

The Summit Church
"The Call to Carry the Cross"
Mark 15:16-22, 33-37, 42-47
March 27-28, 2015

Introduction:

Good evening / morning. For those of you that I've yet to meet, my name is Will Toburen and I'm one of the pastors here at The Summit Church. It's an honor to open God's word with you as we gather on what we call Palm Sunday, the beginning of the Passion week that culminates with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

If I were to mention the names Lonnie Baltimore, Justice Cunningham, Chandler Harnish, Cheta Ozougwu, and Tim Toone, I doubt many of you would have any idea of who I was talking about. In fact, I hadn't heard of these guys before a little research this week. So, who are these guys? They have the illustrious honor of being Mr. Irrelevant which is a title given to the very last player picked in the NFL draft. These guys are given a trophy, just like the Heisman winner, except this one depicts a guy fumbling the ball.

(SHOW TROPHY COMPARISON)

For those of you who just aren't into sports and following the NFL draft, this would be like Amanda, Bo, Brittany, Kara, Michelle, Nicole, and Reegan who failed to get a rose from Chris (Soules) on the first episode from the most recent season of the Bachelor. (I'm pretty sure I'm going to have to turn in my man card for even mentioning that...not to mention I might get fired.)

Sometimes when reading through the Bible we come across the names of people who are briefly mentioned and we just move on without giving it a lot of thought. We treat them a bit like "Mr. Irrelevant". Well this weekend we're going to look at two men, Simon of Cyrene and Joseph of Arimathea, who are a part of the crucifixion narrative that perhaps you've not spent a great deal of time thinking about. Yet through their lives we see a picture of it means to be a disciple.

So, if you have your Bibles turn with me to the gospel of Mark and we're going to look at several verses of Scripture starting with vs. 16.

While you're turning there let me remind you of one of the most penetrating statements Jesus ever made regarding what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

In Mark 8 Jesus is sitting down with his disciples and telling them that he must

suffer many things, be killed, and after three days he would rise again. As He's doing this Peter, who has a propensity for putting his foot in his mouth, steps up, pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him for saying this. Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan (not one of Peter's finer moments)! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Then Jesus says to all his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

In Mark 15 we find 2 men, neither of which we know a great deal about, but who help us paint a picture and help us see more clearly what it means to embrace and carry the cross.

[16] "And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they are striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

"And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull)." Mark tells us more about Simon of Cyrene than any other gospel writer. So, here's what we know:

- He's from Cyrene (to which you say, "Thank you captain obvious"). Cyrene was a Greek colony in North Africa (Libya). Simon, a Jew, had likely made his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.
- The only other thing that we know for certain about him was that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Again, two names that in the grand scheme of things may seem pretty irrelevant.
- So, why does Mark put their names in there? Alexander and Rufus were obviously well known to his readers, so Mark puts their names in there to validate the events of the crucifixion.
- In other words it's as if Mark is saying, "If you don't believe what I'm telling you, go talk to Alexander and Rufus who you know personally, listen to their testimony, because it was their father who carried the cross of our Lord!"
- We'll come back to him in just a moment, but look with me at vs. 33.

[33], "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" And some

of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last."

Vs. 42, "And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid."

Here's what we learn about Joseph of Arimathea:

- He was a prominent member of the ruling party and thus extremely influential in society. He had power and clout and would have been a respected man in the community.
- He was wealthy as evidenced by the fact that he owned a tomb cut out of the rock.
- Beyond this we find a man who now comes to humbly identify with Christ, but who, according to John, had been fairly secret about his faith.

So, here we have it...two men that we don't know a great deal about, yet both play a pretty significant role in the events surrounding the crucifixion of our Lord. One carries His cross and the other takes His body down and places Him in the tomb that he owns. The responses of both men help us further understand what Jesus meant when He said, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*

So, here's what I'd like to do. For the next few minutes I want to share with you 3 valuable lessons we learn about *'taking up our cross'* that will help grow us as disciples who in turn make disciples.

- I. **Lesson #1: Before you can carry the cross you have to first embrace the cross.**
 - a. You can't carry something that you haven't picked up!
 - b. Now, Mark clearly tells us that Simon wasn't given much of a choice as to whether or not he would pick up the cross and embrace it.
 - i. If the Roman authorities told you to do something you didn't have much of a voice in the matter you...you just did it.

- c. Let me be abundantly clear at this point, we are never forced to embrace the cross of Christ and become a follower of Jesus. But what you are pressed into is a decision!
- d. We've just heard the lengths to which God has gone to demonstrate His love towards us. He endured unbelievable physical and emotional torment, but the physical and emotional pain He experienced couldn't begin to compare to the hell that was unleashed on Him when he cried out to His Heavenly Father, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"
- e. So, we are brought face to face with the cross and what Christ has done, and now we have to decide whether or not we're going to embrace it. We have to ask ourselves, "**Am I going to embrace the One who has done everything necessary to save me?**"
- f. No doubt some of you right now are saying to yourself, "I don't know if I can embrace the cross because I have so many other questions."
 - i. You have questions about some of the hard teachings of Jesus.
 - ii. You're not sure you can wrap your mind around what the Bible has to say about creation, or miracles, or the Holy Spirit.
 - iii. You have questions about what the Bible teaches about sexual ethics and marriage, not to mention the doctrine of hell or how a benevolent God would ever allow for such a place.
- g. Here's my challenge to you. All of those are really good questions, I mean really good. But don't let that be your starting point. Start with this: "Did Jesus actually die and take upon Himself the punishment I deserved? Was he placed in a tomb? Did he resurrect from the dead proving to be the Son of God and by doing so forever conquer sin and death?"
- h. If the answer to that is yes...if this is the length to which God would go to save a sinner like me...then I can begin to trust him fully in all these other extremely important matters.
- i. Before we can ever carry the cross we must first embrace everything the cross represents that Christ did for you and me. Are you willing to embrace it?
- j. This leads to a second lesson...

- II. **Lesson #2: Embracing the cross demands we lay everything else down.**
 - a. Both men paint a picture and help us see this...one physically and the other spiritually.
 - b. When Simon was shoved into service by the Roman guards the implication would have been that he literally had to lay down

anything he had on his person. That's obvious.

- c. But what about Joseph of Arimathea? In vs. 43 Mark tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, "*went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*"
- d. What's so significant about this? For Joseph of Arimathea to identify with Christ meant a willingness to lay down everything in his life. Remember he had power, prestige, wealth, and tremendous influence.
- e. By coming forward to ask for the body of Christ Joseph of Arimathea was saying "I'm willing to lay all of this down in order to follow Christ."
- f. In other words he's saying: "It's not about me! It's not about my influence, it's not about my money, and it's not about making a name for myself. I want my life to be about making famous the name of Jesus!"
- g. As I've reflected on this for the last couple of weeks, I've asked myself, "What am I holding onto that is keeping me from following you and knowing you more intimately?" I've fallen under great conviction for how often and easy it is to long to make a name for myself.
- h. Illustration: One of those times was while I was a swimmer at NC State. (I know some of you are thinking to yourself, 'You don't look very much like any swimmer I've ever seen.' Well that was a lot of years ago.)
 - i. I remember vividly one evening, my freshman year, while training over Christmas break, one of the coaches said something that I'll never forget.
 - ii. We were doing this really difficult work out and towards the end of one of the sets he knelt down by the pool and when I touched the wall he said, "You are going to be great someday." And I thought to myself YES! That's what I want! I want to be great and remembered as great.
 - iii. I think it was Lee Trevino, a well-known golfer, who said, "The older I get the better I was", so I don't want to paint the wrong picture here. I was never going to be an Olympian or a national champion...but I thought man if I could become a school recorder holder that would be great.
 - iv. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit this, but one of my motivations was the fact that all the record holders have their names up on the record board in the natatorium. I thought wouldn't it be great to see your name up there for everyone to see.
- i. It doesn't matter who you are, every one of us have things that we must be willing to lay down in order to follow Christ.
- j. You see, our motivation for laying everything down for Him, is

because He laid everything down for us. Paul described Jesus this way in Philippians 2:6-8, "(Jesus) *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"

- k. JoA had seen Christ lifted up on the cross and now he was willing to lay it all down. Now he could say with Paul:
 - i. *"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but what which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."*
- l. When we truly embrace and carry the cross, when we embrace Christ through faith and repentance we no longer are slaves to the things of this world...but are set free.
- m. *"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."*
- n. But there's one final lesson I want us to see from the text...

III. Lesson #3: Fully embracing the cross leads to boldly engaging in His mission.

- a. I want you to take note of something. When we read Mark's account we might have the tendency to think of JoA as strong, bold, and courageous guy. Mark says he "*took courage*" and went before Pilate (of all people) asking for the body of Christ. But remember, John in his gospel paints a very different picture.
- b. John helps us to see that JoA was in fact a disciple, **but only one in secret**. He didn't want people to know that he was a follower of Christ. But why? Why would he be fearful?
 - i. Listen, 'fear' is a natural response when what you value the most is threatened.
 - ii. Think about everything Joseph stood to lose...his power...his wealth...his prominence...his influence...his name.
 - iii. These are the things that defined who Joseph was. So it shouldn't surprise us to see that JoA was fearful because what defined him was being threatened!

- iv. In fact, one of the best ways to determine what your ultimate affections are is to ask yourself, "What am I most afraid to lose?" "What one thing were you to lose it would lead you to despair and question whether life was really worth it?"
The answer to that question will reveal what your idols are.
- c. But for Joseph of Arimathea something was different. Yes, he was a believer, but now, all of the sudden; his courage was greater than his fear. What happened?
- d. The crucifixion! He saw with his own eyes Jesus on the cross and the length to which He had gone to love him and reconcile him to his Heavenly Father.
- e. So, at some point during those course of events JoA said, "I'm going to take a step and lay all this down to go public with my faith."
- f. And when he did the fear that kept him in private was overcome with a courage that led him to go public.
- g. I love how Pastor JD said it: "God doesn't call the brave...He makes the brave the called." As we saw in previous weeks it was true of Gideon and it's true of JoA.
- h. You see, when we fully embrace all that Christ has done for us He promises that He will give us everything we need to engage in His mission and "*boldly proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.*"
- i. Peter says it this way, "*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*"
- j. He has granted us ALL things that pertain to life and godliness.
- k. Illustration: Believer in Central Asia

(Music here...)

So, this weekend here's the question I want to ask each of us: "How is God leading me to embrace the cross and follow Him? What step is the one step He is leading me to take?"

1. For some you realize today that there are things that you are holding onto that you need to lay down. There are things that are keeping you from going all-in.
 - a. Ask yourself right now, "What am I most afraid to lose?" and lay it down.
2. For others you need to take a step to boldly engage in His mission. What does that look like for you to publicly identify with Jesus just as JoA did?
 - a. Taking a step of faith and being bold about inviting someone with you to church next week for one of our Easter services. Listen, your invitation can alter someone's eternity.

- b. Sharing your faith with your neighbor or co-worker.
 - c. Engaging in a small group
 - d. Going on a short-term mission trip this year.
3. Finally, for others of you the step God is leading you to take is for the very first time to embrace the cross.
- i. That means acknowledging your sin against a Holy God and believing that Jesus has done absolutely everything necessary to save you.
 - ii. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus died in your place and by responding to Him with faith and repentance you can become a child of the most High God.

Prayer...