

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 22 February 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Crown of Thorns

Matthew 27:26-34

One of the most powerful and formative experiences of my childhood was that of singing together with my family. On a Friday or Saturday evening, my family would often gather around the piano, and sing hymns and spiritual songs. We frequently sang special music at church, and in local nursing homes, as well; and even when we were driving down the road, we often sang together. The songs that we sang are forever burned in my memory; and they pop into my mind quite often. One of these songs is “**Another Look at Calvary**”: and its first verse and chorus go like this:

“Lord, I come once again to your presence to pray; in your will I’m so anxious to be. Lest I fail to remember, please remind me every day of what happened at Calvary. Let me see that old rugged cross, and the crown of thorns you wore for me. If I walk in shades of night, please restore my blinded sight, for another look at Calvary.”

Many times in my life, when my love for the Lord has started to grow cold, I have taken “another look at Calvary”; and when I take another look at Calvary, tears often come to my eyes. As I remember what Jesus suffered to pay for *my* sin, my heart is set on fire, and I am drawn close to my Saviour once again. Whenever I view the scene at Calvary, and embrace that old, rugged cross, I am reminded of the extent to which the King of glory humbled Himself in order to save my soul. When the King of Kings came down into our world to take on human flesh, He willingly laid aside His heavenly crown; and in the place of His heavenly crown, a crown of thorns was placed on His head. Thorns—the very symbol of the curse—were rammed onto the head of the Prince of Life; and He took the curse of death in *my* place...and yours.

In our study of the book of **Matthew**, we have come to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, remember: the book of **Matthew** was written to a Jewish audience. **Matthew** was written *by* a Jew, *to* Jews; and the overwhelming message of the book is that **Jesus is the King of Israel**. Now, to most Jews—especially to those who have been brought up in strict, Orthodox Judaism—the very thought of the King of Israel’s wearing a crown of thorns is revolting, ludicrous, and blasphemous. Yet, to this day, Jewish hearts are still being stirred, and their eyes brought to tears, as they read the book of **Matthew** for the first time. Could it be that the King of Israel would love them so much, that He would die in their place, as their Sin-bearer? Jews aren’t the only ones who ponder this question, either. Many Gentiles are faced with the question, “*Could* the King of Kings love me that much?” The answer is, “Yes, He could: and He *does*.” This morning, and over the next couple weeks, we will examine the loving sacrifice that the Lord Jesus Christ made for us on the cross. It is my prayer that if you have not been saved, that you *will* receive Christ as your Saviour today; and if you *are* saved, I pray that you will “take another look at Calvary.” The title of this message is ***The Crown of Thorns***.

Read Matthew 27:26-34.

I. The crown of thorns: reminder of the curse (vv. 26-31)

A few weeks ago, when we were in **Matthew 26**, we saw that after the Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus, the council members spat on Him, punched Him in the face, slapped Him, and mocked Him. However, this was just the beginning. A short while later, when Jesus was brought to Herod's court, Herod's soldiers put a "*gorgeous robe*" on Him, and mocked Him. And now, as Jesus stood before Pilate for the second time, He endured yet another round of mocking and beating. Strangely enough, though, Pilate still tried to find a way to release Jesus, even after he had ordered Barabbas to be released, and Jesus to be scourged. In fact, it appears that Pilate ordered Jesus to be scourged with the hope that the people might *feel sorry for Him*, and be satisfied to release Him, after all. If this were what Pilate was figuring, he was dead wrong! The people would *not* be satisfied. It was Satan's hour, and the "*power of darkness*"; and most of the people of Jerusalem were completely under his sway. They wanted the Prince of Life to *die*.

Read John 19:1-16.

Imagine Jesus standing there, with a purple robe on His shoulders, a crown of thorns on His head, and a reed in His hand. Blood is pouring profusely from his head and torso, and muscle and flesh are hanging from His body in ribbons. Then, in words eerily similar to the words of the prophet Zechariah, Pilate says, "***Behold the man!***" Five hundred years earlier, Zechariah had prophesied of the Messiah, "***Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD...and he shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne.***" Unbeknown to Pilate, God Himself put those words "***Behold the man***" into his mouth; and the people, being immersed in Scripture as they were, should have recognised them. God was presenting His Son as the Messiah and King of Israel one last time; and He was using Pilate to do it. Yet, once again, the people hardened their hearts, and said, "***Crucify him!***"

Now, let's take a close look at the treatment that the King of glory received from His creation. First, the soldiers "*scourged*" Jesus. Now, when we think of "scourging," we usually envision being whipped with a leather horsewhip. To be sure, a horsewhip is brutal; but a Roman whip was far more brutal. The Roman whip was called a "cat-o-nine tails," because it branched out into nine strands; and each of these nine strands had bits of bone, and little metal spars, attached to it. It was designed not just to lacerate, but to rip flesh from the body. And how many lashes did Jesus receive? Thirty-nine! In **Deuteronomy 25:3**, God commanded the children of Israel to give no more than 40 lashes to a criminal; and the Sanhedrin had lessened it to 39 lashes, just in case they accidentally miscounted, and gave too many lashes. Thus,

take 39 lashes times 9 strands, and you have 351 total lashes from each metal-laced strip of leather! The pain and the blood loss would have been horrific! By the time Jesus' face had been repeatedly smashed by the people's fists, and a crown of thorns rammed onto His head, and His torso ripped to shreds, He would have been unrecognisable. This is exactly what Isaiah prophesied about the Jehovah's Servant, the Messiah. Isaiah prophesied that Messiah's face would be "*marred more than any man.*" He also prophesied that the Messiah would be "*wounded,*" "*bruised*" (literally, "crushed"), beaten with "*stripes,*" and led as a "*lamb to the slaughter.*"

Read Isaiah 52:14; 53:4-7, 10.

Now, let's look at the next part of Jesus' treatment. The next thing the soldiers did was to "strip Him," and put a "*scarlet robe*" on Him. Apparently, the "*gorgeous robe*" that Herod's soldiers had put on Jesus had been returned to Herod; but now, Pilate's soldiers continued the mockery by putting a purple robe on Him, and by bowing to Him and saying, "*Hail, King of the Jews!*" By the way, it wasn't just a handful of soldiers saying these words. Matthew and Mark record that the "*whole band*" of soldiers was called in to do the job! A "*band*" (called a "cohort") was a Roman military unit of 480 to 520 men! This huge mob of soldiers was there to make sure that Jesus was humiliated as thoroughly as possible.

Now, I wish I could say that this is where the mockery ended. But it wasn't. After the soldiers had had their fun, they stripped Jesus of the purple robe, and put His "*own raiment*" back on Him. However, this small window of decency was only temporary, because after Jesus was nailed to the cross, they stripped Him of His own clothing, and gambled over who would get it. The King of glory was literally hung up *naked* on the cross. Once again, we are reminded that Jesus bore the *curse* of our sin. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned against God, they realised that they were naked, and in need of a covering; and likewise, Jesus was made naked, as He bore our sins on the cross. Yet, here's the irony: because Jesus bore the shame of our spiritual nakedness before God, He was able to provide *us* with a robe of righteousness, to cover *our* shame! Just as an innocent animal was slain in order to provide clothing for Adam and Eve, so the Lamb of God was slain to provide the *real* covering for sinners! **Galatians 3:13** says, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*"

Now, let's look again at **verse 29**, and see how else the King was treated by His subjects that day. (**Read Matthew 27:29.**) Not only did the soldiers mock Jesus' Kingship by putting a purple robe on Him: they also mocked Him by ramming a crown of thorns onto His head. Once again, we are reminded that Jesus took *our curse* upon Himself. Thorns and thistles were part of the curse that Adam's sin brought into the world; and Jesus took those thorns upon His head, as a token of the curse that He was bearing for us.

Read Genesis 3:17-19.

Little did the soldiers know that this Man whom they were mockingly hailing as “the King of the Jews” *actually was* the King of the Jews, and the Lord of lords and King of kings, before whom they will all stand to be judged one day! *Jesus* is the Judge of Israel; yet, here these men were, foolishly spitting in His face—the ultimate sign of insult and contempt. They also took the mock “sceptre”—the rod that they had placed into Jesus’ hand—and smashed Him on the head with it. Both these things—the spitting in Jesus’ face, and the beating of His head with a rod—were foretold by the prophets **Isaiah** and **Micah**. Let’s look at **Isaiah** first.

Read Isaiah 50:4-7.

In this passage, Isaiah foretells several aspects of the torture that Christ would suffer on the morning of His trial. First, Isaiah says that Israel’s Redeemer would give His “***back to the smiters,***” and His “***cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.***” (The New Testament doesn’t record Jesus’ beard being ripped out by the soldiers; but we know, from this prophecy, that Jesus suffered *this* injustice, as well.) Isaiah also prophesied that they would spit in Jesus’ face. What could be more shameful than to be spat upon, and your beard ripped from your face? But that’s not all. **Micah** foretold that the “***judge of Israel***” would be smitten with a “***rod upon the cheek.***” The Hebrew word for “***rod***” is *shevet*, which also means “staff, or sceptre.” The very object that is supposed to be a sign of kingly authority was used to mock and beat the Saviour on the head!

Read Micah 5:1-2.

In **Micah 5:1**, God advised Israel to “***gather thyself in troops***” (in other words, “Get ready for battle”) because a great siege is coming. Now, from the surrounding context, we know that this is not just any old battle in Israel’s long history. The LORD was warning Israel about the *ultimate* battle in Jewish history—the yet-future Battle of Armageddon, which will happen immediately after the Tribulation period. In that battle, the Antichrist, and all nations of earth, will be gathered against Israel, to annihilate them. Why will God allow this terrible thing to happen? The answer to that question is found in the *second half* of **verse 1**, and in **verse 2**.

You see, long before the Battle of Armageddon takes place, two other extremely important events must happen (and *have*, in fact, already happened): and both of them involve Israel’s Messiah. For one thing, the Messiah would be born. In **verse 2**, we are told that the “***ruler in***

Israel,” whose “goings forth” are “*from everlasting*,” would step out of eternity, and be born in this world, in the town of **Bethlehem-Ephratah**. This event already happened 2,000 years ago, on the night when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Secondly, Micah prophesied that the “*judge of Israel*” would be smitten “*with a rod upon the cheek*.” This is a prophecy of Christ’s crucifixion. Now, obviously, these three future events are not listed in chronological order. In fact, they are listed in *backward* order. God first focused the prophetic camera lens on **the Battle of Armageddon** (which is still future for us). He then He zoomed back many centuries, to the time of **Christ’s crucifixion**. He then He zoomed back 33 more years, to the time of His **birth in Bethlehem**. Now, to *us*, it may seem strange to invert the order of these prophetic events; but to God, who is eternal, and exists outside of time, this is not strange at all. God sees the end from the beginning, and the beginning from the end. From eternity past, God had a plan for our redemption; and everything is already “done,” from God’s perspective. But here’s the point: the reason why Israel will have to be “smitten” during the future Tribulation period, and at the Battle of Armageddon, is that they, as a nation, chose to “*smite the judge of Israel upon the cheek*.” When Israel’s leaders said, “*His blood be on us, and on our children*,” they had no idea what they were saying. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God—whether as a nation, or as an individual!

In light of the brutal beating and tearing of flesh that Christ endured on His face (including the ripping of His scalp with the crown of thorns), it is no wonder that Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah’s “*visage*” would be “*marred more than any man*.” The very fact that Christ did not die from the beating on His head, and the shredding of His flesh, shows that He could not die until it was the right time! Moment by moment, hour by hour, all the things that the prophets had foretold of the Messiah were being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

II. The carrying of the cross: picture of discipleship (v. 32)

(Read Matthew 27:32 again.) It’s hard to imagine that the Creator of all things could actually grow weak. We know, of course, that Jesus literally *could not* die until He dismissed His own human spirit from His body. Jesus Himself said, “*I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*” Christ holds the keys of death; and He was able to lay down His life at will. Nevertheless, as the blood flowed from Jesus’ human body, He did grow extremely weak—so much so, that the soldiers soon realised that someone else would have to carry His cross. (Or so it appeared to them.) Jesus did carry His cross at first; but the soldiers soon decided to take the cross from Him, and to give it to a man named **Simon**, who was from the Egyptian city of Cyrene, to carry. In the book of **Mark**, we are told that Simon

had two sons named **Alexander** and **Rufus**, who were with him that day; and, interestingly enough, Mark spoke of **Alexander** and **Rufus** with an air of familiarity, as though his readers should recognise their names. Why so? Well, according to extra-biblical records, Simon, Alexander, Rufus, and their mother, all later came to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and their names were well-known to Christians everywhere. Some even believe that the “Rufus” who is mentioned in **Romans 16:13** was Simon’s son Rufus, who had moved to Rome in his adulthood.

Was it random chance that Simon was picked to carry Jesus’ cross? Not at all! God clearly orchestrated this situation for His glory. God put it into the soldiers’ minds to give the cross to Simon, so that Simon might be faced with the question, “Who is this Man whose cross I am bearing?” Through this situation, God was giving Simon an invitation to believe on His Son. And if Simon and his family did, in fact, believe on Christ, then this situation served yet another purpose—to be a living illustration of “taking up the cross.”

Read Luke 14:25-33.

What does it mean to “take up the cross”? It means to embrace death—death to self. It means to renounce self-will, self-love, and self-ambition. It means to surrender your *life* to Jesus, and to follow Him implicitly, no matter what the cost. And what does it mean to be a “disciple”? It means to be a “learner” of Jesus Christ. To be a “disciple” does not mean to go to church on Sunday morning, sit through a forty-five minute sermon, and then live the rest of the week for self. It doesn’t even mean to go to church regularly, read your Bible every day, and pray every day. You can do all these things without truly being a “learner” of Jesus Christ. In fact, you can do all these things without even being *saved*. To be saved in the first place, you must believe on Christ with true, saving faith—a faith that not only trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, but which also *turns to Christ, from sin*. This is called “**repentance**”; and repentance is inseparable from true faith in Christ. To become a child of God, you must be willing to renounce sin, and every false way, and every false gospel, and embrace *Christ*—even if it should mean that you must suffer for His name. This is why churches in persecuted countries are so much purer than our Western churches. To become a Christian in a communist or Muslim country, you must be willing to suffer—whether by going to prison, losing employment, having property confiscated, being separated from family, or even *dying* for Jesus’ name; and false disciples don’t last long in such an environment. People who are not willing to die to self and take up the cross either reject Christ outright: or, if they do make a profession of faith in Jesus, they soon fall away, because their professed faith was never real.

Perhaps some of you are thinking, “Pastor, are you trying to scare me? Are you trying to make me doubt my salvation?” If you are not truly saved, then, yes! I *am* challenging you to

examine yourself, to see if you be in the faith. If you came to Jesus with the intention of merely *adding* Him to your life (so that He can give you earthly blessings), instead of *submitting* your whole life to Him, then you are not saved: and you must repent and believe on Christ, while the door is still open! On the other hand, if you *did* truly repent and believe on Christ, and you *are* saved, I am challenging you to *continue* to learn from Him every day, and *obey* Him in everything. Every day, continue to count the cost of following Christ, and then take up your cross anew, and *die* to self.

Back in the late nineteenth century, Amy Charmichael (the Irish missionary who rescued many Indian girls from slavery in the Hindu temples) took some of her adopted girls to a goldsmith, so that they could see the process of gold smelting. As they watched the man heating the gold, cooling it, and then heating it even hotter, Amy asked the man, “How do you know when the gold is purified?” His answer was, “When I can see my face in it [the liquid gold in the crucible], then it is pure.” Christian, this is what Christ wants in your life. As He “turns up the heat” of suffering in your life, His aim is not to hurt you, but to remove the dross of sin from your life, so that when you are purified, *His* face—the face of the Master craftsman—may be seen in your life, and your conduct.¹

III. The rejected cup: the conduct of kings (vv. 33-34)

(Read Matthew 27:33-34.) The long procession of mockers and weepers followed Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem, and finally stopped on a small hill called “Golgotha,” a short distance outside the city walls. (The Hebrew word *gulgoleth* means “skull.”) By the way, many people (including myself) believe that this small hill is still identifiable today. They call it “Gordon’s Calvary”; and its shape is still strikingly similar to a human skull. (It doesn’t look quite as much as much like a skull now, since its “nose” broke off from erosion in recent years; but it is still easy enough to see.) Scripture also calls this hill by the name “Calvary,” which is based on the Latin word *calvaria*, meaning “skull.” Again, this is no coincidence. Jesus came into this world so that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for every man; and even the hill on which He died speaks of the suffering of death that He endured for us!

Now, you’ll remember that on the previous night, while He was praying to His Father, Jesus had said, “*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*” Then, at the time of His arrest, Jesus told Peter, “*The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*” The cup that Jesus was talking about was the *cup of suffering* that He was about to endure. Jesus willingly drank *that* cup for us, so that we might be saved. However, there was *another* cup that was offered to Jesus—a literal one—which Jesus would *not* drink. Some of the people standing around the cross soaked the drink from that cup into a sponge, put the sponge onto a stick, and poked it into Jesus’ mouth; but when

He tasted it, He refused to drink it. In a minute, we'll talk about *why* Jesus would not drink of that cup; but first, let's look at the prophecy that was being fulfilled.

Read Psalm 69:19-21.

One thousand years before Christ's birth, King David foretold the very ingredients that would be offered to Jesus to drink—vinegar, and gall (or “myrrh”). Though David probably used the words “*gall*” and “*vinegar*” figuratively in reference to sorrows in his *own* life, these words were, ultimately, a prophecy pointing to Jesus. For Jesus, this prophecy was fulfilled literally, when the soldiers offered him *real* gall and vinegar. By the way, there was nothing new or unique about this. It was a common practice, in Roman times, to mix sour wine (or “vinegar”) with myrrh, thus creating a powerful narcotic. Now, we are told, in the book of **Luke**, that the soldier who offered this mixture to Jesus mocked Him as he did so; nevertheless, the concoction that he was offering Jesus was a powerful narcotic, which would have deadened His pain, if He had ingested it. Why, then, didn't Jesus take it? Didn't He want to forget the suffering He was going through? No, He didn't! If Christ had drunk from this nasty cup, He would have fallen into a drunken stupor; and He would have been breaking God's law.

Proverbs 23:31 says, “*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*” **Proverbs 20:1** says, “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*” The Bible also makes it clear that to drink intoxicating drink is *not* the behaviour of kings and priest. In **Leviticus 10:8-11** God commanded Aaron and his sons, “*Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die.*” And in **Proverbs 31:4-5**, King Solomon recalled how his mother had taught him, “*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*” Would it, then, have been appropriate for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both the King and the High Priest of Israel, to be even the slightest bit tipsy as He hung on the cross? Not on your life! If Christ's judgment had been impaired, He wouldn't have been capable of saying the things that needed to be said in order to fulfil the Scriptures; and He wouldn't have been available when a repentant thief was ready to cry out to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.

Right up to the moment of death, Christ maintained a spotless character; and as our King and High Priest, He has set the bar for *us*, too. We who are saved are “kings and priests” before God; and as kings and priests, we should consider it an abomination to drink that which would impair our judgment, and our ability to serve the Lord faithfully. (And make no mistake about it: the process of intoxication begins the second that alcohol hits your brain cells.) By the way, when Solomon's mother told him, “*Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more,*” she wasn't saying that drinking alcohol is O.K., as long as

you are grieving and sad, and need to forget all your problems. Bathsheba was using what's called "irony"—sarcasm. Bathsheba was saying, "Alcohol is for people who don't want to use their minds, and who don't want to face their problems like men. But it's not for *you*, Solomon! Keep a clear mind, so that you can make *right* judgments, which glorify God!" Folks, this high standard wasn't just for Solomon: nor was it just for our Saviour. It's for *us*, too. Christian, don't *ever* take a drink of alcohol, no matter whom it offends! Follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, and conduct yourself in a manner befitting a king and priest.

Invitation: The King would not drink the cup of alcohol; but He did willingly drink the cup of suffering. He endured "***strong crying and tears,***" and tasted of death, in order to pay for our sin. On the cross, He took *our* sins, infirmities, griefs, and sorrows upon Himself. The thorns that sin had brought into our world were rammed on His head; and He became "a curse for us." He paid an eternal debt for our sins on that cross; and in exchange, He will give eternal life to anyone who will have it. If you have never repented of your sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, please do so today! If you are saved already, perhaps you need to take another look at Calvary today. Perhaps you haven't been counting the cost of being Christ's disciple lately, because you've come to love things and comforts of this world. If so, count the cost; take up the cross of death to self; and follow Jesus with your whole heart.

¹ Robert Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), pp. 106-107.