

## Sudden Call To Serve Luke 23:26

In our human condition we are only able to know the circumstances and the events that we are experiencing at each moment, unable to fully know all of the unseen factors that have taken place to bring us to that moment and to that experience.

And also, we're not able to know where our next moments will carry us. Sometimes those events and those experiences are ordinary and commonplace to us. But then, at other times those events and experiences can be traumatic and stressful, and can leave indelible and long-lasting effects and changes within our souls.

And such would surely have been the case for this man Simon of Cyrene that's spoken about here in these words of our scripture passage for today.

In my imagination, I would think that this Simon was probably taken completely by surprise when he was suddenly and forcibly conscripted into the very distressful task of helping the Lord Jesus to carry the burden of His cross up that hill to Mount Calvary.

And a question comes to my mind as I consider this event, this "sudden call" to join in with and take a very important role within God's Plan for the salvation, the redemption of the souls of all mankind. The question . . . "what would be your response?" "What would be my response"?

Let's read these few words given to us here in the Book of Luke chapter 23 and let's consider them for a few moments. Verse 26,

<sup>26</sup> When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.  
(Luke 23:26)

May we first take a brief moment and go back and repeat some of the things that have taken place over the past few hours leading up to this very special encounter with this man, Simon of Cyrene.

Beginning the night before, there in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was taken into custody. He was then tried before a court of chief priests, found guilty and then sentenced to death.

But then finding it difficult to get someone to carry out their sentence of death, those same chief priests, in their frenzy for blood, dragged Jesus back and forth between other authorities, urgently trying to convince someone, especially the Roman Governor, Pilate, to carry out their evil desires that Jesus be crucified.

Finally, the Chief Priests having convinced Pilate to crucify the Lord Jesus, we then next, find a somewhat brief encounter taking place with a man on the crowded street named Simon, a man from the city of Cyrene, a city in Libya located about 800 miles west of Jerusalem.

Though some historians might differ, there seems to be no other mention of Simon within these scriptures other than here as he was forced to help the Lord Jesus carry His cross up the hill to Calvary.

But yet, this man Simon's name is forever remembered in the records of biblical history and he is spoken about often when the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus is preached.

We find this same record in two other of the gospels. First in Matthew 27:32 where we read,

<sup>32</sup> Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross. (Matthew 27:32)

Then in Mark 15:21 we read,

<sup>21</sup> 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. (Mark 15:21)

This encounter took place just after the Roman soldiers had finished with their cruel beating of the Lord Jesus and were leading Him away to be crucified. And here, though we are not told why, the soldiers thought it necessary to have someone help Jesus carry His cross.

Most likely, it was because of the severity of the beating. We are told in the prophecy of Isaiah that the beating was horribly punishing. Listen to those words given in Isaiah 53:5,

<sup>5</sup> . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

Bible historians tell us that His beating was so severe that parts of His flesh would have been separated from His bones, rendering Him incapable of carrying the heavy cross.

We imagine that at first Jesus was probably stumbling and falling under the heavy load. And perhaps realizing that He would probably not make it up the hill under His own strength, the soldiers, not wanting to delay their task any longer than necessary, then forcibly enlisted the aid of a bystander to help in the carrying of the cross.

Under the Roman law of that day, a local civilian could be forced to help a soldier for the distance of one mile. And it might have been so for this circumstance.

Some historians conjecture that Simon was a follower of Jesus and the soldiers realizing that he was one of Jesus' many disciples thought the punishment would be all the more effective by forcing a friend to help with the execution.

We don't know if Simon was a follower of Jesus or not, at least not at that moment when he was pressed into service by the Roman soldiers. It really does not seem likely because the wording of the verse gives us the understanding that he was just arriving in the city and was caught up in the activity of the crowd. Those words again,

<sup>21</sup> 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. (Mark 15:21)

So then, while it is probably not likely that Simon was a follower of Christ, I do find it curious that God chose to include the mention of Simon's children. Here Simon is called the father of Alexander and Rufus.

May I repeat something that I say often in these studies? And that is that these scriptures are not just records of events that took place in history that a historian, in this case the Gospel writer Mark, chose to write down for us. Yes, these words did come through the mind of the gospel writer. But much more than that, these words are very special words that God Himself decided should be included here. And the gospel writer, Mark, simply had the privilege of recording exactly what God's Holy Spirit instructed him to write, nothing more and nothing less!

And beyond that, we must understand that God never wastes even one word of these scriptures. And so, the mention of Alexander and Rufus is not simply incidental. Their mention had a purpose.

We don't find further record in these scriptures of Alexander. Though other men of the same name are mentioned, they are not known to be this same Alexander. But I have no doubt that his mention was for a good purpose, perhaps for those in earlier biblical history who might have known him.

However, we do find a later mention of the name Rufus. In the Book of Romans chapter 16 the Apostle Paul tells fellow believers in Rome to,

<sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord.(Romans 16:13)

Some bible scholars agree that this Rufus is most likely the son of this man, Simon of Cyrene.

So then, as Simon was first being forced into service to help Jesus carry His cross, he may truly not have known who Jesus was. But as we know, people seem always to change once they are brought into the presence of the "Living Lord". They either accept Jesus as who He is, or they reject Him. And it surely would have been the same with Simon.

May I pause here and say that bible scholars often speak about how some of the words of scripture are not only actual events that were taking place at particular times in history, they also often serve the dual purpose of being a kind of "allegory", a kind of "parable", a "story within a story" given to support or emphasize a special point under consideration. And that can also be true with these scriptures that are before us today.

While all of these things that were taking place were real and actual, the events might also have been specially given to us, by God, as an allegory.

What do I mean? It is this! These words are a visual presentation of what Jesus had said on other occasions as He ministered daily among the people. On those occasions, He had said clearly and plainly that a necessary part of following after Him would be that they must "take up their cross and follow Him."

So then, from the beginning moments of Jesus struggling to carry His cross, and then stumbling and falling, we can see this allegory about others needing to "take up a cross and follow Him" begin to unfold.

From these words, we understand that this man, Simon, did not, at this moment, want to carry this cross. He was forced to do it. And this was not Simon's cross. It was, in reality, the "cross of Christ", the one intended to be the instrument of death for the Lord Jesus.

And that too is part of the allegory. We must understand that while on other occasions, the Lord Jesus spoke using words that speak about "our cross", the only cross that is truly worthwhile and effectual is this one, this "cross of Christ".

It is through His cross and His cross alone that our debt for sin is paid for in full and the salvation that we so desperately need is accomplished. If we try to bear any other cross, especially one that we might ourselves fashion, ours will be a futile and useless effort and our suffering will be for naught.

And just as I believe took place with this man Simon, the first touch of this special cross of Christ will enable everything that will follow along afterwards.

Why and how would that be so? It's because this special cross that Simon lifted to his shoulders was, no doubt, already drenched with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, spilt there from all of the cuts on the shoulders and back of our dear Lord, put there from the merciless beating by the Roman soldiers.

And that too is part of the allegory. The cross alone would not be enough. It is the shed blood that actually satisfies the debt of sin, "for without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin."

And until that blood is spread upon us individually and personally, there can be no remission of our individual and personal sins.

Simon was forced to take up the cross of Christ. And that too is part of the allegory. Yes, we must willingly desire to pick up and to bear the cross of Christ, but in reality, we must often first be forced into doing it.

Our circumstances and the sufferings that come through our circumstances and through other people, literally compel us to consider the only answer that is left remaining for us and that is to call out to God for His help. And it is in those moments of suffering that God says back to us, pick up the cross of Christ and carry it and you will find the answers you are looking for.

May I again emphasize the reality of the point about the Blood of Christ!

We know from all that is said about His Blood in these scriptures that it has a very special power that resides within it, the kind of power and intensity of which we can only imagine, a power that is able to reach deeply into the soul of a person and to save them.

Listen to these words from Hebrews 9:11-14

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?(Hebrews 9:11-14)

If this man, Simon of Cyrene did not already know Jesus as His Savior before he picked up that cross, at the very first moment he touched the precious blood that had been spilt there, I know with all my heart that he was suddenly and immediately miraculously cleansed from every sin that he had ever committed. And his soul was cleansed as white as snow. And he was eternally saved, because that is the miraculous power within the precious blood of Jesus.

And consider for a moment also, the immediate dilemma that must have come into this man's mind. As Simon touched the blood of the Lord Jesus, he was not only immediately saved, he also began to experience a deep abiding love for Jesus, such as he had never known before. And with such deep love, he would surely not have wanted to be a part of Jesus's death.

But then . . . but then, God's newly-formed Spirit within Simon would have also given him a special understanding about what was about to take place. He would have understood, that as much as He loved and adored Jesus and did not want Him to die, he would have to go ahead and help Him on up to that place of crucifixion, because it would only be by His death, done in this way, at this time, that would wash away the sins of the world, else real salvation could not take place for anyone!

What a dilemma . . . what an impossible dilemma . . . feeling such great compassion and love for the Lord Jesus, but also knowing that he still needed to help Jesus on to the top of that hill and to His death!

And no, this one verse does not tell us that all of these things were taking place in the heart and mind of Simon. But oh dear friends, may I say with great conviction that I have no doubt that all of it did. Because that is what happens when you are suddenly caught up in the eternal plan of God and receive a sudden call into His service.

Everything else begins to take on its proper meaning and purpose. Pain and suffering and even death itself seems to have new meaning and purpose. Self, and the needs of self, and all the plans and hopes and dreams that once held great meaning, all change once a person has experienced the Blood of Christ.

Simon had a rare opportunity indeed, one that very few others would ever experience, and that was to actually touch the precious blood of Christ. And I have no doubt that he was immediately and forever changed by it.

Some of those others who touched His blood were the very ones who spilt it, the soldiers who had beaten Him. Surely, they had touched His blood. I wonder what took place within them.

I know that it is not said within these scriptures, but I am confident that the power within the precious blood of Jesus changed those men also, because that is the way and the power of His Blood!

May I close with these last thoughts! You and I will never know the experience of actually touching the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. But though we will not, God's Holy Spirit can and will still, by faith enable us to live in no less of a condition than as if we had personally touched His Blood.

The thing that God requires of you and me is that we also be willing to look down and to see the cross that lies before us . . . and it truly is right there in front of us, right at this moment . . . and then, though it also is drenched in blood, and though it will surely bring great suffering and grief to us, still, we must reach down and take hold of it and embrace it with all that there is within us, because in that cross and in that cross alone is life.

Matthew 16:24-26

<sup>24</sup> . . . Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26)

Pray with me.