

1. Simon of Cyrene – God’s Hand is Sovereign to Open Eyes to Jesus’ Glory

- a. Cyrene was a North African city, in present day Libya
 - i. Built by the Greeks ~630BC, made Roman *metropolis* in 74BC
 - ii. Major metropolitan city on the outskirts of Greek power (~10,000 people)
 1. Many temples, marketplaces, at least 4 theatres (currently excavated), etc.
 - iii. There were long-standing tensions between Greeks and Jews
 1. Inhabitants had been segregated into four classes by the Greek dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla in 85BC: citizens, farmers, resident aliens, and Jews
 2. This shows how Jews were distinguished by the Greek population of Cyrene
 3. Jason of Cyrene wrote 2 Maccabees, which glorifies the Temple of Jerusalem and harshly criticizes Hellenists (Greek-adopting Jews)
 4. The Cyrene Jews revolted during Vespasian's rule (73AD) after the destruction of Jerusalem and killed 6,000 soldiers (First Jewish-Roman War), and more strongly in 117AD under Emperor Trajan's rule (Kitos War)
 5. These revolts caused great destruction to the city of Cyrene
 - iv. Local Agriculture was Primarily Farming and Fishing
 1. Herodotus mentions the great farming there (3 harvests)
- b. “coming in from the fields”
 - i. He may have been a laborer, a migrant worker, just getting off of work
 1. Possibly a Jewish migrant worker visiting Jerusalem to work
 - ii. He may have simply been there for Passover, as Cyrene had a very large Jewish community (who were despised by the Greek and Roman culture)
 - iii. For whatever reason that he was there, it is apparent that he was not familiar with Jesus...yet
 1. He was not a disciple of Jesus at this time
 2. He was simply at hand near the road, coming into the city from the countryside.
- c. His sovereignly ordained and forced encounter with Jesus absolutely altered him
 - i. You would assume that a Cyrenean would want a Barabbas, a leader willing to fight for the freedom of Israel
 1. “Bar-Abbas” means “son of the fathers” and is most likely a name that Barabbas gave himself as a freedom fighter for Israel
 2. Thus, when the crowd asked for Barabbas, they were asking for a “Messiah” who would fight for Israel, and kill for Israel
 3. They didn’t want the Messiah who would give himself up and die
 - ii. Simon heard Jesus speak to the daughters of Jerusalem, heard him say “Father, forgive them” and heard him speak to the thieves; *it changed him*
 - iii. Sometime between carrying Jesus’ cross and the writing of the gospel of Mark, Simon’s family became believers
 1. Mark adds Simon’s sons in an aside because the Roman church knew his sons (Alexander and Rufus) – “Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mark 15:21)
 2. Paul also mentions Rufus in his salutation to the Roman church (Romans 16:13) as well as Rufus’ mother, so the entire family came to Christ
- d. This inclusion of Simon into the story of Jesus, within history, by God shows God’s providential control over his story

- i. Why did they choose Simon, and why was his original town mentioned?
 - 1. Could it be that the Roman soldiers were familiar with the Cyrenean Jews' attitude towards Roman rule, and they wanted to make a spectacle of this, too?
 - 2. Simon may have been darker skinned, as some North African Jews were, and therefore very noticeably Cyrenean by the soldiers.
 - 3. It may have continued to be a power game, a gory political statement, a cruel and ridiculous display of Jewish weakness by making two men carry one 40lb crossbar.
- ii. How would you have felt if you were a Jewish man forced to carry the execution tool, to participate in the process, of a Roman execution of a fellow Jew?
 - 1. This was Simon's condition, and judging from the Jewish uprisings in Cyrene, Simon was most likely not a lover of Roman rule in Palestine, or Cyrene.
 - 2. Being forced to carry the execution tool of a fellow Jew must have been angering, disheartening, and insufferable
 - a. Yet, God ordained this suffering of Simon, this shame and humiliation, so that he might see Jesus and be forever changed
 - b. So, in our sufferings and humiliations and sorrows, we can trust that God has ordained for us to see Jesus and be forever changed
 - 3. Cyrene had a church before Paul went to the Gentiles!
 - a. Could it be that Simon carried the gospel of Jesus to North Africa *before* it was carried there by the apostles? YES!
 - b. Acts 11:20-21 – Cyreneans preached the gospel to Antioch *before* Paul came
- e. Mentioning Simon of Cyrene makes the gospels verifiable to their readers
 - i. “father of Alexander and Rufus” - Readers of the gospels knew these people, so they could ask them to verify this story and the context
 - ii. Simon was there, and he must have told the story, and his wife and sons would know this, and his friends would have heard
 - iii. If you’re making up a story, you don’t include these kind of details

2. Daughters of Jerusalem – God Has All Rights and All Authority Over Every Person

- a. Luke loved to exalt and include women!
 - i. It’s Luke that includes Mary and Martha, the prostitute who believed, the group of women who supported Jesus’ ministry
 - ii. In fact, in no gospel is a woman ever revealed to be hostile towards Jesus
 - iii. Thus, when the apostles had run away, there is a group of women who wail and weep for Jesus
 - iv. He addresses them with compassion, “Daughters” – even though they aren’t disciples, but professional mourners
- b. He relates his coming to the Last Day
 - i. He alludes to Jeremiah 9:20 (and many other judgment texts) concerning destruction and judgment upon daughters of the city
 - ii. Then, he quotes from Hosea 10 regarding the coming ultimate destruction and judgment where the people say, “We have no king”, speaking of YHWH, and he comes in wrath against them, and they would rather the rocks and mountains crush them to deal with the Judge of all the Earth in his righteous anger

1. John's revelation also uses this language: Rev 6:14-17 in relation to the wrath being poured out upon all the inhabitants of the earth, in their fear saying, "from the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb..."
- iii. "don't weep for Me, but weep for your children"
 1. He is not telling us to be tearless in our consideration of His great and loving sacrifice for us, or for his suffering, or for his death, in an objective sense
 2. He is saying that they are weeping for the wrong reasons!
 - a. They weep because they see him as a failed hero, a loser, a mere man who could not deliver, and was sentenced to death
 - b. They don't understand that they are in the same boat – going to their deaths, judged and condemned, and that God Himself is going to judge those who do not receive Jesus as their authoritative King, who say, "We have no king"
 - c. Jesus is saying that until they weep for their own danger, and their own sin, and their own impending judgment, then they won't understand rightly what he is going through in that moment of HIS suffering
- c. What do we learn from these chosen words of Jesus?
 - i. Judgment Day is coming and the question of Kingship is before every person.
 1. Jesus speaks more about the judgment of God than he does Heaven
 2. Love warns of real danger with words of true impending doom
 - ii. Until you weep for yourselves because of your own impending doom that is coming from the holy God against your own sins, you will never understand Jesus
 1. Repentance always precedes faith, as two sides of the coin
 2. Jesus' crucifixion is not because of him, it's because of you!
 - a. His death is not merely another unjust, senseless death by an abuser of power
 - b. His death is unique because it was to atone for your sins, that which comes from your heart and is laid before God as putrid, rebellious, mutinous, destructive, and murderous of all good.
 3. If you try and get rid of the doctrine of Judgment Day, because it offends you, you will inevitably eliminate the doctrine of God's love
 - a. When you try to make God more loving by eliminating the necessity of salvation by atonement, of a Judgment Seat, of a Hell, you actually make Him less loving
 - b. His love becomes like your love, and such is minimized and democratized and dissolved
 4. How? – Why is Jesus dying?
 - a. If you don't see that you are lost and you are under sentence, then you don't have a God who gave His Son, who through Him to the judgment seat, then you don't have a God who loves you so much that he would undergo such judgment
 - b. The more holy that you understand God to be, as revealed in His Word, then the more loving you see Him to be at this particular moment, the giving of His Son for your sins and your ungodliness
 - i. If you say, "I believe in a loving God, not an angry God" than you have a God whose love for you cost him nothing – cheap love, cheap god

- ii. Look at the difference between the person who believes that God is *abstractly* loving and one who believes that God loves through judgment!
 - 1. Abstract love never weeps for himself like Jesus says here
 - 2. Rescued sinner weeps for himself because God's mercy is so great
 - c. This is why Jesus speaks this way to the daughters of Jerusalem – you must believe the bad news before Jesus is the good news
 - d. If you cannot weep for your own sin, and see your desperate need for a Savior (when He was present 'wood is green'), then the revelation of its truth in that Last Judgment Day will not soften your heart, but harden it (when the wood is dry)
 - i. "They will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"
 - 1. Who is speaking to the mountains to crush them?
 - 2. The people who must face the LORD
 - 3. It is not God who is telling the mountains to crush them, but *they* are telling the mountains to crush them
 - ii. Those who are unwilling to "weep for yourselves" and so to see Jesus rightly, as the Savior and authoritative King over them, would rather be destroyed in agony than repent and be saved in that day
 - 1. The sun which melts the heart of wax also hardens the heart of clay, and the glorious brightness of God's great holiness will harden those clay hearts into stone
 - 2. One of C.S. Lewis' characters in *That Hideous Strength*, Frost, was an academic who didn't believe in any personal accountability for the soul, because humans were merely matter. Thus, he kills himself by setting himself on fire. As he does, Lewis describes this attitude that would call down mountains upon oneself:

"Escape for the soul, if not for the body, was offered him. He became able to know (and simultaneously refused the knowledge) that he had been wrong from the beginning, that souls and personal responsibility existed. *He half saw: he wholly hated.* The physical torture of the burning was not fiercer than his hatred of *that*. With one supreme effort he flung himself back into his illusion." (C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*)
3. Sin has told us all our lives that unless we are independent, unless we can rule ourselves and do whatever our hearts leads us to do, then we won't be happy
4. It is this willful independence that ruins us, and on that day it is the insane desire for independence that would rather die than be utterly dependent upon God's mercy
 - a. "I can decide for myself"
 - b. "I can't accept a God who would ask me to..."
 - c. "I'm not completely evil..."
 - d. If you die like that, when you meet Him you will not turn to him to love him, you will rather call the mountains down upon yourself than serve Him
5. This gospel is extremely offensive to our culture, which prides itself in autonomous freedom:

"...the most offensive and countercultural claim in Christianity is not what Christians believe about homosexuality or abortion, marriage or religious liberty. Instead, the most offensive claim in Christianity is that God is the Creator, Owner, and Judge of every person on the planet. Every one of us stands before him guilty of sin, and the only way to be reconciled to him is through faith in Jesus, the crucified Savior and risen King. All who trust in his love will experience everlasting life while all who turn from his lordship will suffer everlasting death."

-David Platt

I think that this mention of Simon of Cyrene is because God is placing before us the object lesson of all those who are confronted by Jesus. Simon is forced to walk directly behind Jesus, within 6 feet, staring at the stripes on his back. He is then taken down the path of the gospel: divine judgment is real and imminent, so repent; Jesus is merciful and forgiving, "Father, forgive them...", so take hope; and you are left with two options: the rejecting thief and condemnation, or the repentant thief and paradise with Jesus. Oh, how the sovereign Lord works!

How shall you respond to this Jesus? How will you hear his warning? You were created and are owned by God. He has all rights over you. Yet, we have craved independence and thus mutinied against him in hatred. We wanted to control our own lives, and sin deceived, and deceives, us into thinking that our autonomy will bring us joy, peace, and rest. We looked into that mirror of autonomy and turned to stone because we loved our own image.

There is a day coming when every human will answer to God who has supreme authority and right over us. This is true. This is the Bad News for sinners.

Behold this Jesus: Even in the midst of excruciating pain and the horrors yet to come of God's great wrath against sin, Jesus is encountering people whom he loves

He saw Jesus place Himself before them as their only hope as the king over their hearts and lives. He loved them to the end. It is this revelation of God's impending justice and the sacrificial gift of Himself in my place, as the sinner, that altered the Cyrenean and thusly altered the very church of Jesus Christ. Antioch owes their lives to Simon. God sovereignly ordained Simon to be forced into a position by Roman oppressors whereby he had to stare at the stripes on Christ's back. He heard every grunt, every groan, every word of warning and word of mercy, and it must have been terrible for him. Being taken down this path, he heard the bad news first, proclaimed to the daughters of Jerusalem, of God's impending judgment day. Next he will hear the words of forgiveness from Jesus on the cross, the incredible mercy towards presently harming enemies. Finally, he heard the promise of paradise to the repentant thief. Simon came unawares and un-looking, his life infringed upon by suffering and sorrow and humiliation, but through it he saw the glory of Jesus Christ as the good news in the light of bad news and it changed him forever.

Don't despise the conditions into which God has placed you, the sharing of his cross-beam with its splinters and shame. He is sovereign, and if you will see Jesus *as He is*, as the King who has authority over you and as the Savior-King who rescues you by dying in your place, then your suffering produces an eternal weight of glory far superior to any comfort or success in this world. Trust the sovereign God with your condition, and behold the God who substitutes Himself in the place of sinners before His own judgment seat. You can trust this King for your good, for it was your sin that made this cross necessary; and it was for your good that He suffered, died, and rose again for your salvation.

God is telling his story, and Jesus is His hero. Behold him, see the stripes on his back for your sins and for your salvation. Entrust your every way to Him, give up your self-dependence and depend upon King Jesus who loves you more deeply than you even imagine and live!