

Running to Win the Crown of Life (Jas 1:12; 1 Cor. 9:24-27)

I. ENDURING TEMPTATION IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE

- A. The crown of life is the “crown for the way you lived” your life. It is not related to forgiveness but to our place of function in the Millennial Kingdom infrastructure. There are 2 Greek words describing 2 types of crowns in the NT. One is the crown of a ruler (diadem), the other is the crown of a victor (stephanos) who won a race in the Greek athletic games (Jas 1:12). God will only give the crown of life to those who He personally approves as being worthy of it.
- ¹² *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved (found consistent), he will receive the crown of life...promised to those who love Him. (Jas 1:12)*
- B. The Greek word for the “judgment seat” is the “bema seat” or the place to receive a reward. This concept is seen when an athlete stands before the Olympic judges to receive a gold medal. Paul viewed life as one long race that resulted in one appearance before Jesus, the “Olympic Judge.”
- ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10)*
- C. In our resurrected body we will all have different spiritual capacities and abilities.
- ⁴¹ *There is one glory of the sun...another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:41-42)*
- D. The crown of life refers to our capacities to experience to God’s glory (anointing of the Spirit) and the authority to impart it in our ministry to others in the age-to-come.
- ¹⁰ *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)*
- E. The crown of righteousness is given only to those who faithfully finish their life-long race having “endured temptation” in each area of their life as they engage in a sustained effort in their war against sin (1 Pet. 2:11). This is not the same as walking in “sinless perfection.”
- F. True spiritual reality is defined by the 8 beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12). Poor in spirit acknowledges our serious dilemma in needing a breakthrough in our heart. Mourning is to be desperate enough to be “extreme” in pursuit of it. Walking in meekness involves our strengths (time, money, etc.). Hungering and thirsting for righteousness includes embracing costly righteousness. Relating with mercy is treating with tenderness those who fail us. Being pure in heart pertains to our thoughts and motives. Being a peacemaker refers to the anointing to bring peace (reconciliation) to that which is out of God’s will (restoring relationships, bodies, finances, legislation, etc.). Enduring persecution as part of the counterattack for plundering Satan’s Kingdom
- ⁴⁸ *You shall be perfect (mature), just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)*
- G. The pursuit of 100-fold obedience includes making a *covenant with our eyes* (Job 31:1), *bridling our speech* (Jas 3:2; Eph. 4:29-5:4), *managing our time* (for service and prayer with the Word) *and money to increase the Kingdom beyond our comfort and honor* (Mt. 6:19-21).

II. PERVERTING THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S GRACE

- A. False teachers promote dark and deceptive doctrines of grace. They pervert the grace of God by reducing the message of grace to receiving forgiveness without repentance and seeking to make people comfortable about continuing in their sin. The grace message gives us power to resist sin.
⁴ *For certain men have crept in unnoticed...ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny... our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)*
- B. Many false teachers have a large following within the Church as they subtly distort God's grace.
¹ *There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed (ridiculed). ³ By covetousness they will exploit you (manipulate) with deceptive words...¹³ They are...carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you...¹⁴ They have a heart trained (experts in greed) in covetous practices... ¹⁸ For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error... (2 Pet. 2:1-3, 13-18)*

III. WE MUST NOT LOSE OUR CROWN

- A. Your crown can be lost by allowing teachers to seduce you with deceptive doctrines of grace.
¹¹ *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Rev. 3:11)*
⁸ *Look to yourselves, that we (you; NAS, NIV) do not lose those things we (you; NIV) worked for, but that we (you; NAS, NIV) may receive a full reward. (2 Jn. 8)*
- B. We can suffer the loss of the reward which God would have given to us for our faithfulness.
¹⁵ *If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved... (1 Cor. 3:15)*

IV. BEING COMPLETE IN JESUS – 2 ISSUES (JUSTIFICATION & SANCTIFICATION)

- A. Because of Jesus' work on the cross, we are complete in Christ. We are instantly made complete in Christ in our legal position (justification) at the moment we are born again. We progressively become complete in our obedience in our living condition before God (sanctification).
¹⁰ *You are complete in Him... (Col. 2:10)*
¹⁷ *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away...²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)*
- B. We are to be complete in our obedience (2 Cor. 13:9, 11; Phil. 1:6; Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:17; Heb. 13:20-21; Jas. 1:4); perfect (Mt. 5:48; 19:21; Jn. 17:23; Gal. 3:3; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28; 1 Thes. 3:10; Jas. 2:22; 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:10; Rev. 3:2); mature (Phil. 3:15); blameless (Lk. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:6-8; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thes. 3:13; 5:23; 1 Tim. 3:2, 10; 5:5-7; 6:14; 2 Pet. 3:14; without spot (Eph 5:27).
²⁸ *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man...that we may present every man perfect (mature) in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ To this end I also labor... (Col. 1:28-29)*

V. GOD'S LONG TERM PLAN IS TO PREPARE THE EARTH FOR HIS ETERNAL PRESENCE

- A. The centerpiece of God's eternal purpose is for Jesus to come back to fully establish His Kingdom rule over all the earth as He joins the heavenly and earthly realms together. God's purpose has always been for God and His people to live together in this way (Eph. 1:9-10).
¹⁰ *That He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. (Eph. 1:10)*
- B. God's long term purpose is to live with humans on this earth with an open display of His glory.
³ *Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. (Rev. 21:3)*
- C. God can only make His habitation on earth after all the nations live in obedience to His Word. This will happen for 1,000 years (one day to God) during the Millennial Kingdom.
⁸ *Do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord...a thousand years is as one day. (2 Pet. 3:8)*
- D. The Lord has chosen to select "His leadership team" to bring all the nations to obedience in the Millennial Kingdom from the time of Adam until Jesus' Second Coming (approx. 6,000 years).
- E. **Principle:** Jesus only selects leaders for His Millennial Kingdom who were faithful to Him during their life on the earth (when they chose to obey God in context to warring against lust).
- F. The mystery of God's government is that He binds Himself in part to the decisions His people make. For example, Solomon forfeited the authority that God offered him in the age-to-come.
⁴ *The LORD God chose me...to be king over Israel forever...⁶ He said to me (David), "...I have chosen him (Solomon) to be My son...⁷ I will establish his kingdom forever, if he is steadfast to observe My commandments..." ⁹ David said..."Solomon ...if you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever." (1 Chr. 28:4-9)*
²⁸ *In the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the Throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Mt. 19:28)*
- G. In our 70 year internship in this life, we have two issues to determine. First, do we want to be in God's family. Second, do we want to function in Jesus' government (initially for 1,000 years in the Millennium, then for all eternity). Our ministry in the Millennium has nothing to do with how much we accomplished outwardly in this age, but rather how much we developed inwardly.
Premise: our calling in the age-to-come is far more important than our circumstances now. Our calling then is determined by the growth of our heart now, thus our difficulty works for us.
¹⁷ *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (includes ruling in the Millennium). (2 Cor. 4:17)*
¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Rom. 8:18)*

VI. PAUL’S TWO PRIMARY ANALOGIES: RUNNING A RACE AND FIGHTING A BATTLE

- A. The two analogies that Paul used most in sharing his paradigm of the Christian life was to run a race (endurance) and to fight a battle (conflict).
- B. Paul saw his life as one long race that resulted in one appearance before the “Olympics Judge” at the Bema Seat of Christ. He compared his life to a marathon runner who was greatly disciplined.
²⁴ *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize (stephanos crown)? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown (stephanos), but we for an imperishable crown (stephanos). 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty (lack of focus)...27 I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)*
¹ *...Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus... (Heb. 12:1-2)*
- C. We must run in the only way in which we can obtain the prize (v. 24). The issue is in running the “right way” not in “outdoing others.” Our race is against darkness (not against others). There are plenty of crowns (gold medals) for all who are faithful. Paul kept his long term goals in view in a way that is similar to an Olympic champion (v. 26).
- D. In Phil. 3, Paul had not yet won the prize of the crown of righteousness because his life-long race was not yet completed. (Some champion athletes stumble at the end of a race they were to win).
¹⁰ *...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God...15 Let us, as many as are mature, have this mind... (Phil. 3:10-15)*
- E. Paul desired to receive the prize of the upward call (crown of righteousness/crown of life). Paul pressed toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ (v. 14). The “upward” call is the “highest” and most “heavenly” dimension of his calling in the age-to-come. Our prize is to walk in the fullest dimension that God has ordained for our calling (in the age-to-come).
- F. While in a prison in Rome (shortly before he died), Paul knew that he had won the prize (crown).
⁶ *I am being poured out (imprisonment) as a drink offering, and the time of my departure (death) is at hand 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, 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....18 The Lord will deliver me from every evil work (temptation and persecution) and preserve me for His heavenly (supernatural) Kingdom. (2 Tim. 4:6-18)*

- G. Many believe that Paul was in prison in Rome twice. His first imprisonment was a house arrest which lasted two years from 60-62 AD (Acts 28:30). During this time he wrote his “prison epistles” (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon). Paul's appeal as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:11; 28:19) was finally heard and he was freed. From Rome he probably went to Turkey and then to Spain where he lived for another two years. On his return back to Turkey and Macedonia, he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Not long after that he was imprisoned again in Rome during which time he wrote his final letter (2 Timothy) in the Fall of AD 67 just before he was executed in the summer of AD 68 (the same time that Nero died). The persecution under Nero started in 64 AD. The Philippian church was founded in 50 AD.

VII. JESUS CALLS US TO STRIVE TO ENTER THE NARROW GATE

- A. We are to strive to enter the narrow gate (live in complete obedience). Only a few follow through in sustaining this quality of life. We do not strive to earn forgiveness but to live in holiness.
²⁴ ***Strive to enter the narrow gate, for many will seek to enter and will not be able.* (Lk. 13:24)**
¹⁴ ***Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way...there are few who find it.* (Mt. 7:14)**
- B. Paul exerted much effort in seeking to live without any compromise before God and people.
¹⁶ ***I always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.* (Acts 24:16)**
¹¹ ***Let us therefore be diligent (make every effort, NIV) to enter that rest.* (Heb. 4:11)**

VIII. OUR PRIMARY LIFE PURPOSE: BECOMING COMPLETE IN OUR OBEDIENCE

- A. Paul labored so the saints would walk in full obedience as to be worthy of their highest calling.
²⁸ ***Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man...that we may present every man perfect (mature) in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor...* (Col. 1:28-29)**
- B. Jesus taught that those who teach others to observe all His commandments would be called great.
¹⁹ ***Whoever breaks (consistently) one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches (encourages) them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven.* (Mt. 5:19)**
- C. We are to pray for the saints to walk in complete obedience and thus, to be found worthy of ruling in the age-to-come. The Church is to have a vision for full obedience knowing that it has continuity to the age-to-come. This purposeful living challenges aimlessness so common today.
¹⁰ ***When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints...11 Therefore we pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling...* (2 Thes. 1:10-11)**
⁹ ***This also we pray, that you may be made complete.* (2 Cor. 13:9)**
¹² ***Epaphras...always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* (Col. 4:12)**

- D. We must see the relationship of gaining endurance (v. 3) to receiving the crown of life (v. 12).
² ***Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (endurance). 4 Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (in obedience in preparation for the Judgment Seat)...12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved (found consistent), he will receive the crown of life...promised to those who love Him. (Jas 1:2-12)***
- ¹⁸ ***For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Rom. 8:18)***
- E. John prophesied the End-Time Church would be prepared by the time of Jesus' Second Coming.
⁷ ***“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Rev. 19:7-8)***
- F. God will greatly increase the ranks of the faithful at the end of the age. Paul is not referring to the “glory” of being forgiven of all spots and blemishes but of the “glory” of overcoming them.
²⁶ ***That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:26-27)***
- G. Denying our lustful desires is the theatre God chose for us to express our love to Him. Each of us has a different struggle according to our personality and circumstances. Thus, we each have a different “assignment” from which we offer our gift of love to God.
²¹ ***He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me... (Jn. 14:21)***
- H. The Scripture exhorts us to live blameless in our obedience in this age.
¹³ ***I urge you in the sight of God...14 that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing... (1 Tim 6:13-14)***
- ²⁷ ***Pure and undefiled religion... is to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)***
- ²⁴ ***Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless (blameless in our character) before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy... (Jude 24)***
- ¹⁰ ***But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Peter 5:10)***
- ² ***Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God...4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. (Rev. 3:2-4)***