

Exhortation 13: Christ Reviled

Charles Herle (1598-1659)

Matthew 27:39

I. The Text Opened

A. Matt. 27:39

1. “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,” (Matt. 27:39).
2. Nothing is more natural to humanity than for one to see another in misery or poverty and feel pity for them.
 - a) How often will a man see a homeless soul, carrying a bag or maybe pushing a cart with what looks to be everything they own in it, and feel a great deal of pity for them?
 - b) Even though they have no knowledge of who they are or what they’ve done or how they now find themselves in this condition, their heart still goes out to them.
3. And yet when the completely guiltless Lamb of God hung wretched, bleeding, and broken on the cross, instead of overwhelming pity, a deep loathing welled up in the hearts of those who observed him.
 - a) They further demonstrated their disgust by “wagging their heads” in a mocking manner.
 - b) Even the worst of criminals who met with such an end didn’t elicit that harsh a response!
 - c) Innocence itself hangs naked in all its misery for the world to see. And yet there is none from the gawking clusters of humanity, (other than his friends and family), who take pity.
 - (1) *How rightfully might our Savior claim that no man ever suffered like he suffered, (Lam. 1:12)?*
 - (2) *Other’s sorrows are at least somewhat mitigated with pity, but his burned more deeply and were made more raw from the vile, poisonous mixture of scorn, insults, and envy that were railed at him in his own moment of abject misery.*
4. But what truer testimony of his power and mercy, as well as his innocence, than that which came from the mouths of his enemies themselves? “He saved others!” they shouted (Luke 23:35).
 - a) What better confession could they have made than this which they offered: to describe him as a Savior!
 - b) So that when they would have had Pilate alter the inscription of his accusation (John 19:21), if they had done rightly, it should have read, “Jesus of Nazareth, that saved others.”
5. The reason for their malice, and his death, is that he saved others. For in their pompous religiosity they add, “if he is truly Christ, the chosen of God, let him also save himself,” (Luke 23:35).
 - a) While their intent with this statement was to disclaim his divinity and bring reproach on his power, how plainly instead do they proclaim his heart of mercy in doing more for others than for himself?
 - b) He freed many from the chains of death, the grave, and the devil, leaving them with nothing to use against him but his own mercy.

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: God's redemptive plan remains unthwarted, for Christ did not save himself so that he may by his cross save others.

1. What is the difference between the Savior's sufferings and those of others?
 - a) Others draw at least pity and condolences while his elicit an onslaught of insults and contempt!
 - b) He saved others, but himself, (they say), he cannot save, (Luke 23:35).
 - c) The truth is that he chose to give up his freedom from sin's penalty of death so death could hold no power over his people.
 - d) He freed his people from sin and from death by subjecting himself to his own death.
2. How easily he could have come down from the cross.
 - a) How easily he could have done to his enemies what they bragged they did and could do to him.
 - b) For though he remained nailed in misery to the cross, yet at his word the seas, the winds, and the waves would still all obey him.
 - c) Men ought to remember that his will is the rule of his justice, and that his actions do not always demonstrate the limits of his power.
 - (1) *For his mercy is in all his works, (Psa. 36:5).*
 - (2) *Many times, his purposes may reserve, or suspend, or proportion the extent of his action; yet nothing can confine his power.*
 - (3) *His word is not bound, so how much less his power (2 Tim. 2:9)?*
 - (4) *For he is, in truth, the Son of God and equal with God.*

B. Christ is Dared to Come Down Off the Cross

1. "If thou be the Son of God, come down," (Matt. 27:40).
 - a) In addition to all the physical torment he suffered, Christ's passion brought him enormous emotional pain when his fear-filled apostles deserted him at his arrest, the religious leaders mocked and blasphemed him, and his own Jewish people wished him dead.
 - b) But both Matthew and Luke record that the derision did not stop there.
 - (1) *For even those who simply passed the cross that day "wagged their heads" in contempt at his marred form hanging between earth and heaven, (Matt. 27:39-40, Mark 15:29).*
 - c) Some of them twisted what he had prophesied about his own death and resurrection in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," into "Ah, you that destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (Mark 15:29-30).
 - (1) *They thought themselves to be clever by daring the Lord to save himself from his imminent death, "If you are who you say you are, then prove it by coming down off that cross!"*
 - d) Only a few years earlier, when he had been tempted by the devil, Christ heard something similar, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from this pinnacle of the temple and God will give the angels charge over you to bear you up," (Matt. 4:4-5).
 - (1) *So, when his enemies at the crucifixion challenge him using the same language, they make it patently clear whose family they belong to.*
 - (2) *And if there was any doubt, Christ had already told them, "You are of your Father the devil, for you do as he has done before you," (John 8:44).*

e) Besides, just how foolish were they to think that Christ was incapable of removing himself from a cross of wood that they themselves had constructed?

(1) They failed to realize that this was the very Son of God who chose to take on himself the form of a man and come to earth from the throne of heaven a little more than 30 years previous.

f) They did not see, (because God blinded their eyes), that they were mere dust underneath his footstool for, in truth, the heaven of heavens could not contain him, (2 Chron. 2:6).

(1) Their taunting behavior demonstrated their complete lack of understanding of who this battered man was, as they really thought a nail driven through each of his hands could hold him to that cross without his consent.

g) They also had forgotten that he had already escaped their capture on more than one occasion when he disappeared from among those who sought to arrest him, (John 10:39), simply because his time to suffer had not yet come.

(1) So clearly, it was not the power of the government officials, nor the orders from the soldiers, nor the insistence of the religious leaders that kept Christ on that cross.

(2) Rather, it was his immeasurable love that held him there.

(3) Such love turned all his tortures into embraces that only death itself could release him from.

III. The Text Applied

A. How much more did Christ prove Himself the Son of God, against all their tortures, temptations, and dares, by staying on the chariot of His cross and leading captivity itself captive, than by coming down off the cross and saving Himself alone?

1. And how truly, like the sun going forth in its might, did He yet rejoice to run His course, though in blood and torture, to save you?

a) He is both the altar and the anchor of your souls.

b) If you will but serve and trust Him, he will ask no more.

c) He has promised to provide all that you need when you seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33), and to make all things work together for your best if you are among those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

(1) How much better to enjoy all things than by way of His benefits?

d) If you should seek these blessings in your own way, they would become their snare, and those things which might be for your betterment would become an occasion to stumble.

e) May he help us see that He loves and cares for us much better than they can do for themselves; which is why he hung there.

f) What those wicked men entertained with shaking heads of derision (showing Christ's constancy and patience), let us embrace with trembling hearts of devotion, ever magnifying His victorious love towards us, a love so mighty that it prevented Him from being swayed against His will and that of His Father's.