

O faithful Savior, who of Your infinite love condescended to walk the way of the cross ... to atone for the sin of all mankind, we humbly ask You, give us grace to remember always in true faith what You have done for us; give us also willingness and strength to follow You upon the way that leads through the thorns of sufferings and grief to eternal happiness, and be our Guide through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Lord, have mercy upon us, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (The Lutheran Liturgy, companion altar book for The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 106)

And those who passed by derided [Jesus], wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

In Christ Jesus, who could, but for your sake would **not** come down from His cross, dear fellow redeemed:

Our text for today is the most somber scene of our Lord being reviled by the unbelieving world while upon the cross of our salvation. Let us begin by hearing these words of instruction through His Apostle Peter: "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."

Could you say Jesus was at His weakest, physically and emotionally, at this point? While He could come down from the cross as the almighty God, He could not abandon the will of the Father for saving us. Soon after our text it would become dark, very dark for our Lord and the Father would not desire Him at all, forsaking Him in the torments of our hell. What the derisive wagging heads said as the mouthpieces of Satan would truly seem to be completely true, He would be eternally deserted upon that cross of His suffering. But the rescue would come, just as it is promised to us even today: **God always Delivers from His Cross of Suffering in this Life.**

I

It is true however what is freeing oneself from nails compared to unstopping of ears of the deaf to hear, loosing of tongues of the mute to speak, opening eyes of the blind to see, cleansing of lepers to return to society and the release from the grave of those who had begun to decay? The One who had power over all such affects of sin, could easily come down from the cross, but the glory that was to come was not yet to be had – not yet.

Just as Satan was there at the beginning of Jesus' three-year public ministry with temptations to forsake the way of the cross and find the glory that was promised to follow, so here at the very end Satan opened his lying deceptive mouth again. But Jesus trusted in the promise of eternal deliverance from all evil, as the writer of the Hebrews points out: "look... to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

God the Father laid this cross upon His Son for you and me. It was beyond any cross that He lays upon us. But cross bearing is promised to all who follow the Lord Jesus. The cross bearing of Jesus was to win salvation for us. Our cross bearing in this life is to discipline us as we continue to trust in all the promises of God as we have come to know them in His Son. The promise to deliver us from

our crosses eternally will also be experienced by us for the sake of the One who endured the eternal cross bearing for us.

II

We often lose sight of the way this works however as Christians during our good days and can be caught off guard when the time for cross bearing comes upon us. Satan convinces us that God owes us glory now in this world of sin and shame, because we follow His Son in this life. Through his agents today, Satan will say of you: *"He trusts in God, let God deliver him now, if He desires him."*

We will call upon the name of God in our days of trouble and imagine that when we find relief from whatever it is, then God has heard us and has blessed us. We wrongly conclude that only when we find relief here and now, that God is keeping His promise of deliverance. But what happens when we must endure a certain cross all our days in this life, do we fall for the lies of Satan which Jesus heard on that cross and think that God disregards us?

Did not Jesus pray earnestly the night before His crucifixion for the Father to find another way for Him to secure our salvation? He pleaded with Him three times to have the way of the cross with its abandonment in the torments of hell taken from Him. But as Jesus said, *"Not My will, but Yours be done."* Did the Father go back on His promise by not granting Him that deliverance? Of course not, this was the only way that would work to set us free from sin, death and hell. Jesus had to drink the cup of eternal wrath toward our sin to its most bitter dregs, not one drop less.

Satan, the preeminent theologian of glory, both in the wilderness after Jesus fasted forty days and nights and on Golgatha while having been beaten to a pulp was now affixed to the accursed tree, tempted our Lord to forsake the way of the cross. But our Lord, the Righteous One, remained faithful to the will of the Father. He did not sin. He opened His mouth not reviling, but in speaking the sweet words of divine promise for even His enemies to hear.

You and I have often failed in our times of temptation. We have voiced our curses not only at our enemies but dare we admit it, against our greatest of all allies, the Lord Himself. Consequently, we should be cast off from the presence of our Lord forever. At least that is what Satan would have us believe. But our Lord is patient with us.

He is slow to anger and abounding in His steadfast love, forgiving these sins and all our sins. We are delivered from all our crosses in this life by the One, who endured His through the everlasting punishment for all our sins.

When Satan and his allies, the unbelieving world and your own sinful flesh, try to tear you from the God who for your own good at times lays all kinds of crosses on you, tell Satan to go back to hell with all his lies. Curse him, the father of all lies, with the authority as a child of God. The glory will come, if not here in time, most certainly in the glories of heaven, on that you can rely for the Lord has spoken it throughout His word in many ways and at many times.

Imagine the darkness of unbelief in the hearts of the chief priests, scribes and elders of the church declaring that if Jesus came down from the cross they would finally believe in Him. What would there have been to believe, that Jesus was a sinner like them, disobeying the will of the Father? We believe in the Son of God who stayed on the cross to the bitter end for our complete salvation.

Let us conclude with these words of the Apostle Paul: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Amen.