

## The Generative Power Of Sacrificial Living

On Sunday, we continued our study of Jesus' experience on the cross by focusing on a phrase the chief priests and elders shouted at Jesus on the cross: "He saved others; but he cannot save himself."

1. Warm up question. What's something quirky that you do that you never tend to notice until others point it out to you?
2. Once again, let's read Matthew 27:31-44. On Sunday we focused on verse 42. As Jeff meditated on this verse and asked what God might have for us in it, the answer he got back was, "There's a lot of truth in what the chief priests and elders said, not necessarily for Jesus, but for us ordinary humans." For us, it's usually a lot easier to save somebody else than to save ourselves. It's a lot easier to diagnose the problems and weaknesses of someone else than to diagnose ourselves. All of which led us to, **Key Lesson No. 1: To save ourselves, we need the help of others; we need to humbly listen to the observations of the people around us.**
  - a. I Corinthians 4:4 says, "I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." What do you think that means? What insights does this verse offer?
  - b. Why is it so hard for us to accurately see and assess ourselves and our own weaknesses and shortcomings?
  - c. Jeff told how he used to play basketball with a passion bordering on idiocy until a friend from church had the courage to gently share this observation. The irony, Jeff said, is that, as a teenager, he had been very disappointed by a pastor who played basketball with the same over-the-top intensity. Yet Jeff couldn't see that in himself. When in your life has someone shared an observation with you that was hard to hear, but ultimately very helpful?
  - d. Two weeks ago, we talked about the importance of not letting other people – especially difficult people – define our understanding of ourself and our life narrative. So how do we balance the need to listen humbly to others with the need to not give away our power and self-image to others?
3. What the chief priests and elders said about Jesus – "he saved others, but cannot save himself" – is generally true for us as ordinary humans, but wasn't true for Jesus. Jeff noted three different points when Jesus could have saved himself from the cross. First, before he even traveled to Jerusalem, he sensed the danger and could have simply stayed away. Second, once he arrived and Judas left the Last Supper to betray him, Jesus and his disciples could have escaped the city under cover of darkness and retreated to the Transjordan wilderness. Instead, Jesus awaited his arrest in the Garden. Third, on the cross itself, Jesus could have called 10,000 angels and God would have responded (Matthew 26:53). But Jesus passed up all these opportunities to save himself because he knew the ultimate benefits of his sacrifice would

overwhelm the costs. From this we learned, **Key Lesson No. 2: Sacrifice is the most powerful generative force in the cosmos. Very few wonderful things happen in life without great sacrifice.**

- a. What were some of the personal costs to Jesus of his sacrifice? What were some of the benefits to him and to us? Do you feel the benefits outweighed the costs?
- b. In John 12:24, when Jesus is explaining to his disciples why he must face the danger in Jerusalem, he says, “Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” How do you think a grain of wheat “feels” when it falls to the ground and dies? What life principle is Jesus trying to teach us here?
- c. As you look back over your own life, what is one of the most beautiful acts of sacrificial love you’ve ever observed? What did it cost the one who sacrificed? How did it benefit others? How did it ultimately benefit the one who made the sacrifice?
- d. Why is sacrifice such a powerful life-giving force?
- e. Of course, not every sacrifice is worthy. How do we know when to say ‘no’ to a potential sacrifice? Can you think of any examples from your own life?
- f. Life often presents binary choices where, like Jesus, we cannot both “save ourselves and save somebody else.” In these moments, we will often – not always, but often – feel called to sacrifice our wants for the sake of the other person – or feel called to sacrifice instant gratification for future gratification. Where in your life right now are you either feeling called to make a sacrifice or trying to discern whether you are called to make a sacrifice?
- g. In Luke 6:38, Jesus says, “Give, and it will be given unto you – a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give is the measure you get back.” What does this verse mean? What insights do you draw from it?
- h. Based on all we’ve discussed, when we face binary choices in life, and feel called to sacrifice for the sake of others (in large or small ways), how should we prepare ourselves mentally and emotionally for that sacrifice? What should be our frame of mind as we resolve to make the sacrifice and then move through it?