



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Luke 23:26-32

“Divine Appointment and Human Disappointment”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For the Scripture reading today we are turning to Luke chapter 23 and reading verse 26 through verse 32. Luke chapter 23 verse 26 through verse 32, the evangelist writes, Luke 23:26,

“And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bear, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father, we approach Thee through the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the access that we have through him. We are reminded of the apostle's statement that we have access in this grace which has been made available for us by all that our great messianic king and mediator has accomplished. We thank Thee for the access into the very presence of the Triune God and Lord we want to give Thee thanks for the blessings of life that are ours through our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that he was our mediator and is our mediator and has acted as our sponsor and representative and has accomplished the atoning work by which we have eternal life. We are grateful Lord and we want to thank Thee for the goodness and mercy and loving kindness shown to us in Christ.

We pray for the church of Christ today and ask Thy blessing upon each individual member wherever they may be and upon each body of believers that meet regularly, local churches in the name of Christ. We pray that as the word goes forth there may be blessing upon them. May there be responsiveness to the word of God and Lord through the preaching of the word, not only edify the saints but build up the body in numbers. We commit to Thee the work of evangelization and edification that has already taken place on this the Lord's Day in many places to the east of us and then will take place many places to the west.

We're grateful Lord for the confidence that our words are heard in Heaven and that Thou does answer our petitions when made in Jesus Christ's name. We pray for this country in which we are a part, and we pray for our president and Lord in the days in which so many critical things are happening in our western world, we pray that the providence of God may guide and direct in the affairs that are political that affect our daily lives. We pray that if it should please these, the things that happen may be favorable for the continued ministry of the gospel of Christ.

We pray for Believers Chapel, we ask Thy blessing upon our elders and deacons and upon the members and friends and visitors who are here today and upon their

families. Oh God we pray that Thou wilt bless each one of them and speak to them this the Lord's Day through the word of God. We pray for those who've requested our prayers whose names are mentioned in our bulletin. We thank you for each one of them and the manifestation of faith expressed in the desire that others pray for them. We for them Lord, we ask that the petitions of many may find a ready response in Thy will. We pray for each of the sick and for those who have difficult problems and trials and for some who have lost loved ones just in the last day or so, we commit them to Thee and their families. We pray Thy blessing upon them. Especially upon our young people oh God, we pray Thy blessing upon them and in their schoolwork this fall and through the winter and spring Lord, we pray that Thou wilt through the teachers that are given to them, instruct them in things that will be useful to them in the life that lies before them. For each one of them we pray. And for those who are believing young people, give them the courage to express their faith to their friends.

Father we give Thee thanks now as we sing together and as we listen to the exposition of the Scriptures. May the ministry of the Holy Spirit be rich to us for Jesus' sake. Amen

[Message] We appreciate very much Ray Smuland filling in for some of our vacationing individuals who are more customarily leading us in singing. Thank you Ray and we appreciate your help.

The subject for today is “Divine Appointment in Human Disappointment.” And we're turning to the passage that we read for our Scripture reading, Luke chapter 23 and verse 26 through 32 as the fundamental passage around which the message will be gathered.

I was reminded when I was in Canada several weeks ago of some unexpected things that have happened in my life and it suggested to me turning to the subject of Simon of Cyrene and the unexpected thing that happened in his life and the lessons that

one can learn from it. I can remember oh about twenty-five to thirty years ago when I was teaching at the theological seminary and we invited out to our home a young seminary couple and specifically for a particular night and when the night came and we had prepared for them and looked forward to have them for dinner, they did not show up. Not knowing exactly what had happened, we nevertheless went on finished the meal and expected them to give us a call and tell us of something that had happened to them. And as I remember, we did try to reach them, but could not find them. And didn't think anything more about it and just thought it was a case of forgetfulness until the next week at the precisely same time we saw them walking up the way into the house and hamburgers had been prepared for us at the time. The unexpected things in our lives are often not only the most revealing and the most practical kinds of things and the question always is what are we going to do with them?

It made a great impression on those people because just the other day when I was in Canada, a mutual friend reminded me that the particular people told them to tell me that they still remember the fact that they had forgotten the engagement and then had come and surprised us. So it's still on their minds and I assure you it's still on my mind too. Someone has called these experiences the bludgeonings of chance. And that was certainly a bludgeoning. Although as a Christian, we accept these things as part of the divine providence spoken of in the word of God.

Simon of Cyrene is so interesting in so many ways and I want to warn you that a few of the things that I will say I can not really substantiate from the word of God, they're somewhat speculative, but I want you to know that so far as I know there isn't anything that argues against the speculation, and a good bit that suggests that it's probably quite close to what really happened. At any rate, Simon had just such an experience as we're talking about. He was a Jewish man from North Africa. So far as we know, he was not a black man; some people have said that he was although I don't know precisely what effect that would have on the incident other than the fact that it might relate more to our

present day. But Simon was a Jewish man and evidently had come to the city of Jerusalem in order to experience the Passover. And after all, all Jewish people who lived away from the land would have looked forward to that great event with a great deal of anticipation. In fact, some of them who lived away would have made that the visit of a lifetime as far as they were concerned.

The Jewish people because of their association with the land never have lost in their hearts deep down the appeal that the land has for them given them by God. And even in many cases when they fight against it, they still have that appeal for the land. In the exile and the captivity that took place many of them were forced to leave the land because as years of neglect passed by, the land became unproductive, they were not able to really have a living from the land and so they made their way away from the land by the poverty of the land, but they never forgot the land. Just like a Scot who leaves the land of Scotland will always in his mind think of that great land and of the appeal of the land to him. Or, and many of us who've come from other places have the same feelings of affection for the places in which we grew up. At any rate, in the word of God it is said by the Psalmist in Psalm 137 and verse 5 something that reflects the feeling of most of the Jewish people, because in this Psalm it is stated, “If I do not remember Thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

So, when we think of Simon and realizing that he now lived in the land of Muammar Kadafi, in Libya, you can understand how he might have longed to get back to the city of Jerusalem and there enjoy a Passover time. Jewish people today still have something of that same feeling in their hearts. They may not even know it in many cases in my opinion but have you noticed how Jewish people name their children? They name them Moses, Jacob, Abraham, David, Simon. Those names that are characteristically names derived from the word of God are still the names that define their existence in that particular sense. So Simon then is a Hebrew who lives beyond the land but longs to come back and visit it.

This must have been thought by the evangelists a rather noteworthy story because it is recorded in all of the synoptics; the story of Simon’s being impressed into service is recorded by Matthew, by Mark, and by Luke. So I would suggest that they regarded it as important and that if we look carefully at it, we might be able to lift a curtain on a fascinating history of an individual that might in a sense be characteristic of or parallel some of our own experiences.

Now the scene of Simon’s misfortune and his fortune is described for us in Luke chapter 23 and verse 26 through 32 and Luke writes of the events that were taking place as the Lord Jesus was leaving the city of Jerusalem forced to leave by the Romans, taken out to Golgotha beyond the city wall in order to be crucified. And he says in the 27th verse that “there followed the Lord a great company of people and of women which also bewailed and lamented him.” The road from Jerusalem to Golgotha was very crowded that day and as a matter of fact, often crowded in our day as well. But oh that it were crowded spiritually.

I take, as I’ve told you many times, I take the *New York Times* every day and it’s very interesting to me how often the articles and stories in the *Times* of all newspapers you might think, gather around certain events that in one way or another are found in the word of God. In other words, we still have that same fundamental centrality of the Christian faith even when it’s being attacked. And so here are groups of people on the way out to Golgotha. Oh that it were so spiritually. There are several classes of people that Luke describes. The first he simply says are people. I would imagine that if you had examined the people who were out on that road on the way to Golgotha, some of them who were part of the crowd would have been like dead trees dying of the chlorosis of indifference to spiritual things, but carried on just by the interest of the people of the day.

We have a great deal of that, and we often fall into the same kind of thing, we’re interested in the things that people are interested in for no real significant reason what so ever. Why is it that I’m looking forward to twelve o’clock and the beginning of the NFL

football season? What in the world of significance is going to come from the excitement and the interest and the wasted time of the hours spent before the television screen all this Fall and into next year? And that doesn't mention the baseball season and the basketball season and all of the other things in which all men are interested in one way or another.

Others no doubt in this crowd, were interested in religion. And so they understood some of the things that were happening. They knew of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Judaism and they knew of the claims of the apostles and others and they knew of the tumults that had been taking place and they'd heard of the rumors of the miracles that this remarkable Jesus of Nazareth had preformed. And they were interested, but they were interested just as individuals are interested in art or they were interested in religion in that way or as individuals who are interested in politics. A few of them no doubt had a bit more interest in our Lord and they saw in him as a person something that was very unusual. In fact, I wouldn't doubt at all that some in that crowd saw him as the perfect model of all human greatness, but who really didn't know him as their own personal Lord and Savior.

Now the women are centrally referred to here and singled out for special attention. “People and of women which also bewailed and lamented him.” Now there's no doubt that they were sentimentally attached to our Lord, and we all know that there are certain differences between men and women and it's not surprising to read in the word of God that the women were individuals who were at least more sentimentally attached to our Lord. It's the women who have the feelings of affection, the softness of nature that some of us who are men do not have generally. And so they were attached to him enough to bewail and lament him. But it's obvious they were misguided, because our Lord turns to them and says, “Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children,” and goes on to warn them of the things that are going to come to pass. So far as we know, they were not the women, or at least not primarily

the women who had ministered to the Lord Jesus, who made it possible for him to carry on the ministry that he carried on. Luke in chapter 8, in the beginning of that chapter talks about the women who ministered to our Lord and enabled him to carry on his ministry without having to do any kind of work, and how important, of course they really were in the plan of God so far as our Lord was concerned. But there are individuals you know, and some of these are men as well, who sit and listen to the Christian hymns and listen to Christian oratorios and then they're very much impressed by the music, very touched by the music. How many people around Christmas time are affected by the music, listen to the Messiah and even have a few tears streaming down the face but the tears are not tears of faith, personal faith in Christ, but the tears of sentimental attachment for various reasons. And so it's very possible for individuals to be sentimentally attached to the signs that are attached to the Christian faith like the music, but not really have that personal faith in our Lord that counts.

The other person who is important in this little incident that Luke describes is of course our Lord. He does not despise this missed place human emotion. He does not resent the fact that the women do not fully understand, he speaks to them in all of the tenderness of the Lord of glory, merely points out that there are certain things that are more important than others. He doesn't say that say that they should not weep, but he points them to that for which it would be more profitable for them to weep. “Weep for Jerusalem's children,” because the sin of Israel has reached its climax, it's full, like the Amorites' sin and now as they crucify their promised Messiah, their judgment has become certain.

You can certainly see from this that the Lord Jesus, in carrying out his ministry, is as someone has said, no waif broken upon the wheel of fortune. And even here where he is in the midst of carrying out his ministry, he is in control of the affairs of his life. It's a remarkable thing, a remarkable incident. Stopford Brook wrote in his journal on a certain Good Friday,

“I ought to have gone to church, but I did not, I can’t stand the elaborate mourning which is practiced now in all the churches for the most triumphal act of pure love which ever was done in all the history of the world. This rod of feeling congenial to some natures, but really an artificial stimulation is the kind of thing which perhaps the Lord sees in the women who are weeping and bewailing him. No doubt, some of this was very genuine, but it’s obvious that it was misplaced even among those who were mourning genuinely for him.”

Well, this is the scene and I’d like to suggest to you that Simon’s story of the fate that befell him and the favor of God that one may see in it may be summarized in three acts. And the first act is this act on Golgotha. In Mark chapter 15, and verse 21 there is a statement by the evangelist there that I, if you have your Bibles you may turn there, it’s Mark 15 verse 21 which bears on the account. We read in verse 21 of Mark 15, “And they compelled on Simon, a Cyrenian who passed by coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.”

There are some very interesting things about that, remember, it’s early Friday morning, our Lord is on the way out to Golgotha. We have a commotion of disorderly individuals. Roman crucifixions were very cruel things and many people went just for the excitement of it. Just as if an individual was to be burned at the stake, there are always crowds around people being burned at the stake. As you look back at the pictures of the incidents that often happened to Christians, you see the crowds or those who are beheaded, executed, always crowds there. And so here there was a commotion of disorderly people. There were some Jewish people no doubt who were speaking out against our Lord. There were also Gentiles who were doing the same thing. There were hard Romans who were responsible for what was taking place. There were the weeping women, there were dismayed followers of our Lord, but very few of them very close to

the scene. We know that just a few were around the cross, and then as far as the apostles concerned, most of them fled. And then we have in the midst of this crowd of people the pathetically weakening Lord Jesus Christ.

I would imagine that there came a point where he stumbled. After all, he hasn't slept in a lengthy period of time. He's had to face several trials by the individuals in authority, not only the political, but also the religious authority. And I can imagine carrying that heavy cross, together with the cross beam, that finally, being so weary, he stumbled. And one of the Roman soldiers decided it was time to intervene and so he reached out and impressed a man who happened to be at that place and put him in service and said “you carry the cross.” And there were expostulations, because we read, “he was compelled.” But Simon lost as you might expect.

He'd been coming out of the country the text says a morning walk from where he was lodging to the city. This was, I suggest, the visit of a lifetime, the trip of a lifetime, he was staying outside the city, for Jerusalem was packed and jammed at this time. And so having found some lodging, he's on his way into the city to spend his time in the city and enjoy Jerusalem on the day of the Passover. And there as he sees the crowd, happens to be there on the corner, stops for a moment to see what all of the noise is about. And just as he stops to take a look, it's at that moment, the Roman soldier reaches out his hand, takes him. I can imagine him saying, “No I'm not one of these people, I'm just here on a visit.” And it didn't do any good, the Romans put him to service and he finds himself going out toward Golgotha carrying the cross of this criminal, so far as he knew, who was being crucified.

It says here, “Who passed by.” No doubt, anxious to avoid the unseemly part of the thing, but nevertheless see precisely what was going on. Maybe he was contemplating the Passover until he saw the crowd. But at any rate, he was compelled by the Romans to carry the cross. The heavy hand laid on an unwilling shoulder. And the

expostulations failed, he thought of it as a disgraceful thing that he a visitor should have to do this.

This word, compelled is a very interesting word because it was a word used specifically of the Persian postal service. Now the Persian postal service was regarded as the best postal service in the ancient world at this time. And one of the reasons it was such a great service was that the postal men, the postmen and the, I don't know whether there were post women then or not, at least the postal authorities had the authority to impress into service any horse that they needed. For example, it was done by horses and at specific places the postmen stopped, spent the night, their horses were rested or they were given fresh horses, at specific points. And they always had the legal right to take anybody's horse that happened to be useful to them if required by the service. And so that's the word that's used here, it's found in only two of only two incidents, three times in the New Testament. Twice of this incident and then in one other place our Lord uses it about an individual who compels a person to walk a mile then to walk with him two.

So, the heavy hand was laid upon him and Simon finds himself having an experience like an individual who walks into, gets inside a revolving door and can not find a way out. So he's got to go out to this place that he didn't want to go. So, he becomes acquainted a bit with what's going on and he hears the women wailing and lamenting what is happening. And then as he carries the cross of our Lord behind him one of the gospel writers says, the Lord Jesus turns and Simon is able to look full into the face of Jesus of Nazareth. And as he gazes into the face of our Lord, he's attracted to the noblest face ever seen, the noblest one he'd ever seen. He sees something that he rarely sees in any individual, tenderness in the midst of majesty, a person who seems to control the circumstances but at the same time is himself apparently controlled by them. Fascinated, by his dignity, fascinated by the combination of dignity and humility and particularly in such a time as this the cruelty, the brutality of the Roman crucifixion. It's difficult for us to imagine, but if you want to read, read Hengel and others who've written

very deeply about Roman crucifixion and the place it played in their political empire in some of the relatively recently scholarly literature.

And he sees the Lord Jesus turn around, he seems him speak to the women, and he's astounded by the submission of the Lord Jesus to what is obviously a horrible experience that is waiting to him. That he should have the presence of mind and the control of the circumstances to turn and to speak to the women who are weeping and wailing. And even in the midst of it call upon the Old Testament Scriptures as he does because he cites the passage from Hosea chapter 10, applies it to the situation about they shall begin to say to the mountains, fall on us and to the hills cover us, something repeated again by the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation as you probably know in his 6th chapter. So, he hears him say, “Weep not for me.” And astonished at what he sees and astonished at what he hears, Simon is forced to go out to Golgotha. We don't know what happened there, but I suggest to you that he was deeply impressed by what happened there.

I suggest to you with the crowd milling about and finding himself there carrying the cross, he was there in the midst of it all. And my opinion, he probably observed the crucifixion, he probably heard some of the things that our Lord said from the cross, “Father, let them go, Father, release them, they don't know what they are doing.” That's the force of the original text at that point. He heard him shout out, “It is finished!” He also heard him and it must have impressed him greatly when in the midst of his sufferings, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” That marvelous cry of dereliction which is at the same time a cry of faith, it's not Oh God, oh God, it's my God, my God. Even in the experience of dying spiritually for sinners, his faith holds firm and true, he's the eternal Son of God, the divine person who has both a divine and human nature. It must have made a tremendous impression on him. But at any rate, I suggest to you that he probably was not necessarily converted at that point.

Act two, is the day of Pentecost. Act two and now I must speculate just a little bit. But I'm going to speculate that Simon of Cyrene was present in Jerusalem still, after all, it was the feast of the first fruits and then the feast of Pentecost. All of these feasts that he wanted to share in, and this, the great feast, the last one in the series, the early part of the series. And we read in Acts chapter 2 and verse 10 that around the temple on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was to come, there were strangers from all over the face of the globe it would seem. And in the 10th verse we read, there were some from “Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,” all gathered there on the temple mount. And in the midst of some of the strangest things that he had ever heard, Simon is present let's speculate.

It's seven weeks later, his visit is almost over. He no doubt has heard a great deal about the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He's told many of his friends that he was the one who carried his cross. And no doubt he's heard many unfavorable things and then he's heard some favorable things. He's heard about his works, he's heard about his miracles, he's heard about his preaching, he's heard about his parables, and one thing has been troubling him I would suggest. And that is he's heard about supposed resurrection. And his Jewish friends for the most part, not all of them for we must remember, the church is a Jewish church from the beginning. In fact, the Jewish church is the church of the gospels and the church of the Acts largely. We sometimes forget that, and we sometimes think of the Jews who crucified Christ. They did participate, but so did the Gentiles. And as a matter of fact, the Christian church begins as a Jewish believing church. Let us be thankful for that, not only for our Lord, but for those that our Lord called to carry on the ministry. We are indebted to Israel; we are indebted to them for the apostles and for the preaching of the word of God as well as to our Lord and to the Father in Heaven.

So, he has heard about the resurrection. And Simon let's say has been a little bit concerned about that because while he would have liked to believe what he heard from the authorities, that some one came and stole his body away while the guards were

sleeping, it becomes evident to him that how could have anyone know what had happened if they were sleeping? And further more there seemed to be a hush hush attitude about the resurrection in the city of Jerusalem and its environs. And then, if it is true that our Lord was not resurrected, where is the body? Where is the body? No one has ever produced the body. And the claims of the empty tomb, they had been making some impression on Simon of Cyrene.

At any rate, on the day of Pentecost, he's out there, the feast day, and there is another big crowd. This time primarily Galileans and people from all over the face of the globe. Not the more distinguished citizens from Benjamin and Judah, but from the north and then from the whole of the world. And furthermore, it was a plain group with the Galileans, and what was happening was astonishing. He looked and he saw these plain Galileans who had never been educated as generally speaking as those from Benjamin or Judah near Jerusalem. But here they were speaking in foreign languages which they had never studied. And the report is going around. Here is an individual speaking in the language of the Parthians and someone says I know that man, he's never had any training but he's speaking in the language of the Parthians and the various other individuals are here, and he's astonished by that. And perhaps Simon is like so many, he's impressed by those who are saying those fellows have just had a few too many glasses of wine or whiskey and they are tipsy and that's why they are doing this, they don't even know what they are talking about.

But at any rate, it's not long before one man stands up from Galilee, Peter, the apostle and begins to preach. And he listens to Peter's preaching, and he's astonished by the preaching because their preaching is so magnificent. It's a man who knows Scripture, who knows the history of the nation, and furthermore, is able in a most remarkable way to take passages from the Old Testament and turn them into a reasoned intelligent discourse concerning the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures with which Simon is familiar and coming to a magnificent conclusion of the application Scriptures to the events

of our Lord's life. Here as the Apostle Peter reached the conclusion “therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ.” There's a breathless silence, and contrary to evangelists' methodology today, the crowd gives the invitation. Not the preacher, the crowd gives the invitation. That's the sign of great preaching. And it's the sign of reality. The crowd gives the invitation and so they cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” And then Peter answers, “Repent, be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” And I suggest to you that Simon was converted. And we'll just leave it at that.

And now I want to go to act three. And I'd like for you to turn to the epistle to the Romans chapter 16 and verse 13 and we'll read this verse in the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. Now, while you're finding it, let me remind you of this, Peter is recognized by many New Testament scholars as lying back of the Markan Gospel, there is some historical evidence for this, and then it does appear that there is much about the gospel that suggests that it comes originally from Peter communicating the facts to Mark and that the gospel is addressed primarily to the Romans. Now that's very interesting that it is addressed to the Romans because in the Epistle to the Romans, you might expect to see something that suggests the connection that we're talking about. And this is one place where in chapter 16 Paul says, “Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord and his mother and mine.” Now Rufus we have read about in Mark chapter 15, and verse 21 where we read, “And they compelled one Simon, a Cyrenian who passed by coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus to bear the cross.”

So, Simon is the father of two sons, Alexander and Rufus, and here now Paul writes the Epistle to the Romans and remember the Gospel of Mark addressed to the Romans, and addressing the 16th chapter to the Roman Christians, he mentions Rufus as elect in the Lord and his mother who is not only his own mother but Paul's mother as well. Now a very interesting statement because of course what it suggests is that when

Simon got home to his home in Cyrene, he told the experiences that happened to him. He told his wife about what he had seen in Jerusalem, the part he had played in the crucifixion of Christ, the only person who ever carried literally the cross of Christ. And then he told about his experience on the Day of Pentecost and how he was converted. And he explained to his wife and to his family how he had found the Messiah of his nation. And obviously they were converted too.

Tradition tells us that Alexander died, that Simon had died in the meantime. When Paul writes the Epistle to the Romans Rufus is now in the capital city of the empire and his mother is also there. And Paul calls Rufus' mother Rufus' mother and his own mother. So evidently, in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, that family had played a part in what he had done. And what the service was and what the mercy shown to Paul by his mother was, we don't know, but it's stated, "She's his mother and she's mine." And I suggest to you that that is the reason for it that she has in the intervening time, after being brought to the Lord through the testimony of her husband, she too has become a helper in the ministry of the apostle. So what we have then in effect is a respected Christian family that arises out of the happening that Simon of Cyrene happened to be on a corner when a crowd moved by and the Roman soldier laid his hand upon his shoulder and forced him to carry the cross.

Now I'd like to say just a few words about the significance of this date with destiny which Simon experienced. I'd like to suggest first of all the marvelous benediction of the accidents of providence that take place in our lives. Strange mingling of chance and fate seems to shape our lives and every one of us can look back and see the ways in which God has directed our paths. We did not realize what was happening until afterwards, and then we saw the hand of God in our lives. Out of the disappointing comes divine blessing and for Simon at least it's something like this. Frustration comes to him on that morning when he wanted to spend the day with his friends and he's forced now to carry the cross of this criminal of whom he knows nothing and mingle with this

crowd of indecorous people and I assume he was a decorous kind of an individual. And as a result of it, it must have been a great frustrating experience for him, but when the Lord Jesus turned and spoke to those women, and Simon, so close to him, heard his word, looked upon his face, reflected upon what he was saying, and then heard those things around the cross, that which was frustrating for him became the situation in which divine illumination came to him and ultimately the beginning of the work of effectual grace by which he was brought to the knowledge of the Lord.

His salvation results, not only his salvation, the salvation of his wife, the salvation of his sons. The fact that his children have become important individuals in the testimony of Christ, like Rufus, the chosen one in the Lord. And Simon's name, think of it, just think of it, that morning, that morning in which he got up, living outside the city, walking into the city, if someone if an angel had appeared to him and said, “Simon, what is going to happen to you today is going to be publicized over the whole of this globe, for centuries afterward. And down through those centuries your name will go sounding along with the name of the Messiah of Israel to the end of time.” What do you think Simon would have said to something like that? But that is precisely what has happened according to the word of God. This man who carried the cross literally is never forgotten, will never be forgotten throughout all history.

There's a great lesson for us who are believers here I think. It's an illustration of how we meet the dilemmas and trials of life that we face. There are three ways in which we can do it to put it simply. We can resist, and we can be tormented by the bitterness that often comes from resisting things that happen to us that we don't like. I have in my notes a clipping from a paper some years ago back in nineteen sixty-seven to be exact, in which seatbelts had begun to be used in our automobiles. And the article was on the things that people do to avoid using seatbelts. And one of the things that the article recounts is that individuals who buy the car, the first thing they do is they go home, get out their scissors and cut out the seatbelts so they don't have to fool with them. And then

there's an incident described of a Ford Motor car, a Thunderbird actually, sold to a lady, and the first thing that she did when she got home was to take off her shoe which had a heel, a long heel on it and to smash the reminder light that glows until the seatbelts are buckled. The first thing she did with her new car is to smash that because she didn't want to have it making the noise every time she got in the car and shut the door. Well, I think there are many of us that are like that in the experiences of life. We want to resist we'd be tormented by the bitterness.

There's another way of course, and that is to surrender. And to surrender in a false sense, that is to be torn apart by self pity and despair as if there is nothing that I can do in my trial, I'll just surrender. The third way is the way that Christians should meet their trials and that is to seek God's will in the midst of the things that happen to us. Now that may involve repentance, it may involve confession. In many regards, it may involve the recognition that we have walked in the wrong way in the presence of the Lord God. We've not been exercised by divine discipline, but that is the way in which we are to succeed.

So, as a good friend of mine, a former student and now a well known preacher said some years ago, “It's either break out in bitterness, break down with a sick headache, or break through finding the will of God in the experiences of life.” I would like to suggest to you that there's a moment like this in everyone's life. For some it's the quiet call in youth. Yesterday I had such an interesting experience, I sat down with a young boy nine years old, wants to be baptized. And I asked him for his personal testimony, asked him how he was converted. Now mind you, he is not a Baptist, he is not a member of a church of Christ, he is not a member of the Anglican Church, he's not a member of the Roman Catholic Church, so of whom in those churches speak about being converted through water. But he said to me, “I was saved in the bathtub.” How interesting. He was saved in the midst of water. I didn't ask him if he was immersed at the time. [Laughter] He said actually, that he was sloshing back and forth in the tub and

that back brought memories to me too, how far can you do that, how long can you do it until the water comes out onto the floor? Well anyway, he said that suddenly he had been thinking about these things, but suddenly as he was doing this, he thought he really needed to settle the relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so in the midst of his bath, he received Christ as his Savior. That's symbolic too, cleansing. But at any rate, that was the moment for him. I surely got the feeling that it was a genuine conversion as I talked with this young man impressed me very much.

For others it comes by the arresting words of some persuasive counsel, some friend who is a Christian or some experience such as hearing the word of God. Or it may come by the accident of divine providence. Some burden that turns one to the Lord, some tragedy that forces us to think about things, some perplexity that only the Lord God can resolve for us we know. I know of my own experience, it was many years ago in Birmingham, Alabama. Actually about fifty years ago when I was invited to a tea, expected only to go to the tea, only promised to go to the tea. Went to the tea, heard Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, with the other fifteen young couples or fifteen young people, about eight or nine young couples. And he listened to him, we plied him with questions, and I asked a question or two about the word of God, I remember asking him how do you know Dr. Barnhouse that the Bible is the word of God? For that seemed to settle everything for me, if you could prove that or have some reasonable assurance of it, that settled every other question because then we're responsible to the word of God.

At any rate, when the time was finished, we walked out into the hall, and there was an evening service which I never intended to go to, I'd only promised to attend the tea. And that was probably a sacrifice because I probably would have played golf that afternoon. But at any rate, when Dr. Barnhouse turned around to this crowd of people and said, "Who's taking me to the church?" My wife said, "We will." And I just could not refuse a preacher. Presbyterian minister, growing up in a Presbyterian church, you just don't say no to the preacher with something so obviously little sacrifice involved. So I

found myself going to church, found myself sitting in about the third pew, third row, listening to the great preacher preach on God’s plan of the ages. And it was through that afternoon that point in time, that moment in a sense that my life changed.

I suggest that every one of us will sooner or later if we haven’t already, face that moment. I don’t want to belabor the point. I just simply ask you the question, “Has that moment come in your life? Is perhaps this the moment if you do not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Have you never realized that the Son of God has come and the fulfillment of the Scriptures as Peter has pointed out and others as well, and has accomplished the atoning and redeeming work of the Messianic King. And now the gospel message goes forth to all, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved. Have you been saved? Do you know Christ as your personal savior? Do you recognize that he penalty for our sins has been born by him? I invite you to come to Christ and trust in him. Time is up, the Cowboys have started playing. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the experiences of life. Help us Lord to be sensible, understanding and responsive to the things that happen in our lives. Lord if there should be someone here who has not yet responded to the gospel may at this very moment they give Thee thanks for the redeeming ministry ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]