

Chapter 85

The enforced cross-bearer,
and the weeping women

Matthew 27 v 32

Mark 13 v 21

Luke 25 vv 26 and 32

A great multitude is walking through Jerusalem's streets. At the forefront march some Roman soldiers. Between them are to be seen three men, each of whom bears a heavy wooden cross upon his back.

Now, why are they doing that and where are they going? ... These three men are three evildoers, who are to be crucified. Yes, so it would appear, to anyone who sees them walking there. They are three malefactors, there is nothing to choose between them by all outward appearance.

Yet ... yet there is indeed a difference. One of these three men is not an evildoer, he is ... the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He too is brought, with the cross upon His shoulders, to Golgotha, to die the cursed death of crucifixion. The other two men are indeed evildoers. They are two murderers who have been condemned to death.

Now that Jesus is to be crucified, they are taking these two murderers along at the same time. The King of Israel is thus here numbered with the transgressors. What a deep humiliation for the Saviour. He, the Holy One, the Pure One, is led away in the company of two base criminals.

Isaiah had long before prophesied, that He was numbered with the transgressors. That

prophecy is here fulfilled.

After Pilate had given the Lord Jesus over to be crucified, the Roman soldiers had removed from Him the robe of mockery. They had put His own clothes upon Him and now they are on the way to Golgotha.

A numerous crowd accompanies them. The distinguished Pharisees and Sadducees are also there. They have succeeded in their designs.

The procession passes through the streets and before long they are outside the city. They descend the hills upon which Jerusalem is built.

But ... Oh, just look, Jesus staggers under the heavy wooden cross. It is no wonder either, considering what a terrible night He has just passed through.

First that unspeakable soul suffering in Gethsemane, then the hearing in front of the Sanhedrin and their ill-treatment of Him. Later the fearful scourging by Pilate. And now that rough cross lies upon that sorely wounded back. Every step, every movement causes Him unbearable pain.

You must not forget that the Lord Jesus was truly human, his human body almost sinks under the heavy burden, he staggers!

The Roman soldiers notice this. At this

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rate Jesus will never even reach the hill Golgotha. That will never do. Yes, but what can they do about it? ... To carry the cross themselves, would be far beneath their dignity. They wouldn't think of doing that. They dare not force one or other of the Jews to do it either, for then an uproar could well break out.

But - there at the side of the road stands a stranger. From the Bible we know that this stranger's name was Simon. He came from Cyrene. That land lies in North Africa, even further away than Egypt. He had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast.

In God's Word we read that he was "coming out of the country". Perhaps some of you will think that he came in workman's clothes with a hoe on his shoulders straight from the land. But that is not so. On the feast days nobody worked, nobody was allowed to work. Had not God Himself said: "Ye shall do no servile work therein"? Had not God Himself commanded: "Whatsoever soul it be that doeth work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people"? No, if you think that Simon had been working on the land, and was now making for home, then you are mistaken.

Furthermore Simon came from Cyrene, and would anyone who came from Africa, from such a distant place as Cyrene, be likely to have a field in Jerusalem? ... Surely not!

No, by "the country" (Dutch the "field"), is meant "the field of the strangers".

During the great feasts there were so many people in Jerusalem, that nothing like all of them could live in the city itself. They had therefore made ready outside the city a large field, and there those who could find no room in the

city, were able to pitch their tents. On such days it would be full of tents and thousands of people would spend the night in that field - or in "the country"! Now you can understand what is meant by "the country", can't you? ... Simon too had a place in the field, where he had pitched his tent.

Simon was in all probability on his way from the field to the temple. There the morning offering would be brought, and Simon the Cyrenian wanted to be present at that solemnity.

As he approaches Jerusalem he meets the procession on its way to Golgotha. Evidently he stepped to one side for a moment and looked in amazement at the scene, not knowing what it all meant.

Then just as the Lord Jesus is upon the point of sinking down and stumbling they have reached the spot where he is. The Roman soldiers see this stranger standing there and they order Simon to help carry the cross.

He refuses however quite definitely, and we can understand why, for if he took the cross upon him, then he would become unclean. Then he would no longer be permitted to come into the Lord's house. Then he could no longer celebrate the Passover feast. Then his journey from far away Cyrene will have been quite in vain, he might just as well have stayed at home.

His refusal however makes no difference. The cruel, rough soldiers COMPEL him. Just read it in Mark 13. They had to COMPEL him. That is a sign that he did not do it willingly. On the contrary, he refused at first.

He is laid hold of, and against his will, a portion of the cross of Jesus is laid upon his shoulders too, so they now bear it together.

Oh, what will have gone on in Simon's

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soul? ... We do not know. Did he become angry, because he had now become unclean? ... Was he saddened because he could now no longer join in the Passover celebrations? ... We do not know. One thing however is certain. The carrying of that cursed wood of the cross was blessed to his heart. Precisely what took place we do not know.

Perhaps Jesus looked upon him when they came at last to Golgotha. ... Simon could not now join in the Passover celebrations in the house of God, but in all probability he now celebrated Passover in truth. Through faith he saw the Lamb of God, which was offered for him too.

Most certainly he was later happy that he had been permitted to carry the cross. Perhaps he later thought with sorrow and shame about his resistance and refusal.

Because Simon had helped to carry a part of the heavy cross, Jesus did not succumb on the way, but reached Golgotha.

Luke 23 vv 2-31

As I have already told you, a great multitude followed the Roman men of war, in order to be present at the crucifixion of the Nazarite. Among these people were also to be seen some women from Jerusalem.

When these Jewish women see the Lord Jesus walk, see that bleeding, pale face; when they notice that Jesus stumbles, then they begin to bewail and lament. With eyes full of tears they mourn for Him. They have compassion upon Him.

But then, just look ... Jesus suddenly stands still and glances earnestly at these weeping

women.

"Daughters of Jerusalem," He says to them, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves."

Those women were making a martyr of the Lord Jesus, and that is not at all what He is. He is no martyr but a mighty Oneⁱ.

As a mighty One He had stepped forward to Jerusalem, while His disciples followed with anxious, heavy hearts. He knew what would take place, and yet He led the way. As a mighty One He had sung the hymn of praise in the Upper Room, though He knew that shortly He would have to suffer so inexpressibly. Like a mighty One He stepped out to meet that band in Gethsemane with the question: "Whom seek ye?", though He knew that they would take Him captive. As a mighty One He had refused to buy His freedom from Herod by performing a few signs and wonders.

Listen to that carefully: He is a mighty One and in no sense a martyr.

He does not want then to be bewailed by these Jewish women. That is why He rebukes the weeping daughters of Jerusalem. It is as though He says: "Oh, daughters of Jerusalem, you have no need to pity Me, for I have taken this load of suffering upon Myself willingly, in order to redeem My people from eternal ruin. That is why I came on earth. That is My object. But if you remain unconverted, then weep for yourselves, for then you will shortly have to bear the wrath of God alone, when death comes. Moreover, fearful days will dawn for you, when the Romans besiege Jerusalem. Mothers will slay and eat their own children. Weep for yourselves and for your children. If they do this to Me, what will they do

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to you and to your children? ... If the punishment of sin, which I bear for My people is so heavy, how heavy shall your punishment be, if you reject Me as your King?"

Can you see, boys and girls that the Lord is rebuking them for their pity. It would have been better if they had wept over their sins. They ought to have wept with sorrow for their wickedness against God.

Alas, it so often happens nowadays, that the Lord Jesus is set up as a martyr. Children sit in school with tears in their eyes. Those children think: "Oh, poor Lord Jesus!" Oh, how they pity Him.

Has it ever been so with you? ... Well, that is wrong, yes worse than that, it is godless when the Lord Jesus is represented as a martyr.

No, weep for yourself, weep for sin, because that is why Jesus had to suffer all this. Dry up your tears of pity and shed tears of real grief over your evil heart!

The Lord's people do indeed grieve that their sins have made it necessary for their Saviour to suffer so much.

The word of the Lord Jesus to the women applies to you too, children. To you also the Lord Jesus says: "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves." For if you die outside of the only Saviour, then at death the full wrath of God will rest upon you.

May the Lord grant that you may rightly sorrow over your sins and your departure from God.

ⁱ Vreugdenhil has "Hero", which is taken from Psalm 89 v 20 *Dutch Statenvertaling* reneclering. The KJV uses the term "mighty One" in Palm 89 v 19.