

# The Crown of Righteousness

by Thomas Watson

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*The crown of righteousness is a reward of holiness that is laid up for the righteous person, who will wear it at the day of their death, and it exceeds all earthly crowns in its lawfulness, purity, and blessedness.*

**Scripture:** 2 Timothy 4:8

**Topics:** "Heavenly Rewards", "Christian Perseverance"

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## Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the promise of a crown of righteousness for those who honor God, emphasizing the need to find comfort and hope in the midst of loss and sorrow by looking to the heavenly reward. He encourages Mrs. Mary Hodges to make sure of her relationship with Christ, highlighting the importance of faith in securing the crown of righteousness and the union with Christ that death perfects. Watson explains the significance of the crown of righteousness, comparing it to earthly crowns and emphasizing its resplendence, weightiness, and honor. He delves into the conditions for wearing the crown, including the work, way, and armor of righteousness, urging believers to strive for holiness and perseverance in their Christian walk.

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## Transcript

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by Thomas Watson

A sermon preached on May 1, 1656, at the funeral of Thomas Hodges

"Those who honor Me--I will honor." 1 Samuel 2:30

To my honored friend, Mrs. Mary Hodges,

It was not my intention when I preached this sermon, that it should go any further than the pulpit. But seeing you were pleased to request me to print it, that I might herein gratify your desire and exhibit testimonial of that respect which I bore to your deceased husband, I was willing to make it more public, and may the Lord make it profitable.

You are sensible enough, I doubt not, of the late loss you have sustained. I therefore chose to treat this subject that I might revive you with the hope of future gain, not forgetting that saying in Proverbs 31:6, "Give wine to those who are of heavy heart."

The Jews have this form of speech at their funerals whereby they would cheer up the surviving party: "Let your consolation be in heaven." So I say to you, look up to heaven! Let the crown laid up for you, comfort you! May the Lord help you to make a sanctified use of this sad stroke of providence.

Learn, dear friend--to make sure of Christ--when you cannot make sure of other relations. Faith will contract you to Christ, and if your Maker is your Husband, death shall not dissolve--but perfect the union. We break our earthly comforts, when we lean too hard on them! but I must not expatiate.

I have here presented you with the sermon as I preached it, only I have cast in some few additional things which, through straits of time, I was then forced to omit. May the blessing of the Almighty rest upon you, and let that golden oil be poured out upon your posterity. So prays,

Your faithful friend and servant in the Lord,

Thomas Watson

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day!" 2 Timothy 4:8

The wise God, that He may invite and encourage the sons of men to holiness of life, is pleased to set before their eyes the recompense of reward, that if the equity of His precepts does not prevail, the excellency of His promise may. God will have His people to be volunteers in piety--not forced with fear--but drawn with love. Therefore He works upon them in such a way as is most alluring and persuasive. He would catch men with a golden bait, and allure them to obedience by showing them what is laid up in heaven for them. So says the text, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." A crown? Oh, infinite! For a delinquent to have a pardon is well--but to have a crown set upon him is no less rare, than stupendous!

A true saint has a double crown--one in this life, the other laid up. In this life he has a crown of acceptance. Ephesians 1:6: "He has made us accepted in the Beloved." Some render it, "He has made us favorites." Here is the crown of acceptance; and in the life to come a crown of righteousness.

The glory of heaven is represented in Scripture under various similes and metaphors. Sometimes heaven is compared to a place of rest, as in Hebrews 4:9. Sometimes it is compared to a house not made with hands (2 Corinthians 5:1). Sometimes it is compared to an inheritance in light (Colossians 1:12). In our text the glory of heaven is set forth by a crown.

The circle is the most perfect figure. This blessed crown encircles within it all perfection. I shall first break up the ground of the text by explanation, and then come to sow the seed of doctrine.

"Henceforth." First, it may bear date from the time of the Apostle's conversion, henceforth there is laid up a crown. As soon as a man is implanted into Christ, he stands entitled to a crown. Or, secondly, this word henceforth may relate to the end of his race and fight. Paul had run through all the several stages of Christianity. He had finished his course, and from henceforth, he said, there was laid up a crown. He knew his work was done, and there was nothing now remaining but to step out of the world--and put on his crown! "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

QUESTION. Why a crown of righteousness? It is a crown of mercy--a crown which free grace bestows. Why, then, is it called a crown of righteousness?

ANSWER 1. Negatively, not that we can, by our righteousness, merit this crown. The Apostle makes a clear distinction between a reward bestowed by merit--and by grace. Romans 6:23: "The gift of God is eternal life." Had the reward been by merit, the Apostle would have said, "The wages of God is eternal life." Alas! How can we merit a heavenly crown? Before we merit, we must satisfy the justice of God for our sin; but we have nothing to satisfy. How can finite obedience satisfy infinite justice? Besides, what equality is there between our service and the eternal reward? What proportion is there between the shedding of a tear--and the receiving of a crown? So we cannot, by our righteousness, merit this crown.

2. Affirmatively, it is called a crown of righteousness in a double sense. First, because it is a crown promised. Revelation 2:10: "I will give you a crown." Since God made this promise, it is a righteous thing to bestow this crown on us.

Second, it is a crown of righteousness because it is a crown purchased. It is a crown bought with the price of blood! It was so bought as it was given, else where was God's mercy? And it was so given as it was bought, else where was God's Justice? This crown swims to us through the blood of a Savior! When Christ was hanging upon the cross, He was purchasing a crown for us! And in this sense it is a crown of righteousness. It is righteous with God to give us the crown, which Jesus Christ has paid for so dearly.

3. This crown is said to be "laid up." The crown is kept in reversion. God does not presently broach the full vessels of glory. He does not presently install us into our honor. It is a crown laid up. The saints are heirs under age. God does not crown them until they are of age. The sons of kings are often crowned during their minority, some have been crowned in the cradle--but the heirs of glory must be of perfect stature before they are crowned. God will give His children the ring and the bracelets here--some of the comforts of His Spirit--but not the crown. We are all for immediate pay. We are still putting off our repentance--yet would be putting on our crown. God will have us wait awhile. The crown is "laid up."

QUESTION. WHY is it laid up? Why is not the crown presently put on?

ANSWER 1. It is not fit that we should yet wear it for two reasons:

1. Our graces are imperfect in this life. They are in their infancy and minority. Therefore we are said to receive but "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23)--not all of them. We have only some imperfect lines of grace drawn in us. Our graces are mingled with much corruption, as gold in the ore is mingled with dross. The most refined soul has some lees and dregs of sin left in it. The life of grace is said to be hidden (Colossians 3:3). Our faith is hidden under unbelief--as the corn is hidden under the chaff. Now if God should set this crown upon us in this life, He would be crowning our sins as well as our graces. Therefore, the crown is laid up.

2. It is not fit that we should yet wear the crown, for then it would take us away from doing our work. We would be idle in the vineyard. Who will take pains for a reward--when he has the reward already? Therefore, the crown is laid up. We must run the race--before we wear the crown.

ANSWER 2. The crown is laid up to make heaven sweeter. The longer we wait for our crown--the sweeter it will be when it comes. The absence of that which we desire, merely endears it more to us when we enjoy it. After all our sweating for heaven, all our praying, weeping, fasting--how welcome will a crown be! Therefore God, though He will not deny our reward--will delay our reward. It is a crown laid up.

QUESTION. But if this crown is laid up, WHEN shall we wear it?

ANSWER. This brings me to the fourth and last particular in the text.

"In that day." What day? "In the day of my death," said Tertullian. Justinus and others are of the opinion that the saints shall not receive this crown until the resurrection. But Jerome confutes this opinion.

The souls of the elect shall be immediately crowned with joy and felicity. The body, indeed, shall lie in the grave as in a bed of perfume, until the resurrection. That this resurrection shall be, is clear. Therefore it is that some of the ancients have called the grave a sleeping house because this body shall wake again. The Jews called their burying place--the house of the living--because they believed that life would come into them again at the resurrection. Until then, the bodies of the saints must wait for their glorification--but their souls shall be immediately crowned after death.

Why else would Paul desire to die--if he were not immediately crowned with glory? It would be better for believers to stay here--if they would not be immediately with Christ. Here they are daily improving their stock of grace; they are increasing the jewels of their crown. Though they sit in the valley of tears--yet God often turns their water into wine. They have many sweet tastes of God's love; they have the bunches of grapes. If Paul's soul should sleep in his body (a drowsy opinion), then when he desired to be dissolved he wished that which was to be his loss. But this crown shall be given "in that day," the day of our death. It cannot be half a day's journey between the cross and paradise.

The words fall into these three parts:

1. Here is a glorious reward: a crown.
2. The adjourning of this reward: it is laid up.
3. The people on whom it is bestowed: Paul and the rest of the believers. "For me, and not for me only--but for all them that love Christ's appearing."

DOCTRINE. The righteous person shall wear the crown of righteousness.

For the illustration of this I shall do four things:

1. I shall inquire who this righteous person is.
2. I shall evidence by Scripture that the righteous person shall wear this blessed crown.
3. I shall show you wherein this reward of glory is compared to a crown.
4. I shall show you wherein the crown of righteousness excels and outshines all earthly crowns.
  1. Who this righteous person is. A man may be said to be righteous in two ways:
    1. LEGALLY righteous. Thus Adam, while he wore the robe of innocence, was legally righteous. He had that law of holiness written in his heart, and his life was a living commentary on it. He lived exactly according to every institute of God, like a well-made dial goes with the sun; but this is lost and forfeited.
    2. EVANGELICALLY righteous. And this righteousness is two-fold.

There is a righteousness by imputation. This is as truly ours to justify us--as it is Christ's to give us.

There is a righteousness by implantation. The one is by the merit of Christ, the other is by the Spirit of Christ. Now this implanted righteousness is in the soul, as an intrinsic quality; and if it is of the right kind it must be there in three ways.

(1) Righteousness must be in the soul extensively, in every part. We do not call a black man white--because he has white teeth. Those are not said to be righteous who only speak righteously. What are these but white teeth? Righteousness, like a holy leaven, must diffuse and swell itself into every part--the understanding, will, and affections. "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Therefore grace is called "the new man," not a new eye or a new tongue--but a new man. Though a saint is righteous but in part--yet he is righteous in every part.

(2) Righteousness must be in the soul intensively. We call water hot when it is hot in the third or fourth degree. He is not said to be righteous who is tepid and neutral in religion. This was Laodicea's temper, lukewarm. Revelation 3:16: "I would you were cold or hot." It is as if God said, "I wish you were anything but lukewarm." Righteousness must rise up to some degree. David boiled over in holy zeal. Psalm 119:139: "My zeal has consumed me."

(3) Righteousness must be in the soul perseveringly. It must abide and continue. He is not a righteous person who is godly only in a passion, either of fear or joy. Hypocrites may seem righteous for a time, as long as the wind blows that way--but it is quickly over. They change quickly--like the herb whose leaves in the morning are white, at noon are purple, and at night are blue. Thus they change in their goodness and are of divers opinions, like Joseph's coat of divers colors. Hypocrites, for the most part, live to confute themselves. They are like one who has a good and hopeful beginning--but a bad end. I have read of a certain people in India called Pandorae, who have white hoary hair in their youth and black hair in their old age. This is an emblem of hypocrites, who at first look white and fair like saints--but in their elder years blacken in wickedness. The piety of these men was never ingrained. They are only to be judged righteous people who, with Job, persevere in godliness (Job 2:3).

There is a great deal of difference between the motion of a watch--and the beating of a pulse. The one is quickly at an end--but the other, proceeding from a vital principle, is permanent and constant. As long as there is life--the pulse beats. True righteousness is a spiritual pulse--which will ever be beating. So much for the first point, who this righteous person is.

2. The righteous person shall wear the crown of righteousness. James 1:12: "He shall receive the crown of life." Revelation 2:10: "I will give you the crown of life." By both Scriptures you see that a true saint, is an heir to the crown. The truth being so apparent, I may say, as they did in another sense, "Why do we need any further witness?" (Luke 22:71). I proceed therefore to the next point.

3. I will show you wherein the reward of glory, is compared to a crown. It is called here a crown of righteousness, and that in three respects:

A crown is RESPLENDENT. The royal crown, hung with jewels, is a splendid, magnificent thing. Thus the crown of righteousness is most radiant and illustrious. For the splendor of it, it is called a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). It must be glorious because it is a crown of God's own making. Sin has made us our crosses; God has made us our crown. What are all the beauties and glories of the world which have been esteemed most famous--in comparison to this crown of righteousness? They all fade by comparison. The glory of this crown is inexpressible. Were the angels themselves sent to heaven to give us a description of this crown of righteousness, they would sooner lack words than matter. But here I must draw a veil, as not

being able to give you the dark shadow of it. Nor can it be set out by all the lights of heaven, though every star were turned into a sun.

A crown is a **WEIGHTY** thing. So is the crown of righteousness. Therefore it is called a weight of glory by the Apostle. We think our sufferings are weighty; alas, they are light--in comparison with our crown. This crown of righteousness is so weighty that it would soon overwhelm us--if God did not make us able to bear it.

A crown is an **HONORABLE** thing. "You crown him with honor" (Psalm 8:5). Therefore, when King Ahasuerus asked Haman what should be done to the man whom the king would honor, Haman could think of nothing more honorable than the crown. "Let the crown royal which the king wears, be set upon his head" (Esther 6:8). A crown is not fit for everyone. It will not fit every head; it is for kings and people of renown to wear. What a great honor it was to wear the Olympic crown, to which the Apostle here seems to allude. A crown is a badge and sign of imperial honor. So this crown of righteousness is the sign of royalty and excellence. Only those who are born of God and have the royal blood of heaven running in their souls, wear this blessed crown. The men of the world may heap up silver like dust--but the crown of righteousness, God reserves only for those whom He has made kings (Revelation 1:6).

4. The last thing is to show you wherein this crown of righteousness exceeds and outshines all earthly crowns. This will appear in six particulars.

(1) This crown of righteousness is **LAWFULLY** come by. It is a crown which God Himself will set upon our head. "The Lord, the righteous Judge will give it to me at that day," says the text. Therefore it is come by lawfully. Other crowns are often usurped, as history abundantly witnesses. They may be called crowns of unrighteousness because they are unrighteously gotten. Julius Caesar was accustomed to say, that for a crown it was lawful to violate any oath. The saints do not have their crown by usurpation, but by election. They are chosen to a crown.

(2) This crown of righteousness exceeds in **PURENESS**. Other crowns are of a more foul, drossy metal; they have their troubles. A crown of gold cannot be made without thorns. Herein the crown of righteousness excels. It is made of a purer metal--there are no crosses or thorns woven into it. It fills the soul with melody; it banishes all sorrow from the heart; there can be no more sorrow in heaven--than there can be joy in hell.

(3) This crown of righteousness can never be lost or **FORFEITED**. Other crowns may be lost. "The crown has fallen from the head" (Lamentations 5:16). Henry VI was honored with the crowns of two kingdoms, France and England. The first was lost through the faction of his nobles; the other was twice plucked from his head before his death. Earthly crowns have many heirs and successors. How many have been disposed either by fraud or force? But this crown of righteousness can never be lost. God will not say, "Remove the diadem, take off the crown" (Ezekiel 21:26). This crown is set upon the head of Christ's spouse--and Christ will never depose His spouse!

(4) This crown of righteousness is a **NEVER-FADING** crown. Other crowns are like a garland of flowers which soon withers. "Does the crown endure to all generations?" (Proverbs 27:24). All outward glory passes away as a swift stream or a ship in full sail. Crowns wear away and tumble into the dust--but the crown of righteousness does not fade (1 Peter 5:4). Eternity is a jewel of the saint's crown! After millions of years, it will be as bright and resplendent as the first day's wearing.

(5) This crown of righteousness does not draw ENVY to it. David's own son envied him, and sought to take his crown from off his head. A crown of gold is often the mark for envy and ambition to shoot at; but this crown of righteousness is free from envy. The white lily of peace is a flower which grows in this crown. One saint in glory shall not envy another--because all are crowned. And though one crown may be larger than another--yet everyone shall have as big a crown as he is able to carry!

(6) This crown of righteousness makes a man truly BLESSED. Earthly crowns have no such virtue in them. They rather make men cursed. They are so heavy that they often sink men into hell! They make men's heads so giddy, that they stumble and fall into hurtful lusts. But this crown of righteousness makes those who wear it, truly blessed. The Hebrew word for "to crown" signifies "to compass round." Because the crown compasses those who wear it with heavenly felicity, the saints shall have a sight of God to all eternity. This is the encompassing crown. But besides, the saints shall have such communications of divine excellencies, as they are capable of taking in. This is the quintessence of blessedness.

Use 1. Information. And there are four branches:

BRANCH 1. It shows us that true religion is not imposed upon hard terms. God does not put us upon unreasonable things. He does not give us work--and then give us no reward. Behold, there is a crown of righteousness laid up! When we hear of the doctrine of repentance, steeping our souls in briny tears for sin, the doctrine of mortification, calling out the right eye--we are ready to cry out as they did, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" No, beloved, God's terms are not unreasonable. He never sets us on work--but we are sure of double pay. He gives us many sweet encouragements while we are doing the work. He often strews our ways with roses, "shedding His love abroad in our hearts" (Romans 5:5), filling us with joy and peace in believing (Romans 15:13).

He who has the least mercy from God in this way, will die in His debt. When we look upon the recompense of reward, which as far exceeds our thoughts as it surpasses our deserts, then surely we cannot say to God, as the man said in Matthew 25:24, "I knew you that you are a hard man." If a king should bid one take up his staff when it is fallen, and for that should settle a rich annuity upon him for life--would not this be a great reward--for a little work? When you have done all, as our Lord Christ said, you are but unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). What advantage do you bring to God? Yet for this poor, inconsiderable nothing--there is a heavenly crown laid up. Surely God does not invite you to your loss. You can never say that He is a hard master. Will Satan, who would discourage you from a strict, holy life--give bond to assure you of something equivalent to this crown? Saul said in another sense, "Will the son off Jesse give you fields and vineyards, and make you captains of thousands?" So, will Satan, who disparages the ways of God, give you crowns to possess? Will he mend your wages? Alas! You know what wages he pays. His wages are death and hell, and truly--the less of those wages the better!

BRANCH 2. See here that which may raise in our hearts a holy indignation against sin--which makes us forfeit our crown. Sin is not only hateful in its own nature--but it is the most horrid, ugly, deformed thing. This made holy Anselm say that if he should behold the pains of hell on one side and the deformity of sin on the other, and he must of necessity choose one of these two, he said, "I would rather throw myself into hell--than voluntarily commit one sin against God."

But besides the intrinsic filth that is in sin (it being the very spirit and quintessence of evil), this may cause in us an abhorrence of it: Sin would degrade us of our honor; it would pluck away our crown from our head. Think what the end of sin will be. As Abner said to Joab, "Will it not be bitterness in the latter end?"

(2 Samuel 2:26). If men, before they committed sin, would but sit down and rationally consider whether the present gain and sweetness in sin--would make amends for the future loss, I believe it would put them into a cold sweat and give some check to their unbridled lusts. Jacob took Esau by the heel. Oh, do not look upon the smiling face of sin--but take it by the heel! Look at the end of it. It will bereave us of our heavenly crown! And can anything counterbalance this loss?

When a man is tempted to pride, let him remember that this will swell his head so big--that the crown will not go on! Woe to the crown of pride! The crown of pride, will hinder him from the crown of righteousness. When he is tempted to lust, let him remember that for enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season--he hazards a crown for immorality. And is there as much sweetness in sin--as in a crown? When he is tempted to drunkenness (a sin that not only unChristians him, but unmans him), let him consider here that it would uncrown him of his reason, and afterwards uncrown him of his eternal happiness. When he is tempted to swearing, let him think with himself, "This is a sin which has nothing to render it delightful." Other sins have a show of pleasure and profit, which is the bait men are drawn with--but the swearer is brought to the devil's hook without any bait!

Oh! Is it not madness--for these unfruitful works of darkness--to forfeit heaven? How will the devil reproach and laugh at men! That they should be so stupid as to forego a crown for a rattle! They are like those foolish Indians who, for pictures and glass beads, will part with their gold. Oh! How should we hate sin--which will take away our heavenly crown from us!

BRANCH 3. See here the misery of a wicked man. Though he may flourish in his bravery while he lives--yet when he dies he shall not have a crown of righteousness--but chains of darkness. Death carries him prisoner to hell--it leads him away to be punished. The Egyptians, as Plutarch reports, at their feasts brought in a death's-head with this motto: "Look upon this, and proceed with your banquet." For the sinner who sports himself with sin, and crowns himself with rosebuds in the midst of all his mirth and music, here is a death's-head for him to look on! The day of death to him will not be a day of coronation--but a day of execution! How can the wicked rejoice? Theophylact used to say, "His estate is miserable who goes laughing to hell." We may say of this laughter, "It is mad" (Ecclesiastes 2:2).

Suppose you saw a man sitting in a rotten chair. Underneath him was a burning fire; over his head a sword was hanging by a slender thread; and before him was a table spread with a variety of delicacies. Surely he would have but little appetite to eat--sitting in such a danger. So it is with a sinner. His soul sits in his body as in a rotten chair. Diseases, like worms, breed there. Under him hellfire is burning. Over his head is not a crown--but the sword of Divine justice hanging. When death breaks this chair of the body, he falls into the fire--and this fire is unquenchable. A multitude of tears cannot extinguish it; length of time cannot annihilate it.

God has the keys of hell. The damned are bound hand and foot (Matthew 22:13), so that there can be no coming out. Oh, that this might frighten and stop men in their wicked courses! When they are dying, the wicked must say to their souls, "O my poor wandering soul, where are you going? What will become of you?" There remains nothing for sinners but a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (Hebrews 10:27). God will not say to them, "Come hither and be crowned," but rather, "Depart from Me--you who are cursed!"

BRANCH 4. It shows us, as in a Scripture glass, the happiness and nobility of a righteous person. In this life he wears a robe of righteousness--and after death he wears a crown of righteousness.

1. In his lifetime he wears a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). This is the righteousness of Christ in which he is looked upon as righteous as Christ Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are made the righteousness of God in Him. It is not said that we are made the righteousness of angels--but of God.

2. After death he wears a crown of righteousness. This crown encircles all blessedness within it. The saints are not perfectly happy until death--then comes the crown! Here we are but candidates and expectants of heaven. This is but seed time. We sow the seed of prayer--and water it with our tears; the golden harvest is yet to be reaped. The crown is laid up. When Croesus asked Solon who he thought happy, he told him of Tellus--a man who was dead. So a Christian is not perfectly happy until death--then the heavenly crown shall be put on! The Thracians used music in their funerals, and Theocritus observes that the heathens had their funeral banquet, because of the felicity which they supposed the deceased parties to participate in. When the mantle of a believer's flesh drops off--then shall his soul ascend in a triumphant chariot, and the garland of glory shall be set upon his head!

Use 2. Trial. Examine yourselves whether you are the heirs of this crown.

QUESTION. But how may that be known?

ANSWER. By this: if you set the crown on Christ's head while you live--He will set the crown on your head when you die! Have you wisdom to seek heaven, strength to do duties, resist temptations and bear burdens? You will not assume or arrogate any glory to yourselves--but let Christ wear the crown. Thus Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "I labored more than they all, and yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." This is the inscription on Christ's vesture and on His thigh, "King of kings" (Revelation 19:16). We do what in us lies to make Him King when we set the crown of all upon His head. A Christian takes the crown of honor and applause from his own head--and sets it upon the head of Christ. This is hard for flesh and blood to stoop to. A proud heart will not easily part with the crown. He will bid others bow the knee. But be assured, there's no way for us to reign with Christ--but to let Christ reign here.

Use 3. Exhortation. This exhorts us to three things:

1. If there is a crown laid up, it calls for our LOVE toward God. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us" to give us a crown. This is the highest ennobling of a creature. If there is love in a crumb, what is there in a crown! If there is love in pardoning mercy, what is there in crowning mercy? It is a favor that we poor vermin, worms and not men, should be allowed to live; but that worms should be made kings, that Christ should be arraigned--and we adorned, that the curse should be laid on His head--and the crown on ours, "Behold, what manner of love is this!" It is beyond all hyperbole. And should this not make our hearts reverberate and echo back love? Oh, Christians! Light your love at this fire! God having shone upon us in love, let our hearts burn in love to Him!

Our love to God must be divinely qualified.

First, it must be a GENUINE love. We must not love Him for something else, as a man loves a potion for health's sake--but as a man loves sweet wine for itself. We must love God for those intrinsic excellencies in Him, which are so alluring and amiable.

Second, it must be a VOLUNTARY love, else it is not love but coercion. It must come freely, like water from a spring. It must be a free-will offering, not like the paying of a tax.

Third, it must be an EXUBERANT love. It must not be stinted; not a few drops--but a stream. It must, like the Nile, overflow the banks.

Fourth, it must be a TRANSCENDENT love. It must be of no ordinary extraction--but a choice, superlative love. We must not only give God the milk of our love--but the cream; not only the truth of it--but the quintessence. "I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranates" (Song of Solomon 8:2). If the spouse has a cup which is more juicy and spiced--Christ shall drink of that!

Fifth, it must be a most INTENSE, ARDENT love. The sun shines as much as it can; such must our love to God be. It must boil over. What unparalleled love has God shown us! Oh, Christian! Answer love with love. In love we may, as Bernard said, reciprocate with God. If God is angry--we must not be angry again; but if God loves us--we must love Him again. Oh, love God the Father who has made this crown for us! Love God the Son who has bought this crown for us. Love God the Holy Spirit who has made us fit to wear this crown.

2. Let us pant and breathe after this happy condition. Does not the heir desire to be crowned? Here we have a weight of sin--in heaven we shall have a weight of glory. How should our souls be big with desire to be gone hence? What is the world we so dote on? It is but a spacious prison, and should we not be willing to go out of prison to be crowned? The bird desires to go out of the cage, though it is made of gold. Every saint is a true bird of paradise; he is ever flying up towards heaven in ardent and zealous affection; he longs to be out of this earthen cage of the body, when with the Phoenix he shall receive his golden crowns on his head, and shine in glory as the angels of God! Tertullian observes that Scipio, when his father had told him of that glory the soul should be invested with in a state of immortality, that Scipio responded, "Why do I tarry thus long upon the earth? Why do I not hasten to die?"

I think that, when we hear of this crown of righteousness which will so infinitely enrich and adorn the soul--it should make us be weary of this world and long for the time of our solemn coronation. How did Paul desire to be depart and be with Christ? Would not man be willing to hoist up sails and cross the waters, though troublesome, if he were sure to be crowned as soon as he came ashore? Why are our souls so earthly? We love to be grazing in the world's full pastures, and are afraid to die. Most men look so ghastly at the thoughts of death, as if they were rather going to the cross than the crown. Oh, long for death! The Apostle calls death a putting off of our earthly clothes (2 Corinthians 5:4). This is all death does to us, if we are in Christ--it puts off our clothes and puts on a crown! This should make us say, as did Hilarion, "Go out, my soul, go out. Why do you tremble? You are going to receive a crown!" A believer, at death, will be the happiest loser--and the happiest gainer. He will lose his sins; he will gain eternal glory. The day of death is the saint's coronation day!

3. Learn to so conduct yourselves, that this crown of righteousness may be set upon your heads when you die.

QUESTION. How do we do that?

ANSWER. Do three things:

1. If you would wear the crown of righteousness, find in your hearts the WORK of righteousness, Isaiah 32:17. This work of grace in you, must be evidenced by a mighty change, which is sometimes called an engrafting, sometimes a transforming. Grace makes a metamorphosis; it produces in the soul a likeness to Christ. First there must be a consecrating work before a crowning work. We read in Scripture of the

solemn inauguration of their king. First they anointed them and then they crowned them. "Zadok the priest took a horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon" (1 Kings 1:39), and after that he was crowned. So there must be the unction of the Spirit: first God pours on us the anointing oil of grace, and after the horn of oil comes the crown of glory.

2. If you would wear the crown of righteousness, then walk in the WAY of righteousness (Proverbs 12:28). This is called in Scripture a walking after the Spirit (Romans 8:1). The people of Israel walked after the pillar of fire; and the wise men walked after the star--whichever way the star went, they went. And sometimes it is called a walking by rule (Galatians 6:16). Those who expect a golden crown, must walk by a golden rule. Be sure you walk with David's candle and lantern in your hand, "Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path." (Psalm 119:105). He who walks in the dark may soon be out of the way. Walk soberly in acts of temperance, righteously in acts of justice, and godly in acts of piety. Walk as Christ did upon earth. His life was purer than the sunbeams, as one said. Copy His life in yours. Be assured, that you shall never partake of the privilege of Christ's death, unless you imitate the pattern of Christ's life. Would you wear the crown of righteousness? Walk in the way of righteousness. But alas, this is a very untrodden way:

(1) Some know the way of righteousness but do not walk in it; like the Grecians of whom Plutarch speaks; they knew what was honest, but did it not.

(2) Others commend the way of righteousness, but do not walk in it; like those who taste and commend the wine but do not buy.

(3) Others walk contrary to the way, instead of walking in the way. They are good only at crossing the way; they oppose the way of righteousness. Such are persecutors (2 Timothy 3:8).

(4) Others walk a few steps in the way--and then go back again. These are apostates (2 Timothy 4:10), as if there were any going to heaven backwards!

(5) Others walk half in the way--and half out of the way. These are loose professors who, under a notion of Christian liberty, walk carelessly and presumptuously, crying up justification so that they may weaken the power of sanctification. They can take that liberty which others tremble to think of. Surely, were there no other Bible read but the lives of some professors, we would read but little Scripture there!

(6) Others walk soberly for a while in the way--but all of a sudden, drinking in the poison of error, begin to be intoxicated with novel and dangerous opinions, who, as the Apostle said, "have turned aside after Satan" (1 Timothy 5:15). Ignatius calls error "the invention of the devil!" Basil calls it a "spiritual drunkenness," and when the head is giddy the feet must reel. Loose principles breed loose practices.

(7) Others, instead of walking in the way, traduce and slander the way of righteousness. "The way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2); or, as it is in the Greek, it shall be blasphemed. The men of the world say that the way of righteousness is a solitary way, and makes those who walk in it, melancholy; and that they must expect to lose their joy by the way. These forget that golden saying of Augustine that when a man is converted and turned to God, his joy is not taken away--but changed. It is more sublime and pure. And does not Solomon tell us that "all the ways of God are pleasantness" (Proverbs 3:17)? Take the most difficult part of the way of piety, and--it is pleasant walking. Holy weeping seems at first very unpleasant and disconsolate--but how often, while the saints weep for sin, does the Lord make them weep for joy! While the water of repentance, like rose-water, drops from the eye--it sends forth a sweet fragrance which

refreshes the soul with inward consolation. Oh, what green branches! What full clusters of grapes hang all along as we are walking in the way of righteousness! How, then, dare men besmirch us with their false charges!

(8) Others creep in the way; they do not walk. They go on but very slowly. Those who look on, can hardly tell whether they make any progress or not. They are dull in their heavenly motion.

(9) Others walk quite beside the way. These are profane people who dedicate their lives to Bacchus, who border every step they take upon the devil's confines! They are like Asa, diseased in their feet. They walk, as the Apostle said, disorderly, like soldiers who march out of rank and file. Jesus Christ not only sends forth blood out of His sides to redeem us--but also water to cleanse us (1 John 5:6). They who do not have the power of the one to sanctify, question the benefit of the other to save.

Oh! All you who would wear the crown of righteousness, walk in the way of righteousness. Labor to keep up the credit of religion in the world. Walk exactly. Walk so that if we could suppose the Bible to be lost--it might be found again in your lives!

3. If you would wear the crown of righteousness, put on the ARMOR of righteousness (2 Corinthians 6:7). The meaning is this: if you will have this crown--you must fight for it. Paul said, "I have fought the good fight," a metaphor, as Chrysostom and Ambrose observe, taken from wrestlers who, when they had gotten the victory, were crowned. It is the crown of victory; therefore the saints in glory are set forth with palms in their hands in token of victory. Christians must strive like Olympian combatants. They must not only be adorned with the jewel of knowledge--but armed with the breastplate of faith. Satan is a lion in the way, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith." 1 Peter 5:8-9.

This crown is worth contending for. A Christian most shines, in his spiritual armor. This is his sacred warfare. The crown is set upon the head of the conqueror. Those dainty, silken professors who live at ease, and will not make the least fight against the enemy, shall have no crown--but will be discarded as cowards. Lycurgus would have no man's name written upon his sepulcher, but he who died manfully in war. God will write no man's name in the book of life, but he who dies fighting. When the saints, after all their spiritual battles, shall come to heaven as conquerors, then shall their ensigns of honor be hung up; then shall the crown of righteousness be set upon their head!

Let this put spurs to our sluggish hearts and make us act with all our might for God. What, wrestling? What, sweating? How should we provoke ourselves to holiness! How should we spend and be spent for Christ! How should we strive to bring in some crown revenues to our Lord and Master--when we consider how infinitely it shall be rewarded! While we are laying out for God, He is laying up for us; henceforth there is a crown laid up. How should this crown add wings to prayer, and oil to the flame of our zeal! O Christian, let your head study for Christ; let your tongue plead for Him; let your hands work for Him! "What honor and dignity has been done to Mordecai?" said King Ahasuerus (Esther 6:3). Inquire what has been done for God.

I think we should sometimes go aside into our closets and weep to consider how little work we have done for God. Beloved, what a vast disproportion there is between our work--and our reward; between our sweat--and our crown. And It is but a while, a very little while, before the crown shall be put on. "The time is short!" said the Apostle. We are ready to strike sail--we are almost at shore--and then we shall be crowned. Oh! Improve the present season for the glory of God. The crown is near by; you must sail

speedily and work rapidly.

And that I may quicken your obedience, consider this: the more work you do for God, the bigger crown you shall wear. There are degrees of glory. He who with his pound gained five more--was made ruler over five cities. But he who with his pound gained ten--was made ruler over ten cities. As one star differs from another in glory, so one crown differs from another in glory. If there are degrees of torment in hell, thereby, for the same reason, there are degrees of glory in heaven. That there are degrees of torments is evident from Luke 20:47: "Who for pretense make long prayers, the same shall receive greater damnation." They who wrap sin in a religious mantle, or who blame God for their wickedness, shall have a hotter place in hell. Just so--there are gradations in happiness. How, then, should we abound in work, seeing we shall exceed in reward!

Use 4. Consolation. Here is a gospel honeycomb, dropping comfort into the hearts of the godly. How may this alleviate all the afflictions of this life, and make these bitter waters of Marah, become sweet and pleasant to drink of! There is a crown laid up! A Christian in this life has something to grieve him--and yet something to comfort him. A true saint is an heir of the cross. If he wears any robes--they are bloody. If he wears any crown--it is one of thorns. But here is that which may sweeten his sufferings; here is sweet wine mingled with his bitter myrrh--he shall be crowned in paradise! This, my brethren, may change our mourning--into melody; and our tears--into triumph! Though we bear the cross, we shall wear the crown!

Our sufferings cannot continue long. If our life is short--our sufferings cannot be long. Oh, how may this sweeten all the bitter cups we drink of! Cleopatra put a jewel in her cup which contained the price of a kingdom. When we are drinking in our wormwood cup--let this jewel be put into our cup to make it go down more pleasantly--we will shortly have an eternal reward of glory! Though death is in the cup--sugar lies at the bottom!

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day!" 2 Timothy 4:8

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