

# Unexpected Change - Rev Malcolm Maclean (Retired)

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[ 0 : 00 ] We can turn back to Mark chapter 15, and I would like us to think together about verse 21. Mark 15 and verse 21.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

Mark 15 and verse 21.

Lots of individuals are mentioned in the Bible. Many are found also in the Gospels. And several details are given about them.

With some of them, their names are given. And the reason for their names being given are obvious.

[ 1 : 16 ] Often they knew Jesus. Or they somehow became involved with him.

This man here. Simon of Cyrene. How do we know his name?

Matthew and Luke also mention him. Matthew and Luke. But Mark does something different. He mentions his children.

Alexander and Rufus. And the obvious deduction we can make from that is that Mark expected his original readers to know who Alexander and Rufus were.

So how did this man hauled out from the crowd to carry the cross of Jesus?

[ 2 : 29 ] Why should his name and the names of his sons be mentioned? Where were the disciples when this happened?

Well, they were hiding. Apart from the Apostle John. None of the disciples were standing nearby.

To ask the man what his name was. It's not the kind of question you'd have asked him anyway.

Especially after the soldiers had compelled him to carry the cross. The women who were nearby.

Watching Jesus. Both as he was on the cross. And they weren't close enough to him.

[ 3 : 37 ] To ask him what his name was. So how do we know his name? And the name of his children?

Well, we'll try and find out. The soldiers. There's five of them.

That was the usual group that engaged in an execution. A centurion and four others. These men were used to doing it.

They were very efficient in the task. And they had the whole process worked out. And they were very keen to get it done as quickly as possible.

On this particular occasion, they had three to deal with. Two of them had been arrested for trying to provoke an insurrection in the city.

[ 4 : 49 ] But the third one. Well. He seemed to be a bit. Confused.

Imagined he was a king. And here he was. Now. Isolated. Abandoned.

And as they. These five soldiers took the three. Victims along the road. Each of them carrying their own cross.

Two of them did it without difficulty. Obviously it wasn't a very pleasant task. But.

The pain for not carrying it. Would be worse than the pain of carrying it. A few strokes of a whip.

[ 5 : 58 ] Would make them pick it up. But this third. This third. Victim about to be executed.

Well. He could hardly stand. Soldiers probably knew why. This group may have been part of the ones that.

Had beaten him. Shortly before he was led out to suffer. But they had the authority just to pick anyone out of the crowd.

And force that individual. To carry. The cross. Of any. Victim. Who couldn't do it. There wasn't much point.

In beating Jesus. He wasn't strong enough. To pick up the cross. No matter what they did to him.

[7:09] His weakness. His weakness. Is very striking.

But there he is. And the soldiers. See this man. The man called Simon.

Simon from Cyrene. Why is he in Jerusalem? I mean. Cyrene is in modern day Libya.

Why is Simon in Jerusalem? Well. He's probably there. Because he said. You. Could have gone up to the. Jerusalem for the Passover.

Jews were. Jews were. Expected. Male Jews were expected. To attend. Three. Of the Jewish feasts.

[8:13] Every year. They were expected. To attend. The feast of Passover. Then. Fifty days later. The feast of Pentecost. Both of them.

Were in the spring. And then. They had a third feast. In the autumn. The feast of Tabernacles. And they were expected. To attend. The three feasts.

Today. The day. That this. Incident happened. Is the day after the Passover. It's Friday. The Passover.

The Passover took place on Thursday. And. Simon would have been. Participating somewhere. In the. Celebrations.

As different groups. Around the city. Took part. In the Passover. Sometimes.

[9:13] The. Participants. Who had come from abroad. For the. Those feasts. They would stay. For the first two.

In Jerusalem. If you remember. From the. The account. That's given. Of what happened. The day of Pentecost. All the converts.

On the day of Pentecost. Are from foreign countries. They are Jews. From foreign countries. And. Peter. As he. Speaks to them.

On the day of Pentecost. He tells them. Even though. They're all from foreign countries. That they were present. When Jesus died.

And he. He tells them. That they had cried. For his death. So perhaps. A good number.

[10:13] Had been at. Calvary. On this occasion. And were still there. The day of Pentecost. It was a highlight.

Of their. Spiritual life. To go to all these. Feasts. And Simon himself. That he would have.

Add regard to. As he. Took part. In the Passover. The day before. On the Thursday. What would he.

Been reminded of. As he took the. The lamb. And everything else. Connected with it. Well he would be.

Reminded of. God's great power. As he. Liberated. His. Simon's ancestors. From Egypt. Delivered them in a.

[11:11] An astonishing display. Of divine power. In fact. There had been. Nothing like it. Since. He was also.

He'd have also. Been aware. As he took part. In the. In the Passover meal. That. That this. Great deliverance. Was. Somehow. Connected.

To the sacrifice. Of a lamb. His blood. Had to be shed. On its lintel. And so. Doorposts.

And so on. And as he. Would have thought. About the lamb. Well. It would be. It would be. Highlighted. For him.

That. This lamb. Would be flawless. Yet. At the same time. When you think. Of a lamb.

[12:06] How. How. Weak. It is. I mean. It's a symbol. Of weakness. What.

Could the lamb. Do. To prevent. Its fate. Simon. Simon. Had seen. All that.

On Thursday. We. Obviously. Don't know. Exactly. What he thought. About. But.

Surely. He must have. Said. To himself. Where. Is. The God. Of the Passover. Why.

Do we have. To have. These. Repeated. Sacrifices. And. What. Can. Possibly.

[13:04] Be. Be. Meant. By. A. Perfect. Pure. Weak. Lamb. Thursday.

Passes. No. Sign. Of. The arrival. Of. Messiah. Despite. The fact. That. Every.

Passover. Meal. They. Had. Their. Empty. Chair. Just. In. Case. He. Happened. To. Appear. At.

Their. Particular. Gathering.

Passover. Is. Finished. But. The. Sacrifices. Go. On. and Simon is meant to go to them the morning sacrifice is due at 9 o'clock the third hour of the day and Simon makes his way into the city to go to it and as he's making his way into the city he sees the soldiers and the victims going in the opposite direction Simon's aiming for the city centre but they're going to the outskirts Simon knows what he should have known it's only a short walk from Pilate's building to Golgotha three quarters of a mile so although he's going into the city to worship at 9 o'clock in the morning sacrifice he wouldn't expect this small group of people heading towards the outskirts to hinder him until he observes that one of the victims has fallen and the soldiers are looking at him to come and pick up the cross Simon well being commandeered into this role is well he's put an end to his plans for the day for a start the group are heading in the opposite direction he's going into the city he's going into the city they're going out and however long it took him to pick up the cross and help Jesus carry it he's going to miss his appointment at the temple he's going to miss seeing the sacrifice that happens at 9 o'clock moreover it's inevitable that there will be bloodstains on the cross and touching bloodstains made a person ceremoniously unclean and therefore unfit to take part in the worship at the temple

[17:16] Simon must have been disappointed another Passover gone by and nothing happened and now he can't even get to go to the morning sacrifice and instead although he's a devout Jew he's now unclean and worst of all he has to go to Calvary the last place on earth he probably wanted to be now we don't know it's impossible to say what Simon did at Calvary we don't know that when he got there did he just put the cross down and head away or did he just stay for a short time

I mean if he had stayed for a short time he would have heard he would have seen the victim Jesus praying for the soldiers who nailed him to the cross he would have seen this weak victim praying for the soldiers who had commandeered him to carry the cross as I say we don't know if he waited for that we don't know if he waited to look at the title that was nailed above Jesus' head this is Jesus the king of the Jews maybe he just went home to think about it maybe he was a reflective person and sudden interruptions and providence are things to think about yet we still know his name don't we how do we know his name maybe Simon went to whatever he was lodging and decided to wait around till the feast of Pentecost maybe he's one of the 3000 who can tell that we still know his name he was given this great privilege of carrying the cross of Jesus but that didn't merit him anything each of the gospel writers had an original audience in mind for example it's obvious that Matthew was writing for Jews and Luke tells us who he was writing to he wrote to a man called Theophilus called Theophilus

John tells us why he wrote his gospel so many will continue to believe in Jesus who did Mark send his gospel to first well for the answer to that question we're dependent on the information from the early church and they tell us that the place where he first sent his gospel was to the church in Rome who lived in Rome well Romans chapter 16 tells us that there in Rome in verse 13 Mark says greet Rufus chosen in the Lord also his mother who has been a mother to me as well here's a Rufus in Romans chapter 16 among all the lists of the church members there in Rome and here in this gospel that church history tells us was sent to the church in Rome is a mention of Rufus again who Mark expects his readers to know it's not too much to put two and two together is it somewhere along the line the man who carried the cross of Jesus became a Christian his wife became a Christian and Paul says about her that she was like a mother to him his children became Christians and therefore they're mentioned here

Mark is virtually saying to his readers Simon of Cyrene the father of Alexander and Rufus sitting along from you in your church gathering was their father that carried the cross of Jesus what a great family honour wasn't it how many people in the first century would have regarded it as an honour to carry a cross they'd have all regarded it as something they didn't want to do Alexander and Rufus well they could think about their father and say he did something for Jesus that nobody else could do so that's why they know his name so what lessons can we take from it and I've got three or four just to mention briefly the first one is

God can interrupt our plans can't he Simon had his plans for that particular day Simon was a devout man but being a devout man didn't make him a converted man Simon was eager to be at the nine o'clock service just as he had been eager to be at the Passover the day before and indeed the Passover was immediately followed by what's called the feast of unleavened bread which lasted for seven days I mean Simon had a whole range of plans ahead of him but God can interrupt our plans

and he can do it in very striking ways if we had said to Simon that morning will you be carrying a cross to Golgotha he'd have thought the idea was preposterous if somebody had said to him in later years after he had become a Christian what would you have thought if you had been given the task of helping the weak lamb get to the place of sacrifice how would he have thought of that

[ 27 : 03 ] Simon had his plans God had his plans you have your plans I've got mine they may not be so graphic as Simon but divine interruptions are very profound voices of the eternal God I've no idea in what ways God interrupts your plans but you know and God knows and God's plan is interruptions are usually designed to bring us to

Jesus in some way or other! and the ways of getting to him might not be what we would expect but he has his plans a second lesson to learn from this is that's the best place to meet Jesus at Calvary it was good for Simon whenever he was ultimately converted we don't know but it was good for Simon that he was taken to Calvary I mean he may have thought he was being forced to go to Calvary by these unfeeling soldiers who didn't care anything about the nine o'clock sacrifice but he was taken to the best place to meet

Jesus because the Jesus we want to meet is Jesus the weak lamb that is the Jesus we want to meet it's wonderful to know that today he reigns on high all power given to him in heaven and on earth but the best place to meet him and the most important place to meet him is when he was struggling under the penalty of pain the sins of those who would trust in him have you been to Calvary I'm sure we've all been to many interesting places but have you been to Calvary not in the sense you can go now and see the rock in Jerusalem which might be the place but have you been to Calvary in a spiritual sense and seeing Jesus paying the penalty for sin a third lesson is that Simon's behavior that day illustrates repentance I mean what is repentance well repentance is basically turning around and moving along with

Jesus that's repentance repentance Simon on his way to the nine o'clock sacrifice wasn't repenting as it were he was just going around doing his plan all of a sudden he finds himself turned right around and that's repentance going in the opposite direction but going in the opposite direction with Jesus you and I can easily know if we're penitent because penitent people travel with Jesus because who else do you repent to fourth lesson

[ 32 : 26 ] I've got two more the fourth lesson from this is God gives precious memories I don't think Simon would have remembered very much about Thursday the day of the Passover that he will never forget what happened on Friday I have no idea of what Simon worked at but I don't think a day would pass when he would forget what happened on the Friday no idea how he died either but I suspect the day he died if his mind was still functioning he would be thinking be thinking of meeting the one he met on that

Friday he left a mark on his life that he never lost God gives precious moments precious moments are unforgettable and the last thing is this one really if you had been there and if I had been there when Jesus stumbled would we have helped him and that's a question isn't it if we had been there would we have helped him because he was after all on the way to helping us shall we pray Lord we give you thanks for Simon's story one that's contained in a very few cryptic words of how the gospel writers knew his name we thank you Lord for what he did for the role he was given to do even if initially he would not have wanted it we thank you for the change you interruption you brought into his life that he discovered that the weak lamb of the Passover did picture a weak suffering savior and help us to trust in that savior as well pray you Lord to bless us and to help us as we make our way through life but help us to walk through it besides the crucified Christ so help us Lord we pray for your own name's sake amen we can sing from psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter and we'll sing verses 57 to 60 The righteous portion art alone, which I did choose, O Lord.

I found resolve and said that I would keep my holy word.

[ 37 : 39 ] With my whole heart I live in need, my face from day our feet.

According to my gracious word, be merciful to me.

I thought upon my former ways, and in my life I will try.

Unto thy testimonies pure, my feet and ironed high.

I did not stay nor linger long, as those that sorrow are.

[ 39 : 19 ] But this journey I lost to thee.

My self I dare prepare. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.  
Amen. Amen. Amen.  
Amen.