

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, January 31, 2010 – 6:00 PM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Series: Matthew

Pardon the Interruption – Matthew 27:32

Introduction: One of my favorite channels is ESPN. I like it because like most guys, I am a sports fan, and all ESPN does is broadcast sports 24 hours a day. Now there are a few sporting events that I don't care for – Soccer, Curling, Sumo Wrestling, to name a few. But most of the others, I'll watch.

ESPN has a show called Pardon the Interruption. I don't particularly care for this program either, but I have watched it on occasion. The format of the show is this: You have two guys are sitting at a desk, and they are recapping the major sports news of the day. Now the annoying thing about this show is the fact that these two guys are constantly interrupting each other or talking over each other. Sometimes, you can't even understand what they are saying because they get louder and louder as they are disagreeing with each other. That is when I just turn them off. I don't like to be interrupted, and I don't like it when I see other people doing it either. It's one of my pet peeves, I guess.

Tonight, as we continue our study of Matthew, we'll meet a man who had a major interruption in his life on the day Jesus was crucified. His name is Simon. *“As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.”* **Matthew 27:32 (NIV).**

You'll recall that after Jesus was brought before Pilate, and finally handed over to the Jews for crucifixion, He was first beaten and whipped and subjected to a humiliating public mockery by a cohort of soldiers looking for amusement at Jesus' expense. Following this, Jesus was then led out into the streets to make His way to Golgotha where He would be crucified. The soldiers forced Him to carry His own cross. It was probably only the crossbeam, but it was still a heavy object to carry for someone who had just taken the worst beating a man had ever endured.

This was the way criminals were dealt with who had been condemned to die under Roman authority. It was crude. It was cruel. But it was common for a criminal to carry his own cross to their execution site.

Well, Jesus carried His cross, but on the way, He fell beneath its weight. He was physically exhausted, having been up all night enduring false trials, beaten, and humiliated. In a bloody exhaustion, He fell beneath the cross. It was then that the Roman soldiers looked for someone who could carry the cross for Him. That's when we meet a man who drafted into service.

What do we know about this man called Simon? Well, not much. Mark says that he was *“the father of Alexander and Rufus,”* and both Mark and Luke tell us that Simon *“was on his way in from the country,...”*

Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:26 (NIV). The country he was from was Cyrene which is modern Libya. So we know he had to travel some distance to get to Jerusalem. That is about all we know about Simon for sure.

Now, we do know something about the Cyrenians. We know that there were Cyrenians present on day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). We know that Cyrenians were influential in the Synagogue (Acts 6:9-10). We know that Cyrenian converts went to Antioch and told the Gentiles about Christ, and many people believed and turned to the Lord because of their efforts (Acts 11:19-21).

Now, it's a possibility that Simon is mentioned again in Scripture. In Acts we read, "*In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.*" **Acts 13:1 (NIV)**. If Lucius and Simon are one in the same, then we can possibly say that Simon left Calvary a changed man. Maybe in the days following, he was a leader in Antioch and a part of the first mission to the Gentiles.

Also, being "*the father of Alexander and Rufus...*" **Mark 15:21 (NIV)**, we know that there was a man named Rufus who was a part of the Roman church. Paul writes, "*Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too*" **Romans 16:13 (NIV)**. If these two men named Rufas are one-in-the-same, then we can assume that Simon raised his children as believers, and his wife was very dear to Paul, because he called her his mother.

We don't know a whole lot about Simon of Cyrene, but what we do know is that on this day, he was pressed into service for Jesus. We know that this happened unexpectedly. We know that what he did on this day; was something very difficult and demanding, and it caused him great pain and hardship.

The point is, what happened to Simon is something that can happen to any of us at any time. Life is constantly presenting us with interruptions. We get sick, we face the death of loved ones, we have to deal with heartbreaks, with rejection, with fear, with betrayal, or with discouragement almost on a daily basis. Things can happen so quickly and so unexpectedly and they can set us back or cause great pain or struggle. We may think we're doing great, and then BOOM...in an instant we're presented with a challenge we never saw coming.

Well, how do we handle those interruptions? How do we deal with the things life throws at us that are unpleasant or hard to bear? Tonight, I want us to learn from this man named Simon how we can survive and thrive in those moments of distress.

First, we can see from Simon's experience that when those crisis moments of interruption come, that's the time to:

1. Watch for God's Work.

Think about what was going on in Simon's mind that day. Simon had come a long ways to celebrate Passover. Maybe he'd had to scrape and saved for many years to get this chance to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. But then, things turned from glee to gloom as the news began to spread that Jesus had been tried for treason and condemned to death on a Roman cross.

It had to be a grim day for Simon as he watched the events unfold, especially as Jesus was being paraded down the Via Dolorosa carrying His own cross.

Now the Roman Soldiers could pretty much do as they pleased with the prisoner. The Roman law said that anyone in their jurisdiction was subject to their whims. So when Jesus crumpled under the weight of His own cross, it was within their power to ask anyone to serve them. And Simon was the one they chose. Call it being in the wrong place at the wrong time or not, Simon was tapped to carry the cross of this condemned prisoner. Not only was it embarrassing, but it was inconvenient, unpleasant, and a bitter experience. It had to be quite a struggle for Simon to deal with this burden that was suddenly thrust upon Him. His mind had to be spinning. He was probably confused and maybe even angry about it

John MacArthur, in his commentary on Matthew said of Simon, *“It may have been the carrying of Jesus’ cross that led Simon to faith in Him. What began as a forced and probably resented act of physical servitude became the opportunity for spiritual life.”* (John MacArthur: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 24-18, Moody Press, 1989, pg. 253). But Simon did what he had to do, and then it was over.

The point is, in our times of interruption, we should always look for God to work. Simon probably didn’t understand at the time that he was helping the Savior of mankind carry His burden. Perhaps later, Simon he realized the impact of Jesus’ death as he saw the darkness come over the land. Perhaps he pondered the meaning of it all as he listened to the exchange of the thieves on their cross. Perhaps his heart was touched as he heard the Centurion proclaiming that this man was indeed the Son of God. Maybe his experience in carrying the cross and all these events he witnessed that day made him want to stay in Jerusalem for a few days following the crucifixion. Perhaps he too heard the rumors that Jesus’ body had suddenly come up missing.

Have you ever stopped in the middle of your struggle and thought about what God could be saying to you? These interruptions and struggles in life are inevitable. They can either cause bitterness or they can turn out to be a blessing.

I’ve found that in many different ways as I go through a struggle in life, God will lead me to a greater truth about Himself that I needed to know.

Matthew 7:7 (NIV) says, *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”* Have you ever thought about how the doors are opened or when or where they are opened? Many times, it God may be opening a door when we’re inconvenienced, or when we’re hurting or when we’re struggling. That’s a good time to watch for the open door.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* If we’ll watch for God’s work, He promises rewards for our faith.

The answer to all of our struggles is to be found in Christ. In moment of distress, watch for God’s work...but

also it's a time to:

2. Watch for the Cross.

Simon was drafted to carry the cross, but he didn't refuse the cross. Now some people will say about their troubles, "well, that's the cross I have to bear." But listen, as Christians, our cross is not just a trouble – the whole world has troubles. Only Christians can bear the cross of Christ, and that will be a struggle.

Our cross is a struggle we have because we are Christians! So we have to be careful that we don't refuse the cross.

In **Luke 9:23-26 (NIV)** Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."*

Bearing the cross involves denying yourself. When we come to Christ, we give Him our very lives. We lose our lives for His sake – our life now belongs to Christ.

When we come to Christ, we're saying that we're not ashamed to belong to Him. We're making not just a one time commitment, but a daily commitment. **Luke 14:27 (NIV)** says, *"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* So, in those times of stressful interruptions, watch for God's work, watch for the cross, and finally:

3. Watch for a Change.

I can see Simon going home and his wife asking him, *"Well, how was your trip?"* That's pretty common, isn't it? But I can't imagine Simon saying, *"Oh, it was OK, nothing unusual. Same ole same ole!"* No, I bet Simon said something like, "Honey, sit down, you're not going to believe what happened to me!"

You see, when you really understand the crucifixion of Christ, and it impacts you personally, there will be a change that comes over you. That's what happened to Simon.

You can't confront the cross and remain unchanged. If you reject Christ, you'll always know that that you are living in rejection of a tremendous sacrifice made on your behalf. But if you accept Christ, you'll never be the same.

Here's the truth about God: He is always at work within us, leading us to make the changes needed. Paul told the Philippian Christians in **Philippians 1:4-6 (NIV)** *"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

That work will result is what is called the fruit of the Spirit. **Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)** *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* Can you see that kind of change as a result of God interrupting your life?

Conclusion: Simon of Cyrene was drafted without choice to help Christ carry the cross, but he didn't have to become a believer. Today we have been given the choice to carry the cross or reject it. That means, we don't have to become believers. But if we do, that will mean a great interruption in your life. That will mean that no longer do we live for ourselves. That will mean that everything will be different. But it will also mean that we have the power to make a difference in someone else's life.

So whatever is interrupting your life today, don't be irritated or discouraged by it, instead, watch for God to work in it. Watch for the cross you will have to bear. Watch for the changes God will make in your heart. As the song Ronnie sings says, Watch the Lamb, and see what a difference He can make in your life.