

Call to Obedience #303
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
www.schultze.org

Save Thyself

By Reimar Schultze

“And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. . . And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.”—Mark 15:24, 28-31

Crucifixion became a common method of execution as early as 300 BC for criminals and rebels. Perhaps mass crucifixions peaked at the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD when tens of thousands of Jews were crucified every day. (See the works of Josephus.) The cross used at the time was a vertical beam with a cross beam on top of that. It was the simplest and easiest method to construct and transport crosses. These crosses, of course, were used over and over again. Before the criminal was crucified, he was flogged (Mk. 15:15). It was not unusual that a criminal would die as a result of the flogging. After the flogging, the criminal had to carry the crossbar of the cross to the site of the crucifixion. He was then stripped of all clothing except for a loincloth and then either tied or nailed to the cross. A small footrest was possibly placed right under the feet. The whole idea of a crucifixion was to prolong the agony of suffering as long as possible. The criminal, exposed to the elements: to heat, cold, rain or sleet; would then hang on this cross for many days often even into the second week. Jesus died on a cross.

Our text says, “Likewise, they that passed by railed on him...Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, he saved others, himself he cannot save.” (Vs. 30-31) I ask you, who were these people passing by, railing at Jesus? The Word says they were bypassers, they had not been there earlier but they came later to join the crowd saying crucify him, continuing the torture of our Lord together with the chief priest and scribes by mocking Jesus. Oh, how hard can the hearts of men be? But yet there is something more serious beyond the hardness of the heart and that is the deceitfulness of it. Paul says sin deceives (Rom. 7:11). And it is because sin deceives there was no one except John the Baptist who saw the necessity of the cross. John said, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) John was full of the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. He had a pure heart; therefore he knew that Jesus would have to become a sacrificial lamb to save us from our sins. He was the first one to know that there could be no Christianity without the cross. No one else, not even the apostles could see that until Pentecost. If you have any sin in your heart, you are deceived and you cannot perceive the absolute necessity of the cross of Jesus and the necessity of your own cross. Yes, you can comprehend it intellectually, theologically, historically, but the real proof of whether you

really understand it in the innermost chambers of your heart, is how you live, whether you are a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God or a compromiser, an accommodator, an excuse-maker or just a talker.

If you watch ungodly television program, you prove that you don't understand the importance of the cross. You save yourself. If you prefer sports events, shopping, or parties to prayer services, while millions are dying unsaved, you save yourself. If you don't discipline your children, you are trying to save yourself. What about gossip, idle words, jesting, immodest clothing, worldly music from rock to opera? What about faultfinding, financial indulgences and divorce? Yes, we preach the cross, we love our songs about the cross, but our daily lives and our church programs tell us that once we get close to it, we circumvent it. We want to save ourselves. The by-passers said save thyself.

I see young people who want to go all for Jesus, but their Christian parents say, now, son or daughter, don't get radical, don't go too far, keep the balance. (In other words, "you just might get crucified.") You might lose your friends, your job, your popularity, and your ministry. When it comes right down to it, most Christians fear the cross more than hell itself, yet it is only the cross that saves us from eternal fires. Save yourself . . . come down from the cross. We want happiness, but not holiness. When the serpent said to Eve, you shall not surely die, he said save yourself. He offered her happiness to give up holiness. Abraham got to Canaan but as soon as he had sojourned it, God sent a famine, God sent a cross. Abraham had sin in his life. He was called, he was dedicated, he was precious to God, but he tried to save himself. He thought surely, since God has called me to be the father of many nations, he does not want me to die of hunger, this would not make sense. God said go to Canaan. God tried to crucify self-reliance out of Abraham so he would become utterly dependent on him, so he could give birth to a nation, but because Abraham did not go to the cross, God's work was delayed for 20 years. Is it possible that God has been trying to start a wonderful work through you, but because you have refused to take up the cross this work is delayed? Abraham could not see the plan. He could not see the cross. He went to Egypt to save himself. He told a lie, he created chaos in Pharaoh's household, and he was thrown out of the country. You can trace people like that all the way through the Old Testament.

God had great plans for them, but when he put a cross in front them, they tried to save themselves, they took the easy way, they gave birth to that which is of the flesh and not that which is of the spirit. They gave birth to Ishmaels instead of to Isaacs. If you want to have an Isaac ministry, one that is of the spirit, one that will never end, take up your cross. Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). He also said, "I die daily" (1Cor. 15:31). Paul had an Isaac ministry. Most churches today are in an Ishmael ministry, they want results quickly. They commit adultery with the world, with its styles, its fashions, its methods, its music, its entertainment spirit. A.W. Tozer said already fifty years ago: "almost everything the church has been doing has been suggested to her by the world." And upon the forehead of many of these ministries is written "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). The greatest sin of the church is in her neglect to take up the cross to follow Jesus.

Because Ishmael ministries circumvent the cross, continuous self-denial, they have a foul and unclean spirit. We are called upon to come out from among these ministries, not to touch the unclean thing any more (2 Cor. 6:17). Oh, how we are blinded from seeing the cross by the “little” sins in our lives. How hard is it to come to the cross, to die on the cross to keep dying so we can keep living in fullness of life? It takes all you have, my friend, second by second, that is why Jesus said, “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12). That is why we need to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We can’t be kingdom Christians being part-timers, we have to be full-timers from morning to night. You have to be a full-timer in prayer and praise for Paul said, “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:16-17). That is being full-timers. Oh, but my friend, it’s worth it all. The cross will lead you to thrills, romance, and adventure. If you are on the cross, you are a rejoicing, witnessing, praying Christian.

How few there are who see the cross. Peter just got a revelation of who Jesus was. He said, exultingly, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” (Matt. 16:16) The Holy Spirit gave him the revelation. We think because we have a revelation of God that we are tops, that we are way up there. We think the same when we have a gift or two, we become exalted, exuberant and proud, but we are deceived. In our exaltation we think we can council others and tell them what to do. You can have revelation after revelation, gift after gift and yet be deceived. Sin deceives. After Peter had this revelation, Jesus said, “I am going to suffer and die.” Peter said, “Not so” (Mark 8:31-32). Who can see the cross? What do we promote in our churches? The gifts, a spirit of entertainment, a spirit of celebration? The problem is that although we may celebrate Jesus and make ourselves feel good, while doing so, Jesus does not enter into our celebrations with us because our celebrations do not come out of a self-denying, broken, repentant, contrite heart. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). We must get rid of our gods some of which we hide under our saddles (Gen. 31:34). Our gods can be our children, our obsession with grades, they can be our relatives, our hobbies, our money, they can be sports, or our marriage or our job or our homes.

Everything that exalts itself above the divine purpose of God must be crucified. Oh, the fields are white for harvest, but the laborers are few because there are too few who have stopped saving themselves. And so, when the call of God comes, we continue to hear, “I cannot come because . . .” Jesus says, “They all began to make excuse” (Luke 14:18). When you hear that from a Christian once, be prepared to hear it over and over again from that same person. The by-passers said save yourself. The chief priests and scribes said, “He saved others, himself he cannot save!” (Vs. 31) Yes, now they made Jesus a philanthropist in his last hours. Indeed Jesus went about doing good. He healed the sick, cast out devils, fed the hungry, and raised the dead. He was a philanthropist. But he was more than a philanthropist. We think because we wrap our shallow faith in philanthropy, we will make it to heaven. We have created a civilized, cross-less philanthropical Christianity that is despicable in the eyes of God. We make ourselves feel good and to compensate for not taking up the cross we help with soup kitchens, or help build churches on mission fields. I have to tell you that nothing Jesus did in all this philanthropy had any eternity in it until he died on the cross. Nothing you do, from giving all your money to the poor to giving your body to be burned, has any eternal

value unless it comes out of a crucified life! Everything that does not come out of the cross is wood, hay and stubble and will not stand the fire of judgement.

Yes, now in the final hours, Jesus was told that he saved others, let him now save himself and we shall believe. I have never forgotten an advertisement that I heard years ago. It was directed to retirees. It said, "You have raised your children, you've worked hard, you've put your children through college, and now treat yourself, do yourself a good one, buy a Cadillac!" Which was then one of the best cars. Friend, God has not only a divine purpose for the first twenty years of your life, but also for the last twenty. There is never a place for self-indulgence on this side of eternity. There is never a justification to save ourselves for Jesus said, "He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39). The cross is not pretty, but on the other side of it "his yoke is easy and his burden is light" (Matt. 11:30), and there is "Joy unspeakable and full of glory!" (1 Pet. 1:8) Go to the cross, don't struggle on it, just die on it. Stop saving yourself!

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