



## “Vantage Points Enroute to the Cross”

*Luke 23:26-32*

**Theme:** Aside from Jesus, there is no hope.

### I. The Celebratory – *23:26a*

#### A. THE DELIGHTED

1. The tragic trials of Jesus had concluded with the cowardly decision by Pilate to sentence Jesus who he had officially declared to be innocent to death.
2. As was customary, the condemned was responsible to go from the judgment hall to the place of execution carrying his own cross – cp. *John 19:17*.
3. Luke states: *“When they led Him away ...”* – enroute to Golgotha in fulfillment of the purposes of God – cp. *Isaiah 53:7-8*.
4. *“they”* refers to two groups of people who were responsible for the fulfillment of the sentence of death.
5. First, it refers to the *Jewish religious leadership* who had been plotting, scheming, manipulating, lying, and insisting that Jesus be executed by crucifixion – His very life being an affront to the legalistic self-righteous hypocrisy.
6. They rejoiced that they were succeeding in ridding themselves of the intrusion that Jesus represented to their lives.
7. They represent all those who are dismissive of the claims of Jesus because of their love for their current lives – they’d prefer to wallow in the squalor of sin – content as a pig in the mire – and angered by the introduction of a righteous standard represented by Jesus.

## B. THE DUTIFUL

1. Second, it refers to the *Roman death squad* charged with the responsibility of executing another set of Jews that they hated – and a famous one at that.
2. These soldiers were charged by Pilate with the execution – something the Jews were not authorized to perform.
3. Aside from the gratification they received from killing another Jew, these soldiers represent those oblivious to the claims of Christ – the people who live their lives without recognition of Jesus and His claim upon their lives.
4. Neither of these groups had any comprehension of the depth of depravity in which they were ensnared – thinking that their treacheries were fulfillment of their duties – **1 Corinthians 2:7-8**.

## II. The Conscripted – **23:26b**

### A. THE INDISCRIMINATE SELECTION

1. As Jesus begins the journey, He is already severely weakened by the physical abuse that He has suffered throughout the night under Caiaphas, at the trial with the Sanhedrin when He was abused yet again, then at the hands of Herod, then again at the hands of the Romans at Pilate's instruction – they beat Him, pushed a crown of thorns upon his brow, and scourged Him.
2. His physical stamina had been depleted and He didn't have the strength to carry the cross – cp. **Matthew 27:32**.
3. At some point toward the beginning of the journey, Jesus gave out and was unable to carry His cross further “... ***and they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.***”
4. The commander of the soldiers likely looked around at the point when Jesus stumbles and finds **[εὕρισκω** - cp.

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Matthew 27:32] a man who looks capable and the “*seized*” him [ἐπιλαμβάνομαι] – lit. “to take into custody” – cp. [Matthew 5:41](#).

5. Matthew is even more graphic of how Simon was chosen – cp. [Matthew 27:32](#).
6. In saying he was “*coming in from the country*” demonstrates that Simon was at the wrong place at the wrong time and was forced to participate in this shameful parade.
7. “*Cyrene*” was located in modern day Libya on the north African shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea.
8. Josephus tells us there was a large Jewish population in Cyrene – enough to have their own synagogue – [Acts 6:9](#).
9. It appears that Simon had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration in fulfillment of the obligation by Jewish men to go the Jerusalem for the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
10. From a human perspective it seems completely arbitrary and random – but it resulted in Simon seeing the horrific event of Jesus’ crucifixion.

### B. THE INTENTION OF SOVEREIGNTY

1. However, God apparently had Simon there for this very purpose – Simon is identified by Mark as the father of two prominent Christian men – cp. [Mark 15:21](#).
2. “*According to the traditional view, Mark addressed his gospel to a Gentile audience, initially the church at Rome—of which Simon’s son Rufus was a prominent member (Rom. 16:13). Paul also refers to Rufus’s mother, Simon’s wife, as having been like a mother to him.*”<sup>1</sup>
3. It is likely that having carried the cross for Jesus he lingered

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, [Luke 18–24](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 368.

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to watch the agony of Jesus' suffering and death.

4. At some point, he recognized who Jesus was and what He had done and came to faith in Him as His own Lord and Savior.
5. It is possible that Simon was still in Jerusalem at Pentecost – cp. [Acts 2:10](#); and then took the Gospel back with him to Cyrene where a church was formed – cp. [Acts 11:19-20](#).
6. One Lucius – from Cyrene – served as one of the pastors at the church at Antioch – cp. [Acts 13:1](#).
7. It seems feasible that Simon of Cyrene became a greatly influential man for Christ with a couple of godly sons, godly wife who ministered to Paul, and an evangelist who helped start the church in Cyrene that produced so many other great and notable Christian leaders.
8. Simon represents those who have no clue of their need until they encounter the Gospel and who then repent – having been drawn by God through grace, who when they once are privileged to serve Christ, never turn back but continue in faithfulness to Him until they are perfected in Him.

### **III. The Curious – [23:27](#)**

#### **A. THE PERVERSE**

1. The next vantage point is described by the *“large crowd”* – *“And following Him was a large crowd of the people ...”*
2. Within this crowd would have been those who were filled with lurid curiosity to see the gruesome act of crucifixion and be entertained by it.
3. They had turned hostile because of the “failure” of Jesus to do what they had expected Him to do – deliver them from the Roman pagan occupation of the “Holy Land.”
4. These people had turned on Jesus and had even been

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influenced by the leaders to call out for His crucifixion and now, they were interested in witnessing the spectacle of the crucifixion – cp. [v. 48](#).

5. They were curious to see the spectacle of the brutality of the Romans against someone who had been thought to be the Messiah.

### **B. THE PERPLEXED**

1. Still another group in this crowd would have been those perplexed at what was happening. There were followers of Jesus who had been completely convinced that He was the Messiah – cp. [Luke 24:21](#).
2. These would have been curious whether something miraculous would happen when Jesus would perform some feat to overcome those who were brutalizing Him – maybe even do what those taunting Him to do – save Himself – cp. [Matthew 27:39-44](#).
3. So many people benefitted by Jesus' ministry – receiving miracle and sign after sign, seeing His heart displayed for the sick and needy, heard His powerful teaching, watched His wisdom applied time after time, and probably wanted Him to be their Messiah until the very end.
4. Nevertheless, fickle in their faith, they never truly committed to following Him – like so many who are caught up in the draft of those whose lives are transformed by grace within the church but who never personally embrace the Lord – cp. [Hebrews 6:4-6](#).

## **IV. The Comfortless – [23:27b-31](#)**

### **A. THE MOURNING OF CONDEMNATION – v. 17B**

1. Still another vantage point are those who feigned grief – mourners who were exhibiting grief in order to profit from it.
2. Upon the execution of even criminals, Jewish society

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provided those who would grieve – insuring a person’s death would not go “unmourned” – *“And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.”*

3. These were not His followers – it did not include Mary His mother, or Mary Magdalene, or Joanna the wife of Chuza, or Susanna.
4. The *“women who were mourning and lamenting Him”* were hired for the purpose and made great show of their *“lamenting”* [θρηνέω] – to lift up one’s voice in tones of grief – to sing a dirge.
5. *“mourning”* [κόπτω] – describes someone beating one’s breast.
6. These *“women”* had sympathetic grief over what Jesus was facing – but it was hollow expression of devotion; they weren’t genuine followers.

### **B. THE WARNING OF CONDEMNATION – vv. 18-31**

1. Jesus – in the midst of His misery, struggle, and weakness – paused and managed the strength to correct these women for their shallow mourning for Him when they were going to face something far worse.
2. *“But Jesus turning to them said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem ...’* – a phrase that is designed to use these women as a personification of all of Israel – cp. ***Zechariah 9:9***.
3. Because of unbelief, Israel was about to face a tortuous and terminal judgment from God – *“... stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’”*
4. This is the opposite of what was considered blessed – due to the fact that having children who would have to endure the atrocities that would be associated with their judgment would

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compound their misery and grief – cp. [Luke 21:23-24](#).

5. This is a reference to the judgment upon Israel that the Romans were about to bring upon them a generation later in 70 AD which is a preview of the distress Israel will know during the Great Tribulation when the Antichrist seeks to destroy them – cp. [Matthew 24:19-21](#).
6. Jesus' description of their desire to die demonstrates the severity of what they would be facing – *“They will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘cover us.’”* – [Hosea 10:8; Revelation 6:16-17](#).
7. Jesus is saying that although He was about to suffer and die, it was not as horrible as what they would have to face as their deaths would result in eternal condemnation forever.
8. This comparison is stated in this next verse: *“For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry”* – Jesus refers to Himself as the *“green”* tree, full of life; and the apostate nation of Israel as the *“dry”* tree that will be consumed completely.
9. Their final doom is certain because of their rejection of the Messiah – a state shared by all who are without Christ Jesus.

## V. The Condemned – [23:32](#)

### A. THE CALLOUSED SINNERS

1. The final vantage point was from the men who were condemned to die alongside of Jesus – *“Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.”*
2. These men had gone through the trial before Jesus – and had been slated to die alongside of Barrabas.
3. Their cynical, harsh, snide treatment of Jesus demonstrated the hardness of heart that they shared – cp. [Matthew 27:44](#);

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### *Luke 23:39.*

4. These men were fools who had given up on anything righteous or good; who were calloused and hardened and saw Jesus as the fool.

### **B. THE CONDEMNED SINNERS**

1. Their state is a raw description of all sinners – who through our debauchery and depravity, indulgence and insensitivity, dereliction and decadence have so soiled our souls that we don't feel there is much hope.
2. We are told repeatedly throughout Scripture that sin brings death – cp. *Genesis 2:16-17; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23; James 1:15.*
3. These men were receiving the just consequence of how they had lived – and were belching hostility and hatred toward Jesus as they marched to the cross.
4. You may be here today bitter, hostile, and dismissive at the need that you have for the grace of God – perhaps thinking it's too late, or perhaps so intoxicated with alienation from God, you senselessly believe you don't need His grace, mercy, and salvation.
5. Yet today that is exactly what you need; otherwise you will carry the burden of your sin all the way to the ultimate execution under the judicial wrath of God which is Hell.

### **So What?**

1. **Some unsaved people turn to Jesus to save them when they consider what Jesus did for them when He died for their sins.**
2. **Some unsaved people have suppressed that their lives are offensive to God and they face eternal punishment.**
3. **No Sinner can “beat death” – sin brings condemnation.**
4. **Every vantage point enroute to the cross was without hope – except that of Christ who knew the salvation His death would provide.**