“Crowns” of Victory

Third in the series, “Heaven’s Joys”

# Scripture: Rev. 3:11; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Tim. 4:8

# Key Thought: God will crown us with rewards for our faithfulness.

# Intro:

(Heaven is for Real p. 85)

One thing I really like about reading Heaven is for Real is that it helps restore our sense of expectation about Heaven. As I said last week, the experiences of Colton do not have the authority of Scripture, but they are one more human witness that we have something to look forward to; that we need to listen more closely to what the Bible teaches us about heaven and have a sense of anticipation about it. We need to have an eagerness to learn like Todd and Sonja trying to find out what Colton had experienced. And as we learn, what we discover will give us a genuine appreciation for the place Jesus said that he is preparing for us.

In this series we are talking about the rewards that God has in store for Christians. This morning we want to discover what the Bible means when it speaks about “crowns” that faithful Christians will receive.

## The crown is a reward for victory

In the United States, at first, we might have a little difficulty connecting with the word “crown.” However, if we understood a little better the analogy that is usually being made in passages like the ones we are investigating today, we would find that we can understand the word quite easily. Here’s why.

According to those who study Greek, the word translated as “crown” here in these texts, during the Greek and Roman era most often referred not to what we think of as a king’s crown, but to the wreath worn by the victors in the Greek Games. It was called a crown.

“In the Olympic games, it was made of leaves of the wild olive; in the Pythian games, of laurel; in the Nemean games, of parsley; and in the Isthmian games, of the pine. The Romans bestowed the "civic crown" on him who saved the life of a citizen. It was made of the leaves of the oak.” (from Easton's Bible Dictionary, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

So really what we’re talking about when we talk about the crown was a symbol of victory and honor. When we have that in mind, today is a very good day to talk about the three Bible references to crowns as we discuss our heavenly rewards.

It’s Super Bowl Sunday, and everybody knows that today the two teams who have won the right to be there, the Patriots and the Rams will compete for prizes. The winning team receives a huge trophy. Each player on the winning team will receive a little more than $100,000 plus a huge Super Bowl ring, the prize possession of every player who has ever been on a winning Super Bowl team. In addition, the honor of having been on the winning team often brings players additional engagements during the off-season and added advertising endorsements which net the player even more money. All these come as a result of the honor that comes from being on the winning team.

So, when we contemplate receiving the “crowns,” we need to think about crowns of victory and honor.

## The Bible mentions three rewards using the word “crown”

In the New Testament, writers like Paul, often either directly or through word inferences compared our diligent efforts to lead the Christian life to the efforts of an athlete competing in the Greek games. Paul spoke of the continuing discipline involved in both pursuits and said,

 “They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

His analogy was particularly poignant because the crowns from the games were made of leaves of various types which lasted only a matter of days perhaps weeks if it were of pine. But the rewards that we will receive as Christians when we are judged by Christ will last for eternity.

As I thought about the joys of heaven and continued to research the rewards that we will receive from Jesus when he judges his servants, I was particularly impressed with several passages that mention the word “crown” as part of our reward. What is clear is that Jesus will be rewarding and honoring those who have served him well. They will be honored for their victory over life’s trials and temptations. Various analogies are used in Scriptures to describe the rewards that we will receive. The Bible uses the word picture of the crown or victor’s wreath in three ways.

# The crown of life

Two passages encourage us to look forward to the “crown of life.” In James we read;

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. James 1:12 NIV

Then in Revelation we are exhorted;

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. Rev. 2:10,11 NRSV

The second passage is somewhat self-explanatory. To receive the crown of life as a reward for our victory, is to be delivered from the threat posed by the “second death.” In Revelation chapter 20, the Bible defines what is meant by the “second death.” In the vision that John saw of the judgment seat of God, he saw the terrible results upon those whose names were not recorded in the Book of Life.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also, another book was opened, the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire. Rev 20:12-15 NRSV

Some interpreters feel that this is a description of the judgment only for those who are not Christians and they posit a separate time of accounting for Christians. Personally, I tend to think that we may simply have differing Scriptural images given to us to impress upon us the certainty that there will be a time of accounting for all our deeds.

For now, let’s just connect the truth from Revelation that the person who has the “crown of life” has escaped hell fire with the pronouncement of Jesus recorded in John 5.

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 5:24 NRSV

It is abundantly clear what is meant by the “crown of life.” The “crown of life” is the fundamental reward of a Christian–eternal life with Christ. The one who receives the “crown of life” “will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). As we continue to study Heaven’s Joys, the rewards to be given to faithful followers of Christ, we will see the promise of eternal life reviewed and emphasized again and again under various pictures. The “crown of life” is one of those verbal pictures.

# The crown of glory

The second use of the word crown in describing the rewards which Christians will receive from Jesus at the time when Jesus judges to servants is in first Peter. Peter was writing to the leaders of the various congregations.

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. 1 Peter 5:1-4 NRSV

The question immediately comes to mind, “What is the “crown of glory”?” Is it something that all Christians can receive or only pastors?

This is the only place that the exact phrase is used in Scripture. But Peter spoke of the concept earlier in the book in a way that helps us to understand that what he is talking about is something that is available to all Christians, not just to the shepherds of the flock. Peter wrote:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
1 Peter 1:6-9 NIV

Notice that what we will receive as Christians we reach the end of our journey and God gives us the inheritance that he has prepared for Jesus’ bride is described with three words. If we are faithful through our trials and persevere in our allegiance to Jesus and practice of our faith, then our faith will be proved genuine and we will receive from our Savior “praise, glory and honor” (1 Peter 1:7).

Last week we spoke about the reward that faithful Christians will receive, the Master’s words of praise, “Well done!” Remember that in last week’s text, there was an additional reward that the faithful servants received. They were given additional responsibility. Both were “put in charge of many things” (Matthew 25:21,23). This was what we would call in our world a promotion, and honor, and advancement.

So, the “crown of glory” refers to the honor and praise that every faithful Christian will receive when Jesus hands out his rewards. There are so many faithful servants now who labor unrecognized, who sacrifice greatly, and no one notices. But the Bible teaches that God notices smallest act of ministry.

If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” Matt 10:42 NIV

God promises to reward all his servants and that reward includes appropriate recognition and honor–their “crown of glory.”

And old Gospel ballad expresses the truth I am teaching like this.

### Palms of Victory (written by Methodist preacher John B. Matthias who attended John St. Methodist Church and was licensed in 1793, ordained a deacon by Francis Asbury in 1797, and ordained an elder in 1813 by Bishop McKendree. His title for the hymn likely was Deliverance Will Come.)

I saw the wayward traveler, in **5** tattered garments **1** clad

And struggling up the mountain, it **5** seemed that he was **1** sad

His back was laden heavy, his **5** strength was almost **1** gone

But he shouted as he journeyed, "De- **5** liverance will **1** come!"

Then palms of victory, **5** crowns of **1** glory

Palms of victory, **5** I shall **1** wear

The summer sun was shining, the sweat was on his brow

His garments worn and dusty, his step seemed very slow

But he kept pressing onward, for he was wending home

Still shouting as he journeyed, "Deliverance will come!"

The songsters in the arbor, that stood beside the way

Attracted his attention, invited his delay

His watchword being "Onward!", he stopped his ears and ran

Still shouting as he journeyed, "Deliverance will come!"

I saw him in the evening, the sun was bending low

He had overtopped the mountain, and reached the vale below

He saw the golden city, his everlasting home

And shouted loud, "Hosanna! Deliverance will come!"

While gazing on the city, just o'er the narrow flood

A band of holy angels came from the throne of God

They bore him on their pinions safe o'er the dashing foam

And joined him in his triumph, "Deliverance has come!"

 *From <*[*https://toneway.com/songs/palms-of-victory*](https://toneway.com/songs/palms-of-victory)*>*

# The crown of righteousness

## The key passage

As Paul was nearing the end of his life, he spoke very personally about the crown that awaited him and the one that awaits each one of Jesus’ faithful followers. Paul was in prison, awaiting what he felt would be his martyrdom. Yet at the same time he was looking forward to the reward that lay ahead. Again, the analogy is from the athletic games. William Barclay tells us that the Greek word (agon) Paul uses for fight was also the word for a contest in the arena.

I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.
 2 Tim 4:6-8 NIV

This is a rich passage. Commentator William Barclay explains two more Greek words.

The word he [Paul] uses for sacrifice is the verb (spendesthai) which literally means to pour out as a libation to the gods. Every Roman meal ended with a kind of sacrifice. A cup of wine was taken and was poured out to the gods. It is as if Paul were saying: "the day is ended; it is time to rise and go; and my life must be poured out as a sacrifice to God."

He [Paul] goes on to say: "the time of my departure is at hand." The word (analusis) he uses for departure is a vivid one. It has many a picture in it and each tells us something about leaving this life. (A) it is the word for unyoking an animal from the shafts of the cart or the plow. Death to Paul was rest from toil…. (B) it is the word for loosening bonds or fetters. Death for Paul was a release. He was to exchange the confines of a Roman prison for the glorious liberty of the courts of heaven. (C) It is the word for loosening the ropes of a tent. For Paul it was time to strike camp again…. (D) it is the word for loosening the mooring ropes of a ship. Many a time Paul had felt his ship leave the harbor for the deep waters. Now he is to launch out into the greatest deep of all, setting sail to cross the waters of death to arrive in the haven of eternity.

So then, for the Christian, death is laying down the burden in order to rest; it is laying aside the shackles in order to be free; it is striking camp in order to take up residence in the heavenly places; is casting off the ropes which bind us to this world in order to set sail on the voyage which ends in the presence of God. Who then can fear it?

William Barclay in DSB commenting on 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

## The conditions for receiving reward

Notice the conditions under which Paul expects to receive the reward. He says I have finished the race and I have kept the faith. To finish the race is be faithful all the way to the end. Jesus said,

Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. Mark 13:13 NIV

For us this is a fearful challenge, but God will help us.

He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 1:8 NIV

To keep the faith means to not stray from the Biblical teachings passed down to us but to faithfully pass on the way of life to those who follow us. This doesn’t mean we have to do everything and practice faith exactly like our parents or grandparents did. But it does mean that we maintain the essentials of the faith. As Paul said to his protege, Timothy,

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Tim 1:14

The writer of Hebrews sums it up.

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. Heb 6:10-12 NIV

## A result of right-living

In summary, I believe the expression, “crown of righteousness” is Paul’s general phrase for the reward that we will receive for our faithful service to God. In the case of the “crown of life” and the “crown of glory” the object of the preposition describes the reward we will receive. But in the case of the “crown of righteousness, the object of the preposition tells us the source or the reason for the reward that we will receive. This one is the crown or reward that is a result of our faithful service to God. It is the result of right-living. This expression is not meant to refer to an additional crown but rather to simply serve as a reminder that the rewards we receive at the time of our accountability before Christ will be based upon our faithful service to God and to others. Service to others is also service to God but I list both because we often think of them in those two categories. We might think of things like sacrifices of praise, acts of intercession, and giving tithes as service to God. We might think of helping a neighbor with a flat tire or comforting a dying friend as service to others. But Jesus is clear that when we do something for others, he considers it as being done for him (Matthew 25:40).

# Conclusion

## Awaits you and I too

The thing to remember is that the crown of righteousness is not something that is waiting just for Paul. He is very clear that the reward of faithful service to God, of righteous living, and of watchful expectation for Heaven’s joys is waiting for all to whom the Master says, “Well done!”

Jesus says to us all,

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.
Rev 3:11 NIV