

He Cannot Save Himself

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as we turn to God's Word, we'll just bow our heads in prayer for a moment. Lord, our God, our Father, we thank you for your Word and for all that it teaches us.

And as we read and think about all that led up to the death of our Saviour, we pray, O Lord, that we would come with a spirit of awe and worship that is honouring to you.

And that you would come to us and teach us and draw us closer to you. So, Lord, we look to you and ask that you would bless us and protect us and that you would glorify your name in our midst.

Amen. Well, please turn back to the passage that we read in Mark chapter 15.

These words describe for us how Jesus was treated on his way to the cross. And it gives us a very detailed description. And the overriding emphasis is on how badly Jesus was treated.

[1 : 1 6] He was accused. He was rejected. He was condemned. He was beaten. He was insulted. He was stripped. He was mocked. And the whole passage in Mark chapter 15 that we read from is an immensely distressing picture.

And as we come to a passage like this, we do so with a sense of reverence and awe at what our Saviour experienced.

And I want us to focus, especially tonight, on the words of verse 31. So also, the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, He saved others.

He cannot save himself. And we're going to look at these words, especially the words at the end of that verse, where it says, He saved others.

He cannot save himself. We're going to look at these words in two very simple ways. We're going to say that these words are wrong. And these words are right.

[2 : 3 1] But before we come to it in a bit more detail, let's just orient ourselves and see what exactly did they say. When we read through verse 29 to 32, we see that there are three groups of people, if you like, insulting Jesus.

First of all, you have the passers-by. You can see that in verse 29. 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.

Come down from the cross. That's the first group. Then we also have the robbers that are also mocking him. Those who are crucified with him. And the third group we have are the chief priests and the scribes.

They mocked him to one another saying, he saved himself. He saved others. He cannot save himself. So we have these three groups. You have the passers-by.

You have the chief priests and scribes. And then you have the robbers who also reviled him at the end of verse 32. And it's almost like you can picture in your mind what was going on.

[3 : 39] You can imagine the passers-by and they're shouting, Save yourself. Save yourself. As they go past him. And it is almost as though the chief priests and the scribes are answering that call when they say, He can't.

He can't save himself. He saved others. He cannot save himself. And you can't help wonder whether the robbers were just simply joining in with this frenzy and following the example of those who were around them.

So a couple of interesting points to note just to begin with. First thing to note, just very briefly, is it's fascinating the areas in which Jesus is mocked. He is mocked as a prophet.

They say to him, you said you would rebuild the temple in three days. And so they're mocking his prophecy. He's also mocked as a priest. You can't save yourself.

You can't even act on behalf of yourself, let alone anybody else. And he is mocked as a king. If he is the king of Israel, let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down now.

[4 : 54] And of course these three areas are the three offices of the anointed Messiah. The prophet, the priest, and the king.

And it's almost like it's just a comprehensive picture of rejection. These people are just hurling abuse at Jesus.

Jesus. And they are mocking him in a complete and a total way. Secondly, the tense of the words that are used in verse 31 imply that what the priests and the scribes were saying was a continuous mocking.

They didn't just say it once. But in their groups they were saying it over and over and over again. It's almost like as one passerby said, save yourself. They're saying, he can't. And then another comes and he says, save yourself.

And they're saying, he can't. He saved others. He can't save himself. Every time a passerby goes, passerby, shouts, save yourself. They respond, he can't. And you can almost sense the satisfaction in the words of these priests and scribes.

[6 : 03] And that is no surprise to us because Mark has made it very clear that this is exactly what the chief priests and the scribes wanted.

Right throughout the gospel, he's emphasized that. Chapter 11, verse 18. The chief priests and the scribes heard it and they were seeking a way to destroy him. Likewise, Mark 14, 1.

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him. And we read from the beginning of chapter 15 and you can see that at strategic moments, the chief priests intervene to ensure that Jesus is put to death.

They are the ones who have a consultation in verse 1. They are the ones who accuse him in verse 3. They are the ones who stir up the crowd to release Barabbas in verse 11.

And so Mark is building up for us an incredibly vivid picture of how this crowd of chief priests and scribes is together mocking Jesus as he hung on the cross.

[7 : 24] And these words are wrong. They are so clearly wrong. And they are wrong for five reasons that I'll just go through very, very quickly.

And I'm not really an expert at alliteration, but as it happens, these do all begin with M. So it should be easy to remember, I hope. First of all, these words are wrong because of the motivation behind what they were saying.

The chief priests and the scribes are saying this in order to mock. The passage by, in verse 29, we are told, derided Jesus. Now, literally, that is the word blasphemed.

They blasphemed Jesus. And it conveys the idea of utter irreverence. They're hurling abuse at him. And it's interesting to note that in verse 31 it says, So also the chief priests and the scribes mocked him.

And so just as these pastors by were blaspheming him with that utterly dismissive spirit, so too, likewise, in the same way, the priests are saying these words with the motivation to mock and blaspheme.

[8 : 40] The word used for mock in verse 31 basically means to make a fool of, to make fun of. And you can almost imagine the laughter in their voices.

And if we just think about that for a minute, it's so wrong. If you think about it, it is absolutely appalling to mock somebody who is about to die.

That is awful, regardless of the circumstances. But even worse is the fact that this person is clearly innocent. And they have just manipulated the events leading up to this moment in order to condemn an innocent man.

But the biggest disgrace of it all is that they are mocking the Son of God himself. And so this is just awful blasphemy.

The motivation behind what they say was awful. Secondly, these words are wrong because they're based on gross misunderstanding of Jesus. The pastors by mocked Jesus because of what he said regarding the temple.

[9 : 54] And in doing so, they demonstrated a complete misunderstanding. As John 2 verse 19 says, Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it's taken 40 years to build this temple.

How will you raise it up in three days? But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Now these words had been used against Jesus in his trial. They said he had said he would rebuild the temple in three days.

But as John is revealing to us, these are words that are being completely misunderstood. Furthermore, to the Jews, the idea of a crucified king was nonsense.

That's why Paul said, we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews. To the Jews, the cross was a place of curse.

And because it was such a place of curse, there was no way that this man could be their king. It's no wonder that they said to Pilate, don't write the king of the Jews, but rather this man said, I am king of the Jews.

[11 : 08] To them, the Messiah was supposed to be this all-conquering king. This guy who was going to come and liberate them from the Romans and re-establish their own kingdom. And the fact that he is there dying on a cross just did not satisfy their expectations.

And we see that they completely misunderstood Jesus. And therefore they mocked him. Thirdly, these words are wrong because they are a mindless denial of the evidence they have seen.

It's really important to recognize just how mindless all of this is. Because this phrase is, at one level, a self-condemnation of the priests and the scribes.

Because they say, he saved others. Now, there's no doubt that refers to the fact that he healed people. Jesus saved people from all sorts of desperate situations.

And these men had seen it. They had seen Jesus do miracles. They had seen him open people's eyes that were blind and heal people who couldn't walk.

[12 : 20] And yet they claimed that it was by Beelzebub that Jesus had done it. And so even though they had seen Jesus do all these miracles, they just mindlessly denied it.

And they were not in any way willing to consider that Jesus could be anything other than a servant of the devil. And so it was a mindless denial of what they had seen.

Fourthly, these words are wrong because they are an attempt to manipulate Jesus. The priests and the scribes are basically telling Jesus to prove himself. You can see that in verse 32.

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. They're basically trying to make a bargain. They're saying, Jesus, you do that. You come down.

And then we'll believe you. Now, I don't believe for a moment that their offer was genuine. But even if it was, it would be so wrong.

[13 : 26] Because who are we to bargain with God? So the words are wrong because of the motivation, because of the misunderstanding, because it's a mindless denial, because they are trying to manipulate Jesus.

And then fifthly, these words are wrong because they completely misjudge the capabilities of Jesus. They said, he cannot save himself.

Now, physically speaking, Jesus could have saved himself in a moment. Did he not say in Gethsemane, do you not think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more than 12 legions of angels?

Jesus has the whole army of heaven at his disposal. And physically speaking, he is more than capable of coming down from the cross. He could save himself in a moment.

The priests and the scribes are mocking Jesus for being unable. But in reality, Jesus is more than able. Far more able than they realize.

[14 : 37] They are misjudging him. And so in these five ways, and probably in many other ways as well, the words of verse 31 are utterly wrong.

And I just want us to pause for a moment there and ask what lessons are there for us here? Well, I think there's two really, really important lessons in these verses.

First of all, we see the danger of a crowd. It's really interesting to note that all the mockers of Jesus mentioned in these verses are presented as groups.

It's a crowd of passersby. It's a pair of robbers. And it's a group of priests and scribes. And it's really interesting to notice.

Look again at what it says in verse 31. It says, The chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another.

[15 : 39] They weren't talking to Jesus when they said this. They were talking to each other. And it's almost like they are trying to stir themselves up.

And it's a reminder that a crowd can be incredibly powerful. I remember as a young boy, I went to my first ever football match. Like, I was going to say a real football match.

That's probably not the right way to say it. But a professional football match. And it was Coventry against Aston Villa. My uncle lived not far from Coventry.

And we were staying there. And he took us to watch Coventry against Aston Villa. And it was at Coventry Stadium. Now, I had no interest in Coventry or Aston Villa.

I didn't even really know where Coventry was. But as it happened, it was nearby. So we got to go to this game. Now, we were watching this match. And what I hadn't realized was that they're actually local rivals.

[16 : 35] Coventry is not far from Birmingham, which is where Aston Villa come from. And so there was a bitter rivalry between the two teams. And I was in this crowd. And not far away from us were the Aston Villa fans.

And all the way through this match, you are watching these two crowds hurling insults at each other. Now, up until that point, I could not care less about Coventry or about Aston Villa.

For the record, I support Aberdeen. But in that match, by the end of that match, I hated Aston Villa.

And I loved Coventry. Because the crowd was stirring me up. A crowd can be incredibly powerful. And remember what we said about the tense of this verb.

They are saying it again and again and again. And it is so the group is just stirring itself up to reject and to mock Jesus. A crowd can be powerful, but a crowd can be so wrong.

[17 : 41] And a crowd can be so foolish. You only have to think back to when you were in school. When you were in school, smoking and drinking and doing stupid things is the coolest thing in the world, isn't it?

And I don't know about you, you go through your teenage years thinking you know it all and then you reach your 20s and you think, what an idiot I was. And yet, at that time, in that crowd, it can pull you in the wrong direction.

And today, as a nation, the crowd of secularism is pulling Scotland down a very, very dangerous path.

And the lesson for us is never depend on the crowd. Never depend on the crowd. They might seem so influential now, they might seem powerful, but if it is opposed to God, then it will come to nothing.

Because throughout history, there have been countless crowds who have opposed Jesus and who have opposed biblical teaching. Once upon a time, there was a crowd called the Docketists who opposed biblical teaching and said that Jesus didn't have a real body, he just seemed that way.

[19 : 01] There was another crowd called the Gnostics who said you have to be saved by some kind of special secret knowledge. There was another crowd called the Marcionites who rejected the Old Testament and half of the New Testament.

And there was another crowd called the Arians who said that Jesus wasn't God. Now, have you heard of the Docketists or the Gnostics or the Marcionites or the Arians? I hope that you haven't.

Because the point is, is that these crowds have disappeared. They seemed powerful once, but now they are history.

So we have to watch out for crowds and we have to be very, very careful about being part of a crowd that opposes Jesus. That's a big challenge for us as Christians because we spend our lives in amongst different crowds.

You go to work, you're in one crowd. You go to school, you're in another crowd. You maybe play football or do a sport, you're in another crowd. And it's important that we are in these crowds as Christians, but we have to be on guard because when they step over that line which takes us away from biblical teaching, then we have to make sure that we don't go with them.

[20 : 18] And so we have to be careful not to follow the crowd. We also have to be careful not to impress the crowd. Jesus could have come down from the cross and he might have impressed these chief priests and scribes, but it would have been for the wrong reasons.

And so often we can try to impress the wrong people in the wrong way. And so if the crowd you work with is mocking somebody or if they're heading off down an immoral path or if your school friends or the people you know are doing things that you know are wrong, we might impress them by joining in.

But we must make sure we stop ourselves. Paul's words need to be our words. For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God?

Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. So the first lesson is to watch the crowd.

The second thing is that these mistakes made by the scribes and chief priests are mistakes that we can make as well.

[21 : 39] These people misunderstood Jesus. They mindlessly ignored the evidence they had seen. They sought to manipulate him. Their motivation was wrong. They misjudged Jesus.

And we can make those same mistakes as well. So often Jesus and his message are misunderstood. Even here in Lewis where the gospel has a wonderful heritage in recent times.

So many people misunderstand what the gospel is all about. People mindlessly ignore the reality of all of this and maybe think to themselves, oh, I'm sure I'll be fine one day.

I don't need to worry about this. People are mindless in their approach to this. People can try and manipulate and bargain with Jesus. Well, Jesus, if you do this, then I'll follow you.

Or if you make sure that this doesn't happen, then I'll follow you. Or even the reverse, which is probably more common, this happened, therefore I am not going to follow Jesus. Something happened in my life, so I'm not going to seek him.

[22 : 42] People might have the wrong motivation. They might think, if I become a Christian, people will think I'm great or whatever. And people can misjudge Jesus.

and they can forget that we will all stand before him on the day of judgment. And so, we look at these chief priests and scribes and we think and we know and we see that what they do is wrong.

But we remember that we have to be really careful that we don't make these mistakes ourselves. So, as we can see, in many ways, the words of verse 31 are utterly wrong.

wrong. But everything that we have said up to this point is in regard to the attitude and the presuppositions of the priests and the scribes.

These things are all wrong. But we haven't yet said anything about the content of the words themselves. And that is because the phrase itself, he saved others but he cannot save himself is not wrong.

[24 : 15] These words are not wrong. They are right. The priests and the scribes are mocking but they are actually making a statement that is 100% true.

The truth is this phrase 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. God but the only way that Jesus could do it was by giving himself up.

Jesus came to save lost sinners. Jesus came to save those who could never save themselves. Jesus came on a mission to rescue those who were in desperate need.

and if Jesus wants to save them and if Jesus wants to save you and to save me then the priests and the scribes are right. They are dead right.

[25 : 36] He cannot save himself. And Jesus has known this all along.

In Mark 8 31 he began to teach them 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 and after three days rise again.

And when you read through the Gospels you see that Jesus had many opportunities to save himself. At the temptation he had the opportunity to give in to the devil's pressure and to relieve himself of this burden and to save himself.

At Caesarea Philippi in Mark chapter 8 when Peter said this will never happen to you when Jesus had said he was going to go to the cross. Jesus could have saved himself and said well you're right Peter I'm not going to do it at all.

At Gethsemane when he was overwhelmed with the pressure of what lay ahead he could have turned back and even before Pilate we read in John 19 Pilate said to him you will not speak to me do you not know that I have the authority to release you and authority to crucify you.

[26 : 50] Jesus answered him you would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above. Jesus knows that in a moment he could walk away from Pilate but Jesus knew that saving himself would mean that he would never have been able to save others therefore he cannot save himself and this is where we see that Christ's will was united to the father's will therefore he cannot save himself he must do what the father wants him to do he must be what the father needs him to be and coming down from the cross at this moment in Mark 15 was a physical possibility but it was a spiritual impossibility because this is why he came and this is what the father wanted and this is what

Jesus needed to do he could not save himself because if he did he couldn't save others he couldn't save you and this is the heart of what Christianity is all about Christ's death on the cross is a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of his people and that's the wonder of the cross that's why the cross is so amazing Christ suffered Christ died Christ bore the punishment of our sin Christ tasted death Christ gave himself up for you and for me Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to

God as Ephesians 5 2 says the priests and the scribes were mocking Jesus they were challenging him to come down but if Christ had come down then all of our hope would have gone therefore this statement is absolutely true he saved others he cannot save himself Christ would agree with the words that were being hurled at him and I want you just to picture Christ on the cross and imagine that you were there and imagine that you are hearing all of this mocking going on and you're hearing this challenge come down prove that you're the king of Israel prove that you're the Messiah come down you saved others surely you can save yourselves imagine you're hearing all that and imagine you could go to

Jesus and say to him can you can you come down can you save yourself and his reply would be I can't because I am here to save you Christ couldn't save himself because of how much he wants to save you and that is where for us as Christians these words of mocking become words of adoration he saved me because he didn't save himself save and if you are not a Christian yet make that your prayer

Lord you didn't save yourself so please please save me these words are true these words are right he saved others he cannot save himself that is the very heart of the gospel and again there are many many lessons for us here and I just want to mention three very briefly before we close the first is this people can declare the truth but not get it isn't that true of these priests and scribes they're saying something that's true and yet they have no idea what they're saying and that's why we have to make sure make absolutely sure that we really understand this and that we really see what the gospel is all about that it is about

[32 : 13] Jesus dying in our place to save us and if you don't yet understand that or if you're not true about it or if you have questions please speak to somebody please ask someone to explain it to you because you need to make sure that you understand the truth of the gospel there is nothing nothing more important than that it's tragic really what these scribes and priests were saying the truth was on their lips and yet it meant nothing to them god forbid that any of us are ever like that secondly Jesus did not compromise in order to please the crowd we've touched on this a little bit again we must not do that we live in a very strange period in history because we live in a situation today where leaders are led by the crowd isn't that true leaders are led by the crowd one of the clearest examples of this is the whole fuss that was made about

Jeremy Corbyn when he became the leader of the Labour Party people opposed Jeremy Corbyn and they said we don't want him as leader because people won't vote for him and we won't win an election if he is our leader and all that is is being led by the crowd the people in the Labour Party are saying we just want the leader who's going to be popular we want the one that the crowd are going to like but a true leader is not led by the crowd a true leader leads the crowd and if he is a good leader the crowd will follow and the best leader of all is Jesus Christ he was not led by the crowd he did not compromise in fact he is the one who leads the crowd he is the head of the greatest crowd the world has ever seen the church of Jesus Christ and if you want a real leader then follow

Jesus and it's interesting to note that if you leave another crowd to follow Jesus you might well find out that that crowd ends up following you as well there's a really interesting verse in Acts chapter 6 verse 7 it says the word the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith did you see what that said priests came to faith and I just wonder whether some of those priests were some of the priests who stood mocking Jesus don't ever ever stay away from Jesus in order to stick with another crowd follow Jesus and you may well find that the crowd will follow you one of the most amazing things that

I have experienced in my life is the fact that when I was in school I was converted maybe when I was about 14 and there weren't many Christians in my class in school and as I grew up you lost touch with people and people who you saw every day in class you never saw them again and as I said there weren't that many Christians in my year but I remember years later sitting at a communion and all of a sudden one of my classmates who I hadn't seen since school walked up and sat at the table and I thought wow he's come to faith and I have classmates in here tonight who have come to faith as well and it's amazing to see that that very often the crowd you leave behind ends up coming with you in

God's time so don't be afraid follow Jesus he is the best leader of all but the third lesson I want to say is this these words sum up the Christian faith they sum up what Jesus did but these also these words also sum up for us how we are to live as Christians in other words Christ put the salvation of others before his own self preservation and we have got to do the same in other words we are not here as church members to save ourselves we are here to save others we are here to bring the gospel to other people and if we are going to save others then we can't save ourselves we can't save our energy for ourselves or our gifts and talents for ourselves we can't save our resources for ourselves or our prayers for ourselves we can't save our church building or church bank balance just for ourselves we are not here to preserve ourselves we are here as

[37 : 58] God's people to save others and if that means that we have to give up everything then we'll do it because nothing matters more than that people will be saved our duty is not towards the preservation of ourselves our duty is towards the salvation of others one of the wonderful things about living in Carlisle is that the drive from Carlisle to Stornoway is just long enough to listen and I listen to lots of sermons and I listen to lots of preachers who are a thousand times better than me but one of the sermons I listened to was one by my colleague Joe Bernard who's the minister in Kiltarlilly Free Church and he said something that I thought was very striking he said as Christians our lives are not a treasure to be protected our lives are a resource to be spent our lives are a resource to be spent in the service of

God now as we do that we will be weak and we will give ourselves to the point of weakness but we will do it because God is with us and that is when we are at our strongest when we are serving him and if we lose part of ourselves if we lose our energy or if we have to give up something in order to further the cause of the gospel if we are worn out or spent then it is just a small step towards doing for Jesus what he did for us that that that that is that is that is that is that is that is rubbish in comparison to knowing Jesus and serving him and pressing on towards that upward call of God in Christ Jesus these words sum up the gospel but they also sum up how we are to live our lives and that's why if you're thinking about going to the table the fears or hesitations that you have really really really don't matter because we are here to live for

Jesus we are here to serve him as his people and we are here to go out to Stornoway and to our island and to our nation and to tell them that Jesus died he didn't save himself and he did that to save others and we are here to gladly nail our colors to the cross and to say we are God's people and we are living for him and we want to share the amazing news of Jesus and so don't worry about saving yourself from what people might say or saving yourself from attention or saving yourself from the fact that you're worried that you'll make mistakes or anything like that don't worry about that just follow Jesus and obey him so these are really amazing words I think they are absolutely wrong in the sense that

Jesus suffered so unfairly and we are so thankful to God that Jesus was willing to suffer such abuse these words are wrong but these words are right and thank God that these words are right he could not save himself because he is saving you amen let us pray God our father we thank you so much for what your word teaches us and we just pray that we would understand more about it and that we would grasp and treasure and rejoice in everything that you have done for us through your son our Lord Jesus Christ and how we thank you that he did not save himself and that you did not withhold but you gave up your only son so that we might be saved and as this congregation looks forward to remembering

Christ's death tomorrow we pray Lord that they would be so encouraged and so overflowing with joy because he did not save himself because he came to save us we thank you for Jesus and God we bow before you and we gladly gladly proclaim that we are yours and we thank you so much that Jesus has made that possible so bless us Lord and lead us on in Jesus name Amen