

John 19:2
Midweek Lenten service
March 17, 2010

John 19:2 (New International Version)

²The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe

How do you view Lenten services? Do you look at them as reviewing interesting history but dealing with something that happened long ago, far removed from your life? Or maybe you regard them as repetitious sameness. You've heard it all before. Or do you see a personal connection that is related to your life today? We pray it is the latter. Today's theme makes a personal connection.

CROWNED FOR ME

I. Jesus received a crown of thorns

II. To win for me a crown of life

We first view what happened to Jesus as He received a crown of thorns. The action occurred in the court of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. It was the morning of Good Friday. By this time the Jewish Sanhedrin had voted Him guilty of blasphemy for admitting He was the Son of God. That crime was punishable by death, but as a subject people they lacked the power to execute anybody. So they had moved into the Roman system.

Pilate realized the innocence of the man before him. He tried telling the Savior's accusers his conclusion, but they were insistent on His condemnation. He thought he had found a solution in the custom of releasing one prisoner during the Passover time and offered the choice between Jesus and Barabbas, a man who had committed murder in leading a rebellion. Urged on by the religious leaders the crowd called for the release of the renowned criminal and the death of Jesus. So Pilate thought punishing Him would satisfy their desires. Maybe if they saw some blood it would be enough. Thus he ordered the horrendous whipping that we heard about in our service two weeks ago.

That got his soldiers started. They added more insult and abuse. A king needs a crown. Ancient coins sometimes had the image of a ruler wearing a laurel wreath. So the men made a crown of thorns for Jesus. There were many plants in Palestine that had sharp thorns. Perhaps one was growing on the courtyard wall and provided ready materials.

They also grabbed a robe from somewhere. Purple was the color of royalty because of the expense of the dye. Another gospel writer calls it scarlet, perhaps reflecting that the robe was faded.

Why did these Romans decide to mock and mistreat Jesus like this? What did they care about a condemned Jewish teacher? Past personal encounters with Him were unlikely, so they had no reason to dislike Him. There was no need to befriend the Jewish leaders, for the two sides were not fond of each other. It must have been a diabolical delight. Be even meaner to those who appear to be down. They acted like a pack of wild animals that gangs up on a victim after he or she is wounded. They derived a thrill from causing pain. They had heard the charge that He claimed to be a king, but they saw no possible way for Him to be one. So rub it in a little. Mockery and pain were both intended. Of course, Jesus would not have been there without the rejection of His own people and their leaders, but these men only made it worse.

When I used the phrase "His own people, that includes us, His followers today. You and I caused the suffering of Jesus as much as the Roman soldiers and His Jewish contemporaries. We might maintain that we would never treat Him in such an awful way, but consider what we do.

God gives us everything we have. He provides plenty to meet our needs. Sometimes we hang on to it as if we could never have enough as we fail to share with others or we bend the rules to obtain it.

No, not always. At times we are generous. That struggle with our attitudes and actions can be frustrating.

The Lord surrounds us with caring members of our family and with fellow Christians. How do we treat them? We get jealous of one another. Did somebody get ahead of me or receive more recognition than I did? We gossip about others and tear down their reputations. We blow our top and make all sorts of accusations. At best we often take them for granted.

Look how we treat God's gift of sex, which He intended as a blessing to express the intimate relationship of a husband and wife. Pornography is rampant. Spouses are unfaithful to one another. Rape occurs. Adults have sex with children. Unholy desires burn within our hearts.

Pride carries away many of us. We think we are hot stuff and deserve credit for what we have. I'm a self-made individual. Look what I have accomplished. We may even think we have achieved a good standing before God. At those times it is a good thing the crown of thorns was not placed on our heads. As our head swells with pride the crown would fit more tightly and the thorns would press deeper into our skull.

Each sin we do pushes the points of the thorns further into the scalp of our Lord Jesus. We can't help but feel sorrow for what we caused Him to experience. We must accept responsibility for our misdeeds and admit what we deserve. We need to repent. Remember, repentance in the full sense includes sorrow for sin and trusting Jesus for mercy.

II.

Jesus was there in the court of Pontius Pilate not for Himself. He was there and He went to the cross for us. His suffering obtained results. He received a crown of thorns to win for me a crown of life in heaven. Jesus paid the full price for our sins. That price was more than a crown of thorns. Remember what He called out on the cross? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His heavenly Father turned His back on Him. Jesus endured the full force of His anger over sin. He suffered the pains of hell during that time. He was not carrying one or two sins. He bore on His shoulders every sin that ever had or ever would be committed in the entire history of our planet. The penalty for all those sins, each one deserving an eternity in hell, was compacted into those hours Jesus hung on the cross. When He was done, nothing was left on our record. When Satan tries to raise an accusing finger against us, he is turned down flat. We are viewed as sinless in Jesus and welcome in heaven where nothing impure or vile can reside.

What a blessed future awaits us! We will be where our believing loved ones have gone. There we will rest from our labors. When tired from the stresses of life, we certainly look forward to that aspect of heaven. There will be no attacks on our faith. Our needs will be supplied. The turmoil and trouble of life will be ended. Nothing can disturb our peace. We will have joy in beautiful surroundings and with a magnificent crowd, as all our fellow believers from every nation on earth will be present before God's throne. That future together is some of the glory that Jesus kept His eyes on as He suffered, enabling Him to endure the scorn and shame and pain involved. He won for you and me a crown of life.

It is ours by faith. That trust in the Savior is not something we have by nature or as a result of our action, but it is the product of the Holy Spirit, who works through the message of Jesus Christ that we receive in Word and sacrament. As He has brought us to faith so we want to remain in faith, regardless of the challenges that come. We want to remain faithful even to the point of death, as we vow when confirmed. It happens as the Spirit continues to work in us through the gospel.

We also receive privileges now as we await the crown of life. The Bible terms us kings and priests. We thus speak of the royal priesthood of believers, or universal priesthood. We're then speaking of all believers. We can bring to the Lord our worship and praise. He has given us the power of the keys, to announce forgiveness to penitent sinners and to warn the impenitent of the peril to their souls. Tonight I want to turn our focus to the royalty part. In Christ we are more than conquerors over the challenges and difficulties of life. Nothing can separate us from His love.

That's really what the Bible is saying when it assures us that all things work together for the good of those who love God. Everything else is serving us. We are the world's masters. It exists to benefit

us. We easily recognize that truth in the productivity of the earth as it supplies our daily physical needs. The same principle extends to events. What happens in our lives is there to bring us closer to our Savior and to remind us of spiritual values and of what is lasting. That's true even of troubles. They remind us not to get wrapped up in the "here and now" but to find our meaning and purpose and joy in Jesus and our connection with Him.

Effects come from having the crown of life awaiting and from ruling with Christ now. We trust Him with our whole heart; we want to trust Him and never leave Him. He is our hope and future as well as our present security, and the only one dependable to provide it.

We live in thankfulness and want to bring glory to His name. We dedicate our lives to His service. We strive to obey His commandments, to do all and use all our resources in accord with His will and to His glory. In so doing we are not seeking His favor or advancement in His kingdom. We are saying thank you for what He already earned for us.

We can bring greater glory to Jesus by offering His Word to others. As the Spirit uses that Word to win souls for Christ, it will multiply the praises ringing forth from grateful souls in worship now and in heaven eternally. Watch for and use your opportunities to confess your faith to the world.

Walk with your Savior in this Lenten season. Hear His Word; be strengthened in your faith and Christian living. Find comfort in the assurance of peace from the cross. Declare His love to others. You don't have to worry about a rival having a crown as some rulers of old did. There are enough for all. Jesus gave all for you as He was crowned with thorns and crucified. Jesus won all for you. As a Lenten hymn expresses, "Thousand, thousand, thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto thee."