

INTRODUCTION

For the next five weeks we're going to be focusing on different aspects of the suffering of Jesus. Today I want us to focus on the crown of thorns.

John 19:1-5. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers also twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and clothed him in a purple robe. And they kept coming up to him and saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" and were slapping his face.

Pilate went outside again and said to them, "Look, I'm bringing him out to you to let you know I find no grounds for charging him." Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

In the Middle Ages there was a Christian leader in France named Bernard of Clairvaux. Many historians attribute the words to a poem he wrote addressing the suffering of Jesus. It was translated into English in the 19th Century. The tune was taken from one of the compositions by J.S. Bach and the haunting minor key compliments the lyrics. The song is entitled, "Oh Sacred Head Now Wounded."

The painting of Christ at the Column by the Italian Master Antonello da Messina, is one of my favorites because Jesus appears with a masculine countenance, and you can see blood drops and tear drops on His strong face.

The mighty Roman Empire stretched from North Africa around the Mediterranean Sea to Spain. And the worst outpost for soldiers was Israel. Josephus writes that many Roman soldiers were sent there as punishment for crimes. So the soldiers who tortured Jesus were some of the most wicked and brutal in the Empire.

Since the charge against Jesus was being the King of the Jews, these sadistic soldiers probably used tools like pliers to twist together a crown of thick thorns. This thorn tree still proliferates in Israel, and every year when we travel there we see the thorns. They are long, nail-like thorns that are hard to break. And today the Israelis actually call the tree "The Crown of Thorns."

Two Roman soldiers stood on either side of Jesus and used a cat o' nine tails to slash the back of Jesus. A Roman flogging was so violent that there are accounts of prisoner dying from the flogging. Then the soldiers pressed a cruel crown on the sacred head of Jesus. We are going to examine four things about the crown of thorns.

1. The material: Thorns represent the curse of sin.

On the surface, we might assume that the crown of thorns was the random idea of some psychopathic Roman soldier. But I don't think it was accidental or incidental. There is a spiritual object lesson for us. Thorns represent the curse of sin.

When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a beautiful garden where thorns didn't exist. The first roses that bloomed in Eden had no thorns.

But we know what happened. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. As a result God pronounced a curse upon the ground. The Bible says in Genesis 3:17-18: "The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."

The thorns represent the painful fruit of sin. The reason we have pain and sickness in the world today is because of sin. Just as there was nuclear fallout after the atom bombs dropped on Japan, sickness, pain, and suffering today are all parts of the fallout of the fall.

The whole creation is suffering. In Romans 8:22 Paul wrote: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now." The reason we have hospitals and mental institutions today is because of sin, not personal sin, but the presence of sin in the world.

A few weeks ago, we took our grandkids out to the ranch of Audis and Deb Byrd. We picked blackberries and blueberries. As I was reaching down into a blackberry bush to pick out a big, ripe blackberry, I scratched my hand on the thorns. I remember thinking, "There were no thorns in Eden. Thanks a lot Adam and Eve."

2. The misery: Thorns aggravate the physical pain of Jesus.

The soldiers placed the cruel crown on that sacred head. The scalp and the temple area are one of the most sensitive parts of the human body. As those nail-like spikes pierced His brow, the precious blood of Christ flowed down His face.

Mark tells us they had a stick to represent a royal scepter. They took the stick and bashed Him in the head and face and began to spit on Him.

I don't think any of us can imagine how Jesus must have looked after He was flogged and tortured. Although I love that painting I displayed by da Messina, I don't think that image is not how Jesus actually appeared. Many other artists have painted that scene, and they all sanitized the true picture to be merciful to those of us who view them.

But according to the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah would be beaten so severely that his appearance wasn't that of a man. Isaiah 52:13-14 says: "See, my servant will be successful; he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were appalled at you—his appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form did not resemble a human being."

In 2004, there was movie called *The Passion of the Christ*. Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus, spoke here on this stage a few years after and talked about the amount of time it took them to create the special effects make-up for the scene where Jesus was flogged.

Some critics say that Mel Gibson went too far portraying Jesus during His torture; actually that's the reason the movie was rated R. I can recall watching it and I literally had to close my eyes away from the hideous sight. I thought about sharing a picture of that with you today, but I don't want to shock you. So what's my point? According to Isaiah 52 He was so disfigured, that He hardly looked like a man. And yet, He chose to suffer.

When I think about the physical suffering of Christ, my mind keeps going back to what Jesus told Peter the night before in the Garden. He said, "Put away your sword. Don't you know that I could ask the Father now and He would send more than 72,000 angels to my rescue?"

Jesus could have used His supernatural power to deflect the pain. Think about it. He could have raised one eyebrow, and the hands forming the crown of thorns would have been paralyzed. But He didn't.

He could have nodded His head and the soldiers with the whips would have turned to whip each other. But He didn't. He could have raised the other eyebrow and the spit directed at His face would have boomeranged back on the soldiers. He could have raised His eyes to Heaven and those Special Forces angels would have been here in an instant to rescue Him. I imagine the Archangel, Michael, with his sword drawn saying, "Just give us the word, Lord, and we'll turn those demonic soldiers into devil eggs in the blink of an eye!" But He was willing to endure the misery and pain.

3. The mockery: Jesus is still being crowned in shame.

The reason they put a crown of thorns on His head, and gave him a purple robe and a scepter is because they were mocking Him as a king. They would slap him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Of course, what they meant was, "Ha! You're no king!" And they continued to spit in His face and beat Him with the stick. They didn't know that Jesus really was (and is) a real King. So the essence of sin is to refuse to bow the before King Jesus. Sin is rebellion. Sin is a clenched fist in the face of God.

The writer of Hebrews says Jesus handled all the shame and mockery. "Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2) The word "despising" isn't a good translation. When we despise something we hate it. But the word in Greek means just the opposite. It literally means that He didn't think much about it. It's like when we say, "Oh, think nothing of it." That's what our Savior did. For the joy before Him He endured the cross and just absorbed the shame.

Two-thousand years later, people are still mocking Jesus. They are still ridiculing Him and shaking their fists in His face. They refuse to bow before Him.

Crazy things are happening in our nation. I think the stress of the pandemic has pushed some people over the edge. Jim Denison pointed out in his article this week that the protestors in Portland burned Bibles in front of a federal building. That's mocking God. A statue of Jesus in Miami was beheaded. Apparently part of the cancel culture is to cancel the Bible and to cancel Jesus Christ. It's like everyone has gone crazy and the inmates are running the asylum.

During days like this, my mind often goes to the second Psalm where the Psalmist asked the question in Psalm 2:1-2: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his Anointed One (Christ)? I love God's response in verse 4: "The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them."

So, what do you think was the response in Heaven when they burned those Bibles and beheaded that statue? Do you think the Father jumped up and said, "What's going on?" No, He just chuckled. There is no panic or outrage in Heaven. It's like Jesus is saying to the Father, "think nothing of the shame."

How should we respond? While those enemies of Christ are crowning Him with mockery, we should be crowning Him with praise. We should bow before Him and say, "Jesus, I bow before you and I crown you as my Master and Lord. You are my king." We are involved in spiritual warfare and prayer is our greatest weapon.

Let's remember the Bible says that one day EVERY knee will bow and EVERY tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God. Those Roman soldiers who mocked Jesus will one day bow before Him. Those protestors who burned the Bibles, one day they will bow before Him and say "Jesus, you are Lord." Whoever chopped off the head of Jesus from the statue will one day bow and say, "Jesus you ARE Lord."

Every time I mention this, some people misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not teaching universal salvation. They ask, "Pastor do you mean those people will be bowing before Jesus in Heaven?" Oh no, only those of us who confess Jesus as Lord in this life will be with Jesus in Heaven. The others are like a criminal confessing a crime. They are confessing "Jesus is Lord" in JUDGMENT—but we are confessing "JESUS IS LORD" in JOY now!

4. The Meaning of the crown.

The crown of thorns was not accidental nor incidental, it was providential. God was using it to teach us some lessons. There are at least two more lessons we learn from the cruel crown on a sacred head.

(1) When Jesus wore my crown He bore my curse.

As I mentioned last week. Each of us as sinners deserved the punishment Jesus received. He died as our substitute. That crown was meant for me.

One of my favorite songs by Sandi Patty was "The Day He Wore My Crown." The first verse says: "The city was Jerusalem; The time was long ago; The people called him Jesus; The crime was the love He showed; And I'm the one to blame; I caused all the pain; He gave Himself the day He wore my crown."

Thorns came as part of the curse of sin. Another part of the curse of sin is separation from God. Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden and lost that sweet intimate relationship with their Creator. We all inherit that curse. But on the cross, Jesus took our curse upon Himself. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:13)

The curse of sin was pronounced in the first book of the Old Testament. Do you know what the very last word in the Old Testament is? The last word in the last verse of Malachi is the word "curse." But, Praise God in the last page of the Bible, in Revelation 21, the Bible says, "There will be no more curse."

Jesus was crucified on the lower slope of Mount Moriah. Centuries before, God said to Abraham, "Take your own son, Isaac, and go to the place I will show you, and I want you to sacrifice him." By this time Isaac was a strapping young man and Abraham was over 100 years old. They went to Mount Moriah. As Isaac carried the wood up the mountain, He said, "Father, here's the wood, and we have the fire, but where is the lamb?"

Abraham said, "God will provide a lamb."

So they build the altar and Abraham told Isaac, "Son, I don't expect you to understand this, but God has told me to sacrifice you. Let's just trust Him." By the way it says in Hebrews 11 that Abraham believed that even if he killed Isaac that God would have raised him back to life.

"So son, put out your hands and let me tie them up. Now lay down on the altar."

That strong son who could have easily overcome his old dad willingly submitted. Abraham lifted the gleaming knife, ready to plunge it into his son. And at that moment an angel says, "Abraham, Abraham, stop. Don't hurt him. God has provided a substitute."

Abraham looked up and there was a ram caught in a thicket. That's the Hebrew word for a bramble of thorns. So there was a sacrificial lamb wearing a crown of thorns. He would be substitute for Isaac, just as Jesus is our substitute.

God was preaching the Gospel to Abraham that day. Isaac was going to die, but God provided a lamb with a crown of thorns as a substitute. No wonder that Jesus would say in John 8:56 "Abraham saw my day and was glad." The second meaning of the crown is:

(2) Jesus was crowned in mockery; but one day will be crowned in majesty!

The crown of thorns was a prophecy of the majestic crown Jesus will wear when He returns. When Jesus came the first time, He came as the gentle Jesus, meek and mild. When He returns it will be a conquering King. When He came the first time it was as the Lamb of God, when He returns it will be as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

One day Jesus will return to planet earth and set up a literal kingdom. Let me remind you of what the angel Gabriel promised to young Mary. He said, "You will have a son (check). You will name him Jesus (check). He will be great. (check). The Lord God will give him the throne of his Father David (hmm, that hasn't happened yet). And he shall rule over the House of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." (Not yet—but it will).

If you've read my book on Revelation, you know I believe that the next event on God's prophetic calendar is the Rapture of the church. I'm ready, aren't you? I say like John, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus, amen?" Then there will be seven years of terrible tribulation that will make this pandemic look like a Sunday School picnic. There will be a one-world order that will align against Israel and Jesus, the King will return to be triumphant in battle.

The Bible describes it in Revelation 19:11-13: "Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God."

The prophet Zechariah describes what happens after the brief battle which Jesus wins with a sword that comes out of His mouth. "On that day the Lord will become King over the whole earth—the Lord alone, and his name alone." (Zechariah 14:9)

We even sing about this at Christmas. "He rules the world with truth and grace. And makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness." Just where is that happening right now? Does our Congress or British Parliament get on their knees and say, "You are our ruler, Jesus, tell us what to do?" No, but one day, He will show himself as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Until then, we must crown Him as our Lord. Have you make Him the King of your heart?

CONCLUSION

So, what should be our response to a cruel crown for a sacred head? I think we should all make our prayer the last stanza of that song Bret sang at the beginning.

Will you say these words with me as a sincere prayer?

What language shall I borrow; To thank Thee, dearest friend? For this Thy dying sorrow; Thy pity without end; O make me Thine forever; And should I fainting be; Lord, let me never, never; Outlive my love for Thee.

OUTLINE

1. The material: Thorns represent the curse of sin.

"The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field." *Genesis 3:17-18*

2. The misery: Thorns aggravate the physical pain of Jesus.

"See, my servant will be successful; he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were appalled at you—his appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form did not resemble a human being." *Isaiah 52:13-14*

3. The mockery: Jesus is still being crowned in shame.

"Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." *Hebrews 12:2*

4. The Meaning of the crown.

(1) When Jesus wore my crown He bore my curse.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" *Galatians 3:13*

(2) Jesus was crowned in mockery; but one day will be crowned in majesty!

"Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God." *Revelation 19:11-13*

"On that day the Lord will become King over the whole earth—the Lord alone, and his name alone." *Zechariah 14:9*

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas