

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 ὡς ἀπῆγαγον 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 coming out of the country and on him
G2956 G3588 G2064 G575 G68 G2007 G846

τὸν σταυρὸν φέρειν ὅπισθειν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ
the cross that he might bear it after G3588 Jesus
G3588 G4716 G5342 G3693 G68 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.