

***He Saved Others, But He Can't Save Himself!***

***"In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at 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?" When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid."***

Do you know what "plagiarism" is? It is when you take someone else's words and make them your own. If I wrote a letter or paper, and you copied it and put your own name on it, that's plagiarism. You stole something from me. Those Jewish leaders who mocked Jesus that Good Friday afternoon did not realize it, but they were quoting directly from Psalm 22. In Matthew's account, they said, "**He trusts in God. Let God rescue him.**" In Psalm 22 it says the mockers will say, "**He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him.**" But this isn't a case of plagiarism. It is a case of God quoting them much as a reporter quotes someone in the newspaper, only he quoted them some 1000 years before the fact.

What a temptation for Jesus. If he would use his power and come down, they would not only shut up; maybe they would finally believe him. But, friends, we and all other believers believe because he did not come down from the cross. This section before us captures what we believe, and why. In order to save us, our Savior refused to save himself.

*I. Jesus would not save himself.*

Law and gospel. If we can't tell the difference between the two, then we may never fully appreciate who we are or what Jesus does for us. The law is that part of the Bible which tells us what is expected of us and promises us we will be punished eternally if we fail. It makes us conscious of the fact we are sinners. The gospel is the good news in the Bible which tells us what Jesus did for us, his suffering, death and resurrection, and promises us only eternal life. It makes us rejoice we are saved. Our Lutheran confessions say, "The preaching of the cross is the strongest preaching of the Law." This is so true. If ever you doubted or wondered what God thinks about sin, just look at the cross.

Outside of church, when have you heard the word, "sin?" Things that were once recognized as sin, or at least carried a stigma or bad connotation, are no longer sin. In fact, they are promoted and praised. Disrespect, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, lying, anger, teasing, all these things have now become virtues or an accepted way of life. And if someone happens to embarrass himself, we simply sweep it under the rug: "Everyone else is doing it." "It is the only way to get ahead."

But here, at the cross, every mouth should be silenced, and we should all stand in horror. Sin should be in our vocabulary. We should feel ashamed. The cross shows us what sin really is. When Jesus became sin, he cried out in a loud voice, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" As sin, Jesus looked around and there was no God. God didn't smile on him and say, "Oh, that's OK." God left him. He was gone. Now, it is true, God tells us he is everywhere, on the highest mountain and in the deepest ocean. Yet, there is one place where God is not present: hell. You want to understand what God feels about sin? Look at Jesus in hell, God's own son, condemned by his father, when he became sin.

But this how he saves us. Jesus died on the cross. No, let me qualify that. Jesus gave up his life on the cross. Remember what Jesus said about himself, "**I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again.**" Jesus could still be hanging there today, if he wanted. It wasn't the nails, the suffocation, anything that killed Jesus. "**With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.**" The other gospels fill in more details. He cried to the father that it was into his hands that he was giving his spirit. Then he gave it up; it wasn't taken from him.

The Bible tells us that there many miraculous signs that accompanied the death of Jesus. First, for several hours darkness came over the land. This was no normal darkness, not in the middle of the day. Scientists are still scratching their heads over this. They can accurately go back and determine where eclipses have occurred. But this was no eclipse. Something strange, eerie, supernatural is happening.

Then look at what happened when Jesus died. The earth shook. Rocks split. So what. That happens all the time. But how about this? Many dead people came out of their graves. That doesn't happen. But one more thing that means so much to us is this: the curtain the temple tore in two. The temple curtain was 80 feet high and the width of a man's hand. There were witnesses, for Jesus died at 3:00 PM and the priests were in the temple preparing for the evening sacrifice. It tore in two.

We have to understand that this temple curtain sectioned off what is known as the Most Holy Place. It was the dwelling of God. If someone wandered in there, they would die. In the Old Testament they had a festival known as the Day of Atonement. It happened only once a year. On that day, only one person, the High Priest, could go behind that curtain into the Most Holy Place. But he couldn't just stroll in there, or he would die. He first had to take a special bath, wear special clothing, at least five animals had to be sacrificed. He wore bells on his clothes and had a rope tied to his feet so if he did something wrong and died, they would notice the bells are not ringing anymore and they dragged his body out with the rope.

Strange, isn't it. But not really. God is simply giving his people a simple picture. It emphasized the need for a Savior. I will let Hebrews explain it for us. We can now, ***"come boldly to the throne of grace to receive help in time of need."*** We can go before God and not be afraid of dying. We don't have to have a rope tied to our feet to drag our body out. In other words, the sinner can stand before God without dying! The High Priest needed the blood of animals. We have the blood of Jesus. The sins that damned Jesus to hell will not damn us. And now that curtain tells us what Jesus means to us. We will not die before the Lord. In fact, we have access to him. There is no curtain, nothing, that separates us from him.

## *II. So he would save us.*

He saves us. Our text gives us a couple examples. Beneath the cross were Roman soldiers. One, a Centurion, looked up and said, ***"Surely this man was the son of God."*** Jesus claimed a soul, a gentile soul nonetheless from the ranks of hardened Roman soldiers. Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Jesus. He was secret because he was afraid what his fellow Jews would say or do. Nicodemus was the same way. He visited Jesus at night because he was afraid of being seen with him. Now God has removed their fears. When it was the most dangerous to be associated with Jesus, they came forward, claimed his body and buried him. Look around you, and look in the mirror. You will see more examples. He saves us, even if we should die.

They buried him in a garden. It is interesting how gardens are used by the Lord. It was in a garden, Eden, where sin entered the world. Christ prayed to the Lord in another garden, Gethsemane, and willfully went on to drink the bitter cup of suffering for us. He was buried in another garden, but in three days he rose from the dead, making every grave a garden that produces the fruit of the resurrection.

Jesus could have saved himself. At any moment he could come down, instantly heal his wounds, and it certainly would have made an impression. But such an impression would last only for a short while. Rather, Jesus stayed on the cross. He would not save himself in order to save us. We live, but not just in the resurrection. We live now. I will let the Bible explain the resurrection that already exists in us: ***"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*** Eternal life, in a sense, has already begun. How could we go back? Amen.