

“The Crown of Thorns”

I'd like for us to take a trip back to Jerusalem two thousand years ago to the scene of our Lord's trial and His subsequent execution. I want to focus on a very iconic picture surrounding the crucifixion of our Lord: that is, the crown that was placed upon His head that day. Matthew tells us about that crown in his account.

Matthew 27:11,26-31 “And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? and Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest...Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.”

Today, I want to speak to you about some great lessons that we learn from Jesus' crown of thorns.

The trial of Jesus is over. He has now been condemned to die by cowardly Pilate. He is handed over to the Roman soldiers to be abused, tortured and, ultimately, murdered. They took Jesus first of all and they scourged Him. That's where they take the victim (Jesus, in this case) and lay his back bare, tying his hands to a post, and a large, strapping Roman soldier would take a whip of several strands of leather. Intertwined were pieces of bone and metal, and that soldier would rare back and lay that whip across the bare back of Jesus. With every blow, the flesh of Jesus would be torn open and a new river of blood would start. You know, Jewish law limited a scourging to thirty-nine lashes, but this Roman soldier was not bound by Jewish law or custom. He mercilessly beat the back of our Lord until the flesh hung in ribbons and His back doubtlessly looked like raw meat. Many a criminal, many a victim died from the scourging alone.

Well, when they had scourged Jesus, those soldiers took Him and dragged Him into the common hall. There, they stripped Him of His meager clothes and they put on His back a robe; not a purple robe of royalty, but a scarlet robe, showing what they thought of Him, mocking Him and His claims of being a King. They spat upon Him, made fun of Him and mocked Him, beating Him over the head with clubs. In the midst of all of this, some soldier callously grabbed a thorny vine, and he wove together a crude crown of thorns and thrust it upon the head of Jesus. Those sharp thorns pierced the tender temple and brow of the Savior, opening up with every thorn, a new stream of blood. They did that in sheer mockery. Jesus had claimed to be the King of the Jews; they didn't believe He was a king. They ridiculed the very idea that He was the King of the Jews, or ANY kind of king. He didn't look like a king or sound like a king. The things He said certainly didn't sound like the things a king would say, so to them, Jesus was a laughing stock, as they now bowed their knees and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They were utterly mocking Jesus Christ.

What a picture that is! Do you know that Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus was even born—700 years before Jesus was even born!—pictured the suffering savior that day, being scourged and beaten, crowned with that thorny crown, and finally crucified.

**Isaiah 52:14 “Just as there were many who were appalled at him his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness...”
(NIV)**

That literally means that when those soldiers got finished with Him, Jesus did not even look like a human being! He bore ghastly scars, and every last one of them was a symbol of our salvation and the price for our sins.

My friend, I don't believe that it was merely happenstance that a soldier took that vine and wove a crown of thorns. I believe it was by the providence of God that that took place, because it is absolutely rich with *symbolism* and *meaning*. Think about the fact that the crown itself symbolized the very curse—in fact, it was the direct result of the curse of our sin! Did you know that God created a world devoid of thorns? There were no thorns in the perfect and paradisaal world that God created. The very first rose that grew upon the earth grew without a thorn. But, thorns came about because of the sin of man. The very crown of thorns that Jesus would wear is a direct result of sin upon the human race, and it is a painful reminder of why Jesus had to die. **Genesis 3** tells us that after man sinned, God cursed man, woman, the serpent and the ground.

Genesis 3:17-19 “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

You see, thorns came about as a result of the curse! Man's sin cursed this world, and had Adam never sinned, thorns would've never grown on this earth. But now, Jesus is wearing the crown because He is bearing the curse. Those thorns that pierce His brow speak of the hardship, toil, pain and sorrow of a ruined creation. Adam brought death and travail upon the earth. Even today, the earth is full of tragedy and vexing problems. The Bible teaches us that the whole creation is corrupted.

Romans 8:22 “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

Suffering and death rest upon everything that God has made. But why? That's one of the great mysteries in the mind of man almost since the beginning of time: why do we live in a world that is full of such pain and suffering? Why does God allow these things to be? Paul tells us why.

Romans 5:12 “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

It's ALL the result of sin that corrupted an otherwise perfect world that was in fellowship with God. Look at Job's conclusion.

Job 14:1 “Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.”

So, every man—even today—feels the thorns of sickness, disease, sorrow, tragedy and, ultimately, death. Even the apostle Paul called his adversity and his trial in life a “*thorn in the flesh*.”

So, you see, when Jesus was crowned with thorns, He was wearing our crown: a crown that was woven with our sins.

Now, let's think about the meaning in that crown when it comes to our salvation. That crown tells us that the curse that was on US was transferred to the sinless head of the Savior. In other words, He was our substitute.

II Corinthians 5:21 "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

That means that God made Him to be a sin offering for us. God made Him to bear our penalty, to pay the price that our sin incurred: that is, death. He knew no sin, He had committed no sin, He was perfectly righteous. But, despite His righteous life and the fact that He never violated the will of God, He never committed sin, He was sinless and pure, perfect and holy and righteous...despite all of that, God let Him become a sin offering for you and for me.

Don't ever forget that a holy God is bound by His own divine nature to punish sin. A price **MUST** be paid for every sin we commit. God doesn't forgive sin on a whim! He never says, well, I'm just going to forget it and act like it never happened. **NO!** Every sin exacts a price. It must be paid in order to satisfy a holy and righteous God. Therefore, the need for a sacrifice. We could either die as a result of our sin, **OR** there could be one who could die in our stead, so that instead of *us* bearing the penalty, *He* would bear the penalty, and it would be paid.

Hebrews 2:14 "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;"

That literally means that Jesus, eternal, coexistent and co-equal with God, came down and took on the form of flesh and blood. He "*took part of the same;*" he became as we are, that through death, He would destroy the devil, who has the power of death. That is, in order to destroy and defeat death, Jesus had to become one of us so that he could become a vicarious sacrifice or substitute and die in our place. Thus, the debt could be paid, death could be destroyed, sin could be defeated! When Jesus was robed and crowned by those soldiers, He was wearing the crown that belonged to us!

I want you to think about something that is absolutely thrilling: when Jesus was standing on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem this day, He was standing on a very significant place. Mount Moriah was a famous place. In fact, one of the great prophecies of all time, and one of the most graphic and vivid portrayals of Calvary took place on that very same mountain. At this very spot where Jesus now stood with the crown of thorns on His head, more than 2,000 years before, there was another scene that unfolded there.

Genesis 22 tells how that Abraham and his son, Isaac, came there. God led them to this very mountain that day to offer a sacrifice.

You recall them walking up the slope of Mount Moriah, and Isaac knows that they're going to offer a sacrifice. But he says to his father, Abraham:

Genesis 22:7 "...Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham knew where the lamb was. Doubtlessly choking back tears, he answered Isaac.

Genesis 22:8 “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering:”

They take the wood with them up the mountain to build an altar for the burnt offering, and then came the dreaded and awful moment when everything was ready and Abraham turns to Isaac and says, Son, you’re going to be the offering. He takes Isaac, his beloved son, and lays him on that altar, and in unwavering faith, he raises the knife. As the blade flashed in the sunlight, the voice of God’s angel cried out.

Genesis 22:11-12 “Abraham, Abraham...Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”

He had passed the test of faith.

Genesis 22:13 “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.”

I’m told the word for “*thicket*” in this passage literally means “*a thicket of briars and thorns.*” Isn’t that something? At God’s providential direction, that beast had wandered up that mountainside, and its head had become so tangled and twisted in a thicket of thorns. As Abraham freed it, I imagine there were still thorns protruding from the head of the ram. He lays it on the altar that was meant for Isaac and raises the knife that meant death for Isaac, but instead, let it fall upon the substitute. On Mount Moriah—where Jesus now stands with a crown of thorns, ready to be our substitute.

John 8:56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”

No wonder Jesus said that! What a wonderful and sacred shadow of the cross! Jesus Christ on the cross, offered once, all sufficient, all atoning, never to be repeated sacrifice for our sins, and He paid it ALL. He paid the debt. He wore *our* crown. He became *our* offering, *our* sacrifice.

Now, because He was willing to wear our crown of thorns on that day long ago, today He wears another crown.

Revelation 14:14 “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”

I’m told that the crown of Queen Elizabeth is the most famous and valuable crown in the world. It contains 5 rubies, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds. It’s also adorned with 273 pearls and 2,868 diamonds. But that crown is a trinket next to the crown of the Lord Jesus Christ. Out of the midst of that thorny crown that He wore, as He stood in ridicule and mockery on Mount Moriah that morning, grew the Rose of Sharon. Out of that ugly and miserable crown woven by those soldiers bloomed the rose of peace and pardon. When He conquered sin, Satan and hell, He was swept up into glory, and He sat down at the right hand of God, and a crown was then placed upon His head: a crown that was rightfully His. A crown that was not yours, not mine, not one that He was wearing for us. The crown that was placed upon His head is His and His alone. It wasn’t placed there in mockery, but in victory. He shall wear that crown until the day He comes again and delivers the kingdom up to God.

I want to ask you a personal and decisive question: Do you crown Jesus as Lord and King of your life? Or have you thrust the thorny crown of mockery and insincere worship upon His head?

The story is told many years ago during the reign of the pious Queen Victoria, that one day she was listening to her preacher, Dr. F.W. Farrar, and he happened to be talking about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Queen Victoria was greatly moved by his sermon, and she summoned him up to the royal box. It is said that when Dr. Farrar approached, the queen brushed away tears and said, "You've preached a wonderful sermon today. It made me so wish that I could be sitting on the throne of Great Britain when Jesus Christ comes again, because I would love to take this crown and lay it at His nail pierced feet."

That's a beautiful thought, and such is a window into her heart and her soul, and her reverence for the Lord Jesus. But the fact of the matter is, we don't have glittering crowns of gold to lay at His feet, nor is Jesus interested in such crowns. But there *is* something that we *do* have. We have a sinful, scarred life that we can humbly give to Him, and we can say, "Here is all that I have, and all that I am. Take it and make it what you want it to be."

What kind of crown are you placing on the head of the Savior? Do you honor Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Have you ever submitted to Him in obedience to the gospel, allowing Him to be YOUR sacrifice and YOUR offering for sin? No other offering will do. You can follow the way of Cain and you can try to offer your good works and your morality, piety and good intentions, your culture, education, sophistication and all of these other things that you might decide to try to give to God. But none of that will do. There's only one thing that you can bring to God to plead your case and pass the judgment that is coming, and that is the blood of Jesus.

There's only one who can take your place and pay the debt that you owe. That is, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:3-4,18 "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life...Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

That, my friend, is how you bow before Jesus and place the crown of submission on the head of the Lord. You begin living your life for Him today. Bring your broken life to Him in repentance and contrition, and you in essence, in your obedience to the gospel say to the Lord, "You take my life and make out of it what will glorify and please YOU, and not me." What kind of crown are you placing on the head of the Savior today?