

The Fight of Faith Crowned

by Thomas Watson

Thomas Watson's sermon highlights the Christian's battle of faith and the glorious rewards that await those who endure to the end.

Scripture: Exodus 19:22, Romans 8:18, Romans 8:37, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Ephesians 6:16, Philippians 4:13, 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 1:12, 2 Timothy 4:7, 1 Peter 5:4

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Persevering Faith"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches a powerful sermon on the Christian's combat and crown, emphasizing the importance of fighting the good fight of faith with courage, constancy, and the hope of receiving a crown of righteousness. He delves into the spiritual armor and weapons needed for the battle against the lusts of the flesh, Satan, and the enchantments of the world. Watson encourages believers to persevere in the faith, finish their course, and keep the faith to receive the eternal crown of glory laid up for them in heaven. He also honors the memory of the late Mr. Henry Stubs, a holy and faithful minister, highlighting his humility, integrity, earnestness in preaching, charitable heart, and devotion to God.

Transcript

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by Thomas Watson

(A sermon preached at the funeral of that eminently holy pastor, Mr. Henry Stubs, 1678)

Christian Reader,

It was not my intent to have this message appear publicly--but being requested by the near relations of this worthy deceased minister to print my sermon (which by their appointment was preached), I knew not well how to withstand their importunity. Indeed, I was more willing to let these lines be published--that I might raise a pillar of remembrance to the precious name of Mr. Stubs.

The subject matter treated is the Christian's combat and crown. Oh, this blessed crown cannot be fully penciled out in its orient colors--though an archangel should take the pencil! The Roman emperors had three crowns set upon their heads. The first was of iron, the second of silver, and the third of gold. God sets three crowns upon the elect: grace, joy, and glory. What should we thirst after -- but this incomprehensible bliss! If our thoughts dwelt above, we would live sweeter lives! The higher the lark

flies--the sweeter it sings.

Cyprus was anciently called Macaria, the blessed island--but it is more true that heaven is the blessed island. Heaven is a place where sorrow cannot live--and joy cannot die! It may be compared to the fields of Sicily where there is continual spring and flowers all the year long. Could our meditations mount up to the empyrean delights, how would the world disappear and shrink into nothing! To those who stand upon the top of the Alps, the great cities below seem as little villages. After Paul was enrapt into the third heaven, the world was crucified to him (Galatians 6:14). When worldly things are in their highest meridian of glory--they hasten to a sunset. Let us live more in the altitudes, and take a prospect of our eternal felicities. What can be more delicious or sacred--than to have Christ in our heart, and the crown in our eye!

I have inserted something more into this sermon than straits of time would permit in the delivery. If it kindles holy ardors in the breasts of any and quickens their pace in the way to heaven, I have my wish. That this may be effected is the prayer of him who is

Your friend and servant in the gospel,

Thomas Watson

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!" 2 Timothy 4:7-8

These words were spoken by Paul, the aged, not long before his death. Verse 6 says, "I am now ready to be offered," or, as the Greek word signifies, "to have my blood poured out in sacrifice." What a comfort it was to make this noble declaration before his departure: "I have fought a good fight!" The text falls into three parts:

1. Paul's courage--"I have fought a good fight."
2. Paul's constancy--"I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."
3. Paul's crown--"Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

Here is a large field, and I can but pluck a few ears of corn. I begin with the first part of the text.

1. Paul's COURAGE--"I have fought a good fight." That is, "I have fought to an agony." Observe, first, that a Christian's life is military. 1 Timothy 1:18 says, "That you may fight a good warfare." A saint's life is not delicate and slothful--but like the soldier's life:

(1) In respect to **HARDSHIP**. A soldier does not have his soft bed or daily fare, but undergoes tedious marches; and such is the Christian life. 2 Timothy 2:3 says, "You, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." We must not be delicate, silken Christians--but expect to wrestle with difficulties. The naked neck is too soft and tender to bear the cross of Christ.

(2) In respect to **WATCHFULNESS**. A soldier gets up to his watchtower and sends abroad his scouts for fear the enemy may surprise him. A Christian must stand sentinel and be ever on his guard. It was Christ's watchword, Mark 13:37, "I say to you all--watch!" When you have prayed against sin--watch against temptation.

(3) In respect to COMBAT. 1 Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight of faith." In order to fight, a Christian must get his armor and weapons ready.

He must get his ARMOR ready. The care of most is to get riches, not armor. There are two things absolutely needful--food and armor. It is necessary to get Christ for our food--and grace for our armor--without which there is no abiding the day of trial. A soldier who wears his prince's colors but has no armor, will soon flee the field. If you wear Christ's colors but have not the armor of God upon you, you will turn your backs in the day of battle. There are two chief pieces of the spiritual armor.

First, the HELMET is divine hope. 1 Thessalonians 5:8: "For a helmet--the hope of salvation." A helmet is to defend the head so that it is not hurt. So the hope of salvation as a helmet defends a person and makes him lift up his head in the greatest dangers. Christians, be sure you get the right helmet, because the helmet of hope may be counterfeited.

The first deceit of the helmet, or a false hope--is DEAD hope. Hypocrites have a faint wish for heaven. They hope for heaven--but exert no activity in working out salvation. True hope is a "lively hope" (1 Peter 1:3). True hope of glory sets the affectations on fire, and adds wings to the endeavor.

A false hope is an UNCLEAN hope. A man hopes--but continues in his sins. It is vain to speak of hopes of salvation--and have the marks of damnation! True hope is a helmet made of pure metal. 1 John 3:3: "He who has this hope purifies himself."

A false hope is VANISHING. It is not a helmet--but a spider's web. The least terror of conscience makes it vanish. But a true hope is permanent. Proverbs 14:32: "The righteous has hope in his death." In a dying hour--his hope is in a living God.

Quintian the persecutor commanded one of his men to cut off the breasts of Agatha, a martyr. "Do your worst, tyrant," said the martyr, "yet I have two breasts which you cannot touch. The one is of faith, the other of hope." Oh, get the right helmet! The devil laughs at hypocrites who are deceived with false armor. A fool is content with a paper helmet.

The second piece of the spiritual armor is the BREASTPLATE, which is love. "Putting on the breastplate of love" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). This breastplate is inseparable; it may be shot at--but it cannot be shot through, Song of Solomon 8:7. A soul armed with love will go through a sea and a wilderness and will die in God's service.

A Christian must get his WEAPONS ready.

Ephesians 6:16: "Above all things taking the shield of faith." A shield is of great use. It defends the head, it guards the vital organs, and it keeps the arrow from entering into the body. The shield of faith defends the heart and beats back the fiery darts of temptation. A Roman soldier resisted Pompeii's army until he had over a hundred darts sticking in his shield. Hold forth the shield of faith--and nothing can hurt you.

Ephesians 6:17: "The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." It is good for a soldier to be well skilled in his weapon. The Word of God is a weapon to stab lust at the heart! It is observable that when the devil tempted our Savior he ran to Scripture and said, "It is written" three times. Christ wounded the old serpent with this spiritual weapon!

Having gotten into this warlike posture, a Christian must enter the arena and fight the good fight of faith. In the future life, the saints shall be out of the noise of the drum and cannon, and not one more stroke shall be struck. Then they shall not appear in their armor--but in their white robes and with palm branches in their hands in token of victory. But here on earth, they must fight the Lord's battles, and have no cessation of the warfare, until death.

There is a threefold enemy which they must encounter:

The first regiment is the lusts of the flesh, which war against their souls (1 Peter 2:11). The flesh is a sly internal enemy and least suspected. An enemy within the walls of the castle is most dangerous.

Luther said he feared his own heart, more than Pope or Cardinal. The heart is the fomentor of sin. It mints evil thoughts--and blows up the coals of fiery passions. It is the Trojan horse out of which comes a whole army of lusts! Shall we not fight the good fight, and discharge with the fire of zeal against this bosom traitor, the flesh! The primitive Christians chose rather to be destroyed by lions without--than by lusts within!

The second regiment to be resisted is Satan and the infernal powers. 1 Peter 5:8: "Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion prowls about." He walks about not as a pilgrim--but a spy who narrowly observes. Satan, like an ambusher, lies in a bush, and his design carries death in the front, "seeking whom he may devour." He tempts one man to be drunk--another to immorality. He sets kingdoms quarreling that at last he may devour them, like the person who sets two gamecocks to fight, so that once they have killed each other he may sup with their carcasses. Does this hellish Goliath come into the field and defy the living God? Shall not some spear be lifted up against him? 1 Peter 5:9: "Resist him, standing firm in the faith."

The third regiment Christians must fight against, is the enchantments of the world. The world is a flattering enemy. It kills by embracing. Worldly things hinder our passage to the holy land. They choke good affections--like the earth puts out the fire. Whom the world kisses--it betrays! Heliogabalus made ponds of sweet water to drown himself and gilded poisons to poison himself. Just so, the world destroys millions with her sweet waters of pleasure--and her gilded poisons of riches. Let us then gird on our armor and fight valorously.

For good reason we should fight the fight of faith--because we carry rich treasure about us. He who carries precious jewels with him, should be in a fighting posture. We carry a precious soul about us. If the cabinet of the body is so wonderfully wrought and embellished (Psalm 139:15), then what is the jewel in it! The soul is a spark and beam of celestial brightness, a blossom of eternity; and shall not we, by our martial prowess and chivalry, defend this treasure? To be robbed of the soul is an irreparable loss. God (said Chrysostom) has given you two eyes. If you lose one, you have another; but you have only one soul and if you are robbed of that, you are undone forever!

USE. Is the Christian life military? To blame, then, are they who have no spiritual weapons, nor do they make one skirmish against the enemy. It is death to go abroad unarmed. People spend time in dressing themselves by the looking-glass and putting on their jewels--but do not put on their sacred armor. They take the timbrel and harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ--as if they were rather in a play-house, than in battle. Lycurgus would have no man's name written upon his tomb, but he who died manfully in war. God writes no man's name in the Book of Life, but he who dies fighting the good fight of faith!

Give battle to sin and Satan, and pursue them with a holy malice. To encourage you in the fight, let these things be weighed:

1. It is a good fight. It is a lawful war. Princes may commence a war to invade other men's rights and properties--but God has proclaimed war against sin. Colossians 3:5: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."
2. We have a good captain. Jesus Christ is the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). If a flock of sheep has a lion for their captain--they need not fear the wolf. Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). He not only leads us on in our march--but helps us in the fight. A captain may give his soldier armor--but he cannot give him strength. Christ animates and strengthens us (Isaiah 41:10). He puts His spirit within us, and so we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).
3. Our enemy, Satan, is beaten in part already. Christ has given him his death's wound upon the cross (Colossians 2:15). The devil may roar against a child of God--but shall not hurt him. He could not touch Job's life, much less his soul; therefore, fear not. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Satan is a conquered enemy. He knows no march, but running away.
4. Fighting is the best way to have peace. By sitting still, we tempt the enemy to fall upon us and wound us. Our peace is preserved by war with Satan. He who has been skirmishing all day may take David's pillow at night and say, "I will lay me down in peace."

QUESTION. How may we fight the good fight so as to overcome?

ANSWER. Let us fight in the strength of Christ. Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Grace itself, if it is not strengthened by Christ -- will be beaten out of the field. Some fight against sin in the strength of their vows and resolutions--and so are foiled. We must go out against our spiritual antagonists in the strength of Christ--like David went out against Goliath in the name of the Lord (1 Samuel 17:45). "The saints overcame the accuser of the brethren--by the blood of the Lamb" Revelation 12:11.

We must fight on our knees by prayer. Prayer whips the devil. The arrow of prayer, put into the bow of the promise and shot with the hand of faith, pierces the old serpent. Prayer brings God over to our side, and then we are on the strongest side. Let us pray that God will enable us to overcome all our ghastly enemies. While Joshua was fighting, Moses was praying on the mount (Exodus 17:11). So while we are fighting, let us be praying (Ephesians 6:13-18). The way to overcome is upon our knees.

2. Paul's CONSTANCY--"I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." It is as if Paul should say, "I have finished my course. I have run out nature's lease. I have come to the ordained end of life, and am stepping into eternity. I have kept the faith, that is, I have kept the doctrine of faith. I have lived the life of faith."

Observe, Christians should hold on until they come to the finishing of their faith. It is not enough to begin well, to put forth fair blossoms of religion at first--but we must continue firm to the end. This is the glory of a Christian--not only to hold forth the truth--but to hold fast the truth. It is a beautiful sight to see silver hairs crowned with golden virtues. It was the honor of the church of Thyatira that her last works were better than her first (Revelation 2:19). The excellency of a medicine, is when it keeps its virtue. To finish the course and keep the faith, is to be like choice wine which keeps its spirits to the last drawing.

USE 1. Here is a bill of indictment against those who, before the finishing of their course, have departed from the faith. They are fallen to worldliness or wantonness; the very mantle of their profession is fallen off. Judas has many successors! Demas forsook God, and afterwards became a priest in an idol temple. Julian bathed himself in the blood of beasts offered in sacrifice to heathen gods, and so, as much as in him lay, washed off his baptism. Things which move from an artificial spring quickly cease. Profane hearts, having only external artifices of piety--but lacking a vital principle of grace, soon make a stop in true religion. How can they adhere to God--who never truly loved Him? The soldier who has no true love for his commander, will throw off his colors. Hosea 8:3: "Israel has cast off the thing that is good." We have had more shipwrecks at land--than at sea. Men shipwreck their conscience (1 Timothy 1:19). Apostates unravel the work they have been doing for heaven. They pick out all their golden stitches. As if a painter should with a pencil draw a choice piece of art--and then come with his sponge and wipe it out again. Apostates drop as windfalls into the devil's mouth, having disparaged the ways of God and put Christ to open shame (Hebrews 6:6). God will make them do penance in hell!

USE 2. Persevere in the faith. What is a man the better, to run some part of the race--and then tire and stop? What is a man the better, to come within an inch of heaven--and then fall short? Who makes reckoning of corn which withers before harvest, or fruit which falls from the tree before it is ripe. Oh, Christians, remember your salvation is now nearer! (Romans 13:11) You are within sight of the holy land--and will you now tire in your march? This is as if a ship laden with jewels and spices, within sight of the shore, should be cast away. Or it is as if a Jew had run to the city of refuge and had gotten within a few feet of the city and then fainted and been slain by the avenger of blood. It was Beza's prayer, "Lord, perfect that which You have begun in me--that I may not suffer shipwreck when I am almost in the haven."

Consider that persevering in the faith is an evidence between a true saint, and a hypocrite. The hypocrite sets up the trade of religion--but will soon stop. He advances his mast and topsail, and sets out for heaven--but in time of temptation falls away (Matthew 13:21). But a true Christian is fixed in holiness. He is not as a wave of the sea--but as a rock in the sea. His zeal, like the fire of the vestal virgins in Rome, is always kept burning.

That we may spin out this fine thread of piety, to its full length and hold out to the end:

1. If we would hold on in the faith, let us be well-grounded in the fundamentals of true religion (Colossians 1:23); the doctrines of justification, regeneration, resurrection and eternal recompenses. Such as are unprincipled will be led into any error--such as the Mass or the Koran. You may lead a blind man anywhere!
2. If we would hold on in the faith, let us preserve a jealous fear of ourselves. Fear is the soul's safeguard. It causes vigilance and banishes presumption. Romans 11:20: "Be not high-minded, but fear." If God does not uphold us--we fall. How many have been overturned with self-confidence, as the vessel with the large sail. The fear of falling--keeps us from falling. Fear begets prayer--prayer begets strength--and strength begets constancy.
3. If we would keep the faith to the end, let us labor to taste the sweetness of piety in our own souls. Psalms 34:8: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." The light of truth is one thing--the relish of truth is another. Psalm 119:103: "How sweet are Your words unto my taste--yes sweeter than honey!" Many fall away because they never tasted what piety was. They could taste some sweetness in food and wine--but Scripture promises were dry breasts to them. If the wine of the Word has ever cheered our heart--we will

never part with it.

4. If we would continue our progress in the ways of God, let us be inlaid with SINCERITY. This silver thread of sincerity, must run through the whole chain of our duties. A Christian may have a double principle--but he does not have a double heart. He is sincere with the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:13). Nothing will hold out but sincerity. Psalm 25:21: "Let integrity preserve me." When Job could not hold fast his estate, he held fast his piety. How was this? From his sincerity. Job 27:6: "My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." The garment of Job's profession did not tear, because it was lined with sincerity.

3. Paul's CROWN. The third part of the text is Paul's crown: "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." It is a crown laid up. A Christian's best things are to come. Well might the Apostle say, "It does not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). We are here on earth, as princes in disguise. The world knows us not--but there is a crown laid up for us! While we are laying out for God, He is laying up for us.

What crown is this? A crown of righteousness. The felicity of heaven is described sometimes by a city of riches (Hebrews 11:10), sometimes by a country of pleasure (Hebrews 11:16), sometimes by a crown of honor. This crown has various appellations:

It is called a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). It is full of splendor, therefore it is said to be bespangled with stars (Revelation 12:1). We can no more bear a sight of this crown until God enlarges our capacities, than a weak eye can bear the dazzling beams of the sun.

It is called a crown of life (James 1:12). Whoever heard of a living crown? It is a crown of life, not only because it is bestowed in the life to come--but because it enlivens with joy. It not only crowns the head--but cheers the heart. It is a living crown.

It is called a crown of righteousness in the text, not that it is rightly due to us, or comes by our merits, as the papists corruptly teach. We cannot deserve a crumb at God's hands--much less a crown! Whatever service we do for God, is a due debt; nay, we cannot pay for this crown--for all our duties are stained with sin! Where then, is merit?

It is called a crown of righteousness, because it is purchased by Christ's righteousness, and because it is righteous for God, having promised this crown, to bestow it.

Hence, for the persevering saint, there is laid up a crown of righteousness in heaven. A crown is the highest picture of worldly happiness. It is only for kings and people of renown to wear. There is a crown of righteousness laid up for the elect. It is a weighty crown. The Hebrew word for glory signifies a weight--things that are precious and weighty. The more weighty they are, the more they are worth. The weightier a gold chain is--the more it is worth. The heavenly crown is expressed by a weight of glory in 2 Corinthians 4:17. This crown of righteousness exceeds all earthly crowns.

This crown of righteousness is more REFINED. Earthly crowns are interwoven with troubles. They are not made without crosses. It was King Henry VII's motto: "A crown of gold, hung in a bush of thorns." But the saint's crown is not mixed with trouble. It adds no sorrow with it.

The crown of righteousness is given to every individual saint. Here on earth, the crown goes but to one person; a crown of gold will fit but one head. But in heaven, every saint is a king--and has his crown!

The crown of righteousness does not draw ENVY to it. David's crown was an eyesore to Absalom--and he would have plucked it from his father's head. In the life to come, different degrees of glory shall neither stir up pride, nor cause envy, for though one crown may be bigger than another, everyone's crown shall be as big as they can carry!

The crown of righteousness is EVERLASTING. What disparages earthly crowns--is that they are corruptible. Proverbs 27:24: "Does the crown endure to every generation?" Terrestrial crowns soon molder into the dust--but the crown of righteousness is a crown of immortality; it neither wastes nor fades. 1 Peter 5:4: "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." Eternity is a jewel of the saint's crown!

QUESTION: What is the MATTER of which the celestial crown is made?

ANSWER: The crown itself consists in the beautiful sight and fruition of the all-glorious God! What else is the angel's crown, but the beholding of God's face! (Matthew 18:10) To experience transforming sights of God, will ravish the elect with infinite delight!

If there was such gladness when Solomon was crowned (1 Kings 1:40): "All the people went up after him, playing flutes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound", what mighty acclamations and triumphs will be on the saints' coronation day? Such will be the ecstasies and divine raptures of joy--as exceed our very faith! The delights of heaven may be better felt--than expressed. Whatever can be said of the celestial crown--is but as a drop in relation to the ocean, nay, scarcely so much!

QUESTION: WHEN shall the saints receive this crown of righteousness?

ANSWER: They shall receive it in part, immediately after death. Before their bodies are buried--their souls are crowned! 2 Corinthians 5:8: "Absent from the body--present with the Lord." If the crown were not instantly bestowed after death, it would be better for believers to stay here on earth, for here they are daily increasing their grace. Here they have some bunches of grapes by the way--sweet foretastes of God's love. So they had better stay here if they do not have a speedy transition and passage to glory. But this is the consolation of believers--that they shall not wait long for their glorification. No sooner did Lazarus die, than he had a convoy of angels to carry him to Abraham's bosom! Christians, you may be eternally happy and blessed--before you are aware! It is but winking--and you shall see God!

The full glorification will be at the resurrection, when the bodies and souls of believers shall be reunited. Their bodies shall be crowned with immense felicity, and in some measure, be like Christ's glorious body.

QUESTION: But why is the crown deferred at all? Why is it not set on a Christian's head immediately after conversion?

ANSWER: It is not yet the proper season. We are heirs under age. We receive but the first fruits of the Spirit (Romans 8:23). Grace is in its minority now. Though some princes have been crowned in their cradle, God crowns none until they are of perfect stature. Sin now mixes with grace. Would we partake of glory--while we partake of sin?

Our work is not yet done; we have not finished the race. The laborer does not receive his pay until his work is done. Christ's reward was deferred until He had perfected His work. John 17:4-5: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." The Lord does not think we should have

our pay beforehand. When we have arrived at the end of our faith--then comes full salvation (1 Peter 1:9).

Then there is nothing lost by solid piety. After fighting the good fight of faith, comes the crown of righteousness. When we hear of the severe part of religion, steeping our souls in the briny tears of repentance, mortifying our besetting sins--we are ready to grumble and rebel; but do we serve God for nothing? Will He not compensate our labors with a crown, yes, a crown which far exceeds our thoughts--as it does our deserts! No man can say, without wrong done to God--that He is a hard master. The Lord gives double pay. He gives great rewards in His service here--inward joy and peace--and afterwards He refreshes us with the delights of paradise which are without intermission and expiration! Oh, what a vast difference there is between duty enjoyed--and glory prepared! What is the shedding of a tear--compared to an eternal crown of glory!

See what contrary ways the godly and the wicked go at death. The godly are advanced to crowns of glory; the wicked are bound with chains of darkness (Jude 6). But what are these chains? Surely such as no strong corrosive can eat asunder. By these chains, I understand God's sovereign omnipotence, fastening sinners under wrath (as the chain does the prisoners) so that they cannot stir. Sinners may break the chain of God's precepts--but they cannot break the chain of His power. This is the unparalleled misery of impenitent souls--they do not go to a crown when they die--but are chained in a hellish prison! Oh, think what horror and despair will possess the wicked, when they see themselves engulfed in tremendous flames and their condition is hopeless, helpless, and endless!

A servant under the old law who had a hard master yet, every seventh year being a year of Jubilee or release--might go free. But in hell, there is no year of release when the damned shall go free! (Mark 9:44). Have people lost their reason--as well as their conscience! They never think--what their sins will bring them to. Though now sin shows its beauteous colors--yet in the end it will bite like a serpent! If a man had but a sight of hell (said Bellarmine) it would be enough to make him live a most godly life.

See the grand folly of those who for vain pleasures and profits, will lose this celestial crown! It may be said of them, as in Ecclesiastes 9:3, "Madness is in their heart!" Tiberias, for a drink of water, lost his empire! Men swallow their sugared temptations, and afterwards they forfeit eternal blessedness. This will accent and enhance a sinner's torment, and will cause gnashing of teeth, to think how foolishly he lost paradise. For a flash of impure joy--he parted with the quintessence of eternal happiness. Would it not vex one to think he should be so seduced, as to part with his great inheritance, for a bit of music? Such are they who let heaven go--for a song! If Satan could make good his boast--in giving all the glory and kingdoms of the world--they could not offset the loss of heaven's crown! When a sinner dies, the devil receives him as his fool.

If the saints are installed and have the royal crown set upon them at death, then what little cause have we to mourn immoderately at the death of godly friends! God allows us tears. Jacob wept over his dead father. Tears give vent to grief--but there is no reason why we should grieve excessively for the death of our pious friends. They receive an eternal crown of glory! Shall we mourn--when they are crowned! Suppose you had a dear relation beyond the sea, and you heard he was crowned king. Would you grieve to hear of his advancement? The friend who dies in the Lord, receives immediately a crown of righteousness--and will you be cast down with sorrow? Why should you shed tears immoderately, for those who have all tears wiped from their eyes! Why should you be swallowed up in grief, for those who are swallowed up in joy! They are removed hence for their advantage; as if one should be removed out of a dungy cottage--to a rich palace.

The prophet Elijah was removed in a fiery chariot to heaven. Shall Elisha weep inordinately because he no longer enjoys the company of Elijah? Is it not better to have sparkling crowns and white robes--than to sojourn in the tents of Kedar? Is it not better to live among holy angels--than fiery serpents? Is it not best to have Christ's banner of love displayed over us? Are there any sweeter smiles, or softer embraces, than His? Why then should any bathe and even entomb themselves in sorrow--for the death of their godly relations?

Theocritus says it was a custom among the ancients to have a funeral banquet, because of the felicity they supposed the deceased parties entered into. Oh, you who hang your harp upon the willows and, with Rachel, refuse to be comforted! Remember there is no wiping away tears from the eye--but with the shroud! Your godly friend could not be in the region of the blessed--until he died. His dying day was his ascension day! Oh, then, keep your tears for your sins--but do not torment yourself with grief, for him whose soul is as holy as it would be--and as happy as it can be!

Are we heirs to this glorious crown? Such only as are righteous people, shall wear the crown of righteousness. The work of righteousness goes before the crown of righteousness (Isaiah 32:17). Are we not only morally but theologically righteous? Have we a righteousness of imputation, procured for us by Christ's merit, and a righteousness of implantation produced in us by His Spirit? Are we consecrated with the anointing oil of grace? God gilds the elect with the beams of His own holiness, and makes them shine like Himself. Have we both circumcision of heart, and circumspection of life? If we are righteous people, we are sure to wear the crown of righteousness.

Let not the profane presume on eternal happiness. Let them not think to go to heaven, by leaping out of Delilah's lap into Abraham's bosom. 1 Corinthians 6:9: "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" God will not lay a viper in his bosom--or set a crown upon the head of a swinish sinner!

Use of Exhortation.

1. It has a double aspect to all in general.

Believe that there is a crown of righteousness laid up, for all who fight the good fight. This truth should be engraved upon our hearts as with the point of a diamond. Carnal people look upon the felicities of the other world as a dreamy idea or delusion. They do not see the crown with bodily eyes; therefore they question it. The verity of the soul may as well be questioned because, being a spirit, it cannot be seen. Doubting biblical principles is the next step toward denying them. Let us set our seal to this: There is a crown of righteousness laid up! Where should your faith rest, but upon a divine testimony? The whole earth hangs upon the word of God's power--and shall not our faith hang upon the word of His promise? Titus 1:2: "In hope of eternal life, which God who cannot lie, has promised."

The saint's crown is purchased by Christ's blood (Ephesians 1:14), and Christ will not lose His purchase. What was the end of Christ's ascension? He went up to heaven not only to invest Himself--but all believers, with glory. What did Christ pray for--but that all the saints might be with Him. (John 17:24) What Christ prayed for as a man, He has power to give us since He is God. Besides, the Lord has given us the anointing of His Spirit to prepare us, and the pledge of His Spirit to assure us of happiness (2 Corinthians 1:21). The crown of righteousness shall indubitably be bestowed--for He will not lose His pledge. To question this, is to destroy the main article of our creed which is life everlasting. Such atheists who judge the eternal recompenses to be fictions, put God to swear against them--that they shall never see life.

Strive for this crown. I have read of those who travel in long pilgrimages to the Holy Land. They have hard lodgings and pass through a number of dangers, and at the end of their journey pay a large tribute to the Turks. When they come there, they see only a bare sepulcher where it is supposed that their Savior lay. Did they take such pains to gratify their superstitious devotion? What herculean labor, then, should a Christian undertake in his journey to the true land of promise, whereby he shall both see and enjoy his Savior--and not enter into His sepulcher but His palace and be eternally crowned with the delights of the Jerusalem above!

If we would take as many pains for heaven as others do for the world, undoubtedly we might obtain it -- reaching forth unto those things which are ahead (Philippians 3:13). This is a metaphor taken from racers who reach their neck forward and strain every limb to lay hold upon the prize.

There are two things requisite for a Christian--a watchful eye and a working hand. To achieve our purpose, let us add pursuit. What scuffling is there for worldly honors! Men will wade through blood for a crown! Was there such strife for a corruptible crown in the Olympian races? Sometimes the crown bestowed upon the victor was made of olive branches, sometimes of myrtle, sometimes of cinnamon enclosed in gold--but still it was corruptible. Oh, then, how strenuously should we labor for the garland made of the flowers of paradise which never fade! With what vigor and resolution did Hannibal march over the Alps for the obtaining of terrestrial kingdoms! How then, should we act with extreme intensity for that orient crown which shines ten thousand times brighter than the sun in its meridian splendor!

Luther spent three hours a day in prayer. Anna, the prophetess, departed not from the temple--but served God with fasting and prayers night and day (Luke 2:37). The learned Calvin, Jewell, and Perkins were indefatigable in their pursuit after glory.

Let us look to this cloud of witnesses and, turning back to ourselves, ply our oar and double our efforts. Who would not toil all day to catch salvation at night? The flesh cries out, "What weariness is it! Who can endure all this labor!" The labor for heaven, though it seems painful, is transient. The fight is quickly over--and then comes the unfailing crown of glory!

2. It has a particular aspect to believers. Be full of pantings and longings for this crown of righteousness. Does not the banished prince desire his native country? The unwillingness of Christians to go to heavenly glory, shows:

(1) The weakness of their FAITH. They question their saving interest in this excellent glory. Were their title to heaven more cleared, they would need patience to be content to stay here on earth any longer.

(2) The weakness of their LOVE. Love (as Aristotle said) desires union. If men loved Christ as they should, they would desire to be united to Him in glory. Paul desired to depart--and be with Christ (Philippians 1:23). It was the speech of a holy man on his deathbed, "My heart is in heaven, Lord; lead me to that glory which I have seen already as through a glass."

We are encompassed with a body of sin--should we not long to shake off this viper! We are combating with Satan--should we not be willing to be called out of the bloody field, where the bullets of temptation fly so fast--that we may receive a victorious garland! We now live far from heaven. Would we rather desire God -- than enjoy Him? Should we not long to be crowned with the blissful sight of God's face!

Though we should be content to stay here to do God's service--we should ambitiously desire to be always sunning ourselves in the light of God's countenance. Think what it will be to be led into Christ's wine-cellar, to have the kisses of His mouth, to smell the fragrance of His ointments, to lie in His bosom, that bed of love! Think what it will be like to have unstained honor, unparalleled beauty, and unmixed joy! What will it be like to tread upon stars, to dwell among cherubim, and to feast on those heavenly delicacies and rarities with which God Himself is delighted! I think our souls should be big with longing for these things, and we should be put into such a blessed pathos of desire as Monica, who, hearing of the joys of heaven, cried out, "What should I do here on earth? Why is my soul held any longer with this earthen fetter of the flesh?" Would God but give us some idea or imperfect glimpse of heaven's glory, how would we be ready to fall into a ecstasy! And being a little recovered out of it, what earnest suitors would we be to be caught up forever into the heavenly paradise!

You who are the heirs of glory--be exhorted to work with all your might for God. Love and serve God more intently than others, for He has laid up such things for you as eye has not seen, nor can it enter into man's heart to conceive. 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Paul had a spirit of fervent activity for God. 1 Corinthians 15:10: "I labored more abundantly than they all." Paul's obedience did not move slowly, like the sun upon the dial--but swiftly, like the sun in the skies. His eye was upon the eternal crown! "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!"

The recompense of reward may add wings to duty--and oil to the flame of zeal. What are we--that God should encircle us with happiness and not others--that He should (as Jacob) cross His hands, lay His right hand upon us and His left hand upon others? Oh, may sovereign electing grace forever to be adored! How can we ever serve God enough! If there could be tears shed in heaven--it would be for this--that we have been so lame in our duty, and have brought no more revenues into the heavenly treasury!

Let this revive and bear up your hearts under all your present sufferings. Acts 20:23: "Bonds and afflictions abide in me." Affliction is the saints' portion here on earth. Instead of roses, they are crowned with thorns. You may as well separate weight from lead--as sufferings from a saint's life. 2 Corinthians 4:8: "We are troubled on every side." Believers are as a ship which has the waves beating on both sides--but this text may buoy them up from sinking. There is glory which outlasts and exceeds all their sufferings!

The saints now drink in a wormwood cup--but shortly they shall drink in a spiced cup and taste the same heavenly nectar as the angels! One day of wearing the celestial crown, will abundantly pay for all their sufferings! Romans 8:18: "I recognize that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us!" The weight of glory makes affliction light. Oh, you saints who are the true birds of paradise, sing in winter. There is glory ahead, and every suffering will be like a grain put in the scale to make your glory weigh heavier. Suffering saints shall have more jewels hung upon their crown!

Let this be an antidote against the fear of death. The day of death is (as Seneca calls it) the birthday of eternity. Believers are not fully happy and holy, until death. Death, therefore, is made a part of the inventory (1 Corinthians 3:22). "Death is yours!" When the mantle of the flesh drops off, the soul ascends in a triumphant chariot. God has promised His people a portion--but it is not paid to them until the day of death. It is their Father's good pleasure to give them a kingdom (Luke 12:32)--but they cannot see it until death has closed their eyes! Why then should the saints be troubled at death?

Indeed, I wonder not that the wicked are appalled and frightened at the approach of the King of terror. They are in debt to God's justice, and death, as God's sergeant, arrests them and drags them before the divine tribunal. But why should any of God's children be under such consternation and have trembling of heart? What hurt does death do to them? It pulls off their fetters--and puts jewels upon them! It leads them to gates of pearl, and rivers of pleasures! Faith gives a title to heaven, death gives a possession to heaven.

"Go forth, my soul," said Hilarion on his deathbed, "what do you fear?" Why should the godly dread their privilege? Is a prince afraid to cross the narrow sea, who is sure to be crowned as soon as he comes to shore? This puts roses into the pale face of death, and makes it look more ruddy and amiable. Death crowns the saints with all the delights of heavenly glory.

I am done with the text--and it remains that I should speak something to the occasion of this sermon.

It has pleased the all-wise God to take to Himself lately, that holy and faithful minister, Mr. Harry Stubs, whose death we now commemorate. The memory of the just is blessed. Fulgentius calls a good name the godly man's heir--it lives when he is dead. This man of God has left a sweet savor and perfume behind in God's church, besides his achievement of human learning. He was enriched with the knowledge of Christ crucified.

He was very humble. Humility is the best garment a minister can preach in. He was one of a thousand, for integrity. The plainer the diamond is, the richer it is.

He was an earnest preacher, and chose rather to speak solidly than showy. He spoke as was befitting the oracles of God. Levity is below the majesty of preaching.

He was a painstaking laborer in God's vineyard. He preached in season, and out of season. The souls of people were dearer to him than his life. Praying and preaching were rather his delight, than task. He was a burning lamp, consuming himself to give light to others.

He preached feelingly. He felt those truths in his own soul which he recommended to his auditors. An unconverted minister is like a lute, making sweet music to others but itself is not sensible. This vessel retained a scent and relish of those sacred truths which he poured out to others.

He lived much by faith and had sweet communion with God. All the saints have God's heart--but some have more of His company. He was exemplary in his deportment. Ministers, by virtue of their calling, approach nearer to God (Exodus 19:22). The higher the elements are, the purer they are. The fire is purer than the air. The higher we are by office--the holier we should be. Now deceased, he lived as an incarnate angel. I may say of him what Basil said of Gregory Nazianzen: he thundered in his doctrine--and was radiant in his life.

He was charitably minded. I have been credibly informed that out of what little he had gathered together while he was living, he appointed two hundred pounds, which he entrusted to the hands of trustees to be improved annually for the good of the poor to buy them Bibles.

He was of a sweet temper, never fierce--but against sin. He was devout toward God, affable to his friends, and loving to his relations.

The Lord honored his ministry very much; he had a double crown. The souls he converted were his crown of rejoicing, and now he wears a crown of righteousness. How great a loss has London of this eminent minister! It has been told me that he set apart some time every day to pray for the church of God. He (like Moses) lay in the breach--to turn away wrath. We shall soon grow poor if we lose such praying friends. During the time of this good man's sickness, he was asthmatic and labored much for breath so that he could not express himself so freely; but what was heard to drop from him was very savory. He said he had fled to the city of refuge and recited that Scripture, 2 Timothy 1:12: "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."

I pray that God will give all who are concerned in this loss, wisdom to improve this present stroke and make a living sermon of their dead pastor. He now enjoys the sight of that God, whom he so pathetically longed for upon his deathbed. He is now into the upper region above all storms! His body is returned to dust--and his soul to rest. He is enclosed in happiness, as the word for "crowning" imparts. He is as rich as the angels! Though he has lost his life--yet not his crown!

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