

September 4, 2005 by Steve Brandon



# The Sufferings of Christ

## Matthew 27:26-32

1. He was scourged that we might be healed (verse 26).
2. He was stripped that we might be clothed (verses 27-28).
3. He wore a crown of thorns that we might wear the crown of glory (verse 29a).
4. He was mocked that we might be honored (verses 29b-30).
5. He was put to a painful death that we might enjoy pleasures forevermore (verse 31).
6. He was weak that we might be strong (verse 32).

I finally did it. This past week, I finally watched the movie, "The Passion of the Christ." Though it was released some 18 months ago, I hadn't watched it until this past week. I could give you several reasons why I haven't watched it yet. First of all, I'm not much into movies at all. You could probably number the movies that I have watched this past year on one hand. Second, I don't want Hollywood to put images into my mind which are ultimately mere fabrications of what really happened. I want my understanding of what took place to be formed by what the Bible says (and doesn't say). Third, finding two hours in my week to watch a video sounds difficult, as there are so many things that need to be done. Fourth, I'm not into blood and gore. Fifth, I'm not sure of whether or not it is a violation of the 2nd commandment, which tells us not to make a graven image.

All of those reasons are mere fronts for why I didn't watch it yet. The real reason why I haven't watched this movie is due to my own fears. I wasn't sure that I would be able to handle the blood and gore, especially as they nailed his hands to the cross. But, the reason why I did watch it this week was due to our text this morning. This passage is filled with blood and gore. It is the heart of the movie. "Passion" means "sufferings." (I did watch it in the middle of the afternoon, lest I go to bed at night just after watching it, lest I have a nightmare about it).

There is no reason to ignore the reality of Christ's sufferings, as the Bible doesn't. In fact, we cannot ignore it. For, the sufferings and the death of Christ are at the heart of our faith. Without a suffering Messiah, our faith is in vain! In fact, I go further. Had Jesus not suffered and died in the way that the Scriptures portray, our faith is in vain, because it believes in something that is not true. And so, we must look deeply into the sufferings of Christ. The movie that I watched this week shows them very well.

After seeing this movie, "the Passion of the Christ," there are many who have asked the question, "Why"? In fact, that is precisely the reason why John Piper wrote a book entitled, "The Passion of Jesus Christ." He includes 50 reasons of why it is that Jesus suffered like he did.

I have a non-Christian friend with whom I have been speaking about the gospel. He happened to see the movie. He asked me, "Why did He suffer so badly?" It is the natural question that it raised when seeking this movie. It's a good question to ask. After all, we have seen in recent weeks of the innocence of Jesus Christ.

Over and over and over again, Jesus was declared to be a righteous, innocent man. At His religious trial, the religious leaders sought to obtain any sort of testimony against Jesus that they could. All they could get was false testimony, which was obviously contradictory (Matt. 27:60). Nobody could rise up and testify that Jesus had done anything wrong! Judas, one of His most intimate companions, gave testimony to the chief priests and elders that Jesus was an "innocent" man (Matt. 27:4). Of anybody that would know of the sins of Jesus, it would be Judas. Yet, he declared Jesus to be righteous and innocent. At His Roman trial, there were several occasions during which Jesus is demonstrated to be righteous. On three occasions in the gospel of John, Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, "I find no guilt in Him" (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). In Matthew, He washes his hands before all of the people, telling them "I am innocent of this Man's blood" (Matt. 27:24). Though Jesus was declared to be innocent on many different occasions, yet, He suffered greatly. The fundamental question is: "Why? ... Why?"

Last week I mentioned to you that the sacrifice of Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice. By this, I mean that Christ suffered instead of us. Indeed, this is the glorious news of the gospel of Christ: We deserve to be punished for our sins. But, Christ took that punishment for us! He took it in our place. He was punished "instead of" us. But, the gospel goes far beyond Christ merely suffering for us. The gospel goes beyond Christ simply taking our punishment for us. It also has a flip side. Not only does Christ take upon Himself what we deserve. He also gives to us what we don't deserve.

As we walk through our text this morning, I would like to take each of the punishments that Christ bore and use them as a spring board to remind you of what Christ will give to us who believe. It's going to be a bit more devotional than usual. [\[1\]](#) It might be a bit more poetic. In doing so, we will be enabled to slow down and reflect upon the sufferings of Christ and what they obtained for us who believe. Apart from the benefits that we receive in the gospel, this is a sad text. But, when we see the benefits that come to us, it become a thrilling text!

### Matthew 27:26-32

Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he delivered Him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. And they stripped Him, and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on

Him, and led Him away to crucify Him. And as they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

## **1. He was scourged that we might be healed (verse 26).**

What happened to Jesus Christ was typical of those who were to be crucified. They were first scourged and then sent to the cross to die. In so doing, the criminal would be weakened. And thus, would die sooner.

Roman beatings were brutal. The Old Testament limited the scourging of the Jews to forty lashes (Deut. 25:3). However, in a typical Roman scourging, the only limiting factor was the endurance and will of those who actually carried out the flogging. When Jesus was scourged (verse 26), He was stripped of His clothes, tied to a post, and whipped on His bare skin with leather thongs which had pieces of bone or lead on the end. The end result would be gashes into the skin which would cause tremendous pain. Depending upon the number of lashes received and the type of whip used, the skin might easily be ripped right off the body. Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived near the time of Christ, tells us of how there were some who were beaten so severely by the Romans that "their inward parts appeared naked." <sup>[2]</sup> In other words, the skin was so destroyed that their inward part lay open and bare to the air. Jesus received a Roman scourging.

So, why was Jesus whipped like this? He was scourged that we might be healed. Isaiah 53:5 prophesies of the Messiah, "By His scourging we are healed." The Scriptures say that the suffering that He endured became a sort of tonic for us. "By His scourging we are healed."

From time to time, I experience migraine headaches. It happens about once a year. It begins with my vision. I get what is called an "aura." I lose my peripheral vision. I can see straight ahead of me, but I cannot see anything to the side of me. If I look straight ahead and wave my hands to the right of my face or to the left of my face, I cannot see them. When that happens, I know that in an hour or two, my head is going to hurt really bad! I often go right to bed and try to get to sleep before the sharpest pain comes on. It will often take me about 24 hours until I am feeling better. On two different occasions, it has landed me in the hospital, as the pain has been so bad.

Over the years, I have tried a variety of medicines to try to help me. My father is a physician, and so, he would hear of the latest drug and would bring home a sample that would sit in my medicine cabinet until I had my next headache. I tried many things. I even tried some medicine that you inject into your body with a needle at the onset of the aura. (That was a terrible experience—I believe that the medicine caused much more pain than I have ever received before).

But what I have found over these years is that simple over-the-counter Exedrin Migraine medicine has helped me the best. In fact, my most recent headaches haven't lasted 24 hours. They have lasted about five hours! What is amazing is that this medicine is composed of common drugs. It contains aspirin, acetaminophen (i.e. Tylenol), and caffeine. There is something about the combination of these drugs that help with migraine patients. In my case, it has helped immensely!

As I reflect upon this, I think of how many different drugs I have tried to find relief from my headaches. None of them worked very well. But, it was the simple combination of common drugs that have helped me the best. In the same way, you may be looking for a solution to your sin. You might have tried reforming your character. You might have tried to overcome your sin through mere will power. You might have tried to make up for your mistakes. You might have tried to make a deal with God. You might have tried the "read your Bible" and "attend church" routine. But all of this is taking the wrong medicine.

The way in which you will be healed of your sin is simple. You need to take the tonic of His scourgings. You don't take it in your mouth. You receive it in your ear and you believe it. "By His scourging, we are healed." This is what the hymn writer said, ...

There is a fountain filled with blood,  
drawn from Immanuel's veins.  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,  
lose all their guilty stains.

## **2. He was stripped that we might be clothed (verses 27-28).**

In verse 27 we find the Roman soldiers gathering around Jesus in much the same way that a pack of coyotes surrounding their prey. In verse 28, we read that they stripped Jesus. That is, they took off His clothes, which probably consisted of an outer tunic that wrapped around His body. Jesus was left standing in His underwear. For us today this would be a shameful thing. But for the Jewish people living during the times of Christ this would have been especially true. The Jewish culture of that day was much more modest than our culture is. In fact it is true today. Men in the Middle East don't even wear shorts. I don't care how hot it is. It is rare for you to see any man wearing anything other than long pants. It was much the same in the days of Jesus. So, to strip Jesus down to His underwear would have been a shameful thing. It would show Him to be naked, having nothing!

But here is the good news: He was stripped so that we might be clothed. When we believe in the gospel of Christ, we are clothed in His righteousness. The Apostle John described the scene that he saw in heaven of "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes." (Rev. 7:9). The clothes picture the righteousness of Christ that has covered us of our sin. When Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, he says, "all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:27). In Philippians 3, Paul speaks about this clothing as a "gain." We won't stand before God clothed in our own righteousness. We will stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

## **3. He wore a crown of thorns that we might wear the crown of glory (verse 29a).**

Look at the very first part of verse 29, "after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head." This was a form of punishment. The flogging would have left Jesus bleeding upon His body. This crown would have caused Jesus to bleed upon His head. In order for the crown to stay fixed to His head, the thorns must have penetrated deep into His skin and possibly into His skull.

Certainly there were times during His sufferings when Christ bumped His head upon the cross that He was carrying. When He did so, the thorns would have been dug deeper into His skull. It is likely that as Jesus hung upon the cross that the cramps He experienced would have caused His neck to jerk back upon the cross, which again would have driven these thorns into His head. If I think that I have a problem with headaches, this crown would have given Jesus a splitting headache! especially when the soldiers took their reeds and beat Him on the head (as verse 30 says). The reeds would have acted like hammers as they drove the thorns deeper and deeper into His skull, like nails.

A few weeks ago I told you that my youngest daughter, Hanna, got a splinter in her bottom, which had penetrated through her jeans as she was sliding down some wood. It was about an inch and a half long. It went into her skin and back out of it again. Well, yesterday, Hanna got another splinter about the same size. This time, it went straight into her foot. It was probably lodged about 3/8 of an inch into her foot. I played surgeon once again and pulled it out. By the screams that Hanna let out, you would have thought that she was losing a limb! But, it all underscores how painful His crown of thorns must have been upon His head. His crown of thorns would have been like many splinters in His head, pressing in from many sides.

And the truth of the gospel of Christ is this: Christ wore a crown of thorns that we might wear the crown of glory. There are many places in the Scripture that speak about the crown that believers in Christ will receive one day. James speaks of the "crown of life" which believers will someday receive (James 1:12). Peter talks about the "unfading crown of glory" that we will receive. At the end of his life, Paul was anticipating the crown of righteousness, which the Lord would give to him in that future day (2 Tim. 4:8). And that crown is available to all who "have loved His appearing." (2 Tim. 4:8).

Think about the difference between the crown that we will receive and the crown that Jesus was forced to wear. Our crown will be padded and will sit nicely upon our head. No pain, only comfort. But, the price to obtain our crown was His crown of thorns, which was far from comfortable.

#### **4. He was mocked that we might be honored (verses 29b-30).**

This is the point of verses 28 and 29. The reason they stripped Jesus was to place upon him a scarlet robe. John tells us that this robe was "purple," the color of majesty (John 19:2). Perhaps this was a purple robe that was dirty and appeared to be scarlet. Perhaps the blood of Jesus stained it to make it look scarlet. But, it was meant to make Jesus look like a "king." The crown of thorns was to make Jesus look like a "king." And then, he was given a "reed in His right hand" (verse 29), which would be like His royal scepter.

When it was all done, Jesus would have looked like a little kid, who was playing dress up. Just as parents often go along with the game, so also did these soldiers. "They kneeled down before Him, ... saying 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" (verse 29). But, this wasn't a cute little game played with cute little children. This was a mockery of Jesus. This is what verse 29 tells us, "they ... mocked Him." They may have said things like, "Jesus, look at You. I love your royal clothes! Your robe is so beautiful! Your crown is lovely! Your staff is fitting! We hail you as King!" Perhaps they even sang a little royal song as they paraded around the King. All of it was to mock Jesus. It was to bring Him down. It was to humiliate Him!

I just can't help but think of the truth of Psalm 2 at this point. In that Psalm, the kings of the earth mock and scorn "against the LORD and against His Anointed" (Psalm 2:2). But God is the One who sits in the heavens and laughs at them (Psalm 2:4). As these Roman soldiers were mocking Jesus, the LORD in the heavens was scoffing at them (Psalm. 2:4), saying, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay" (Rom. 13:19). When Jesus was eventually laid in the tomb, God raised Him from the dead. God seated Him at His right hand in the heaven places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. God put all things in subjection under His feet" (Eph. 1:20-22). God gave great honor to Jesus, because He "bore up under sorrows when suffering unjustly," which finds much favor with God (1 Pet. 2:19). Though Jesus was mocked, He will someday judge, as the ruler of the world.

And the good news of the gospel is that we get to share in the glories of Christ. Or, to put it another way, "He was mocked, that we might be honored." In Ephesians 2:7, we are told that God will forever display us as vessels of His mercy to bring great praise and honor to Himself. I recently wrote an article, searching in vain for words to describe God's purpose for our lives. God uses those who are saved to display the wonders of His marvelous grace. In fact, God saves us in such a way that all boasting is excluded from our lives, precisely so that God may be magnified for His grace. <sup>[3]</sup>

The mocking that Christ received was severe! Look at verse 30, "they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head." Spitting upon someone is an act of highest insults. It shows that you think that they are only a little bit above pond scum. That's what they thought of Jesus. I have already talked a bit about how brutal it would be to be beaten upon the head when you are wearing a crown of thorns. But, at this point, we can see the irony of the situation. They took the reed out of His hand, which represented the scepter of His kingdom and hit Him on the head with it.

They hated the King. They will hate us too. The follower of Christ will receive much suffering in this life. But, equally sure is the honor and blessing that the Lord will bestow upon those who have loved Him. Paul said that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us!" (Rom. 8:18). When we are welcomed into the kingdom, the Lord Jesus will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant. ... Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21). On that day, we will receive glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15). We will walk in a glorified city (Rev. 21). We will become full "partaker of the glory that is to be revealed" (1 Pet. 5:1).

#### **5. He was put to a painful death that we might enjoy pleasures forevermore (verse 31).**

Verse 31 says, "And after they mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him."

They say that necessity is the mother of invention. Where there is a need, people often work hard to meet that need. Crucifixion was born out of such a necessity. Governments wanted a way in which to kill people as slowly as possible and with as much pain as possible. Crucifixion wasn't like the guillotine, which would chop off the head and kill its victims quickly. It wasn't like hanging people in gallows, which would break their neck when the floor dropped, which would cause a quick death. It wasn't like the firing squad, which drops its victims quickly. Rather, it was created to cause the victim to suffer as much as possible before he died. I have told you before, it's like drowning slowly. For the victim ultimately dies of asphyxiation, as they no longer have the strength to pull themselves up to breath. The victim dies of lack of oxygen in the body.

You might compare this a bit to some of the martyrs of the Christian Church. I remember reading of some Scottsmen, who were martyred by being tied to a post at low tide. As high tide would come in, they would drown slowly as well. Can you imagine it? You are tied to this post at high noon, waiting for the high tide to come in at 5pm. The hours between noon and 5pm are spent thinking of the pain that you will experience when you drown. As the waves begin to come in, the cool of the water chills your body, but you aren't too concerned with that. Your concern heightens when the tide comes up to your waist and a large wave comes crashing in over your head. You hold your breath for a little bit and soon, you can breathe again as the waves recede. But as the tide continues to come in, the waves come over you more and more often, giving you less and less time to breath. Near the end, just when you think that you're drowning, the wave would recede, just in time to catch a gulp of air, which would sustain you for just a bit longer. And your body, already screaming for oxygen, would find a little bit of reprieve. Then you would again experience the pain of drowning all over again. Until finally, thinking that that it's all over, you get what you think is one last grasp of air, only to inhale a mouthful of sea water. And then you drown. <sup>[4]</sup>

Crucifixion is a bit like this. Only, while you are waiting to be drowned, you are hanging by nails through your hands and feet, which cause extreme pain that doesn't stop. I remember my sister comparing the difference between the pain of labor in child birth and the pain of passing a kidney stone. She said that both were extremely painful, but passing a kidney stone was greater, because the pain never stopped. So was the crucifixion. It was a painful death.

But, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus endured a painful death that we might enjoy pleasures forevermore! Our joys in heaven will far surpass the greatest joys that we have here on earth. Our pleasures in heaven will far surpass the greatest pleasure that we have here on earth. I get this straight from Psalm 16:11, which says, "In Your presence is fulness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever." I get this from the description that the apostle John gives us of heaven! No fear. No crying (Rev. 21:4). No pain (Rev. 21:4). Perfect bodies (1 Cor. 15) No sin! (1 John 3:2).

It's not that we will be without feeling. Everything that we have will be good. Everything that we do will feel good. Everything that we hear will sound good. Everything that we see will look good. Everything that we smell will smell good. If God gives us any new senses in heaven than we have here (which I don't doubt at all), it will stimulate us toward the good. All of this was paid for through the sufferings of Christ.

## **6. He was weak that we might be strong (verse 32).**

It gets this from verse 32, which reads, "And as they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross." I believe that the point of this verse is to help give us an idea of how weak Jesus was when He was actually nailed to the cross.

When you put the gospel accounts together, it appears as if Jesus began to drag His cross through the streets of Jerusalem. But, at some point, the Roman soldiers had to press a man into service to carry it for Him. Certainly, this was because the beatings that Jesus received were so severe that He couldn't carry the cross all by Himself. I believe that it was all Jesus could do to walk. But, apparently, Jesus could walk. Luke tells us that when they pressed Simon into service, Simon was to follow Jesus, who walked in front of him (Luke 23:26). Simon would have dragged the cross of Christ through the city streets and outside the city gates to "Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull" (Matt. 27:33).

By the time Jesus finally made it out the city gates and up the hill, I'm sure that Jesus was exhausted. Once He was hoisted onto the cross, He would die quickly. It only took Him six hours to die. Mark tells us that it was "the third hour when they crucified Him" (Mark 15:25). The first hour of the day was at six in the morning, when the sun came up. The third hour was 9am. Verse 45 tells us that it was finally in the ninth hour that Jesus finally "yielded up His spirit." (verse 50). This translates to 3 o'clock in the afternoon. This was only six hours. This was quick! When Pilate was asked if some certain Jews could take the body of Christ, Pilate inquired as to whether Jesus had died already (Mark. 15:44). It was not unusual for victims to hang upon the cross for days before finally dying. But, Jesus was weak.

In fact, it is right here that many people think that the cross of Christ is foolish. A crucified God? It's unheard of in the world's religions. People are looking for strength. People think that it's the wise and strong and self-sufficient who are worthy to be followed. Those who think so stumble at the cross. But, a crucified God is precisely the message of Christianity. Is this not what John 3:16 says? God so loved the world that He sent His Son to die He died for our benefit. It is those who believe and trust in Him who find their strength.

But, here comes the glorious news of the gospel: He was weak that we might be strong (verse 32). Now, it's not that we are strong in and of ourselves. It's that we find our adequacy and our strength in God (2 Cor. 3:5). See, God looks upon the humble, lowly people (Is. 66:1-2). It is those types of people that He strengthens. And He strengthens us through the cross.

It is no accident that Paul said that He would boast only in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14). When you boast, don't you normally boast in the most important thing in your life? Don't you normally boast of how good you are or how strong you are? That is exactly what Paul is doing. The cross of Christ is our strength. It is there that we find our righteousness. It is there that we find our strength. "To [those of us] who are being saved [the cross] is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 4, 2005 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] The seeds for these thoughts and this outline came from J. C. Ryle's excellent commentary on Matthew, p. 281.

[2] Josephus, The War of the Jews 2.21.5.

[3] Food for the Flock, September-October, 2005, which can be found at [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

[4] The story of Margaret MacLachlan and Margaret Wilson, who were drowned in the way described, are contained in chapter 47 of Herman Hanko's book, "Portraits of Faithful Saints." It can be read online at <http://www.prca.org/books/portraits/margaret.htm>.