

The Beast Within – Matthew 27:27-31

A Sunday School teacher was teaching on forgiveness one Sunday, and he wanted to check his student's understanding of the lesson, so he asked, "*Can anyone tell me what you have to do before you can be forgiven of sin?*" From the back of the room, a boy spoke up, "*You have to sin.*"

It is safe to say that we all have to deal with sin on a daily basis. We have to certainly put up with all the sinning that goes on around us in the workplace and out in society, but tonight, I want to talk about another place where sin is present every day. I'm talking about those dark sins that seem to hang around in our hearts. I'm talking about that sin nature that we all have that relentlessly torments and tortures us.

Now, don't sit there and pretend that this doesn't apply to you because God's Word says in **Psalm 36:1 (NLT)**, "*Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts, they have no fear of God to restrain them.*" And in **Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)**, the Prophet says, "*The heart is deceitful about all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*"

As Christians, we should always strive to live holy lives, yet even we have those times in life we experience that inner urging from deep within us to just forsake our new spiritual nature and give in to the raging power of sin.

For example, have you ever experienced a sudden rush of anger that just makes you want to scream out a profanity? Have you ever felt an overwhelming sense of hatred that makes

you suddenly wish you could take that person you're dealing with behind the woodshed and beat the tar out of them? Have you ever found a wallet and turned it in, but kept the money for yourself? Have you ever purposefully padded an expense account or claimed a phony deduction thinking, "*No one will ever know?*"

Well, maybe you've done that or maybe you've just wanted to do that, but the fact is; there is within us crouching tiger called sin that can, suddenly and without warning, spring up and attack with a vengeance. And it's after those times, we usually and hopefully come to our spiritual senses and say, "*Where did that come from?*" "*Why did I do that?*" or "*That's not me! That's not who I am!*"

It's this beast of sin that caused even Paul to admit in **Romans 7:15-16 (NIV)**, "*I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.*"

Charles Mallory, a Methodist minister said, "*Like fresh meat to a hungry lion, nothing can be more frightening to us than when our human nature picks up the scent of sin and begins to salivate at the opportunity to feed it passions.*" (Charles Mallory, "The Spit of a Soldier" March 2005, Sermoncentral.com)

As we've seen throughout our look into the last week of Jesus' earthly life before His

crucifixion, this beast of sinfulness has reared its ugly head more than once. If you recall, on the night Jesus was betrayed, his disciples fell fast asleep when they should have been watching and praying. Judas, who had once followed so close to Jesus, came even closer to Him for a kiss of betrayal.

The religious leaders, who were charged with bringing people to God, wanted the Son of God dead. King Herod wanted Jesus to put on a private show for him. Pilate wanted out, gave in, and then tried to wash his hands of the whole thing.

And as we read tonight in our text, we come to the soldiers. Their thirst was not for the living water that Jesus could provide, but for the blood He could shed for their enjoyment.

READ Matthew 27:27-31.

Now let me say this; we really can't fault the soldiers for flogging Jesus and taking Him to his crucifixion. They were soldiers and being under the command of Pilate, they were just following orders like any good soldier would do.

But, what they did with Jesus following the flogging went beyond the call of duty. They took the orders given to them and carried them out to the nth degree, doling out more ridicule and insults upon Christ than was called for. So there is fault to be found with what they did.

The soldiers' actions that day can only be explained as the beast of sinfulness in the heart of man rearing its ugly head once more. Jesus had already been beaten within an inch of His

life, but these soldiers felt there needed to be more. In their crude and savage quest for blood, and under the guise of just wanting to have a little fun, they set out to satisfy their inner cravings.

First, let's notice:

1. The Scourging

Matthew 27:26 (NASB) says of Pilate, *"Then he released Barabbas for them. But after having Jesus scourged, he delivered him to be crucified."* Before heading out to Golgotha, **Mark 15:16 (NASB)** gives a little more detail about this and tells us, *"And the soldiers took him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and they called together the whole Roman cohort."* The Praetorium, or more specifically the courtyard of Pilate's residence was where this scourging was to take place. *"The whole Roman cohort"* amounted to as many as 600 soldiers. These were probably the soldiers who were assigned to Pilate's residence. Most scholars agree that these soldiers were mostly citizens of Rome's occupied territories and not necessary Italian. This would help explain why they would not be familiar with any of the traditions or practices of Judaism, and could have cared less about this particular Jew. For them, Jesus was just another condemned prisoner whom they were free to abuse as much as they pleased as long as they didn't kill him before he was crucified.

The scourging was most cruel and severe in nature. In a common flogging, the prisoner would be stripped of most of their clothes and

then bound to a stake or pillar to be whipped. The whip that was used consisted of a number of leather thongs, usually nine, that were laced with lead and sharp bones and/or spikes so that every blow would cut deep into the skin and underlying tissue, causing intense pain. This whipping would continue for 39 lashes.

To think that our Lord was subjected to this kind of tortuous abuse is beyond our ability to comprehend, but when we think of what Isaiah prophesied in **Isaiah 1:6 (NIV)** when he said, *“From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness-- only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.”* and **Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)** *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”* we can understand why Jesus went through this. His punishment was for our peace. His horrible beating was for our healing. Next, let’s notice:

2. The Sarcasm

Not only was Jesus beaten physically, but these Roman soldiers also continued with a form of mental and sarcastic ridicule that went beyond the physical torture.

Matthew 27:28-30 (NASB) *“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.”

Now here is where the soldiers crossed the line from duty to demonic delight in my opinion. As bad as the scourging was, they were only carrying out orders in whipping the prisoner. But they took the punishment a step further. No doubt, upon hearing of the charge against this Jewish prisoner, these pagan soldiers gave in to their inner urgings of evil and cruelty by seizing the opportunity to further incite the already approving crowd. They began to ridicule the prisoner with crass and humiliating gestures of mockery, and began their sarcastic charade of hailing Jesus as a king. They strip Jesus naked, and taking a scarlet cape from his uniform, a laughing soldier drapes it around Jesus’ shoulders to imitate His royalty. Another forms a crown of thorns and places it upon Jesus’ head to mimic Caesar’s official wreath. Another mockingly asks how a “king” could rule without His scepter, so he grabs a large wooden reed and thrusts it into Jesus’ hand.

Then, much to the delight of the crowd, these 600 pagan gentile soldiers add further insult to injury by mockingly kneeling before their newly-crowned king and hailing him as the *“King of the Jews.”*

No doubt these wickedly twisted soldiers thought this was quite an amusing spectacle they had created. They must have thought, *“If this man wanted to be their king, but they didn’t want him, we’ve made him into one anyway.”*

So here's what we think of your king! A king is supposed to be a man of power, but we've defeated him and forced him to stand in his own blood. A king is supposed to be a man of prestige, but we've made him to look like a clown-prince of a defeated kingdom by standing wearing a mock robe, a mock crown and a mock scepter." And apparently it was amusing to them because they heard the abusive shouts and merciless insults from an approving crowd as they egged-on the soldiers.

So being further fueled by the evil beasts from within their hearts, other soldiers begin to spit upon Jesus, while another yanks the reed from Jesus' hands and smashes Him over and over again upside the head, again, much to the delight of the crowd.

Now what would make people do all these inhumane and degrading things to another human being? It's all because of something that sits and simmers deep within the human heart. It's the three-letter word called:

3. The Sin

God's Word tells us that we all are sinners. **Romans 3:10 (NIV)**, reminds us that, "*there is none righteous, no, not one.*" **Romans 3:23 (NIV)** says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" **Isaiah 53:6 (NIV)**, says, "*all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.*" Furthermore, it says that we all are prone to be drawn to sinful things. **James 1:14-15 (NIV)** "*but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then,*

after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin..." So, it's not that we can't do good things. We can and we do. It's just that we have a hard time doing good because of our own sin nature – our own evil desires keep pulling us down.

You see, even though we were all made in God's image, we have fallen. As I said last week, morally, we are made in God's likeness, but because of our propensity to sin, we've corrupted God's original design and intent. Even King David admitted to that when he said, "*For I was born a sinner— yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*" **Psalms 51:5 (NLT)**.

So, we have this human problem called sin, but, we can't beat ourselves up over this, because in our own power, we can't do anything something that we inherited at birth. The simple fact is that sin is a universal condition.

So, we have a lot in common with those Roman soldiers, don't we? In effect, the things they did to Jesus, are things any one of us are capable of. Their mockery, their insults, their abuse and their spit symbolize all the filth that lies like a crouching tiger deep within our hearts. As I said, we can't control it, but there is something that can be done about it. Finally, I want us to see:

4. The Submission.

There is one other soldier I want us to see tonight. He's not mentioned in our text, but he was there. He's not the soldier who spit, but rather the soldier who spoke out. **Mark 15:39 (NIV)** "*And when the centurion, who stood*

there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!''"

This centurion was probably an officer in charge of the some of the cohort who participated in Jesus' scourging. His command would have been of a smaller battalion of 50 to 100 men. He was also a part of the detail that actually carried out the crucifixion of Jesus. Having witnessed and giving approval of the beating and mocking of Jesus, perhaps he is now having second thoughts and even a change of heart at what he allowed his solders to do to this man who now hung upon the cross.

Maybe he somehow was able to put the symbolism together that upon that cross was not just an ordinary man, but actually was who he claimed to be. Maybe he put it together that they one they had mocked as "*the King of the Jews,*" actually was the King of not just the Jews, but of the Gentiles as well. Maybe he now saw Jesus as not merely an object of sarcasm and ridicule, but as an opportunity for salvation and forgiveness from a wicked and evil past. Somehow, this repentant soldier was able to see everything that was wrong about his heart was nailed upon that cross and forgiven.

And so with unashamed submission and without regard for what others may have thought; this humbled soldier saw himself as one of the sinners for whom Christ died. He saw himself as one in need of forgiveness. So in the only way he knew how, he confronted the beast from within, and casting all his sin upon

the cross that stood before him, he proclaimed his newfound freedom by confessing, "*Surely, this man was the son of God!*"

This soldier came to Christ the way we all must come – as a sinner to the cross. He came in humility and submission. He came confessing his sin and asking for forgiveness.

Conclusion: We all stand before the cross tonight as this centurion did. We all are made to come to grips with all that Christ has done for us and all that he became for us.

Jesus loved us enough to become one of us. He began His ministry in the wilderness by being hungry, yet He is the bread of life. Jesus ended His ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the living water. Jesus got tired traveling from place to place, yet He is our rest. Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world. Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the good shepherd. Jesus died, yet by His death he destroyed the power of death.

All of this was from the one who endured the scourging and the sarcasm and the spit. All of this was from the one who was made to become our sin. Jesus endured all of this to show the world just how much He loves us.

Isaiah 50:6 (NIV) says, "*I give my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pull out my beard. I do not hide from shame, for they mock me and spit in my face.*"

May we commit ourselves to live even more holy and separate lives so that the beast of

sin that lies within us may not be aroused to bring out the worst in us. Rather, may we allow what Christ has done on the cross to be the death of our sins so that the best in us is awakened into a newness of life that brings glory to God and is pleasing to Him.