

# Suddenly, The Cross!

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Simon got up early that morning. It was the Passover season and he wanted to get to Jerusalem before the events of the day began. He must not miss anything important. After all, he had come all the way from Cyrene in North Africa, so he might as well take in everything.

The city was crowded with pilgrims like himself. Housing was at a premium; so Simon had gone out into the country to find a place to stay.

As he walked the road to Jerusalem, Simon began to feel the excitement of the coming festivities. Soon he would be inside the city, mingling with the crowds and joining them in keeping the feast according to the law of Moses.

As the massive, sun-painted walls of the holy city came into view, Simon felt deep emotions stirring afresh within him. Perhaps the words of the Psalms came to him and he broke out into singing: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:2); and "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1 - 4).

But, unknown to Simon, inside those walls something was happening, something that would throw him together with a Person who would profoundly affect his life and project him into history.

And it would happen very soon, for he was almost at the gate of the city.

Suddenly, Simon heard a noise that sounded like an angry mob. The shouting and the confusion grew louder, and he began to feel uneasy. But before he could figure out what was happening, he found himself facing a hostile procession of soldiers, religious leaders and rabble-rousers that came pouring through those gates like angry bulls.

The angry mood of the crowd made Simon cringe. But the sight that almost sent him into shock was the bloody human figure that staggered beneath the load of a cross.

Simon gasped in horror! Deep feelings of fear, mingled with disgust and pity, surged inside him and etched their expression on his face.

Perhaps it was some reaction from Simon that the mob interpreted as sympathy for Jesus. Whatever it was, for some reason the vanguard grabbed him, and soon the strong arm of mindless, inhuman, brute force had pressed him into its service.

Simon suddenly found himself carrying a cross! He could not avoid it. He could not escape it. There it was, the symbol of utmost shame, laid upon him by forces beyond his control.

A wave of humiliation must have swept over Simon as he felt himself caught in the cross-fire of the taunts and jeers being hurled at Jesus.

What a shame for him to be carrying a cross! Ah, but what a high honor it would become! For what seemed at the moment like a calamity was destined to be memorialized by the Holy Spirit three times in the pages of Holy Scripture (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26).

The cross of Christ is like that. Though it was the instrument of shame and death, God made it an instrument of life and glory.

It was after Jesus Christ suffered the death of the cross that God highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:8, 9). And Hebrews 12:2 says that He "endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

It was through obedience unto death that our Savior became highly exalted. Through the cross He attained the throne! Hallelujah!

God purposing that His divine Son should die on a cross? To the "natural man" that sounds like the ultimate in foolishness. But it is wiser than man. God in Christ suffering death on a cross? It sounds like the ultimate in weakness. But it is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:25 - 29).

Why? Because by what happened on that cross we are reconciled to God (Ephesians 2:16). By the blood shed on that cross we have peace with God (Colossians 1:20).

No wonder that Paul, moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to the believers in Galatia who were in grave danger of trusting something else for salvation, "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Without the cross there is no salvation, no deliverance, no reconciliation, no eternal life.

Jesus made that very clear: "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not

worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38). "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25).

To the rich young ruler Jesus said frankly, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:21).

But the young man went away sad. He wanted eternal life, but he refused to carry out the death sentence on his own selfishness. He would not take up the cross and follow Jesus.

No, conversion is not a process. It is a choice, a deliberate act of the will.

Self reigns supreme in the heart of the sinner. God points to the cross and says, "There is where the reign of self ends." Repentance is carrying out the execution of selfishness right on the spot, as God has commanded. Taking up the cross means death--death to sin.

What a revolution! The old self-establishment that ruled the heart and controlled the life is overthrown as Christ comes in to purify the heart, take His rightful place, and begin the rule of love!

Yes, *the cross demands a decision*. We cannot just examine it, discuss it, decorate it, admire it. We must either take it or leave it.

If we pick up the cross and follow Jesus, we lose our little self-centered, self-dominated life. We find instead a life that is full and eternal--in Him.

But if we reject the cross, we hold on to our narrow, self-centered life and lose the real and abundant life Jesus Christ offers us freely.

So, suddenly--there is the cross. Stained with the blood Jesus shed for our sins, it confronts us now, just as it did Simon of Cyrene. He could not ignore it; neither can we.

What will you do with it? Which decision do you make right now? It is a life-or-death issue. Take it! Take it now--and follow Jesus.