

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 130

“He Saved Others; Himself He Cannot Save”

Text: *“Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; Himself He cannot save” (Mark 15. 31).*

I am sure all of you must have noticed that in various parts of Scripture there are words which were spoken in scorn, and yet there is a blessed meaning hidden in them. I am sure you can think of many such occasions. Just to mention one: when they said in scorn, “This Man receiveth sinners.” What a blessed gospel truth! What a blessing that has been made to many, though it was spoken in scorn and in contempt! So we have it here. This word spoken in scorn: “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” As our hymnwriter says:

“The words a gracious meaning have,
Though meant in scorn by you.”

Really, it is the foundation of a sinner’s hope. What a blessing this word has been made to many! What a beautiful hymn it is that is written on this text (1012)!

“Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” One of the most sad and trying, difficult things for any person in trouble, and especially in great distress, is to be mocked, for people to laugh at them, to mock at their calamities, to speak scornful words. O but especially with the dear Lord Jesus when He was in the agonies of death, and O what a weight this added to His sin-atonement sufferings.

What a solemn thing that we are reminded here that it was the chief priests and the scribes – if you will, the leaders of the people; if you will, the most respectable people, people who should have known how to act with some kind of decorum. But we have it: “They that passed by railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others;

Himself He cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe” – even that twisting the gracious, loving words of the suffering Saviour and using them against Him. We have to say,

“O Thou dear suffering Son of God,
How does Thy heart to sinners move!
Sprinkle on me Thy precious blood;
Help me to taste Thy dying love.”

“He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” What a remarkable statement this is. The Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, “Himself He cannot save.” Yet of course, in one glorious sense, it was an easy thing for Him to save Himself. As we sing,

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

You remember what He said to Pilate when Pilate said, “I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release thee.” He said, “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above.” And He said how He could pray His Father and He would immediately send twelve legions of angels to deliver Him. And then we think again of how in the Garden of Gethsemane there came that cruel troop to arrest Him, headed by Judas Iscariot. The Lord Jesus said, “Whom seek ye? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am He,” and at that almighty word, they fell backwards in helplessness to the ground.

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly.”

And the Lord Jesus again spoke so kindly to them. “Whom seek ye?” And again, in the hardness, bitterness of their hearts, they cried, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Then you see the love. “Himself He cannot save.” “If therefore ye seek Me,” take Me, bind Me, crucify Me, but – this is an almighty word: “let these go their way.” And that was not just spoken for His immediate disciples. It was spoken concerning all His beloved people, right down to the end of time, including some of you here this evening – I hope all of you. “Let these go their way.” As Krummacher beautifully says: the passport of the whole blood-bought church of God to heaven: “Let these go their way.”

“Himself He cannot save.” So:

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly.”

But, “Himself He cannot save.” Why? Because He was there with a covenant engagement from all eternity, that in the fulness of time He would suffer on the cross and lay down His life for sinners. That is why “Himself He could not save.”

“Himself He cannot save.” There was a multitude whom no man could number, for whom He was dying, making the atonement for sin. If He did save Himself, then no sinner would ever have been saved. They must all have perished to all eternity.

“Himself He cannot save.” He came with that loving desire to obey His Father’s will. “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God.” And so He must die, this being part of His eternal Father’s will. “Himself He cannot save,” because He had loved His people with an everlasting love, and this was the supreme display of His love, that though it were an easy thing for Him to save Himself, yet “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

So beloved friends, we see salvation here, the foundation of salvation, but we see substitution here. It is a great point in real religion: substitution; He instead of me; Christ taking the sinner’s place; Christ dying, that the sinner might be free. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust,” or as it means, the Just in the place of the unjust. The old preachers often used to say how the Lord Jesus died “in the room, place and stead of His people.” Now that is substitution, and it is a doctrine which is mocked and derided today. The doctrine is mocked and derided just as much as the dear, suffering Saviour was Himself.

I will tell you one thing. Living souls will not mock this doctrine. It is a doctrine they love, and the reason being, apart from this doctrine, apart from substitution, He instead of me, apart from this beautiful yet solemn word, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save” – apart from this word, you and I would have no hope. What did we sing just now?

“Here we have a firm foundation;
Here’s the refuge of the lost.”

And so we have this beautiful, gospel truth: “He saved others” – unworthy sinners – “with an everlasting salvation” – who could never save themselves. There is something to rejoice in here, something to thank the Lord for. There is a refuge here to flee to. There is a hiding place from the wrath of God. There is forgiveness here. There is cleansing here. There is hope for the worst of sinners who lives to feel his need, hope for those of you here this evening who have lived to feel your need.

“He saved others; Himself He cannot save.”

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Thursday, 20th May, 2021

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“Himself He cannot save.”
Insulting foe, ’tis true;
The words a gracious meaning have,
Though meant in scorn by you.

“Himself He cannot save.”
This is His highest praise.
Himself for others’ sake He gave,
And suffers in their place.

It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.

’Tis love the cause unfolds,
The deep mysterious cause,
Why He who all the world upholds,
Hangs upon yonder cross.

Let carnal Jews blaspheme,
And worldly wisdom mock;
The Saviour’s cross shall be my theme,
And Christ Himself my Rock.

T. Kelly