

Matthew 27:29b  
Midweek Lenten Service Week 4  
March 10, 2010

**Matthew 27:29 (New International Version)**

<sup>29</sup>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.

**Mt. 27:29b  
Jesus Holds the Scepter!**

What do the following people have in common? Herod the Great and his son Herod Antipas...the Pharisees...the Sadducees... Pontius Pilate...the general population of Israel...and Jesus' disciples? What did they have in common? None of them got it! What didn't they get? None of them understood the concept of the promised Messiah-King and his promised Kingdom.

Think about it. Right from the very beginning Herod wanted nothing to do with a King. He was so paranoid about threats to his throne he had virtually eliminated his entire family. It was Herod the Great who had commanded the execution of the baby boys in Bethlehem. His one surviving son, Herod Antipas was an apple which didn't roll far from the tree. He was the Herod who, thirty years after, had beheaded John the Baptist and had participated in the support of Pilate during the trial of Jesus.

What about Jesus' other enemies – the Jewish religious sects of Pharisees and Sadducees? They had no time for Jesus as a King. On one hand, the Sadducees didn't like Jesus because he didn't seem to advocate complete submission to the authority of the Caesar in Rome, yet at the same time, the Pharisees despised him, because to them it seemed Jesus did.

Pilate was completely clueless. He had absolutely no idea what kind of kingship and Kingdom Jesus represented. At his trial before Pilate, Jesus' enemies brought him up on charges of treason. They claimed that Jesus was seeking to lead a revolt against Caesar and Rome – a ridiculous charge which Jesus did not bother to dignify with a denial, yet still insisted he was King of the Jews.

It was ancient prophecies from the Old Testament that had confused the people of Israel over the years and had led to generations of misunderstanding of who and what the Messiah-King was. They knew that a king would come from the tribe of Judah. On his deathbed, the patriarch Jacob had foretold regarding his son Judah, ***The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his.*** (Gen. 49:10) Of the prophesied scepter the Psalmist wrote, ***your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.*** (Ps. 45:6) To the great king David, God himself promised him the fulfillment of an eternal kingdom through his line, ***"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."*** (2 Sam. 7:16)

Now, after hundreds of years of oppression by Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, the people of Israel were begging for deliverance. They dreamt of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy coming in the person of a second David. They waited anxiously for the Messiah-King who would once and for all eliminate foreign rule and reestablish an eternal kingdom of glory on earth. Even Jesus' disciples for a time had adopted that view political

power and glory that they too hoped Jesus would reveal. Yet the fact remains that God promised One who would wield an eternal scepter of power and glory forever and ever.

The fourth of our midweek Lenten Crosspieces is a scepter. A scepter-or ruling staff- was a long pole held by Kings. It was often richly ornamented and symbolized the power a ruler had over his subjects and nations. I would often be displayed as the king sat on his throne, many times with it positioned on the floor between the king's feet demonstrating the authority he had beneath his feet over all he ruled.

Authority and power was not the message the Roman soldiers were sending in the lesson for today. Matthew records, ***they put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.*** They didn't get it either. They had heard the accusations of Jesus' enemies. Perhaps they had gotten wind of the exchange between Jesus and Pilate behind closed doors. This Jesus had claimed kingship! To them this was a joke! To them there was but one king, and his name was Caesar. Rome was the authority. The Roman Empire was one larger and greater than any before in history. Caesar's scepter symbolized a power that stretched virtually from one end of the earth to the other. Now hear was this backwoods hick from Palestine claiming to be king! What a joke! *"You want to be a king, Jesus of Nazareth? Then here is your scepter!"* There stood Jesus, a stick in his right hand. With the best solemnity they could possible fake, they knelt before Jesus and hailed him as king. The only power that that stick symbolized was the power of pain as they used it to beat him over his head.

You know what else they didn't get? They didn't get that even in their snotty mockery they put on display the most powerful King the world will ever know. Sure, Jesus allowed these ignorant soldiers to have their moment of glory. He had allowed himself to be hounded and mocked and hunted for the past three years. He had and still was patiently bearing the mockery of a world that didn't get it. But even in this most humiliating display, Jesus allowed them to teach a truth to the world – a truth which Jesus confessed to Pilate, ***"I am a King."*** But Jesus' Kingdom was no threat to Caesar or Herod. This was no King who sought an earthly throne and political power. This was a King whose rule is one of grace and peace. His Kingdom is one of forgiveness and salvation. His Kingdom is you!

The Herods, the Pharisees & Sadducees, Pilate and his soldiers had their time. Even today, those who mock Jesus have their time, but it will end. It will end when the King returns – this time, not in humility and mockery. This time he will come as the victorious King to gather to himself all who believed in him and to curse all who didn't.

This will be a special day for you and me. Whereas we can say we didn't put the stick in his hand and mock him in fake worship, we cannot say we are guilt-free of the exact same thing. How often haven't we offered up shallow words of worship and praise. We have faked our way through life, putting on false displays of godliness, all the while wishing we could live like the rest of the world. And even if we could honestly say we have never done that, we still stand before the judge guilty-as-charged. We were conceived, born, and still bear the guilt of rebellion and hatred of Adam.

Yet, by God's grace, you and I were chosen to see Jesus beyond the stick and beatings. We have been blessed with the eyes of faith that see in Jesus the King to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. In him we see the absolute forgiveness of the Old rebel Adam in us and the washing away of each and every time we have sinned. We have been blessed with hearts that look forward with eagerness our King's return in glory and power. So let's conclude with this incredibly beautiful vision of the return of our King from John's Revelation:

***<sup>11</sup> I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. <sup>13</sup> He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup> The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses***

*and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. <sup>15</sup> Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:*

*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

To him be the eternal scepter of all power and all glory, forever and ever. Amen.