

March 6, 2016

THE IRONY

Matthew 27:39-44

It's still the same scene, Golgotha, the Crucifixion of Christ; but the point of view has changed. It's as if we can see the setting through the eyes of Christ, or, at least hear what's happening – what He hears – around Him. Jesus had already been mocked by the Roman soldiers. After He had been flogged, He was dragged into the Praetorium, the headquarters for Rome in Jerusalem, and there, He was mocked, and given a crown of thorns. What is happening now is not so much a profusion of more mockery as it is a series of outbursts of scorn.

The people nearby are taunting Jesus, they may not be laughing at Him, but they all seem to want to get in a few last jabs. It's like kicking someone when they're already down – it makes you, the kicker, feel powerful, self-satisfied, superior. You've gotten the better of them, now let them really have it. The more you can cut them down, the more you think it builds you up. "You thought you were so great! Look where you are now! Ha!

"You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days... save yourself! Come down from the Cross, if you are the Son of God!" (v. 40) How foolish to think, from the world's point of view, that this is the way God would save us from our sins. But...someone acknowledged the saving grace witnessed by the life of Christ! Someone said, *"He saved others!"* ... *"But He can't save Himself!"*

What if He did come down from the Cross? What if He did save Himself? What if laser beams suddenly shot out of His eyes and He vaporized a few of His scorners? That would be so cool! But I can remember when I was a teenager, and someone suggested how it would have been totally awesome if Jesus had done something like that, something supernatural, superhuman. But the conversation turned to how people would focus on the phenomenal, believed in the extraordinary actions of Christ. We wouldn't need faith. We wouldn't need the Sacrifice of the Cross – the Sacrifice wouldn't have been complete, without the Death.

The irony of this moment is that Jesus had saved others, He was saving me when He was suffering on the Cross. The irony was that, by the power of God, He could have come down from the Cross... "He can't save Himself!" Can't, or, Won't?

A little aside seems necessary, here. Why do we need a savior? Well, God is holy, and heaven is a holy place. Nothing unholy can come into the Presence of God. We need to be made holy, righteous. We need to deal with our sinful nature. That is what happened on the Cross. Jesus died to make us holy. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the Cross to pay for our sins. His death makes us righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - *For he hath made Him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*

Galatians 2:19b - 20 -- *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

It's curious – the idea of saving only ourselves. Often, we think that once we have experienced God's saving grace in Jesus Christ, we've got our ticket to heaven. But a true follower of Christ should realize that that's not all there is to the Christian faith. Once we have found the cure, and received it, we should want to lead others to that cure! That's how wonderful the cure is! But I think we forget how great it is to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We get used to it. And, like the way we might take our glasses for granted after a while, we forget how great it was when we first began to see things

clearly. And putting on our glasses just became part of our daily routine. Don't let the grace of God be just a routine thing. Don't take it for granted!

But there's nothing routine about the wonderful gift that comes to us because of the sacrifice our Savior made on our behalf! Salvation is a wonderful gift. But... like so many wonderful gifts, we put them on a shelf or in a closet and all but completely forget about them. Or, at least, that's the way it seems. That's the way we often act. The complacency of our faith is just as scornful as the words spoken with such a scornful tone by the Chief Priests, the Teachers of the Law, and the Elders when they said, "*He is the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the Cross, and we will believe in Him!...*" (v. 42) No you wouldn't! If Jesus had come down from the Cross at that moment, they would probably have credited it to some demonic power. They weren't doubters, they were rejecters! And they have become the blasphemers,...the very crime they used to accuse Jesus in order to condemn Him.

In Matthew, both the thieves that were crucified with Christ joined in the taunting scorn. The only reason they might do so might have been to make themselves superior to Jesus. If they could sympathize with the crowd, they might think better of them. Matthew didn't hear the hope expressed by the penitent thief that Luke heard about. (Luke 23:39-43)

But then, trust comes into the irony of this scene. "*He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if God wants Him, for He said, 'I am the Son of God!'*" But that's exactly what Jesus was doing... He trusted God, and on Sunday, God raised Him from the grave...which proved to those who truly trust God that Jesus was exactly who He said He was!

Let us trust God. Let us trust Him to help us rise out of our complacency, to set our hearts on fire in such a way that our faith brings glory to Christ instead of scorn, that it brings righteousness to light instead of watering down the honorable title of *Christian*, that it brings blessings to the lives of others in such a way that they will want what we have. For we have found the cure. It's in our midst. It is the saving grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, and we want the world to know what we know!

Pass it on!