
The Brutal Taunts

*“And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads. . . . In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him. . . . The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words” (Matthew 27:39, 44).
“The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine” (Luke 23:36).*

At the foot of the cross, we see religious sinners, ignorant sinners, civil sinners, and condemned sinners at their worst. Matthew, Mark, and Luke pictured these four groups of humanity taunting Jesus as He was hanging on the cross (Matthew 27:39–44; Mark 15:29–32, Luke 23:35–37). These onlookers not only insisted that Jesus be crucified, but they also ridiculed Him as He underwent the torture of crucifixion. They coarsely jested in the face of the worst type of human distress. Those around the cross and those passing by the cross intensified the agony that Jesus suffered for our salvation. It was one thing to execute Jesus, but it was even worse to laugh at Him as He bore the horrible pain that would bring His death.

These puny specimens of the human race railed at His prophecies. Their mockery was put in the form of an accusation. Matthew said, “And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!’” (Matthew 27:39, 40). Perhaps an access road ran alongside the place where Jesus’ cross stood. He may have been within conversational range of the crowd. Passersby shook their heads in derision and made cutting remarks to Him. They were saying, “We remember Your words. We have not forgotten what You said You would do. You said that, if the temple were destroyed, You could rebuild it in three days. However, look at You! You cannot even save Yourself, much less rebuild the temple!”

Yes, earlier in His ministry Jesus had uttered a prophecy similar to their statement. Filled with prejudice, their minds had blocked out its meaning. They had taken His words out of context, and they were using them in the lowest form of ridicule. They tried to make Him say something He had not said, and then they laughed at what they pictured Him as saying.

After Jesus had cleansed the temple, the Jews came to Him and asked Him for a great sign that would confirm His authority. They said, “What sign do You show us as Your authority for doing these things?” (John 2:18). Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Jesus, John said, was speaking of the temple of His body, not the physical temple (John 2:21). He was giving a prophecy concerning His resurrection. The Jews, thinking only in terms of the physical temple, completely misunderstood what Jesus said. He had foretold His resurrection, but they had missed it.

The disciple is not above his Lord. He may often face the same type of ridicule. As he offers proof for his belief that Jesus is the Christ, he may be told, “You don’t understand what Jesus meant. His prophecies are just empty sayings.”

They also mocked His miraculous power. Their ridicule was put in the form of a temptation. We read, “In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, ‘He saved others; He cannot save Himself!’” (Matthew 27:41, 42a).

The high priest, chief priests, elders, and

scribes had gotten what they wanted. They had demanded that He be crucified, and that verdict had been given. Jesus was hanging on a cross before them. "We," they must have thought within themselves, "have won the battle we set out to win."

On many occasions, Jesus had publicly demonstrated His miraculous power. The people had seen it, acknowledged it, and had accepted the implications of it. Even Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler, said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). His miracles were obvious, credible, and unmistakable.

Jesus' enemies had been unable to deny His miracles. At times, they had attributed His power to the devil (see Matthew 12:24), but His powerful deeds had been too obvious to be denied. They had determined, however, that they would not allow His power to convince them of His deity. Having come to this point, they said, "Yes, there is a sense in which we must say that He saved others; but look at Him now. He cannot save Himself! What good is it to be able to save others when He cannot rescue Himself from peril? What kind of King is this? How frail His power actually is!"

Sweeping aside this demonstrated truth of His ministry, the sightseers at the foot of the cross wagged their heads and also said, "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40b). The soldiers raised their voices in mockery to the suffering Christ with the same words. Coming near to Him, they offered Him sour wine to drink and said, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" (Luke 23:36, 37).

Throughout Jerusalem, only His apostles, disciples, and a few others might have understood why Jesus was staying on the cross. The rulers, in their ignorance, cried for Him to come down from the cross. Their jabbing words for Him to save Himself composed one of the favorite lines at the foot of the cross. Little did they know, little did they understand, that had Jesus saved Himself, there would have been no salvation for any member of the human race.

They scorned His position as King. Their mockery was put in the form of defamation.

They said, "He is the King of Israel" (Matthew 27:42).

They knew that Jesus admitted to being a king, but they were laughing publicly at the idea that Jesus was the great King, the Almighty King, the Messiah, who had come to deliver Israel. They said, in effect, "Here is one way that You can convince us to believe in You. Just come down from the cross. We have discarded everything You have said and done, but if You will do this one thing for us, we will believe in You. Just come down from the cross."

Jesus had worked miracles before them, the Father had testified from heaven that Jesus was His Son, and He had shown them through His teachings that He was fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, they had rejected all the evidence He had given them. The evidence was more than sufficient, but they had chosen not to believe it. Their words, "If You come down from the cross, we will believe in You," were hollow. They had no intention of believing in Him. If their hearts had been pure, Jesus' earlier miracles would have convinced them. The King of kings was in their midst, but they rejected Him, crucified Him, and ridiculed Him.

They scoffed at His personal relationship with God. This taunt came in the form of a proposition. They cried, "He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43). Probably, this taunt hurt Jesus the worst. They were saying, "He is supposed to be so religious, so spiritual. If He is really close to God, why does God not come to His rescue? He said that He was the Son of God; well, then, let us see if God owns Him and will deliver Him. If God really loves Him and considers Him a servant of His, He will come down and deliver Him. Anyone can see that God is not coming to help Him. He is certainly not the Son of God!"

Many of those at the cross declared that Jesus had been rejected by man as well as by God. They argued that His sin had found Him out. "This Man," they said, "is supposed to be One who walks with God. Why doesn't God show up and bring Him down from the cross? Can't we all see that even His God has forsaken Him?"

As they hurled these words at Him, they

were using one of the prophetic psalms as the heart of their castigation. The words “He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him” come from Psalm 22:8. At midday Jesus would quote from the first line of this psalm. He would cry, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1a). In the pain, grief, and sorrow of the cross, Jesus lived out the pictorial prophecy that David uttered in Psalm 22; but the Jews twisted the words of the psalm into barbed ridicule. The Scriptures were misused and made to be the content of their sarcasm. By false exegesis, the unbelieving religious leaders turned prophecy into blasphemy.

Yes, Jesus died on a cross in an atmosphere filled with the taunts of wicked men whose brutality and insensitivity reached terrifying depths. They scoffed at His prophecies, His miraculous power, His divine position of Kingship, and His personal relationship with God. In our walk with Jesus, we may well face the same barbs of criticism. When we quote Jesus, we may find people laughing at His

prophecies. When we discuss the miraculous evidence of His deity, we may be jeered. When we honor Him as King, we may be greeted with sneers. When we preach Him as the Son of God, we may be regarded as fools. If such occurrences do happen, we should face them all as Jesus did—quietly bearing the ridicule as we lay down our lives for those who are mocking us.

Eddie Cloer



“But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him’” (Psalm 22:6–8).

“Many bulls have surrounded me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (Psalm 22:12, 13).