

# The Crown of Life

Understanding eternal rewards

## Have you been watching the Olympics?

What amazed me is how some of the athletes have devoted their lives to winning a medal at the Olympics. Todd Eldridge at age 30 has won 6 national and 5 world championships but no gold medal at any of the previous 3 Olympics. This fourth attempt would be his last and the pressure was too great on him so he failed to win.

## What does it take to be competitive as a world-class athlete?

Hard work, devotion, vision, and discipline...

1 Cor 9:25 - 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. As a world class athlete disciplines himself to be a contender, we to should discipline ourselves to obtain a reward that is infinitely more valuable than Olympic gold

## What is discipline?

Control to stick to a regime, not veering from the course we are on, not doing things to excess, being under the authority of another.

## We are going to take a look at this imperishable crown...

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.

## When you hear a verse starting out with “blessed is”, what do you think of?

This sounds like one of Jesus' Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount.

## There are at least fifteen allusions to the Sermon on the Mount in James, what does this tell us about him?

It comes from a man who knew the teaching of Jesus and took it seriously

## Who is blessed in this verse?

A blessing is pronounced on those who endure temptation.

## What are temptations?

- Temptations are allurements from a path toward God.
- In context here, these temptations are trials or afflictions (v. 2).

## How are temptations and afflictions related?

Bring faced with a temptation is a type of affliction and both are trials...

James 1:2-4 - My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

We are often faced with temptation when we are weak from an affliction. This is a tactic of the Tempter (see Matthew 4:3 when Jesus was weak in humanity from His 40-day fast being enticed to turn stones into bread.

## Will all who face temptation be blessed?

No, only those who endure temptation, those who with patience and constancy goes through all difficulties in the way of his duty.

## How can afflictions be a blessing?

- Afflictions cannot make us miserable if they are not our own fault. A blessing may arise from them, and we may be blessed in them.
- Those who “*know that all things work together for good to those who love God*” (Rom 8:28) know that God uses afflictions to bring about a greater good than was possible otherwise. For example:
  - Rom 5:3-4 - And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.
  - The hope that we have as believers can be infectious and God can use this to bring salvation to others.

## Besides blessing, what else does James say will be the result of enduring temptation?

Enduring through sufferings and temptations are the way to eternal blessedness represented by the crown of life.

## When will this crown of life be given?

When those who love God are approved or as the NIV says, confirmed.

## What does it mean to be approved?

Judged...

1 Cor 3:8-15

8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

13 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.

14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

### **What is the crown of life?**

It is the blessing of eternal life that all believers receive and represents rewards for our service in the Lord's work.

### **Will all our crowns be the same?**

- No, each will be unique, determined at our judgment so some will be more glorious than others will.
- How we respond to the testing of life in this world will have a bearing on what kind of reward we receive in eternity.
- Those who resist temptation will receive a reward but those who give in to temptation will suffer a loss of reward.

### **What impact will these degrees of rewards have on how each of us will spend eternity?**

It has not been revealed what we will be doing in eternity but Scripture says that we will reign with Him:

2 Tim 2:12 - If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, he also will deny us.

Rev 1:5-6 - Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Rev 5:9-10 - And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Our reward will be to what degree of responsibility and authority God gives us in eternity (see the parable of the talents in Matthew 25)...

Matt 25:29 - For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

### **Since there are degrees of rewards, are there also degrees of punishment for those who reject Christ?**

Yes, hell will not be the same for all people...

Luke 12:47 - And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

### **How long will we bear the crown of life?**

- The tried Christian shall be a crowned one: and the crown he shall wear will be a crown of life. It will be life and bliss to him, and will last forever.
- We only bear the cross for a while, but we shall wear the crown to eternity.

### **To whom is the crown of life promised?**

- To those who love God.
- The crown of life is promised not only to great and eminent saints, but to all those who have the love of God reigning in their hearts.
- Every soul that truly loves God shall have its trials in this world fully recompensed in that world above where love is made perfect.

### **Is resisting temptation what people do to obtain the crown of life?**

No, this determines the degree of blessing but the promise of the crown of life is not based on resisting temptation (James 1:12).

### **How may we receive the Crown of Life?**

By loving God and remaining faithful no matter what happens to us in this world...

Rev 2:10 - "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

### **How do we love God?**

By responding to what He has done for us... believing Him and receiving Jesus into our life accepting Him as Savior and Lord.

### **Who gets the credit for our loving God?**

God Himself...

1 Jn 4:19 - We love Him because He first loved us.

It is not possible to love God without His work in our lives...

John 6:29 - Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Certainly love is the first of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

**If we love God, what should our motivation be for enduring temptation?**

- Our enduring temptations must be from a principle of love to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ, otherwise we are not interested in God's promise (an attitude of gratitude).
- A man may for some point of religion even give his body to be burnt, and yet not be pleasing to God...  
1 Cor 13:3 - And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

**How do we know that God will keep His promise to reward those who love Him with the crown of life?**

Because His very character is at stake. It is therefore what we may most surely depend upon: for, when heaven and earth shall pass away, this word of God shall not fail of being fulfilled. Jesus said:

Matt 24:35 – "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

**When we receive our future reward of the crown of life, is this a debt that God owes us?**

Our future reward is not a debt, but by a gracious promise.

**What other crowns besides the crown of life does the Bible discuss?**

Let's look at them...

2 Tim 4:8 - 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.

**What is righteousness?**

Doing what is right, being justified in God's eyes, acting in God's will with His perspective.

**Who receives the crown of righteousness?**

Those who are acting in obedience and looking forward to the Lord's coming...

Matt 24:42 – "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."

**How do you look forward to the Lord's coming?**

Have an eternal perspective about what we think, say and do. Being ready to face Him at any moment either through death or at the end of the church age. Being aware that signs that His coming is near.

**Will all believers receive this crown?**

Yes, but like the crown of life, not all will be the same because some believers have looked more toward the Lord's return than others have.

**If you are not looking for the Lord's return, what are you doing?**

Allowing yourself to be consumed by the things of the world.

**What is the danger if you are not looking for the Lord's return?**

That you really are not saved and will not be prepared when He comes. See the parable about the 10 virgins in Matthew 25 where the moral of the story is to keep oil in your lamps (be ready by being indwelt by the Holy Spirit).

1 Pet 5:1-4

1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

**What is the crown of glory?**

Special rewards given to those who serve as leaders in the church.

**Is the crown of glory limited to pastors, elders, deacons, teachers and evangelists?**

No, we are all called to lead...

Matt 4:19 - Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

We all have someone in our lives that we need to act as a leader to bring them to God: a spouse, children, family members, acquaintances, friends, associates, etc.

**Will all pastors, elders, deacons, teachers and evangelists receive the crown of glory?**

If they are saved they will but not all believers will receive this reward to the same degree.

**So what is the criteria for receiving the crown of glory?**

To what extent believers have taken advantage of the opportunities the Lord has given us to win souls.

**What will we do with our crowns when we receive them?**

Use them to glorify God...

Rev 4:10-11 - the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."