

Christ and the Curse

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Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:1–21 and Matthew 27:26–31

Text: Matthew 27:29

Cursed—what an awful word! And yet, that is the word spoken for the first time by the Lord when the first Adam—and we with him—fell into sin. Cursed—just as Galatians 3:10 puts it: “Cursed [is] every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” You and I all are by nature cursed, condemned, and despicable in God’s eyes. That is who we are by nature, the way we are born, with original sin, with active sins, and sins of neglect. God is pure, holy, and righteous, and every sin, even the smallest in our thoughts or deeds, is hateful to Him.

That is why Christ needed to deal with the curse, why He was put on trial. That is especially why, after His unjust trial, He was deeply humiliated. Let’s look at why Christ was mocked and ridiculed by the Roman soldiers and what happened before our blessed Savior was led away to be crucified.

Perhaps you wonder, Why did the Lord Jesus suffer so deeply? I think we all know the answer, which we must learn to give in faith and deep humility: *our sin*. Christ came to take away the curse each one of His children deserves. He came to bear, to shoulder the load, of our

curse. Everything the soldiers did to Jesus reminds us of the tragic curse of our deep fall in Adam.

That, then, leads us to our theme: Christ and the curse. Let's begin with Matthew 27:26–31:

Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

Reminding Us of the Curse

Christ's trial before the Jewish leaders and the Roman rulers was riddled with injustice—after that devastating verdict in which Pilate succumbed to the pressure from the bloodthirsty Jews, after he washed his hands, after the Jews have called the curse of God upon their own heads. We see in verse 26 that Barabbas is released and Jesus is surrendered into the hands of the Jews to be crucified. A governor pronouncing sentence would typically say something like “You will mount the cross.”

Scourging

But before our Savior walks that humiliating way to the cross, He is to undergo the violence and ridicule of the soldiers. Verse 26 shows that something terrible happens to our Savior. Jesus had to undergo scourging, something that long ago the prophets prophesied about, as if they stood there themselves. Isaiah prophecies about the

Servant of the Lord, in Isaiah 50:6, as He says, "I gave my back to the smiters." And Psalm 129:3 puts it like this: "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows."

Beloved, how the Savior suffered! This was one of the cruelest things that happened after someone was condemned to die on the cross. They uncovered Jesus's back, and with a whip—most likely made of leather straps and metal spikes at the end—they would slice open the flesh of the back of our innocent Savior. According to Jewish custom, the maximum Jesus would receive was thirty-nine lashes, but we do not know if the Romans followed Jewish law here. If they didn't, the Savior received as many lashes until the flogger grew tired. The wonder is that the Savior innocently and willingly endured this. He *gave* His back to the smiters, Isaiah said. And just before that in Isaiah, He says, "I was not rebellious" (Isa. 50:5). Who will not weep at the sight of such cruelty?

Yet we are to remember the words of our Savior, who said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke 23:28). This was needed to save a fallen world that has plunged itself into horrible cruelty. Who of us does not remember what the Bible shows us in Genesis 4, right after Adam fell into sin? The curse was working itself out into a lack of loving concern and envy, selfishness, and hatred in Cain's life. Sin's curse entered our world, along with hatred, cruelty, and violence. And we all know the result: Cain murdered Abel. And when God calls Cain to account, Cain says, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 4).

Who will not weep when we see the cruelty of our own day? Babies murdered in the womb, the elderly injected with poison to die, healthy body parts of boys and girls being cut off because they want to be the other gender. Doesn't that remind us of the words God spoke just before

the flood? The violence was so devastating that it says in Genesis 6:11–12, “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” Doesn’t God hear the cries of babies being killed in the womb today? And must He not answer with judgment?

But let’s turn our eyes back to the Savior, whose back was violently ripped open. Why? Because here we have the second Adam, who, in order to bring redemption, had to suffer the ugly consequences of the sins of His people. That’s why His back was torn open, plowed with deep furrows. Because God said, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). And Galatians 3:13 explains that for Christ to redeem us from the curse of the law, He had to be made a curse for us—not only by crucifixion but also by this violent scourging. Because of our fall in Adam, cruel violence entered our world. Therefore, Christ, the second Adam, to undo the curse, had to first bear the curse. Not only was the blessed Savior scourged but He was also humiliated by being undressed, so that He was exposed and naked.

Naked

Verse 27 tells us that Christ was taken “into the common hall” of Pilate’s palace, and then “they gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.” These were strong and impressive Roman soldiers who were not afraid to kill people. The word used here for “the whole band” is *cohort*. That means either that there were about six hundred or perhaps less, just as many as they could find. And this whole group of Roman soldiers, while the crosses are being prepared, take some time to “have fun” watching and enjoying some cruelty. They start by undressing Jesus. We know that the

Romans normally led criminals out naked to the cross. But because the Jews found this offensive, they probably only humbled Him here, at their private “party,” and later, as they hang Him on the cross, there again they strip Him of His clothes so that He hangs naked and exposed at the cross. Jesus was exposed, shamed, dressed, and undressed at the will of these strong soldiers. How humiliating! How shameful this must have been to the holy heart and mind of the blessed Savior!

Again, we ask the question, Why? Well, don’t we hear in these words another echo to the curse of our fall in Adam? Adam and Eve ate from the tree. They wanted to be like God, and they were tempted and fell! What was the result? They immediately felt naked and exposed before the eyes of God and each other. Genesis 3:10–11 says, “And he [Adam] said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he [God] said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” The Lord specifically tells us that before the fall, everything was very, very good. Purity and bliss characterized the relationship between Adam and Eve as well as their relationship with God. The Lord shows us in Genesis 2:25, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” But the curse brought to all of us the sense of shame that comes with nakedness.

Our culture does everything to undo that sense of shame, everything to make sinful nakedness accepted. But that shame will never be annulled on this current earth. God will not take away the results of the curse unless we know Jesus Christ, who bears this curse, because that is what *we* deserve. Let’s not point fingers at the world. Let’s point fingers at ourselves. How much of this mindset has entered our lives? How much have we become desensitized to what is shameful?

Let me ask some questions: What are you watching? What kinds of things are you watching that are actually cursed by God? Have you been watching films that show nakedness and violence? Young men, have you perhaps been playing video games that promote violence? Ladies, does your clothing expose your body or cover it? Have you indulged in these things? Have you enjoyed those things that have entered our world because of the curse? How many Christian couples start their married life in purity?

Christ was not only violently treated and endured cruelty but also was humiliated and exposed, all because of the curse. But the slightest trace of violence, the slightest trace of impurity in our minds, brings us under the curse. Christ was made a curse for sinners like that—otherwise, there would be no redemption possible for any of us. But that is not the only echo of the curse in this passage.

Thorns

Adam, created in the image of God, was crowned with glory and honor: the glory of knowing God intimately and personally and the honor of being an assistant ruler (vice-regent) for God Himself, caring for God's amazing creation. But this glorious and honorable place was not good enough for Adam. He wanted to be like God, and as he (and we) desired to be like God, God responded to his rebellion with a curse. Genesis 3:17–19 says:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Before the fall, the ground was only bringing forth pleasant plants—beautiful, fruitful, delightful. But after the fall, thorns and thistles entered, and work became difficult, laborious, and at times monotonous and frustrating to Adam. Yes, we must all die, return to the dust. And the symbol of this curse was the thorns. Are we then surprised when we read another echo to the cursed fall in Matthew 27:29, “And when they had platted [twisted] a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head”?

What a reminder of the curse! This was a very painful and bloody experience, as the thorns pressed in the Savior’s holy temples, especially when the soldiers also smote the Savior with a stick on His blessed head. How vividly this reminds us of the curse: “Cursed is the ground, thorns and thistles shall it bring forth.” Here Christ is crowned with thorns and thistles. Think back of the honor and glory with which Adam’s head was crowned before the fall. And now look at the Savior again, crowned with the vivid reminders of the ugly curse! Bernard of Clairvaux wrote,

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown;
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine.

Christ, our second Adam, who, even more than the first Adam, was crowned with honor and glory from eternity, was willing to wear a cursed crown, a painful crown, a crown that scorned Him as the Messiah. Why? Because we chose our own pleasure over God. How often we still do that! Jesus is ridiculed as the Messiah; that’s what is happening here: They are scorning, mocking Him as the Messiah, as the King, which brings us to the fourth echo of our miserable fall and curse in Paradise.

Mocked as King

It wasn't just the crown the soldiers used to ridicule the Savior. Verse 28 of our text shows that they put a scarlet robe around Him. This was most likely an old soldier's cloak, colored purple or scarlet—symbolizing faded glory. That is all the glory they have for Jesus—a faded scarlet soldier's robe. They mock His victory. Verse 29 shows they put a reed in His right hand, but not just a flimsy reed. No, this is a firm reed stalk. They hit His head with it to fulfill Micah 5:1, "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." This is put into the right hand of the One who from eternity ruled this world with a glorious scepter of righteousness.

Our text also shows that they bowed the knee to Him and said with a mocking voice, "Hail, King of the Jews." They fall on their knees as if they want to honor Jesus as King, but they do it in such a way that all the soldiers laugh about it. They say, "Hail!" or *Ave!* That is how they greeted their Ceasar. How they loved putting Jesus down!

Verse 30 shows they even spit Him in the face—how dishonoring and unloving! Isaiah already prophesied about this in Isaiah 50:6, "I hid not my face from shame and spitting." How the Savior suffered! Psalm 69:20 says, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked [for some] to take pity, but [there was] none; and for comforters, but I found none." Adam was given the task to take dominion over this earth (to be a ruler and king), to work and keep the garden, to subdue the earth, to be the ruler of this world.

Genesis 2:15 says that our task was to *dress* (work) *and keep* (guard) the garden of Eden. But in the fall, Adam's kingly crown tumbled off his head—and off ours too. As we lost our relationship with God, we lost our purpose, our identity as rulers. Instead, we began to live for ourselves, wanting to rule our own lives. Wickedness, oppression, disobedience, and self-will are the results.

Since that moment, we have all sought to rule our lives apart from God. Ever since, we've all tried to rebuild our little piece of paradise here on earth. But the Lord says, "I have *cursed* all these things, unless you know Me, through Christ, unless you know and trust My second Adam." Paul in Romans puts it like this: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.... But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Rom. 5:12, 15).

Let this sink in for a moment. The first Adam brought the curse into this world, and the curse came to us all. The crown of glory and righteousness is fallen from our head. Sin and death passed upon all of us. But then the second Adam comes and freely takes the curse and willingly suffers its heavy load.

Scourging. Nakedness. A crown of thorns. Being mocked as a King. That's why He is able to give free gifts of grace to miserable sinners as we are, cursed by nature. Jesus underwent all this to redeem sinners like us from the curse. He became a curse so He could give the most unworthy of sinners a blessing. And because He did this, His gracious gift of salvation can abound, overflow—literally, super-abound—to many! And that brings us to our second point.

Redeeming Us from the Curse

What an amazingly liberating truth: Christ bore and endured the curse so that sinners like you and me can be set free, redeemed from the curse. How? By looking in faith to Christ as the One who bears the curse in our place. But you might wonder how the redemption of this curse becomes yours. To answer that question, let us consider

these four objects again, but now in the context of how Christ redeems sinners.

Punishment: A Scourge

Christ was scourged, allowing His back to be plowed, because that is how He bears the punishment our sins deserve. Isaiah 53:5–6 puts it like this: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Have you ever come to that point in your life where you were deeply humbled and said, “I accept it; I deserve the punishment”? “Mine, mine, was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.” Have you come to the point where you said, “Oh, Lord, I have gone astray, like a lost sheep, but seek thy servant”? Have you been amazed by the fact that the chastisement, the punishment, that brings us peace was upon Him?

Look at the Savior, beaten and scourged! Then hear Isaiah’s prophecy, and 1 Peter 2:24 repeats these words: “by whose *stripes* we were healed!” Christ’s scourging was needed to heal us from our sin-sick hearts, infected with the deadly virus of the curse. Only His stripes, His punishment, can heal me from my love of sinning.

When you see how deeply He needed to suffer to set us free, oh, how you will hate your sin when you see the self-denying love of Jesus, what He does to save such wretches like us! Only *His* punishment brings us back to the Shepherd and Bishop of our soul—God Himself! That’s how Jesus redeems us from the curse. He takes the scourge. He takes the punishment.

Shame: A Robe

Secondly, Jesus bears the shame of our sin. Consider how they take off His clothes. Consider how they shame Him. Consider how He hung naked on the cross. Sin leaves us ashamed, exposed, helpless, wanting to hide, wanting to flee, fearful. By nature, we slavishly fear God. We expect punishment. We expect to be humiliated. But now look at the Savior, how He was shamed—deeply shamed, exposed and uncovered—and realize that you and I need a covering for our sins. Have you and I ever been deeply ashamed of our sin?

Then look to Jesus, for when they take His clothes from Him, this is one of the moments Christ is, as it were, weaving the garment of purity for His people. This is the robe of righteousness you and I need to cover the shame of our sins. His righteousness covers our unrighteousness, and His purity covers our impurity, from head to toe, so that you and I can say with Isaiah 61:10, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”

Look at Jesus, so deeply shamed, and receive His righteousness, as you realize your own shame. He clothes you with the garments of salvation. Will you not rejoice? He covers with a beautiful robe of righteousness. Will you not be joyful in your God? Paul puts it like this in Romans 3:21–24: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [yet sinners through faith are] being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that

is in Christ Jesus.” That is how Christ redeems us from the curse and its shame.

Pain: A Crown of Thorns

Third, take another look at this crown of thorns. What pain entered this world because of the curse! What glory we lost in our fall! Oh, as we look to this crown, let us repent of everything that contributes to the curse. Let us repent of everything in our lives that has been weaving this crown for the Savior. Let us realize how the curse has infected our world.

Let us realize that this world is groaning. Creation is groaning because of the curse upon our sin. Romans 8:19–22 puts it like this: “For the earnest expectation of the creature [literally, creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” What is Paul saying here?

1. Creation itself is expecting the day that every believer, every son or daughter of God, will be presented spotless to the Lord. Creation is waiting eagerly!
2. We are all subjected to vanity, futility (creation is itself experiencing the frustrations of the curse), but still there is hope.
3. The whole creation groans and travails, it suffers agony, because of the curse, ever since the fall until now.
4. Yet we will be delivered from the bondage of this corruption. One day we will be ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Christ was earning that liberty here as He was wearing this crown of thorns. He had to wear it to deliver us from the bondage and frustration, the pain and suffering, so that one glorious day we could be perfectly free—freedom for which the whole creation longs.

Revelation 7 gives us a promising preview of the glory to come: “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 7:14–19).

So, Christ needed to bear the cursed crown of thorns to deliver us from a world that groans under the results of the curse. A glorious crown awaits for all those who are redeemed by Christ’s blood! Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:8, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”—all because the Savior wore a crown of thorns to redeem us from the curse.

Identity: A Throne

Finally, and fourthly, when Christ was mocked as a ruler, as King, it was because we in Paradise were kings and priests unto our God. Tragically, we lost that secure identity. And how often we still want to find our identity in other things than Christ and the task God has given us to love and care for people around us. Christ is mocked as King here when the soldiers say with ridicule in their voices, “Hail, King of the Jews.”

They limit Christ's dominion, because it is a worldwide dominion, and they mock His capacity to govern, to rule. Yet, as Christ is mocked as ruler, what is He doing? He is buying back the title and acceptance by the Lord for His children, for believers, the title we had in Paradise as kings and priests unto our God. Here, as He is rejected as King, He is making sinners accepted in the Beloved—in Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son in whom He is well-pleased, the King of kings!

It is striking how Revelation puts it. We read twice that God's children are kings and priests unto our God. First, it is from the well-known greeting in Revelation 1:5–6: "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." We see that Christ gives us this new identity and that all glory is to be given to God because to Him belongs all glory and dominion.

But then in Revelation 5, we read again about the believer's new identity: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (vv. 9–10). Here we see that though all dominion belongs to the Lord, in glory He will share this dominion with His people, and we shall reign on the earth. Adam lost dominion in the fall. We still experience the curse, but Christ was mocked as King, killed as Priest, to give back the only secure identity in this world. Do you see how amazing Christ's salvation is?

Let us conclude with this: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,” but “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings...in Christ” (Gal. 3:10; Eph. 1:3).

Christ took the curse to give guilty sinners like us the blessing, salvation, redemption. Let me summarize the four ways in which Christ redeems sinners from the curse:

1. Christ was scourged because by His stripes we can be healed from all our sins.
2. Christ was shamed with nakedness because He was weaving a robe of righteousness for sinners who are unrighteous and naked.
3. Christ wore the crown of thorns because He was redeeming the groaning creation from the results of the curse. The eternal crown that the redeemed will wear is eternal life—through Jesus Christ.
4. Christ was mocked as King so that fallen kings and priests once again could receive a secure identity.

I conclude with these questions: Whom will you trust? Whom will you serve? Whom will you worship? Whom will you bless? The first Adam (self), and be forever cursed, or the second Adam (Christ), and be forever blessed? Amen.

