

Communion

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[0 : 0 0] Our Father, as we read the familiar and yet solemn verses that describe the death of Your Son Jesus, we are conscious that we walk on hallowed ground, and as we would consider the death of Jesus, and as we would endeavor to consider why He died and the implications and the results of His death, that You would be the one who would guide our thinking, guide the words that we speak, guide the manner in which we understand them, and that we would be instructed, that we would be challenged, that we would be enabled to have a greater understanding and so a greater sense of gratitude to You and to Your Son Jesus for so great a work of redemption on our behalf. So, we do pray that You would be the one who would be with us and guide us and direct us as we turn to consider Your Word this morning, and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. It is a sobering and frightening thing to appreciate man's capacity for cruelty, that uniquely human trait of not only being able to inflict pain on others, but of reveling in and enjoying the suffering of the victim. Real-life examples of this are not hard to find. Most school playgrounds will be the theater for such cruelty on a daily basis. As we remember this morning the death of Jesus in our place, as we consider and give thanks to Jesus for what He endured in our stead, we will focus on one aspect of the suffering He endured—the insults and mocking taunts of His enemies. Now, the question could reasonably be asked, is there any merit in taking time to consider, to dissect the cruel words of cruel men? In the words of a Spanish saying, would it not be more advisable to foolish words, deaf ears? Or, as we often advise our children when they are faced with insults or mockery, what do we say to them often? Just ignore them. Just don't pay any attention to what they say.

Would that not be a more appropriate policy in the face of the taunts and insults that were directed at Jesus?

And yet, these mocking taunts of the enemies of Jesus have been recorded for a reason. And in a strange and yet revealing way, they have a ring of truth about them, certainly some of them, and certainly the ones that we are going to consider this morning.

In particular, the words of the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law, as they are recorded for us in the passage that we've read in Matthew chapter 27, verses 41 to 43.

[3 : 3 9] And we'll read again these three verses. Matthew 27, reading from verse 41. In the same way, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders mocked him, mocked Jesus.

He saved others, they said, 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.

In this brief record that very possibly only presents part of the cruel taunting Jesus was subjected to by these men, there are three statements in particular that I want us to consider this morning. First of all, what the mockers state in these words, he saved others. Or we might say, what Jesus can do. He saved others. This is what Jesus can do. But the second statement that I want us to consider of his mockers is the following one, he cannot save himself. Or, what Jesus can't do.

And then, thirdly, the statement that they make in what follows, he trusts in God. And the words that follow on from that, there in verse 43, he trusts in God. Or we might say, what Jesus always does.

He saved others. What Jesus can do. He cannot save himself. What Jesus can't do. And he trusts in God. What Jesus can't do. What Jesus can do. What Jesus can do. What Jesus can do. What Jesus can do.

[5 : 34] These three statements. And I want to consider them in reverse order. So, we're going to think, first of all, of this mocking statement, or at least made with a mocking intention on the part of his enemies. He trusts in God. Then in verse 43, he trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him.

Now, in this taunt, we notice, I think, two things. There are certainly two things that I'm going to highlight. First of all, we notice a truth clearly stated and a truth cruelly questioned. A truth clearly stated and a truth cruelly questioned. The truth clearly stated is the one that we've mentioned and focused on or mentioned already in a couple of occasions. These words, he trusts in God.

Now, this was true. And they, though his enemies, are stating this truth very clearly. He trusts in God. Period. They recognize that to be so. And I do wonder, and I think it reasonable to conclude, that though they are stated in mocking terms, especially with what follows, and we'll see that in a moment, they do reflect the genuine perception of the mockers who had long observed Jesus.

These men who are conducting this mocking activity, those men who are mocking him with these words, are men who had followed the steps of Jesus very closely. They were very familiar with his life and ministry. And very especially, they had been witnesses to his demeanor in the hours leading up to his crucifixion. And they had been able to see for themselves that he or Jesus, even in such an hour, or especially in such an hour, trusted in God. They had seen, they had been witnesses to his resolute resistance to seeking the favor of man or the mercy of man in the face of his imminent death.

Humanly speaking, we might say, would have been well within his powers to have secured freedom from the position he was in and to have escaped death. But he chose not to do so.

[8 : 03] They had been witnesses to his dignified insistence on his identity as the Son of God. They too had heard how he had expressed his unwavering confidence that he would soon be seated at the right hand of the Mighty One. Indeed, these are words that he addressed to the very Sanhedrin, where these men would have been present there in the previous chapter. We've read the passage in chapter 26 and in verse 64. How does he give expression to that confidence, that trust in God? I say to you all, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One. And so, when they taunt him with these words, he trusts in God, they were saying something that was true, and I would suggest they were saying something that they knew to be true. But of course, his trust in God was a permanent trait of his whole life. Can we not see in the incarnation itself a vivid and eloquent announcement of the Son's trust in his Father? His trust was so absolute that he was prepared to leave heaven itself. He was prepared to divest himself of his majesty and glory. He was prepared to clothe himself with humanity. He was prepared to be obedient even unto death and death on a cross. And why? Because he trusted his Father.

He trusted his Father's will. It was his delight to do his Father's will because he trusted his Father. Why is it that a small child will do what his Father tells him, however strange the demand be?

Because he trusts Him. And so with Jesus, he trusted in God. This is true, what they cry out to Him, or what they speak among themselves with an earshot of Jesus. He trusts in God. Yes, indeed.

So this is a truth clearly stated, but there is also in what follows from these words, and building on this statement, he trusts in God, there is also a truth cruelly questioned. Let's just notice again what they go on to say in verse 43, he trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him. Or as other versions translate it, if he desires him. Let God rescue him. He trusts in God, so it's reasonable to conclude that if he is indeed trusting in God that if he is indeed trusting in God, then God will be willing to rescue him. If he wants him. If he desires him. The force underpinning and giving seeming credibility to the taunt, if he wants him, if he desires him, is found in the first statement just considered. He trusts in God.

And so the idea is, given that he trusts in God, surely God will deliver him. Is that not how it works? God honors them who honor Him. Is that not precisely what the psalmist affirms in Psalm 22 and verse 8?

[11 : 35] Words that are poignantly echoed by the mockers. Knowingly or unknowingly, we do not know. But if we notice there in Psalm 22 and verse 8, see what the psalmist says there, and see how things seem to have very strangely changed in the words that are addressed to Jesus or spoken within earshot of Jesus to mock Him. In Psalm 22 and verse 8, what do we read?

Psalm 22 and verse 8. He trusts in the Lord. Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.

Now notice carefully this cruel twist in the mocking words of the chief priests. The sins of the psalm.

Let him deliver him, since he delights in him. Notice how that is replaced with another word, with the word if. Let him deliver him, if he delights in him. Let him deliver him, if he wants him. Let him deliver him, if he desires him. And what a difference a little word can make. You see, this is the truth questioned. This is the doubt that is being sowed on the part of those who mock Jesus. Does God really desire him? Does God want to rescue him? Does God care? Does God love him? If he does, surely he will deliver him? If he does, surely he will help him. If he does, surely he will rescue him. This was the conviction of the psalmist. And yet, the doubt is sowed. Is he really the Son of God? Would a loving father look on indifferently to the plight of his Son? Would a loving father be able to see what was occurring there at Calvary and do nothing? These are the questions that are being sowed in the mind of Jesus by these mocking et al. By these mocking etons of the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now, if, if he desires him. And I wonder, did these words sow a seed of doubt in the tormented, sin-bearing soul of Jesus?

[14 : 28] Did he begin, for the first time in all eternity, to contemplate the possibility that his father did not desire him, that his father did not want him, that his father did not care for him, did not love for him? Did he begin to consider that perhaps he wasn't really the Son of God at all?

We don't know. We do know that we need only glance forward to verse 46, just a couple of verses further on in the chapter, to read the pain and anguish-filled words of Jesus.

Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And where did that question begin to formulate itself? Jesus cries in a loud voice and elevates this question, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, but where did that question first begin to be conceived?

When was the very notion of the father abandoning his son first conceived in the mind of Jesus? Might it not have been with the cruel if of his taunters?

He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now, if he wants him, if he desires him. Can we imagine the depth of anguish such a taunt would have produced? No, we can't. And thank God that we cannot imagine the depth of anguish that this subjected Jesus to. We have been spared from such depth of anguish by Jesus being prepared to endure it for us. But what we do know is that that pain which we cannot understand that pain which we cannot begin to comprehend that that torment that he endured, he endured for us. He endured for his people. He endured for you and for me, Christian friend. That we do know. What Jesus always does, he trusts in God.

[17 : 04] But did he? Always? In this darkest hour did his trust tremble? Did his faith in the goodness of God and the perfection of his will waver? Tremble, perhaps, waver? It may be. But he never stopped trusting.

Listen to the words that declare to the cosmos his profound trust in God, words uttered as he breathes his last. Father, into your hands. I commit my spirit. There could be no more eloquent way of Jesus saying, Father, I trust in you. Here at death's door, there's one thing I can do is this. I trust in you.

I commit myself to you because I trust in you. There are things I don't understand. There are things that I'm not able to consider and to analyze and to get my head around, if you wish. But this I know, that I can trust in you even in this darkest hour. He trusts in God. The first statement of the mockers, it was a true statement. But there's a second statement that they also make as we go back in in reverse order, as I suggested, and it is this. He cannot save himself. There, in verse 42, he saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. No can do. Now, for his mockers, his impotence in the face of death is the most clear and eloquent evidence that he is not who he claimed to be.

Their reasoning is very clear to their mind, very logical. If he can't save himself, how can he save others? Messiahs just don't get crucified. It's not in the job description. So they thought. And so, Jesus hanging impotent on the tree as they perceived the scene before them was clear evidence that he was not who he had claimed to be. Their denial of who he was was vindicated by the cross, so they thought.

He cannot even save himself. He would put himself forward as a savior of mankind, and he can't save himself. Is it true what they say? These mocking words that they speak among themselves, but making very certain that Jesus can hear, are these mocking words true words? Is it true that he could not save himself? And if it is, why? Why couldn't he save himself? Was it a lack of power or a lack of resources at his disposal? Well, certainly not. Listen to what Jesus himself said to Peter in the previous chapter.

[20 : 07] In chapter 26 and verse 53, what do we read? This is Jesus himself. And what does he say to Peter? As Peter would have rescued him by violent means, what does Jesus say? Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Resources he had.

What would a centurion and a handful of soldiers do against twelve legions of angels? A Roman legion had about six thousand soldiers. Do the maths. Twelve legions. Seventy-two thousand angels. Oh, he had resources at his disposal. Just imagine for a moment—indulge me—imagine for a moment if he had called on those twelve legions of angels. What would the chief priests have said then? What would the centurion have said then? What would the others have said then? As this impotent Jesus dying on the cross calls on these legions of angels to rescue him? Seventy-two thousand angels would be quite a heavenly SWAT team. But why not? Why didn't he do that? Why didn't he save himself? Power he had. Why didn't

Jesus do this? Why is it true to say—and we are making this affirmation that it is indeed true what the mocker said? Why didn't he do that? Why didn't he do that? Why didn't he do that? Why didn't he do that?

Well, if he was to save you, he could not save himself. If he was to save me, he could not save himself. Jesus came to die in the place of sinners. This was his mission. This was his Father's will.

This was the plan of redemption hatched in eternity, conceived in love by the Godhead. The Son came to take upon himself the wages of sin. He came both to satisfy the justice of God and to reveal the love of God. And at Calvary, as the psalmist so beautifully expresses it, justice and mercy kissed. What he had to do could only be done on the cross. The salvation that he had to secure for sinners such as you and me could only be secured by his death in our place.

[22 : 54] And to those who would doubt that Jesus died as a substitute for sinners, and though it is at the very heart of the gospel, it is a surprising thing that there are those, those who would doubt that in my place condemned he stood. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah in that chapter so familiar to us. In chapter 53 and from verse 4, speaking of the one who would come, speaking of Jesus, surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Why could he not save himself? Why did he not save himself from that terrible and cruel death? Because he came that his body might be broken. He came that his blood might be shed. He could not save himself if he was to fulfill his Father's will. He could not save himself if he was to save you.

He cannot save himself. Never a truer word was said. Now, they claim, those who mock him in this way, they claim that had he come down from the cross, had he displayed his power in that way, they claim that they would have believed.

Listen to what they say there in the passage we are considering. He saved others, they said, 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. We will believe in you if you would but come down from the cross. So they say, would they have believed? We don't know. But more poignantly, in whom would they have believed had he come down from the cross? Not a Savior, a failed Messiah.

That is all they would have had to believe in, had he come down from the cross. We believe because he stayed on the cross. That is why we believe, and that is why our faith is grounded because he did not come down. Because he did not save himself. It is because he stayed on the cross that I would plead with you all to believe in this Jesus. Because he did not come down.

[25 : 55] Because he did not save himself. Driven by his loyalty to his Father and his love for you. He cannot save himself. Mocking words, but true words. And then thirdly, another statement of those who would mock him. Another true statement. He saved others. He saved others, they said, then in verse 42.

Did the mockers mean this? Did they really recognize that Jesus saved others? Or what did they mean by this statement that they used mockingly in his presence? Well, the reality, of course, is that none doubted his power to save from the curse of disease and demon possession, not even his most ardent opponents. And they are here represented, a question, the reality of his power to save.

They would seek to attribute that power to demonic sources as a way of wriggling out of a reality that could not be denied. None of his enemies were saying, oh, he doesn't really do miracles. He doesn't really raise people from the dead. They knew full well that he did. They could see those who had been saved by him. They could see Lazarus walking about, alive and well. They knew that he had indeed saved others, which makes their unbelief and their rejection all the more difficult to comprehend. He saved others, yes, they believed that. Many witnesses could be called who would have willingly testified, He saved me. He saved others. Another true statement on the part of the mockers. But notice also the tense in which they make this true statement, He saved others. He saved others. Yes, in the past,

He has saved others. That we can't deny. But now they gloat foolishly and perversely. All that is water under the bridge. All that is in the past. No more saving now to be done by Jesus. Oh, he may have saved others. But no more saving now. And how wrong could they be here? They are profoundly wrong, because what they were witnessing, what to them confirmed his incapacity to save anybody else, what they were now witnessing was his central, pivotal saving act. Because it is on the cross that we see Jesus supremely as the Savior as the Savior he is. It is at the cross that the serious business of saving sinners was conducted. All that came before was but preparation for this central saving act. It is at the cross that Jesus did what was necessary to save you. It is at the cross that his blood was shed. It is at the cross that he paid the price of our sin. He saved others. Yes, indeed. But he continues to save. Redemption was accomplished at Calvary 2,000 years ago. The price was paid. The eternal saving plan was executed. But that redemption is applied.

It is freely offered now to all and to any 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 you if you would but believe and put your trust in him. Let us pray.