

Sermon Texts (Genesis 3:17–18; John 19:1–6 ESV)

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³ They came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” ⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”

Crowned with Sin: Thorn-Covered Ground; Thorn-Covered Head

It can be difficult to find joy in working the ground. Whether you are growing crops or flowers, there are seemingly countless things that can go wrong, chief among them being thorns and thistles growing up with them. No matter how hard you try to prevent them from growing, they somehow always do, and if you don’t catch them in time, they could end up killing your crops or your flowers. This, like all other hardships you experience in life, is a consequence of sin.

Adam had disobeyed God’s command. Therefore, God said to Adam, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field” (Genesis 3:17–18). Adam’s work would no longer be joyful. He would now labor in pain, and the ground would now bring forth thorns and thistles. But even this God used for Adam’s good. The thorns and thistles were a reminder to Adam of his sin and of his need for a Savior.

We can see examples of this being true today. When people feel safe and secure, they don’t see a need to go to church and hear the comforting words of our Lord. As a result, church

attendance is low. But, when there are times of hardship and people no longer feel the safety and security that they once felt, church attendance suddenly goes up. It is through the thorns and thistles of hardship that we realize our need for a Savior and turn to him in repentance. This is why God placed a curse on the ground. It was for mankind's benefit that the ground was cursed, just as it was for mankind's benefit that God sent a Savior to deliver us from the curse of sin.

The thorns and thistles would be a reminder to Adam and his descendants of their sin that corrupted the world. We see this corruption in the thorns and thistles that we experience in our daily lives. We feel the pain of fear when those around us cause us to question our safety. We feel the pain of betrayal when those who we thought we could trust reveal our secrets or abandon us for their own personal gain. We feel the pain of weakness when we get sick. We feel the pain of loss when our loved ones are taken from us. We feel the pain of our own sins when our consciences prick at us. All of this pain is too much for us to bear on our own, but there is one man who took all of our pain and bore it by himself: Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Jesus already knew what it was like to feel pain. He felt the pain of hunger when he fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. He felt the pain of loss when his friends, John the Baptist and Lazarus, died. He felt the pain of betrayal when Judas handed him over to the religious authorities, when his disciples abandoned him after his arrest, and when Peter denied him three times in the courtyard. He felt the pain of injustice when the religious authorities falsely accused him of crimes that he never committed. And now, he was experiencing the pain of mocking and beating at the hands of the soldiers and would soon be experiencing the pain of death and hell on the cross. Jesus, your Savior, felt all that pain for you and endured it all for your salvation.

As the soldiers were mocking and beating Jesus, they happened to find some thorns, the divine reminder of our need for a Savior, which they twisted into a crown and put on the head of the Savior. On some coins, emperors were represented with a laurel wreath encircling their heads. So, since they heard it said that Jesus was the King of the Jews, the soldiers thought that this would be a fitting way to mock him even more. This man who was a so-called King was now made to look absolutely ridiculous.

As the soldiers continued to beat him, the crown of thorns was pressed into Jesus' head, causing him even more pain. That pain that Jesus experienced was your pain. The pain that pressed into Jesus' head was the pain that you experience from those around you and from the guilt of your own sins. The sinless Son of God wore all of your thorns and thistles on his head and carried them all the way to the cross. There, all of the thorns and thistles of life, along with the pain that they cause you, were put to death with him. On that cross, Jesus put an end to the curse of sin.

Before Jesus went all the way to that cross, Pontius Pilate first paraded him out in front of the crowd, having been thoroughly tortured and humiliated, and said, "Behold the man!" (John 19:5). Pilate did not realize the full implication of what he was saying. There stood not just any man, but the man, the man who was your divine substitute, your atoning sacrifice. Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, stood there and took all of the pain and suffering, all of the mocking and beating, that you rightfully deserve for your sins. He took all of it so that you would not have to take it.

The Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "For if many died through one man's trespass [that is, Adam's trespass], much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. . . . For as by the one man's disobedience

the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:15, 19). It was because of one man, Adam, that sin entered the world. Adam disobeyed God, and because of that disobedience, we all disobey God as well, for we all inherited Adam's sin. But one man undid all that. Jesus obeyed his Father in every way and, despite having no sin, stood in our place to bear the curse of sin and to receive the punishment for sin that we rightfully deserve. It is because of that one man's atoning sacrifice that our sins have been forgiven; it is because of that one man that God's grace is freely given to us; and it is because of that one man that the gates of heaven have been opened to us.

When we enter heaven, we will get to experience the same joyful work that Adam and Eve briefly got to experience in the Garden of Eden. In heaven, there will be no thorns or thistles that cause us pain, neither in the ground nor in our lives. All of the pain that we experience in this life; all the fear; all the betrayal; all the weakness; all the loss; all the sin will never be experienced again because the curse of sin that caused that pain has been put to death with our Savior. We eagerly await that day when we get to experience the joys of heaven, but until that day comes, we wait, just as all creation waits for Jesus' return. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him [that is God] who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:20–21). On the Last Day, the ground will return to its former glory, when God creates a new heaven and a new earth. At that time, our bodies will be glorified as well. Our glorified bodies will never again experience the thorns and thistles of sin, which our divine substitute wore on his own head as a crown and put to death with him on the cross for us. Because Jesus wore our crown of thorns on his head, a crown of glory is now ours, a crown of glory that will never fade away.