

# THE CROWD AROUND THE CROSS

Luke 23:26-49

IN THE CROWD around the cross we find the whole world of humanity in a microcosm. You and I and our predecessors are all there someplace.

## *Simon the Cyrenian (v26)*

It was a part of the prisoner's humiliation that he carry his own cross to the place of execution. It appears that Jesus was unable to carry his cross any longer, so the soldiers forced a visitor from the Cyrene, called Simon to help Jesus carry the cross.

When we think of all the indignities and injustices the Saviour had already suffered, he had undeniably become weak and exhausted, so much so, that the cross was too heavy to carry.

Simon, that day did not expect to carry the cross of Jesus. Providentially, he was brought into contact with Jesus. And we have good reason to believe he was converted that day. Mark identifies him as "*the father of Alexander and Rufus*", who had become Christians.

He Simon had come from far, to worship at the Passover. Before he met Jesus, he had religion and devotion, but had no Saviour. But after he met Jesus, he had reality and salvation.

God can still use unexpected and difficult situations, even humiliating ones, to bring people to the Saviour. Simon was given, by God, the opportunity serve Jesus and be remembered by all believers for centuries afterward. We can be sure that Jesus was grateful to Simon for providing some help and relief during his staggering climb to Calvary's hill.

Let us understand that this cross-bearing by Simon as nothing to do with the verse, "***Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me***" (Mark 8:34). This was Jesus' cross, not Simon's cross.

### *The Daughters of Jerusalem (vv 27-31)*

Next we find the women of Jerusalem, who were weeping and wailing after Jesus, saying, "Poor Jesus! Poor Jesus!"

What He said to them must have shocked them. Jesus wanted their repentance, not their sympathy. Jesus points out the sin of the nation to them.

Remember that to the Jew, children were a sign of blessing. Jesus is saying that a day will come when barren women will be the blessed ones because their children will not suffer the horror of the coming judgment.

The nation was like a "**green tree**" during the years Jesus was on earth, because Jesus was the "**green tree.**" It was a time of blessing and opportunity, and it should have been a time of fruitfulness. But the nation rejected Him and it became like a "**dry tree**". In condemning Him, they condemned themselves.

We might paraphrase His words like this: "If the Roman authorities do this to One that is innocent, what they will do to you who are guilty? When the Day of Judgment arrives, can there be any escape for you?"

In 70 AD Titus, General of the Romans armies would fulfill prophecy and bring Jerusalem to ruins, while massacring the people.

Those women were emotionally attached to Jesus, but did not possess saving faith. They had no real spiritual understanding of what was going on. Christianity is filled with people who in some measure are sympathetic to Jesus yet are not truly His disciples.

### *The Religious Rulers of Israel (v35)*

Jesus arrives at Calvary, the place called the Skull. There they crucified Him between to criminals. From the cross, the Saviour's first words are, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do**" (Lk. 23:34).

When sinful men were manifesting the greatest hatred for God; Christ was manifesting His greatest love for them. With blood streaming down His body Jesus was asking for forgiveness for His killers.

And as the people stood and watched, the religious leaders scoffed at Jesus. They said, ***“He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the Chosen of God (v35).***

These were the chief priests, teachers of the Law, and elders of the land. They challenged and rejected His divinity. They heaped insults and looked for signs.

Mark tells us they insisted that He come down from the cross that they may see and believe. Matthew tells us that those who passed by, perhaps on their way to work, also hurled insults at Jesus and shook their heads, saying, ***“Save yourself, come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”***

It seems everyone wanted Him to come down from the cross, in order to prove Himself. But the reality is, by staying on the cross, He would prove His divinity.

If he saved Himself, then nobody else could be saved! He did not come to save His life. He came to give it up as a ransom for sinners.

Behind the voice of the people shouting abuse at Jesus, you can hear the sinister voice of Satan mocking God's Son. Notice how similar these words are to the words of Satan when he tempted Jesus at the beginning of his ministry: ***“Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, He orders his angels to protect you’”*** (Matt. 4:5-6).

Satan’s temptation was an attempt to stop Jesus from His mission of redemption.

### ***The Soldiers of Rome (v36)***

There was a written notice fastened to the cross, above Jesus, which read: **THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS.**

We learn that the soldiers also came up and mocked the Him. They offered Him sour, cheap wine and said, ***“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”***

The soldiers couldn't care less about Him being the Christ. But they ridiculed Him as king. The qualification of a king was his ability to break men and rule over them, and subdue them. See, if a Roman Caesar failed to take care of himself, they had no use for him as Emperor.

### ***The Two Criminals***

The narrative moves on with two thieves, who were guilty of armed robbery involving murder. They were crucified with Jesus, one to the right and the other to the left.

Mark tells us they both hurled insults at the Saviour. Luke concludes that something miraculous happens with one of thieves. He has a miraculous change of heart! The fear of dying and meeting God gripped his soul to the point that he begins reproving his friend, and says;” ***Don't you fear God?” Since you are dying with guilt? We are getting what we deserve, but not this man, he has done nothing wrong. “***

Then the dying sinner turns to the dying Saviour, and says the most blessed of words. ***Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.*** Jesus answered him, ***“Today, you shall be with me in paradise?”***

It was “instant salvation” for the man. The bible does not teach infant salvation, or works salvation, but “instant salvation” by grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a gift of God, so that the saved man can never boast.

One thief repents, the other doesn't. Through the door of death one went straight to Paradise, the other straight to Hell. There is no purgatory! Purgatory is a lie and a great assault on the Saviour's atonement. Christ Jesus suffered all of Hell's horrors and torments in our place—not some.

Every sinner is “stuck” between Heaven and Hell. Everyone can be moments away from death. Where will you go, if you die tonight? Have you trusted Jesus for forgiveness?

## **The Father**

The Father was there. We must keep in mind what our Lord's accomplishment on the cross that day was an eternal transaction that involved Him and the Father.

Jesus did not die as martyr who failed in a lost cause. Nor was He only an example for people to follow. It was the eternal plan and council of the Godhead that Jesus should come into the world to die for our sins.

Verse 44 details the God-sent darkness that shrouded the cross as the Son of God was made sin for us (2Cor. 5:21). It was a though all nature was sympathizing with the Creator as He suffered and bled and died.

At the end of the darkness, Matthew tells us, Jesus cried in a loud voice, ***"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"***

It was a cry of overwhelming distress; but not of distrust. What this abandonment was and how Jesus felt it, we are not told. He was in an awful place of "incomprehensible loneliness" as He bore the full force of God's wrath.

Later knowing at all was completed, Jesus said, ***"I thirst"*** (Jn. 19:28). Our Lord began His ministry with hunger; He ends it with thirst. His thirst was both physical and spiritual. The cry mainly expressed his yearning for restored communion with His Father. ***"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God"*** (Ps. 42:1-2).

Afterwards Jesus cried with a loud voice, ***"It is finished."*** It is a cry of victory. This meant for the Savoir that His life of toil, oppression, humiliation, and suffering and of loneliness was finished. Never again shall He experience pain. The wages of sin have been paid in full. Redemption had been accomplished, and His resurrection would confirm it all.

With a loud voice, Jesus cried out, ***"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"*** (Lk. 23:46). This is a cry of confidence and commitment. Christ's death was a voluntary one. His life was not forced from Him. He had previously said that no one could take His life; ***"but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."***

As He breathed His last breath, ***the curtain of the temple was torn in two***. God ripped the curtain—from top to bottom.

It was as if God in person acts as any devoted Jewish father would have done by His own Son's death-bed. He rent his garments. The customary Jewish mourning gesture of a father was to tear his outer garment.

The torn curtain meant, no more need of Judaism, temples, priests, special holy days, and animal sacrifices. The OT way of doing things is finished! With the veil of His body ripped, any believing person can come to God now.

### ***The Centurion***

Luke emphasises the impact the phenomena of the darkness and the earthquake made on the Centurion. And how he then praised God saying, "***Surely this was a righteous man.***"

Mark stresses the impression made on him by the loud cry of Jesus and how he gave up His spirit. He confessed, "***Surely this man was the Son of God.***"

He too believed that day.

In one or another of these individuals you will see you own image. Are you part of the unbelieving crowd, or part of the ones who trusted Jesus, were converted and became disciples?