
The Thorn-Crowned Brow

“The soldiers . . . dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him” (Mark 15:16–20).

The crown of thorns is mentioned three times in the Gospels (Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20; John 19:1–3). It was not enough for the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers to crucify Jesus. In addition, in keeping with the culture of the day, they scourged, mocked, and humiliated Him.

Pilate had asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33). Jesus had given him this answer: “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37b).

Truly, Jesus is not only *a* king, but He is *the* King! Paul called Him “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Timothy 1:17). Following His resurrection, Jesus was highly exalted and given a name that is above every name, a name to which every knee will one day bow and which every tongue will one day confess to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11). He is pictured in Revelation as wearing a white robe bearing the words “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). At the end of time, Jesus, the Son of Man, will come with all the angels. Then “He will sit on His glorious throne” and “all the nations will be gathered before Him” (Matthew 25:31, 32a). Beyond any contradiction, He is *the* King of all kings!

In their mockery of Jesus, the Jewish leaders, together with the Romans soldiers, took a branch or two of thorns and twisted them together into a grotesque, circular crown and

placed it upon His head. With this image of a crown, they were mocking His kingship, His divine position. As they pressed it down upon His head, they mocked His personage, His personality, and His being. By taunting Him about who He said He was and what He had come to do, they were mocking God’s eternal purpose for the salvation of men.

We see here the unutterable irreverence of man. Pilate had not found any fault in Jesus. His interrogation had surfaced no wrongdoing in Him. Under normal circumstances, he would have commanded that an innocent prisoner be released and the trial be forgotten. However, under pressure from the Jews, his character crumbled. He handed Jesus over to the Jews—not only to be crucified, but also to be mocked and humiliated. Can you imagine man, the creation, mocking his Creator? What audacity!

We see here the immeasurable condescension of Jesus. The journey of Jesus to become one of us meant becoming a servant of men, to be sure; but it also meant, in regard to the crucifixion, becoming an object for man’s derisive amusement! In order to be our Savior, Jesus had to endure the mockery of His kingship, the slapping of His face, being spat upon and hit on the head as soldiers teased Him, and the jesting of men as they bowed before Him to stretch His humiliation to the limit. Why was Jesus willing to undergo all of this? He did it for our salvation.

We see that Jesus had to wade through the wrath of hell in order to placate the wrath of heaven. The wrath of hell was the physical side of the

cross—the physical sufferings, the torture, the blood, the nails, the mockery, and the taunting. Hell heaped upon Jesus all the physical humiliation and sufferings of which it was capable. The wrath of heaven was the spiritual side of the cross, the bearing of our sins. Our Savior had to subject Himself to this wrath in order to bear our sins in His body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Before He could actually offer Himself as the atonement for our sins, He had to be the object of human scorn, a plaything in the hands of wicked men.

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J. C. Ryle wrote that Godfrey of Bouillon (1060?–1100) refused to wear a crown at his corona-

tion as the medieval king of Jerusalem. He reasoned that he should not wear a crown of gold in the city where the Savior had worn a crown of thorns.¹ It is also said that John Huss, a famous Reformation leader, refused to make any complaint when he was led out to die at the stake with his head covered by a paper which pictured three devils. He said to himself, “My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake, did wear a crown of thorns: why should not I, therefore, for His sake, wear this ignominious crown?”² Jesus wore the crown of thorns so that you and I might wear the crown of glory; He wore the purple robe of mockery so that you and I might wear the white robe of righteousness.

¹John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, vol. 3, *St. John* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., n.d.; reprint, Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1976), 304.

²Ibid.