

Southport Presbyterian Church
Rev. Kevin Bausman
Good Friday, April 10, 2009

Jesus Stayed on the Cross
Matthew 27:39-43 (NIV)

“Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 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!’

“In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ‘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. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Jesus as He is dying on the cross has one last temptation thrown at Him. It’s a temptation to prove Himself, to prove He is the Son of God by coming down from the cross. “Show Your power. Prove Yourself,” is the temptation.

This is just one of the many temptations the evil one has thrown at Jesus over the years. The most recent was the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was tempted not to go through this path of suffering. The earliest was when He started His ministry—again the temptation to prove He is the Son of God.

This happened during Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness when the evil one tempted Him twice with the challenge, “If you are the Son of God...” and then dares Jesus to prove it by doing something spectacular such as turning stones into bread—which would not only prove His Deity but make quite an impression by such a display of power. It would also mean He would save Himself from any further pangs of hunger.

But Jesus did not yield to any of these temptations in the wilderness. He resisted the evil one by quoting Scripture.

Now on the cross at probably the weakest point in His life—feeling horrendous pain, abandonment, and approaching death—Jesus is tempted once again. The people say they’ll become believers if He comes down from the cross. Show us Your power, then we’ll believe. Impress us. Save Yourself.

And once again, Jesus does not give in to the temptation. He refuses to do anything they demand of Him. Certainly He could save Himself. Certainly He could show His power in doing so. Indeed, it would be very impressive.

But Jesus doesn’t do it. Why? Certainly, we know that to yield, to give in to these temptations, would be to disobey His Father and go against His Father’s will. That would be sin.

Jesus sought to please His Father out of love in all things and to remain sinless. But along with this reason, there are other reasons Jesus did not yield to this final temptation.

One is that Jesus does not have to prove Himself by doing spectacular things in order for people to believe in Him. In fact, He doesn't even engage those who jeer Him at the cross. He gives no verbal response at all to their challenges. He continues to hang on the cross.

The world then—and even now—wants Jesus to prove Himself by some spectacular show of power. Then they'll believe. They believe power. They believe force. They'll believe if He'll come down from the cross.

William Barclay, however, notes: “The very faith which is dependent on signs and wonders is not faith. If faith cannot believe without sensations it is not really faith, it is doubt looking for proof and looking in the wrong place. God's rescuing power is not something to be played and experimented with, it is something to be quietly trusted in the life of every day.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1, Revised Edition, p. 69)

“The Jews could only see God in power; but Jesus shows [people] that God is sacrificial love.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2, p. 405)

Jesus does not have to prove Himself nor defend Himself with spectacular power so He will be accepted, so people will believe. For will they really believe?

General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, once said; “It is because Jesus did not come down from the cross that we believe him.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, Revised Edition, p. 362)

Secondly, Jesus is more concerned with making an impact than making an impression. How impressive it would be to see more than 12 legions of angels—more than 72,000 of them—descend from Heaven and rescue Jesus, as He said He could do in **Matthew 26:53**. (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1485) It would be very impressive to see Jesus come off the cross. But was Jesus here to impress or to impact?

We see Jesus' impact on one of the two thieves. In Mark's Gospel we read in verse 32 of Chapter 15 that the two thieves being “crucified with him also heaped insults on him.” But in **Luke 23:35-43** we see that one of them “later repented and asked to be in Jesus' kingdom.” (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1529) We read in **Luke 23:39-43**: “One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don't you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’” It appears that in Luke's Gospel after the one thief saw Jesus “forgive his executioners [just prior to this] (**Luke 23:34**)” he “determined that Jesus could be trusted.” (*The Quest Study Bible*, p. 1408)

In fact, this thief is the only one to whom Jesus responds while on the cross. He does not respond in either words or action to His accusers or even to the other unrepentant thief.

Jesus came to make an impact on people's hearts and lives—not to impress them, not to have them follow Him by force or by displays of power and wonder. He came not to coerce people. He came to win them through love, and love kept Him on the cross—love for you and me, for all of us.

The world—then and now—is impressed by displays of might and power, of pedigree, education and dollars. It is impressed with power flaunted in the kinds of cars driven, the splendor and number of houses owned, of titles, degrees and honors, of strength militarily, economically and politically.

Yet who with all the above has ever impacted the world or left their mark on the world as Jesus has?

Walter Wangerin, Jr., in his excellent book for Lent called *Reliving the Passion* writes about Jesus standing before the high priest Caiaphas, in **Mark 14:61** and being asked the question—point blank—“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” What Rev. Wangerin writes here helps us understand even further the reason Jesus sought to make an impact and not an impression. He writes: “From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus charged those who experienced his power to say nothing about it. Wonders and miracles, evidently, were not the central purpose of his coming. They may have been signs pointing *to* the Messiah; but they were not the definition of the messianic office.

“And when he was at the height of his ministry (as the world assesses height, as the world assesses greatness) he demanded that no one say he was the ‘Christ.’ When he was dazzling crowds, confuting enemies, causing shepherds and lepers and kings to ask, ‘Who is this man?’ when masses were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak!’ even when Simon Peter explicitly confessed, ‘You are the Christ’—Jesus commanded them ‘to tell no one about him.’ ...

“Even when Peter, James, and John saw his celestial glory in the transfiguration—saw Jesus revealed as the fulfillment of the whole Old Testament—he told them to keep quiet.

“The world would have misunderstood the glory.

“The world might have expected a warrior-king, someone triumphant in its own terms. A winner, you know. A number-one, against-all-odds, pride-inspiring, tear-in-my-eye, flat-out, all-around, good-guy *winner!* A hero.

“Only when that characterization is rendered absurd and impossible does Jesus finally accept the title ‘Christ.’

“...It is when Jesus is humiliated, most seeming weak, bound and despised and alone and defeated [standing before the evil high priest Caiaphas] that he finally answers the question, ‘Are you the Christ?’

“Now, for the record, [Jesus says], ‘Yes, I am.’

“It is only in [complete] powerlessness that he finally links himself with power: [He says:] ‘And you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power.’ Because any display of messianic power is far, far in the future—in his and in ours together, on the last day. *The last day of the world, not today!*

“This, then, is the Christ that Jesus would have us know and accept and...reflect:

“One who came to die.

“One who, in the assessment of this age, failed—an embarrassment, a folly, a stumbling block. An offense!

“One crucified.” (Walter Wangerin, Jr., *Reliving the Passion*, pp.81-82)

It is important for us to remember that even today Jesus through us, His people, seeks to impact our world and not impress. That means that things we undertake do not have to be a success by the world’s standards in order to have an impact.

Jesus’ refusal to impress with power, with the spectacular and to instead continue hanging on the cross to impact people’s lives, to impact even history, is why Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:22-24: “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**

Finally, Jesus endures the cross, refuses to save Himself, refuses to come down because He sees the long and the broad picture—a picture of love. Coming down from the cross is short term. He saves Himself—but Himself only. If He leaves the cross, we’re finished, we’re lost. There is no way for us to have our sins forgiven, no way to come home to God, no life after death.

Jesus stays on the cross. He knows Sunday will come, and He knows what that will mean for you and me. Max Lucado makes a profound statement on Jesus’ love for us which kept Him on the cross when he says that “Jesus would rather go to hell for you than go to Heaven without you.” (Max Lucado, *And the Angels Were Silent*, Dustjacket)

Indeed, William Barclay describes the depth of Jesus’ love on the cross when he writes: “Jesus came to tell [people] of the love of God, more, he was himself the incarnate love of God. If he had refused the Cross or if in the end he had come down from the Cross, it would have meant that there was a limit to God’s love, that there was something which that love was not

prepared to suffer for men [people], that there was a line beyond which it would not go. But, Jesus went the whole way and died on the Cross and this means that there is literally no limit to God's love, that there is nothing in all the universe which that love is not prepared to suffer for men [people], that there is nothing, not even death on a cross, which it will refuse to bear for men [people].

“When we look at the Cross, Jesus is saying to us, ‘God loves you like that, with a love that is limitless, a love that will bear every suffering earth has to offer.’” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 362-363)

That is the depth of Jesus' love for you and me. He refuses to save Himself in order to save you and me, in order to show His love for you and me, if only we'll respond in faith to that love.

“Martin Luther had a dream in which he stood on the day of judgment before God Himself—and Satan was there to accuse him. When Satan opened his books full of accusations, he pointed to transgression after transgression of which Luther was guilty. As the proceedings went on, Luther's heart sunk in despair. Then he remembered the cross of Christ—and turning upon Satan, he said, ‘There is one entry which you have not made, Satan.’

“The Devil retorted, ‘What is that?’

“And Luther answered, ‘It is this—the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth [cleanses] us from all sins.’” (James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, pp. 67-68)

Brothers and sisters, that is why Jesus stayed on the cross and died.

To Him be all the honor and the glory and the praise forever and ever.

Amen.