

He Saved Others, He Cannot Save Himself

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2019

Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] The passage that Alistair read for us is, in many ways, one of the most moving passages in Scripture. This is part of the wider narrative of the final few hours leading up to Jesus' death on the cross.

The passage that we read, in many ways, describes how Jesus was treated on his way to the cross. There's an amazing contrast. If you think back just a few days earlier, Jesus had had the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem where many people had welcomed him and rejoiced at his coming.

Now, just a few days later, everything is so different. And reading through this passage, the overriding emphasis is on how badly Jesus was treated.

He was accused, rejected, condemned, insulted, beaten, and mocked. And it's a very distressing picture as we read it.

As we come to a passage like this, we always do so with a sense of pause and reverence and awe at all that Jesus did for us.

[1 : 20] And I want us to think together about this passage. In particular, I want us to focus on the words of verse 31, but I'll just read the wider section that's on the screen.

Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, aha, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.

So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, he saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.

Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. And it's the words in bold that I want us to focus on. He saved others, he cannot save himself.

And I want us to look at these words in two ways. First of all, we're going to say that these words are wrong.

[2 : 19] And then we're going to say that these words are right. But before we do that, I want us to just ask ourselves, who's saying all this and what is being said?

If you look at these verses that are on the screen before you, you can see that there's three groups of people who are insulting Jesus. There's the passers-by in verse 29 and 30, people just wandering past and seeing a crucifixion.

Then there's the religious leaders, verse 31 and 32. You can see the chief priests and the scribes also join in in the mocking. And then finally, at the end of verse 32, you can see that the two thieves who were also crucified alongside Jesus, they took the opportunity to insult him as well.

And reading that, you can almost, I think, detect a kind of link between the two. The passers-by come along and they shout out, save yourself.

As it says, you, the one who could build the temple, destroy the temple and rebuild in three days, save yourself, come down from the cross. And it seems as though the chief priests and the scribes are answering them because they're saying he can't, yes, he saved others, but he can't save himself.

[3 : 37] And maybe the two thieves joined in with this same kind of back and forth. Just as we aside, I want us to notice a couple of interesting points.

First of all, if you look at that, you can see it's interesting to think about the areas, if you like. But if we're going to be all theological and say, think about the theological topics in which Jesus is mocked, you can see that he's mocked as a prophet.

They're saying, you said you would knock down the temple and rebuild it in three days. It's not come through. You're a false prophet. They're mocking him. He's mocked as a priest.

You can't save yourself. You can't, you've got no one. You can't approach God. You can't save yourself. You've got no kind of power as a mediator, as a savior, as a priest.

And then he's mocked as a king, as you can see in verse 32. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down and then we'll believe him. He's mocked as a prophet.

[4 : 41] He's mocked as a priest. And he's mocked as a king. And of course, these are the three great offices, we say, of the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah.

God's anointed one, and as the anointed Messiah, he performs these three great functions as prophet, priest, and king.

And yet in these very areas, he's been mocked and rejected. The second thing I want us just to notice is that the tense that's being used here is important, particularly in verse 31.

Because it says here, the chief priests mocked him to one another. It's not completely clear in English, but in the original language, the tense that's been used indicates that they were doing this again and again and again.

They didn't just say it once, but they repeatedly mocked Jesus. It's as though if you maybe imagine one set of pastors by saying they're like, he saved others, he can't save himself.

[5 : 44] Save himself. And then more came. Same. He can't save himself. There's a repeated continuous emphasis of mocking in their tone and in their words.

And you almost wondered if there was a kind of sense of satisfaction in this chief priests and the scribes, because this is what they'd wanted all along. Throughout the whole of Mark's Gospel, it becomes very clear that for the chief priests and the scribes, their number one goal was to get Jesus killed.

They wanted him executed. Chapter 11, we read that they were looking for ways to destroy him because the crowd were astonished at his teaching. Same again in Mark chapter 14.

In these last few days of Jesus's time before his crucifixion, the chief priests we read in Mark 14, 1, were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him.

This is what they wanted. And I think their mocking is almost like a sort of a kind of horrible gloating in what happened.

[6 : 58] The Bible gives us an immensely vivid description of a crowd of chief priests, scribes, passersby, mocking Jesus as he hung on the cross.

And as I said, we want to notice first of all that these words are wrong. And they're wrong for lots of reasons. We can focus on five very brief.

Firstly, they're wrong because of the motivation behind what's being said. What they're saying, all these words are said in order to mock.

Verse 29, it says, passersby derided him. The word is literally, they blasphemed him. And it conveys the idea of just hurling abuse at somebody.

Then verse 31, you've got that really important two words at the beginning where it says, so also the chief priests. So just as the passersby were just blaspheming and hurling abuse at Jesus, the chief priests and scribes are doing the same thing.

[7 : 59] Their motivation is to blaspheme and mock. That word mocked in verse 31 can also mean to make fun of, to make a fool of.

It's like you can almost hear kind of laughter in their voices. And in so many ways that's wrong. At a very basic level, they're standing before somebody who's dying.

And to shout and mock in that kind of situation is horrible. And what's even worse is the fact that they knew he was innocent.

They're the ones who'd been at the trial. They're the ones who'd heard Pilate say, what's he done wrong? And they're saying, we don't care what he's done, just crucify him. They're the ones who knew that they'd had to bring false charges or tried to bring false charges against him in order to get him to be put to death.

They knew he was innocent and yet they gloated in his death. And perhaps worst of all, that blasphemy and abuse has been hurled at the Son of God himself.

[9 : 14] So there's a horrible motivation behind what's being said. It's wrong. Obviously these words are wrong because they're based on a terrible and gross misunderstanding of Jesus.

The pastors by demonstrate this when they say, he said he would rebuild the temple and he destroyed the temple and rebuild it in three days. Of course, they're completely misunderstanding what Jesus meant.

When Jesus had said that, he'd said, yes, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. But John makes it very clear that he was speaking about the temple of his body.

He would build one not made with hands. These words were used against Jesus in his trial just in Mark chapter 14, a few verses before this, but they represent a misunderstanding of Jesus.

But to the Jews, the idea of a great leader or a king being crucified was just nonsense.

[10:20] Paul speaks about that, how Christ being crucified was a stumbling block to the Jews. To them, a cross was a place of curse. There's absolutely no way that this man could be their king.

He's been crucified. That means he's the lowest of the low. That was why when Pilate put the sign above his head saying, the king of the Jews, they said, no, no, no, don't write the king of the Jews. Write, he said he was the king of the Jews because there's no way this man is king.

To them, the Messiah was meant to be all powerful, all conquering. He was going to come and get rid of the Romans and give them their nation back and be this great military and political deliverer.

Jesus didn't satisfy any of those expectations. He didn't match up. The chief priest describes completely misunderstood Jesus, so they mocked him.

Thirdly, these words are wrong because they're actually quite mindless and they're a mindless denial of the evidence that they've seen.

[11:27] In one sense, those words there in bold are a powerful self-condemnation of the chief priests and the scribes in their rejection of Jesus because they say he saved others, reminding us of the fact that they saw Jesus perform miracles.

They saw Jesus heal people. They saw Jesus do astonishing things. They never, ever denied that Jesus performed these miracles. They just questioned how he did it.

Instead of recognizing that these miracles are a test into the fact that he's the Son of God, they're like, he does that by some kind of demonic power. They didn't deny that he saved others, but they rejected that it could be anything to show that he was divine.

Even though they had seen Jesus prove who he was by these signs, they denied it. It was just a mindless blocking out of the truth.

Fourthly, these words are wrong because they're an attempt to manipulate Jesus. They're basically telling Jesus to prove himself, aren't they?

[12:45] They're saying to one another, he saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.

They're trying to make a bargain. If you do this, then we'll believe. Now, I'm quite sure that that was not a genuine offer.

I don't think it was. But even if it was, it would still be utterly wrong. Who are we to bargain with God? So the words are wrong because of the motivation.

They're wrong because of a misunderstanding. They're wrong because they're mindlessly denying what they've seen. They're wrong because they're trying to manipulate Jesus. And they're wrong, fifthly, because they are totally misjudging the capabilities of Jesus.

Because physically speaking, Jesus is more than capable of coming down from that cross. When Jesus was in Gethsemane, he'd said to his disciples who were looking to kind of resort to violent measures, he said, do you not think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more than 12 legions of angels?

[14:01] Jesus has the whole army of heaven at his disposal. And at that level, he is more than capable of coming down from the cross.

He could have saved himself in a moment. The chief priests and scribes mock him for being unable. But in reality, he is more than able.

They are totally misjudging him. And so in these five ways, at least the words in front of us of verse 31 are wrong.

And I want us just to pause for a moment there and ask the question, what lessons does that have for us? Well I think there's two really important lessons to note.

One here we see very powerfully the danger of a crowd. It's very interesting to notice that in these verses before you, all the mockers who are mentioned are presented in groups.

[15:02] So you have a crowd of pastors by, you have a pair of robbers, and you have a group of priests and scribes. And notice the priests and scribes aren't actually talking to Jesus.

They're talking to each other. You can see that in verse 31. They mocked him to one another saying, he saved others, he can't save himself. And a crowd can be incredibly powerful.

I remember once experiencing this for myself, probably when I was about, oh I don't know, about 10 or 11 years old. I went to my first ever football match, which was Coventry against Aston Villa, way down in England.

My uncle used to live in Northampton and he took us to this football match. And way back then Coventry were actually a Premier League team long, long time ago now. So it was a fairly big match and it was a local Derby, Coventry and Aston Villa are based in Birmingham, which isn't that far away.

And I had no interest in either of these two teams. I was just delighted to go along our football match and I thought, I'll go along and we'll just see who's going to win.

[16:11] And it was at Coventry Stadium and we were in Coventry's kind of patch around Coventry supporters. And not far away from us were the Aston Villa supporters.

And as I said, I had no interest whatsoever in Coventry or Aston Villa as far as I was concerned. They were both just, I was neutral. But during the course of the match, you're watching it and you're in amongst the Coventry crowd and you're like, oh, and by after about an hour, I was the most passionate Coventry fan ever.

And I by about an hour and 10 minutes, I kind of loathed this group of people over there called Aston Villa fans. And you were just caught up in it so much.

And the crowd just stirred you up whereby you were desperate for Coventry to win and desperate for Aston Villa to lose. And full of frustration and hostility to this group of supporters, just 100 yards away who I'd never met.

At one level, it was completely bonkers. And yet it's so easy. A crowd can be so strong. A crowd can self-validate itself.

[17:18] Can't it? So these chief priests are talking to each other, telling one another the same things again. And all the time they're validating their own opinions. That can so easily happen, a crowd can talk itself into all sorts of strange views.

You can see that if you go online, you'll find crowds who are validating themselves with the view that the earth is flat. And validating themselves with the view that, I don't know what other conspiracy theories there are out there.

I don't have any interest in them, but I'm sure you can think of examples yourselves. You can all seem so right. And remember what we said, this is a repeated mocking. It's as though this group is stirring itself up again and again to reject Jesus.

And the crucial thing we have to remember is that, yes, the crowd is powerful, but the crowd can be so wrong. You only have to think back to school days to see the great example of that.

When you're in school, it's the coolest thing in the world to stand in the corner and smoke or vape, it'll be nowadays.

[18:26] It's the coolest thing in the world to pick on somebody. And you can see that in schools, that the crowd validates behavior that later in life you look back on and you really cringe in many ways.

And the same is actually true among adults. And you only have to look at Scotland today to see that crowds, ideologies, pressure groups are pulling us as a nation in certain directions.

The lesson for us is never depend on the crowd. A crowd can seem so influential, so powerful, so strong, but in the end if it's opposed to God, it will come to nothing.

Really has been full of crowds that have been shaking their fist at God and they're gone. It's interesting, in the mid-1960s the president of Russia at the time, in the middle of the space race, had said, we're going to go up into space and we're going to knock God off his throne.

I would tell you his name, but I can't remember it, and I'm pretty sure nobody here can remember his name either, or one or two can, but not many.

[19:49] But that's the point. He's the one who's been knocked off his throne, whatever his name was. And we have to be so careful about being part of a crowd that maybe opposes Jesus.

And that's something that we all need to just think about. Whatever stage in life we're at, in school, students at work, tomorrow you're going to go out into crowds who probably don't think that much about Jesus.

And we just need to be very careful how we interact with that crowd. There's nothing wrong with having fun with the crowd, nothing wrong with just getting the news and chatting with the crowd, but if that reaches the point of gossip, if that reaches the point of speaking about somebody in a way

that you really would not be happy with them hearing, then that's when you need to step back. Nothing wrong with having a laugh with the crowd, but if that leads down the road of drinking too much, kind of losing inhibitions, losing self-control, then that is too much.

We have to be very careful of the power of the crowd. And there's a great example in this passage of why we should never seek to impress the crowd. Jesus could have done that, couldn't he?

[20 : 58] He could have come down from the cross and it would have possibly impressed this crowd or some of them, but it would have been for all the wrong reasons. He would have impressed the wrong people in the wrong way, and that's a very easy trap to fall into.

We can try to impress the wrong people in the wrong way. Instead, we want to make sure that instead of seeking to please man, we want to maintain our place as servants of Jesus, seeking to please God.

But the second thing I want to say is we see the power of the crowd, but as individuals, we also see many mistakes that we can fall into as well. So we said that the priests inscribes, they've misunderstood Jesus, they've mindlessly ignored the evidence they've seen, they've tried to manipulate Jesus, their motivation is wrong, and they misjudge him.

And we think we would never do that, but actually these are easy traps to fall into. So often Jesus and his message is misunderstood.

You can see that throughout our own country today, many people will maybe try to claim an association with Jesus, but don't really understand what Jesus is calling him to do.

[22 : 20] Many people try to just block out the reality of all this and the seriousness of all this, and they kind of just mindlessly think, I don't even want to think about God or Jesus.

Sometimes people try to manipulate Jesus, they'll say, well, Jesus, I'll follow you if you do this.

Some people have the wrong motivation, that's very easy to fall into.

And I guess all of us at times can misjudge Jesus and forget that we'll all stand before him on the day of judgment. We need to watch that we don't make these mistakes.

So these words are very, very wrong. But at the same time, these words are very, very right.

Now, what do I mean by that? Well, the surroundings of this statement are all wrong. The attitudes, the motivation, the behavior of the people, all of that's wrong.

[23 : 27] But in terms of the content of these words, that statement there, those seven words that are in bold, these words are not wrong. These words are right. The scribes and the priests are mocking, but they are making a statement that is 100% true.

Because the truth is, this phrase here summarizes what Christianity is all about. Christianity is all about Jesus saving others.

That's why he came, to seek and to save the lost, to give his life as a ransom for many, as we read at the start, but the only way he could do that was by giving himself up.

If Jesus wants to save others, then the chief priests and the scribes are dead right. He cannot save himself.

And Jesus has known this all along. Back in chapter eight, he began to teach his disciples about the saying that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.

[24 : 43] And after three days rise again. Now, throughout the Gospel of Mark, we've seen that Jesus, well, you'll see if you read it through, you'll see that Jesus had many opportunities to save himself.

At the temptation, he could have given up on his mission, turned back and not had to endure that suffering. But Cesarier Philippi in chapter eight, when he began to tell the disciples that he was going to suffer and die, Peter said, this will never happen to you.

Jesus could have turned back at that moment. And then at Gethsemane, you see it really come to a head where Jesus says, in a way, really don't want this, but not my will, but yours be done.

And even before Pilate in his trial, we read in John's Gospel, Pilate said to him, do you not know that I have the authority to release you, an authority to crucify you? Jesus said, you'd have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above.

Jesus knew all along that he could save himself, but he also knew that saving himself would mean that he would not be able to save others.

[25 : 57] And for that reason, he absolutely cannot save himself. And behind that lies the fact that Christ's will was united to the Father's will.

Therefore he cannot save himself because he must do what the Father needs him to do. Coming down from the cross might have been a physical possibility, but in terms of his relationship with his Father and in terms of the spiritual outcome of his mission, it was absolutely impossible for Jesus. He couldn't save himself because if he did, then he couldn't save others. If he did, he couldn't save you.

And this is the very heart of what Christianity is about. It's about Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of his people.

That's the wonder of the cross, that Christ suffered, Christ died, Christ bore the punishment of our sins. He tasted death. He gave himself up for you.

[27 : 06] And the priests and the scribes taunted Jesus and mocked him. They challenged him to come down, but if Jesus had come down, then all of our hope would have gone.

Therefore this statement is absolutely true. Jesus would agree. Just picture Jesus on the cross and imagine you were there and you heard this shouting and this talking among the chief priests and the rulers.

You hear them saying this, oh, he saved others, he cannot save himself. Imagine that you could say to Jesus, can you come down from the cross?

And his reply would be, no. I can't come down because I am here to save you.

And the reason why Christ couldn't save himself is because of how much he wants to save you.

And that's why for us, these words of mocking become words of adoration.

[28 : 14] He saved me because he didn't save himself. And if you're not yet a Christian, please make that your prayer, Lord, you didn't save yourself, so please save me.

These words are right. These words are true. This is the heart of the gospel.

And again, there's some important lessons for us here. First of all, we see that people can declare the truth, but not really get it.

That's the fascinating thing here. They're mocking. They don't really have any relationship with Jesus at this point, but what they're saying is true. And that can be so true.

We can maybe know the gospel message. We can know a passage like John 3.16 off by heart, but do we really understand it?

[29 : 17] And if you're not sure if you do, then speak to any of us, to me, to Alistair, to one of the other elders, to a Christian friend. Never be slow to ask questions about Jesus.

If you're shy about talking, put them in an email. We don't mind. But just please make sure you know and understand the truth of the gospel.

People can speak the truth, but not really know it. Secondly, we've mentioned this a little bit before, but it's worth thinking about a little bit more.

Jesus did not compromise to please the crowd. Neither must we. We live in a strange situation today where often leaders are led by the crowd.

So often you'll see that in politics, especially when a new party leader needs to be elected. So a party has their leader steps down.

[30 : 16] They need to elect a new leader. What's usually the number one criteria that the people who are voting them in will vote for, they'll say, who will win us an election?

And so they want to vote for the person that the crowd will like the best. So they want a leader who's following the crowd.

A true leader doesn't follow the crowd. A true leader leads the crowd. But if he's any good, the crowd will follow.

And Jesus is the perfect example of that. He was not led by the crowd. He did not compromise. In fact, he leads the crowd. He's the head of the greatest crowd the world has ever seen, the church.

And if you want a real leader, then follow Jesus. And the amazing thing is, is that if you leave the crowd to follow Jesus, what you may very well find is that many of the crowd will probably end up following you too.

[31 : 21] There's an amazing version, Acts chapter 6, which talks about the spread of the church in the early days. And it says, the word of God continued to increase.

The number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. Now there's something astonishing there.

It's the priests who are saying, he saved others, he cannot save himself. And in Acts chapter 6, it's saying, now a great number of them became followers of Jesus.

And that's the amazing thing about the gospel. Even people who mock can become believers. Over the years I've found it amazing. I became a Christian in my early teens. I went through school with not many Christian friends. There weren't many Christians about when I was in school.

[32 : 21] And you see all these people in your class who are cool and trendy and into all the stuff that the crowd are doing. And you just think, you know, that just seems to be what they live for.

And there's been a few times in the years since that I've seen people in school who I would probably never have thought would have become Christians.

I remember one incident in particular in church and seeing somebody walk in and it was for a communion service and they sat down for the communion service and I remember thinking, wow, when did that happen?

And that's the amazing thing about grace. Don't follow the crowd. Follow Jesus. And the whole reason that we can do that is because he himself never compromised.

But the third thing I want to say is that, and maybe this is the most important application of all, this verse does not just summarize the Christian faith.

[33 : 30] It does, but it is also a guide as to how we are to live as Christians. So Jesus put the salvation of others before his own self-preservation.

As Christians, we must do exactly the same because we are not here as members of this church to save ourselves. We are here to save others.

But if we're going to do that, if we're going to see other people saved, we cannot save ourselves. In other words, we cannot save our energy for ourselves. We cannot save our gifts or our resources for ourselves.

We cannot save our prayers for ourselves. We cannot save our church building or our church bank account for ourselves. We're not here to preserve ourselves. We are here so that souls will be saved.

And if that means losing everything, so be it. Our duty is not to preserve ourselves.

[34 : 30] Our duty is to work so that others will come to know Jesus as well. Our lives as Christians are not a treasure to be protected.

They are a resource to be spent. And whether that's praying, serving, spending time together, meeting up as twos and threes, going to city group, getting to know our neighbors, spending time with our colleagues, whatever it may be, we are here to give of ourselves, to serve, so that we can save others through the work of Jesus in us.

So these are amazing words. They're wrong. And we're so thankful to God that Jesus willingly suffered such abuse.

But they are right. And how we thank God that they are right. Jesus couldn't save Himself because He came to save you.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the truth contained in these words, that Jesus saves others because He could not and would not save Himself.

[36 : 10] Father, thank you so, so much for that and help us to see more of just how much you've done for us through your Son, our Savior Jesus.

And we pray, Lord, that as we seek to live our lives for you, that we wouldn't seek to just protect our own interests or preserve our own strength, that we wouldn't just be about saving ourselves, but our goal would be to save others and to share this good news with the world around us.

Amen.