

Title: “Do you Choose the Crown or the Cross?”

Chris Ryan

Luke 4:3

3/6/2022

Service Readings: Deut. 26:1-11; Rom. 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

Jesus chose the cross – for us. And in doing so he earned the real crown – the one of true glory, the one of victory over death and sin.

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.

Does Adam and Eve choose the crown or do they choose the cross? The third chapter of Genesis records their temptation in the garden. Satan first approaches Eve and asks “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” At that moment, she could have responded by choosing the cross – by choosing obedience to God rather than glory for herself. But she doesn’t. Instead, she chooses the crown. Her desires now directed inward, shuts out the desires of God and replaces the will of his heart with the will of her own. Adam soon follows.

After the Exodus, do the Israelites choose the crown or do they choose the cross? God had been faithful in his promise to free them from the Egyptians. Miracle after miracle he showed them who he was: the plagues, the Red Sea, the manna from heaven, the water in the desert. His people had witnessed the glory of God first hand. And on the cusp of deliverance into the land flowing with milk and honey, they could have chosen the cross. They could have trusted in God’s continued provisions and protections as they faced the evils of those that falsely laid claim to the land. But they didn’t. Instead they choose glory, or rather lack of it. They turned inward, shut out the promises of God and replaced them with the security of their own.

Does Jesus choose the crown or does he choose the cross? This was the question as he was led by the Holy Spirit in the desert. All things were created through him. All things were subjected to him. He *could* want for nothing because he was God. But he was also man and so he was tired and he was hungry when Satan first approached him. “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” At that moment, he could have responded by choosing the crown but he didn’t. He could have displayed his power over creation with a simple act – one that would directly benefit him in that moment, but he didn’t. Unlike Adam he does not fall to the same temptations as man and unlike the Israelites he trusts God for his provisions; Jesus chooses the cross. He replies “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” He displays perfect obedience to the Father. He knows that his father will provide all that he needs. He rejects the desires of glory, the immediate needs of his own, and continues to trust completely in his father. And, even in the third temptation when Satan offers him the crown of the world, Jesus still chooses the cross.

Today marks the first Sunday in Lent. It is a time where we can find ourselves out in the wilderness as well, wandering where the Holy Spirit will lead us for the next 40 days, but only if we want to

participate. We can choose to follow or we can choose to ignore the invitation of Lent and exit the wilderness without a second thought. This is a choice that each of us will have to make. But be warned that if you choose to stay, and to be led, you will come face to face with the same question that Adam, Israel, and Jesus had to answer. Will you choose the crown or will you choose the cross? And before you consider your answer, let me spoil it and tell you that you have already chosen – and it is the crown. The church calls this sin and we are all guilty of it. Satan has asked us to prove our loyalty to ourselves – to prove our worth to ourselves. He has already challenged everything about us – what we think of ourselves and what we know of ourselves. He has already tempted us to command our own stones to become bread. And what are these stones? Selfishness of time, talents, and treasures. Stones that look like obedience to self, to family, to the world, at a cost of obedience to God. We have made bread for our own glory, chosen the crown and have already placed it on our head.

And so, because we have already sinned, and are sinful beings, if you choose to be led by the Spirit this season, it will look far different than Jesus' experience. Just like it will be for me, you won't reply to Satan with Biblical passages and you won't overcome his temptations. Your experience will be crushing – to you. You will face all of the many failures of your past – the many times where you have disobeyed God and fallen short of his expectations. You will be reminded that regardless of how "Christian" you think you are you are no match for Satan, or even your own sinful thoughts and desires. So if you are still interested in this journey, you'll probably want to be prepared. And how do you do that?

There was once a young man who had traveled the world climbing the tallest mountains and hiking the longest trails. He had set his sights on traversing the Sahara Desert on foot. And to prepare for his journey, he secured a backpack and some additional supplies – of which one was a car door. When asked why he choose to carry a car door across the desert, he replied, "Simple. If it gets too hot, I can always roll down the window."

If you prepare yourself to enter into the wilderness ready to beat Satan, ready to prove that you are obedient to God, then you are no different than that traveler with a car door, for you are entering the wilderness with the wrong mindset and the wrong preparations. Lent is not about surviving the attacks of Satan or even proving your obedience to God. It is not about you at all! I take that back. It is *all* about you, but not about your *abilities*. Lent is all about your *inabilities*. It is about feeling the weight of your sinfulness in all its awful glory. You want to wear a crown? Then wear the crown of sinner. It's a beautiful crown with the gold of selfishness and the jewels of disobedience. And it fits perfectly on your head and on mine. You see, this is the purpose of Lent. It is about recalling all of your sinful deeds, your entire sinfulness, and recognizing that you have placed it all on the shoulders of Jesus. Lent is about realizing that if he had decided not to carry them to the cross for you, you would be left hopeless, crushed, and damned. *This* is what you travel out into the wilderness to accomplish. *This* is your mission for the next 40 days. It is to feel the weight of succumbing to Satan and succumbing to your own sinful desires.

But that is not all that Lent is about. It is also a time of preparation. While in the desert, Jesus prepared for his journey to the cross, and during Lent, we do the same thing. We prepare for Jesus' journey to the cross. We pile up our failures onto his shoulders and then we watch as he takes them from us, accepts the judgement for us, and becomes the sacrifice for atonement.

During Lent, we prepare for Easter morning when we feel the magnitude of Jesus' work. We come to know that he willingly atoned for our sins and we feel the weight of our guilt dissolve away as we see our Lord, risen and seated at God's right hand. Our sorrow, our shame, our guilt is replaced with joy and gratefulness and love. We have a God that loves us so much that he went through all of this for us. How can we ever repay him? How can we ever thank him? How can we ever.....

He chose the cross – for us. And in doing so he earned the real crown – the one of true glory, the one of victory over death and sin. The one of gold like the radiance of God's face and with the jewels of his love and acceptance. This is the real crown. And Jesus earned it. And he takes the sinful crown from our head and replaces it with the one that is rightfully his. And he shares this victory with us.

But it is hard to really understand and appreciate all of this if you have not wandered in the desert. And so, this Lent, I invite you to wander where the Holy Spirit leads you. Spend time in God's Word each day. Commit to meet with God every day and the Holy Spirit will guide your thoughts and prayers. He will lead you if you let him, if you give him the time. Commit to let the weight of your sinfulness weigh you down because through it you will feel the freedom of Christ's victory.

Please pray with me.

Jesus, refuge of the weary,
blest Redeemer, whom we love,
fountain in life's desert dreary,
Savior from the world above,
often have your eyes, offended,
gazed upon the sinner's fall;
yet, upon the cross extended,
you endured the pain of all.

Jesus, may our hearts be burning
with more fervent love for you!
May our eyes be ever turning
to behold your cross anew,
till in glory, parted never
from the blessed Savior's side,
graven in our hearts forever,
dwell the cross, the Crucified!

Amen.