

Cause + Effect (Part 3): How the Cross of Christ Gets Laid on Us

Introduction

The Text

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. (Luke 23:26)

Part 3?!

- A. I thought I only had two parts to this little Cause + Effect mini-series we're running on these opening verses of [Luke 23](#). But it turns out I've got one more for us.
1. I've said that in the opening verses of this chapter it seems to me we're given these vignettes, these little pictures, that display for us both what the gospel is and what it is mean to accomplish in our lives.
- B. That's where I get the title Cause + Effect.
1. The cause is the gospel itself, in the case of these vignettes here, it's the innocent One, Jesus, being condemned to the cross in our place.
 2. And the effect flowing out from the gospel here, is manifold . . .
 - a. We saw in the first part back in [vv. 1-12](#) that the gospel effects reconciliation, not just between us and God but between one another. And this was pictured there with the reconciliation between Herod and Pilate, who had been at enmity with one another until Jesus shows up, then suddenly they're friends.
 - b. Then, last week, in part two, we saw in [vv. 13-25](#) how the gospel effects the release of prisoners, how it unlocks the cell door and we go out free. This was, of course, pictured in Barabbas, the infamous insurrectionist whom Jesus quite literally takes the place of. That's Barabbas' cross, these are his charges, his sins, and yet, while Jesus is led away to be crucified, Barabbas is free to go. It's a picture of the redemption that is ours through the blood of Christ.
 - c. And now we come to part three in all of this and here we have another picture of what the gospel effects in our lives. Here we see how Jesus bearing his cross for us, leads to this resolve in his disciples to bear their own cross for him. That's what's pictured there with this Simon of Cyrene.
- C. And it's this that we shall consider in more detail this morning. So we have, yet again, two headings quite similar to those from the previous sermons: (1) Cause: The Innocent Condemned; and (2) Effect: The Guilty Resolved (namely, resolved to pick up their cross and follow him). So let's go!

(1) Cause: The Innocent Condemned

Two Observations

A. So Jesus has been accused, falsely. He's been tried, haphazardly. He's been condemned, wrongly. And now he's being led away to be put to death.

1. I've got just a couple observations I wanted to bring out here on this point . . .

Observation #1: "They Led Him Away"

A. First, make note of the fact that in our text this crowd and now the Roman soldiers and things are "[leading] him away . . ." (v. 26).

1. We know from down in v. 33 of this same chapter that they are taking him to a place called "The Skull" or in the Aramaic, "Golgotha."

a. And John tells us it was a place "near the city" (John 19:20) but "out[side]" the city (v. 17). And it was obviously a place where convicted criminals would be crucified.

B. And here is where we're reminded that in Jewish and Roman culture it was customary that one would be put to death outside the gates of the city.

1. You may recall the injunction from the Hebrew scriptures for example, Lev 24:14-16, where God instructs Moses: " ¹⁴Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. ¹⁵And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. ¹⁶Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death." And you put them to death outside the camp, or outside the city.

a. This is where you take blasphemers. This is where you take idolaters. This is where you take those who high-handedly rebel against the Lord their God.

i. And yet this is where they are taking Jesus, the only truly innocent One. Don't you understand, he's letting them lead him away there . . . for us!

Observation #2: The Apparent Weakness of Jesus

A. For this, let me first give you some quick background on how the Romans would crucify criminals.

1. They likely already had the vertical beam of the cross implanted in the ground out at The Skull.
2. And Jesus along with these other two felons would be required to carry the horizontal crossbeam out from the place of conviction to the place of crucifixion.

3. And when they arrived the two beams would be fastened together. It was a walk of shame intended to put the criminals on public display.
- B. And here's what we must see, though we know from John's gospel that Jesus began by carrying his own cross, it would appear he quickly grew so weak and tired that he could not finish the journey. So the soldiers have to commandeer a bystander to carry it for him. We'll talk about that in a minute, but for now I just want to let that sink in—the frailty of our Savior here.
1. Now, we may at first be inclined to think Jesus a bit pathetic.
 - a. The other two criminals seem to be getting along okay. Why can't he?
 - b. And furthermore, we know that Jesus has been preparing for this hour his entire life, indeed even from all eternity. And now the hour has come and he has not the strength even to carry the wooden crossbeam?
 - i. What are we to make of this?
- C. Well, you see, Luke's account is rather brief on this point, and we may have missed the fact that each of the other gospel writers tell us of how Jesus was terribly scourged and flogged all before the cross was laid on him. It is possible that such a thing even happened twice to this point.
1. [John 19:1](#) seems to indicate that the threat that Pilate made in [Luke 23:16, 22](#), he actually carried out at some point before ultimately delivering him over to the will of the people. Some scholars think this was probably what the Romans referred as “fustigation”—the lightest form of flogging used to punish those who committed minor crimes.
 2. But then in [Matt. 27:26](#) and [Mark 15:15](#) use a different Greek word, [phragelloō](#), translated “scourged” which commentators believe refers to what the Romans called “verberatio.”
 - a. This was the most severe form of whipping administered in connection with capital punishments. They would use a multi-lashed whip containing embedded pieces of bone and metal and they would just flay open the back of these people, often exposing the bones and intestines and things. It's insane. And the pain of it all would sometimes get so intense that criminals would just die then and there, tied to the whipping post.
 - i. The goal in Jesus' case seems to have been to get him as near to death as possible, so they could get him up and down before sunset—perhaps simply because of expediency, maybe because the next day was the Sabbath.
- D. So now you're seeing it. How are you going to put a thirty to forty pound beam of wood on a back and body like that?
1. And let me remind you, this is the One who “[upholds the universe by the word of his power](#)” ([Heb. 1:3](#)) and yet here, under the burden of our guilt and shame, under the incalculable weight of the wrath of God, the Son staggers and slows to a mere crawl.

- a. Well, the Romans and the Jews can't have this. It's taking too long. "We don't have all day." So we read again in v. 26 that "as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus."

E. And with this we transition to the second heading . . .

- 1. We see the Cause, the innocent One condemned for us.
- 2. Now we come to yet another Effect from all this: namely, the guilty, the sinful, those who truly see him and the glory of his grace, resolve to take up their cross as well and follow after him.

(2) Effect: The Guilty Resolved

His Cross and Mine

- A. Simon was likely a Jew traveling in from Cyrene (which is modern day Libya in North Africa) to celebrate the Passover there in Jerusalem. He had no intention, it would seem, of involving himself in this parade of criminals and things, but, nonetheless, God had other plans for him.
 - 1. And, as it turns out, what we have here with this "Simon of Cyrene" is a powerful picture of what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower, a Christian.
 - a. If you want an image of true Christianity, authentic discipleship, well I don't think we can do any better than the one drawn up for us in this singular verse.
- A. You see, there's only two other places in Luke's gospel where the cross is explicitly mentioned, where this Greek word *stauros* shows up. And both of them have to do not with Jesus' cross, but with yours and mine—with the cross of a disciple.
 - 2. I'll take you to the first instance in [Luke 9:22-25](#) and we'll camp here for a moment. Here we have the first time Jesus really predicts his own suffering and death. And it's no coincidence that it's in this context that he also begins to discuss our own cross-bearing: "22 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.' 23 And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?'"
 - a. Now I've got four quick observations I want to make on this . . .

Observation #1: The Priority and Precedence of Christ's Cross

- A. First, we must see the priority and precedence of the cross of Christ. While Jesus doesn't explicitly mention his own cross there in v. 22, we know, of course, that's what he's referring to. He will suffer, be rejected, and killed, and on the third day rise. It's a prediction of his own demise and ultimate triumph. He will not have an easy time of things. He will not just march to victory. He will

be hated and scorned, and as we've just seen, falsely accused, haphazardly tried, wrongly condemned, and strung up on a cross.

1. That's first. That's priority. That's the fact that precedes everything else in this text.

Observation #2: The Connection with My Own Cross

A. But, interestingly now, while discussing his own cross, Jesus begins to speak of ours as well. There's a connection between the cross of Christ and the cross of a disciple. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (v. 23).

1. We must not think that Jesus gets the cross and we go straight to the crown.
2. No, don't you see? He's connecting his path with our own. Just as Jesus gets the crown on the other side of the cross, so too it will be with you and I.
 - a. As Paul says in Rom. 8:17: "[We are] heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."
 - b. Or from Jesus' own mouth in John 15, 16: "A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. . . . In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (15:20; 16:33).
 - i. "I go before you through death to life. And make no mistake, if you would be my disciple, you will follow after me in the same." There's just no room left to interpret this any other way. He's got a cross and so do I.

B. And for Simon here, he could literally feel it, right? I love how one commentator puts it: "Taking up the cross and following Jesus' is not an imaginary ideal, and not always metaphoric. Simon of Cyrene literally fulfills Jesus' injunction!" (PNTC).

1. This isn't just some abstract idea for him now. He can feel the heavy burden of this cross on his back. The scoffing, the mocking, the jeering that Jesus was receiving, he's absorbing some of that, he's in the line of fire now. The crossbeam and the crosshairs are on him at this point as well.
 - a. The reality of it all is ripping through the metaphorical.

Observation #3: The Promise of Life and Joy

A. You know, we spend so much of our time, energy, money, trying to preserve our life, enhance our life, save our life. And Jesus undercuts that entire endeavor with a few words there in vv. 24-25: "24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

1. On the one hand, it's vanity and futility and the epitome foolishness to strive for your best life now—to polish brass on a sinking ship. "What are you doing getting everything all shiny and in its place? The ship's taking on water? Can't you hear the sirens? This thing's going down brother. Don't attach your heart to it!"

2. But on the other hand, if you'd hear him out on this, if you'd take him up on this, if you'd take up your cross and follow after him, if you'd lose your life for his sake . . . well then you would find it after all. Oh it may look like his ship is sinking here, but our Savior's going to come up out the other side, up from the grave, and he's never going down again. Attach your heart to him!
 - a. You see, contrary to what you might initially think, he's not trying to rob you of life and joy here, he's trying to give it to you in all its fullness. Come and die . . . and then you'll know what it's like to truly live!

Observation #4: The Daily Need

- A. And for the fourth observation I simply want to draw your attention to a single word there in [v. 23](#): "daily."
 1. This taking up your cross and following Jesus thing is not something you do once and then you're done. No. It's every day of your life.
- B. Every sin you ever commit is a shrugging off of the cross. I don't want to die to this or that desire.
 1. I want sex, I'm going to get sex. From the internet, from my girlfriend, wherever. Don't tell me what to do.
 2. I've got frustrations, I'm not going to bite my tongue. I'm going to vent those things. And even if I stay quiet on it, well I'll let you know I'm upset with some passive-aggressive maneuvering.
 3. I've got a dream, I'm not going to pray about it or "surrender it to God." I'm going to go get it. That's what Americans.
 - a. You get the point. You may have lived yesterday out on the altar, but you got down from it this morning. It's a daily thing.
- C. I wonder, what does taking up your cross look like today for you? Where are your fleshly impulses, your sinful trajectories, your worldly temptations still breathing? What needs to be put to death so that you can truly live?!

Three Aspects

- A. Now with [Luke 9](#) in the background, and with Simon of Cyrene put forward as our tangible picture of all this, the last thing I want do with you is simply consider what it means exactly when we take up our cross and follow Jesus. What does it entail?
 1. There are three aspects I wanted to bring out at this point, and I'll give them to you up front: (1) Passion; (2) Union; and (3) Mission. Let's briefly consider them one at a time now.

Aspect #1: Passion

- A. I think the first thing communicated by the taking up of our cross is that we are passionate about Jesus, that we see him as our supreme treasure, worthy of giving up all else for.
- B. We've seen this play out in the natural scene round about us, haven't we? You give up things, you "die" to things, because you find something else more valuable.
 - 1. So you say no to chocolate cake because a thinner waistline is more desirable to you, especially with summer now upon us, it's beach weather.
 - 2. Or you say no to rest and relaxation this weekend, why? Because getting ahead at work, earning that promotion, climbing the corporate ladder, that's more of a treasure to you than a beer with your bros or whatever. You're more passionate about it.
- C. You get it. We understand the concept. And the idea of taking up our cross is just this on steroids. It's saying there is nothing else in all the world more important to me, more desirable to me, than knowing Jesus. I need his grace, I need his care, I need his cross, so I'll let everything else go.
 - 1. This is Paul in [Phil. 3:8](#): "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ . . ."
 - 2. It's the disciples, if you remember, when they're first called they just leave their boats, their nets, their families, their hometowns, whatever . . . and they follow.
 - 3. It's the woman at the well who after meeting Jesus, leaves her water jar there at the well. "I don't need physical water anymore, I found living water."
 - 4. It's the guy in that parable Jesus tells, who in his joy sells all that he has so that he can buy that field and get the treasure of the kingdom of heaven ([Matt. 13:44](#)).
- D. It's even, I think, pictured right here with Simon. I think that's partly why Luke emphasizes the fact that Simon carries the cross "[behind Jesus](#)" (v. 26).
 - 1. I mean I would have thought, given the fact that Jesus was probably just crawling at this point, that Simon would have been off in the lead.
 - a. But Luke goes out of his way to accent this, why? Because Jesus is the treasure.
- E. What I've said to this point, you may have thought: "Okay so Jesus has a cross, I have a cross . . . so I'm somehow atoning for my sin, is that what's happening?"
 - 1. No, not at all. Jesus goes first. We're not out in front. We're not even side-by-side. Jesus goes first. He does what only he can do.
 - 2. And then when we see the worth, the value of that atonement, well, we're ready to join him in the sense that we're ready to let all else go to lay hold of him. And we don't care what that means—if the world hates us, rejects us, kills us. He's it for us. Just get me in.

Aspect #2: Union

- A. And that leads us to this second aspect of union. Here we see taking up our cross is not just an expression of our passion for Jesus, it's also a picture of the sort of union we share with him as well.

- B. So you have all these texts in the New Testament that talk about how when we take up our cross and come to Jesus through repentance and faith, God sees us as having died with Jesus there on the cross and having been raised with him now in newness of life. We're united with him in that in other words. So . . .
1. Rom. 6:3-5: " ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."
 2. Gal 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
 3. Gal. 6:14-15: " ¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."
- C. You know, the text in [Luke 9](#) speaks, it would seem, of a separate cross that a disciple takes up. And I suppose that is a fine image.
1. But the truth of it is: our cross is always inherently connected to Jesus'. Taking up my cross unites me with his. That's the point.
 - a. And that's what's brought out in particular with this scene in [Luke 23](#) with Simon. It's quite literally Jesus' cross he's bearing. There's a particular and peculiar union between Simon and Jesus in these moments.
 - i. Jesus goes not just before us, he goes for us. He goes not just in front of us, he goes in place of us. And when we take up our cross we come into that. All that he accomplishes through the bearing of his cross becomes ours.
- D. This is why the old Puritan Samuel Rutherford would write: "O how sweet are the sufferings of Christ for Christ! God forgive them that raise an ill report upon the sweet cross of Christ. It is but our weak and dim eyes, and our looking only to the black side, that makes us mistake. Those who can take that . . . tree handsomely upon their back, and fasten it on [nicely], shall find it such a burden as wings unto a bird or sails to a ship" (Letters of Samuel Rutherford, 43).
1. It's not a weight, it's a wing! We can soar to new heights because we've died with Christ and been raised in him by his Spirit.
 - a. We're united with him in his death under the wrath of God—I don't need to die for my sin, he did, in my place.
 - b. And, consequently, we're also united to him in his resurrection—we're new creations in Christ. It's only up from here!

Aspect #3: Mission

- A. And this leads to the third and final aspect I'd like to bring out. We take up our cross as an expression of our passion for Jesus and as a picture of our union with him in his death and resurrection . . . but also as a way of participating with him in his mission to reach the world with the good news of the grace of God.
1. So the author of Hebrews says: “¹² Jesus . . . suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (Heb. 13:12-13). Just like he gave his life in love for others, whatever the cost, so too shall we.
 2. Listen to how Paul describes his ministry in 2 Cor. 4:7-12: “⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.”
 - a. Are you catching that? Just like our Savior laid down his life in love for the world around him, so too shall we. Taking up our cross and following him means we go out into this city ready to give of ourselves to see the gospel gain traction. We don't just talk about the cross. We look like it. We don't just share it. We show it. We die so that others might live.
- B. Isn't this just the antithesis of what happened this past week with the mass shooting?
1. There you have a guy who seems to have been nursing bitterness, dreaming of vengeance and that sort of thing, concerned with, consumed with self, and it leads to not only taking the lives of others but it destroys himself in the end as well.
 2. But the Christian, because of the cross, runs in precisely the opposite direction, we give our lives for the sake of others, even our enemies, and in that we all find life in the end . . . in Jesus.
- C. You know the last thing I'll say here is this. When you're living on mission, when you're a genuine cross-bearing Christ-following disciple, it's contagious and it influences not just people out in the city and things, but people right there in your own family, your inner circle. We're on mission in our homes as well, right?
1. In Mark's account of this he goes out of his way to say that Simon is “the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mark 15:21). And the assumption of most commentators is that this implies his sons were active, known members of the church later on. Otherwise, why mention that?
 2. And you go to Rom. 16:13, and it's possible this same Rufus is mentioned again along with his mom who would be Simon's wife. There Paul writes: “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.”

- D. And the picture we get, albeit a bit cobbled together, is that because Simon was the kind of dad and husband who legitimately and, in this case literally, picked up his cross and followed Jesus, man it had an attractive, replicative effect on his family.
1. “Why’s dad so different? What happened when you stepped out to run that errand? What did you see there just outside the city gates?”
 - a. And he tells of the Messiah, the Son of God, who died in his place, for his sins, and offered him new life. It was transformative. And he wanted to walk that Calvary road back to his family and back to Cyrene.
 - i. He wanted to lay his life down in love for them so that they might also might take up their cross and follow Jesus, because they have the passion, they want the union, and they’re ready to join him on his mission. And it seems like that’s what they did.
- E. So how about you? What if you were in place of Simon here? What if you weren’t seized by the Romans to carry this cross, but instead you were given a choice . . . what would you do?
1. Would you shrink back from it and retreat to the fringes of the crowd and keep a safe distance away from there on?
 2. Or, seeing what your Savior is taking on himself in love for you, would you take it up in love for him?! He’s calling. Let’s go!