

Wendy's April Prayer Thoughts

The blossoming of the blackthorn (*Prunus Spinosa*) is a welcome harbinger of Spring. Its mass of snow-white flowers may be seen in hedgerows and woods. Their dainty flowers appear before the leaves, and attract queen bees and minor bees, as they come out of hibernation. The bark is dark brown/black and smooth, but the twigs form straight side shoots and their thorns can be 4" long. They will develop into next year's side shoots. Unless pruned, the shrub will become a tree. The world's tallest tree found in France, is 9.60 metres, and the oldest at 65 years is in Austria. For 4,500 years the blackthorn has been a barrier for livestock. The Wild Life trust of Wales documented how 2/3rds of Britain has been continuously hedged for over 1,000 years. Since WW11 166,000 kilometres have been lost. Blackthorn produces berries in the autumn which are used for making sloe gin. Its wood being hardy is still used for making walking sticks, which are never dead straight, for canes and tool handles. The Royal Irish regiment of the British Army carry blackthorn batons. It is also the traditional wood for the Irish shillelaghs, stout knobbed sticks used for fighting. In Germany it is used for divining rods.

Ancient Israel was an agricultural society. Scripture records that hedges were built to safeguard animals and crops. The prophet Isaiah, in what is known as The Song of the Vineyard, compares Israel to a vineyard which only produces sour wild grapes. In spite of its favourable condition and the work put into it, its yield was only fit for dumping, and the land to be left alone. I quote from chapter 5:4-5 NIV. "Let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will tear down its hedges and let it be destroyed. I will break down its walls and let animals trample it. I will make it a wild place where the vines are not pruned and the ground is not hoed, a place where overgrowth with briars and thorns." God had given His people protection, but with hedge and wall removed they were vulnerable. Vineyards often had a doubled fence with the building of a wall and a hedge of thorns.

Thorns, along with thistles were first mentioned in Genesis, in the account of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after their disobedience in eating fruit from the forbidden tree. 3:17-19. God explained to Adam the effects of sin. "Cursed be the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the ground." As would be expected, thorns are mentioned many more times in the Bible. Gideon used actual thorns and briars to discipline the leaders of Succoth after they had refused to give bread to his 300 hundred exhausted warriors. "I will trample your flesh on the thorns of the wilderness and on briars."

..... So he tortured them by having them dragged under heavy weights over thorns and briars painfully lacerating their bodies.

In Proverbs 15:19 the writer pictures two kinds of path in life... "The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the righteous is a level highway." When the lazy man finds his way hindered by obstacles preventing him from going forward, it's a self-imposed punishment. The upright man has his path smoothed out by God who journeys with him and enabling him to avoid difficulties and to overcome his trials.

In the 3 Gospels of Mark, Matthew and John we read about The Crown of Thorns, which was cruelly placed by the Roman soldiers onto the head of Jesus during His passion and Death. The apostle John records that it was woven from 'branches' 19:2. Mark adds that Jesus was struck on the head with a reed, so embedding the thorns more deeply into the scalp to add to the agony. 19:19. It is thought that the crude crown had been quickly woven from the flexible branches of the Jujube tree, (*Ziziphus Spina - Christi*). Mark and Matthew tell of the crown being made from twisted thorns." So the possibility that the Red Date Palm (*Phoenix Dactylifera*) was used, the thorns growing along its leaves up to 12 " or maybe it was fashioned from the branches of the Black hawthorn bush, (*Rhamnus Lyciodes*). Whatever, the Crown of Thorns was made from, the soldiers engaged in a little horseplay as they awaited orders. They placed it on the head of Jesus, and dressed Him in a robe mocking Him as a king as they saluted Him, "Hail, King of the Jews." They ridiculed Him by bowing the knee to worship, and insulted Him by spitting in His face. Mark 15: 15:19. They were blind to His divine authority.

When Jesus came to earth He forsook His crown of glory. He wore a crown of thorns that we might wear a crown of glory. Such was His sacrificial love as he hung on the Cross, bearing the suffering to redeem those who would accept Him as King of their lives.

Take time to pray beneath the Cross as you centre your thoughts on the Crown of Thorns.

1. Think of the cruel thorns - 72 the traditional number of thorns Read Isaiah 53:3-5... "He was pierced for our transgressions." Ask forgiveness for the spikes you have punished Him for; barbed words, boastful behaviour etc...
2. Think of the blood running down His face from the piercing thorns. Read Ephesians 2:13. "You have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Thank Him that through His astounding love and suffering he paid the purchase price to redeem you to God, and for bringing you into fellowship with the Godhead - Father Spirit, Son.
3. Ask yourself what importance you place on receiving the shed blood when you receive Communion? **Read Luke 22:19-22. "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."**
Is Christ living in you?