

# Crown Him With Many Crowns

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Today I want to share with you a picture. It will have to be drawn by words and not paint or chalk, but it is a picture nonetheless, a picture of Jesus our Lord, a particular picture with a special meaning, drawn from His experience very early Friday morning, at His trial before Pilate. The “sacred reminder” we celebrate on this Sabbath, the Lord's Supper, recalls the victorious conquest of Christ on the cross. His death and resurrection mean everything to us. Though rich, for our sakes He became poor. Though honored by the host of heaven, He was rejected and abused by mankind. To heighten the humiliation, the Bible tells us that the soldiers wove a cruel crown of thorns and placed, or rather pressed it on His head. The scars of those thorns will remain on the blessed brow of our Savior throughout eternity as a trophy of His sacrifice.

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" Matthew 27:27-29.

In the New Testament there are two words translated “crown.” You know them both. One is *stephanos*, the crown of the athlete, the victor. The names “Stephen,” as in the appropriate case of the first Christian martyr, or “Stephanie” come from that root. This, back in Roman times, was often a chaplet of apple leaves placed on the head of a winner of an athletic game, a sporting event. The other word for crown in the New Testament is *diademata*, from which we obtain the word “diadem.” This refers to the crown that a king wears. This is the crown of authority and royalty.

It is true that Matthew uses the word *stephanos*, or athlete's crown, when reporting the despicable behavior of those soldiers. However, there is no question that the soldiers were jabbing sarcasm at Jesus, ridiculing His being a King. On another occasion we'll talk about the lesson conveyed by Jesus' wearing the *stephanos* of thorns. The scarlet robe, the reed scepter, the crown, the bowing of the knee in mock reverence and the disdainful acclamation, “Hail, King of the Jews,” were all done in feigned honor to the kingship of Jesus.

He wore a crown, a crown of thorns. Let's think for a moment this morning about the crown that He wore. Who wears a crown? Our first response to that question might likely be “kings.”

From ancient times crowns have adorned the head of those who rule. In another sense, to be the “king” of something indicates the epitome, the highest expression, the absolute. Someone skilled in property transactions might be known as the “king of real estate.” The late Michael Jackson was styled the “king of pop.” To be “king” in something means you're the best, you're “tops,” you're the clearest and highest manifestation of whatever it is that you are king. You rule in whatever field it is that you are crowned. What does it mean then, when you are crowned with thorns? Of what is that Person king?

The first time we read about thorns in the Bible is Genesis 3, describing the effects of sin. Thorns are an expression of the curse because of disobedience. Because of His marvelous love, Jesus volunteered to accept the curse of sin for us, so that we might have hope of eternal life and be able to enter the Garden again. Part of that curse was hanging on a cross, Paul explains in Galatians. Part of that curse was sweating blood for the bread of life. Part of that curse was feeling the pain of thorns, woven into a crown.

Thorns are a reminder of the curse; a reminder of sin. You could say that, by wearing a crown of thorns, Christ became (we say it reverently) the King of sin. That's the message the picture sends. Christ, the King of sin? Is that biblical? Is that theologically correct? It certainly would not be if the idea were that it was His own sin, because we know that He was without sin. He was the Perfect Sacrifice without spot or blemish.

And yet, through the mystery of how Christ became our Savior, our sins were placed on Him. He bore our iniquity. He bore the very first sin of Adam, the murder by Cain, the atrocities of those who lived before the Flood, and every heinous and repulsive act or thought of transgression ever done on Planet earth. In fact, the Bible says that He not only carried our sin, but He “became sin.” That's why Jesus chose to use the Old Testament story of the snake on a pole as illustrating His death on the cross. A “snake” on the pole? Isn't a snake a symbol of sin and its originator? How could that represent Jesus? Yet our Lord Himself said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” John 3:14. In a symbolic way, by taking our sin, by “becoming sin,” He was represented by the serpent when He died on the cross. He became so closely identified with our transgressions that He “became sin,” He “became the serpent” on the cross.

He “became sin for us.” When the Scriptures use that form of expression, it is to intensify the radical nature of Christ's role as Sin-bearer. In a parallel thought, the Bible not only says that “God loves” (which it does many times), but it says that “God is love.” I John 4:8. The Bible says that not only does God give light, but that He is light. John 8:12. So when the Bible says that not only did Christ bear our sin (Isaiah 53:4-6), but He “became sin,” we must recognize the emphatic nature of what is being said. This might be the most concise and theologically potent verse in the Bible. The entirety of God's plan of salvation is distilled into one perfect crystalline drop of Gospel truth in this verse. “For He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” II Corinthians 5:21. See the picture of Jesus wearing the crown of thorns, becoming thereby the “King of sin.”

And why did He do this? Why did He endure this great humiliation? It was, as Paul declares, “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Do you catch the incredible significance of that statement? By achieving our salvation, it isn't as though our evil deeds are replaced by our good deeds. Our wicked thoughts and actions are not replaced by good thoughts and actions that belong to us. He “became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” May we propose that this supersedes even the moral standing of Adam in the Garden before sin! Adam was without sin, and his thoughts and actions were righteous, but they were “his own.” And he was accepted in them and was well pleasing in God's sight. But nowhere in the Scriptures do we read that Adam was given the “righteousness of God.”

But the redeemed! The ones who were born in sin and made a practice, a pattern of sinful behavior in their lives, but who are now in Christ! By the miracle of the atonement, Jesus has “become sin” for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him! Glory to His name! Praise God for His wonderful plan of salvation! Thank God for Jesus Who became our Savior, in Whose honor we share these emblems of His body and blood today! Someday soon He'll return in the clouds, wearing the royal crown, the *diademata* of His Kingship! May that day be soon!