

King Jesus before His Executioners

Matthew 27:26-38

Halifax: 24 June 2007

Introduction:

Over the last while in our Matthew Sermon series,

- I have been presenting to you the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ as they are recorded in Matthew's account.
 - We have seen that although He was brought to humiliation of the deepest kind,
 - yet His regal bearing remained and was even displayed all the more by His sufferings.
 - We have seen that He is the right kind of king—very different from the kings of this world—
 - a King who loves His people so much that He gives Himself completely for their good—
 - It seems that there is nothing that He refuses to bear for them!
 - It is not that He does what **they** want all the time,
 - but rather that He employs His wisdom and strength to do what is best for them.
 - That is the way a king ought to be—the way all who are in authority are called of God to be.
 - So far:
 - We have seen Him deliberately giving Himself into the hands of His own people who come in the night to arrest Him with His own disciple at their head...
 - We have seen Him submitting to a so-called trial by the Sanhedrin,
 - accused of claiming Himself to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God—as if being the Messiah were a crime.
 - We have seen Him standing trial before the Roman Governor,
 - found to be innocent by Him of any wrongdoing,
 - but nevertheless sentenced to be crucified.
 - And now, this morning, in Matthew 27:26-38, we come to see Him before His executioners...
 - these barbarous Roman soldiers who,
 - at every step and with every intention of doing the opposite...
 - further the purposes of God concerning Him.
 - God uses even their wrath and foolishness to promote His glory.

- We will look at this under two categories this morning.

I. First, see how the ones who execute King Jesus are used to draw attention to the fact that He is a king.

A. It is very ironic that Jesus was officially charged with being the King of the Jews...

1. It was the custom at a crucifixion to affix to the cross a written statement of the crime with which the crucified person was charged—the Romans wanted everyone to know...

a. And so the Roman executioners do that, and they do it in a way that rubs the Jews...

- You can see it in verse 37...

- Instead of saying that He falsely claimed to be the King of the Jews,

- they write the words:

- “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”

- We are told in John that Jews complained about this to Pilate—

- They wanted Pilate to say,

- “He claimed to be the King of the Israel”

- but Pilate would not change it—

- He had put in three languages so that all would know what this man was charged with.

b. I think he got quite a chuckle out of this...

- He knew that the Jewish leaders had no interest in preserving the seat of Emperor Tiberius...

- He knew that if they had really thought Jesus to be the Messiah, capable of overthrowing Roman rule,

- the last thing they would have ever done was turn their over to be crucified!

- But in their desperation to get rid of Him,

- that is exactly what they had done...

- They had charged Him with the great crime of being their King when Cesar was their king!

2. This is marvellously ironical because Jesus was charged with being exactly what He was.

- a. He really was the King of the Jews,
 - and here it is on this little sign affixed to His cross, telling the truth about Him and about why He was there on the cross.
 - He was there as Israel's king, representing them.

- b. It was not, of course, that Jesus really was a rival king to Tiberius.
 - It was very popular among the Jews to think that the Messiah would come to overthrow the Romans,
 - but this was a gross misunderstanding of the Messiah's work.
 - He is no rival to a temporal throne!
 - He is much greater than!
 - He is the Son of God who raises up and puts down kings whenever He so pleases...
 - His jurisdiction goes far beyond a one-generation-long rule over the Roman Empire!
 - He is King forever and ever, and there is no king that rules that He has not placed in office!
 - The King of the Jews had no interest in putting down Tiberius and taking an earthly throne.
 - He was already reigning as the King of kings and the Lord of Lords.
 - He had come to this world on a great mission,
 - not to set up a rival kingdom,
 - but rather to give His life a ransom for the redemption of His people so that they might be pardoned in order that they might not see judgement but have everlasting life.

- c. Neither His Jewish accusers nor His Roman executioners had a clear understanding of just how great a king Jesus really was!
 - But still, as God would have it in His marvellous providential working,
 - The truth was clearly declared in the epitaph on the cross—
 - “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”
 - However great the misunderstanding of those who put this inscription there may have been,
 - it was nevertheless true... to the glory of God.

TRANS> The Roman executioners thought it was quite a joke that Jesus had been charged with being a king...

- He had no army, no palace, no crown, no royal attire, no attendants...
- and so in their ignorance, they decided to make sport of it all...

B. But in their antics, they actually drew further attention to Jesus' kingship.

1. In a very cruel, mocking way,

a. These jokers supplied Him with:

- a reed for a sceptre,
- a wreath of thorns for a crown,
- and a soldier's scarlet tunic to represent the purple robe that was characteristic of kings.

b. Then, as the language would seem to indicate,

- they each took their turn approaching Him with their mock honours...
- Each one took his turn, bowed to Him,
 - and then, leaning over as if to kiss Him, instead spit in His face...
- And to show what they thought of His regal authority,
 - they took the sceptre which is the symbol of a king's authority and smote Him on the head—probably driving in the thorns all the more.

c. They thought these mock symbols of royalty and homage were perfectly fitting for the one they thought to be a mock king.

2. But all that they did here bears witness to what is true about Him...

a. What they did in a mocking way,

- They will one day do in reality!
- Like Joseph's brothers who laughed at Joseph's prophetic dream that they would bow down to him,
 - who, when they had sold him to Egypt, said, "What will become of his dreams now?"
 - These Roman executioners will find themselves bowing in truth to the one they esteemed so unworthy...
 - Like Joseph's brothers,
 - they will find themselves on their face before Him declaring that He is not merely a King like their emperor,
 - but that He is a king in a much greater sense!

- that He has been given the name that is above every name.
- What they supplied to Him in mockery, He will have in truth!

b. Let every worshipper of Jesus know this!

- The homage we show Him today is but a pale reflection of the homage we will show Him in glory...
- We have not begun to give Him the glory that is due to His name, but when we see Him in His glory, we will...

- There are two sorts of worshippers of Christ today:

1) First, there are those like these Roman soldiers who suppose that they **have** given Him all that He is due...

a) Among these are those who render Him no homage at all...

- They refuse to kiss the Son lest He be angry.
- They have very little regard for His law and feel themselves at liberty to ignore it as they please—whenever it is not agreeable to them.
- And they have very little regard for His sacrifice—
 - What use is it to them?
 - It is of no account—they are content to go on without it.
 - They may call Him a good man, perhaps even a holy prophet...
 - But they have no use for Him beyond that...

b) And then, among this first class who suppose that they have given Him what is due to Him,

- are those hypocritical worshippers...
 - Many of them can be found in our church houses today, singing and praying...
 - partaking of the sacraments and listening to His word...
 - But in fact, they have no more regard for Him than these soldiers.
 - They offer to Him an outward display of worship that is but a mockery—but a show...
 - They have no intention of serving this King on His terms...
 - They only go through the motions as these Roman soldiers did.

- They have no real regard for His sacrifice...
 - They have no respect for His commandments...
- c) These are the ones who feel that they have given Him what is due to Him—what is fitting for such a king—
- a reed for sceptre, a wreath of thorns for a crown, an old scarlet tunic for a robe...
 - They come with their lips, but their heart is far away...
 - As in Malachi's day,
 - they bring to this great King sacrifices that are blind and lame and suppose that He will be pleased with them!
 - They suppose that He will take no notice of it.
 - Indeed, they are greatly mistaken!
 - What terror will be theirs when He comes in all His glory with the Holy Angels, clothed in shining garments, to call them to account...
 - They will cry out for the rocks to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the lamb!
 - They will see that He whom they lightly esteemed is a consuming fire.

TRANS> They suppose that they have brought Him what He deserves when in fact they have brought nothing but mockery!

- But then there is the second sort of worshipper of King Jesus...
- 2) These are the ones who come reverence and godly fear,
- not supposing that they have brought to Him what He deserves at all,
 - but something far less than He deserves!
- a) Such is the characteristic of all true worship!
- It is worship that says with Isaiah,
 - “Woe is me for I am undone—a man of unclean lips who dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”
 - It says with Jacob
 - “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercy and truth that you have shown to your servant.”
 - It is worship that says with Daniel,

- “We do not present our supplications before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.”
- b) True worship acknowledges that Jesus is a King so great that even our very best praise is but a mockery...
- It confesses that our worship is too much like that of the Roman soldiers—a cheap show...
 - Yet, it comes with confidence and boldness through the blood of Christ that was shed to atone for sin...
 - It draws near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having the conscience sprinkled by His blood...
 - It comes knowing that His sacrifice for our sins (not our performance) is the only ground of our acceptance before Him.
3. Both kinds of worship will redound to the glory of God...
- If you are a self-satisfied worshipper,
 - who supposes that your worship is more or less acceptable on its own merit,
 - God’s glorious wrath and judgement will be displayed upon you...
 - You are a vessel of wrath designed to display to all creatures the glory of His wrath.
 - But if you are humble worshipper who realises that your worship is entirely unacceptable to God apart from the redeeming mercy of Christ,
 - then God’s glorious mercy and grace will be displayed through you...
 - You are a vessel of mercy set up by Him to display to all creatures the glory of His mercy and grace in Christ.

TRANS> And so my brothers and sisters, you see how these mocking Roman soldiers were used to draw attention to the fact that Jesus is the King of the Jews,

- That He was the One God had promised from the beginning that would come to redeem the world.
 - These soldiers were ignorant,
 - they did not know what they did...
 - but we find that even on this very day,
 - some of them were awakened to the truth—
 - even the Centurion and those with him who at last declared (as recorded in v. 54,

- “Truly this was the Son of God!”
- Despite whatever participation this centurion may have had in the scorn and abuse of our Lord,
 - if this confession was anything more than a passing flash of light that came to him...
 - if he truly repented,
 - He will stand as a testimony of God’s grace and mercy through Jesus Christ...
 - highlighting the truth that there is forgiveness with God.
- Though you may have worshipped God falsely your whole life,
 - being satisfied with your prayers and your devotions,
 - it is never too late to repent so long as you have breath in your lungs.
 - Learn from these mocking Romans that Jesus is indeed King!
 - What they said of Him in mocking way was true, though they believed it not.

Now I want to draw your attention to the second way Jesus’ executioners unwittingly bring glory to King Jesus...

II. Secondly, Jesus’ Roman executioners were the ones who laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all.

- Of course, it was God the Father who laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all—
 - who charged Him with our sins so that He might bear the penalty of our sins...
 - But these Roman soldiers were God’s instruments who brought all of God’s punishments upon Him...
 - they were the ones who did to Him all that had to be done that He might fully atone for our sin.
 - In their cruelty, they omitted nothing that God required of Jesus to fully bear the curse for us...

A. First, they put the stripes on His back that belong to us.

1. It is mentioned in passing in verse 26 that Pilate had Jesus scourged... but what a thing it was!
 - The cruel Roman scourge consisted of leather whips with bits of bone and metal tied into them that was ripped across the back of the one being punished...

- Many died from this terrible torture.
 - It often tore the skin so deeply that organs were exposed...
 - How this increased the agony of the victim—
 - think of the excruciating pain to these wounds even as the garments of our Lord were torn off in the soldier’s mocking...
 - And as His shoulders bore the cross beam.
 - And then as He was nailed to the cross with those open wounds on his back.
2. Brothers and sister, the scriptures are clear that it was necessary for Jesus to bear this scouring in order that we might be healed!
- God’s word declares that “by His stripes we are healed.”
 - He who was innocent received this torture so that we who are guilty and worthy of many stripes might be free.
 - They represent the stripes that God,
 - the only just judge, will lay on all who are still in their sins—
 - all who have not repented and found life in Jesus.
 - We cannot see so clearly that this is what we all deserve, but when we see the glory of God, it will be clear.
 - It is what we all deserve, and for us, the Lord received it from the hands of these Roman executioners.
 - What a debt of gratitude we owe to Him!

B. Secondly, see how He is dishonoured and put to shame by His executioners...

1. Here He is, regarded as a mock king, as one who was full of false boasts...
 - He is divested of all honour, and His clothes are stripped off of Him to expose Him in the shame of nakedness...
 - He is spat upon as one deserving of utter contempt...
 - As I mentioned before, spitting was considered such a loathsome thing that a slave was considered worthy of death if he spit in the presence of his master.
2. Jesus, who had nothing to be ashamed of, bore this shame in our place who have much to ashamed of.
 - He did it so that we who have come to Him for salvation will not have to be exposed in all our sin...

- Oh yes, we like to deceive ourselves and others and pretend that we have nothing to be ashamed of,
 - but what will it be to have your wicked thoughts exposed...
 - all the envy, all the malice, all the indifference toward others, all the immoral thoughts, all the bitterness toward our God...
3. But all this will not be exposed for those who have come to Jesus for mercy...
- because the Roman soldiers have exposed our shame in His person...
 - You who believe are clothed with the garments of His righteousness so that your nakedness will not be exposed—
 - even when you at last stand before the LORD at the end!
 - What a substitution this!
 - We sinned, and King Jesus bore the shame of our sin!
 - The Roman soldiers saw that this was done.
- C. Thirdly, see how He was given a crown of thorns...
1. Thorns remind us that the whole creation was cursed for our sake—
- In Genesis 3, God pronounced the curse upon Adam and his posterity that from then on, the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles...
 - This represents all that is difficult in nature...
 - from destructive storms to cut fingers...
 - from bee stings to cancer...
 - from computer crashes to plane crashes.
2. Yet here, the Roman executioners place the crown of thorns on King Jesus...
- With this crown, Jesus is represented to us as the one who bears the curse of nature for us...
 - Paul tells us in Romans 8:20-23 that
 - Romans 8:20-22: For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.
 - God has promised us that not only our bodies, but nature itself will be made new.
 - There will be a new heavens and a new earth—not one that is entirely different, like us
 - the earth will be transformed...

- all that is wrong and all that is corrupt will be removed.
3. The Roman soldiers, by placing this crown of thorns on Jesus, show that by His sufferings, He redeemed even nature itself—
 - He took upon Himself all our infirmities so that at the consummation,
 - we may enjoy the earth without a curse—
 - an earth that will remain in perfect harmony with us forever and ever.
- D. Fourthly, see how these Roman soldiers lead Him away (out of the city) to be crucified...
1. It was a mighty band—a whole garrison or cohort is here mentioned which consisted of 600 soldiers...
 - And they brought Jesus out (according to v. 31) to be crucified...
 - With strong hands, they brought Him out of the city as one unworthy to live there...
 - The book of Hebrews compares Him to the sacrifices of the Old Testament that were slain outside the camp...
 2. Here again, our Lord is bearing this in our place—as a substitute for all who belong to Him...
 - For in His own teaching He told us that at the last day the holy angels will come in great numbers and great strength to separate
 - the wheat and the tares,
 - the good fish from the bad fish,
 - the branch that bears fruit from the branch that is barren...
 - What strong hands will take hold of the wicked and cast them into the fire of God's judgement,
 - away from His glorious habitation,
 - consigned to the place of darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!
 3. God has seen fit, by the hands of these Roman soldiers, to lay this judgement upon Christ who alone was worthy to live in His house...
 - He has been cast out so that we, who are unworthy, might freely come and be counted as sons who are worthy...
 - might be brought into the joys of everlasting fellowship in the very house of God.
 - Know for certain, my hearers,

- that you can only be accepted into the fellowship of God's house through Christ because He was cast out for you.
- Just imagine it!
 - We have been made sons through Jesus Christ with all the rights and privileges of sons...
 - We deserve to be expelled from God's house, but Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren because He has been expelled for us!
 - Let us come with gladness and hope that we will live in the blessed communion of love that has characterised Heaven from the beginning between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - Imagine it!
 - Joint heirs with Jesus Christ in that house of glory!
 - all because Jesus was cast out for us by the hands of these soldiers.

E. Fifthly, see how the Roman executioners stripped the LORD Jesus for us.

1. The entire estate of our Lord Jesus consisted in the clothes that He wore, and the estate of the crucified was given to the executioners...
 - Here at the end, every last thing including the shirt on his back was taken from Him.
 - He was brought to extreme poverty.
 - As Paul told the Corinthians, He was made poor so that we might be made rich.
2. At death, we would also be divested of our very last possessions and left naked,
 - but the LORD has borne the curse poverty for us so that we may have an eternal inheritance in heaven.
 - Never again will we know the stresses of bill paying and of putting food on the table.
 - The Roman soldiers, by divesting Jesus of His last possession have made it possible for us to inherit the earth if we are meek...
 - if we are those who come as paupers to receive grace from Jesus who lost all for us.
3. In the meantime, let us hold very loosely the things in this world, knowing that we have a place prepared for us in heaven.

F. Sixthly, see how the Roman executioners put Jesus with a pair of robbers—

1. He was numbered with the transgressors...
 - He Himself was accounted the chief among them...
 - placed in the middle of them
 - chosen as more unfit to live than Barabbas who was released.

2. What a picture this is!
 - a. Here is Jesus in the company of robbers to show that He bore punishment for even the worst of offenders.
 - No matter what murder and wickedness you may have committed, our Lord's sacrifice reaches beyond it...
 - He has suffered as the chief sinner.
 - You can have perfect confidence that by coming to Him,
 - you will find sure mercy.

 - b. By taking the place of Barabbas, Jesus shows us that He takes the place of the very worst offenders.
 - This is a picture of what He has done for us all.
 - The Judge has died and the criminal is set free!
 - He has taken our place.

 - c. This is also a picture that He has delivered us from living forever in the company of robbers...
 - It is a part of His sufferings that He had to come into this world that is filled with hatred—to live in the company of sinners and robbers...
 - He bore the company of sinners of the worst kind—which vexed his righteous soul—
 - in order that He might establish a kingdom that is free from these things...
 - where there are none to steal or murder or molest...
 - a world of love rather than a world of oppression.
 - a world where we live for others.

TRANS> The Roman executioners have seen to it that Jesus die in the company of the wicked so that we, who ourselves are wicked, might be raised with the righteous.

G. And then at last, there is the crucifixion itself...

1. The Roman executioners placed Him on a cross to show that He was cursed by God, for it is written in God's Word,
 - "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."
 - Next week, we shall look further at Jesus before His Father—even before His Father's wrath...
 - He is the one who took the very wrath of God for us when He was crucified so that we might be shown favour.

2. Consider it well—the righteous king is crucified and His unrighteous servants are set free.
 - a. It is like this—
 - 1) God the Father looks upon His elect people, chosen from before the foundation of the world to be His own...
 - But He finds that they are a nation altogether unfit for communion with Him.
 - They are fit only for cursing and eternal damnation.

 - 2) But this wicked nation also has a king, also elect from before the foundation of the world...
 - And their king is perfectly righteous... God the Father delights in Him and finds no iniquity in Him.
 - He alone is worthy to live in communion with God.

 - 3) And so the Father comes to Judge His people because His justice demands it,
 - But He says to the King...
 - "These are my chosen ones whom I love and whom I have purposed to show mercy.
 - It cannot be that any of them should perish.
 - You take their place and bear their curse that I might in justice set them free from the curse."
 - And so the King steps forward as their representative and says,
 - "Yes Father, let their judgement fall upon me!"
 - And so the righteous king is cursed and the wicked nation is set free from the curse.

 - b. What a king He is that would take the sin and guilt of the whole nation on Himself...
 - even the sin and guilt with which He had no share...

- He steps forth at their head to bear the entire penalty for them
 - all the fiery darts of God's wrath fly upon them...
 - and He takes them every one.
- At the cross He was struck with them all so that none can ever reach His people!
 - What wonderous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul!
 - 2 Cor 5:21: For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- These Roman soldiers are the ones who brought Him to all this under the sovereign hand of God so that we, His chosen ones, might be redeemed.
 - Thanks be to God for what He has done.
 - Thanks be to the Lord Jesus!

Conclusion:

- Now I beseech all of you to come and entrust your soul to this king!
 - Let your heart melt as you behold His dying love for you!
 - As you see the grief that your sins brought to Him, learn to despise it!
 - As you see the love that He showed to you in taking all of God's wrath...
 - delight in that love and begin to live in it... begin to show the same regard for your brothers and sisters that Jesus has shown for you.
- Are you grateful for what he has done?
 - Your gratitude will be seen by how you treat those for whom He died.
 - He has brought us into His house of eternal love...
 - He has brought us to receive of the Father's grace...
 - Let us see that we live as His sons
 - trusting Him all the while to cleanse us because we come so short
 - and trusting Him to transform us so that we may become more and more like Him.
- Hallelujah, what a Saviour!