

Matthew 23-04-02b

We're in Matthew chapter 27, we are looking at the event That is central to all of human history We have come to it here in Matthew chapter 27 verse 32 as They came out they found a man of Cyrene Simon by name him they compelled to bear his cross We're not certain if this was aid where the cross was borne by both the Lord Jesus and Simon This is Likely that the Romans would insist that Jesus at least carry a portion of it Because that is the Common practice and a part of the humiliation and Degradation of the whole scene is is Bearing your own cross. It's kind of like if they've made somebody tie their own hangman's noose and then hang you with it but The fact that Simon is mentioned by name is is Is interesting and worthy of note as They came out they found a man of Cyrene Simon by name him They compelled to bear his cross and this is not you know somewhere along the road This is as they came out. They're coming out of the praetorium and Jesus is already physically in such bad shape That he cannot carry this cross How big is the cross Anybody that has set posts for any reason I've done fences and carports and all kinds of things, but you know that for any weight-bearing pole it needs Two or three feet into the ground even if it's just going to be there temporarily It needs to be set deep so the vertical pole that forms the cross is going to be Quite long if a man is in that day five to six feet tall and Keeping in mind.

We have a clue. It's an indirect clue about The height at which people were crucified specifically Jesus and these two thieves and It has to do with the measure that was taken to hasten the death of the thieves You remember what they're going to do? You see it in the The Breaking of the legs and Why would they do that why wouldn't they if they want to hasten death Break break ribs do some damage to the the chest area break the arms and the legs or whatever, but Breaking the legs is one clue because it indicates that they took this Basically five-pound sledgehammer and had to reach up at eye level or higher and break these break these bones and that indicates that the the Knees, let's say are at a seven to eight foot height and the bodies are up above that this Promotes visibility large crowds can gather and see the victims the other clue we have is the Stabbing in the side with a spear. It wasn't a knife it was a spear because that was the only thing that would reach that high and pierce the Cardiac area the heart area is with a spear So this is up at an elevation which tells you that this cross on the vertical is Is quite long you would expect this could be an eight to ten foot pole possibly longer To sink part of it into the ground and still be able to elevate the the person to that height So this is a big and heavy Piece of execution equipment it of course then has the cross piece as well we also know from ancient sources and I I do this with some hesitation, but I think that that truth is worth knowing and The work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and the suffering that he endured does not need Exaggeration it is as bad as it gets but many people have been executed in heinous ways read Fox's Book of Martyrs people death by impaling Nero turning Christians on crosses into human torches people being burned to death there are all sorts of incredibly painful and heinous ways to die and in all four gospel accounts the

physical suffering aspect is Not emphasized it is almost glaring in its omission It doesn't talk about how bloody Jesus was The the gospel accounts are the opposite of things that you might see in and I've only seen commercials for it but the passion of the Christ you see still shots of that where Jim Caviezel is representing the Lord Jesus, and he's just a catastrophic mess in terms of the Flaying and the bloodiness and the enormous crown of thorns and so on This is what the human mind Does in the same way that when there is a miracle we want sound effects and CGI and and amazing spectacular Accompaniment to a miracle where in the Gospels Sometimes you have to look because some kind of way it happened when Jesus multiplies the bread and the fish there is no spectacularity at all They brought him the five loaves and the two fish and suddenly five thousand people are fed and you think well But was there a glow in the basket did how did the bread multiply? How did the fish become more fish and the even when you watch depictions like on the chosen? You know they they throw it into a basket and suddenly the lid of the basket is falling off because the stuff is just multiplying inside like popcorn and We we want that that's the human way of telling a story I say that to say in no way to to diminish or disrespect the physical suffering that was a part of this process it is understated to the vanishing point in all four gospel accounts it doesn't say and behold as they Scourge the Lord Jesus You know and give some physical description of how terrible it was it says he was scourged That's it it says someone was pressed into service to carry the cross and that's it No drops of blood flowing down the vertical pole of the cross and then dripping onto the ground and the we dramatize At our own expense and to our own hurt Because if the Bible doesn't make a point of a thing what conclusion do you draw? If the Bible doesn't make a point of something what conclusion should we draw that's not the point That's not the point there are many horrific and painful ways to die Battlefield deaths Unimaginably horrific But That's not the point it was horrific it was painful it was bloody and awful But that's not the point So what is the point I? Have come and For this cause I was born for this cause I came into the world to bear witness to the truth So we want to stick to the truth as closely as we can The crown was probably spiny Probably not comfortable, but it wasn't an implement of torture It was designed as a mockery just as the scepter We don't talk about the reed as a scepter much which was then snatched out of his hand And he was smacked in the head with it Knocking this crown to the floor and they take the purple robe away Possibly the same robe that came back on the Lord Jesus from Agrippa Remember he dressed him in a purple robe and sent him back to Pilate so there is a purple robe around Just as a quick side note for vocabulary purposes Depending on which gospel you read the word is purple and in another gospel It is scarlet And they say well, maybe it was a soldier's robe that was a cast-off because it was faded because they wore Scarlet robes the Roman legionnaires wore scarlet robes and if it was faded it might have looked purple They're trying to explain.

Why does one gospel say purple and one say scarlet depending on if you read Matthew Mark and so on but These terms were virtually interchangeable. This is why when you

get to Revelation 17 and the scarlet harlot or the scarlet that is dressed the the harlot that is dressed in red white and blue Scarlet blue purple were not well distinguished in ancient Greek language and almost any shade we do this freely we talk about we don't really distinguish always technically lavender or purple or Some of these other colors that are anywhere in the range between red and blue There's a wide variety of colors and people don't always use them in a technical sense Why am I belaboring this? the mockery is The point the mockery is given several verses here not the blood not the scourging Behold they did strip his back bare. They did tie him to a post They use the cat and I tails the lead weights did this and the glass did that that's not what is detailed here What's detailed? this flippant Arrogant mocking attitude this Supercilious superior dismissal Ignorant The they are in fact in the presence of a king and they make a mockery of him as king That's the point and Anytime there's a point we want to turn the corner into application, right? There but for the grace of God go I maybe yesterday or today.

That is me. I Twisting it to my benefit and someone else's harm We are made of this stuff This is us This is the fallen human nature, which all of us possess We think well, I would never that's what Peter said on this very 24 hour period I will never and he turns right around and does it I would never and he turns right around and does it he dismisses and Contradicts what Jesus tells him multiple times Jesus assures him Jesus prays for him. It seems as though he can't help it He's the brightest student in the group Peter and John.

They're at the top of the class This is for our instruction it's for our it is to be impressed on our hearts We need to suspect ourselves of this we need to examine ourselves for this Well, I'm a Roman. I'm just doing my job. I see no bona fides that I've no got no reason to believe this man is a king How hard have you looked? How long have you lived in Judea? You honestly you've never heard of this Yeshua from Nazareth before Of course, they've heard of him every year.

He's been down for the feasts. There have been crowds in the streets Any of these guys that aren't fresh off the boat from Rome know Who Jesus is they have heard the stories these guys sit around in a barracks. They're on watch off watch.

They talk they've got confidants and informants among the Jewish population they've had the Sanhedrin types come to them before and say why don't you keep an eye on this guy? There's an effort right now in this country, I think To press people To a point where they will do something stupid we will Exaggerate charges we will make claims we will Feel sorry for people who attack Christians and We'll almost celebrate the people who who attack and kill little kids and their teachers at a Christian school We're gonna feel sorry for the group to which the perpetrator belongs and and we're gonna talk about their problems and Ignore the fact that this was an attack on Christians at a Christian school why why this is a concerted effort you listen to quote after quote and video snippet after video snippet and Amazingly, it is as though there's a memo that goes out

at 530 in the morning and everybody gets the same phraseology And you see this over and over again. There is an agenda What are they hoping for? They're hoping for another January 6 They're hoping that people will become so incensed and get so sick and tired of what's going on that they do something stupid which will then be turned into a pretext to Take away freedoms take away rights to further oppress to label a group as dangerous And domestic terrorists and so on I'm telling you they're gonna keep pushing until somebody does something stupid and that's going to be the pretext For a power grab even greater than we are already witnessing as we speak they're just They're pushing and pushing and pushing. This is evil at its worst It is at its most bald-faced and open, but you see it here There is pushing and pushing past the breaking point and it is this kind of thoughtless self-righteous arrogant attitude That is literally the death of us It's easy to see in other people point the finger the Jews want to say the Romans did it the Romans want to say the Jews brought it on the Christians want to say boo on the Jews and the Romans Antisemitism has been justified for centuries based on the fact that the Jews killed Christ conveniently omitting and ignoring the fact that Jesus himself as a Jew his disciples are all Jews the first Generation of the church is all Jews.

Oh, no, they killed Christ and this gives me a pretext and a justification to persecute hunt down Cast out and in some cases murder Jews this twisted thinking For Selfish purposes self-gratification Self-vindication I am right and you're wrong. Therefore what I anything I do is right and anything you do is wrong This is the worst kind of thinking Jesus tells Thomas the preceding evening and by extension all of the disciples. I am the way I Am the truth I Am the life you're never going to get to the father If you don't understand me if you don't follow me if you don't Become Like me That's got to be our focus don't be distracted by the pictorial nature of the Torture of the Lord Jesus here.

The Bible makes no issue of it. You've got to go to the Old Testament Where he is wounded and bruised and even there it doesn't say look how tragic that is. He was Wounded for our transgressions he is bruised for our iniquities It Is the reason that he underwent that that is the focus in Isaiah not the the simple physical fact of it By his stripes we are healed That's the point the healing being inaugurated into and dwelling in the truth traveling that way Arriving and laying hold of that into that life The realms of the Father being acceptable Qualified to be presented to the Father by the Lord Jesus.

That's the point So as we go through this we come to Simon of Cyrene They compelled him to bear his cross It doesn't say that Simon Rushed up to help Jesus he was standing in the crowd and the soldiers and We assumed that there was some problem with Jesus getting to Golgotha With this cross so they press this Shimon into service Where is he from? All three gospels the synoptic Gospels tell us about Simon Cyrene was a Greek city in Libya northern Africa We assume from the fact that he is from Cyrene that he is a Black man that he's a native African, but that is a complete assumption. The Bible doesn't say he was black It's like if you say Saul of Tarsus That well, he must be a Roman or he must be a Greek because he's from Tarsus Sorry, no, he is Jewish fully Jewish from

a Jewish family living in a Roman town A Greek speaking town, but Paul is not Greek He's Jewish, even though he is not from Judea or Jerusalem or even Galilee He was born and that's why he has Roman citizenship because he was born in a Roman town So we do not know the ethnicity of Simon at all you would say well if he is of Cyrene he You know all probabilities are he could have been a black man again, what does the Bible not say It makes no issue of his race It's not important it's not the point and to make a point of it is to add to the Bible Read Revelation 22 for what happens when you start adding things to the Bible that aren't there whether it is four-inch thorns on the crown or whether it is Look at this poor black man who? You know of all people chosen in the world God picked a black man to get you can't make that argument It's not in Scripture. It's not of the truth.

What does Scripture say? Simon by name He is named it doesn't say they picked a man out of the crowd They picked a slave out of the crowd picked a black man out of the crowd they Chose a man of Cyrene Simon by name now did they come up and say We're looking in the crowd is anybody here from Libya is anybody here from Africa Find me an African fine. Who's from Cyrene? How do we know he's from Cyrene? This isn't a detail that would come up you grab some guy out of the crowd and say carry this thing and There's no Tradition of black slaves so that well, they're gonna find a black man and make him do it because you know, this is slave work This is all later accretion and Interpolation by people who are reading the present into the past we know he's of Cyrene and we know his name because he is Talked to later, which we will soon see Cyrene like Tarsus had a large Jewish population There were 100,000 Jews from Judea that had been resettled in Cyrene During the reign of Ptolemy Soter remember Ptolemy Marinda the Greek Empire under Alexander gets divided up and you've got the four sections and Ptolemy is is the Greek ruler of Egypt The Jews have been forced to settle back in The o 323 to 285 BC a hundred thousand Jews had been resettled in Cyrene and This is one of the reasons that Christianity Blossomed in Egypt remember Alexandria became a great scholastic center. So did Cyrene Cyrene in Libya was an early hotbed of Christian faith Because there were Jews there who knew the Old Testament and converted to Christianity when they heard the gospel the Gospel of Mark to keep your place here and turn over to Mark chapter 15 gives us a Detail that is not found in Matthew Mark 15 verse 21 they compelled a certain man Simon a Cyrenian the father of Alexander and Rufus As he was coming out of the country and passing by to bear his cross Simon was not in the crowd.

He wasn't there for the Ekehomo he didn't Hear the people shouting his blood be on us and on our children. He didn't hear Pilate say behold the man Simon as He was coming out of the country and passing by There he sees this procession. There is a crowd.

There are women wailing And Jesus is emerging and coming out of the praetorium There's he's being accompanied by Romans and it's kind of like Moses I will turn aside to see this strange sight, but he's he's not involved He doesn't really know what's going on.

He's a literally a passerby But notice it says the father of Alexander and Rufus Why on earth would Peter say that and Mark writes it down the father of Alexander and Rufus well, guess who Alexander and Rufus are They are known to Peter because in the first generation of the church Alexander and Rufus are there they are known to the early church community who Receives these Gospels You can leave mark and turn to Romans chapter 16 Romans chapter 16 Remember in the greeting section at the end of chapter 16 and when we were doing Romans we saw that these are people that Paul commends as Worthy Fellowship worthy to cultivate friendship and time spent with greet these different ones and When you get to verse 13 greet Rufus chosen in the Lord his mother and mine this is the only other Rufus we find in the New Testament and You get the idea that mrs. Simon Is the mother and Rufus is the son. He is a prominent and well-known believer It is possible that it is someone else but it seems significant to me that you only find Rufus here the fact that The Jews and the Jewish community in Cyrene Seem to have largely converted to Christianity in the first century is borne out if you turn back to Acts chapter 11 And verse 20 chapter 11 verse 19 says those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen Remember Stephen Acts chapter 7 Acts chapter 8 Paul is holding the garments of those who are stoning Stephen and the Lord Jesus stands at the right hand of the father to receive him and so on Those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia Cyprus and Antioch Preaching the word to no one but the Jews only but some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene Some of them were men from Cyrene who when they had come to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists preaching the Lord Jesus Rufus and Alexander are Greek names Rufon R-o-u-p-h-o-n is is comes to us as Rufus Rufon but Alexander Where do you think that came from? That's originally a Macedonian name.

That's that's Alexander the Great and so Simon named his sons Rufon and Alexander which tells you that they are in this Multicultural mixing pot in Cyrene that is Strongly Greek influence. That's why the the Alexandrian school down in Egypt also is is very deft and schooled in in Greek and the early Greek manuscripts And the same in Cyrene. So these are Jews who are in Africa Embedded in the Libyan what will become the Libyan African culture, but there is also Egyptian presence They were settled there the Jews were settled there there is a Jewish presence there and this is a sort of multifarious set of influences, but this is the Universality You've got the Jews You've got the Romans, but now you've got Simon from Cyrene and in the day that the gospel was written the same time as Acts was written people knew that Cyrene was a Cultural melting pot and there were great diversities in that town.

This is why you can't say what color Simon was his name is Shimon Shimon is a Jewish name. How many Shimon's are there in the Bible in the New Testament, especially? There there were two Simons in Jesus group of disciples Right, they're all over the place Simon the sorcerer There are many Simons and it's a Jewish name so he is Jewish but as with Saul of Tarsus He's got a Jewish name, even though he is born in a in a Greek and

Roman environment So 1120 some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene who when they had come to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists preaching the Lord Jesus Who are the Hellenists? Greek speaking Jews remember Stephen was implicated when they had to the the Hellenistic families felt like their widows were not being adequately ministered to and so the church appoints deacons the first and foremost of Whom is Stephen? To minister to the daily needs of the widows, but it was the the Hellenists the Greek speaking Jews So they speak Greek down in Cyrene and they are qualified to address the Hellenistic Jews and Say look We're from a Jewish community in Cyrene and we are here to share the good news of Jesus Christ He is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophecies of which you are so aware and with which you are so familiar he has come and We're here to tell you about it men from Cyrene So There was a burial cave Discovered in the Kidron Valley remember the Kidron separates Mount Zion from Mount of Olives There was a burial cave discovered in 1941 a belonging to Cyrenian Jews dating before 70 AD and There is an ossuary in that tomb inscribed twice in the Greek Alexander son of Simon So Rufus Seems if these are the same two which seems likely to me. Why else would they be mentioned by name? It appears that Alexander may have died in or near Jerusalem and have been buried there These are common names.

It's possible that it was someone else, but it's just interesting That Alexander the son of Simon is in this Cyrenian Jewish tomb It's not just any old tomb it's in the Cyrenian section of the cemetery if you will There have been a lot of traditional accretions just as we have already seen About other aspects of Jesus trial and his Scourging and his and the mocking and his crucifixion a lot of traditions have grown up about Simon of Cyrene because so little is said But there is enough evidence in Scripture itself to tell us that it was no accident that Simon was on that road There have been movies made that that sort of take off on this theme you remember Spartacus Kirk Douglas Sort of famously is is I think I'm remembering this right isn't he the one that gets a cup of water that's given to him by Jesus that you only see from behind and the movie the robe and others where a seemingly happenstance or glancing contact with the Lord Jesus Happens and is later a part of someone's active faith. They didn't know it at the time but and That seems to be in view here when you go back to Mark chapter 15 and See the details which Matthew interestingly chooses to exclude he has Mark before him. We are certain but when When Peter preaching and Mark writing it down says they compelled a certain man Simon a Cyrenian the father of Alexander and Rufus the Alexander and Rufus are well known enough that Mark writes their names down Assuming the audience needs no further introduction They are that well known as He was coming out of the country the countryside and passing by to bear his cross it seems that there was a a crossroads or some short part of Simon's route that caused him to intersect with this procession.

Think about the odds think about the timing. What are the odds? It is a chance meeting one would think But sometimes God brings things into our lives to give us pause for thought or to give us a helpful illustration Simon isn't a part of the proceedings. It seems

to be happenstance that he is grabbed as a an innocent bystander and Put under the cross of the Lord Jesus But I believe in God's economy.

It is no accident He could say why me? What have I done? How did I get in Brogliot in this unforeseen? I'm I'm just going about my business here. I'm not a part of this but he is intersected and You could say in a way that this contact so indirect yet so Emphatic in Scripture recorded in Matthew Mark and Luke Was life-changing for Simon and Then for his sons Who I believe show up later in Scripture in Paul's letter to the Romans in the Testimony of the Cyrenians to Christ to Hellenistic Jews We do not know what God is doing in circumstances but we know the God who is weaving them together for good and rather than obsessing or railing or Focusing on the Unfairness or the unlikelihood or why did this happen? Why is it this why is it that? to trust that God has a purpose and Many cases you find the purpose recorded in Scripture is so great That it's almost hard to look back and see by what seeming accident. It was brought about What are the odds that on the particular day that they were stoning Stephen Saul of Tarsus would be there watching the coats But God Uses that as part of the goads that he is kicking against when the Lord Jesus confronts him on the road Saul of Tarsus heard Stephen's testimony and he is one of the few on that day For whom it was not easy to dismiss Because Saul is amazed that Stephen knows these details as well as he he has sat at the feet of Gamaliel and Almost in a Simon of Cyrene way here is Paul at on any given day, he's all the way from Tarsus, but here he is and There he is and he hears what he hears and he sees what he sees Stephen Sees the resurrected Lord Jesus guess who the next person is who's going to see the Lord Jesus Saul of Tarsus Stephen sees him Saul is next What he witnessed in Stephen he is going to experience himself So I find this mention of Simon is not accidental It is a part of the point these verses could have been dedicated to the physical suffering of the Lord Jesus Which was not insubstantial not immaterial, but it's not the point This is the point God intersects us with his plan and purpose and It is for our good and the fulfillment of his purpose and to Not just be reconciled to that But to understand it to appreciate it and to watch for it and to be confident in it is our great privilege well Next Sunday, which is Resurrection Sunday.

We will pick up here in Matthew chapter 27 and And Review both the crucifixion and its aftermath, but we'll close here in a word of prayer Father thank you for the truth of your Word Thank you for the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ to which he has so effectively born witness Been our example continues to be our example our high priest our intercessor The head of all things to us as his body the church. We pray that as we reflect on this critical moment in time this critical event in the sweep of human history that the Holy Spirit will help us to not only appreciate its magnitude and its Accomplishment but the value for application in our own lives. We pray it in Jesus name.

Amen