

Luke 23:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

Analysis

And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. Simon of Cyrene (modern Libya in North Africa) was likely a Diaspora Jew coming to Jerusalem for Passover. The Greek *epilambanō* (ἐπιλαμβάνω, "laid hold upon") indicates forcible compulsion—Roman soldiers impressed Simon into service using their legal authority to conscript civilians for manual labor.

The phrase "laid the cross" (*epethēkan autō ton stauron, ἐπέθηκαν αὐτῷ τὸν σταυρόν*) refers to the *patibulum* (horizontal crossbeam), not the entire crucifixion apparatus. Condemned criminals typically carried this 75-100 pound beam to the execution site. Jesus, weakened by scourging and blood loss, could no longer bear it. Simon's involuntary service became a profound act of discipleship—he literally bore Christ's cross, fulfilling Jesus' call: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Mark 15:21 identifies Simon as "the father of Alexander and Rufus," suggesting these sons became known in the early church (likely the Rufus mentioned in Romans 16:13). Simon's forced participation in Christ's suffering appears to have led to genuine faith—from compelled burden-bearer to willing disciple. This demonstrates how God sovereignly uses even involuntary circumstances to accomplish His redemptive purposes.

Historical Context

Cyrene was a major city in North Africa with a substantial Jewish population. Josephus records that one-quarter of Cyrene's population was Jewish. Many Diaspora Jews made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, and some maintained homes there. Simon was "coming out of the country" (ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ), likely returning from field work outside the city walls.

Roman law permitted soldiers to impress civilians for compulsory service (angaria), the practice Jesus referenced in Matthew 5:41. The condemned carrying their cross served both practical and psychological purposes—displaying the criminal's guilt while exhausting him before execution. The Via Dolorosa ("Way of Sorrows") from Pilate's Praetorium to Golgotha was approximately 600 yards through crowded Jerusalem streets. Archaeological evidence suggests the execution site was outside the city walls but visible from major thoroughfares, maximizing the deterrent effect.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Simon's forced cross-bearing becoming a path to discipleship encourage us when God uses difficult, involuntary circumstances in our lives?
2. What does Jesus' physical inability to carry His own cross reveal about the genuine human suffering He endured for our redemption?
3. How does Simon's story illustrate that following Jesus often begins with reluctant obedience that transforms into willing devotion?

Interlinear Text

Καὶ	ὥς	ἀπήγαγον	αὐτῷ	ἐπιλαβόμενοι	Σίμωνος	τινος
And	as	away	him	they laid hold upon	Simon	one
G2532	G5613	G520	G846	G1949	G4613	G5100
Κυρηναίου	τοῦ	ἐρχόμενου	ἀπ'	ἀγροῦ	ἐπέθηκαν	αὐτῷ
a Cyrenian	G3588	coming	out of	the country	and on	him
G2956		G2064	G575	G68	G2007	G846
τὸν	σταυρὸν	φέρειν	ὅπισθεν	τοῦ	Ἰησοῦ	
G3588	the cross	that he might bear	it after	G3588	Jesus	
	G4716	G5342	G3693		G2424	

Additional Cross-References

Acts 2:10 (Parallel theme): Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

Acts 6:9 (Parallel theme): Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

Acts 13:1 (Parallel theme): Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 6:6 (Parallel theme): Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

Luke 9:23 (Cross): And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Luke 14:27 (Cross): And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.