

**Exegetical Notes, Matthew 27:32-44**  
**“To Carry His Cross”**

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**Matthew 27:32-54**

**Verse 32**

*As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and forced him to carry the cross.*

- After his “trial” before Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea from 26-36 A.D., Jesus had been sentenced to death by crucifixion. He was “flogged,” beaten with a whip embedded with splinters of bone. Sometimes these beatings were so severe that the prisoner died before reaching the place of crucifixion. Jesus was then taken into the Praetorium, Pilate’s official residence in Jerusalem, where Pilate’s soldiers mocked and beat him again. Then the procession to Golgotha, the place of crucifixion, began. Under normal circumstances the prisoner was forced to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion. The severity of the beating he had received made it impossible for him to carry his own cross.
- So the Roman soldiers compelled a man from the crowd (see Matthew 5:41) named Simon to carry Jesus’ cross. This man was a visitor to Jerusalem from Cyrene, a city in northern Africa. He was probably Jewish or a convert to Judaism in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.
- After this experience, he apparently became a Christian as his two sons, Alexander and Rufus, are mentioned as being Christians (see Mark 15:21 and Romans 16:13).

**Verse 33**

*They came to a place called Golgotha (which means the Place of the Skull).*

- While the exact location of Golgotha is disputed, it was the place where crucifixions took place.
- There is no mention in the Gospel of this place being on a hill, although tradition so implies.
- It may have been called the place of the skull because it resembled a skull in some way or because it was the place where people were executed. Perhaps unclaimed bodies were left there unburied.

#### **Verse 34**

***There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.***

- Gall was a bitter tasting narcotic.
- Tradition says that the women of Jerusalem offered wine mixed with the narcotic gall as a way of lessening the suffering of those condemned to be crucified.
- After Jesus tasted this drink, knowing that the narcotic would lessen his consciousness and his suffering, he chose not to drink it.

#### **Verse 35**

***When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.***

- Jesus suffered a Roman crucifixion. Heavy wrought-iron nails were driven through his wrist bones and his heel bones to hold him to the cross. Death was slow and very painful. The cause of death was suffocation. If the victim lingered too long, his legs were broken to quicken death. This method of execution was reserved for slaves, non-Romans, and base offenders.
- It was the right of the executioners to take the condemned's clothing. They normally divided the garments between the members of the squad by casting lots.

#### **Verse 36-37**

***And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."***

- This was customary practice. As the condemned person made his way to the place of crucifixion a sign was carried before him on which was written the charge against him.

- The charge against Jesus was treason. The sign said that he claimed to be king of the Jews, the Roman understanding of his claim to be Israel's Messiah.

#### **Verse 38-40**

***Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"***

- These verses are somewhat problematic: First, robbery was not a capital offense under Roman law. Thus, robbers would not normally have been crucified. These men must have been involved in some sort of insurrection against Rome as well as being robbers. Second, there is no place where Jesus actually made the remark that he is accused of making here. The closest remark to it is that found in John 2:19. See also Mark 15:57-59 where, at his trial, false witnesses accuse Jesus of having said this.

#### **Verse 41-44**

***In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders mocked him, "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"*** ***In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.***

- Those who witnessed the crucifixion saw it as proof that Jesus was not who he said that he was. They challenged him to prove that he was who he claimed to be by coming down from the cross. Jesus could have done just that. However, if he had come down from the cross the plan of God to provide for our salvation would have been thwarted and still those who mocked him would not have believed. They would have concluded that he came down from the cross by the power of Satan. See Matthew 12:22-23.
- The mocking of Jesus as he hung on the cross was universal. It came from those highest up, the chief priests and the elders of Israel, to those also condemned to die as criminals.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *To Carry His Cross*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)