

# Compelled To Carry The Cross

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We are returning to Matthew's Gospel in Chapter 27 and first of all can we read a few verses just to get an aspect of the context within Matthew's Gospel. Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Matthew Chapter 27, let's read first of all verses 27 to 44. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole battalion before him and they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and twisted together a crown of thorns they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand and kneeling before him they mocked him saying Hail King of the Jews. They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head and when they had mocked him they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. As they went out they found a man of Sion and assigned him by name and compelled this man to carry his cross and when they came to a place called Golgotha which means place of a skull they offered him wine to drink mixed with gall but when he tasted it he would not drink it and when they had crucified him they divided his garments among them by casting lots and they sat down and kept watch over him there and over his head they put the charge against him which read this is Jesus

King of the Jews. Then two robbers were crucified with him one on the right and one on the left and those who passed by derided him wagging their heads and saying you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days save yourself. If you are the son of God come down from the cross so also the chief priest who describes Nelders mocked him saying he saved others he cannot save himself he is the king of Israel let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him he trusts in God let God deliver him now if he desires him but he said I am the son of God and the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way and for a few moments together seeking the Lord's blessing will especially concentrate our thoughts in verse 32. Matthew chapter 27 and verse 32 as they went out they found a man of Sion in Simon by name they compelled this man to carry his cross. As we made reference earlier today we are giving some consideration of the gifts that we give to God and there are of course many ways in which we are able to consider this and to consider our own giving to the Lord and what we do for him. We gave the offering of our worship as we considered earlier on today but we also give our service to the Lord and that of course covers a great deal of different elements but I wish for us to consider this in a general sense our giving of the gift of our service and as we do so and as we reflected earlier today we are coming consistently to the cross constantly to the cross we are to stay near the cross we are to reflect time again and contemplate on what has been done for us and what has been achieved by the Lord on the cross and that of course is what informs the giving of our gifts, the giving of our worship, the giving of our service to the

Lord. We do it in response to the gifts we've received to what God has done for us. We come here very much in the context of the Gospels we read Matthew and Mark's Gospels at the sense of which we are here at the point where Jesus is on the cross and crucified and if we could maybe take a step just before this and to reflect on what occurs immediately prior to this and focusing on this especially in verse 32 and what we have as we approach the cross and as we approach these different elements it is everything that Jesus has already begun to endure. In terms of prior to this we have the intensity of the upper room experience, language of betrayal, the institution of the Lord sufferer that is itself demonstrative of his death. Then we have the Gethsemane experience, the anguish and agony of our Savior as he prays before the Father, his arrest, his trials and the reality of the abuse that he endured, the physical violence, the emotional agony, the anguish that he faced as he was there before the soldier, the man in which Pilate himself commanded Jesus to be flogged and all the different elements of this trial and this abuse and the wounding of our Savior that the Prophet himself told us would occur and also how all of these different elements themselves bring us towards the cross and speak to us of the reality of what he has done for us. Even as we think of these things the Prophet said with his stripes we are healed, all the different elements of his suffering that climax of course at the cross and the suffering of his soul. He endured this for us. He endured this for us. Is it not right and proper there in to ask what will we do for him? If he endured all of this for us, what honour can we give to him? What service? What gifts? What can we do? And as an example this night to help us to consider this brought before us is one man who undertook a task that until the end of this world will be remembered as an honour, an honourable task that he did for Jesus as Jesus approached the cross. In verse 32 they found a man of sirene Simon by name. First of all it is considered this man Simon as the one who was a bystander and we see in the midst of the horrific abuse that Jesus has endured at Pilate's headquarter before the whole battalion of Pilate's soldiers. We see that there is an element of this in which there is a spectacle. In verse 31 they mocked him and the sense in which he was being stripped of one item of clothing and clothed with something else and then he was beaten with the rod and they put a crown on his head and they derided and mocked him and they made a sport out of him and part of the torment that he endured and the charge of

something of course that the Roman soldiers did to alleviate their own boredom. Here are men who are trained to fight, trained to kill and now they've been seconded to Jerusalem at a time of religious festivities and they're here around the governor and there is one particular prisoner who has unprecedented attention. They call this man the king. They say that he went about doing miracles. They say he raised the dead and they've got a particular interest in him more than anybody else and so their attention is fixed on him and they mock and deride him in this way. Pilate himself engages in this too. He is the one who sends him in verse 25 to be scourged. Scourging was so torturous and so painful that men often died from the wounds of scourging. The skin and the flesh are lacerated by the whipping and a man is left physically exhausted. Somewhere around this point too of course Pilate brings

Jesus out and in the battered and bruised state he says the crowd, behold the man, in all the physical suffering and the reality for Jesus is what was before him and so Pilate has sentenced Jesus and the soldiers in verse 31 have led him away to be crucified but he is here under this great physical exhaustion and the Roman soldiers are tasked to undertake the punishment. The sentence is clear. It's capital punishment. This man is to be put to death and where they're going to put him to death is at the highway into Jerusalem where people come in and out. They're coming in and out of the city and the city is busy.

[10:22] This is the time of the feast of the Jews. This is the time of the greatest of the feasts, the Passover. The place is busy with people. For the Romans the tactic behind this was that they had to make this as obvious and public as possible. It's a spectacle. It's a deterrent and they would bring the crime, the charge of the person who was condemned and they would place this sign before them so that people would know you don't do this and there is this deterrent and there is this affirmation too of the authority in Rome, conquered a foreign land and they're in control. They're declaring their sovereignty over this land. They make the crime known and not only the crucifixion itself but even leading up to the crucifixion, the public element spectacle and deterrent is there. Leading the condemnation through the streets of the city. And of course there is a sense too in which the crime is to be known publicly. The crime of course that Jesus is charged with verse 37, they put this charge against him. This is Jesus, king of the Jews. And so somewhere in the procession from Pilate's headquarter to Golgotha as they lead Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem to make a public spectacle of him, there is this sign. Whether it's in front of him or whether he's carrying it with him, king of the Jews, king of the Jews and the crowds watch the spectacle and they're at their mocking and their derision as Jesus journeys to his death. And with him is the instrument of his death, the instrument of his execution. He carries the cross beam, the physically exhausted body, lacerated, bruised, spat on and beaten. Under this crushing weight of this enormous cross beam, continuing in the ongoing anguish and torment which he goes through. It's a sorry sight. There is very little sympathy for him on the journey. There is a little which we learn of from Luke in Luke chapter 23 and then verse 27. A great multitude of people and women were more in a lamenting foreign and Jesus turns to them, he says, Daughter of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. It's a little bit of sympathy. But the scene really primarily is smirking this and it belongs to his humiliation. He humbled himself for us. He endured for us. But at this moment in verse 32, it's all taken its toll. Behold the man, the body under the extremity of exhaustion and pain and anguish, stumbling through the streets of Jerusalem. And the soldiers are there and they're able to identify what's going on and they're able to identify that they themselves have orders to fulfill. The Roman soldiers take their orders seriously.

They have to. They have to. And the order here is take this man and crucify him. And they have to ensure that this is to be done and they can see what's going on here. As they're journey towards Golgotha, the danger is that this man is so physically exhausted that he is going to expire on the street, expire before he even reaches there. They can't let this happen. They have to fulfill what the governor has called them to do, the order that they have been given from the one who represents Rome to them. They understand that they have to find somebody compelling someone to carry the cross. And that's where Simon is introduced to us. And he is introduced to us here as a man of Sirenia. He is found in this moment. Sirenia is actually modern day Libya, North Africa. A very large Jewish settlement.

His own name, of course, is very Jewish. We understand here that he's come into this scene as Mark told us, coming in from the country, a passerby on the scene. We understand that he's come at this heightened time of religious fervour in Jerusalem, in the greatest of feasts, in the Passover feast. He's come to worship. He's come through this great journey from the other side of the Mediterranean to come here to Jerusalem, engaging in this purpose to worship the Lord, to be there at the temple, to be there at the time of Passover, to eat the lamb at Jerusalem, to engage in worship. He has taken this seriously, what God has commanded him to do, engaging in all of this religious preparation, ensuring that he is clean, free from pollution. Probably coming into Jerusalem, we would say, singing the songs of Ascent, singing the Psalms of the pilgrims, entering into Jerusalem, anticipating that this is a day of worship, that this is a day he is going to come into Jerusalem in this way. And for him, it is almost as if he would perceive that this is like an accident, juggling on the scene, watching what's going on, watching the spectacle, the Roman soldier taking the condemned prisoner, those who have been found guilty by pilot to the place of crucifixion, the crowds mocking and deriding, the horror. As if he used her body, stumbling under the cross, almost a death, carrying the instrument of death, bruised, battered, and the ragging, and their calling him the king of the Jews. The prophet says, like a lamb to the slaughter. Simon here is bystander, but Simon becomes one who is compelled. Simon as the man who is compelled, he is surprised here that he will become more than just a spectator. The Roman soldier find him in verse 32. They went out, they found a man of siren, Simon by name. The soldiers are seen the danger that Jesus is under here. And they want to ensure that he is going to reach Gogotha, they want to ensure that crucifixion will take place. And they understand that for this to happen, somebody is going to have to help with this cross to alleviate what he is currently going through to a little to ensure that he would face a greater pain and a greater agony and that the public spectacle would continue.

And so we have this word in verse 32, they compel this man, Simon to carry the cross of Jesus. And this word compel is quite a technical word, and it is used specifically by the Romans to compel a citizen into public service. And they were allowed to do this under Roman law. At any point they could compel any citizen to a public duty, a public service, they could make someone do something because they were the authority, they were the rulers.

And they could do this under the name of Rome. And so they decided they're going to do this and they find this man, Simon by name. For him he's a passerby, simply standing there, a spectator, just like everybody else in the crowd, just they're the same as everyone else. And they say they found this man, they compel this man, this man. And Simon sees it's him. He is the one who is thrown out of the crowd. He is the one the soldiers have highlighted. He is the one who the finger points to. He is the one who singled out this day.

[ 20 : 13 ] Why me? Why not the man beside me? Why not somebody else? This is not what Simon had in his agenda for this day. This is not what he expected. This is not how he rose to this day. He thought he was going somewhere else to do something else. But amongst everyone I wrote to, and amongst the entire crowd, it's him. It's Simon. He's the man. He's to be compelled. It's a daunting prospect for Simon. He sees the condemned man exhausted near death.

And this heavy piece of wood stained with the condemned man's blood. And the ugly, brutal reality of everything he is speaking of a crude death. The whole scene for Simon is death.

And he has endeavored himself as he approaches the religious feast of the Passover to be ceremonially clean. And he thinks and considers what this means. He's done everything possible in his own part to be free of pollution and now he's to put his hand to death and blood and condemnation. And in the scene, at its very heart, it's this man, stumbling under the weight of the cross. And the question for Simon is he going to serve? Is he going to carry? Is he going to give a little relief? Really, in one sense, there is no question.

There is no choice for Simon. He is compelled. You see what they say in verse 32, they compelled this man. They made him do it. He thought this was all some kind of accident, that he stumbles across the scene, but he is compelled by a higher authority, a higher sovereign.

An even Rome. For Simon, this is a divine appointment. The compelling comes from God.

[ 23 : 09 ] The meeting and appointment is of God. The choosing and calling out from the crowd. The realisation of identifying Simon above everybody else. It's of God. When God compels a person, there is nothing they can do but to keep their obedience until they hold up the cross. When God does this to you, there is nothing you can do but to give yourself to the task that he compels you to do. Because we think really of Simon, first of all as a bystander, secondly as the one who is compelled, but really Simon is a disciple. The whole scene, the picture, the party place and the metaphor even of the very language. It all tells us about the believer.

It all tells us about the disciple. Here we have this cross beam that Simon has to carry, that he has to bear. And friend isn't it the language of faith? Isn't it the reality of what God calls us to do as followers of Christ? Luke chapter 9 and verse 25. Sorry verse 23.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke again chapter 14 and verse 27. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. And again there are many references but Galatians 6 verse 14.

But far be it for me to boast except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. You see this language and this metaphor is about the life of faith, about how God compels us to come out of the crowd, to see that he is the one who is calling us and compelling us and telling us to follow Jesus, to carry the cross ourselves, to live out and make our faith known, to be willing, to be derided and mocked with Jesus, to make our faith known, to make him known, to serve him, to follow him, to deny ourselves. This day marks a life changing day for Simon. Where everything changes, his view of Jesus, his view of himself, his view of what is clean and what is pollution, his view of the cross itself. This day everything changes for Simon because it is the day that

God compels him. And when God compels you, everything changes. We find of course that it is more than just metaphor but we understand here as Simon has been identified by name for us here in Mark's Gospel too that we realise that he is somebody who is known to the early New Testament church. And we see in Romans 16 and in verse 13 that we have Alexander and Rufus, sorry Mark 15, we have this his sons, Alexander and Rufus and then a reference again in Romans 16 verse 13 where we see that the blessing doesn't just come to Simon, comes to his home, comes to his family, comes to his children but it begins with him bearing the cross. Something that began as compulsion became a blessing. What seemed such a shameful act was actually an honourable service to share in that rejection, to embrace that shame, to carry the cross. We have reference of course here of Jesus' silence a number of times, the prophet also speaks of it. What a journey this must have been for Simon. Carrying the cross whether he carries the entire cross or carries it behind Jesus, it's a little uncertain but we know that he follows Jesus here. Watching all that's going on. Carrying this weight and before him the silent march of the condemned

[ 28 : 52 ] Christ around him, the taunter, the mocking, the laugh at him, in front of Simon sees the back of Jesus, the lacerated body from the scourging and he watches and he follows and the journey through Jerusalem and they reach the destination, a place called the Place of the Skull and he sees the condemned man willingly lie on that cross, nails, pious hand, feet and in a moment the soldier raised the cross and the body hangs, suspended and he cries to his father, darkness fills the land and he breathes his last and somewhere within these moments Simon comes to the conclusion and the realization he did this for me. What he was watching was his Passover, slain, his king put to death, his sins paid for so that

Simon can say Jesus died for my sins and I carried his cross. Will you tonight carry the cross? Will you follow Jesus? Will you make your faith known and under the compulsion of God come out from the crowd? Will you do such a little thing when he's done such a great thing? Will you carry the cross? What are you willing to do for the Lord? How are you willing to serve him? Will you follow him? Stop being the bystander and part of the crowd and embrace the shame and the rejection of the world. Deny yourself, follow him and take up the cross. Amen.

Lord bless you and the folks again.