

## A Crown Of Thorns

Having sentenced the Lord Jesus to be crucified Pilate placed our Saviour in the custody of Roman soldiers accustomed to causing pain and death. The Lord was treated as a convicted criminal though no crime had been committed. He was subject to sadistic abuse and cruel mockery. Christ's kingly reputation proved too tempting for the soldiers' vile imaginations. They robed Christ in purple and scarlet, platted a crown of thorns for His head and placed a mock sceptre in His hand. Then they knelt in pretend worship.

### **Surrounded by enemies**

The scale of this charade may be greater than first appreciated. Mark and Matthew appear to emphasise how the individuals charged with Jesus' crucifixion gathered around them 'the whole band' of soldiers. It has been suggested this would have numbered hundreds of men and suggests a great jeering spectacle was made of Christ's torture.

### **The kudos of killing a king**

Dressing and parading Jesus as a king, bowing before Him and uttering shameful statements was an elaborate display no doubt orchestrated specifically to irritate the Jews as well as disrespect and dishonour the Saviour. The Roman soldiers must have known the celebrity and honour that surrounded Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem a few days previously. They relished making sport of Israel's King while unwittingly fulfilling many Old Testament prophecies.

### **Evil spills over**

Yet it was more than mockery, it was deliberately barbaric. It takes thought, time and effort to make a crown of thorns. The sharp piercing pain as its spikes were pressed down on the Lord's skull and brow must have been excruciating. Striking Jesus' head with a reed, or cane as the word may be translated, and spitting in His face was spiteful, cruel and unnecessary. Jesus, already weakened by scourging, was condemned to die, yet these fiends could not let pass an opportunity to brutalise their defenceless prisoner.

### **A willing sacrifice**

Isaiah tells us it is with Christ's stripes we are healed, hence Jesus must be scourged. He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not his face from shame and spitting. Do not fail to see how completely the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled as the Saviour was wounded and hurt. We have previously noted how the Lord Jesus by the spirit of prophecy foretold His suffering, and the corresponding sorrow of his soul, for example, in Psalm 22 and Psalm 69.

### **Simon of Cyrene**

Jesus' own clothes were put back on Him. They would become the property of His executioners as David foretold in Psalm 22:18. Then He was led away to be crucified. Christ's body was already so badly beaten as to make Him incapable of carrying His cross, at least at the speed desired. Not to be robbed of their spectacle by having Christ prematurely die on them, Simon, a man of Cyrene, which is modern-day Tripoli in Libya, was pulled from the crowd and required to carry the Lord's cross. It is possible Simon was a follower of Jesus. Two of his sons were noted members of the early church.

### **The place of a skull**

The Lord Jesus was taken outside Jerusalem's city walls to Golgotha, the exact location of which is debated. It is called 'the place of a skull' perhaps because the physical location had some resemblance to a skull, being a small hill, or because it was a frequent place of executions with bones littering the ground. Despite the Latin name Mt Calvary, there is no direct scripture reference to Christ dying on a hill. Here, at around 9:00 in the morning the Saviour was nailed to His cross and crucified. It would take another six hours for the Lord to die.

### **The day of fierce anger**

There have been many protracted and tormented deaths in this world, some natural and some, like the Saviour's, intentionally violent and brutal to maximise pain. However, we must always remember that our Lord's suffering was like no other. It was physical, mental and spiritual. As the Lord's enemies assailed His body, Satan assaulted His mind

with temptations, and the sword of God's holy justice entered Christ's soul, demanding vengeance against our sin. Jeremiah asks in Lamentations 1:12, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger'.

### **All for love's sake**

There is much for a child of God to learn by considering the suffering and death of our Saviour. However, let us never come dispassionately to Golgotha. Let us always approach the Lord's suffering with awe and reverence. Here for love's sake, the Lord Jesus, God's Son our Saviour, died as our Substitute in our place. Here Christ suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh. Here our salvation was hard fought-for and gloriously won.

Amen

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