

Hail Your Sacrificial King! (Matthew 27:27-31)

- 1) Jesus willingly sacrificed himself for your sake
- 2) His cross is your confidence for salvation

If someone wants to show off their power or accomplishments, what will they do? In the world of competitive sports, everyone chases after the W. It's not enough to have a winning record. Your goal is to be the champion and take home the trophy. In the world of academics, you show your accomplishments by adding titles to your name. Mister So-and-so becomes Professor So-and-so. Later on Professor So-and-so becomes Doctor So-and-so. In the world of geopolitics, nations show their power with their military's might. I'm too young to remember this, but I've been told that during the Cold War few things got people more worried than footage of Soviet Army parades.ⁱ In the midst of a sea people would be rolling by tanks and rockets capable of doling out untold destruction. These examples are ways that humans show they have power or have accomplished something difficult.

In our verses from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 27, we don't see these signs of power from Jesus. Rather we see the opposite. Matthew tells us, **“Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”**ⁱⁱ This is the Gospel of our Lord. Jesus doesn't look like the King of kings here. He looks like a beaten criminal who's lost it all. But nothing could be further from the truth. For it's in this moment we see our sacrificial king who graciously gave his life on the cross so that we may the confidence of our salvation.

Jesus' path to be our sacrificial king began before our verses for this morning. Starting in Matthew chapter 26, the apostles betray and abandon Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The chief priests, Herod, and Pilate all had Jesus on trial. Finally Pilate gave in the crowds and sentenced Jesus to die on the cross. And this is where we come to these verses in the Praetorium where the Roman soldiers torment Jesus. They mockingly dress him up as a king with a scarlet robe that

Roman officials wore. They twisted together a crown of thorns and drove it into his head. They put a staff in his hand to complete the kingly picture. Then they paid him false homage with the biting words of sarcastic satire. They knelt before and mockingly shouted, “**Hail, king of the Jews!**”ⁱⁱⁱ They spat on him. They took the staff from his hand and beat him on the head again and again. Finally once the soldiers had their depraved fun^{iv} at Jesus’ expense, they returned Jesus to his bloody clothes and led him to the cross. It would be there on the cross that Jesus would complete his sacrifice for our sake. He gave up his perfect life in exchange for our sinful lives and so that those who believe in him may have forgiveness. It was on the cross he showed himself to be our sacrificial king.

Say you were with those Roman soldiers while they mistreated Jesus. If they were to ask you if you called this bloody mess of a man your King, what would your answer be? I imagine you would be careful to choose your words. If this is how they treated Jesus, what would they do to those who followed him? The Roman soldiers certainly did not call Jesus their king. But if you were to ask your friends or family, what would they say the same about you? That Jesus is not ruling in your heart? While we do not have Jesus before us as the Roman soldiers did, we do have the Word of God at our fingertips. Do we regularly come to God and see the wonders of our Savior’s sacrificial death as recorded in Holy Scripture? When friends, family, coworkers, or professors imply that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross isn’t enough for our salvation, do we speak up for our King? Or do we give in to the peer pressure and later try to justify it? The frenzy of December is coming – travel plans...Christmas preparations...the usual busyness of life. Will we show that our hearts are focused on Christ through it all? All of a sudden, this scene from the Praetorium doesn’t seem so distant. Our hearts can scarily be like those of the Roman soldiers. We’ve given the cold shoulder to God’s precious Word. We do not speak up for Christ’s complete sacrifice on the cross. We do not follow the will of our heavenly King.

But what lifts our spirit as we look at our sacrificial king in the Praetorium is not *what* Jesus suffers. It’s *why* he suffers – his gracious love for sinners.

Unrepentant sinners like Pilate, Herod, the chief priests, and the Roman soldiers who did not have Christ ruling in their hearts. But also repentant sinners like the apostles who, in a moment of weakness, abandoned their King in the Garden of Gethsemane. Sinners like you and me who likewise do not follow our King or defend his sacrifice on the cross. In God’s unfathomable grace for all sinners, Jesus walked his path to the cross and suffered with every step he took. In the Garden of

Gethsemane, in the courtrooms, in the Praetorium, and on the cross itself. And it was on that cross that Jesus sacrificed his perfect life for all sinners. The ultimate^v sacrifice, once for all, never to be repeated. The sins of the repentant and unrepentant were all laid upon our Savior in addition to the mockeries^{vi} he received while hanging from those nails. And why did Jesus choose to go through all this? Because of his grace so that we may be forgiven and free from fear that God will punish us for our sins. This is what Jesus' sacrifice on the cross means. That our sins have been paid for and we are in the clear.

But when we look at the cross, it's not only Jesus' sacrifice we see. We also see the crown of life he earned on it. On the front cover of our worship folder, you see a stained glass window with a cross and a crown intersecting. You may recognize it as one of the stained glass windows we have here in the sanctuary up towards the top. I'm only going to talk about this one stained glass window this morning. But if you're curious about the other ones, we have a booklet in the entryway. You can find it on the shelves by the bathroom.

But looking back at this particular stained glass window, we see a timeless biblical truth – where the cross is, there also is the crown. This is because when Jesus died on the cross, he conquered sin and the devil. That's why the cross is important to this day. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God,^{vii} all people had one place to spend eternity – suffering in hell. Try as we might, no human is powerful enough to keep all of God's laws all the time. No one can escape Satan's clutches. That is, unless they believe in the only one who beat Satan as his own game – Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life and never gave into the devil's temptations. Not even in the midst of the great suffering Jesus endured in the Praetorium. It wasn't just the ultimate sacrifice Jesus gave when he died on the cross! It was also when he showed that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords who has power everything and everyone. Not even death could hold onto our Savior. Jesus has the crown of life because of what he did on that cross on that Good Friday.

And it's because of that cross we too have the crown of life. If you believe that Jesus paid the price for your sins with his sacrificial death, you will receive the crown of eternal life. The Apostle Paul tells us this in Romans chapter 10, **“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and**

are saved.”^{viii} How can God make this promise? Because he has the power. Our Savior sacrificed himself for our sake so that we may be with him in heaven. Why do we receive the crown of life that Jesus won for us? For the same reason Jesus sacrificed himself. Because of his grace. You and I do not deserve to be blessed in this way. Without Christ, we are no better than the Roman soldiers who mocked Jesus in the Praetorium. Yet, just as Jesus was gracious to sacrifice himself for our sake, so he is gracious to give us the crown of life and rule in our hearts as our sacrificial king.

Hail your sacrificial king! He has given his life for us so that we may live in heaven. Trust in the promise of the cross and believe that your sins have been paid for. God will not punish you. He has already punished our Savior by accepting his death as payment for our sins. Face the world with the strength that only your sacrificial king can give you. He’s beaten Satan and every opposing force. He is the one ruling in your heart through faith. Don’t be afraid to show that. Stand up to the peer pressure and share the good news of what Christ has done for you. Live for Christ as you close out your Thanksgiving celebrations and get ready for a busy month. And don’t forget what the cross means for you. It is where Jesus sacrificed himself for you. It is where he won the crown of life over sin and Satan. It is where your sins were paid for. It is where your King gives you the crown of life. Hail your sacrificial king who has given you the certainty of your salvation. Amen.

End Notes

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- ⁱ You can find one such parade at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEhyTQnU2n8>.
- ⁱⁱ Matthew 27:27-31. All biblical quotations are from the 1984 edition of the New International Version unless otherwise stated.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 27:29b.
- ^{iv} G. Jerome and Michael J. Albrecht, *The People's Bible: Matthew* (Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI: 1996), 413.
- ^v There is an intentional double meaning here. First in that ultimate means “last; ending a process or series” so that there is no need to do more sacrifices. Second in that ultimate means “maximum; conclusive; unsurpassed; representing a point beyond which further progress is impossible” so that there is no way any other sacrifice can come close to comparing to Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/ultimate?s=t>, accessed on November 24, 2017).
- ^{vi} Matthew 27:39-44 spell out the exact details.
- ^{vii} Genesis 3.
- ^{viii} Romans 10:9,10.