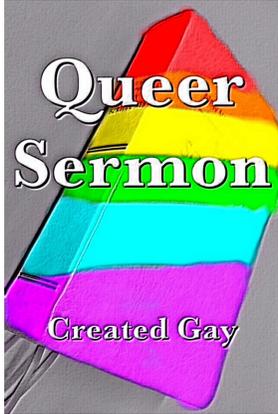

CREATED GAY



Being a Stranger for Jesus

by Gary Simpson

Mark 15:20-25 and verse 39 (KJV) And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him. And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And

they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.

39 And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

Simon from Cyrene carried Jesus' cross. Cyrene is in northern Africa, in what is currently part of Libya. When Jesus was alive, Cyrene was a major city.¹ There were enough Jewish people in Cyrene that there was a Cyrenean synagogue in Jerusalem.² Some commentators believe Simon was in Jerusalem for the Passover.³

¹ Carl Focken. "Simon of Cyrene." *Lutheran Church of the Redeemer*. Atlanta, Georgia, March 4, 1998. <<http://www.redeemer.org/sermons/mar04.html>>, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Books, 1987), 67 and Kenneth Barker, et. al., eds. *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985), 1528.

² *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (67) refers us to Acts 6:9.

³ Some of the commentators include:

Barker, et. al., 1528.

Bruce Barton, et. al., eds. *Life Application Bible: The Living Bible*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Pub. and Youth for Christ, 1988), 1454.

Generally, the Romans made the condemned man carry his own cross,⁴ or at least to carry the cross beams.⁵ As a deterrent, those condemned to death often had to carry the cross the longest possible route to the place of crucifixion.⁶

On the way to the place where Jesus would be crucified, the procession passed by some women who were wailing. The women were giving a death wail for Jesus.⁷ In response to the wailing, the gospel story notes that Jesus asked the women not to weep for Him, but to weep for themselves and their children, because judgment was going to fall on Jerusalem (Luke 23:26-31).⁸ That was a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem that took place 40 years later.⁹ In effect, Jesus was asking the women to mourn for all those who would die in Jerusalem. In the story, when His death was imminent, Jesus appears to be concerned about the fate of others. In traditional Christian thinking, it was Jesus concern for others that compelled Him to the cross.

There might have been something almost as gripping about Jesus' trial and death as there had been about His teaching ministry. The Biblical account gives the sense that Jesus did not protest His fate, yell out in anger or scream in rage. For Jesus, the horrendous event and brutal suffering was for some people who were crucified. Jesus was on the cross for hours. There are accounts of people who took a week to die.¹⁰

There are several important things we can learn from the gospel passage. From Mark's account, we can learn about discipleship, salvation and the daily burdens we face.

I'm certain that the last thing Simon of Cyrene wanted to do that fateful day was to carry a cross for a condemned man. The job was hard and unpleasant work. In the church, we can get really philosophical, stary eyed and emotional about serving God. The glory, the honor, the privilege to serve and to suffer with Christ. But not everything we do for God feels like a glorious privilege, like an honor. To be frank, suffering with Christ is still suffering. Serving God in a Pentecost phase of our lives is much more enjoyable than serving God during a Lenton phase in our lives. And some jobs we perform for God and humanity have their gross moments. Somebody needs to care for the sick,

⁴ Bruce B. Barton, et. al., 1454.

⁵ Donald Senior, et. al., eds. *The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible*. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), N.T., 93. Some people believe the condemned man carried on the crossbar and not the entire cross. That is the position taken by Wayne A. Meeks, et. al., eds. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1949.

⁶ Barton, et. al., 1454.

⁷ D.A. Carson, et. al., eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1017.

⁸ Earl Radmacher, Ronald Allen and Wayne House. *The Nelson Study Bible*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1997), 1749.

⁹ Barker, et. al., 1583.

¹⁰ William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*. Revised Edition. (Toronto: G.R. Welch, 1975), 360.

feed the poor and clean the church bathrooms, but to be honest I would far rather dress up in all the colors and walk in a Pride Parade.

I doubt that the soldiers thanked Simon of Cyrene for carrying the cross and Mark's account does not tell us that Jesus thanked him. There are times when people thank us for our service for God and humanity, but the thanks tend to be few and far between. The glory and the thanks we get for what we do does not correlate with the value of what we do. Some of the most valuable and important people in the church are the people who do the behind-the-scenes work. Those who are faithful prayer partners might have the most important work.

And the human tendency is to forget very quickly. The gospels contain numerous examples of people Jesus healed. But where are they when Jesus needs support and where are the disciples? Jesus' disciples were to afraid to carry His cross. A stranger had to do the job.¹¹ As I conclude, I am going to challenge you, like Simon of Cyrene, to be a stranger for Jesus.

Simon of Cyrene spent a few minutes carrying the cross of Christ and Simon's name appears in the Word.¹² Those who follow the Lord, those who carry the cross of Christ find their names appear in glory, in the heavenly. When people carry the cross of Christ there are times when those around have a moment of spiritual enlightenment and recognize just who you are really serving and they encounter God. So be a Simon of Cyrene style stranger for Jesus.

¹¹ Robert Tannehill. *Abington New Testament Commentaries: Luke*. (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996), 339.

¹² Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Unabridged One Volume Edition. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 1992), 1815.