

“Cries to the King on the Cross”

(Luke 23:35-43 – Christ the King – November 23, 2025)

Luke 23:35-43 – ³⁵*And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.”* ³⁶*The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.”* ³⁸*And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.* ³⁹*Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”* ⁴⁰*But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”* ⁴²*Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”* ⁴³*And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

Dear Redeemed, who belong to the Kingdom of Christ by faith:

“*THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (vs. 38). So read the inscription on Jesus’ cross. The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, had it put there after Jesus was tried and crucified, explaining the charge against Him (John 19:19). Pilate meant it as a statement of mockery against the Jews, as if to say: “If you want a King other than Caesar, this is what you get!” Yet that inscription over Jesus unwittingly declared the truth. For He is King of the Jews; and He is King of all: “*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*” (Revelation 19:16).

In response to this timeless inscription, no soul can keep silent. In our text, we hear two opposite “**Cries to the King on the Cross.**” On the one hand, unbelief cries out in mockery: **1) “Save Yourself!”**; but the voice of repentance and faith cries: **2) “Save me!”**

1) “Save Yourself!”

“*Save Yourself!*” That is the mocking cry of many who behold Jesus’ cross. It was the cry of these “*rulers*” who sneered at Jesus in anger and unbelief. These members of the Jewish High Council were not content simply with getting Jesus crucified; they wanted to gloat over His death and get the last word in to His bitter end. As “*the people stood looking on,*” these rulers led them in the cry: “*He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God*” (vs. 35)

Scripture had foretold that the Christ would come into the world as a King. God had promised that He would raise up a royal Son of David, who would also be God’s Son. He would rule an eternal Kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-14). “*Christ*” means “*Anointed One.*” At Jesus’ baptism, God anointed His Chosen One saying: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17). God anointed His Son in our flesh with the Holy

Spirit and power, as the King who would accomplish His work of saving us from sin, Satan, and eternal death (Acts 10:38).

But to the rulers and people, Jesus did not look like *“the Christ, the chosen of God.”* In their minds, the heaven-sent King should come with almighty power to conquer Israel’s enemies and establish for them a worldly kingdom of glory. But how could Jesus be any kind of King to save God’s people, if apparently He could not even save Himself? To them, Jesus’ cross proved He was under God’s curse for falsely claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-66). They thought He was dying for His own sin.

As heaven’s King heard the cries of rejection, the prophecy of Isaiah 53:3-5 was ringing true: *“He is despised and rejected by men... we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”* What the rulers and people did not grasp is the great love of God in sacrificing His only-begotten Son for their sins and the sins of the world. This is how God was reconciling sinners to Himself, so He could bring us into His eternal Kingdom.

“Save Yourself!” Now the Roman soldiers join the cry against the King on the cross. In their eyes, Jesus was just a criminal getting what He deserved. They had enjoyed mocking this wannabe King, crowning Him with thorns, dressing Him in a scarlet robe, kneeling and saying: *“Hail, King of the Jews!”* before leading Him out to crucify Him (Matthew 27:28-31). Now the soldiers tease the thirsty Jesus with sour wine and cry out: *“If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself”* (vs. 37).

“Save Yourself!” This time the cry comes from one of the criminals hanging next to Jesus, who blasphemed Him: *“If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us”* (vs. 39). Thus unbelief, even in the throes of death, refuses to accept Christ as Savior. To the bitter end, it demands signs from Him if one is to believe. Yet there is no repentance in that voice. All the impenitent would want with a powerful Christ is to escape the present cross and death, that he might go on living a sinful life. When Jesus does not pacify his demands, he seeks to save himself by joining the cries of the crowd against the Lord.

Yet, as heaven’s King endured such scorn from all who cried out against Him, how did He respond? With a heart of love even for His enemies, desiring only their salvation, He prayed: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23:34).

As we hear these faithless cries to the King on the cross, what do we say? For surely, along with the whole world of sinners, we too are gathered around that cross which stands at the center of human history. When we see that inscription – *“THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS,”* the *“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”* – we cannot keep silent.

Are there times we have cried out to the King on the cross like these rulers and people? Maybe we expected Jesus to give us a kingdom of glory in this world. We think He should give us earthly success and an easy life as a reward for our faithfulness. We think He should answer our prayers by making things happen the way we want. When He does not come through the way we expect, we may cry out in disappointment. Jesus reminds us: *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matthew 6:33). However, our sinful nature does not like to wait for heavenly glory. It cries out in a self-centered, self-serving way: *“Save yourself! Seek first the life you want for yourself in this world. The things of His Kingdom can wait.”*

And are there times we have cried out to the King on the cross like that criminal? We want Him to remove a certain cross in our life, and then we will trust Him. But when He does not respond on demand, we may give up on His help or cry out in rebellion. We want to follow Jesus without having to share His cross of rejection, so we hide our faith and join the voice of the crowd. We want to follow His will, until it means dying to the desires of our sinful nature. Jesus says: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matthew 16:24-25). But our sinful nature shrinks back from the cross. It cries out in a self-preserving way: *“Save yourself!”*

2) “Save me!”

How different is the cry we hear from one who would die to himself and live to Christ: “Save me!” This time it comes from the other criminal dying next to Jesus. He cries to the King on the cross with tears of repentance and faith: *“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”* (vs. 42).

Matthew’s account reports that, at first, he too had joined the crowd in reviling Jesus (Matthew 27:44). But during those agonizing hours on the cross, the Holy Spirit worked repentance in his heart. As he felt death coming so painfully for his crimes against mankind, he realized that this was only a foretaste of the judgment and eternal death he deserved for his sins against God. Now he confesses his sin openly, even rebuking the other criminal who blasphemed Jesus: *“Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong”* (vs. 40-41).

Not only was he sorry for his sin; he also believed that Jesus was there to save him. Maybe in his childhood, he had been taught some of the prophecies from Scripture about the Christ, the King who would come to save His people from their sin. Maybe at some point in the past few years, even amid his wayward path of sin, he had heard Jesus preach about His Kingdom, forgiveness, and eternal life. Maybe then, he had blown it off as a bunch of rubbish. But now on the cross, he witnessed the Savior of sinners patiently

enduring the mockery of enemies, praying to His Father in heaven for their forgiveness. Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Now the hardened sinner is broken, and he confesses that faith openly, crying to the King on the cross: *“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”* (vs. 42). In other words: “Jesus, save me from my sin and death. You alone are my hope of eternal life!”

Dear heirs of Jesus’ Kingdom, by God’s grace, through faith. Is this not also our cry to the King on the cross? “Save me!” We confess that, as sinners, we are the ones who deserve to die; and there is nothing in us deserving His Kingdom. We plead only the divine blood of heaven’s King as worthy to cleanse us of all our sin. We plead only His perfect righteousness to cover us and present us fit for His heavenly Kingdom.

To the repentant sinner dying next to him, Jesus spoke the most comforting words of absolution and reassurance: *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (vs. 43). There would be no having to make up for his sins first, no punishment, no purgatory; Jesus was being punished for him. There would be no having to prove his worthiness to enter heaven; Christ was his righteousness. This repentant criminal was declared a forgiven, restored child of God in Christ, and an heir of His heavenly Kingdom. This very day, the moment his body died, his soul would be home with Jesus.

Likewise, as we cry to the King on the cross, “Save me!” He assures us that all is well. Though our sins have been great, He forgives them all. As God in our flesh, Jesus has gone through death and risen from the grave for us. Even as we face death, He assures us: *“Because I live, you will live also”* (John 14:19). We will live with Him forever, in soul and body in the great Resurrection. We can look forward to the wonderful day of our own heavenly homecoming, when Jesus will say to us: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34).

As we behold such a good King, who has given His life for us and continues to rule all things for our eternal good, how could we keep silent? His love inspires us to sing:

Crown Him the Lord of Life Who triumphed o’er the grave
And rose victorious in the strife For those He came to save.
His glories now we sing Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring And lives that death may die.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.