

# 'He Saved Others; Himself He Cannot Save'- Mar 15:31

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*Jesus' inability to save Himself was a demonstration of His strength and love, and it was the basis for His ability to save others.*

**Scripture:** Mark 15:31

**Topics:** "Sacrifice", "True Strength"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the profound irony in the mocking words of the religious rulers, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save,' highlighting their ignorance of the true nature of Jesus' mission. He emphasizes that Jesus' inability to save Himself was a deliberate act of strength, rooted in His commitment to save humanity through His sacrifice on the Cross. Morgan illustrates that while the rulers saw Jesus as defeated, He was actually fulfilling His purpose, demonstrating that true power often lies in self-sacrifice. The sermon calls believers to embrace this principle, suggesting that to truly save others, one must be willing to forgo self-preservation. Ultimately, Morgan concludes that Jesus' refusal to save Himself was the very act that made salvation possible for others.

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## Transcript

Mar 15:1-52.

THESE words were uttered by the religious rulers in Israel, the chief priests. With them were associated the moral rulers, the scribes. Mark distinctly tells us that the words were spoken among themselves, but evidently in the hearing of the assembled people. The statement revealed the thought, at the moment, of the spiritual and moral rulers of Israel concerning Jesus. They were spoken, as Mark also reveals, with equal distinctness, in mockery. They were the words of jeering contempt.

This becomes the more patent as we read the remainder of what they said: "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the Cross, that we may see and believe." Those words were saturated with the spirit of contempt and mockery. Jesus had claimed to be the Christ, on solemn oath before the high priest but a few hours previously. He had claimed to be the King of Israel, with equal solemnity before Pilate the Roman Procurator, even more recently. Let this Christ, this King of Israel come down from the Cross. Then mark the last tone of satire: "That we may see and believe; He has always been calling us to believe, and declaring that unless we believed we should die in our sins; let Him now give us some proof,

so that we may believe! It was the language of jeering contempt. They were singularly cruel and devilish words, for supposing them to be true, in the sense in which they meant them, then the cruelty of uttering them under such conditions is almost unthinkable and utterly appalling. Observe their admission: "He saved others." That was a fact which even they could not deny. Everywhere, in Jerusalem, in all the towns and villages and hamlets through the countryside, were those whom He had saved. Palsied limbs were stilled with peacefulness; blind eyes were looking out with joy upon the light of day; dumb mouths were uttering forth the praises of the Lord; men long oppressed with serious disease, and women bowed down with long infirmities, were well. "He saved others." They were bound to admit the fact. There could be no contradiction. What refinement of brutality then, to taunt Him in this hour with His inability to deliver Himself! Even if they believed that His claims to Messiahship were worthless, common decency would have said, now it is over, let Him die in peace. But no! such is the human heart, in spite of all refinement, in spite of all culture. So they taunted Him in His dying, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

'These words of the spiritual and moral rulers were singularly revealing, drawing attention to the then condition of Jesus, making us look at Him and think. They were singularly revealing also, in manifesting the ignorance of the men who uttered them. But these words, uttered in the ignorance both of contempt and hatred, were most of all remarkable in that in the uttering of them they declared, all unwittingly, the supreme and central truth concerning Him: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

Let us then, first look at Him as they saw Him; secondly, consider their double mistake; and finally, think of the issue of that upon which they looked, but did not understand.

In the first place we will attempt to see Him as He was seen of men that day. Two ugly words cover the whole story. They saw Him, condemned and executed. We are not dwelling in these meditations upon details. I am growingly impressed, that the only way to come to these stories of Christ is with the self-same reticent reverence which characterized the men who wrote the story. We have no detailed description of the actual crucifixion in either Gospel. When these writers came to the actuality, they ever dismissed it, as it seems to me, in an almost half-whisper: "They crucified Him." I wish Art had been as reticent, in all the centuries, and that we had no pictures of Jesus on the Cross. I say we are not dealing with details, but we must not forget this dark background; He was condemned, executed; high lifted upon the Roman gibbet; apparently one of three malefactors, doers of evil. That is how they saw Him; condemned, found guilty by the highest religious court, of blasphemy against God Almighty; rejected for Barabbas, Barabbas being chosen by the priest-inspired crowd, fickle and unstable as a crowd always is; -God pity the man who depends upon a crowd; finally they saw Him delivered, as expedient, by political authority, that of Pontius Pilate.

After He had raised Lazarus from the dead, a council was held among these-self-same chief priests and rulers, and the subject of discussion at the council was this: What are we doing? Everybody is going after this Man, and unless we stop His influence, we shall to quote the spirit of the passage lose our power and place with the Roman authorities. It was then and there that Caiaphas the high priest had said: "It is expedient for you that one should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." John interpreted the deeper meaning of that, for he added, "This he said not of himself;" but what Caiaphas meant was this: We must get rid of Him, it is politically necessary to get rid of Him. That was the ground of their appeal to Pilate, and the ground upon which Pilate delivered Him. His condemnation was considered expedient in the interest of political necessity.

Thus we see Him upon the Cross, crucified with malefactors; as a danger to the Roman rule, as having exercised an evil influence among the people of His time, as being the enemy of God. Therefore we look upon Him with the eyes of these men, as done for, and done with. The body is destroyed, the spirit is dismissed, and the world is rid of Him. The body is destroyed; those feet that have travelled long, long miles for three persistent years ; and those hands that have been held out in blessing, and have touched men from disease into health, from death into life, from suffering into joy; they are fast at last ; they have nailed them to the gibbet. Those ears that have always been open to listen to a story of sorrow, those eyes that have flashed with the light of essential emotion and tenderness and strength; the ears are deafening as He hangs there, and the light of the eyes is fading. That voice that has so often been heard, is soon to be silenced. They have destroyed the body and they have dismissed the spirit. The Sadducees probably denied that He had a spirit; the Pharisees claiming that He had, now saw it passing into Hades, the world of departed, spirits. At least they would be rid of Him. It was then that they said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

Now let us observe their double mistake; first their literal blunder; and secondly, their spiritual blunder.

As to their literal blunder, let us for the moment forget all that we know spiritually of the significance of these words of our text. It is a little difficult to get away from the ultimate spiritual interpretation, even at the beginning of our meditation. They said, "He saved others," a great admission-"Himself He cannot save," a strong declaration. They were wrong, and first they were entirely wrong, even in the sense in which they meant the thing they said. Jesus, during those four and twenty hours, could easily have saved Himself. His being upon the Cross was not the result of their victory over Him. They had not caught Him, trapped Him, shut Him up, imprisoned Him, crucified Him, and so beaten Him. His being on the Cross was not their victory. All that is not the deepest truth. Jesus could have escaped the Cross in three ways. He could have escaped the Cross by diplomacy with Pilate. Pilate earnestly sought some loophole of escape, wrought with strange and weird persistence to discover some way by which he could deliver Him; and a word from Jesus would have been enough. Some word of diplomacy, of policy, of arrangement; and all the priests would have been powerless to persuade Pilate to the thing he ultimately did. It was the silence, the heroic silence of Jesus that compelled Pilate to do what he finally did. If for the moment that is not convincing, then hear the words of Jesus spoken to Pilate as recorded by another evangelist: "Thou wouldest have no power against Me, except it were given thee from above." He could have escaped.

But there was another way in which He might have escaped, and in proportion as we really get into the atmosphere of this wonderful scene we shall realize it. He could have escaped by popular appeal. The cry of the crowd, presently hissed between shut teeth, "Crucify, crucify!" was but a parrot cry. They were only repeating what they had been told to say. The high priests persuaded them to it. If one catches a mob anywhere at the psychic moment, it will shout anything under God's heaven! Individually, that mob may go home to repent of what it shouted, but under the influence of excitement they will do it. The crowd was driven by the high priests because they appealed to it first. Supposing Jesus had reached them first with an appeal! The attempt of the rulers to avoid the feast time as the hour of His arrest, was based on their knowledge that this was so. They said: "Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people." They knew perfectly well that He had but to stand erect for one moment, and say something to that crowd, and the whole mob would have swept the priests out of the way, and delivered Him. But He did not do it. He did not save Himself,

I cannot consider this matter without going further; for He is not wholly a man as I am. If not by diplomacy with Pilate, if not by popular appeal, then He could have escaped by Divine wrath and destruction of His

enemies. Listen to Him as He said, but a little while before to one of His own disciples: "Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech My Father, and He shall even now send Me more than twelve legions of angels?" Knowing full well the danger, or, at least the inadequacy of imagination, yet as I look upon that scene, being no Sadducee, believing as I do in angels as well as spirits, it seems as though the very hosts of heaven could hardly be restrained from delivering Him. One glance of His eye, one word of power, and Pilate and priests and mob would have been swept away. He could have delivered Himself. That was their literal blunder.

Involved within it, is that which is the deeper thing; their spiritual blunder. He could not save Himself! But His inability was born of His ability; His weakness was the outcome of His strength. He was strong enough not to save Himself, strong enough to decline diplomacy with the Procurator, strong enough to be silent when one word would have turned the mob into an army of His friends, strong enough to .restrain His own omnipotence, and to bow, bend, stoop, submit. He could not save Himself.

Whence came that strength which manifested itself in weakness? What were the secrets of that ability which had its most eloquent expression in disability? I shall attempt to answer the question, by putting the actual facts concerning the Lord Jesus, in contrast with the ways already suggested, that were open to Him for escape.

Instead of employing diplomacy, we see Him cooperating with God; that is, acting in conformity with truth, moving along the line of the essential and the eternal; setting His face resolutely, in spite of all that such setting of His face involved, in the direction of holiness and light. Here we pass into the mists. Here we come into the presence of the mystery. Yet, through the mists, out of which the light breaks; and the mystery, through the darkness of which the revelation has proceeded, He was striving against sin, and He was resisting unto blood! Because that was the Divine pathway-why it was, is not now under discussion,-because in the Divine economy He could only slay death by dying, only end sin by being made sin in an appalling mystery, He would have no conference with any suggestion of escape from that pathway. In that cooperation with God, in conformity to the underlying and essential truth, however dark the way and mysterious the hour, He was strong enough to be weak enough to die.

Or again; the second method of escape that was certainly open to Him on the natural level was that He might have escaped by popular appeal. He did not, because He was acting in separation from man-that is by separation from sinners, uninfluenced by their advice, by their votings, by their clamour-and with God for their sakes. Perhaps we can understand this better if we allow our minds to travel away from the scene for a moment, and remember that ever and anon in human history, as those have appeared who have trod this self-same pathway-not in the same degree, but obedient to the self-same principle-over and over again the men who have fashioned the ages, and have made the conditions which have been brighter and better and purer for the world, have had to stand alone, separating themselves from humanity in the interest of humanity, travelling up new Calvaries, Calvaries for which they gathered inspiration here. So He withdrew from the crowd, He did not ask its aid. He made no appeal to them; and that for their sakes. In the interest of their condition, and in order that presently He might win from them a truer judgment, a more righteous vote, a sanctified assent, He asked nothing of them. He trod the winepress alone, separate in His heroism from humanity, for the sake of humanity.

Or again, if we really seek for the secret of His strength, it is to be found finally, fundamentally, and inclusively in that He, Who might that day have escaped the Cross by an act of Divine destruction inspired by Divine wrath, accepted the Cross in order to an act of salvation inspired by Divine love. He was still

acting under the mastery of the will of His God; here also, as surely as when He declined diplomacy, and stood alone for truth, He was moving along the line of the essential and the eternal; here, He was not in conflict with God, but in cooperation with Him. He could not save Himself, because He was one with God in a double determination; the determination to smite and blast and destroy sin; and the determination to heal and lift and ennoble a sinning race. Not these things held Him; the court, and the brutality of His enemies; but His o'ermastering, and o

So, finally, let us glance at the issue of what they did not understand. Yet the whole truth of that was expressed in what they themselves did say. What is the issue of that attitude of Jesus? He saved others. Perhaps it would be better to change their statement a little, not to interfere with its essential thought, but to change merely the tenses of its verbs; so that from beneath the mistake, the essential truth which they knew not may emerge. They said, "He saved others," and the tense was past. They were looking back. "Himself He cannot save," and the tense was present. They were looking at Him on the Cross. We look back at this scene, and say: Himself He could not save. We look around to-day, and say: He saves others. Though they did not understand it-even the disciples themselves did not understand, but presently light came, and ever and anon these men who wrote the records reveal in some passing phrase their past ignorance and their new illumination-the truth is this, that all those whom He had already saved, He had saved in the power of the fact that He could not, in that final way, save Himself. He had opened blind eyes, He had healed palsied limbs, He had driven fever away, He had restored physical conditions; but He always did these things upon the basis of His passion and His atonement. The writers came to know it, I repeat, and one memorable passage comes to mind, in which Matthew tells the secret of a wonderful eventide by the side of the sea. They brought unto Him from all the countryside the sick folk, and He healed then! all. If Matthew had written his record that night, he would have written with wonder and amazement; but later on the publican saw things as he had never seen them; and in the light of the resurrection, when he wrote his record afterwards, this is what he said: He healed them all, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases." Behind all His physical healing, was the spiritual passion of the Lord. I reverently declare that the Man of Nazareth would never have healed a sick lad or lass, man or woman, but in the power of that hour, when they mocked Him and scorned Him.

Turning from that past, to which they looked, and considering that future toward which He was looking when He could not save Himself because He would not save Himself, let us ask what is the issue of that great fact. We will confine ourselves to the atmosphere of this very story in considering this matter; measuring the strength by the weakness; going again to the threefold door of escape that was open to Him in the natural, and considering the threefold issue in the supernatural. He might have escaped by diplomacy. He was bound by the simplicity of truth. He might have escaped by popular appeal. He was bound by a separation from popular acclaim in order to the redemption of the populace. He might have escaped by the exercise of His Divine power in wrath. He was bound by the consideration of a Divine love and mercy.

Now what has the issue been? He established authority on the basis of truth, rather than on the shifting sand of diplomacy. Jesus Christ is not ruling over men by diplomacy, by compromise. Perhaps one of the most terrific things, one of the most frightening things, and one of the most blessed things concerning Him is that He will not make a compromise with men, that He will enter into no diplomatic relationship with them by which, if they grant Him so much, He will grant them so much, He will not meet men half-way. There is no diplomacy in the government of Jesus. The day will dawn, which is not yet, but which must be,

when delegated authority;-and all authority is delegated to the Christian; in his understanding of the universe, and his philosophy of the world, the final authority is God, and the powers that be are all ordained by God for beneficent purposes;-shall be based, not upon diplomacy but upon truth. I do not say that all diplomacy must be untrue, but it is in terrible danger of being untrue. I will go so far as to say that when in this country we have done with a good deal of our diplomacy, and the whole truth of foreign conditions is before the people, we shall do better than we have done ; when we have simple, clear statements of the facts of the case, and not half-veiled lies that deceive. That day is coming. We are moving toward it slowly, through catastrophe and cataclysm and blood and fire and vapour of smoke; and all the way He leads, the Man Who can save others, because He would not save Himself.

Consequently, therefore, by His action He prepared for a popular vote which shall be inspired by wisdom and by love. He prepared for a people ransomed, and a people emancipated, who presently will bow to the authority of His truth, and acclaim Him Lord. To-day we may hold almost in contempt the opinion of the crowd. How soon a man is forgotten. Let him drop out, and who thinks or cares for him? Let a prophet be gone, and within a decade there will be a letter in the newspaper, drawing attention to the fact that his grave is neglected! If a man is going to depend upon the opinion of a crowd, God pity that man. Nevertheless, the day is coming when all peoples and kindreds and nations and tongues and temperaments will forget their differences, and merge in one great song, and it will be the song that proclaims Immanuel, King of kings, and Lord of lords. But that day would never have been reached but by His pathway of loneliness.

Finally, therefore, He made possible the saving of those very men who otherwise would have been destroyed. What men? Those very men locally, for the universal will best be seen here in the light of the local. The men who were round His Cross, the soldiers who crucified Him, the mob that clamoured against Him; the priests, those very men could be saved because He did not save Himself. There is a little statement of history, in the Acts of the Apostles, full of interest: "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." These very men that mocked Him, that jeered at Him, He made possible their saving! In that is the greatness of His victory.

This, blessed be God, is the Gospel. He saves others; Himself He could not save. Or once again, to change the reading: To save others, He did not save Himself. He could not save Himself, because He was determined to save others.

If we name His name, if we wear His sign, if we profess that we are Christ's men and Christ's women, then we have to remember that this is not the Gospel only; it is the law. It is the abiding principle of the propagation of the Gospel, and must be to the end of stress and strain and conflict. Every Christian worker of whom it is true that he or she is saving others, cannot save himself or herself. Or again to change the method of the statement; the measure in which we are at the end of attempting to save ourselves, is the measure in which we are moving out upon the highway of being able to save others. That is true in statesmanship. That is true in all the ministry of men to the needs created by the tragedy of life. It is true of the Sunday School class; and it is true of the pulpit.

It is true of statesmanship. If statesmen are attempting to save themselves and their country, they will fail. If statesmen are seeking the larger good, and are moving along the line of giving themselves out in sacrifice in order to reach the larger goal, they will save others.

In the case of those who minister to human need, doctors and nurses, I need not argue it. It is always true of such that they are not counting their own lives dear unto them, that they may make this sacred service of ministry and sacrifice.

It is true of the Sunday School class. It is true of the pulpit. We can make no contribution toward the victory of spiritual truth save at the point of sacrifice. A young minister fresh from college, said to W. L. Watkinson, that master of satire, upon one occasion, "You know, Dr. Watkinson, preaching does not take anything out of me." "No," said Dr. Watkinson, "and therefore, it puts nothing into anyone else!" That is true, Biblically true. If we are to save others, we cannot save ourselves. The only question that we have to face is this: Are we strong enough to be weak, mighty enough to submit, able for the gracious disability out of which the forces that renew, spring for the blessing of humanity?

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