

## Luke 23:33-43

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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This lesson, chosen for Christ the King / The Reign of Christ Sunday, seems to be chosen as a deliberate counter-point to the temptation to rush to a quick and easy, "Christ the all-powerful King will rescue you from all physical hardships, and prevent any bad things from happening to you," type of sermons.

Indeed, the question that cries out from the page is, "If Jesus can't save himself, how can he save us?"

The taunting of the leaders, soldiers and the one criminal: "If you are the King / Messiah, save yourself," are all part of the humiliation of Jesus that is intended not only to kill him physically, but to also kill him "inspirationally." That is, to make sure that all hopes and dreams that the crowds had begun to place in Jesus were also terminated. This will not be a heroic death. His followers will not be able to glory in his noble death as a martyr for their cause.

Their taunting reveals a new found sense of confidence that finally they can challenge Jesus publicly and he will not have a come-back that will only further embarrass them, and further prove their powerlessness before him. They are demonstrating THEIR power and authority is now THE power and authority and folks had better start paying attention to what THEY say, and forget about this Jesus fellow.

So, why doesn't Jesus save himself?

He's done some pretty amazing miracles in the past. Why doesn't he just climb down from the cross? Or even, at a minimum, why doesn't he have some witty remark to once again rebut the taunting? He has always bested his opponents in the past, why not now?

What sort of Saviour can't even save himself? How can this be good news?

A couple of things from Jesus' past complicate any easy response.

First, we know that Jesus does not "do" miracles on demand. That's because Jesus was not a miracle worker. That is, the core of his purpose was not to "do" miracles. Jesus "does" miracles only as natural signs of the real presence of the Kingdom of God being really "at hand." In other words, Jesus is not an entertainer, is not here simply to amuse and amaze.

Second, Jesus has already dealt with this taunt way back in Luke 4:9-13:

Then the devil took him (Jesus) to Jerusalem, and placed him on a high pinnacle of the temple saying, "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

'He will command his angels, concerning you, to protect you,' and

'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The taunting of Jesus on the cross is actually a temptation; a temptation to misunderstand and mis-use the nature of God and of Jesus' relationship with God.

And it is a temptation that is contained in the one sneaky little word, "If." **IF** you are the Messiah ..." raises the hidden possibility that maybe you're not. The word, "if," raises questions and doubts about the true nature of God and of Jesus' relationship with God and demands an immediate, conclusive, answer. It gets us thinking - or rather, doubting. And it shifts us from relating with Jesus to reasoning about him; from love to logic; from our hearts to our heads.

If Jesus really is the son of God, why doesn't he save himself? What does it mean to believe in a Saviour who doesn't save himself?

All of us would very much like to have a saviour who would come to the rescue, kill the bad guys, cure the disease, end the injustice, and solve every painful circumstance. But that's not the kind of saviour Jesus is.

Salvation is not an event. It is not a miracle that rescues us from pain. Salvation is a relationship. It is an intimate, true and trusting knowing of God. It has nothing to do with circumstances. Are you rolling in clover? Great. But how is your relationship with God? Are you in the midst of an excruciating dying? Terrible. But how is your relationship with God?

And relationships are about loving commitments not logical convictions. We persist in relationships, not because they are logical and reasonable, but because we are committed to constructive connections that ground the very core of our being; that provide the hope for health and growth into maturity, wholeness and well-being.

The salvation of Jesus is not about miraculous changing of circumstances - climbing down off crosses, etc. The salvation of Jesus is about a relation - God's relationship with us - that endures, survives and persists through all circumstances. And, I believe, brings us finally to Paradise - a final circumstance that ends all circumstances; and instead brings us finally, fully and freely into a relationship of healing, reconciliation, justice and lasting peace and joy.

Truth be told, many days I'd rather have the miracle, but unfortunately, all God offers is unending grace and love.