

## THE LOGIC OF THE CROSS

"He saved others; himself he cannot save." Matthew 27:42.

Through the ages the seven sayings from the cross have arrested the attention of believers. But the words to the cross have suffered neglect. Men have usually shrunk from repeating these cries of reviling and derision and blasphemy. Yet they also are quite significant.

When these words in our text were spoken the last scene in the earthly life of the Son of God was about over. These words constitute one of the taunts the chief priests flung at the Christ while He was hanging on the cross. But this was only one of the taunts. There were many others. This was the most bitter and base taunt of all. These same enemies of the Christ also said, "If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." Then, they added, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God."

These words were spoken in derision by His enemies. However, they spoke much more than they knew. These were profound words. Each of their statements contained an element of truth. The first part of each one is a very obvious truth. "He saved others"--certainly that was true. "If He be the King of Israel"--certainly He was. "He trusted in God"--most assuredly that was true. There was truth in every one of their taunts. These enemies of Christ unwittingly proclaimed the truth concerning Him. In spite of themselves, and quite unintentionally, they unconsciously paid a high tribute to Christ in their bitter taunt. But what a pity that these men made a wrong use of the truth! They drew wrong conclusions.

These words of cutting scorn, which were spoken by the chief priests, the scribes and the elders, surpassed all others in the keenness of their mockery and the intensity of their virulence. They were the taunts of hatred. While the ignorant rabble pressed near the cross to hurl their revilings into the face of Christ, the dignified movers of the crowd stood apart from the cross, moving up and down before it, speaking among themselves so that the Saviour could hear, and talking scoffingly about Him. Nodding their heads significantly to one another, they said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

Many true words have been spoken in jest, and it was the case on this occasion. In their delusion they saw in His crucifixion what they believed to be a complete frustration of His claims. There is an air of relief in the words they spoke. They were not sure until now that He would not save Himself. They knew that He had unusual power at His command. They were not ignorant of the life which Jesus had lived, and of the works which He had done during these recent years. They exercised great care to keep themselves informed regarding what He said and what He did. And thus far they had succeeded. He had been arrested, tried, condemned, and was hanging on the cross.

He had saved others, but would He save Himself? As the day wore on, they watched Him on the cross, and waited through the slowly moving hours. What if He should put forth that mysterious power He had used on former occasions, liberate His hands and His feet from the nails, and come down from the cross, thereby covering all of His adversaries with shame and confusion? Their anxiety was very real, and the torment of the suspense was great. What they could not understand at all was the possibility of one having power and never using it for himself. To them this was inconceivable. When they were finally persuaded that He was going to allow Himself to suffer and to die, they, with triumphant relief, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

Such were the words of cutting scorn with which ungrateful men repaid the love of the Christ. Perhaps they are the most cruel words ever spoken. And yet it may be that they contain within themselves the most sublime testimony that was ever offered to the character and work of Christ. "He saved others." Indeed He did. That was the truth. He saved

them physically and spiritually. He took away their sicknesses and forgave their sins. He healed their bodies and saved their souls.

"He saved others; Himself He cannot save" is a statement which asserts the necessity of sacrifice. But it is not the necessity of impotence. Rather, it is the necessity of obedience to a law, of the fulfillment of a condition, and of the acceptance of a lot. For a sacrifice to be entirely noble and perfectly beautiful, it must be a willing sacrifice, it must have a worthy purpose, and it must be impelled by love.

We note that Jesus Christ died in perfect willingness. It was not the Roman guard which forced Him to go to the cross, and not the driven nails which held Him to its beams. He said, "I lay down My life of Myself; no man taketh it from Me." That He remained on the cross was not due to His impotence, but to the fact that He willed to remain there for the noblest purpose the human mind can conceive, namely, the redemption of man and his restoration to the image of God.

In order to save Himself it would have been necessary for Him to turn His back upon His Father's will, as well as upon the work which He had come to do. Christ remained on the cross because He had purposed steadfastly to do the Father's will. The Saviour's death was marked out and determined before the foundation of the world. Before Adam was created the fall was already anticipated in the mind of God. A Saviour from sin was appointed before sin actually entered into the world.

No matter what it would cost Him, Christ was determined to remain on the cross to the end. Viewed from the standpoint of God's plan, Christ could not save Himself. His purpose was to do the Father's will. Viewed from the standpoint of His everlasting love, He could not save Himself. He had come to seek and to save the lost, and in order to do these things it was necessary for Him to take their place.

Because Christ would not come down from the cross, His enemies said that He could not. They should have known that the same power that made it possible for Him to save others could also enable Him to save Himself. But Jesus Christ had no place in His program for the saving of Himself. To have descended from the cross would have been to falsify every Old Testament prediction, rite and sacrifice; to have repudiated His own teaching; to thwart the eternal plan of His Father in heaven; and to have left souls unredeemed forever. But, He did not come down from the cross. Instead, He died that we might have life everlasting.

Perhaps you have read the story of a man who fell from a high scaffold and of another man below who reached out his arms to catch him. The falling man was scarcely injured, but when he struck the man who was trying to catch him the force of his fall drove his arms into their sockets, broke his shoulder, frightfully pushed his spine out of shape and caused him to go through life terribly deformed. After months of awful suffering, the injured man rose from his bed to walk the streets an object of pity to every person who saw him. One day he was asked what had become of the man whom he had protected. What kind of a look do you suppose came over his face? It was a bright one and he said, "He gave half of his property to his rescuer, he divides his earnings with me now, and never allows me for a moment to be in want." Ah, there is something that men know how to appreciate. But suppose he had forgotten him. Suppose he had turned away from him when he met him on the street and refused to recognize his obligation to him. I know what you would say. And yet there are some of you who seem to forget that there is One Who was maimed and bruised and crushed and broken for you, Who put Himself between you and eternal death, and Who has been kept waiting all these years for just a look of grateful recognition, or a word of sincere appreciation. If you will only be silent, I am confident that you will hear Him in accents low and tender:

"I gave My life for thee;  
My precious blood I shed,  
That thou might'st ransomed be,  
And quickened from the dead.  
I gave, I gave My life for thee,  
What hast thou given for Me?

"I suffered much for thee,  
More than thy tongue can tell,  
Of bitterest agony,  
To rescue thee from hell;  
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,  
What hast thou borne for Me?"