

Jesus, Simon and the Cross

If you ever want to understand the Word of God, you are going to have to read the Word of God. That may seem like an obvious statement, but it is surprising how many Christians don't think about it. And when you read the Word of God, it is important to keep in mind the keys to the Word's interpretation. We will be looking at a topic today that will give us the chance to utilize many of those keys. I will try to remember to point them out as we go. The topic is "Jesus, Simon and the Cross". We will begin in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 27:26 – 36

By the time Jesus got to Pilate here, he had already been beaten and buffeted by the priests, elders and the council. Pilate also had him scourged and gave him over to the soldiers. They continued the abuse and when they led him out to be crucified, they found Simon and made him carry the cross. In these verses, there is no indication that Jesus ever touched the cross (let alone carried it) until he was nailed to it.

These verses are clear, they interpret themselves right where they are written. This is the key of "In the Verse". You don't need a concordance or even a dictionary. They interpret themselves in the verse, right where they are written.

But one record may not tell the whole story, especially when we are reading the Gospels. There are other accounts of incidents, and they must be read to get the whole picture. This is called "scripture build-up" or "narrative development". So, we need to read all records of a specific incident or topic to get the whole picture. Let's turn next to the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 15:14 – 25

Here again, we see that these verses interpret themselves right where they are written. They are clear and understandable and agree with what we just read in Matthew. We see again that as Jesus is led out after the abuse and torture that he received, Simon is forced to carry the cross.

Simon had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He had not come to be caught up in this drama or to carry the cross on the way to the execution. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time and got involved in this just by chance. Yet, the mention of his two sons indicates that they were known to the believers for whom the Gospel of Mark was written. It may be that this “chance encounter” led to the salvation of Simon and his household. Now, let’s go to the Gospel of Luke, continuing our scripture build-up.

Luke 23:24 – 27

Here is the first record that contains a hint of a difficulty. But you will see that there is no difficulty if we simply allow the scripture to speak. In letting God’s Word interpret itself in the verse where it is written, we must be careful to not allow words that are not written creep into our understanding. Because of traditions they have been taught or paintings they have seen, many people will understand the last phrase of verse 26 to say, “that he might bear it after Jesus had borne it”. Here we should remember the Biblical truth that we must adhere to: namely that the difficult verse must be understood in light of the clear verses.

Matthew and Mark were both very clear that Simon bore the cross, not Jesus. When we read Luke in that light, the record tells us that in the procession to Golgotha, Jesus was being led (dragged) by the soldiers and Simon, carrying the cross, came after or behind. We simply do not

allow the traditions to affect our reading of the Word of God. Now we have one more Gospel record to read, the Gospel of John.

John 19:14 – 18

Here for the first time, we read that Jesus was bearing the cross. This seems to plainly contradict what we read in the other Gospels. Whenever we have an apparent contradiction, we look at two things. The contradiction will either be in our understanding or in the translation. Here, the translation of the words “bearing the cross” is correct. Thus, we will need to make sure that we understand what those words mean. It cannot mean that Jesus bore the wooden cross because the other three Gospels were very clear about that. So, we will use another key to the Word’s interpretation. We will examine places where this word or phrase has been used before. Let’s turn to Matthew.

Matthew 10:36 – 39

We can see from the context here (and that is another key to the Word’s interpretation. Things must be read in the context) that the phrase “taketh not his cross” (v. 38) is in the context of putting nothing ahead of the Master in our lives. And we should remember that Jesus prayed in the garden that, if possible, this cup be removed from me. But he also prayed, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. Jesus put nothing ahead of God’s will but was obedient to the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8).

Matthew 16:24 -26

Here again, we see the phrase “taketh up his cross” used in the context of denying one’s own desires and living for Christ.

Mark 8:34 – 37

Mark 10:17 – 22

In verse 21, Jesus is not exhorting the man to literally take up a wooden cross, but rather to live for Christ. It is putting aside one's own desires, goals and purposes to live for the Master.

Luke 9:23 – 25

Luke 14:26, 27, 33

So, back in John 19:17, when we read that Jesus was “bearing his cross”, he was submitting himself to the will of God. He went through with what God required to fulfill the plan of redemption. Now there is one more way that the word “cross” is used and we should briefly consider that.

I Corinthians 1:17, 18

Here the word “cross” is used to stand for all that the death of Jesus upon the cross accomplished. It is a figure of speech, meaning not the literal wooden cross but all that Jesus actually bore for our benefit.

So, in summary, Jesus did not bear the wooden cross. That was forced upon Simon. Jesus did the will of his Father and bore the burden of our iniquities, paid the price for our healing, fulfilled God's plan of redemption. By bearing this cross for us, we are now complete in him and can live with victory over all the negatives of the world.