross and put it to the side and say, "I am going to go the easy route."

You realize it was a 15 minute journey from the front door of Pilate's palace to the hill called Mount Calvary. It is a tough decision.

Traci and I were talking and praying last night and I told her. I said, "Honey, this story is more real than any story in this series."

I don't have two little boys. I have got three. And guess what our days have? Calendars and agendas. And guess what I am? I am a dad and I am a husband and I want to do everything I can in my power to protect. And I can imagine as I am on my way to a soccer game, as we were yesterday, as we have things that they love to do, we want to do, we have planned to do. But yet even in our every day life, how many choices do we have every day. Do I live for Jesus? Do I not? Do I bear the cross or do I take the easy road?

It says, "They compelled him."

Now there have been some who say, “Well, he was obviously forced to do it. He did not have a choice.”

Yeah, he had a choice. Either bear the cross or get stuck on one. That was his choice. If he had said no they would have put him on one. He was going to bear a cross one way or the other. Either carry it or be put on it. He carried the cross.

So what did it do? Yes, he was in the minority. Yes, he was mocked. Yes he was martyred. But I want to share a couple of things that it did in his life that it will do in you life when you get serious about the cross of Jesus in your life.

Here is the first thing. It will change you. It changed him. He will forever be different. He will never be the same again.

Have you ever had an event in life that was so impactful that you will never forget it? You can almost smell the room or the area in which it occurred. You can see the faces. You can almost go back in time. Can you imagine that moment in his life where when he picked up that piece of wood that he may have been 12, 18 or 24 inches from looking into the eyes of Jesus Christ. When he got through with his 15 minutes of being compelled, his clothes would have been soiled. Most likely there would have been blood. There would have been the saliva of those men upon him as they spit on him as he was being mocked.

See, when you encounter the cross of Jesus you are never the same again. Your life changes. Your directions change. Everything about you changes. He would have smelled different. He would have looked different. He would have walked differently. For the rest of the day everywhere he went people would have said, “Simon, what happened to you?”

Can you imagine explaining that one? I mean, when I show up or somebody comes and sees me and I have got mud all over me, they have got two options. Either, A) you were doing yard work or B) you were wrestling your boys. They know what I have been doing.

Can you imagine having your clothes torn, blood upon you, saliva and someone saying, “Simon, what happened?” “You are never going to believe it. I actually carried the cross of Jesus Christ.”

Do realize that when you walk out of this room in a few moments, wherever you go, that ought to be your distinctiveness. People ought to say, “What is different about you? Why are you different? Why do you talk differently? Why do you dress differently? Why are you so distinct? Why are you so...?”

It changed him, but it also did something else. It changed those around him.

Now the Bible is very specific that every word, every word has been given to us by God.

Not every thought, not every principle, every word. Notice what it says in verse 21, “With his sons Alexander and Rufus.”

It didn’t just say his kids. It didn’t just say his family. It was very specific to say that this event did not just change Simon. It changed his family. It changed those around him. It became infectious. That is why in Acts 16:31 it says:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”⁴

Now it doesn’t mean that when you get saved, your kids automatically go to heaven. What it says is when your life changes for Jesus; it changes the lives around you. It changed Simon. It changed Alexander. It changed Rufus and that leads me to my absolute final thought today.

When we look at bearing the cross, we look at embracing the cross of Jesus. What does it do? It changed his future. And it can change your future as well.

I cannot tell you how many conversations I have had with people lately who are overly and rightfully concerned about the future of our culture, the future of this next generation, the future of our world.

People say, “I don’t know what is going to happen. When I see the world out there in the news I just don’t know what the future holds.”

I want you to turn to Romans chapter 16 and I want to show you a little piece of Scripture. You know there are two things in the Bible that often times we get bored with and we just ignore. One of them is the genealogies. So and so begat so and so begat so and so and so begat so and so. The other ones are the salutations at the end of all of that we know as Paul’s letters. Salute this guy, this guy, this guy. And you read those names and you go, “I don’t have a clue who this guy is. Why did God give us these?”

Every time God put the word in the Bible, whether it is a name, whether it is a noun, whether it is a verb, an adverb or an adjective. He had the reason for it. Look in Romans 16:13 at the end of the Apostle Paul’s life as he was writing to the Church at Rome. Thirty years after Simon carried the cross, who does he say salute? Salute Rufus.

Now can I be absolutely honest with you? We have no idea who Rufus is. The Bible doesn’t give us any indication. But what if it was Simon’s son? We don’t know. In fact, I will be honest with you. Any pastor, any theologian, any academician who literally puts their feet in concrete and goes, “The is absolutely who Rufus is in Romans 16:13,” they are treading on thin ice there because we don’t really absolutely, positively know exactly who this is because Rufus is a common name. But do you find it interesting that the Lord may have given us a nugget here? Salute Rufus.

⁴ Acts 16:31.

Simon takes a cross for 15 minutes. He walks across the street. It soils his clothes. It changes his agenda. It messes up his day. But listen. It changed the generations to follow. If you are concerned about the generations that are coming up, if you are concerned with the world around you, let me give you some biblical advice based on Romans 16. More than being angry, more than being upset, get with bearing a cross. Get serious about Jesus. Do you know what will happen? It will change your kids' life. It will change your grandkids' life. It will change your neighbor's life. It will change everybody's life.

I know I am short on time, but I have got to share with you something that happened yesterday. We are at a soccer field. We are indoors. Why? Because we are wimps. It is never more than 72 degrees. We are indoors. Our littlest one JJ is on the field.

Now when my wife and I go to soccer games we take four chairs. Why? Her, myself and the two kids who aren't playing at the time. We have three games, three teams. It is a wild day at the soccer field.

Yesterday we looked at each other and tears welled up in our eyes as we counted around us 11 little boys seated and only two of them were ours. Now I know what some of you are thinking. What did you do wrong?

Traci looked at me and here was basically the way she goes. "This is why we do what we do."

I promise you that the possibility statistically of all those little boys being in a household of faith is slim to none. In our culture today only five percent of that age group even darkens a door of a church today, but I am going to tell you something. It may not have included a hymn. It may not have included a sermon. It may not have included an invitation, but nine little boys whose last name isn't Meyers went to church yesterday, because they heard conversation that was differently. They saw love between a husband and a wife that was different. They saw children and parents responding different. Sure, our clothes weren't soiled. Sure our faces weren't bloody. I am going to tell you. A change was made, though it is small.

And we don't know what has been put in their lives, what is put in your neighbor's life, what is put in the life of the person you volunteer with, your child's life, your grandparent's life. But when we come to the story of Simon, I want to challenge you with the same challenge I am challenging myself. Are you ready?

Let's quit griping about them and start living what we believe. Let's stop complaining about them and worry about me. Let's stop being concerned that they are compelling me to change my standards when Simon did what he was supposed to do? And look at the change. It says, "Salute Rufus." Thirty years later a man who killed Christians in his previous life said salute this guy. I don't know definitively if it was Simon's son, but it makes good preaching to say he was. Could it be that 15 minutes of taking the cross seriously changed generations to come?