Jesus did not save himself to save others

Mark 15:16-32

Key Verse: 15:26 “The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

If someone asks me what the most important event in human history is, I will answer, “One is Jesus’ crucifixion, and the other, Jesus’ resurrection.” Indeed, these two events changed human history from death to life and from curse to blessing. These are two of the main pillars of gospel faith and Christian doctrine. Today we will study one of these tremendous stories which happened in Jerusalem, Israel over 2,000 years ago. Some of you may not be excited with my message because you have heard it many times from sermons, stories, movies, and so on. But I ask you to pay attention to this story so that you may renew your relationship with Jesus and make a new decision to follow his beautiful example.

After Jesus was tried before Pilate, Jesus was flogged by the Roman soldiers and handed over to be crucified. (15) The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. (16) They called more soldiers to protect themselves from the possible riot of the Jews. They put a purple robe on Jesus, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. A purple robe and a crown are symbols of kingship. They put them on Jesus not to show him their respect as a king, but to humiliate him in public. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. (16-19) When the head of Jesus was hit by the staff, crimson-colored blood began to flow down from his forehead to his cheek. More painful than from thorns and the staff to Jesus was ridicule and humiliation. Still, Jesus didn’t open his mouth because he wanted to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29) Isaiah prophesied this, “*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*.” (Is 53:7).

There appear important supporting actors in the story of Jesus such as Peter, Pilate, Barabbas, and Simon. Today we’ll study about Simon from Cyrene. Look at verse 21. “***A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross***.” The weight of the beam of the wooden cross was about thirty or forty pounds. It was too heavy for Jesus to carry by himself who had been already flogged and tortured by the soldiers. So, the soldiers picked up Simon from Cyrene to carry the cross. Simon was one of the Jewish pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He must have thought that he was one of the most unfortunate persons in the world because he had to carry the cross of the criminal who had been condemned by the Roman law. But he didn’t realize that he became one of the most blessed men in the world because he carried the cross of Jesus, the Son of God. The Bible historians say that Simon became converted and brought his wife and two sons to Christ Jesus. (Ac 13:1, Ro 16:13) Through the story of Simon we learn that unintentional carrying the cross of Jesus turns out to be the source of blessing. Even though Simon carried the cross of Jesus unintentionally and forcefully, he became the source of blessing to all his family members. We often ask ourselves why we have to suffer and confront unexpected difficulties. The present sufferings seem to be endless. However, the cross of Jesus has the power to change our destiny from suffering to blessing. The cross of Jesus turns over our future from misery to glory. Not long ago, Peter denied Jesus three times because he feared suffering. He did not want to take up the cross and follow Jesus. But after he found the secret of the cross of Jesus, he was willing to carry the cross and die with Jesus. He encouraged the suffering Christians who were following Jesus in this, “*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*.” (1 Pe 4:12-13) Amen!

Look at verses 22-23. **They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.** The soldiers brought Jesus to an execution site called Golgotha. Then they offered Jesus pain reliever, wine mixed with myrrh, but Jesus refused it. Why did Jesus refuse to take the pain reliever? This is because Jesus was determined to take the full measure of pain which human beings could experience on the cross. Jesus did not avoid or reduce the price of our sins, but paid the full amount of the price of our sins through his obedient death. The soldiers divided up his clothes. They cast lots to see what each would get. (24) This shows us the cruelty and brutality of the senseless soldiers. They nailed the innocent man on the cross and then they played a game under the cross. But this was also done to fulfill David’s prophecy. David said in Psalm 22:16-18. “*Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment*.” David sang this song as if he was crucified by his enemies who had condemned him and tried to kill him. It is amazing that David had prophesied this long ago even before crucifixion was invented. The Holy Spirit moved David’s heart to prophesy the death of the Messiah through his own suffering.

It was nine in the morning when they crucified Jesus. They posted the charge against each criminal on the top of the cross. Look at verse 26. “***The written notice of the charge against him read: “THE KING OF THE JEWS***.” St. Matthew and St. John added, “Jesus of Nazareth” with the King of the Jews. (Mt 27:37, Jn 19:19) Have you ever seen the written notice “I.N.R.I” on the top of the cross of the statue of Jesus? I.N.R.I in Latin “*Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum* “means “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” The soldiers noticed the charge of Jesus as the King of the Jews. But they did not realize that they were proclaiming the real identity of Jesus as the king of the Jews. We call this ‘dramatic irony.” According to John’s gospel, the notice was written in three languages, Aramaic, Latin and Greek. (Jn 19:20) This means that God let all the people of the world read this notice and believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the King of the Jews, the Promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. (27) They put Jesus in the center between two rebels so that they could humiliate Jesus to a maximum degree. Now the three crosses were set up on the top of the hill. Look at verses 29-30. “***Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself***!” People who saw Jesus hung on the cross began to mock him. David prophesied this also in Psalm 22:7-8, which says, “*All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. “He trusts in the LORD,” they say, “let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him*.” **In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others”, they said, “but he can’t save himself!” Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.**” (31-32) They were ignorant and senseless. They didn’t know what they were talking about. They didn’t realize that Satan used them to tempt Jesus to give up the cross and come down from the cross. If Jesus wanted, he could have come down from the cross and saved himself. Everything was possible with him and for him. But Jesus didn’t come down from the cross. He did not save himself to save others. He remained on the cross to the end in order to bear our sins. He didn’t come down from the cross to obey the Father’s will.

I don’t need any more explanations of this story because the story itself moves our heart. But I want to think about God’s unconditional and sacrificial love of Jesus who didn’t save himself to save us. Paul said in Romans 5:6-8, “*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.” God loves us not because we are perfect, but because we are imperfect. Jesus died on the cross not because we are righteous, but because we are sinners. God loves us whether we are righteous or sinners. His love is unconditional. This is the reason why we come to God as we are. Praise God! John 3:16 says, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life*.” It is amazing that God did not save his One and Only Son to save this world.

We know many great people who did not save themselves to save others. They are missionaries, war heroes, fire-fighters, doctors and nurses, and so on. We meet other heroes not far from us, but from very close. There are no parents on this earth who are not willing to sacrifice themselves for their children. Fathers and mothers in our church sacrifice themselves for their children. I hope that their children may appreciate this. The parents work hard day and night to support their children spiritually, mentally, and financially. They do not save themselves to save their children. Their sacrificial love comes from the sacrificial love of Christ who didn’t save himself to save others. We are little Jesus who give his light to this dark world.

Today let us think about Jesus who didn’t save himself to save us. We are all the debtors of his death on the cross. We are the ones who should be condemned and die on the cross because of our sins. We are the ones who should pay the price of our sins. But Jesus took our place. He paid the price for our sin. He died on the cross. Peter said, “*He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.*” (1Pe 2:24) Jesus endured the cross. Like him we must endure the cross to the end. Whatever cross we may carry, let us endure the cross. There is glory in the cross of Jesus. Our present sufferings in the cross are not worthy compared to the glory in the resurrection! Amen!