

## “Bearing His Cross”

John 19:17

### Introduction

If you ever get an opportunity to travel to Jerusalem you will find a road there called the Via Dolorosa. It's a Latin name that means *the way of grief* or *the way of suffering*. Besides the Wailing Wall and temple site, where the two Muslim mosques now stand, the Via Dolorosa is perhaps the best known and most visited site by Christian pilgrims. Tradition holds that this was the path that Jesus walked on His way to be crucified.

Along the way there are various stopping points that mark Christ's progression. These specific places are called the *Stations of the Cross*. Nine of the fourteen stations are on the Via Dolorosa. Most of these spots are based upon the traditions of men rather than biblical facts and accounts. They include biblically accurate events, like the scourging of Jesus (the first station), the place where Simon began to carry His cross, and Jesus' conversation with the women from Jerusalem. But there are also things that are completed based on tradition – Jesus meeting His mother, a woman named Veronica who wiped His face and three different places where Jesus stumbled and fell. Jerusalem is filled with places of tradition that have become sites of veneration and idolatrous worship. But there is also much value in seeing and understanding the places, landscape and feel of the cities and geography of our roots.

The final steps of our Lord before His

crucifixion are important to us because the recorded for us in the Word of God. To the very end, God designed every event and every surrounding detail to point men and women to the saving work of Jesus Christ. Man's natural response to the death of Christ is to pity Him. Here is one who clearly was not guilty of death and yet He died in the most brutal way possible. But God does not desire our pity. The death of Christ should cause us to look deep in our own hearts and weep for ourselves. That is the message that resonates through the Scriptures even as Christ walked to the place of His crucifixion.

### [John 19:13-22]

There are no wasted words in the Holy Bible. Everything has a purpose. So even here, as Pilate has handed Jesus over to be crucified, there are two smaller and yet still significant details that we want to examine before Jesus is actually crucified. One of those is the journey from Gabbatha or The Pavement as the place of Pilate's judgment seat was called, to Golgotha, the place of the atonement. The other is that place itself, where the cross was driven into the ground and Jesus shed his blood.

#### I. The Journey.

John's specific words in verse 17 reflect what we have learned all along about this crucifixion.

*They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross . . .* They may have taken Jesus in the sense that God used men to bring about His will, but when we read that *Jesus went out*, we know that He willingly laid down His life.

In spite of the traditions of men that are called the Stations of the Cross, the Bible only tells of two

incidents that took place between the sentencing of Jesus and His arrival at Calvary.

### 1. The Man from Cyrene.

John omits this detail, but the other 3 gospel writers include it. Luke writes in Luke 23:26 *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.*

Cyrene was a port city in northern Africa. We know very little of this man. His name was Simon. He was a father, we know that. Mark tells us the names of his sons, Alexander and Rufus. Given Mark's later contacts in Rome, some have speculated that this is the same Rufus that Paul sends greetings to in Romans 16 where he calls Rufus a *choice man*. If this is so, this man may well have been a disciple of Christ. Or it could have been this event that led to his conversion. We are told in the other gospels that he was traveling in from the country that day – evidently caught up in the happenings and pressed into carrying Jesus' cross (Luke says he was seized).

Regardless, it does present to us a picture of discipleship. Jesus said, *if anyone wishes to come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me*. Jesus was speaking metaphorically. He was creating in our minds eye a picture of discipleship. To come after Jesus involves following in His footsteps. It means death to self.

Jesus never asked us to do something on our own. We can carry our cross only if we are connected to His cross. Only if our sins have been nailed to Christ, can we lay aside our pride and selfishness to live for Him.

Here is Simon from Cyrene, taking up his cross, which was Jesus' cross. He was compelled to do it. And he followed behind Christ, walking

where He went. In our daily living as disciples of Christ, death must ever be present in our minds. (We like to focus on life – and rightly so. We have been raised up with Christ. We are new creatures. ) But let's never forget that we are united to Christ in His death. We have already died. We are *living sacrifices*. Without death, our sins are free to rule our hearts. Without death, we are still held captive. So the cross of Christ is our only hope. *I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.*

## 2. The Women from Jerusalem

Again John omits the story. But Luke 23:27 says this. *And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' "Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*

When you consider that Jesus had been flogged to near death; when you remember that He then bore His own cross for some distance, it is a wonder that He would speak at all. But the work of Christ was not yet completed.

As the women wailed and cried out for Him, Jesus directed their attention away from His suffering and inward to their own hearts.

Much is made of the physical sufferings of Jesus. And there is no doubt that we need to understand how He suffered for us. But have you ever notice how little emphasis the Bible places upon the details and descriptions of the crucifixion? John scarcely mentions it. Too much emphasis on

the external aspects of the cross might cause us to miss the point. His death was directed specifically as an act of love toward those He would save. But in order to be saved, a person must first see and understand his own sin and need.

So when the women took pity upon Him, Jesus redirected their focus. *Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.* And then He warned them of the coming judgment of God upon Jerusalem. All that they loved, all that they trusted in was about to come tumbling down. And if they didn't turn from their false hope, a day would come when they'd wish they didn't have children or they'd wish they could be buried under a mountain than rather than go on living. That's how severe the judgment of God would be on those who wouldn't believe.

If men are to be saved – if you are to be saved from your sin if you are not – the essential first step is to recognize your sin and doom apart from Christ. And here is Jesus, moments from death, laying the foundation for these women to trust in Him.

So that's a little bit about the journey

## II. The Place

It seems like in the Bible the place of one's death is either very significant or it's not mentioned at all.

Abraham – told the place, the field, even the name of the cave because it was the only land he owned and it reminds us that he lived by faith.

Joseph – In Egypt. *God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.*

Moses – in the land of Moab after climbing up Mt. Nebo to see the Promised Land from afar.

Saul – alone in battle. Cut off from the people of God.

Ahab – by a random arrow in his chariot.

Dogs licked up his blood

Jezebel – thrown down from an upper window, body eaten by wild dogs.

David - at peace in his castle.

So now here the place of Jesus' death is significant. It has a gripping name. Golgotha. The Place of the Skull. It was a little hill outside the gates of Jerusalem with one purpose – to execute criminals. It was a very public place. Very visible. Right on a main road where people would pass by and see any activity. Such a place had three functions.

1. It warned people.

Whenever evil is punished, the righteous are warned. When church discipline is exercised in the church today, one of the effects is that the people of God are warned about the consequences of sin.

When individuals and families would walk by Golgotha – whether any crucifixions were under way or not – people would have a stark reminder that there is a way that leads unto death.

God graciously gives us many warnings in life. The Word of God is filled with written warnings. If you obey you will be blessed, if you disobey you will be cursed. Life itself gives us experiential warnings. If you touch a stove you'll get burned. If you neglect your gold fish they will die. If you mistreat your friends they will leave you. If you sin there will be various consequences.

Among the warnings God gives us is to observe the consequences of another's sin. They say 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> born children are disciplined less. Some would argue it's because parents get soft.

More likely is they observe the trouble of their big brother or sister and take the warning to heart.

Golgotha was a powerful warning to people.

## 2. It humiliated the wicked.

Those who were sentenced to Golgotha were publicly humiliated. The one to be crucified was stripped of his clothing. There is important biblical imagery here going back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned they needed and wanted clothing to cover themselves. At Golgotha a person's sin was exposed.

The person was jeered and mocked.

Matthew tells us that *those passing by were hurling abuse at Him. In the same way the chief priests also along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him. Even the robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him.*

Perhaps there was no place on earth more humiliating than The Place of the Skull.

## 3. It punished evil.

The ultimate purpose of this designated place was to extract life as a penalty for sin and evil. God said that the consequence of sin would be death. Here death came by crucifixion. The most cruel and painful of all deaths. It was a Roman form of punishment that was reserved for non-Romans – and those who were the worst of criminals.

And this was the place Jesus chose to die. In this place *He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf.*

When you look at Golgotha, you need to be reminded that Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. He loved you so much that He would give up His life and take upon

Himself the humiliation of your sin so that you might have life.

When you look at that place you ought to be warned. Apart from Christ you will pay for your own sin.

When you look at that place you ought to see your only hope. In that place of death there is life. *Jesus went out bearing His own cross.* Don't pity Christ. Don't weep for Him. Weep over your own sins. They took Him to Golgotha. And if you know that, if you believe it, then the Place of the Skull becomes for you the Place of the Living.