

# Luke 23:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

## Analysis

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**And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.** The soldiers' taunt echoed Satan's temptations in the wilderness (Luke 4:3, 9): "If thou be the Son of God..." Both temptations challenged Christ to prove His identity through self-preservation and spectacular demonstration. The conditional "if" (ei, ει) casts doubt on Jesus' kingship—"if you really are king, prove it by saving yourself." This reveals humanity's fundamental misunderstanding of divine power and kingdom authority.

The irony is devastating. Jesus was the King of the Jews—not merely of Jews, but King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16). The title "king of the Jews" appears throughout the Passion narrative: Pilate asked, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" (Luke 23:3); the inscription on the cross proclaimed it (v. 38); the rulers mocked it (v. 37); the soldiers jeered it. Yet His kingship manifested not through earthly power but through sacrificial death. He reigned from the cross, conquering sin, death, and Satan through apparent defeat.

Christ's refusal to "save himself" demonstrates His kingdom operates by radically different principles than earthly kingdoms. Worldly kings preserve themselves at others' expense; Christ sacrificed Himself for others' salvation. Worldly power conquers by force; divine power conquers through weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). The soldiers demanded visible proof of kingship—descending from the cross in power. But Christ's true kingship required remaining on the cross in love, accomplishing what no earthly power could achieve: reconciling sinners to God.

## Historical Context

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The title "King of the Jews" held political significance in first-century Palestine. Rome had installed client kings (Herod family) and maintained direct control through provincial governors. Any claim to Jewish kingship threatened Roman authority and risked execution for sedition. The soldiers' mockery reflects Roman contempt for Jewish messianic hopes, which they viewed as dangerous delusions.

Crucifixion was Rome's standard punishment for sedition and insurrection. Spartacus and 6,000 fellow rebels were crucified along the Appian Way in 71 BC. During the siege of Jerusalem, Josephus records Romans crucifying Jewish rebels in various positions "for amusement." The soldiers' taunt—"save thyself"—was likely standard mockery directed at all crucifixion victims who had claimed authority or power. They saw Jesus as another deluded messianic pretender receiving deserved punishment. That this "pretender" rose from the dead three days later and His movement conquered the Roman Empire reveals the spectacular reversal of the cross.

## Related Passages

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**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

## Study Questions

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1. How does Christ's refusal to save Himself, despite having the power to do so, demonstrate the nature of true love as self-sacrifice?
2. What does the contrast between worldly kingship (preserving power) and Christ's kingship (sacrificial service) teach about Christian leadership?
3. How should Jesus' victory through apparent defeat reshape our understanding of success, power, and what it means to "win" in the Christian life?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ λέγοντες Εἰ σὺ εἰ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων  
And saying If thou be the king of the Jews  
G2532 G3004 G1487 G4771 G1488 G3588 G935 G3588 G2453

σῶσον σεαυτόν

save thyself  
G4982 G4572

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