

When reading the Gospels, you might come across something that seems like a contradiction. In Matthew 27:32, we're told that a man named Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross. But in John 19:17, it says Jesus carried His own cross to Golgotha. So, which account is correct? Did Jesus carry the cross by Himself, or did Simon help?

Let's examine both passages and bring clarity.

What Matthew Records

Matthew 27:31-32

"And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross."

Matthew clearly states that Simon was forced to help carry the cross. The Roman soldiers, seeing Jesus' physical weakness after severe flogging (cf. Isaiah 52:14), pulled Simon from the crowd to assist.

What John Records

John 19:17

“And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.”

This verse seems to suggest Jesus carried the cross by Himself the entire way. But there’s a theological and narrative explanation.

Is This a Contradiction?

No, not at all. What appears as a contradiction is actually a difference in emphasis. The Gospel writers sometimes include different parts of the same event based on their purpose and audience. The Bible is divinely inspired (2 Timothy 3:16) and free from error, so it does not contradict itself.

John’s Gospel emphasizes Jesus’ intentional and sovereign journey to the cross—He bore the weight of sin as our Redeemer (Isaiah 53:4-6), and so

John records Jesus as “bearing His cross” to underline that truth. He doesn’t mention Simon because his focus is theological more than narrative.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke give more detailed descriptions of the journey, including how Jesus, weakened in body, needed help. This doesn’t mean Jesus didn’t carry the cross—it means He started with it, but at some point, Simon had to step in.

Luke 23:26

“Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.”

This aligns with a practical and historical reality: Roman executions were brutal. Jesus had already been scourged (John 19:1), crowned with thorns, and mocked. Physically, He was near collapse (cf. Psalm 22:14-15), so Simon was compelled to assist.

Spiritual Meaning of Simon Carrying the Cross

The event is not just historical—it carries deep spiritual meaning.

Notice in Luke 23:26, Simon carries the cross behind Jesus. This mirrors what Jesus said to all His followers:

Mark 8:34–35

“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

This shows that true discipleship means more than just believing—it involves self-denial, surrender, and following Jesus through hardship. The cross represents death to self, obedience to God, and the willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ (Philippians 3:10; Romans 6:6).

Simon carrying the cross behind Jesus is a picture of every believer’s calling—to walk the path of Christ, bearing the cross daily (Luke 9:23).

So, was it Jesus or Simon who carried the cross? Both. Jesus began the journey carrying His cross, and at some point—due to His weakened condition—Simon of Cyrene was compelled to help. John highlights the sovereignty and sacrifice of Christ, while Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide narrative details, including the moment Simon steps in.

This is not a contradiction but a complementary account, showing both Jesus' strength and His human suffering.

A Personal Reflection

Simon was pulled from the crowd, perhaps unwillingly, but he ended up walking behind the Savior. It became a powerful image of Christian discipleship.

So the real question is:

Have you taken up your cross to follow Jesus?

Have you chosen the path of surrender, obedience, and self-denial for His sake?

Jesus bore our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He calls us now to follow Him—not from a distance, but closely, carrying our own cross with faith

and courage.

May the Lord give you grace to walk with Him faithfully.

God bless you.

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