

Title: “Our Crown of Death for His Crown of Life”

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Mark 15:16-20

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Service Readings: Isaiah 52:1-6; Mark 15:16-20

Exegetical: In this narrative, Mark records the beating and humiliation of Jesus at the hands of the Roman soldiers. After being rejected by Pilate and beaten, he is subjected to physical and verbal abuse including beating, a crown of thorns, mocking, and spiting. After enduring this, they send him to be crucified. In recording this story, Mark sets the stage for an illustration of conversion that is available to all. In this pericope the solders “worship” him but we’ll find that after he breaths his last, at least one centurion is changed (see Voelz’ commentary for discussion).

Focus: Jesus takes our crown of sin which leads to death; Jesus gives us his crown of forgiveness that leads to life.

Function: That my hearers may live in the forgiveness that they have been given the crown of life.

Malady: At times we fail to obey God in our thoughts, words, and deeds so we create a “crown of sins” that should rightly condemn us.

Means: (Christus Vicar) Jesus took our sins, carried them to the cross, and suffered the punishment for us. God rewarded him by crowning him with honor and glory and now Jesus crowns us with the crown of life.

The connection to the text is the crown that the soldiers placed on his head. The crown was still present when he was crucified.

The major metaphor will be the crown. It will represent our sins that we place on him and that he carries to the cross. God will crown him with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9) and Jesus will crown us with life (James 1:12)

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Introduction

The actual, physical crown of King Henry the IV is lost; we simply don't know where it is or even what it looks like. It is probably a beautiful, expensive piece of jewelry but that's all it is and that's all it will ever be. The true worth is, it is not in the material or craftsmanship that defined it but in the metaphor of what it represents. It is there that we find its value and authority and impact on the person who wears it.

Born a prince, Henry IV ascended to the throne without any conflict or challenge. At the age of 19 he became a king. But he wasn't satisfied. He wanted more. He knew that he could do more, accomplish more. He knew that he deserved more. And so, when the current king of France was assassinated, he saw that as an opportunity to extend his reach. It was an opportunity to increase the power and majesty of his crown. This would be much harder to acquire because he had no clear claim to the throne. He had a bloodline, but it was weak and so when his uncle was recognized as the new king, the stage was set for a power struggle. He would eventually claim the crown and be recognized by as the king of France, but it would take civil war and several other struggles. He would even have to convert to Catholicism to gain support from the church - a support that would be necessary to assume the throne. Eventually, he *did* accomplish it. Eventually he *did* ascend. Eventually he *did* wear that crown, but it was stained. It was stained with greed and murder and deceit. But King Henry IV wore it proudly, at least until his assassination some 20 years later. You see that crown brought him power, but it also brought him death.

The actual, physical crown of King Henry the IV is lost. We don't know what it looks like, but we know what it represents. I have a crown, too. You can't see it, but I can describe it to you. And you have a crown. It probably looks different than mine because it is *your* crown. We may both have stones of doubt, pearls of lies, metals of weakened faith but the sizes and locations of each are probably different. But those differences don't really matter. What matters is that our crowns represent the same thing, they both represent sin - yours and mine. And even more important than what they represent is what they lead us to. Our crowns, yours and mine, lead us to death. Just like King Henry, the crown that we build and place on our heads lead us to our death. But here's the message for today: Jesus takes that crown, our crown of sin that leads us to everlasting death and he exchanges it with his crown of forgiveness; a crown that leads us to everlasting life.

First Text

This morning our gospel reading recounts one moment in the torture of Jesus. At this point in the passage, he had already been whipped with shards of bone or metal, almost to death. He would have been in complete agony, every part of his body in pain. Beginning in verse 16:

¹⁶ And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. ¹⁷ And they clothed

him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.

There is so much going on in this section of Mark's gospel, and even so much going on in just these three verses! So, it may be easy to miss some of the details that don't immediately stick out. The first that I want to focus on is that the whole battalion was assembled, and they gathered around Jesus for one purpose - to mock and abuse him. There could have been 200 hundred, maybe upwards of 400 soldiers, and they were there to rebel against this man who called himself God.

We look out into the world today and see similarities. It still rejects our King, it still mocks him, and it mocks those that worship him. But the blame can't be placed wholly on the world, just like it can't be placed wholly on unbelievers. Even believers make up this group today. How often do we mock him in our daily lives? How often do we robe him in a royal cloak on Sunday morning but then remove it before the football game starts? How often do we attach expectations to our worship of him? We bow down but only if it doesn't consume too much of our time or resources? You see, we may not have been part of that group 2000 years ago, but at times we are part of it, today.

The other area I want to focus on this morning is the second part of verse 17:

and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.

Scripture records that the soldiers placed a physical crown on his head, a crown that mocked him as king. A crown that denied his true authority. Their crown was physical, but every person throughout time places a crown upon him as well. It is not a crown of thorns but a crown of sin. Remember King Henry IV? His crown was a beautiful one, a crown of authority over two kingdoms. A crown that ruled armies, that ruled nations. It was a crown that ruled wealth. His crown *dripped* with power. But when he placed it upon the head of Christ it became a crown of sin, and it dripped with God's blood. And the crowns that we wear with pride and self-honor, the crowns that we hold in beauty over the world become crowns of sin that pierce at the very head of our true King.

But this is why Jesus was there that night. This is why he didn't call down his army of angels to combat Roman and take his rightful place as ruler. This is why he stood silent and allowed the soldiers to crown him. He was there to take on the sins of these soldiers and the sins of King Henry, and the sins of you, and the sins of me. He was there to take the crowns of sin from every person from every time. He was there to place our crown upon his head - even for those that denied and rejected him. How painfully beautiful that is. How comforting it is to know that Jesus took our crown, even as we mocked and abused him. Can there be a greater, more loving king?

Second Text

The last verse in our passage is equally beautiful and sweet.

²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

You see? After they had clothed him in royal robes and mocked him as a false king, they removed that cloak because they rejected that title. But notice how they left the crown upon his head? That crown, your crown and mine, stayed upon the head of Jesus all the way to the cross. And there, on the hill, where Christ our King was crucified, he wore our crown of sin, he wore our crown that leads to our own death, upon his head. And when God, his Father turned his back on him and he suffered our punishment, Jesus continued to wear that crown. And he wore it when he gave up his spirit. And it was there that our crown led to death: his death. That crown should have been upon our head; that death should have been our death, but he wore it for us, and he died our death for us.

But here's the thing, our crown disappeared that day. Our crown became lost, just like King Henry's physical crown. It is nowhere to be found. It no longer exists. But on Easter morning a new crown was created. It *is* a crown of eternal life and salvation. It *is* a crown from a real king. It is Christ's *own crown* of glory and honor. It is the crown of life that God promises to those who love him (James 1:12). This crown is a crown of forgiveness. It is a crown of love and acceptance. It is a crown of adoption into his royal family. Jesus earned this crown through his death and resurrection and he hands it over to us.

Can there be a greater, more loving king?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

You are the one, true King, our Lord and our Savior. Your royal blood that you shed has made it possible for us to be adopted into your kingdom, into your family. Lord we praise and worship you for your mercy and love. We ask that your crown of life, the crown that we now wear, shines brightly into the world, today. May the jewels of your love draw people to your grace and into your loving arms. May we bring to all the message of the true and powerful king.

In your name we pray.

Amen.