

Communion

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Date: 13 March 2016

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[0 : 0 0] We've read in Isaiah, and we've read verses where the prophet paints a prophetic picture of the suffering servant. And we can maybe remind ourselves of some of the words that we've already read there in the 50th chapter of Isaiah. In verse 5, the sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious. I have not drawn back. Jesus received the commission given to him by his Father. He heard what it was, and even in the face of what he knew was awaiting him, he did not draw back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. It's not pleasant what is being described, but it is, of course, accurate. There is this prophetic understanding, revelation of what would befall the suffering servant, our Savior Jesus. And this evening I want to think particularly of how the words of the prophet, I did not hide my face from mocking, were fulfilled. Of course, mocking was a feature of not only the death as Jesus hung on the cross, but of the events surrounding it, the trial that we thought of last Sunday evening as well.

But this evening our focus will be on what we find in these verses in Matthew's gospel relating to how Jesus was mocked as he silently hung from the cross dying there in our place. Jesus died there, of course, having obediently, to use again the language of Isaiah, opened his ears and fixed his path to fulfill the saving purposes of God. And in doing so, he also silently faced his mockers. As we read the verses of Matthew that relate the crucifixion, the passage that we read, one is struck by how passive Jesus is.

In fact, the only thing we're told about Jesus actually doing something is when he refuses to drink the wine mixed with gall that was offered to him. Other than that, he simply hangs dying there on the cross, certainly in the part of the account that we've read, enduring what was thrown at him. And in particular, as I say, this evening our concern is the manner in which he was mocked or certainly some of the mockery that he was subject to. And we're particularly going to focus on the mockery that he was subjected to by those who are described as the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the elders. There in verse 41, we're told that they directed their taunts and their insults and their mockery in a particular way. And let's just remind ourselves what it is that they said, the manner in which they mocked him. From verse 42, he saved others, but he can't save himself. He's the king of

Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him. For he said, I am the son of God. And the words, though they are delivered and directed to Jesus with vitriol and hatred, yet in a strange way there is a ring of truth about what they say. And we're going to concentrate our attention on three phrases in particular that we find here in this passage. First of all, one of the taunts being that he saved others. There at the beginning of verse 42, he saved others. A declaration of what Jesus can do.

What they themselves recognize that he could do. He saved others. But then, of course, they follow it up with the following taunt. And of course, they go together. But himself he cannot save. He saved others, but he can't save himself. And we want to think about that and how that also, unbeknown to those who were taunting him and mocking him, also carries more than just a ring of truth. What Jesus couldn't do there as he died on the cross. And then a third way in which they taunted him, there in verse 43, he trusts in God. He trusts in God. And again, that, though it's used in mocking tones, is true. Obviously, the intent of those who use these words are, well, where's God now? This man who trusts in God. Well, let's think about these taunts that were directed to Jesus, and let's think of them in reverse order. So first of all, we'll think about the taunt that they direct to him, he trusts in God. And in this taunt, I think we can notice a truth that is clearly stated, but also a truth that is cruelly questioned as these words are directed to Jesus. First of all, we could see in these words a truth clearly stated, he trusts in God. And I do wonder if these words, even though they were addressed very much as a form of mockery, did reflect the genuine conclusion of the mockers who had long observed Jesus. They had followed his steps for some time, especially in the hours leading up to his death. And of course, in so many ways, in those hours where they had been observing him, they would have had reason to conclude that, in effect, this is a man who was trusting in God. His resolute resistance to seek the favor of men, though he could have done so.

[6 : 06] His dignified insistence on his identity as the Son of God, even though he knew that that would lead to his death. His unwavering confidence that he would be vindicated at the end of all that he was to endure. In the previous chapter, chapter 26, when he is before the Sanhedrin, he expressed words, of course, that sealed his fate in a way where he declared his confidence that he would, in due course, be seated at the right hand of the mighty one. There in verses 63 and 64 of the previous chapter.

In all of these ways, he gave evidence, very clear evidence, that he was indeed trusting in God. Of course, Jesus' trust in God and his Father was a constant throughout his life.

We could see the incarnation itself as a vivid announcement, demonstration of the Son's trust in his Father. His trust was so absolute that he was prepared to leave heaven itself, divest himself of his majesty and glory, clothe himself with humanity, become that ordinary man that we were thinking of this morning. And even more, be obedient, obedient even unto death, and death on a cross. And why did he do all of these things? Well, he did all of these things in trust that his Father would vindicate all that he did. He trusted his Father. He trusted his Father's will. So, it's a truth that they declare. Maybe they even themselves believe that in some way it was true. But more to the point, the taunt intends not only to declare a truth, but more to the point, what they're trying to do is to question this truth. Notice what they go on to say there in verse 43. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him. Let God rescue him now if he wants him. The force underpinning and giving seeming credibility to the taunt is found in the first statement that we've just noticed. He trusts in God. The point is, well, given that he trusts in God, surely God will deliver him. If it's true that he trusts in God, then surely a just God will honor that and will deliver him from what is befalling him. Is that not the way it works?

God honors those who honor him. Well, here is a man who honors God. Here's a man who trusts in God. Surely God will intervene in his favor. That's precisely what the psalmist declared in Psalm 22 from which we've already sung this evening and words in the psalm that are poignantly echoed by the mockers. If we just turn to Psalm 22 and in verse 8, notice what we read there. Psalm 22 and in verse 8, we read as follows. He trusts in the Lord. Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him. We can hear the echoes of those words in the mocking taunts of the religious leaders.

And yet, there is a change in the wording used. In the psalm, what we read, we've just read it, let him deliver him since he delights in him. But there's a cruel twist in the mocking words of the chief priest. The sense of the psalm is replaced with an if in their words. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, if he desires him. So they're introducing this question mark.

[10 : 14] They're using the very language of Scripture, whether knowingly or unknowingly. But then there is this cruel twist from the psalmist declaring that God would indeed respond to the one who trusts in him.

There is this question mark introduced if God wants to, if God desires him. But seemingly he doesn't because, look, he's not doing anything to come to his aid. This is the truth that is being questioned.

Does God desire him? Does God want to rescue him? Does God care? Does God love him? Is he really the son of God? He claims to be. Is he really? Would this be the fate that would befall the son of God?

Would a loving father look on indifferently to the plight of his son? And then, of course, the question might then be, well, does he really trust in God? Because if he really trusted in God, then this wouldn't be happening to him. I wonder if these words, the words of these cruel men, I wonder if they sowed a seed of doubt in the tormented, sin-carrying soul of Jesus. Did he begin for the first time in eternity to contemplate the possibility that his father did not desire him if he wants him, if he desires him? Well, we don't know. We do know that we only need to glance forward to verse 46 of this chapter. We didn't read that far, but if we glance forward to that verse, we read the pain-filled words that Jesus cried out about the ninth hour. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Where did that question begin to formulate itself? When was the very notion of the father abandoning his son first conceived in the mind of Jesus? Might it have been the cruel if of his mockers?

[12 : 19] Let God rescue him if he desires him, if he wants him. Can we begin to imagine the depth of anguish that such a taunt would have produced? Well, we can't. This is part of the great blessing that we have as those who benefit from the suffering of Jesus. We don't have to suffer as he suffered. We are spared, and so we can't even imagine the anguish that he endured as he was taunted in this cruel way.

He trusts in God. That's what Jesus always does. But did he? Did he trust in God always? Throughout this experience, in the darkest hour, did his trust tremble? Did his faith in the goodness of God and the perfection of his will waver? Well, it may, perhaps, did waver, but he never stopped trusting.

Listen to the words that declare to all who listen and to us as they're recorded for us his profound trust in God, words uttered as he breathes his last. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Another way of saying I still trust in you. Even in the midst of all of this, I still trust in you. But then we also have the prophetic testimony of Isaiah chapter 50 that confirms for us that even under such duress, his trust remained firm. Because that is what is said of the suffering servant in the verses that we've read in that chapter of Isaiah. Let's just remind ourselves of what we read from verse 7 of that chapter. Because the sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near.

Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other. Who is my accuser? Let him confront me. The language describes the events surrounding his death and the death itself, his trial and his death.

[14 : 29] And what does the suffering servant declare? The sovereign Lord is near me. He is with me. He will not put me to shame. And so even in the prophetic word, there is this confirmation that the words, the mocking words of his enemies were true and remain true throughout. He trusts in God. But then there's another taunt that is directed to him.

And as I noted, we're going in reverse order. He cannot save himself. He saved others. He cannot save himself. For his mockers, the impotence of Jesus in the face of death is the most clear evidence that he is not who he claimed to be.

For them, this is what makes it so evident. He can't be who he claims to be if he's dying. And messiahs don't get crucified, or so they thought. It was beyond their conception that the messiah would die such an ignominious, such a cruel death.

It was, to their great delight, confirmation that he wasn't who he claimed to be. He couldn't be the son of God. He couldn't be the messiah. Look at him. That man there cannot be who he claimed to be.

And why are they so sure of that? Well, because he couldn't save himself. He was incapable even of saving himself. Well, is it true what they say? He cannot save himself.

[16:03] Well, again, although unbeknown to them, their mocking words are true words. He could not save himself. Why could he not save himself? Was it because of a lack of power or a lack of resources?

Well, certainly not a lack of power or resources. Listen to what Jesus himself said to Peter in the previous chapter, in chapter 26 and in verse 53.

He speaks of the resources at his disposal. At the time, Jesus said to the crowd, Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?

Sorry, that's verse 55. In verse 53, Do you think I cannot call on my Father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? A Roman legion was thought to be something around 6,000 soldiers.

So you can do the math. Twelve legions of angels at his disposal had he chosen to call upon them. But he chose not to call upon them.

[17:07] Can you even imagine the scene at Calvary had he done so? Jesus hanging on the cross, enduring the poisonous insults, spitted out by his enemies. And then King Jesus calls on his angels and they appear in all their splendor.

It's quite a scene to picture. Why not? Why didn't he do this? Why is it true to say what these men said? He cannot save himself.

This was another, much more dramatic than the one we were looking at and considering this morning. Another occasion of self-imposed powerlessness.

He chose not to save himself. If he was to save you, he could not save himself. If he was to save me, he could not save himself. And in that sense, it was true what they said.

He came to die in the place of sinners. This was his mission. This was God's will. This was the plan of redemption hatched in eternity, conceived in love by the Godhead.

[18:08] The Son came to take upon himself the wages of sin, death. He came both to satisfy the justice of God and to reveal the love of God.

And this could only be done on the cross. Had he saved himself, he could not have concluded the mission that he had been given.

He could not save himself if he was to fulfill the Father's will. He could not save himself if he was to save us. And so those taunting words also carry more than a grain of truth.

They claim, his taunters claim, that had he come down from the cross, they would have believed. So they say. And while we don't know, would they have believed had he done so?

But more poignantly, in whom would they have believed had he come down from the cross? Not in a savior, but in a failed Messiah. We believe because he stayed on the cross.

[19:13] But then the third taunt that was directed to him, the first in the order in which it's recorded for us, is he saved others. Of course, that taunt only carries weight with what follows.

He saved others, but he cannot save himself. But I wonder, did the mockers mean this when they say this of Jesus, that he saved others? A little bit like the question we ask of when they said he trusts in God.

Is that what they actually believe? We think, well, perhaps they did. And what about this? He saved others. What did they mean by this? Well, what is clear throughout Jesus' life and ministry, that none doubted his power to save, certainly from the curse of disease and demon possession.

That was never doubted, even by his enemies. Not even his enemies questioned his power to do these things. The power was so evident. The evidence was so visible that it would have been utter folly to question it.

Because it was there before anyone could see that he had the power to save in these ways. Everybody believed that. It may have caused them great distress to have to recognize it, but it was there before their very eyes.

[20 : 26] And so, no doubt, when they declared this about him, he saved others, they were declaring something they knew to be true. Many witnesses could have been called had that been in question and could willingly have testified, well, he saved me.

He saved others. Another true declaration. But in what tense is it stated by his enemies? He saved others. You see, this is the cruel twist also.

They gloat foolishly and perversely that, yes, he saved others in the past, but he's done saving now. And nobody's going to be saved by this man now.

Yes, in the past, he saved, he healed, he cast out demons, he did all of these wonderful and marvelous things, but not now. Look at him. He's not saving anybody where he is now.

It's all in the past. No more saving to be done by Jesus. And here we can conclude how wrong could they be.

[21 : 34] How wrong could they be in that conclusion? What they were witnessing was his central, pivotal saving act. It was on the cross that we see Jesus supremely as the Savior he is.

It is at the cross that the serious business of saving sinners was conducted. All that was done before were glimpses that pointed towards this pivotal saving act that was conducted there on the cross as he died for sinners.

It was at the cross that Jesus did what was necessary to save us. He saved others. Yes, he did. But he continues to save.

Redemption was accomplished at Calvary 2,000 years ago. The price was paid. The eternal saving plan executed. But that redemption is applied, is freely offered now to all and every sinner who would but put their trust in Jesus and his finished work.

He saved others. This is what Jesus can do and does do and will do for all who trust in him. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word.

[22 : 54] We thank you for what we have read of the death of your Son, our Savior, in our place. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your word. He did indeed put his trust in you as that prophesied suffering servant.

Trusting in you even through his darkest hour. We thank you for your word. We thank you that he was indeed and continues to be the one who saves sinners.

and we thank you that his determination to save sinners was such that he did not save himself, that he did not call on the resources at his disposal to spare him the death that he knew that he had to die in our place. And so we pray that these realities would be clearly in our mind as we now turn to remember in a very tangible way the death that he died in our place as we participate in the Lord's Supper. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.