

**Matthew 27:38-54** - Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads<sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"<sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.<sup>42</sup> "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him."<sup>43</sup> He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"<sup>44</sup> In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.<sup>45</sup> From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.<sup>46</sup> About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").<sup>47</sup> When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."<sup>48</sup> Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.<sup>49</sup> The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."<sup>50</sup> And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split<sup>52</sup> and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.<sup>53</sup> They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.<sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Dear believers in Jesus:

Imagine you're standing on Calvary as Jesus is crucified. There's a lot to take in—different sights and smells. But for a moment, I want you to focus on the sounds. What do you hear? A cacophony of voices all around you. The first voices you notice are from the Jewish leaders. They seem to have the most to say. "***He saved others, . . . but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'***" The trials are over and the sentence is being carried out, but in their hatred of Jesus they're still sarcastically demanding that he provide evidence for his claim.

The next voices you hear are from the soldiers beneath the cross. Luke's gospel tells us that they join in: "***If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself***" (Luke 23:37). Evidently, they aren't finished having fun at Jesus' expense.

Now you notice voices coming from the road that passes by the crucifixion site. People on their way to work or the market are chiming in! "***You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!***" What moves a traveler passing by to shout at a dying man like that?

Finally, you pick out two voices coming from above you. You look up and see that the men on either side of Jesus are saying the same things. Again, Luke provides the details: "***Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!***" (Luke 23:39). Do you detect some desperation along with the cruelty? Are these men hoping there's something to this man's reputation and that this just might be their lucky day?

The voices you hear come from different people in different tones from different places on that hill, but they all swell into one diabolical chorus with a clear theme: "***Prove it! If you're really God, show us!***"

Still today, you can hear the echoes of voices directed at God or his people—or no one in particular: "***If there is a God, where's the proof? Why can science explain everything without him? Why is there so much evil in the world? Why do prayers go unanswered? If you're up there, God, make me better. Give me a sign. Then I might believe.***"

Just like at Calvary, these voices come from different places. Some are spoken in hatred by people determined to fight against a God they can't stand. Others are uttered with the singular goal of having fun at our expense. Some reveal a skepticism that shakes its head at Christianity's claims. And some have a ring of desperation, as if the speaker would love to be wrong.

In other words, the people of the world today continue to put God on trial and demand to see the evidence. You hear the voices. How do they affect you? Again, picture yourself there on Golgotha listening—not as a fly-on-the-wall observer, though, but as a disciple. How do those voices make you feel? Maybe angry: "***How dare you say those things!***" Or frustrated: "***You don't understand who he is.***" But you might also be wondering if the voices are right: "***Why isn't he doing anything? I've seen him multiply loaves, heal the blind, and raise the dead! Why won't he come down from the cross? Is this the limit of his power? Is he not the one I thought he was?***"

Likewise, all the calls for proof from around us begin to affect us here today. “*If Jesus is the Son of God, why did he let this tragedy happen to me? Why doesn’t he stop his enemies from taking advantage of his people and mocking his name? Why doesn’t he give some kind of proof, some kind of sign? Why does he stay quiet?*” From our own sinful hearts, our voices join the chorus. And Satan, the unseen director, smiles.

The solution isn’t to ignore the voices raised against Jesus. In fact, if we listen more closely, we’ll notice that those first voices were on to something. “**He saved others!**” If only they had set aside their spite for a moment, they might have followed up with the right question. “**He saved others. Why doesn’t he save himself?**” They didn’t consider the fact that Jesus was refraining from using his power for a reason.

Why didn’t the man who could raise the dead save his own life? For all our *why* questions, Jesus had one too. But his question is meant to be an answer: “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” “The Son in the flesh calls out not to his Father but to his God. It’s not a cry of unbelief but of agony. It reveals what no one standing there could see. The man on the middle cross wasn’t just suffering from lacerations, nails, thirst, and suffocation—on top of the ridicule. This man, who had done nothing wrong in the court of humankind or the court of God, was suffering God’s wrath for the sins of others. His question came from the depths of the torment we deserved. The one who saved others *didn’t* save himself. Why? Because he loves us!

That’s the answer to all the *why* questions that plague us. “Why doesn’t Jesus do \_\_\_? Why would he allow \_\_\_?” If he was willing to suffer and die in our place, we cannot doubt his love. Would he be abandoned by God for us only to later abandon us? Would he meticulously follow every commandment, fulfill every prophecy, and forgive every sin only to later make a mistake in our lives? The answer to our questions remains the same: It must be because he loves us! It may not be the answer we want, but it’s the answer we need.

Not everyone on that hill was blind to this. Matthew tells us that the two thieves joined the chorus, but Luke says that one changed his mind. What moved the thief to turn from mocking Jesus to defending him? It wasn’t any display of power! Rather, it was Jesus’ humble love. Maybe it was his prayer for forgiveness or his dignity in the face of mockery. Or perhaps other words of Jesus not recorded for us or the testimony of believers there. Whatever it was, we can say that it was the Holy Spirit working not through a mighty miracle but through a Suffering Servant.

Jesus still works in us the same way. By a simple washing, he puts his Spirit in us to convince us that he is our Savior. Through time-worn words, he speaks to us the same forgiveness, the same promise of paradise. In an unassuming meal, he lets us touch and taste Exhibit A: the very body and blood he gave for us. These means bring Jesus’ death to us to forgive our doubts—and put them to rest.

Of course, the skeptics in our world—and in our hearts—will say, “Maybe God doesn’t help because he can’t! Maybe there are no signs because there is no God!” That sounds a lot like those voices around the cross—and God had another answer for them. At the moment Jesus died, the temple curtain was torn in two. The earth shook, the rocks split, the tombs broke open, and the dead came to life. These were all enough for the centurion and soldiers to acknowledge that Jesus must have been the Son of God.

As you know, this was just a preview; the clincher would come on Sunday. But this display of power removes any last thought that Jesus couldn’t be the Son of God he claimed to be. Eyewitnesses—friends and foes alike—saw it and testified to it. Their accounts were recorded, with the Holy Spirit’s stamp of approval, and preserved for us today. There’s no question that the one on trial, the one suffering and dying, is our God.

Therefore, there is no question that Jesus is our Savior. Today he gives us the proof. Amid the chorus of voices demanding evidence, the silent suffering of the Son of God is all the evidence we need. His refusal to save himself is proof of his determination to save us. He cries out to his God to prove that he suffered every lick of hell for us. He confidently entrusts his spirit to his Father as proof that his work is done—and the Father shakes the world to confirm it. On Golgotha, Jesus gives us all the evidence we need. Amen.