

"THORNS"
John 19:1-6

March 6,2013

Lent Service 4

If you like flowers, then you probably love roses. They are very beautiful and come in many colors. But if you try to pick a rose, you could get hurt. Why? Because of the thorns - THORN. How many of you like thorns? We don't like them, but we will endure thorns because we enjoy the roses. Thorns are sharp, painful, and can draw blood.

Tonight, we want to consider thorns. Roman soldiers used thorns to make a crown. They forced the crown on the head of Jesus, our Savior and our true King. This crown was like the cloth robe from last week. Soldiers used the robe to make fun of Jesus and mock Him as a king. The soldiers used the crown of thorns to mock Jesus and torture Him. They bowed before Him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews!". Then, they hit Him and beat Him.

Those soldiers and their actions seem very cruel to us. When we imagine them spitting at Jesus, taunting Him, striking Him, pushing a crown of thorns on His head until it bleeds, we feel sad for Jesus and angry at those soldiers. How could people hurt Jesus like that? We blame those soldiers -- they're guilty. But are those soldiers alone guilty?

Let's think again about thorns and sins. Sin means doing bad things and not doing good things. Those thorns in the picture are like sins.

First, notice: there is not one thorn, but many thorns. In the same way, there is not one sin in the world, but many sins. Let each of the thorns in this crown represent a sin. Those soldiers sinned against Jesus - mocking Him, beating Him, putting on the crown of thorns. Those are terrible sins, but they are not the only sins. We sin, too. We sin against God. We sin against other people - our parents, spouse, children, friends, teachers, and so on. In fact, the Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

Secondly, thorns hurt us. You bleed. In the same way, sins cause pain. Once, I was in a conference and we were discussing how some signs begin. Some signs are clear. BOOK is signed "book" because it looks like a book. MAN is signed "man" because, long ago, men wore hats.

Someone asked, "Why do you sign SIN, "sin"? One person said SIN is almost like the sign for PAIN. Why? Sin causes pain. This is true. When we sin against God -- ignore Him, not eager to worship, refuse to serve Him, HE is hurt because He loves us so much. When we sin against other people, pain happens, too. When someone steals, beats, or kills, that hurts other people. When a parent is tired and yells at a child, that child is hurt. When another person insults you, you are hurt. When someone gossips about you, you are hurt. There are many other examples. Sin causes pain just like a thorn causes pain.

What to do? Suppose you saw a child who tried to pick a flower, but a thorn was stuck in their finger. That child is hurt and crying. What would you do? You wouldn't tell her to stop crying. You wouldn't tell her stop feeling pain. You wouldn't even give medicine to help the pain. You would take out the thorn. In the same way, when sin causes pain, what do we do with people hurting in our world today because of that? We can't tell them to stop feeling guilty. We can't tell them to stop feeling pain – it will be all right. No. Someone must remove the sin. We can't do it because sin so thoroughly controls us.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to do this. This crown of thorns is a perfect example of that. The soldiers used this crown to torture Jesus. But Jesus willingly accepted that crown. He accepted each thorn, just as He accepted each sin - your sin, my sin, all sin. He accepted the pain of each thorn, just as He accepted the pain of each sin - your pain, my pain, all pain. Ultimately, after the crowds shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" and Jesus accept that. He was crucified for your sin and your pain. When He died, Jesus defeated sin and removed it. When you trust in Jesus Christ and His suffering and death, your sin and guilt are cancelled and gone.

But what about the pain? Even though Jesus has taken away sin and forgiven it, the pain still remains. Jesus never promises us an easy life with no suffering. We still experience pain and suffering because of our sins and because other people sin against us. Sometimes, God will remove the pain and stop the suffering, but often that pain and suffering will continue. God uses that pain and that suffering to accomplish good things.

A man in the Bible named Paul experienced that. Once, Paul complained about some pain and suffering that he was experiencing. He called it a "THORN in the flesh." We don't know what it was, but we do know that it was bothering him. Paul asked God to remove it – he prayed three times, but God refused and said, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power becomes perfect in (during) weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9)

When we have God's grace, we have everything we have everything we need: forgiveness, new life, and a home in heaven. But if God loves us, why would he allow pain in our lives? God uses pain and suffering for our good. Sometimes, when our lives are going along smoothly with few problems and pain, then it is easy to forget God and depend upon ourselves. It is at that time when God allows pain and suffering into our lives: to get our attention. Pain and suffering can draw us closer to God. When we are truly suffering and cannot help ourselves, then we turn to Jesus Christ. We rely on His power for our lives and feel closer to Him. Paul understood that. When God refused to take away his "thorn" in the flesh, Paul no longer complained about his suffering. He said, "I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties for Jesus' sake. For when I am weak, then I am truly strong."

We can have that same understanding. When we pray to Him and tell Him our problems, Jesus is sympathetic. He says, "I understand your problems, your pain, and your suffering. I experienced those too." Jesus bore all of our pain and suffering in order to give us the power to endure our pain and suffering now. With Jesus' help and support, you can endure any pain or suffering in your life.

But there is more. Jesus also gives us the power to help other people bear their problems. He wants us to do that. The Bible says, "Bear (Support) each other's (other people's) burdens (problems) and you will be obeying the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2).

We can do that in our families. Children, when your parents are burdened with a lot of responsibilities and problems, then you can help them by being cheerful and obeying them. Parents

can do the same. When your children face pressure at school, you can be sympathetic. Listen to their problems and discuss those problems with them.

Our church here is a wonderful place to share our problems, suffering, and pain. God wants His people together to worship Him and to help and serve each other. When you are experiencing pain in your life, then you can come here to church so that other members can help you, support you, and pray for you. You may still have the problem, but you will feel encouragement and be able to endure that problem better.

We also eagerly await the time when all our pain and suffering will end. That will happen. When Jesus rose from the dead, He won a crown for us, but it is not a crown like this (thorns). He has given us a glorious beautiful crown. The Bible says, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you a crown of life." We will not suffer and die forever, but we will rise from the dead to enjoy life and glory with Jesus in heaven forever.

Our comparison tonight is kind of strange. A crown is usually shiny and shows glory, power, and authority. This one is made of thorns and shows pain, suffering, weakness, and humility. Those two pictures are contradictory. But that's ok. We learn from that. Jesus accepted this crown to forgive our sins. Jesus accepted this crown and all the pain and suffering so that we are able to endure our pain and suffering and help other people to endure their pain and suffering, too. Jesus accepted this crown with all its weakness and humility so that we would receive a crown of life and live and rule with Him in heaven. So, as you leave tonight, remember the crown of thorns and all that it means. I encourage you to receive His love and forgiveness; endure the pain and suffering in your lives with His help; and help others to do the same until you receive the glorious crown of life. Amen.