
On the Way To Calvary

*“After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him”
(Matthew 27:31).*

We have come to the end of the record of the historic trials of Jesus. Pilate, from the bema at Gabbatha, gave his final verdict concerning Jesus; but his judgment had no integrity to it. Under personal and political pressure, he yielded to the will of the Jewish council. Luke wrote of the governor, “He delivered Jesus to their will” (Luke 23:25b).

Jesus had already been scourged (John 19:1), as was customary before crucifixion. All that remained to be done for the execution was to gather the cross and other necessary equipment and to organize a procession to take the prisoner to the place of execution. While the last-minute details were handled, Jesus was mocked by the soldiers and put back into His own clothes to face the unimaginable death that He would experience. Matthew said, “After they had mocked Him, they put . . . His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him” (Matthew 27:31).

Two other prisoners were made ready to be crucified with Jesus. These were convicted robbers who had been condemned to death and were being held for execution. A detail of Roman soldiers—four soldiers under the leadership of a centurion—could handle several executions as easily as one, so these two men were added to the procession. Luke said, “Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him” (Luke 23:32). Little did those in charge know that, by adding the two condemned men to this event, they were fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:9).

The parade of prisoners and Roman soldiers wound through the streets of Jerusalem and finally exited one of the gates in the wall of the city, ending at a location not far outside the wall (Hebrews 13:12). The spot was known as “the Place of a Skull,” or “Golgotha” in Hebrew or Aramaic (John 19:17). It is also called “Calvary” (Luke 23:33; KJV), from a Latin word (*calvaria*) which means “skull.” The route that was taken has been given the name *Via Dolorosa*, a Latin designation that means “Way of Sorrows.” Since this was the time of the Passover, the street was no doubt lined with people from Jerusalem and from faraway places. Some had participated in the trials by voicing their conviction that Jesus should die, while others were merely curious and had gathered to see what was taking place.

In harmony with Roman procedure, the condemned were forced to carry the cross beams on their shoulders to the place of their crucifixion. John recorded of Jesus, “He went out, bearing His own cross” (John 19:17). Weakened from the scourging and the exhausting night that He had endured, Jesus likely struggled to carry the heavy beam. The Gospel writers did not say that He fell to the ground under the weight of the cross, although that is a reasonable assumption. As the procession made its way along, it became clear to the detail of Roman soldiers who were conducting the execution that help would be needed for Jesus. Mark said, “They pressed into service a passerby coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to

bear His cross" (Mark 15:21). The Roman soldiers, when necessary, could order any bystander to assist them with whatever was needed. Luke said, "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). A soldier must have pointed at Simon and said, "You, come over here and carry this man's cross." Bearing Jesus' cross, Simon walked behind Him to the place of execution.

At one point along the route to Calvary, Jesus turned and spoke to a group of women who were following along behind Him. His exhortation to them is the only recorded occasion when Jesus spoke to people between Gabbatha and Golgotha. The women were wailing and lamenting for Him. We do not know much about these women. They may have been professional weepers who took it upon themselves to join the procession, walk along behind Him, and publicly lament for Him. Hearing them, Jesus stopped, turned, and addressed them:

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? (Luke 23:28–31).

Shortly after Jesus made these remarks to the women, the procession arrived at the place of execution. The journey from the Praetorium to Calvary was not a long one; it may not have been more than half of a mile. However, for Jesus, who had been scourged and had gone without sleep, food, and drink for twenty-four hours, each step was torturous, requiring every bit of energy that His body could muster.

Every part of our Lord's death has significance and meaning for us. Each segment places upon our hearts lessons that should never be forgotten. This journey to the cross is no exception. What does it say to us?

Simon's encounter with Jesus gives us an important illustration. Simon, the man forced to carry Jesus' cross, illustrates the fact that an

event can happen at a most unexpected time, changing one's life forever. That morning, Simon went into Jerusalem as an unknown man from another country. He saw a procession moving down the street and went over to see what was happening. Then a Roman soldier pointed at him and required him to carry Jesus' cross. At that moment, Simon moved from obscurity to a place in the Scriptures. Wherever the gospel is preached, he will be mentioned. Let us learn from this to receive every moment with expectation and anticipation and do our best with it; for when we least expect it, we may come to a moment that will transcend in significance all the other moments of life.

The wailing women remind us of an age-old truth. They declare anew that what we see may not necessarily be the reality. Jesus stumbled along as a criminal among criminals, going to a horrible death. Some who followed the prisoners thought that Jesus was receiving what He deserved. Beyond the appearance, beyond the ugliness of it all, was the truth: Jesus, as the Savior of the world, was making His way to a place where He would offer Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. All previous time had looked toward this event, and all subsequent time would look back to it. He would endure the cross and despise the shame. Then, following His resurrection, He would sit down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

The thieves challenge us. The presence of the two thieves reminds us that almost every circumstance brings opportunities to offer salvation to a lost soul. Even in such a desperate time, Jesus' words and actions must have had an impact on one of these men. Later, as they were dying on their crosses, He talked to the inquirer about his spiritual needs. Our Lord used some of His last breaths to speak words of grace to the dying man beside Him who needed hope and believed the truth that Jesus shared with him (Luke 23:43). No place, no situation—regardless of how much agony it contains—is void of opportunities to show the light of God's love. Who would have thought that one of these thieves would be won to Jesus before he died?

Our Lord's walk from the judgment before

the governor to the crucifixion at Golgotha was brief but eventful. Nothing is mundane or “just the usual” when Jesus is present!

Eddie Cloer



“Oh, what wonders are we about to approach [as we prepare to witness the death of Jesus]. . . .

From the most appalling scene the world ever witnessed, a paradise of peace springs forth. From the most ignominious sufferings, we see the most glorious triumph emerge; and from the most dreadful of deaths, a divine and never-fading life arise.”¹

¹F. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Saviour* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 9.