

27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole company around him. 28 They stripped him and dressed him in a scarlet robe. 29 They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: "Hail, king of the Jews!" 30 Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head. 31 After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

What do you picture when you think of a king? Most people imagine someone sitting in a comfy throne who is surrounded by their friends and advisors. He is wearing a crown made of precious metals and jewels. Wears the best clothing with a big fancy cape. When you take a look at them, you know that this is an important person with a lot of wealth and power. This Sunday in the church year, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. But here, we have a picture of Jesus which seems to be as far from a king as possible. Instead of living in luxury and comfort, Jesus had been whipped and stands trial. Instead of being surrounded by people he trusts, he is surrounded by Roman soldiers who mock him and make fun of him. Instead of having a big fancy crown, Jesus is crowned with thorns. Instead of being clothed with the best clothes, Jesus was stripped of his own garment to wear this ragged military cloak. Jesus' presence here doesn't seem to portray wealth and power. But yet, Jesus is the king we need. Jesus is the king who was crowned, criticized, and crucified.

The gospel begins today with Jesus being led into the Praetorium. Praetorium – this isn't a word that we use all that often. "Hey man, you want to go hang out at the park by the Praetorium?" But this would have been an important and prominent building. This would have been the house of the governor, like a palace. I guess we might compare it to the White House. When people are brought to the White House, this is considered a huge honor. For Jesus' welcoming party, a huge group of Roman soldiers gathered, the whole company. This could have been up to 600 soldiers. These soldiers, who should have been honoring Jesus as the King of kings, took off whatever Jesus was wearing and instead placed on him an old scarlet military cloak for traveling. This old ragged thing didn't honor him, but was used for mocking. Instead of glory, it brought pain as it clung to his fresh open wounds from being flogged.

They also make a crown of thorns to put on his head. A crown is what signifies a king as someone important. It stands on top of his head, pointing attention to him. The wealthier and more powerful the king, the more ornate the crown was. It would be crafted out of the most expensive metal that it could. It was as large as it could be. It contained many jewels. We can see how much the soldiers valued Jesus as a king. Instead of this fancy crown, they made a crown of thorns. It set him apart as someone they mocked and criticized. They showed how much they "valued" Jesus by their actions. Instead of crowning him with glory, they crowned him with gore.

Once they crowned him, they criticized him. They mocked him and made fun of him. They knelt in front of him. They cried out, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Usually if someone would yell, "hail," they meant it as praise. They only meant it as insult. They spat on him and struck him on the head with a reed. Would you expect a king to receive this little respect? Any other king would have received more respect. What are they trying to say?

But talk about disrespect. They laughed at Jesus for claiming to be a king. Even though the Corona virus wasn't till now, it was still rude to spit on someone. There wasn't an ounce of decency from these soldiers toward Jesus. This wasn't even common for them to treat others who were facing crucifixion. They didn't hold anything back in their criticism. They crowned him and they criticized him.

This causes us to ask, "How do we treat Jesus?" Do we put on Jesus' head a precious crown or a crown of thorns? What do our actions show? Our Savior tells us to follow everything that he says. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind." We decide to skip our daily Bible reading in order to sleep in. We struggle to give our offerings to church because I could use that money for something that I need. Sometime, I don't even think asking God first for help when I am in trouble. Each time we let something else take first place in our heart, we shove Christ's crown of thorns further and further on his head. Our sins are a direct slap in Jesus' face. Our sins are us, spitting in Jesus' face.

But Christ is our King who wanted to be crowned with a crown of thorns. He wasn't sadistic, but he wanted to suffer for us. He endured the crown of thorns so that we wouldn't have to endure the fires of hell. Christ rules by love, love for us. It is this love that led him to suffer under the soldiers. He was clothed with a stinky old soldier's robe so that we could be clothed with the robe of righteousness. Christ suffered crown OF THORNS and criticism so that we can be crowned with glory and clothed with righteousness.

What happens after a while with a bully? They have their "fun" with their poor victim (they poke at them, steal things), and then they get bored and move on. The same thing happened with these soldiers. They crowned Jesus with a crown of thorns. They criticized him, making fun of his claim to be a king. And then the fun was over. They moved on. After they crowned him and criticized him, they crucified him.

What an awful punishment! Crucifixion certainly wasn't pleasant. They placed together two tree trunks, which would be rough and give splinters, to nail a person's hands and feet into. The nails would be pounded straight through each hand, and both feet. Then, they lifted the cross so that the person would die a slow, painful death because they wouldn't be able to breathe. This is why this form of execution was reserved for the worst of criminals. It was actually considered merciful to flog them ahead of time. If they survived being whipped (which didn't always happen), they wouldn't survive as long on the cross.

This is how the soldiers showed that they were bored with Jesus, they had him sent away to be crucified. Do we ever show that we are done with Jesus? We come to church and exclaim our praise and thanks. Then, we walk out of the doors. Does Jesus always remain a high priority even when we aren't in church? You receive a raise at work. Do you stop and give thanks to God? My health suddenly takes a turn for the worse. Do I turn immediately to God and ask for help and confidence? We see all the bad things in the world. There is unrest in our backyard. People get sick and die of disease. There are wars overseas. Do we ask God to work things out for his good? It will seem like God and his Word is the most important thing while we are in church. But, when we walk out of these doors or turn off the screen watching the online service, we forget about Jesus.

But Jesus never forgets about us. He loved us so much that Jesus was crucified. He was lifted on a cross so that we will be lifted up to heaven on the last day. Awaiting us in heaven is glory, praise, and exaltation. Christ is the best king we could ever have. Christ's rule is a rule of love. He appeared to be the opposite of a king so that he could save us from being separated from him and his kingdom forever. There never has been or will be a better king than Christ. What

other king gives his kingdom to his subject? Our king gives us the victory, that victory he won for us by giving up his own life. There is no greater king ever than Jesus!

Just as Christ did not appear much as a king in the gospel, it sometimes doesn't feel like Christ is our king. We can't see his kingdom or him. But we remember our king as we are foreigners in this world and members of Christ's kingdom. We call upon our king in the day of trouble. When we hurt or in need, we ask our king for help. When something amazing happens (i.e. the birth of a child, nice weather, or when you receive a generous gift), we give thanks to Christ the king. Isn't every day another day of his grace? Every morning and night we have the chance to thank God for another day in his grace and to continue protecting us in our sleep. God opens our eyes to him, his work, and his kingdom when we open the Bible and read. God tells us that he is love. That Jesus is the light of the world. That he is our Savior. We see in the pages of Scripture Jesus' saving work through his life, death, and resurrection. We know that God has prepared a place for each one of us in his kingdom, where there won't be any more suffering, pain, or death

Christ the King. What a great statement. Christ's rule is a rule of love, which led him to be crowned, criticized and crucified. This is how Christ crowned us with glory, clothed us with righteousness, and lifts us up to heaven. Even when Christ didn't seem like a king, he was the best king of all. We rightly exclaim, "Hail! King of the Jews!" Amen.