

Himself He Cannot Save

The events recorded here cover three long hours of suffering from the third to the sixth hour of the day, or from 9:00 am until noon, by our scale. Crucifixion was no quick process, even for one already so severely beaten as the Lord Jesus. Exhaustion, de-hydration and slow suffocation would also play a part. The stress and physical trauma on Christ's body was already extreme even before the coming hours of darkness when His spiritual suffering intensified.

A name above every name

The Romans were accustomed to write an inscription bearing the charge or ground of a criminal's condemnation and fix it to the cross on which he was crucified. All four evangelists mention the use of an inscription at the crucifixion of Jesus and Mark calls it 'the superscription of his accusation'. Combining the gospel records suggests, 'THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS' is what was written.

A name that endures

Pilate is said to have written it, either personally or by command, in three languages so ensuring maximum awareness. It was written in the languages of the day; Greek, Latin and Hebrew, but also the languages of philosophy, science and religion to be an enduring testimony to the kingship of Christ (Psalm 135:13).

This superscription annoyed the Jews who felt it should be recorded merely that Jesus claimed to be KING OF THE JEWS. Pilate refused to alter or amend what he had written and the testimony of Christ's kingly rule has stood ever since. No king has excelled or ever will displace 'Christ The King'.

Prophecies fulfilled

Along with Christ were crucified two convicted criminals, one on either side, so the prophecy of Isaiah was accomplished that stated, 'he was numbered with the transgressors'. At every turn, the Jews and Romans fulfilled what had been foretold concerning the Messiah and His suffering. Hereby they testified, albeit unintentionally, to the Saviour's true identity. Even the very words they spoke in mockery were lifted directly from the prophets. 'He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him' (Psalm 22:8).

Heartless abuse

But the principal feature of these three hours was the general scorn and abuse hurled at the Lord from all sides. The soldiers who crucified Jesus mocked Him saying, 'If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself'. The two thieves crucified with Jesus reviled Him. The people who walked along the road by which the Saviour hung 'railed on him, wagging their heads'. The chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and members of the Sanhedrin who had followed the Lord to observe His execution all shouted abuse as the Saviour hung suffering. 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.'

Our enmity against God

One might imagine basic humanity would discover some pity for a sufferer such as the Lord Jesus. What need was there to aggravate and exacerbate a dying man's pain? What need to gloat? Yet, surely, this is the point. Here the depravity of human nature and the bile of Satanic bondage spilled out against the Lord because of who He really was. No one came to hurl abuse at the thieves! Even those they had robbed brought no rebuke. The truth is there is enmity in man's heart against God; a deep rooted antagonism and an implacable hatred. Even as the Lord hung suffering in agony these men and women justified themselves, and scorned the Son of God.

Honoured in His shame

As these fiends laughed and shouted back and forth, taunting the Lord and flaunting their ignorance, little did they realise even their insults honoured the Saviour. In dying Christ served His church as their Substitute and honoured God's law by His suffering. How appropriate then, that these shameful words of mockery should rather honour their victim than shame Him.

They cried, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save'. In doing so they confirmed the truth about the Lord's healing, delivering, life-giving miracles – truly, 'He saved others'. Yet they also testified to His role as God's sacrificial lamb, come to bear, pay for, and take away the sins of His people – 'himself he cannot save'. Our precious Saviour would not, could not, did not save Himself from the anguish, the humiliation, the pain. Why? Because He loved us too much.

Amen

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