

Receiving Crowns that Reflect Our Love for God (James 1:12)

REVIEW: GOD’S PARTNERS: ENTHRONED, ROBED, AND CROWNED

Well, I want to look a little bit more tonight at the subject of receiving crowns. These elders are the faithful few throughout redemptive history—Old and New Testament—who have three expressions of their reward and their intimacy with the Lord.

Number one: they are sitting on thrones. Number two: they are clothed in robes. Number three: they are wearing golden crowns. It is this issue of crowns that I want to focus on a little bit more.

James 1:12: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” James 1:12 is a verse that we will look at a couple of times tonight. James 1:12: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation.” When God says that he or she has been consistent in resisting temptation, we are talking about in eternity at the judgment seat of Christ. When James writes in 1:12: “for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised for those who love Him.” When the Lord approves them, it is as if the Lord says, “This one is approved. Yes. They will receive the crown of life that I have promised to the people who love Me.”

What James does here is ties loving God with all of our heart to the subject of enduring temptation, as temptation needs to be endured. That is a very interesting word. The word endure is the word that James has chosen to use by direction of the Holy Spirit. It is talking about persevering because temptation provides us with opportunities to sin. Our emotions are stirred up. We want to yield to it. But by the grace of God, we have the ability not to.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13: THERE IS NO TEMPTATION TOO GREAT

The Lord says, “There is no temptation.” The Word of God says in 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” There is no temptation so great that a person cannot endure it in the grace of God. God will give them a way of escape if they want it. If they really want it, according to 1 Corinthians 10:13, God will make a way of escape for them every single time. So there is a war currently going on in our members. There is a war in our members called lust that is waging war against us. This war against lust requires endurance. This is not something that we seek to obey for just a season, or maybe during just a high point in our spirit life and say, “We are going to really go for it.”

It is the sort of thing that we endure for decades. We stay in this battle against sin. We do not give in and give up. It is a common thought, “Will this thing ever go away?” No. The war against sin will not end in this age, or in this life. It does not. It goes on for decades and decades this war. It requires endurance, not momentary spurts of inspiration where we really go hard after God for three months. Many people live their spiritual life that way, but James said that when we endure,

we stay the course through the decades even through the highs, the lows, and the seasons of life. The Lord is watching, and we develop a history of faithfulness in the subject of enduring temptation.

THE CROWN OF LIFE IS APPROVED BY THE LORD DIRECTLY

Only the Lord knows when He does this, but there is a time in the life of faithful believers when He approves them to receive a crown—a crown of life. It is the idea that the believers have applied for the crown of life; so the Lord reviews their application, and then He approves it. Nobody can receive this crown of life except if the Lord personally approves them. It is linked to loving the Lord. The Scripture makes it clear that we will only resist temptation consistently because of love.

Now the crown of life is not the same thing as being born-again. Some have mistaken this as synonymous with being born-again. He is talking to believers. I would venture to say that there will be two or three billion believers throughout history; there will be many more who will be counted in the great revival before the Lord returns. But my guess is that there will be two to three billion saints in redemptive history, and my guess is that the vast majority of them do not receive this crown. However, millions do, but millions are a small percentage of the billions of born-again believers.

THE CROWN OF LIFE, OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND OF GLORY

It is a crown called the crown of life. It is called the crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:6-8: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” Timothy describes the crown of righteousness. I am assuming it is the same crown—the crown of life, or the crown of righteousness.

1 Peter 5:4: “and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Peter calls it here “the crown of glory” in verse five. I assume that is the same thing as the “crown of life” in James 1:12, and the “crown of righteousness” in 2 Timothy 4:8. I do not think that there are different crowns. I think that it is only one crown. Now this crown of life is distinct from receiving salvation. A crown speaks of authority. A crown speaks of a status in God’s kingdom of honor and of service before Him. In the age to come, there will be positions of working together with the Lord that only those with crowns will qualify for these assignments that are very near and dear to the Lord’s heart.

It will take a certain authorization to be able to function in these assignments that are nearest and dearest to the Lord’s heart. These assignments are very important to Him that He wants to do through His people. So a crown speaks of authority. Life is talking about the life of God—the anointing of God. The life of God, and the anointing of God, or the presence of God are synonymous. This is a place of reward that has to do with our ability to experience, and to impart

the anointing, or the life of God. We experience it ourselves, and then we impart it to other people.

WE WILL HAVE DIFFERENT CAPACITIES TO EXPERIENCE GOD

Now when it talks about crown, it is emphasizing the authority dimension. Now each of us will have a different capacity. In our resurrected bodies, we will have a different capacity to experience the anointing, the life of God, or the presence of God. Some will have a greater capacity, and others will have a minimal capacity. The good news is that everyone will experience the Lord to the fullness of their capacity, so they will be content.

They will be overflowing according to their capacity, but some will have a far greater capacity than others in two different ways: first, in experiencing the life of God and the anointing of God. Secondly, we will differ in the authority to impart the anointing to others. In the age to come, you will impart the anointing, and you will impart wisdom and revelation to others. Your ministry does not end in this age. As a matter of fact, your ministry hardly begins in this age.

THIS LIFE IS MERELY AN INTERSHIP FOR ALL OF ETERNITY

Although we give ourselves in diligence to our ministries in this age (imagine seventy years on the earth, eighty due to strength is what Moses said in Psalm 90), our ministries in this age are at best an internship that is preparing us for our next assignment on the earth in physical, resurrected bodies on the earth. Our next assignment will be a 1,000-year assignment, and then we get another assignment after the 1,000 years are up, which is after the millennial kingdom. My point is that our assignment in this age is an internship.

There are many believers who are consumed with this assignment, and this is it. This is all they think about in terms of ministry. So they think it seems reasonable to try to take shortcuts to get a bigger ministry right now. So they will take shortcuts in the Word of God. They will take shortcuts in prayer. They will take shortcuts in meekness. They will take shortcuts in godliness, anything to get the show on the road faster without understanding that by far our smallest assignment is in this age.

The Lord is watching us, and no matter how big a person's sphere of ministry, or sphere of impact is, it is so small compared to the assignment God wants to give them in the age to come. Billy Graham, who arguably has one of the largest ministries in history, is merely in his internship. He is merely an intern. He is on the very front end of his ministry. His fifty years of preaching in stadiums in this life is but an internship compared to what his assignment is in God's heart in the age to come. We have to be approved by the Lord to receive this crown, and the Lord is the only One who can approve this. You cannot get it by networking. You cannot talk somebody into it. You cannot do a person a favor, and they open a door for you. This crown, this ability to impart the life of God with authority to others is given only by the Lord's approval. My assumption from the Scriptures is clear that many are called, but few are chosen. A small percent of the Body of Christ endure temptation over years because of love. They choose to endure because of their devotion to the Lord. The Lord watches them, and we do not know how long the Lord requires to approve somebody for a crown. We do not know, but we know that it requires enduring temptation.

ENDURING TEMPTATION INCLUDES OUR PRIDE

I mentioned this Sunday: now enduring temptation is far more than resisting lust in terms of physical lusts, physical passions, and physical appetites. Temptation and lust are a whole lot more about pride than they are about physical pleasure. Physical pleasure is a significant part of temptation, but pride is a far greater problem to the human spirit than physical pleasure is. We are far more aware of our impulses for pleasure than we are aware of our pride, but the greatest battlefield, the greatest difficulty is the issue of humility. It really is. It is resisting the temptation to pride and self-will.

I just decide, “I am going to do it my way; when I want and how I want. I want it to be convenient. I want it to be for me—it has to serve me.” That is the most natural thing to every one of us. So I like this word endure. It seems like an excellent word—endure temptation—because laziness, pride, comfort, and selfishness are so powerful of forces in our spirit. Well just a little bit of review from last week.

THE ELDERS ARE FAITHFUL BELIEVERS FROM REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

Paragraph A. John saw the twenty-four elders ruling with God. The elders are the faithful believers from redemptive history. They are enthroned; they are robed. They are crowned.

WE ARE TO BE ENTHRONED, ROBED, AND CROWNED IN OUR DESTINY

Paragraph B. There are significant emotional implications to knowing that our destiny, and our future involve being on thrones with robes and crowns. When this connects to us in our hearts, we feel very differently about our lives. Even those who see it the most, only see it a little bit compared to reality. Even Paul only saw it partially compared to the full truth of it. When we begin to see that our life is just an internship for eternity, we understand that we are headed toward thrones, robes, and crowns that reflect our diligence, our obedience, and our meekness in this age. When we see eternity, it really affects the way we view ourselves, and the way we view life.

The apostles in the New Testament were very focused and very aware of this subject. It fills their teachings. All the apostles comment on this regularly. Jesus talked about it regularly. However, we are in a culture where we have a profound lack of revelation, and we do have a significant earthly assignment that is coming next. This is far more important than the earthly assignment we have now. Our assignment in the age to come will also be on the earth, and we will have a physical, resurrected body. I say this like a broken record, but it just needs to be said. People have this idea that we are going to go away to heaven. The Scripture is clear that at the second coming: heaven is coming to earth. God’s purpose is for us to have a supernatural body with the anointing of the spirit in a natural, physical environment to serve God. We will teach, minister, serve, govern, rule, relate, eat food, and know each other in the natural. We will tell stories, and remember the past. We will plan the future like we do now, but just in a far more glorious way. Because people do not have sight of this, people make so many compromises in this age that they will really regret when the whole story is in front of them.

Now these twenty-four elders are pictures. They are God's ideal. God is saying, "This is how far I am willing to go with My people. They will be sitting on thrones in My very presence with crowns on. This is how committed I am to My people." That is what is being said in Revelation 4.

GOD WILL SET HIS PEOPLE ON THRONES AND GIVE THEM WHITE ROBES

Roman numeral II. This is just continued review from last week that God's people will sit on thrones and have white robes. I am not going to go through that; but for those who are just with us for the first time tonight, I will just give you a few sentences on that. We have the notes on the Internet from last week if you want more.

CENTERPIECE OF GOD'S PURPOSE: BRING HEAVEN AND EARTH

Roman numeral III. All three of these subjects thrones, crowns, and robes are vast. They are not just kind of incidental, small subjects that are in the storyline of Revelation 4. Every phrase in Revelation 4 is so significant to God and to His plan in our lives. Each word is very significant. Now this is one of these paragraphs that I use all the time in handouts. If you have been here for a while, you can almost finish the sentence for me because I use it so often. In doing that, I am making a point that I really urge you to understand this principle and to use it often.

JESUS WILL JOIN THE HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY REALMS TOGETHER

Here is the principle: the centerpiece of God's purpose is to bring heaven and earth. That has always been the centerpiece of God's thinking of His plan for the human race—to bring the heavenly and earthly realms together, not to have them separate.

It says in Ephesians 1:9: "having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself," and the word mystery in the New Testament talks about God's hidden plan. God wants us to know His hidden plan, "which He purposed in Himself;" here it is—the purpose that God has already carried in His heart from before the ages, "that at the right time, in the fullness of time," at the right time, here is what God is going to do. Ephesians 1:10: "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth—in Him." He is going to bring them together as one reality. That has always been the centerpiece of His plan involving human beings.

Colossians 1:20 says the same thing, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven." He is bringing all things in those two realms together. He is reconciling them, and they are going to fulfill His purpose is what it means. To be reconciled to the Lord means that God's purpose is going to be completely fulfilled in those two arenas.

HEAVEN IS WHERE GOD’S POWER AND PRESENCE IS OPENLY MANIFEST

Paragraph B. Heaven speaks of the supernatural realm where God’s presence and power are openly manifest. Heaven includes the realm of the angels. Heaven is the place believers go for the last 2,000 years from the cross to the second coming. It is a temporary holding pattern from the cross to the resurrection for disembodied spirits. They do not have their physical bodies in heaven right now. They are waiting for the second coming when the graves open and all the saints, Old and New Testament, get their physical bodies at the second coming. The saints in heaven are in Paradise, but they do not have the physical dimension that they are going to have at the second coming. The only person who has a physical body that we know of, in heaven, is Jesus. He is the first fruit. His physical body is like it will be on the earth.

Now the reason that the saints do not have a physical body in heaven is because they do not need one. They do not need one to relate to the environment of heaven. The physical body is necessary to relate to a physical environment, and there is not a physical environment in heaven. Heaven will come down. The New Jerusalem is coming down from the heavenly realm out of heaven to the earth, and God is going to join the two realms together.

THE EARTHLY REALM REQUIRES A RESURRECTED BODY

Paragraph C. He is going to join the heavenly and the earthly—the material, physical realm with heaven. This is the place where human process, human emotion, and physical sensation reach their fullest. One of the reasons that demons want to inhabit human bodies is so they can have physical expression, sensation, and emotion in a way they cannot separate from humans. They long to inhabit humans. It gives them a greater range of experience. The earthly realm requires a resurrected body because we have to have a physical body in the earthly realm because we are relating to a physical realm called the earth.

WE WILL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Roman numeral IV. We will stand at the judgment seat of Christ. I give three main passages here. You can read them more carefully on your own, but it is really important that we understand this. Romans 14:10-12: “For we shall all stand before God’s judgment seat . . . So then, each of us shall give account of himself to God” All—everyone—shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and everyone will give an account of what they did with their life after they were born-again. Only believers go to the judgment seat of Christ. The unbelievers go to the great white throne in Revelation 20:11. Unbelievers are going to be cast into the lake of fire. Believers go to the judgment seat of Christ.

THE BEAMA JUDGMENT SEAT

It is interesting that the word judgment seat is the word *bema* seat. This is a really common piece of information. Every time you read the judgment seat of Christ, you will run into this word *bema* because the *bema* seat would be compared to where the judges sit in the Olympic games. It is the place where the judges sit to evaluate and to give reward. The *bema* seat is the place where the trophies and the metals are handed out. The *bema* seat is very different than the great white

throne. Again, it is in Revelation 20:11 where the unbelievers go. We all stand before the *bema* seat to determine our reward from this life. The *bema* seat is a very positive thing, though there is some negative dimension at the *bema* seat, it is mostly positive. The point of it is to give rewards out. So that is what the judgment seat, or *bema* seat is; it is the reward seat, and that was a common word in the Greek culture. Everybody knew what a *bema* seat was.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:10: WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT

It says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “We must all appear”—every believer, all believers, not unbelievers—but all believers “must appear before Him so that each one may receive the things done in their body.”

What did they do with their personhood? What did they actually say and do? According to what was done, how were their deeds? When we do something, it is really significant. It is much more significant to do it than to think it, though motives matter. A person can think about giving way to sin, and at the last moment change their mind. It makes a world of difference both in their life here, as well as when they actually walk out sin, as we open the door for Satan. We give him legal permission to afflict us in a greater way. It is like we are handing the key to our life to him to a certain degree but not entirely. There are certain doors that he cannot get into in our life except that we open them, unlock them, and open them to him.

We do it by doing, by deeds, not by thinking. Thinking gets us in trouble, but thinking does not open a door to the demonic realm. Thinking does not cause us trouble at the judgment seat. Doing causes trouble, but it goes the other way too. A lot of people have good intentions. They want to be faithful to the Lord; they set their hearts to do this, and they do not actually do it. They do not get around to doing it. Doing is what matters in the highest arena. Motives do matter as well, but doing is where the real essence of our life evaluation happens. Good intentions are good, but good intentions without action are not so powerful.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:13-15: EACH ONE’S WORK WILL BE TESTED

OK. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15: “Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

The fire of God’s judgment will test if someone’s work, which he has built upon will endure. If it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up: a person’s work can be burned up means their life lacked maturity, obedience, and meekness. If we do not continue on into maturity, our works end up getting burned up.

It says here in 1 Corinthians 3:15 that the believer suffers loss, but he himself is saved as though by fire. He is saved, but he does lose what would have been his. There is a dimension of suffering loss for believers at the *bema* seat. It is the loss of what God desired for their lives, what He would have given them. One of the main ways that is expressed is by their limited capacity to know Him; still they are overflowing. When they meet the Lord, they get as much as

they can take. It is like coming out into the noonday sun from a dark room. Your eyes have to get adjusted before you can take the light. You can never look straight at the sun because our capacity for the light is so limited.

Our capacity to experience God will be limited. It will grow in time in the resurrection. Also our authority to impart the grace of God will increase. We will release the glory of God to others as well in a limited capacity. That is where the arena of the suffering loss is, we loose in terms of the capacity and responsibility in working closely to the Lord in the age to come. Now, again, in eternity our capacities increase. I want to go into the age to come with the fullness of all that God ordained for me, and nobody can give this to you. It is only between you and God. It is called follow through. A good word for faithfulness is following through. We follow through on bridling our tongue. We follow through with making a covenant with our eyes. We follow through in spending our money in a way that glorifies God and builds His kingdom. We follow through on resisting lusts of the flesh. We follow through on humility and servanthood. Follow through is what faithfulness is synonymous with.

GOD SETS GOLDEN CROWNS ON HIS PEOPLE

Roman numeral V. Looking at the passage that we looked at last week of Revelation 4:4: “Around the thrones were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.” Now we mentioned this.

DIADEM IS A CROWN OF A RULER, *STEPHANOS* IS A CROWN OF A VICTOR

Paragraph A is review from last week. There are two Greek words describing two types of crowns in the New Testament. The first Greek word diadem is the crown of a ruler; most of us are familiar with that word—diadem. Then *stephanos* is the crown of a victor. It is the athlete in the Olympic games who wins. That athlete in today’s world gets a gold medal, but in that world they got a *stephanos*, or a crown. They did not get a diadem. They did not become president of the nation. It was not a ruler’s crown. They got a *stephanos*, a victor’s crown because they ran the race, and they won the race. So the *stephanos* crown denotes a victorious athlete and not a political ruler. It is important to make a distinction between these two words because many Bible translations just put the word crown, and you do not know which one it is.

“STEPHANOS” IS THE VICTOR’S CROWN FOR THE ELDERS

Paragraph B. The Greek word describing the crown of the elders in Revelation 4 is a *stephanos* crown, which means the elders; it is not talking about a diadem as a king. They had thrones as a king, but this is a different type of thing than a king’s crown. It means they are being rewarded for gaining significant victories over sin in their earthly life. They ran a race, and they were victorious in the race. They resisted temptation over the years. It does not mean that they never failed. Obviously, they failed at temptation. There is nobody, not even Paul the apostle who did not fail. All of them had failed in temptation even as believers.

So we are not talking about sinless perfection. We are talking about normal, weak, and broken people like you and me—like Peter, James, and John who are really just normal, weak people

who have all the wrong tendencies. They have the tendency to give in, give up, and to just quit, and go with the flow with no effort. Peter, James, and John were all the same. People have this lie, this deception, and you do not want to buy into this deception because it will hurt your life: Peter, James, and John were different because they met the Lord.

We often think wrongly, “They were apostles, and their names are on the foundation stones in the New Jerusalem. Their names are there, so they must have had some special setup to where they did not have to endure temptation.” That is absolutely wrong. We think that certain personalities who have had a few supernatural experiences, or we think of certain people who God has called like the twelve apostles were somehow immune to the rigors of the real endurance to win this crown. This is a complete lie. The reason it is a bad deal to think this is because we look at the great men and women of history, and we think, “Yeah, but they were different.” We disqualify ourselves, and we take ourselves off the hook. We put ourselves into a category of not being accountable to press in, and that hurts us in our walk with God. We may not figure that out until we stand before Him, but we really suffer great loss with that mindset. Moses had tremendous experiences with the Lord; obviously, Moses had to make the choices for meekness and servanthood like everyone else. He even got angry a few times and got in trouble with the Lord.

TO LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT AND HINDRANCE TO RUN THE RACE

Hebrews 12:1-2: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin which so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

We have to lay aside every weight. We tear off every sin that so easily ensnares us. It is interesting that you cannot run a race with weights on. A lot of believers are saying, “I am going to go out and run, as if it is the Olympics—the finals. I am going to go run the mile run, or the marathon.” The marathon would probably be more appropriate. Imagine a top runner who says, “I am one of the top runners in the world.” The marathon guy gets up, stretches out, and then he puts ten-pound weights on each leg.

The guy next to him asks, “What are you doing?”

He says, “I am just, you know, weighing myself down. I am just exciting about this race.” They are looking and saying, “What are you doing? You have weights on your leg.” A few miles into it, no matter how good shape that they are in, their legs start getting heavy, and it is hard. It is far more difficult. Now weights are different from sins. It says, “Let us lay aside the weight and the sin” (Heb. 12:1). The sins are sins, and the weights are things that are legitimate. They are not in themselves sinful, but they slow down your progress in the Lord.

The Lord says, “In and of themselves, they are not wrong, but they do take you out of the race, and weights must be laid aside.” Many believers will find any Bible verse they can come up with

to enforce a life filled with weights. “What about this verse about grace?” They get every grace verse that they can to back up and justify a life filled with weights. They say, “This is not wrong. This is not wrong. This Bible verse . . . that is legalism.” They have this whole argument set up. They have weights all over them. The gun goes off, and they run the race. They are in the way back in the pack compared to where God would have had them. We are not racing against people. We are running a race against sin and before our destiny in God.

WE ARE NOT RACING AGAINST EACH OTHER BUT FOR OUR DESTINY

That is what the race that we are running is related to—our destiny in God and our calling in God. We are not racing against people. We are racing against the war of sin, selfishness, laziness, and comfort in our spirit. The idea is that for many people, it is not sin that takes them out of the race. It is the weights that take them out of the race. They work hard to find Bible verses to back up a lifestyle of passivity that they can call on fire for the Lord. They get a bunch of other people to agree with them, and they feel good about it, but they still lose the race, and their friends do too.

I do not want to feel good about a slothful, spiritual life. I am not looking to find some example in church history and say, “Wow. They are awesome, but they are different from me. I am different because they had the Lord touch them in this way, and I am off the hook now. I can just be a good American.”

I am not interested in creating a mindset to enforce compromise and passivity. I want to take the weights off. I want to confront the sin, and I want to run with endurance. You do not run with endurance for three months or six months. Endurance is talking about decades. We are going to stay with this thing. We are going to be men and women of the Word and men and women of fasting and prayer. We are going to choose the highest way forward in God. We are going to be people of meekness and servanthood, and we are going to stay with it for decades.

Someone says, “I do not have decades left. What do I do?” Use everyday between now and what you have left. There is only one thing worse than wasting seventy years—it is wasting eighty years. I have had people over the years say, “I am seventy. I am eighty. It is too late.”

I say, “Yeah, it is too late for you to run with endurance your whole life, but it is not too late to run the next couple years with endurance. Start now.”

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27: RUNNING THE RACE TO RECEIVE THE PRIZE

“Do you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

Now in a race where it is runner against a runner, then only one receives the prize; but in this passage, he is not saying that only one person receives it, and everybody else is second place, or less than that. That is not what he is talking about here. He is switching his analogy. Now he is not putting it one man verses another man in the marathon or whatever, or one woman verses another woman.

There is only one way to run the race to guarantee that you are going to win. In the kingdom of God, millions will win, and billions will not. Billions will not, but millions will because there is only one way to run. That is what he is talking about. He is changing his analogy. He is using the race where one runner wins and the others do not. Now he is saying, “There is only one way to do this thing because all the other ways will slow you down.”

THE STEPHANOS IS A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

He is going to go on and describe. He says, “You are going to run in a way that you may obtain the prize.” Now the prize is this *stephanos* crown. That is the prize to get a crown in the age to come. Paul really wanted the crown. He mentions it several times in his writings.

2 Timothy 4:8: “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” In 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul is in prison. It is the last one that Paul wrote, and Paul dies right after he writes it. He says, “Finally, the Lord has laid up a crown.” I mean, this is interesting because Paul knew in his spirit before he died that he actually got the crown. He knew it. Somewhere the Lord communicated to him. He is in prison in Rome. He says, “Paul, I approve of you. I am telling you before you get here just to kind of excite you between now and the final few weeks you have before you die.”

What an incredible revelation that he actually knew in this age that the Lord approved of him. It is as if God says, “You know what? I reviewed your application. I watched your last forty years. Yes, you are in. You got a crown.”

Paul answers with excitement, “I got it. I got it.” In the passage in Philippians 3, some of you are familiar with verses 12-14: “Now that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” It is as if Paul says, “I have gone hard for God, but I have not attained it yet. I have not attained what I am after yet.”

You think, “What is it that Paul had not attained?” He had not attained the assurance that he has this crown. So throughout his Christian life, Paul did not know. He says, “I do not want to get messed up. I do not want to be disqualified.” He says here in this passage where we are right now. 1 Corinthians 9:27, he says that he does not want to “become disqualified.”

In Philippians 3:11-12, Paul says, “I have not attained it yet.” I love this: here he is in prison his final weeks. He is writing 2 Timothy 4:8, and Paul basically says, “Timothy, I got it. The Lord has made it clear to me. I am going to receive the crown.” What an awesome way to provoke Timothy. Paul is saying, “I am going to die, Timothy, soon, but you run this race.” Now, here is what he is saying here.

RUN IN A WAY TO OBTAIN THE PRIZE

He says here in 1 Corinthians 9:24, he tells the Corinthians, “Run in such a way to obtain it.” There is only one way to run. Every one of us has a different assignment. It is the narrow road that few find; it is the narrow way that few find even in the kingdom of God! Many are called, few are chosen. Few find the narrow way. It is the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. It is a real one, not just the rhetoric of it. It is really the walking of it out.

There are so many twenty-year olds, or twenty-something years old in our spiritual family here. If the Lord tarries, if He does not come back for forty-fifty years, there are a number in our midst who may have four to five decades to go for this, and you have clear vision now. You have understanding. Many people did not have the understanding when they were twenty years old. You can get on this path, begin to run, and let decade by decade pass. All the money you make belongs to the Lord. Just because the other Christians use it on their own thing, you say, “No, I want it to be Your thing, God.” Your time is the Lord’s. It is not yours. The other Christian buddies say, “Hey, have grace. Kick back, relax.” I am all for relaxing a little here and a little there, but I am on a race. I am running a race, and there is only one way to run this race and that is to win it. The only way to run is with wholeheartedness. That is the idea.

In 1 Corinthians 9:25 he says, “Everyone who competes for the prize, every marathon runner is temperate, or restrained.” You can put the word restrained there instead of temperate. “Every marathon runner,” we will stay with that analogy, “is restrained in all things.” Underline the words all things. A marathon gold medalist is not wondering if they have to workout next week. A marathon world champion is trying to find every way to get a better advantage to be more prepared for the race. They are not reading books to figure out if they cannot workout and still be a medalist. It is not even on their mind.

Here is what Paul is saying (1 Cor. 9:24-27, paraphrased): “They will be restrained in everything. There is not one area in their life that a marathon champion is not restrained in. There is not one area. Everything in their lives is to train for that race. They do it to obtain a perishable crown. They do get a crown. They get a gold medal or a *stephanos* crown. They get the crown of the athlete in the games, but it is perishable.” In those days, the crowns were wreaths made of flowers or ivy or different things. In a couple days, even these wreaths dried up, but they wore them throughout the Olympic games. They had many different types of games that when they won, they wore it throughout the event, and people said, “Wow, he has that crown on” because it was just a wreath that they would wear. In days or weeks, depending on how it was made, it would perish. It just dried up and was gone. Wearing the crown was a big thing. Today, we have gold medals where people can hang on their wall if they want to. But then, once they die, it is over.

It is as if Paul asks, “Why is it that these world champions will bear every restraint to win a prize? Why do they do all this for a crown that dries up in a few weeks? Why would they do that?” Even in our modern-day gold medalists, it is over when they die. They do not get to bring that gold medal with them to heaven. Paul exhorts us, “But we have the opportunity to get an eternal imperishable crown. Why are we not temperate in everything? Why are we so into licentiousness, which is taking ‘liberties’ in order to live in compromise and to live at ease? Why does the athlete restrain themselves in everything for a nothing crown? We have an eternal crown, but so many will not run for that crown in a way where their lives are restrained. They just do not see it. They do not see the eternal crown.”

1 Corinthians 9:26: “I am not with uncertainty.” I love that. It is as if Paul says, “I do live my life with lack of vision. I have clarity. I know what I am after. I am going after that crown.” He had focus; he had a goal, and he had a methodology. His methodology, in a sense, was wholeheartedness. The question in his mind was not, “Lord, what will You let me get away with?” The question was, “Lord, how far will You let me go? How much power will You give me to abandon myself to You?” It is as if Paul says, “I run with certainty. I am really clear about what I am after.”

The Body of Christ needs a baptism of certainty to touch their mind and spirit. The Church today in our nation lives as uncertain as the unbelievers do. It is kind of, “Go hard a little bit, and take what comes.” Paul says, “I have a dogged tenacity to get this crown. I know what I am after.” Look at 1 Corinthians 9:27: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” Now he is talking about his own personal life, and he is talking about his earlier days before he was in prison in Rome and died.

Paul says, “I discipline my body.” This is the idea of being temperate. He disciplines his physical passions—that is what he is talking about. It does not mean that he just does pushups every morning. He is talking about his bodily passions, physical appetites, to keep them disciplined, and bring them under subjection to the spirit. Now notice Paul did not just wake up one morning and say, “Holy Spirit, I am now under subjection.” Rather, Paul admits that, “this is rigorous.” Paul’s flesh loved sin like everybody else’s body loves sin. He says, “I bring it into subjection to the Holy Spirit; here is why: I do not want to preach to others and then find out that I am disqualified from the crown. What good does it do that I preach with clarity and power, and then when I stand before the Lord I do not get the crown? What good is it if I am disqualified, but everybody thinks I am an awesome preacher and apostle, but God does not approve me for the crown of life at the end? What good is it? I am not taking any chances.”

Again, this is 1 Corinthians 9:27, he was not sure yet. In Philippians 3:12-13 Paul basically says: “I am not sure. I have not attained it yet. I do not have the assurance.” In 2 Timothy 4:8 he says, “I know I got it. It is coming.” Someone says, “Oh, I would love to hear that on this side.” Well then live like Paul lived, and you will hear before it is over. If we live with that kind of focus, we can be sure that the Lord has it in His heart to give this to us.

JAMES 1:12:

OK, I am going to take us to another verse. This is as far as we are going to get. You can just read the other notes. James 1:12: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.” Here is the key point of this verse: we looked at this earlier today. We will probably look at it Sunday again. This is the passage I was looking at Sunday when I was talking about the six stages to temptation, which is in James 1:13. Look at the next verse in James 1:14: “but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” When we are tempted, we can be drawn away and enticed by sinful desire. Then when desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin. When sin comes forth, it brings forth death.

James 1:12 is the main point that James is talking about, actually, his entire epistle is about verse 12 in reality. For five chapters, James is talking about the futility of this age and the glory of eternity, and the clear point for which James’ logic and argument are proving that which brings people to verse 12, and he is exposing that which stops James 1:12 in our life.

JAMES 1:12: “BLESED IS THE MAN WHO ENDURES TEMPATION”

Here is James 1:12: the grand verse of the book of James. This is what James wants. This is what he wants us to want, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation.” That is the verse we started with. James 1:12: “When he has been approved,” when the Lord approves him, when the Lord approves his promotion, he has to get the approval from the Lord directly in the age to come, “he will receive the crown of life, and God will give it to the people who love Him.”

Now let’s look at the verses just a little bit to get the flow of this, and we will just end with looking at a little bit of it. I want you to keep this verse in mind throughout the entire chapter, or really the entire book. Let’s look at James 1:2. He says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” Why? “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” The word patience is talking about endurance, steadiness. It is patience, meaning, not giving up. It does not mean being patient with the person who annoys you, who you live by and think, “that person really annoys me.” It is more than that. It is talking about endurance in the race. He says, “If you have trials, and you respond rightly to them, the trials affect your life in a way where it produces endurance in your life.” I think the New American Standard translation has the word “endurance” instead of the word “patience.”

JAMES 1:4 PERSERVERANCE, ENDURANCE, CHARACTER

James 1:4, “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Let endurance have its perfect work. Let endurance work in your character. Endurance means staying the course, staying steady on a committed heart. That is what endurance is talking about year in year out: staying the road of humility, seeking God, filling your life with the Word, and being spiritually minded. James 1:4: “Let endurance work in you, so that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing.” What he is talking about when he

means lack nothing is he is talking about James 1:12. At the day of judgment, that you will not be incomplete when you offer your life before the Lord because endurance is what you have to have in order to be complete on the last day.

TO STAND BEFORE THE LORD WITH NO REGRETS

When we stand before the Lord, the Lord wants to know, “Did we stay the course?” Did we, not did we get excited for a few months, but did we stay the course? Did we stay steady? Yes, everyone has weak times and failure times even when they set their hearts to keep their course steady. He is not talking about sinless perfection. What we want more than anything in life, whether we know it or not, is we want to lack nothing on the judgment seat of Christ day. We would say, “Lord, whatever it takes, get me ready so I can receive the crown on that day.”

That is what Paul is talking about. Paul did this many times. He is making a direct correlation to trouble today and reward eternally. If a person experiences trouble today, if a person responds in a godly way in humility, this will form their character where they will stay steady, and then they will get the prize at the end. That is what is on James’ mind. He says, “Do you see the guy opposing you today is directly related to preparing you for your crown in the age to come, for real? If you do not have trouble, you will not have the same measure of response to the Lord.”

I am thankful that God does not listen to me and take me seriously. I say, “Lord, I am different than other guys.” We all have this secret that we are different. We think that we do not need it quite so heavy. We tell God, “If you give me money, honor, ease, and everything easy—power and anointing easy—I am different than those other billion guys. I will just be godly. I just will, trust me.”

The Lord would answer something like, “You know, pee wee, I really like you, but you are like really delusional. If you do not have some trouble, and I give you all the increase, your heart will become weak in the spirit.”

“Oh, Lord. No. I am different. I am not like those other guys.”

The Lord might answer, “No, I love you. I want you to receive a crown when you stand before Me. You do not see, Mike, that the trouble in front of you that you have to resist.”

Even when the Devil comes and strikes, the resisting of the Devil increases the forming of humility in difficulty. Being patient, trusting the invisible God, choosing love in difficulty, and steadiness that forms our spirit in a mighty way when we just want to give up and choose not to—it is all those decisions of endurance that forms our spirit in a mighty way.

DIAMONDS FORM FROM PRESSURE

It is like the piece of coal that is down in the earth that is under pressure. After time, the coal becomes a diamond. A diamond is being produced in our spirit, and I am sure there is a piece of coal out there that says, “I do not want the pressure. I just want to be a diamond. Just make me a diamond with no pressure.”

Our spirit is being formed into a diamond-like; that is not an exact analogy, but our spirits are being formed with the brightness of the glory of God. We only do it through the choosing a thousand times a thousand. We choose meekness, love, and we say yes to the Lord. We are going to throw ourselves back into this, even when we are tired. No matter what, we keep choosing going back into it, and your spirit is becoming like coal being transformed into a diamond.

The Lord says, “James, tell them the pressure on that coal will produce something in them that will last forever. They will not regret it, and they cannot become complete without the pressure.” The pressure is critical because the way the human spirit is, our human spirits will quit. They will go the easy route if there is no pressure.

JAMES 1:5: “IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM”

Now it goes on in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him;” in other words, James is saying, “If you do not have”—he did not change subjects. He was not one moment talking about trials, and now he is talking about wisdom. We think about wisdom, “Lord, I lack wisdom on my career.” James did not change subjects; he is talking about lacking wisdom related to the trial. In other words, you could say lacking perspective of what is going on.

The Lord answers, “Do you lack perspective of what is going on?”

We answer, “Yes, I do not understand. I do not get it. It seems like everybody is beating up on me, and nothing is working.” Just so you know, that is how the whole human race processes his or her trials as, “Everyone is beating up on me, and nothing is working.” That is just really common for three billion out of three billion people on planet earth; that is how we all process pain, so it is not a unique insight that you have. Three billion people in history; believers, process it the same way counting the billion yet to come. James answer this question by basically saying: “If you lack perspective of how this trouble is helping you, if you really cannot connect with it, I understand that. Ask God for the spirit of wisdom and revelation to connect your heart with the trouble and the gold, or the diamond it is producing in your spirit, and how you will be blessed forever with that diamond or that spirit of endurance.”

James 1:9, “The brother in humble circumstance ought to take pride in his high position.” Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation. Now James is talking about a lowly brother. He is talking about social status. It is as if James says, “He has no social status. He has no honor, no authority. He has nothing to recommend him to anybody’s attention, that anyone would pay attention to him. If he is godly, let him glory in the fact that he is going to be exalted in just a minute. Let him glory in it right now.”

It is really hard to get a brother in lowly circumstances to glory in their exaltation if they would just respond to God in it. They are so in pain about their lowly circumstances. They are angry with God. They are mad at the guy who should have opened the door for them. They are mad at

life. James says, “Tell that brother that his eternal exaltation is moments away, and he can begin to glory in it right now even though he cannot see it, but if he will ask wisdom,” James 1:5, “he will get insight into it.”

JAMES 1:10-11

James says, “Let’s go to the other side. Let’s talk about the rich man,” James 1:10-11: “The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.”

Now, James is using extremes here. He is talking about a poor man who responds rightly, and he is talking about a rich man who does not respond rightly. It is as if James says, “You tell the rich man that he should glory in his humiliation. When things go difficult in his life, tell him to glory in the chance, take these opportunities to humble himself because the way he is going, he is living from strength to strength. Everything he has in his life is wealth and fame. It is so deceiving his heart as to what reality is about, he is so seduced by his bigness, and he does not know in his circumstances how little his heart is before God. When things go hard, when he has enemies against him, and when difficulties come, tell him to glory in the chance to be humiliated because that is his only redeeming quality that he can transfer to the age to come. He can make changes at the heart level, and it will count eternally.”

So James is really doing this massively politically incorrect statement. He basically says, “Low guys, start rejoicing in the fact that you have a great opportunity to get the crown of life. As believers, most of us do not have the distractions of the rich. Glory when things trouble you that drive you back to prayer, seeking God, and repenting of your sin. Whenever someone does this to you, though it humiliates you, glory in it because the way you are going, everything you are building is like a flower that is going to fade, and it is going to go nowhere tomorrow.”

I have seen over the years that guys get so excited if their ministry grows just a little bit. They get so euphoric and so intoxicated about their little ministry. It started with 100 people, and now they have 1,000. They are so excited that they almost feel disconnected from God. They are so consumed with trying to get it to go to 2,000 now. They are just networking, coming, going, and they have lost their life in God. They are so jazzed about getting their little world a little bit bigger, and that flower is going to pass away. That momentary glory means nothing.

So James 1:11, “For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers, the flower falls off, and the beautiful appearance of that man’s life will perish. So the rich man;” James is talking about the rich man who will not go deep in God. That is whom he is talking about. Some rich people do go deep in God. It is the exception. Most of the rich in the kingdom of God do not go deep in God. It is harder for a rich man to enter into the deep things of God. Some do it. I know a few rich guys who really have chosen the road of humiliation because they have all this wealth, but they have chosen humility and servanthood. It is really remarkable for a rich man to do this as believers.

James is begging them. He basically is saying, “Your wealth may last for forty years, but it will be nothing when you stand before God. All that will matter is the size of your heart. So when things go badly, thank God for some of the things that are happening, not that you want it to go badly.” You do not plan for it to go badly, but you take the opportunity to humble yourself. Now you can humble yourself without things going badly, but most people do not. I mean, the ideal is that we would walk in humility when we have high circumstances, not just low ones.

History says that most believers and unbelievers both do not walk in humility if they have a surplus of honor, fame, fortune and goodness. It is interesting that most of the Body of Christ in our nation is fixated on getting more surplus. The preaching, ministries, books, and seminars are all about how to get more, and how to get it now. It is completely contrary to James 1. There is nothing wrong with getting more as long as that is our main goal. We have to have a heart that endures temptation, endures it, and gets approved by the Lord through our few years on the earth.

We will end with James 1:12: “Blessed is the man who preserves under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” God promises that he will get the crown of life. The Lord will give it to him because he endured temptation because of his love and devotion to the Lord.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen, let’s stand. We have need of endurance. Endurance is not something you get for three or six months. Endurance is something that we do for years and years and years—God perfects endurance in us. I am going to invite any who would like prayer. I want those to come who are saying, “I really need grace for endurance. I need to choose it, not just one day show up with it.” We choose it.