

## Day Eighteen

### Jesus: Real, Relevant, Raw and Radical!

#### The Thread of Love

**Luke 23:26-31(NLT)** As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. **The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.** <sup>27</sup> A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. <sup>28</sup> **But Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.** <sup>29</sup> For the days are coming when they will say, ‘Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed.’ <sup>30</sup> People will beg the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and plead with the hills, ‘Bury us.’ <sup>31</sup> For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” <sup>32</sup> Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. <sup>33</sup> When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> **Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”** And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

**Mark 15:20-25(NLT)** When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified. <sup>21</sup> **A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus’ cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.)** <sup>22</sup> And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means “Place of the Skull”). <sup>23</sup> They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it. <sup>24</sup> Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece. <sup>25</sup> It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.

It is an enigma that the central theme of Christianity is celebrated by remembering a method of execution. The cross was not something celebrated; it was something that was disdained and feared. It was a method of execution spared for the very worst; for criminals, revolters, and the despised. Central to what we believe as Christ followers is the Cross of Christ. The cross was a place, a process, and a method of extreme agony. Crucifixion was a practice that originated with the Persians and was later passed on to the Carthaginians and the Phoenicians. The Romans perfected it as a method of execution, which caused maximal pain and suffering over a period of time. The cross was so painful that in order to describe something that is extremely painful, we say that it is “excruciating.” The best way to describe unbearable pain is “excruciating.” The word comes from the Latin words “ex” meaning “out of,” and “cruciate” meaning “from the cross, to cause great agony”; literally, “out of the Cross.”

**It is impossible to read the accounts of Jesus being crucified and not see the thread of love woven through the tapestry of pain.** Jesus' body is most definitely in shock due to His injuries and the loss of blood from the flogging that He received. The soldiers take off the purple robe (which obviously inflicts further pain) and puts Jesus' own clothes back on Him. The brutality that Jesus is being treated with might be shocking to us, but for these Roman soldiers, it is just business as usual. They have done this hundreds, if not thousands, of times. They now parade Jesus through town. They take the longest route to put everybody on notice. Don't mess with Rome.

Jesus carries His cross, consisting of only the cross beam. John's gospel tells us Jesus carried His own cross. Obviously up to a certain point. Then the soldiers force Simon to carry Jesus' cross. Simon was coming in when Jesus was going out. Simon literally is the first person to pick up a cross and to follow Jesus. Simon has no choice but to obey the soldiers; it's the law. What Simon might not be aware of, is that the Person he is carrying the cross for, is also the One who told His disciples to go the extra mile to demonstrate love. Slowly, the thread of love will be unveiled for Simon.

A crowd is following as Jesus is leading this morbid procession. The grief-stricken women are wailing. Suddenly, Jesus turns around and says these words, ***"Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."*** Simon obviously must have heard these words because Jesus turned around to say the words and he was walking behind Jesus. Love speaks and takes no time to weep for Himself. In agony and pain, too weak to carry the cross, His thought is not for Himself, but for the pain of a future generation. He is thinking about the very children of the people who are walking behind Him. The fact that Simon was forced to carry the cross begins to fade in his mind and is now replaced by curiosity. He sees in Jesus, not a reluctant victim bemoaning His own fate, but a willing participant determined to the end.

"What kind of Man is this?", must have been Simon's thought? When they arrived at Golgotha, Jesus is nailed to the cross next to two other criminals. They offered Him wine drugged with Myrrh (this was usually given as a narcotic to dull the pain), but He refused. Simon must have seen this yet again. Why would Jesus refuse this drink? Because Love bears all things, including all of our pain. Love chooses not to take the shortcut. Then, as Simon starts to walk away, while the soldiers are casting lots for Jesus' clothes, Jesus speaks. Simon pauses, what would Jesus say? ***Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."*** The weight of these words that Simon heard was heavier and weightier than the cross he just carried! The thread of love is being weaved from the mouth of Jesus straight through the heart of Simon.

"Father, Forgive them!" Simon cannot believe his ears. This must have shaken him to

his core. No eye-for-an-eye kind of prayer or future retribution, just simply forgive them. Mark's gospel records what no one else does, when he writes the gospel of Mark. "A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (**Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.**)" Obviously, these were the children of Simon, and the reason Mark mentions them is because they were well known to the early church. (When Mark wrote his gospel) It is highly likely that this is the same Rufus that Paul mentions in **Romans 16:13(NLT)** "Greet Rufus, whom the Lord picked out to be his very own; and also his dear mother, who has been a mother to me."

**Duty and obligation forced Simon to carry the cross, but Love changed his direction.** Let's face it, life can be hard! Life can be downright cruel. Life can be vicious and tough. For some of us, when we go through experiences like that, we begin to question everything and everyone. We ask, "Where is God in all of this? Why did God not intervene? Why did He not stop this or that from happening? Does God really love me?!" Simon will tell you, "He absolutely does." When you think it's over, God might just be beginning! Throughout your life, even in moments where you least expect it, the thread of God's love can be found. His love speaks loud and clear if you are willing to listen.

Love speaks. It says I am forgiven. Love says I am invited. It says I am welcome. It says I don't have to be good enough. It says there is a way. It says my past can be done away with. It says my shame, my guilt and my pain are removed. Love speaks loud and clear. Its message and call is heard all over the world. Love's message has been spreading for more than 2000 years. Love shouts from the top of mountain villages, love speaks in bustling cities of enterprise. Love cuts through every and all barriers. Love cries out to the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the highest of society and the outcast of society. Love speaks to the foolish and the wise, the desperate and the independent. Love speaks to presidents, kings and paupers. What does Love say? "**Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing...**"

**"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."**

Allow the thread of God's love to be the focus of your life and your experience. You are His beloved...

**Prayer:**

- **Ask the Lord to help you to make love your highest goal.**
- **Pray for a baptism of love.**
- **Ask the Father to help you live your life in such a way that your children will see**

**the evidence of God's love through you.**

- **Ask the Lord to help you love those whom you deem as “difficult” to love.**
- **Pray that all of us as Christ followers will live a life of love so that the world will know who we follow.**