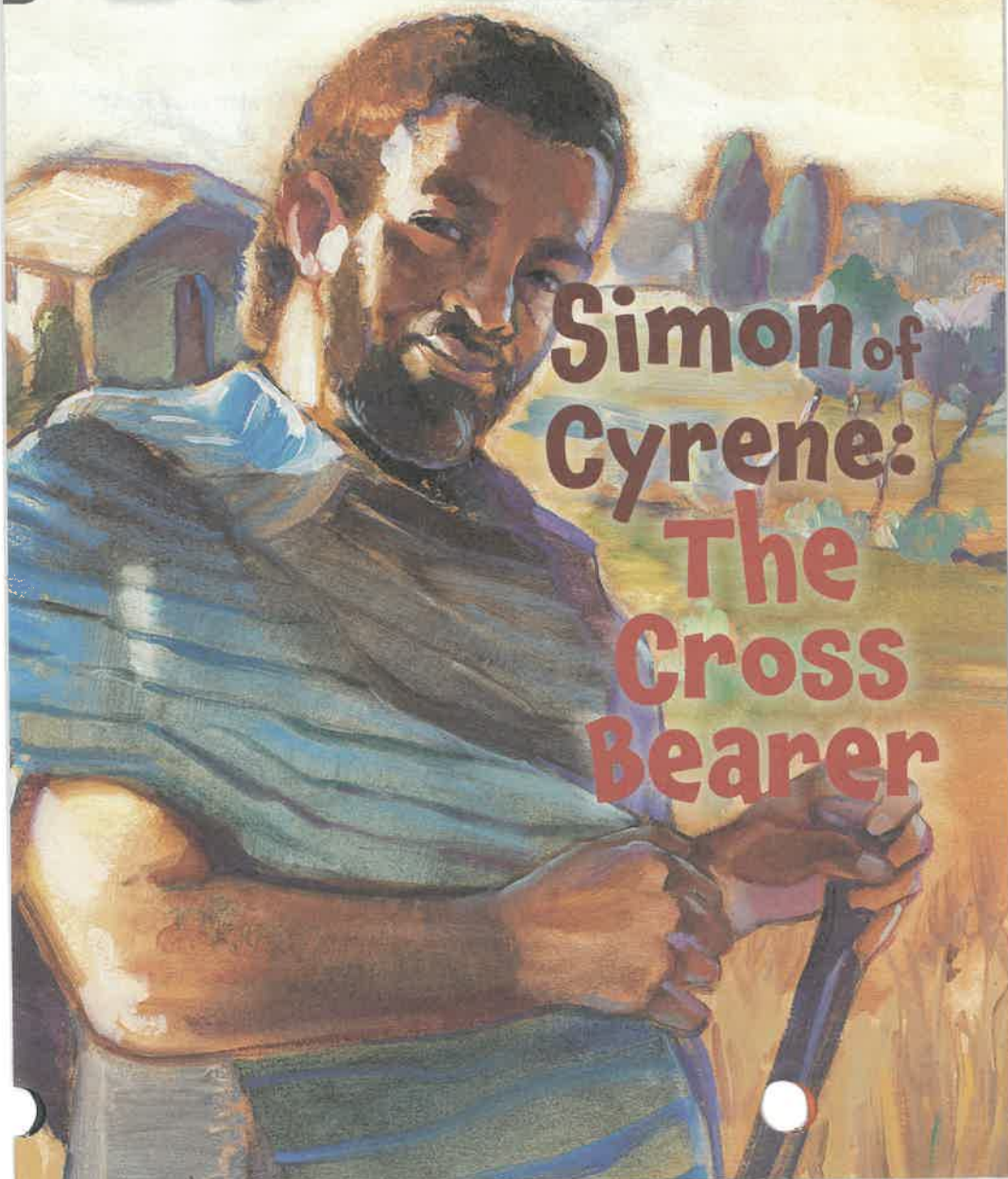


the rack



**Simon of
Cyrene:
The
Cross
Bearer**

Simon of Cyrene: The Cross Bearer

A man can only take so much. I could see that the man known as Jesus had taken a lot.

He stumbled through the streets of Jerusalem, bleeding, exhausted, trying to bear up under the weight of that heavy beam.

Prisoners condemned to crucifixion have to carry part of the cross they would hang from.

People everywhere shouted, "Crucify Him!" They sounded glad to see Him go off to die.

You may wonder how I know what that day was like. Well, I was there, for one thing. I'm Simon, by the way. I'm not the Simon you might be thinking of. One of Jesus' disciples is called

Simon Peter. You probably know about him. Jesus also had a brother named Simon (see Mark 6:3). There was also a church leader, Simon or Simeon, who was also called Niger (see Acts 13:1).

As I said, I was there that day. I had come over from Cyrene (sigh-REE-neh), my hometown. Cyrene is located in northern Africa. That's over 600 miles from the land where Jesus lived.

Cyrene was the capital city of a whole section in north Africa. This section also was sometimes called Cyrene. Many people from my area in Africa had come to the great Jewish feast of Passover, and 40 days later to the feast of Pentecost (see Acts 2:10).

Passover was the time when Jesus was crucified.

In that day, the Romans ruled the whole world. The sight of Roman soldiers became a common one. When one of them told you to do something, you had to do it. I was just passing through Jerusalem when I saw Jesus stumble. That's when a Roman soldier grabbed me and made me carry Jesus' cross for Him.

I was glad to do it. He looked half dead already. The soldiers guarding Him had beaten Him pretty badly. That's what they usually did to criminals. But to look at Him, I knew there was something different about Him. This man wasn't a criminal. Yet, there He was, going to be crucified.

I took the cross beam to a place called Golgotha (GAHL-guh-thuh) outside of Jerusalem. That means "Skull Hill." That's where crucifixions took place. Crucifixion is about the worst way a person can die. It's a slow, painful death. Two others were crucified with Jesus that day.

Jesus was nailed to the cross and left there to die. Some of the priests and teachers of the Law came by to make fun of Him, telling Him to come down from the cross and save Himself. Others also made fun of Him.

About noon, the sky grew dark. It was chilling how the darkness just rolled in as if God couldn't bear to look at the world. Somebody said he heard Jesus say something like, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Someone else gave Him something to drink. But it wasn't long before He sort of gasped, then . . . that was it. He was dead. One of the Roman soldiers even said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" That day changed my life forever. When Jesus came back from the dead, I couldn't help believing in Him as the Savior. I knew that He died for the sins of all people, including me.

- How did Simon respond to the Roman soldiers?
- How would you have responded?
- What differences can a Christlike response make in a difficult situation?



Away from the crowds, a chance to go one-on-one with a Pharisee. Quickly walking down the streets at night, perhaps afraid of being caught. Can't worry about that, this is too important.

Thus the stage is set for Nicodemus's meeting with Jesus. As they met, Jesus told him some amazing truths that would transform anyone who responded with belief. Read about this night meeting in John 3:1-8, 16-21, 36.

Nicodemus said some flattering things when he first met Christ, but Jesus knew the Pharisee had come for another reason. Read verse 3 again. Jesus' reply sounds like an answer to an unasked question. What do you think that question might have been? And better yet, Jesus knew the answer: To see God's kingdom, you have to be born again.

Write the first few words or phrases that come to mind when you hear the expression "born again."

Photo: © Tom Buttle/MALT/Stockphoto

Quick, quote John 3:16 from memory. Now, not so quick, explain this verse in your own words. Write your explanation after each phrase.

For God so loved the world

that he gave his one and only Son,

that whoever believes in him

shall not perish but have eternal life.

Back to the original question that brought Nicodemus and Jesus together: How can a person see God's kingdom? Use verses 3, 5-6, 17-18, and 36 to answer the question.

Today's Scripture

John 3:1-8, 16-21, 36

Bible Study

³Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

⁴"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."

³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

UPON A

DONKEY

Jesus rode upon a donkey into Jerusalem—fulfilling a prophecy spoken about the Messiah. When the multitude saw Him, they cut down leaves and branches and spread them in the street ahead of Jesus. The leaves were palm leaves, and the branches were probably olive branches from the most common tree around Jerusalem. Both trees have symbolic meanings. The palm stands for victory and the olive for peace and anointing.

- The palm tree has roots deep in the ground, to live long
- oil is used for lamps
- dates provide food
- sap is used as sweetener or wine

In the Bible, God uses things to give us revelations of how much He loves us. Jesus is like the palm tree:

- He is a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2)
- He is the light of the world (John 8:12)
- He is the life (John 14:6)
- He is able to make our lives full (John 10:10)

We are reminded of Jesus' entrance into our lives and His death for our sins and His resurrection for our justification. We reflect on how as a Christian we, too, can become like the palm tree:

- rooted and built up in Him (Col. 2:7)
- the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16)
- a tree planted by the streams of water (Ps. 1:3)
- a branch that bears much fruit (John 15:1-7)



Bible Art © Sergio Carrillo

every day devos

KEYS TO THE Kingdom

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." John 3:3



How can a person be born a second time? Nicodemus wanted to know. Jesus, however, was talking about a different birth—a spiritual birth that brings new life through Him.



8

Monday

Read John 3:3. Then read John 1:12-13. How are these verses similar? If you're not one of God's children, you can receive Him (John 1:12). If you are, thank God for making you part of His family.

Tuesday

Perhaps the most memorized verse in the whole Bible is John 3:16. Read it now as well as verses 17 and 18. What promise does God make in this verse? What happens if you don't believe? Thank God for eternal life.

Wednesday

Read Colossians 1:13-14. What pictures come to mind as you read these verses? Illustrate these verses, contrasting the "dominion of darkness" with "the kingdom of the Son."

Thursday

Nature is full of examples of rebirth. Use one of these examples and create a poem or drawing that symbolizes the new life God gives. (Hint: Think of the season we're in.)

Friday

Think about the words we use to talk about salvation. How would you explain these terms to someone who had never before heard them? Write a letter to a non-Christian friend explaining these words.

Saturday

Express your thanks to God for His gift of new life. Write, sing, draw, paint, jump, shout, run—with all your heart in praise to God.

Lesson 3