

The Crown of Thorns

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Date: 14 June 2009

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[0:00] Would you open your Bible to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 27.! Somewhere near the Praetorium in Jerusalem, a thorn bush is growing.

! Now, there's nothing exceptional about this in and of itself. Thorn bushes grew and continued to grow all over Palestine. Where it came from, how long it had been there, how it had got there are questions we know nothing about.

But from its branches would be woven a crown to sit upon the blessed head of the King of Glory, our Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew says in chapter 27, in verse 27, Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.

They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. Hail, King of the Jews, they said.

[1:23] They spit on him and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him.

Then they led him away to crucify him. Pilate wanted to please the Jews. So he has him turned over to be crucified and has him flogged.

Now, the Romans did not place a limit on the floggings that they gave a man like the merciful Jews who would stop at 39. But they could go on and on.

Sometimes the flogging could be fatal. And so were fulfilled the words speaking of our Lord in Psalm 38, 7. My back is filled with searing pain.

Psalm 129, 3. Plowmen have plowed my back and made their furrows long. Isaiah 50 and verse 6.

[2:30] I offered my back to those who beat me. And it was then, with his back split open in searing pain, that the soldiers get the idea to have some fun with their weakened and humiliated prisoner.

You remember the accusations that the Jews brought against Jesus to Pilate were not the accusations that they had in their own court.

Their problem with Jesus was that he claimed to be the Son of God. And for that, he must die. But Pilate would care nothing about whether he claimed to be a son of God or not.

He cared nothing about what was blasphemous to the Jews. So, as they brought their charge to the Roman court and Pilate the governor, the charge was that he claimed to be a king.

And any king is a threat to our king, Caesar, who sits on the throne of the Roman Empire.

[3:33] And so, when Pilate tried to set Jesus free, the Jews kept shouting, If you let this man go, you're no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.

Verse 12 of John 19. So, here are these soldiers now having some sport with their prisoner. And they hate the Jews.

And they thought that this would be just the king for these despised people. These miserable people. So, they mocked his claim to be a king.

Now a king must have a crown, mustn't he? And so, they find a thorn bush growing nearby and twist together a crown of thorns on the spot and shove it into his tender head to make it stay on. We're told that one kind of thorn bush growing in Palestine produces thorns two inches long, as sharp as a pin, as hard as a bone. And so, King Jesus must have a crown.

[4:36] And this is the crown they consider him worthy of. A crown of thorns. And the king must have a robe.

And so, they clothe him in a purple robe, the color of royalty. And then he must have a scepter. And they shove a staff into his hand.

And so, after dressing up their prisoner to look like a carnival king, they began making sport of him. They come before him and kneel down in front of him and say, Hail, King of the Jews.

And they spit on him. And they took the staff out of his own hand. And they struck him on the head again and again, pounding the crown of thorns into his skull.

And after they had mocked him, they took off the robe, put on his own clothes, and then led him away to crucify him, still wearing the crown of thorns.

[5 : 42] The whole thing was a cruel joke. They're poking fun, both at the Jews. Here's your king. Behold the man. Here's a king that's befitting of you.

And poking fun at Jesus himself. They treat him as a delusional man with an imaginary kingdom. And it's in such behavior that we have an eloquent testimony of what sinful man thinks of the claim of Jesus Christ to be a king.

He is king, isn't he? What does man think about his claim to be king? Open your Bibles and read the crucifixion account and see how man mocks the claim to be king.

Nothing in this claim to be taken seriously. It's a good laugh, but nothing more. He's a pretend king with a pretend kingdom.

We'll give him a crown of thorns. Sinners in derision crowned him, mocking thus the Savior's claim.

[6 : 51] That was your nature and mine that mocked him. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.

We did not recognize his authority. We did not bow to his command. So the crown was to mock his kingship.

But why a crown of thorns? Why not a crown of olive branches? What's the significance of this?

And on the merely human level, well, we could point to the cruelty of the soldiers.

They wanted a crown that would inflict some pain upon their prisoner. But there's more here than meets the eye. Are the thorns a pointer to something of deeper significance that is happening?

Why thorns? In fact, why is there even a thorn bush growing nearby for the soldiers to go to and to pluck its branches and to weave a crown of thorns?

[7 : 58] And for that matter, why are there any thorn bushes anywhere on the planet? You know, they're not a part of God's original creation, these thorns.

When he created all things very good, you could have looked all through the Garden of Eden and you'd never found a thorn bush. You could have looked the whole world over.

You'd have never found thorns and briars. Rather, we find they were only introduced later as punishment for man's sin.

Thorns are a part of the curse for man's sin. God cursed man with death and he cursed man's environment with thorns. Remember the account in Genesis 3?

Right after Adam and Eve have fallen into sin, God said to them, cursed, says to Adam, cursed is the ground because of you.

[9 : 01] It's cursed, but you must know it's your fault. Cursed is the ground because of you.

Through painful toil, you will eat of it all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken.

For dust you are, and to dust you will return. Thorns and thistles will now be produced from the earth to make man miserable in his labors.

It's part of the curse. I remember John Lydig talking about pulling weeds and thorns in the field with his father, and how his father would say, Oh, Adam, what have you done?

What have you done? He knew the thorns were the result of Adam's sin. There would be no thorns had Adam not sinned.

[10 : 09] And we need to remember that as we come to the cross and we come to the praetorium. There had not been that thorn bush there that day had Adam not sinned. But that thorn bush is the eloquent testament and testimony to man's sinfulness.

Man and his environment are under the curse of God. And so Jesus dies not only bearing a crown of thorns, but also bearing the curse which thorns represent.

We were under the curse of a broken law, weren't we? As it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. Have you done everything written in the book of the law?

Have you continued to do everything written? If not, you're cursed. A curse that is standing today. It's still in effect today.

The curse of God upon all who have ever broken his law at any point. And how is it that Jesus redeems us from the curse of the law? Galatians 3.13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

[11 : 25] For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. So the one dying with the crown of thorns is being cursed. He's being cursed for us.

It's substitutionary curse bearing that's going on on that middle tree. Substitutionary curse bearing. He's bearing the curse as a substitute in the place of his people.

He bore the crown of thorns for us. God curses him instead of us. And so he gets our curse and we get his blessing. That's mercy. That's grace.

All at Calvary. What does it mean actually to be cursed by God? What does that mean? Well, it's the penalty for disobeying God.

It means to be condemned by God. It means to be damned by God. Under his infinite wrath. Separated from everything that is good. That's what it means to be cursed.

[12 : 30] Matthew 25, 41. This is what Jesus will say to those on his left in that day. Depart from me, you who are cursed.

Depart from me. Away from me. Out of my presence. You who are cursed. Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. You see, to get the full picture of what it means to be cursed, you have to go to hell.

Hell is what it means to be cursed by God. You must go there and see people weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in anguish. And you must go back in another million years and find them doing the same thing.

And another million and billion years and forever and ever to know that there is no end to what they are suffering. That's what it means to be cursed by God. That's what sin deserves.

God is so holy and good that any disobedience against him deserves that curse. And that's the endless woe that we all would have been suffering.

[13 : 41] Me and you forever. Had Jesus not borne the crown of thorns and died the death of the cursed man for us.

And that's what Jesus suffered for those hours on the cross. He was suffering what would have been ours for eternity.

For all who come to him, for all his people. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. So the curse of hell fell on Jesus at Calvary.

It was condemnation and he took it willingly. He voluntarily submits to such abuse that we might be saved from wrath and know the blessedness of eternal life.

Which is to know God. God, the living and true God and his son, Jesus Christ, which is to be forgiven, adopted, born again, made holy, brought into friendship and fellowship with the living God.

[14 : 43] This is life eternal. And it was won for us by Jesus bearing our curse. But it's not just a multitude of sinners who have been set free from the curse of God.

The world itself has also been redeemed by his bearing the curse. And that's why believers were looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. The home of righteousness, a home that's redeemed from the curse.

And so when Isaiah talked about that new heaven and new earth without the curse, how will he explain that? We saw it from Brother Nathaniel preaching in Isaiah 55 and verse 13.

Here's a description of life without the curse. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree. And instead of briars, the myrtle will grow.

And this will be for the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed. Yes. Instead of the thorn bush.

[15 : 51] There will be the pine tree. The curse removed from the earth. That's what Paul writes of in Romans 8 verses 19 and following.

That the whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth waiting for that day. The redemption purchased by Christ. It too wants to be set free from this curse that it labors under.

The curse of frustration and bondage to decay. That even the creation must suffer because of man's sin. And so we come to the last book of the Bible.

And in Revelation 21, John is given to see that day in vision. And it's because the Lord took the curse that we look forward, as John describes it, to a new heaven and a new earth where God will wipe away every tear from our eye.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. For the old order of things has passed away. The cursed order. The order under the curse.

[16:56] It's done. Passed away. Creation subjected to frustration under the curse of God because of man's sin. It's done. And the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, 3 says, No longer will there be any curse.

No longer any curse. All because Jesus bore the crown of thorns, took the curse, bore the wrath. So just as man's sin brought the curse upon man and his environment, so Christ's redemption delivers from the curse both man and his environment.

This world that has been cursed because of man must, too, be delivered through Jesus and his curse bearing. He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

We sing at Christmas. The king. Joy to the world. The king has come. And he makes his blessings flow just as far as the curse is found.

Does the curse extend to the creation? Yes, says the thorn bush. Yes, says the thistle. Well, then the blessings of Christ's cross work must also reach to creation.

[18:18] And instead of the thorn bush will come up the pine. So Christ's redemption. What do we owe to Jesus? Because of his bearing the crown of thorns and that curse for us.

Don't be fooled by this crown of thorns. There's more going on here than what meets the eye. The thorn crown man on the middle cross is a real king with a glorious kingdom.

He looks like a carnival king. But he is the king of glory. And though his kingship is rejected by the Jews and mocked by the soldiers, it's nonetheless real.

And the crown he wears, even that thorny crown, testifies to this despised reality. He dies with a crown on his head.

He's a glorious king. He's worthy of being crowned with many crowns. This is the king of all kings, the Lord of all lords. The one before whom every knee will hit the dust and every tongue will confess that he is indeed Lord over all.

[19:32] But so few saw him that day for who he was. Most everyone mocked his claim to be king. The soldiers, the criminals, chief priests.

If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself, said the soldiers. And so their cruel mocking goes on, even as he hangs there dying.

And then we see one of the thieves crying out something that should give us pause. Remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Your kingdom. Shocking, miraculous that one of the thieves sees him as the king. Sees him as a king with a kingdom.

What did he see as he looked over at that middle cross beside him that day? Well, there was a notice written above his head and it read, This is the king of the Jews.

[20:38] And under the notice was the blood streak body of a man whose face was swollen beyond recognition from pulling out his beard and beating him. Despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows being mocked and making no response. A man dying in apparent weakness. Hardly king like. Wouldn't you agree? There's no army.

There's no earthly glory. There's no servants waiting on him. And his own disciples have forsaken him in fear. There's no hallelujahs to the king today. Only crucify.

Crucify. A broken man. Down to his last hours. Nailed to a cross. He's not coming down again. Not alive.

Left to suffer the torturous death of crucifixion. The only crown he had was a crown of thorns beaten into his skull. Nothing regal about that.

[21:39] And yet, God-given faith reveals to this criminal's eyes what few saw that day. That Jesus really was a king.

And has a kingdom. He truly deserves a crown. And so he prays, remember me. Have mercy on me. To cry for mercy.

Remember me with mercy. When you come into your kingdom. Such mercy is possible. Because this king wears a crown of thorns. Bearing the curse for sinners.

And this is the great and glorious act whereby this king saves his people. You won't find that in history books. You won't find that in story books that talk about the great king coming to save his people.

He frees them. Not by riding into Jerusalem as a knight in shining armor and destroying the Roman army with the breath of his word. None of that. No show of superhuman strength.

[22 : 38] Rather, he saves them by dying in weakness. Dying in weakness under the curse of the Almighty. But this is the glory of this king.

Is it not? That by dying, he purchases a kingdom. And by dying, he conquers all his and our enemies. And it's this that his subjects sing about. Listen to their song.

What do they sing about him? This tunes the theme of their songs. Unto him who has loved us and freed us from sin by his blood. And made us to be a kingdom.

Kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. To him be glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. With your blood, you purchased men for God. You made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.

Worthy is the lamb that was slain. You see, this is the glory of the king. That he saves his people by bleeding under the curse of God for them.

[23 : 39] They sing of a king. They glory in this king. Who saves them by dying for them. And it's this that sanctifies them.

This is the very thing by which the world is crucified to them and them to the world. Christ in him crucified. This is what makes them eternally grateful.

And motivates them to offer themselves up as living sacrifices. And self-sacrificing service to their king and his cause. And this is what has won their glad obedience.

It's what makes them willing to die. To go to be with him. The king who bore the curse. The crown of thorns for them.

And every day we spend in heaven throughout all eternity. We will know that we are there. Because he was here on the cross for us. And we'll never get over it.

[24 : 35] It will yield fresh glories every moment of eternity. And it's our privilege as believers to have eyes that see and hearts that feel even now.

Something of the wonder of Christ our king. Killed for us. Bunyan has Mr. Standfast receive a message.

Saying it's time for you to die. He doesn't put it that way. You know how crossing the river is the symbol of death. And so Mr. Standfast received a message which said that he must prepare for a change of life.

That his master was not willing that he should live so far from him any longer. And so he stepped into the river. And said. The waters indeed are to the palate bitter.

And to the body cold. Yet the thought of what I am going to. And of the convoy that awaits me on the other side.

[25 : 38] Lies like a glowing coal on my heart. I see myself now at the end of my journey. My toilsome days are over. I am going to see the head that was crowned with thorns.

And the face that was spit upon for me. Made him a happy man to die. To go to be with him. We're going to see him. We're going to thank him.

We're going to see him. No longer crowned with thorns. But crowned with glory. In fact. That's what we see even now.

With the eye of faith. Hebrews 2 and verse now. Hebrews 2.9. We see Jesus. Who was made a little lower than the angels. Now crowned with glory and honor.

Because he suffered death. So that by the grace of God. He might taste death for everyone. Yes. The head that once was crowned with thorns.

[26 : 40] Is crowned with glory now. A royal diadem. Adorns the mighty victor's brow. Thomas Kelly paints the picture.

From the perspective of heaven. And what was all a stir when Jesus the king. Is coming back into heaven.

Having purchased a kingdom. Purchased souls for God. By suffering. By suffering. The curse for them. Look ye saints.

The sight is glorious. See the man of sorrows now. From the fight return victorious. Every knee to him shall bow. If just once our eyes are open.

To the glory of Christ. We'll consider what fools we are. To live for the glory of ourselves. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Thank you.