

Beloved people of the Lord Jesus Christ;

Just recently I was speaking to a Christian man who told me the story of a dying acquaintance he visited. His dying friend was not a Christian and so he was concerned about his spiritual welfare. So he asked, "Shall I pray for you?" And the dying man turned to him and said, "I have never believed in God or Jesus, why should you pray for me now. Please don't." And with those last words, the dying man slipped into eternity. When Jesus was hanging on the cross there were many people who did not believe he was the Saviour, the Messiah that the whole OT had pointed to. And you wonder why they didn't believe? Jesus had turned water into wine. He healed the lame. He caused the blind to see. He had cast demons out of the possessed. He fed thousands with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. And last but not least, he had raised people from the dead. But still the people didn't believe. Rather than believe him to be the Son of God, the Messiah that the whole OT pointed to, they mocked and ridiculed him.

We read in verses 39-44 and I paraphrase. "Come down from the cross you weakling! You claimed to be the Son of God, come down from the cross and we will believe you. Come on Jesus, you, who claim to be the King of Israel, come down from the cross and we will believe you are the Son of God! In fact, if it is true that you are the Son of God, then let God rescue you." I dare say if it had been you or I on that cross, we would have got down and showed these taunting people a thing or two. Perhaps it was a great temptation for the Lord for the Lord as well. To come off the cross and show the world once and for all that he was everything he said he was and so much more. To show these taunting people! And then consider too for a moment what restraint is shown by the Father in heaven when He sees his only Son taunted and tested in this manner. In his great mercy and love he had sent His Son to be their Saviour. And all these sinful human beings, scum really, can do is give His dying Son an horrendous time.

Had they forgotten, that the Father in Heaven would only have to speak and a legion of angels would come to his Son's rescue and Jesus would be spared from the taunts of the mocking crowd and the agony of the cross? Of course, the prince of the world was also at work through these taunting people. The devil was not going to give up until all hope was lost. And it was not the first time that the devil had tempted the Lord Jesus. Christ had faced many temptations during His time on earth – unbelievable temptations, temptations beyond what you or I can withstand. After his baptism when he was brought into the desert by the Holy Spirit, the devil pleaded with him, "Bow before me and all the kingdoms of the earth are yours and then you won't have to go to the cross or the grave!" "I know you are hungry, so turn these stones into bread! Or fall down off this temple and let the angels protect you, after all you are the Son of God and you shouldn't have to suffer." And when those blatant temptations didn't work, the devil subtly uses the Apostle Peter. When Jesus spoke about his need to go to the cross with his disciples, the Apostle said, "Never Lord" and Jesus rebuked Peter, "Get behind me Satan!"

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane He alone had to struggle with drinking from God's cup of wrath while his disciples slept. And now hanging upon the cross, He has to endure still another temptation from the devil through the taunting crowd. "Come down from the cross you who said you could destroy the temple in three days and rebuild it! Come down from the cross!" The soldiers sat close by, gambling near the place of execution; people who passed by hurled insults; the Jewish leaders shouted cruel remarks; so did the criminals who were crucified with Him. Their mocking, taunting refrain was written by the devil himself. "Come down from the cross! Come down from the cross and we will believe!" And when you think deeply about it we were there too! We actually sing about it often, "Behold the man upon the cross, my sin upon His shoulders; ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished"

Congregation let us not think for a moment that this temptation was not real for Jesus. The majority of these people were Jews, some of them were the leaders of the church. They should have known that this man upon the cross was none other than the promised Messiah for whom they had all been waiting for and to whom all the Scriptures pointed. The saying is true, there are none so blind as those who do not wish to see. Oh what hatred and unbelief that is in the heart of men and women who reject the Christ. Thankfully, Jesus didn't do what we would probably have done if it were within our power. He didn't succumb to their taunting and come down of the cross. Jesus' active obedience remained on the cross he knew there was so much more at stake. From eternity the plan of God for our salvation was the death of Jesus upon the cross. We could not pay the cost, but Jesus, the perfect Saviour could and would. But Satan had been against that plan from the beginning for the suffering and death and the subsequent resurrection of Jesus would mean salvation for God's people and Satan doesn't want that.

The devil wants mankind to remain in their sin and misery. He wants them to remain living without hope and without eternal life. And of course the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus ultimately meant defeat for Satan. While Jesus remains on the cross, Satan's dark kingdom is in trouble. If only Jesus would come down off the cross, then Satan would win. Come off the cross! There is a great battle going on while Jesus is on the cross and if Jesus stays and dies then Satan has lost! The suffering and death of Jesus means the fulfilment of the promise already made in the Garden of Eden. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen 3:15). The suffering and death of Jesus means that someday there will be a new creation – a creation with no place in it for Satan and sin and evil. In so many ways it would have been easy for Jesus to come down from the cross. After all, He is exactly Who He says He is. He is the Son of God. He is not only the King of Israel but the entire universe. He is Almighty God in the flesh and He is able to do exactly what He says He can do. He is able to destroy the temple and build it in three days. He virtually showed all of that and more during his ministry.

Sometimes we mistakenly think it was the nails that pinned Jesus to the cross and kept Him there. Of course in a sense it was, but there was much more at stake here! Jesus ignored the taunts, the jeers, the mocking, and the scornful cries. He ignored the devil's refrain and He remained on the cross for there was more at stake. Obedience to His father in heaven was paramount. And His Father's will was that he remain there so that salvation for all who were called before the foundation of the world to trust in Jesus's completed work of salvation would be saved. If Jesus had come down off the cross his ministry would have been over and salvation's work left undone and you and I would also slip into eternity without hope. If Jesus stepped down from the cross He would have denied Himself, His mission and His teaching. If Jesus stepped down from the cross, He would have ceased being the Saviour and Redeemer and Mediator. If Jesus stepped down from the cross, no one – not even the devil and his demons – would have believed in Him. If Jesus had come off the cross, then you and I would remain in our sins and eternal punishment would be all that waits for us. But thankfully Jesus remains on the cross. If He was to save you and me, He could not save himself. That is really the bottom line! Jesus is our Saviour because in perfect obedience to the Father, He remained on the cross despite the taunts from those who were present.

And so, when we think about Good Friday, then we realize it was only one thing that kept Jesus there, his perfect obedience to the Father and fulfilling His Father's will – to save sinners of which I am but one of many! People often wonder what is wrong with the world. They see things going wrong – it is as plain as the nose on their faces but very few have an answer. I came across this little snippet which I think says it all. One editor of a daily newspaper decided he would ask the question, "What's wrong with the world." He got several replies. Some blamed the governments, some blamed the media, some blamed particular religions and various races, but one replied, "Dear Sir, in response to your question, "what is wrong with the world?" he answered, "I am" and the person signed his name. That's being honest wasn't it? I am what is wrong with this world and you are what is wrong with this world. You and I are the ones who don't love God above all and our neighbour as ourselves. You and I are the ones who are guilty of idolatry. You and I are the ones who are greedy and selfish. Isn't that why there are wars and terrorism and injustice in this world? You and I are what's wrong in this world and the sooner people realize that the sooner they will see their desperate need of the Saviour. We are not only the sinners who mocked the Lord of the universe and nailed him to the cross, but we are the also the sinners that need Him to stay on the cross for our salvation and thankfully he did.

"Come down from the cross! Come down from the cross! We will believe your claims if you come down from the cross!" The majority of the crowd didn't present on Good Friday did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah. Only a centurion and few soldiers guarding the scene who after they had seen all that happened exclaimed, "Surely He was the Son of God." I wonder sometimes what it will take for sinners to believe? Allow me to mention a few things. First, it takes a work of grace. God's word and Spirit need to impact your life in such a way that you too will believe that Jesus stayed on the cross for you. Second what will it take for you to believe? It takes a work of grace, for the Bible teaches that Christ alone saves and not our works, gifts and not our power. Third, what will it take for you to believe dear friend? A work of grace, that despite our mocking cries, Jesus stays on the cross until all our sin is paid for in full. Fourth, what will it take for you to believe dear friend? A work of grace. For the Holy Spirit to convict you until you get on your knees and rid yourself of all pride and simply say, "Lord Jesus, here am I, a sinner, save me I pray!"

And the good news is that he will for he has promised that all who come to him he will not drive away! Praise God that Jesus stayed on the cross! My prayer is that when you are on your death bed, you will not say to your Christian friend, "don't pray for me!" Rather that together you can pray, "We will not boast in anything, no gifts, no pow'r, no wisdom; but we will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Why should we gain from His reward? We cannot give an answer, but this we know with all our heart, His wounds have paid our ransom." Amen.