



Speaker:
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He Could Not Save Himself

◀ Series: The Gospel of Mark • 54 of 54

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And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads and saying, “Ah, *thou* that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself and come down from the cross.” Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, “He saved others; himself he cannot save! Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross that we may see and believe.” And they that were crucified with him reviled him.

We ended last week’s message with our beautiful saviour being strung up on a tree trunk. He’d been falsely accused, convicted as a criminal, beaten, mocked, forced to march to the place of his own execution, and was there tied and nailed to a Roman cross.

As we re-enter the story, we witness people continuing to insult him. They include both clergy *and* laity. There seems to be a fashion within the church today to put the blame for what happened to Jesus on the shoulders of the religious leaders alone. The facts recorded for us here, and the teaching of the apostles afterwards, clearly shows the Jewish opposition to Jesus came from every stratum of their society. Perhaps if you’re a socialist you’re more inclined to put the blame for all this on the rich and powerful. But the common people were guilty too.

Jesus undoubtedly gave the religious leaders a particularly hard time. Much has been entrusted to them and much was expected. Even now, Christian pastors have a greater accountability before God because of their weighty duty as assistant shepherds.

But let’s not forget it was the **poor people** who urged Jesus to leave their country after seeing a great miracle. Let’s remember most of the crowd baying for Jesus’s blood at his trial were the **common people**. And among this wicked crowd of people abusing Jesus here were **ordinary folk**. Sin is truly universal.

In verse 29, an example’s given of what the people were saying. “Ah” is the equivalent of our expression “Hah!” It’s an expression of mockery.

The religious bunch have turned up and they join in too. We focused the other week on how many references there were to Jesus’s divinity and his role as Messiah. But most of them were wrapped up inside insult and sarcasm. We concluded these were veiled references to Christ being the King of Israel. And here we see yet another description of him as the Christ.

In Psalm 109, and verse 25, we read this ancient prophecy about the Messiah:

I became also a reproach unto them. When they looked upon me, they shook their heads.

Psalm 109:25

Shaking your head in disappointment is something we use even in our culture today.

What stood out for me in these verses is that statement in verse 31: *He saved others but he can't save himself*. And it's for this reason I've chosen as my title today "He could not save himself". What I'd like to do now is describe what they meant by that statement, and then I'll look at its more important, prophetic meaning.

What They Meant

When we see the word "saved", we almost always understand it to mean eternal salvation from sin. And that's a pretty safe rule.

When we think about what the religious crowd said, it wouldn't make much sense. They certainly didn't mean he eternally saved others but he **couldn't** eternally save himself. They didn't believe he saved anyone in that sense, and they wouldn't believe the Messiah needed himself to be saved from sin.

I've assumed they used the word "saved" in the same sense both times. And I've said I don't believe they were talking about him justifying others but not himself.

When they said he couldn't save himself, it appears they meant he couldn't save himself from the *trouble* he was in. There he was: a helpless victim. God hadn't rescued him, and even his own faithful band of followers had abandoned him.

Assuming that's what they meant, we can apply that sense to their acknowledgement he saved others. That is, he saved people from their trouble. He saved them from lifelong illnesses and disabilities and saved some from demonic possession. Let's take a look at two examples we've already come across in Mark's gospel. The first is in Chapter five and verse 34:

And he said unto her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace and be whole of thy plague."

Mark 5:34

And in the following chapter, chapter 6 and verse 56, we read:

And whithersoever he entered—into villages, or cities, or country—they laid the sick in the streets and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment. And as many as touched him were made whole.

Mark 6:56

Now take note: when it says the girl and the people were "made whole", it's the same Greek word elsewhere translated "saved". It simply means they were saved from the trouble they were in.

So Jesus saved people out of their difficulties and pain but seems unable to help himself! This business in verse 29 about the temple shows the misunderstanding of what Jesus said persisted. If you remember, Jesus said if they were to destroy the temple he'd restore it within three days. Had his hearers been more spiritually tuned in, they'd understand he meant the temple of his body. He'd be killed, but he'd be raised from the dead in three days.

Their point then was if he had the power to rebuild a monumental structure like the temple in three days, he'd easily be able to get himself out of this difficulty. He didn't, so they reason he couldn't be the Messiah after all.

You see in verse 32 how the Jews assert if Jesus comes down off the cross, they'll believe him. Now that's just a lie. Why do I say this? Because there had been *several years' worth of miracles* Jesus has done. Many of them were witnessed by the religious leaders themselves. Had Jesus supernaturally extracted the nails, undone the ropes, healed his wounds, clothed himself and drifted down back onto the earth, the Jews would simply say, *He did it by the power of Satan*.

It does show that this maxim of "seeing is believing" was in use just as much then as it is today. In our day, hardened atheists challenge us in the same way. *Give us proof and we'll believe*.

As useful as that principle is—that we expect to see evidence to support a truth—the reasoning of God is much greater. He does provide the atheist with evidence, but they'll no more accept it than the Jews in our story did. Regarding Jesus, the principle of God is *believing is seeing*.

You have to *believe first* before you can see clearly. We're all born blind, and it's only through a process of soul work performed by God that we can have that faith which *allows us to see properly*.

And we see an incarnate son of God. We see a sacrificial lamb at Calvary. We see an empty tomb. AND WE SEE A RISEN, EXALTED AND ENTHRONED KING DEDICATED TO SAVING US AND PRESERVING US.

If you think about it, they wanted to believe in a Christ who would remove himself from the cross. But they'd be believing in a false saviour and would be doomed!

Jesus **would** come down from the cross...but only when his work was done. ONLY WHEN HIS GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF DYING WAS COMPLETED would he allow himself to be removed.

As a Prophecy

Like so many things we read in the Bible, this saying we're focused on today has a dual meaning. You know what I mean: David wrote of his own troubles, but many of these are to be understood as the thoughts and words of Jesus Christ.

For example, when Jesus cried from the cross, *I commit my spirit into your hands, Lord*, he wasn't merely copying the Psalmist's words because he thought they were appropriate. He was showing that in yet another way *he was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy*.

And it's from that perspective we should view this phrase we're looking at today. I'd like us to revisit it as a prophecy. That is, we maintain today that **Jesus has eternally saved others**—and continues to do so—yet **it was never possible he could save himself**.

He saved others. He is the great Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. He laid down his life for his friends, and these friends are none other than those he elected to salvation before the world was.

In your Bibles, turn with me if you would to Romans chapter 5. We're going to have a look at verses 18 and 19 in order to reflect on the nature of this salvation:

- **Therefore as by the offence of one...**

This one was none other than Adam. He was placed on a beautiful earth, was given a beautiful wife, and was given the job of maintaining a beautiful garden. He had an abundance of food and drink and was surrounded by a wondrous array of breathtaking animals, birds and other creatures.

There was this one rule. There was just one tree he wasn't to eat from. But in an act of pure rebellion and unbelievable ingratitude for what he has, he found the need to eat from the tree. And in doing this, he betrayed God and more importantly committed an offence against him.

- **...judgment came upon all men to condemnation...**

We're descended from Adam—all of us. And in some way, we were affected by his failure. We each come into this world with a bias towards sin. We're unable to live righteously. And all the time we live apart from God we live under the cloud of his condemnation.

- **...even so...**

In the same way.

- **...by the righteousness of one...**

Jesus Christ is the Righteous One. In the same way as Adam's actions affected all in his family, so the works of Jesus Christ affected everyone in *his* family. How?

- **...the free gift came upon all men...**

We who are in the family of Jesus have received the free gift of God's grace. All those belonging to Christ have benefited. And it was to this end:

- **...unto justification of life...**

Those who have been the objects of God's free grace receive the righteousness of Christ as their own. **They're made to be as spotless and innocent as Jesus Christ himself**. The verse then reinforces this point:

- For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

- **Romans 5:18–19**

Jesus Christ secured the salvation of many through his atoning death. In other words, he saved others. The Jews were right. It's just they had no idea how right they were!

But we need to repeat the point made earlier. In order to save others, it meant he was not able to save himself.

Think how much Jesus was tempted to abandon his mission and save himself. Even back in the garden of Gethsemane, knowing the ferocity of what was coming to him, he was tempted to change the plan. And now people are filing past the place of his crucifixion, tempting him to show his power by coming down off the cross.

And then we have the religious elite. They challenged him to save himself. And what a temptation that would have been! When you watch a film, and the baddies eventually get their comeuppance, it's intensely satisfying. It's thrilling to see justice carried out so definitely.

Imagine if the Bible read differently at this point. Imagine if we next see in the story Jesus crying out, "Lord send now your mighty angels". Imagine him being carefully taken down off the cross and ministered to while other angels rounded up his enemies so he could sit in judgement on them. He could then lead the angelic army back into Jerusalem, wipe out Rome and assume control of the whole earth.

Perhaps that would have given Jesus some sense of satisfaction. **But that would have been overwhelmed by the knowledge that this course of action would result in the doom of the entire human race.** We wouldn't be reading these Bibles. We wouldn't know each other. We'd be doing what everyone around us today is doing right now: finding ways to waste time until it's time to die! And then we face God in judgement with no saviour to refer him to, no advocate to plead our case. All of us would be consigned to the lake of fire.

But despite feeling sorry for Jesus on the cross as we read this account today, we're heartily glad he chose to stay there! We're glad he chose obedience rather than selfish escape. Here then is the ultimate example of obedience, described in a Philippians chapter 2 in verse eight as follows:

...and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:8

The attitude of Jesus, a great example to us, was *Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*

His sacrifice wasn't only about mere obedience of course. *He gave himself with all his heart* because he genuinely *loved* us. Listen to the words of this hymn:

*Give me a sight, O Saviour, of Thy wondrous love to me,
Of the love that brought Thee down to earth to die on Calvary.
Oh make me understand it; help me to take it in,
What it meant to Thee, the Holy One, to bear away my sin.
Was it the nails, O Saviour, that bound Thee to the tree?
NAY, 'T WAS THINE EVERLASTING LOVE, THY LOVE FOR ME, FOR ME.*

It was obedience AND love that drove him to go to his awful fate. He shunned the temptation to save himself SO THAT he could save others. God's word says of him that, *When the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.* He made himself to be the sacrifice on the altar, burnt up by the wrath of God and giving off as it were a sweet-smelling fragrance wholly acceptable to God.

Our reading began with people "railing" on Jesus. This word means nothing less than *blasphemy*. And this is the case when *anyone* says something bad about God. If they say he's not the creator, or if they accuse him of cruelty, they're guilty of blasphemy.

Everything in Jesus's life up to this point and everything that follows plays out according to a predetermined purpose in the mind of God. Listen to this quotation taken from Peter's speech in Acts chapter 2:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Acts 2:23

Yet see how Peter makes the point that his hearers are guilty of wickedness in having Jesus killed. It's an expression of that doctrine that God directs the events in this world while people still have responsibility for sinning. And the reward for those who mock God either blatantly or simply through living apart from him? Psalm 40 and verse 15 says:

Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, "Aha, aha!"

Psalm 40:15

Eternal desolation. Eternal devastation.

But the good news of the gospel is **Jesus refused to save himself because he intended to save others**. One of the thieves crucified alongside him was one of them! Even one of the Roman soldiers received a spiritual revelation and declared Jesus to be truly the son of God.

Because Jesus would not save himself, a great multitude would be delivered from their sin and the eternal outcome of it. Yet when this multitude is viewed among the whole human race, it becomes a minority. Very few people, the Bible says, will walk that narrow path which leads to eternal life. Most of our relatives and friends will, tragically, choose to stay on the broad road which leads to destruction.

It will always be few who are saved. But just as the value of diamonds is in their rarity, so the church of God is all the more special for its fewness of numbers in any particular generation.

If you belong to God today, you're very special. What any one of you has is greater than that which is held by the richest man on the planet. He exceeds you only in ownership of things

that'll disintegrate and vanish away, whereas you have a future inheritance that will never end.

Whether we say Jesus *would* not save himself or *could* not, we rejoice today that he *did not* save himself and chose instead to save us.

Amen.