

“He saved others, but he can’t save himself” (Part Two)

Reflection 8 in the series “Salvation: The Quest”

“He saved others, but he can’t save himself.” This was the taunt hurled at Jesus as he hung suspended between heaven and earth enduring excruciating pain on the cross. But then that’s always the same testing for all of us, and very often it comes down to whether to save yourself or others! Here we come back to our theme “Salvation: The Quest,” and we see that saving and being saved still in their primal, basic sense mean rescue and deliverance. So you stand by a lifeboat on an ocean-liner. It’s filling up. The deck tilts dangerously beneath you. And in the next moment or so you will decide whether to save yourself or others.

You are given a marvelous once-in-a-lifetime (you think) opportunity, but others will pay heavily for it. You will leave others holding the bag, carrying your load. Maybe everyone you know ends up hurting. And it comes down to whether to save yourself or others.

The building’s on fire. It’s you or a five-year-old child down the hall. You can hear her crying. You’re at the door; you have a second or two to decide whether to save yourself or others.

Perhaps you know the truth about something. Perhaps you know that the way a certain doctrine has been taught for years is wrong – that teaching it that way has led many, many people to not be able to trust God. But if you say so, you will draw heat to yourself, and depending on your circumstances, your reputation or your ministry may be destroyed. Or you know that what we are doing to our planet is wrong, that it will put life as we know it at great risk for our grandchildren. Or you know that torture is wrong, yet most people around you don’t. Or you know that a vast concentration of wealth and influence in the hands of only a very few at the top of society unravels the ties that bind society together. In all these cases, the issue is whether to speak or be silent, whether to save yourself or others. Sometimes it’s very subtle, every bit as real though very subtle, but it comes up, sooner or later, for everyone. It’s your defining moment: whether to save yourself or others.

So the chief priests mock Jesus, as do the teachers of the law and the elders. He (ha!) saved others. Some good his miracles do now. He can’t save himself! Case closed. And it must have been so tempting to act to save himself: the nails through his wrists, blood trickling from his brow, the struggle for breath, pressing up on his feet and wrists to relieve the chest pressure, tearing his flesh, sagging again, his lungs screaming for air, and – the mocking – “He saved others (the blind, the lame, the deaf, the dead). He cannot save himself! Ha!”

And all the while what the mockers were missing, and Jesus wasn’t, was this: “To save others I cannot save myself, to save others I cannot save myself,” down to his last agonizing breath, “To save others I cannot save myself.” Only my death can transform

the world, break human hearts, destroy pride and arrogance, and everyone's deadly preoccupation with their selves.

Only my death will reveal to them their own sins and not the sins of others. Only my death will end the ugly moral indignation of immoral people. Only my death will both teach others humility and offer them empowerment; only it will show some of them that they too can give their ultimate – they too can take it to the limit and lay down their lives for others.

Only my death will set their spirits free, proving undeniably that God is love and that nothing except themselves can ever separate them from this God who is love. Only my death will teach them to trust and forgive – to extend to others the mercy they know they need themselves. Only my death will teach them that the only way to life is to save others and not themselves, down to their very last breaths.

Only my death ...

So (in verse 4 of the hymn)

“To the howling mob He yielded.
He did not for mercy cry.
The Cross of shame He took alone.
And when He cried, ‘It’s finished,’
He gave himself to die;
Salvation’s wondrous plan was done.

—

He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free.
He could have called ten thousand angels
But he died alone for you and me.”

So here's the challenge. What God is asking you to do goes so much against instinct, against everything most people tell you, you'll have to start all over, to be born again, filled with the Spirit of God. Because what he asks is that we be disciples, followers of Jesus who suspended on the cross, as the flies swarmed around him, as blood trickled down his forehead, as his wrists throbbed in pain, as his chest heaved in agony gasping for one more breath, as he heard the taunts of the teachers of the law, kept his focus: **TO SAVE OTHERS, I CANNOT SAVE MYSELF.**

So your time comes ...

Your time comes and when it does the lifeboat leaves without you, and no one is left fighting your battles, doing what it was your calling to do, and the five-year-old at the end of the hall lives though you may not, and the truth is told whatever the consequences

to yourself, and whatever your defining moment, when you come to it you will decide to save others and not yourself. And all of this too is part of Salvation: The Quest.

– Dale Pauls