

November 20, 2011
Christ the King Sunday

"That's My King with the Crown of Thorns"

MATTHEW 27:27-31

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ 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.

Chickens can be very mean to other chickens. I was recently talking to someone who had a few chickens in their backyard. A friend gave them another chicken which they tried to introduce to the other chickens. The next morning they found the new chicken dead, picked to death by the other chickens.

Children can be mean to other children. I recall a girl in elementary school whom the farm boys called "Chicken." She had red hair, freckles, and was tall and gangly with long legs like a chicken. When she walked by they would make chicken sounds. She would fight back in anger at the relentless teasing. I wonder what went through her mind at night when as she cried herself to sleep. Have you ever been picked on and teased by other children? Have you ever joined in the teasing, or just as bad, not said anything when you should have stepped up to defend someone. You were afraid that bullies might start teasing you.

Poor Forrest Gump. He stumbles into the bus with iron braces on his legs, and hears the same words over and over again, "This seat is taken. This seat is taken." It is a shame what human beings do to hurt other human beings.

In the words just read to you, we see our Lord Jesus circled by a band of Roman soldiers who are ridiculing his claims to be king. Imagine for a moment the horrible words they spoke against Jesus, as they dressed him in a scarlet robe and placed a crown of thorns on his head. They actually enjoyed spitting on him, and driving the crown of thorns into his head with the scepter they had placed into his hand.

On this Christ the King Sunday we look at Jesus as he was crowned with thorns. We are not ashamed to tell the whole world, "That's my King! That's my King over there crowned with thorns giving his life to save me!"

What the Roman soldiers did not see

The Roman soldiers had no eyes for Jesus as their king. "Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. The Praetorium was probably the place where the Roman governor conducted his business.

The soldiers gather around Jesus to pour out their anger on this man, this Jew, who dared to claim that he was a king in opposition to their Caesar. Already they have seen Jesus badly beaten by the Roman whip, but this is not enough. In their perversity and anger they want to see more abuse heaped on Jesus.

Jesus knew this would happen to him. In Psalm 22 which was written a thousand years before this, we hear the Messiah speaking about being surrounded by his ferocious enemies. "Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me." Bulls are powerful, and the bulls of Bashan were probably noted for their size and strength. Lions circle their prey and relentlessly hang on for the kill. Jesus was not exaggerating as he describes the mistreatment he endured at the hands of his enemies.

The whipping was not enough for these cruel bullies and misshapen monsters of society. They wanted more. "They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and then set it on his head. They put a staff in his hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail King of the Jews,' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again." They stripped Jesus of his clothes. In the movie "The Hiding Place" the two sisters are stripped down naked in a prisoner of war camp in Germany. One sister says to the other, "Corrie, they did it to Jesus, too."

Kings wear robes made of expensive purple dye. See that faded red robe over there, it will do. Put it on the shoulders of Jesus and let it rub the deep whip marks on his back. Kings wear crowns. Here is a thorn bush, weave the thorns together and push the crown down on his head. Kings have scepters to rule. Grab that stick and put it into his hands. Kings have royal subjects who bow down to them. Bow down and laugh my fellow soldiers, laugh and curse at this despicable man who claims he is a king, this man whom they call the king of Jews. Listen to them cackle and laugh as they kneel before Jesus and say, "Hail King of the Jews" They spit on him with gobs of spit and strike him on the head with the stick again and again.

What a horrible glimpse we have into the human soul as we see these soldiers abuse the body of Jesus. They are precursors of the masters who beat their slaves, and the Nazi's who mocked the naked bodies of people they threw into death camps. They are the precursors of the modern day cyber bullies who beat up other children with words in text messages and lead them to despair. They are the precursors of farm children who tease a gangly red hair girl with chicken sounds. Always there are those who stand by and say nothing, people like you and me who were nice enough not to tease, but not nice enough to step in and say something to quiet the voices of others. Inside all of us is this Roman soldier just wanting to get out and take over our lives.

So sings the popular recording artist Taylor Swift in her song called "Mean." "You with your words like knives And sword and weapons that you use against me. You have knocked me off my feet again and again. Got me feeling like nothing. You, with your voice like nails on a chalkboard, calling me out when I'm wounded. You, picking on the weaker man. Well, you take me down with just one single blow."

The Roman soldiers thought of Jesus as just a worthless human being to be kicked around and used for some fun. They never realized that in front of them was the King of kings and Lord of lords who created the world in which they lived and controlled every beat of their evil hearts. They never realized that with one word from his mouth he could call an angel from heaven to smash them to the ground and lead them to cry out for mercy. They did not know that this person who was their Lord and God was also the one who was going to the cross to pay for the sin of the whole world. They did not know that hell was staring them in their face without the help that only Jesus could bring.

Do you see him there this morning, crowned with thorns? That's my King. That's my Savior. He wears the crown of thorns so you and I can wear the crown of life.

What you see

"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." You know why Jesus allowed himself to be led away to be crucified. You know he has done nothing wrong. He has lived the perfect life none of us could ever live. He never joined in teasing other kids. He prayed for his enemies as they were nailing him to the cross. That's our King. That's my king! That's your King! Look at the face of Jesus with the blood streaming down from the crown of thorns. Look at the compassion and love on his face. Look at the determination and joy as he prepares to give his life to save people like you and me who deserve eternal death for our failures to love people and care about them as God expects of us.

God's Word opens our eyes to see something the Roman soldiers never saw on Jesus. They see him carrying the cross. They see him wearing the crown of thorns. Through God's Word we see our King carrying our sin on himself. The word of God makes it so clear to us this morning. Our physical eyes cannot see him carrying our sin, but we see it with the eyes of faith. Our eyes have seen and our ears have heard the clear words of Isaiah 53. "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." We listen to the words of 2 Corinthians 5 that tells us, "He became sin for us who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

The other morning I opened up the Santa Barbara News Press and on top of the page it said that the National Debt is at 15 trillion dollars. That is almost 50,000 dollars for every person living in this country. This huge debt of our country is small in comparison to the debt each of us accumulates in one lifetime here on this earth. That's my King wearing the crown of thorns and paying for the debt of my sin that was placed on him. That's my King who cries out from the cross, "It is finished!" and rises from the dead to declare beyond a shadow of any doubt that everything has been completely pardoned and forgiven.

My King is the Shepherd who goes to the cross for me, and then seeks me out when I wander away from him. Listen to your King speaking to you again from the words we just heard from Ezekiel 34. "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness." My King is a Shepherd who rescues me when I am lost and then he holds

me in his arms not only through this life but even as I face my final moments of life on this earth. Your King promises that nothing will ever pluck us from his loving arms. Your King promise you that nothing will ever separate you from his life. My King and Your King promises us that because he wore that crown of thorns we will someday wear a crown of life.

No king has ever suffered what Jesus suffered. No king has ever built a kingdom that lasts forever based on his blood that was shed for us. Do you see that man beaten by Roman soldiers with a crown of thorns on his head? That's my King. That's your King. That's the King who wants everyone to be in his kingdom of glory that lasts forever. Amen.