



the long weekend

REFLECTIONS ON THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

Intro: Most people have heard the ancient Easter story, but have you ever wondered about what it means for us today? New Zealand-based Salvationist and author Carla Lindsey has, and her ponderings led her to write a thought-provoking book, *the long weekend: reflections on the crucifixion of Christ*. She asks questions about what was going on for the people caught up in the Easter events, and digs deeper into some of the things that go unnoticed in the story.

This series of selected excerpts from *the long weekend* is designed for reading – one per week – throughout Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday (17 February). You will be taken on a journey of thoughtful discovery as Carla unpacks the Easter story in such a way that the most talked about event in the Christian calendar comes to life in a completely fresh and meaningful way.

Carla Lindsey, *the long weekend: reflections on the crucifixion of Christ*, Hamilton: Maruki Books, 2011.

What if?

A LENTEN REFLECTION

Do you ever wonder about the 'what if's' in life?

What if I had taken that job?

What if I had gone out with that girl/boy?

What if I had done that thing?

What if I *hadn't* done that thing?

What if I had driven round that corner one minute earlier?

What if I had been paying more attention to that relationship?

What if?

You can do your head in wondering 'what if' when the truth is, we just don't know.

I wonder 'what if' about a lot of characters in the Bible. I *do* find the Bible quite frustrating at times! It doesn't tell me everything I would like to know about the people in it (and about a whole lot of other things as well but I haven't got time for that here!). I guess the Bible tells me all that God knew I would *need* to know, but I'm still left wondering. I would like to fill the details in a bit more. I would like to get more of a sense of who some of these people were ... of what their story was.

Simon of Cyrene is one who intrigues me.

Matthew doesn't tell us much about him at all, just that, "*As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross*" (Matthew 27:32).

So, we know he's from Cyrene, which was located in Northern Libya. It was an area that had a large Jewish population. Perhaps then he is a Jew and is back in Israel at this time celebrating Passover. We don't know, but it would make sense. Mark tells us he's passing through (Mark 15:21), but from where to where? **We don't know.**

Why was Simon there at that TIME and at that PLACE?

What led him to be in that spot SPECIFICALLY?

What's Simon's STORY?

What was it like for Simon?

What did he SEE?

What did he FEEL as he got caught up in the events of Easter?

Did he have any sense of how BIG this moment was?

What Simon saw wasn't anything unusual. At that time crucifixions were common and they included parading the criminal through the streets. One of the main reasons the Romans adopted crucifixion was because of its humiliation. So this procession that Simon witnessed would have headed down the longest and busiest roads possible in order that the criminal would endure the maximum amount of public ridicule.

Not only that, the long walk to the crucifixion site was also a way the Romans could communicate a very clear message. “See this pathetic excuse of a human being? Get on the wrong side of the Romans and **THAT WILL BE YOU!**” It served as a **very** graphic warning.

Around the neck of each criminal was a sign listing their crimes. In Jesus’ case his crime was claiming to be **King of the Jews.**

The procession consisted of four soldiers (who would form the execution team) and the criminal. As the soldiers marched they formed a square. The criminal walked in the centre of the square carrying the 30 to 40 pound cross beam on their back.

So as Simon was going about whatever his business was that day, he got caught up in this scene.

Down
the
road
came
the
procession.

Jesus, **WEAK** and **EXHAUSTED**, was lead through the streets. Maybe Jesus tripped, perhaps he wasn’t going fast enough. Maybe the soldiers feared Jesus was in such a bad state he might die on the way and rob them of the pleasure of demeaning him further. We don't know, but for some reason someone is pulled out of the crowd and forced to carry Jesus’ cross beam. **That someone was Simon.**

I wonder what Simon saw in the eyes of Jesus. I wonder if Jesus acted differently to other criminals he may have seen. Did Simon stay and witness the crucifixion? I wonder, did Simon later hear about the resurrection of this man whose cross he'd carried?

What **impact** did carrying the cross of Christ have on Simon's life?

I think it had a big impact on Simon.

Okay ... I don't know that for sure, but I found a really interesting piece of information in Mark's retelling of the story. He adds a little bit extra. It reads:

“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country and they forced him to carry the cross” (Mark 15:21).

Hmm ... Simon, the father of **Alexander** and **Rufus** ... who are Alexander and Rufus?!

“Who cares” you may say, but obviously Mark thought that it was necessary to include their names! Why does Mark need to tell us that this Simon is connected to someone called Alexander and someone called Rufus? Who were they anyway?

Mark doesn't give us any details about them. No clues at all. But the fact that Mark doesn't tell us anything about Alexander and Rufus, actually tells us something about who they were. It tells us that whoever Mark was writing to already knew them.

He adds their names like a passing comment as if to say: “*Oh, you know Alexander and Rufus. This guy carrying the cross, he was their Dad.*” Mark didn't feel the need to explain Alexander and Rufus to his audience.

So, the question becomes then, who was Mark writing to?

Many scholars believe that Mark was writing to the early church in Rome. So since he just throws these names into the mix we presume that these two men were well known to the church in Rome. Perhaps they were leaders in the Roman church.

Either way they needed no introduction.

We know something about the Roman church from Paul's letter to it, *The Book of Romans*. Paul concludes the letter in his typical style, sending personal greetings to those he knew in the church. As we go through his greetings we find a fascinating verse.

It says: “*Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too*” (Romans 16:13). Now, is this Rufus that **Paul** is talking about, the same Rufus that **Mark** is talking about?

Maybe, we don't know for certain, but I do think it's a **really** interesting coincidence!

Had the whole family moved to Rome and become involved in the church? Had they become like family to Paul?

What if Simon *did* see something in Jesus eyes, in contrast to the other criminals he'd seen?

What if he did stay and witness the execution?

What if he was there when the sky went dark?

What if he heard about the resurrection?

What if Simon went home a different man?

What if his family could see the difference in him?

What if they wanted what he had?

What if they had an encounter with Jesus too?

What if they were changed and started spreading the news about Jesus?

What if they caught the vision and became leaders in the early church, bringing many to Christ?

What if this is a simple story about one man who had
an encounter with Jesus, who went home
and told the people he loved about it?

What if we all just went and did the same?

Carla Lindsey is a New Zealand-based Salvationist, author and speaker.