

***Matthew 27:27-31 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. 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.***

Dear Christian friends,

A coronation is a special event. Some of you can remember when Queen Elizabeth was crowned. I can't, if you will permit me to rub it in even at my age. But I have seen footage of the event. It must have been spectacular: all the pomp and ceremony, the glittering carriages, the dazzling jewels in scepter and crown, the flowing robes, the thousands of well-wishers lining the streets and throwing flowers. Not even Charles and Di's wedding could compare.

In our text we have another coronation. Only this coronation was a little different. Pomp and ceremony was replaced by trial and torture, the scepter a staff used to beat him, a robe was there but only to mock and cover a stripped body, the streets were filled with people calling for a crucifixion, and the crown was made of thorns.

While Queen Elizabeth's crown is valued in the billions of dollars, it is for all practical purposes priceless. But not the crown that adorned the head of the Light of the World. There are two types of thorn plants that grow around the Holy Land: one is called the *Zizyphus Spina Christi* and the other is called *qundaal*. Both have long, flexible stems that can be woven into a crown. But considering the cruelty of the

soldiers, most agree that it was probably the *qundaal* variety with its inch and a half long thorns. Then, listen again to what they did with it: with the whole company of soldiers looking on, ***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. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.***

Not much of a coronation, was it? These guys were taking out on Jesus every frustration they had ever had for having to serve their time in the army thousands of miles away from their families. They were giving pay-back for every Jewish zealot that had made life difficult for them. This Jew claimed to be a king. And they were going to show him that no one was a king but their emperor. And so they went to work on him.

And we sit here shaking our heads at the violence of the moment, shocked that these unbelieving, godless pagans could carry out such cruelty. But understand, they didn't know who he was. As Jesus would later say, ***Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.***

But what's your excuse? You know Jesus to be your Savior and King, right? And yet, you are just as guilty as those soldiers of spitting on him, laughing at him, beating him, and crowning him with thorns. Every time we cheat it is as if we're spitting at him. Every time we put our desires ahead of God's desires it is as if we're laughing at him. Every time we replace the true God with whatever replacement god we are worshipping, be it booze, or lust or money, it is as if we are beating him ***again and again.***

Oh, and don't think like Pilate that we can somehow escape by washing our hands and claiming to be innocent of his blood. No, we have crowned our king. We have crowned him with torture, shame, and death. And because of that, we deserve to die.

An integral part of Roman society and culture was the military. In fact, if a man had never distinguished himself in battle, it was rare that he could ascend to a

position of leadership. A part of that military tradition was something called a Grass crown. This crown was woven out of grass from the battlefield and was awarded to a commander or soldier who single-handedly saved his legions in battle. The greatest of leaders and Emperors had received such honor during their military careers. In fact, if a man entered a room wearing such a crown, everyone, be they emperor or slave, everyone stood in honor of his achievement.

I can only imagine that the weavers of Christ's crown of thorns had the grass crown in mind. As they wove I'm sure that they thought that they were being clever, ruthlessly mocking this upstart Jew who claimed to be a king. How ironic that the crown of thorns they wove in mockery that day, would come to symbolize that very same deliverance.

You see, single handedly Jesus delivered all of the creation. He saw us in our lost condition, a terminal condition, a condition that could only bring us death. And he willingly donned that crown of thorns. Jesus silently endured the grief and pain of Good Friday to make complete payment for our sin. He allowed himself to suffer the worst death imaginable, because he loves you more than he loved life itself. He took on your sins, death and the devil, and won the victory for you. So that now, that crown of shame has become a crown of glory. As we just sang, *The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now*. In other words, the violence of Good Friday has given way to the victory of Easter Sunday. Our king rules!

And Jesus tells us, "***The kingdom of God is within you***" (Luke 17:20-21). Yes, Jesus rules in you. For he has marched victoriously into your heart and defeated sin and death and Satan. For most of us, that triumphant procession took place on the day of our baptism, and will take place again today in little Noelle, when God the Holy Spirit drowns our enemies with a few drops of water, water connected with his powerful Word. And look at the results:

Because Jesus was ruling in the heart of a believer, Joshua could live by his bold

statement: "***As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord***" (Joshua 25:15).

Because Jesus was ruling in the heart of a believer, Mary could feel the baby Jesus in her womb and joyfully proclaim: "***My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior***" (Luke 1:46-47).

Because Jesus was ruling in the heart of a believer, Peter was able to look Jesus in the eye and confess: "***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God***" (Matthew 16:16).

Because Jesus was ruling in the hearts of believers, Paul and Silas took advantage of every opportunity to share the good news and invite anyone who would listen to ***Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved***" (Acts 16:31).

And look at the difference he has made in you. Because Jesus rules your heart you are free to crown your King, too. Only now you crown him not with sin, shame and death. Now you crown him with what he deserves. Because Jesus rules in your heart, you gather together to worship him and rejoice in your salvation. Because Jesus rules in your heart, you confess your faith by your words and actions. Because Jesus rules in your heart, you eagerly share your joy with people who do not recognize Jesus as King of their lives. Because Jesus rules in your heart, right where your treasure is, you thankfully share with him from what he gave you in the first place. We don't give him what's left. We don't give him what we can spare. We don't give for our own self-aggrandizement. We don't even pass judgment on the generosity of others. No, we simply give. We humbly offer. We generously return what is his. As the Epiphany hymn encourages:

*All our costliest treasures bring  
Always, only, for our King.*

Yes, Because Jesus rules in your heart, you can crown him. Crown him with your gifts. Crown him with your life. Crown him with your God-inspired love. Crown your King with ***praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength... for ever and ever***. (Rev. 7:12)  
Amen!!