

Cruel Mocking

Shortly after Noah stepped out of the ark to begin a new life, God placed the responsibility of capital punishment on mankind, and He has never rescinded it.

Genesis 9:6 **"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man."**

Yes, because man was created in the **"image of God,"** his life has been set aside as sacred.

And that's the basic rationale behind the need for capital punishment.

However, in today's so-called enlightened society, many of our governments have rejected God's wisdom on that point, and their citizens have paid the consequences.

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But man's rejection does not change God's proclamation, and He still expects His decree to be carried out.

And I'm also sure He expects it to be carried out as humanely as possible.

But once again, as history demonstrates, man has perverted God's righteous law to conform to his own unrighteous purposes.

First of all, the death penalty was extended to cover many lesser crimes.

That was never God's intention.

And not only that, but in many instances, their method of execution was anything but humane.

We only have to look at crucifixion, a method favored by Rome, to verify this point.

From beginning to end, it is one of the most inhumane and excruciating methods of execution possible.

And you would certainly expect such a display of human suffering would strike pity into the most hardened heart.

Yes, you would.

But that certainly wasn't the case at Jesus' crucifixion.

No, not at all!

In that dark hour of human depravity, the rabble and the rulers, the robbers and the Romans, joined their voices in a universal chorus of derision.

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First of all, let's listen to the crowd.

Matthew 27:39-40 **"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."**

No doubt these bitter outbursts simply gave voice to their disillusionment.

Only a few months ago they had streamed out of their cities and villages to marvel at Jesus' miracles.

And no doubt some of them had partaken in that feast so miraculously provided.

Yes, they had built their castles in the air, and imagined a great military leader who would rescue them from the tyranny of Rome.

They had even tried to take Him by force and make Him their King.

And now He hung before them helpless, a symbol of Roman supremacy.

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And then there were the religious leaders. Only a few months ago this Man's popularity had threatened their authority over the people.

Now, because of their clever schemes, He
hung before them, a defeated foe.

Yes, it was time to savour their victory.

V 41-43 **"Likewise the chief priests also,
mocking with the scribes and elders,
said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot
save. If He is the King of Israel, let
Him now come down from the cross, and we
will believe Him. "He trusted in God; let
Him deliver Him now if He will have Him;
for He said, 'I am the Son of God."**

And the next verse tells us, **"--- the
robbers who were crucified with Him
reviled Him with the same thing."**

And not to be outdone---**"The soldiers also
mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour
wine, and saying, If You are the King of
the Jews, save Yourself."**

Now, I think it would have been far better if these men had been content to hold their tongue.

After all, they had already had ample opportunity to exercise their brutality, and had gone to great lengths to portray Him as a comic king.

Yes, the moment He had been condemned, their devilish mockery began.

With all the soldiers gathered around, they had clothed Him in scarlet, placed a reed in His hand, and jammed a crown of thorns down on His head.

And then, for the entertainment of all, some of the soldiers had bowed the knee before Him, crying out in derision, "**Hail, King of the Jews!**"

And then they spit on Him and hit Him on the head.

Oh yes, it would have been far better if they had held their peace, but emboldened by the mockery of His own people, they joined in once more.

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And did you notice that little word **"if"** that keeps popping up in their mockery? Actually, the crowds were the first to use it---**"If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."**

And then the religious leaders chimed in --- **"If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."**

And, as we will soon see, even one of the criminals used that word.

But that wasn't the first time that word had been used.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Satan had used it to tempt Him.

In fact, the very first thing he said was,
"If You are the Son of God, command that
these stones become bread," and later on,
"If You are the Son of God, throw
Yourself down. For it is written: 'He
shall give His angels charge over you.'"

And now, even though these mockers didn't
realize it; just like Satan, they were
encouraging Jesus to bypass His Father's
will.

Yes, "If You are the Son of God" and if you
are "the King of Israel," come down from
the cross.

Embrace the glory, and reject the
consequences of being the "Lamb of God
who takes away the sin of the world!"

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But there was another reason for deserting
the cross that had nothing to do with
Jesus.

It was the motivation of a very desperate man.

Yes, "--- **one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."**

Well, that certainly was a long shot, but in his condition, anything was worth trying.

However, nothing can be gained by blaspheming the Son of God, and an appeal that begins with an **"if"** has no chance of success.

But as pathetic as this appeal was, it couldn't compare with the devastating effects of the religious leaders' words.

When they said **"He saved others,"** they freely recognized the mighty works that should have led them to their Messiah.

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You see, Jesus hadn't gone around the countryside saying *Look at Me, I'm your Messiah*.

No, His Heavenly Father had provided His credentials, and He was content to let them speak for themselves.

Certainly, there were other witnesses to His authenticity.

There was John the Baptist, the Father's own testimony from heaven, and the scriptures Jesus fulfilled to the letter.

However, it was His mighty works that were a special testimony to Israel.

But these mighty works were not enough for their leaders.

In fact, one day in the temple, they confronted Jesus about His lack of a personal testimony.

Here's what they said---"**How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.**"

To which Jesus replied---"**I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.**"

And now, not only had they not believed, but they were using these mighty works to mock Him---"**He saved others; Himself He cannot save.**"

Yes, their condemnation was universal.

Well, almost universal.

You see, in that crowd of mockers, there was one man who had changed his mind.

It was that other thief and he had eliminated that awful "**if**" from his vocabulary.

Yes, in those fleeting moments of life, his ridicule had turned to recognition.

And not only had he recognized Jesus, but he recognized his sin---"**we receive the due reward of our deeds.**"

And he also recognized the injustice of Jesus' punishment---"**but this Man has done nothing wrong.**"

And, finally, he recognized his Messiah---"**Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.**"

To which his Messiah immediately responded--"**Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.**"