

The Thorns of Life

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • May 6, In the year of our Lord, 2018
Scripture Reader and Reading: – Genesis 3.17–19

Prelude:

I. Thorns are small irritations in life.

- A. A thorn is not like falling off a cliff, or going through the brunt of a hurricane.
- B. Thorns often make pleasant things a little less so.
 1. Picking blackberries is fun and profitable, but the tiny thorns that get stuck in your clothes and somewhat in your skin can be a little irritating.
 2. Roses are beautiful to behold, but as you know you have to be careful when you grab a hold of the stem.
 3. Most people think of palm trees when they think of Southern California, and they are an unusual looking, but beautiful tree.
 - a. However, when California has its powerful winds, especially the Santa Ana winds, these palms branches are brought down.
 - b. It can be very dangerous to be underneath one when it falls.
 - c. Even to pick them up poses a hazard for along the branch is a row of shark tooth-like thorns.
 - d. Without the palm on the end it would like the mouth of a sword fish.
- C. Sometimes thorns can be pretty bad, and the pain can be all-consuming, seeming as though it is the greatest pain ever, but in the end they are overcome.
 1. I can still remember when my brother fell into a cactus patch in Eaton Canyon in Pasadena, California.
 2. He was yelling and screaming at the top of his lungs and my mother and another lady (I think it was my aunt) had to take off all of his clothes and pull out the stickers that seemed to be in every part of his body.

3. I do not think that Ron would have listened to me much if I had told him that it was not as though he had fallen off of a cliff, for the pain from the many small irritations would cloud any of his thinking.

II. That is the problem with thorns.

- A. They are relatively minor in comparison to some other things that could happen to our bodies.
- B. Yet it is the very smallness of the sticking of the thorn that makes them so irritating to us.
- C. This is no doubt the reason that thorns are also used symbolically in the Bible to describe irritations in the spirit, and so other things.

Persuasion:

I. Thorns are the result of Adam's sin.

- A. Our world was originally created without thorns.
 1. Genesis 3:18 reveals part of the curse that God put on the earth for Adam's sin:

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.
 2. Imagine holding roses before the fall of Adam, and picking blackberries.
- B. Adam sinned by eating from a tree of which God had said not to eat, so part of the curse is in connection with agriculture.
 1. Adam thought that he could do well by eating something which the earth produces, so now the earth brings forth something that irritates to us.
 2. The curse corresponds to the sin.

II. Thorns in nature.

- A. Oddly enough thorns do now serve a purpose.
 1. Plants are protected from intruders in one form or another by thorns.

2. Thorns can be used as security around your home, if you plant them beneath and next to windows.

B. Thorns in Bible lands:

1. 56 times in the Bible you will find the words "thorn," "thorns," "thornbushes," "bramble," and "thistle."
2. "Probably there is no country on earth where so many plants of this sort exist. As many as 200 different species of thorny plants are found there besides many others which are 'clothed with scabrous, strigose or stinging hairs, and another multitude with prickly fruits'" (*Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, edited by F. N. Peloubet, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Universal Book and Bible House, 1947, p. 689).
3. May be this is why the Bible is rich in either referring to literal thorns or using them in symbolic ways.

C. Thorns or thistles have helped the Scottish.

1. "The prickly purple thistle is the national emblem of Scotland. In the 13th century, when Alexander III was king of Scotland, King Haakon of Norway landed an army on the shores of that kingdom and attempted to conquer it. According to tradition, in the night attack on the Scottish camp at Largs, a barefoot Norseman stepped on a thistle and cried out in pain. The Scots were alerted, and the attack failed. Haakon's successor surrendered the Hebrides to Scotland. In 1687 an order of knighthood, the Order of the Thistle, was established by the English King James II and dedicated to St. Andrew. It became inactive in the Revolution of 1688 but was revived in 1703 by Queen Anne" (*Compton's Encyclopedia*, America Online).
2. "A great army, many years ago, invaded Scotland. They crept on stealthily over the border, and prepared to make a night attack on the Scottish forces. There lay the camp, all silently in the starlight, never dreaming that danger was so near. The Danes, to make their advance more noiseless, came forward barefooted. But as they neared the sleeping Scots one unlucky Dane brought his broad foot down squarely on a bristling thistle. A roar or pain was the consequence, which rang like a trumpet blast through the sleeping camp. In a moment each soldier had grasped his weapon, and the Danes were thoroughly routed. The thistle was from that time adopted as the national emblem

of Scotland. God has His uses for even the simplest and humblest of us" (Walter Baxendale, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, no. 7070).

3. Likewise there are some ways in which we can be benefited by the thorns of life.
 - a. It really depends on where you are spiritually on whether thorns are a help or a hindrance to you.
 - b. The thorns can keep you from going where you should, but if you yourself become a thorn, then you will suffer greatly, for
 - c. even as thorns are referred to as fuel for fire, so some people are going to be eternal fuel for an eternal fire.

III. Spiritual thorns:

- A. We experience thorns in the spirit, which can be the result of sin, just like with Adam, or they can serve to keep us in the straight and narrow.
- B. Thorns are reminders of where not to go.
 1. Proverbs 22:5 says that thorns are in the way of the perverse:

**Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;
He who guards his soul will be far from them.**

- a. If you start to walk down the path of the perverse, then God promises that there will be thorns in the way.
- b. There are going to be many irritations.
- c. It is not that God is irritating you, but He wants you to stay away from the way of perverse.
- d. Maybe Psalm 119:67, 71 discusses this very thing, though the word thorn is not used, yet "affliction" is and it conveys the same thought:

**67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word. ...**

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted,

That I may learn Your statutes.

- (1) You can see the psalmist walking down a path, and he starts to veer and he runs into thorn bushes.
 - (2) So he gets back on the path that God wants the psalmist to be on.
2. Along these same lines I wonder if Isaiah 32:13 reveals why some people suffer in the spirit:

On the land of my people will come up thorns and briers, yes, on all the happy homes in the joyous city;

3. Matthew 13:7 thorns choke the word and it brings forth no fruit:

And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

C. The thorns of life can remind us the source of our blessings.

1. Second Corinthians 12:7–10 reveals that Paul was given a thorn in the flesh to remind him that he was made sufficient by the grace of God, and that through Paul's weakness God strength was perfected:

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- a. As we have all experienced at some time or another a thorn stuck in the flesh is irritating, and for the moment keeps you from doing what you need to be doing.

- b. How about a thorn that could not be removed?
 - (1) It would be a constant irritant.
 - (2) It would also remind you that you need help to accomplish many things.
 - c. This is how it was for Paul.
 - (1) His thorn was a constant irritant.
 - (2) It also reminded him that things he accomplished he did so because the grace of God was at work.
2. Do you have something like this? Some kind of physical ailment or something else that keeps you from doing all the things, especially the things that you would like to do for God?
- a. Do not curse God.
 - b. Run to Him, realizing that His grace is sufficient for you.
 - c. Let your thorn in life be a reminder to you that you need God and His grace desperately.
 - d. Your life is not for yourself alone, simply to do what you want to do, but your life is for letting the power of Christ be seen in you, and if that is accomplished by having a thorn in your literal flesh or in your spirit, then so be it.
- D. Israel had thorns in the side.
1. During the days of Abraham the Lord had promised the patriarch in Genesis 15 that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, but since the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full, the people would have to wait four generations, or over 400 years.
 - a. That time was spent in Egypt.
 - b. When the Amorites had finally reached the point of intolerance for God, it was time to bring in the Israelites to destroy the Amorites and let Israel dwell in the land.
 2. However, in Numbers 33:55 you will learn that if Israel did not fully destroy the Amorites, then they would become like thorns to the Israelites:

But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.

- a. Psalm 106:34–36 says it all that Israel did not do as the Lord commanded, and so they paid for it later:

34 They did not destroy the peoples, Concerning whom the LORD had commanded them, 35 But they mingled with the Gentiles And learned their works; 36 They served their idols, Which became a snare to them.

- (1) Thus idolatry and all of the sins associated with it became a constant problem for Israel.
- (2) In fact it was idolatry and related sins that eventually moved God to remove the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria, and the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon.

- b. Joshua 23:13 says:

know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

E. God considers the rebellious to be like thorns.

1. Ezekiel 2:6 wicked people are constantly referred to as thorns in the Bible:

And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house.

2. Second Samuel 23:6–7

6 But the sons of rebellion shall all be as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. 7 But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place.

- a. They make themselves undesirable to God.
 - b. He cannot take them and make them into something beautiful, so they are burned.
3. Hebrews 6:4–8 makes a comparison between Christians who fall away, and the earth bearing thorns for the gardener who takes the thorns and burns them:

4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. 7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

IV. The crown of thorns.

- A. It is truly amazing how God often uses the consequences of man's sins for man's good.
 1. For example, I have already shown you that we have thorns on the earth as the result of Adam's sin, yet thorns often fulfill good purposes today.
 2. Remember Joseph who was sold into Egypt by his brothers, but God used their evil to help them later when Joseph made provision for his family in Egypt during a world-wide famine.
- B. Thorns are in our gardens because of Adam's sin, but Jesus saved us from sin when He wore a crown of thorns.
 1. John 19:1–5ff gives this remarkable account of Jesus shortly before His crucifixion:

1 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. 3 Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands. 4 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him." 5 Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!"

- a. So they saw the Man wearing a crown of thorns.
 - b. They had no idea that He was wearing the crown of thorns to take away the thorn of sin in their lives, and in your life.
2. How do you respond to the Man who wore a crown of thorns for you?

Exhortation:

I. Have you become as a thorn in the spirit?

- A. God wants to make something beautiful of you.
- B. If you remain as a thorn in His hand, then He will burn you.
- C. Jesus Christ the Son of God wore a crown of thorns for you so that you do not have to be burned in the fire of hell.