

Claim Your Crown

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Each of us have been given a very unique invitation; it is literally the opportunity of a lifetime. Each one of us has the potential to live and rule under Christ during His millennial reign on this very earth. There are a very select few that will be given this chance and it will never be offered again. Firstfruits...of all whom will be eventually born into the kingdom of God. It is an incredible privilege and honor, set aside for those who overcome adversity and trials in this life now. Who overcome fleshly lusts and desires and set themselves not to sin, bringing their own bodies and minds into subjection. Each of us, who respond to God's call, has a reservation in His house.

John 14:2-4

² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know."

We have a reservation and a place has been prepared for us, but it is up to us individually to be there and occupy our place. Christ says we know where He has gone and we know the way there. The responsibility is ours to be there and receive, or claim, what has been reserved and set aside for us. Part of our reward will be the awarding of a crown. Paul, in his second epistle to Timothy, knows his time is growing short. He is encouraging and admonishing Timothy to continue on in the work of preaching the gospel while the people were still willing to hear it.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

This is a very special gift that will be bestowed on God's called and chosen people. Everyone, who sees that crown, will know that you overcame and that you were faithful until the very end. What an incredible privilege and honor, and what an occasion that will be. A very special coronation ceremony!

Tools for the Quest

A time of rigorous testing and trial has descended upon God's people and it continues to this very day. A sifting and winnowing; by which many have fallen by the wayside. It is **vitaly** important that we recognize that this sifting is taking place, if we are to go the distance and claim our crown. It is absolutely crucial, throughout this process, that we maintain a very close relationship with God. It is God's fondest wish that we all make it into the kingdom, but He will never force us to go His way. It has to be a voluntary and willful decision and action on our part. But, if we are drawing close to God, He will in turn draw close to us. And He will guide us and help us if we are seeking Him out.

Luke 18:18-23:

18 Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **19** So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. **20** You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' " **21** And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." **22** So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven (this word, here translated heaven, literally means the abode of God); and come, follow Me." **23** But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

This man received a personal invitation to the kingdom! Christ stood right before this man and told him that he would receive treasure, or his crown if you will, in God's dwelling place. But, what happened? The man could not bear the thought of parting with his earthly riches. This man clearly believed in Christ and His message, because he called Him teacher and asked how to receive eternal life. Christ recognized that this man understood God's law, because He said, "you know the commandments." However, this man had a serious lack of faith, the kingdom of God was not real to him, he could not touch it, or see it. His material possessions were real to him.

Luke 18:24-27:

24 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! **25** For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." **26** And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" **27** But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

This is a very important point to bring out here; nothing is impossible with God. As we are told in the 8th chapter of Romans, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" It takes a close, intimate, relationship with God and the help of His indwelling spirit if we are going to make it to the end and claim our crown. Christ left us serious warnings; that it was not going to be easy to follow Him and gain the kingdom. In Luke chapter 18 and beginning in verse 1, Christ, as He so often did, is teaching through a parable:

Luke 18:1-8

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' " 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Here, Christ was teaching the importance of prayer and being persistent. If this widow was finally able to get a response from this judge, even though he had no fear of God and respected no man, through her persistence, how much more will God hear and react to his own elect who cry out to Him? We must never forsake prayer; it is our direct line of communication with our Father. But, then notice at the very end of the parable, Christ says a curious thing:

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

What does Christ mean here? He literally means despite the fact that God will be hearing His people and intervening for them, that even though He will be helping them and aiding them, because they are His special people and they know the truth, will there really be any among them that have a deep and abiding faith in Him. It is just like the parable we read about the rich man, he believed, but lacked the faith to do as Christ had asked him.

Notice who Christ is talking about here, the elect! The chosen people of God! So, there are two vital things we need to possess and be building upon continually if we want to claim our crown. A close intimate relationship with God and a solid unwavering faith in Him, not just an outward profession of faith, but a deep, heartfelt, confidence in God and His word.

There is one another warning Christ gave in Mark.

Mark 13:21-23:

21 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

In order for something to be possible, there has to be a chance it could occur. Christ said if possible, or if there is a chance, even the elect could be deceived. If possible, means that we will be faced with having to choose between what is truth and what is error and deception. We have all experienced this first-hand in our lives and some of us several times. The only way we are going to make it through to the end, is by putting to use the two elements I mentioned earlier, a relationship with God and unwavering faith. God's spirit gives us the spiritual discernment to separate the truth, from error.

Seeking Our Crown

In the Bible, we can find several different types of crowns. But, in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul speaks about a crown that is very important to us and one we should be seeking. Paul uses an analogy to compare the pursuit of God's kingdom with a sports competition that took place in Corinth called the Isthmian Games. The Corinthians held sports competitions somewhat like the Olympic Games, but on a smaller scale.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. Paul here is saying do not run a halfhearted race, but run as if there were only one prize! 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Just as those who compete in sports competitions train physically, we must be training spiritually. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. He runs as though there were only one crown and he is going to win it!

Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. The Corinthian races involved physical contact, the athletes would practice leaping through the air to simulate leaping into their competition. They also swung (flailed) their fists in the empty air to practice hitting their competition, Paul is saying here that he fights as one with meaning and purpose, not wasting his time in meaningless pursuits. **27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.** What Paul means here is that even though he understands the truth and teaches others, he disciplines himself to also put the things he teaches into practice, so that he does not miss the opportunity to claim his own crown.

We must seek out our crown, if we are to claim it. We must determine where our crown, or treasure, lies and then make it the highest priority in our lives to go after it. In the book of Mark, Christ uses the analogy of a “pearl of great price” to represent the kingdom. A man discovered the pearl and sold all he had, so that he could seek after the pearl and obtain it. Compare this parable to the one we read earlier about the rich man; he could not bear to part with his material wealth. The man, who found the pearl, sold all that he had and made it his number one priority to seek and possess the pearl. In Luke 12, Jesus Christ plainly tells us that the pursuit of the kingdom should be our utmost priority.

Luke 12:29

29 And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. 30 For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. 31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

God knows our needs; there is nothing that happens on this earth that God is unaware of. If we make the pursuit of the kingdom our number one priority, God will take care of the rest. He wants us to rely on Him, He wants to take care of us and provide for us, so that we can fully concentrate on our goal and be there to claim our crown. In Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, we are told in verse 6 that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. This word that is translated diligently here means:

ekzeteo (ek-zay-teh'-o); from NT:1537 and NT:2212; to search out, i.e. (figuratively) investigate, crave, demand,

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People who are diligently seeking God, do not take no for an answer. They do not let obstacles in their path slow them down. They do not just give lip service to God; they are actively and deliberately seeking Him out and His kingdom.

However, we must move forward with caution; Satan sets all sorts of traps and snares to avert our attention and is even constantly seeking ways to make us give up, or tire of our pursuit of God's kingdom.

1 Peter 5:8

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Satan is actively hunting us, slinking around and waiting to pounce when our guard is down, when we are at our weakest. A lion smothers its prey and that is precisely how Satan tries to rob us of our future and the opportunity to claim our crown. If he can plant a seed of doubt and cause a wavering in our faith; that is all the opportunity he needs to take advantage of us. If we are not extremely careful, he will have us by the throat and begin to smother us with deception, false doctrine and wrong attitudes.

1 Peter 5:9:

9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Here is advice on how we can repel Satan's attacks, by remaining steadfast in the faith. And we should also realize that we are not alone in our struggle. We are all under constant attack and Satan has more and more resources to use against us all the time. It is going to get tougher and tougher for God's people as we draw nearer to the end of the age. We need to support and encourage each other to keep moving forward and to never give up our quest to claim our crown.

Hebrews 3:13

**13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," (or, while you are able) lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence (our faith) steadfast to the end,**

And also another example:

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

No one understands the unique challenges, tests and trials we all face like another member of the body of Christ does. A simple five or ten-minute phone call can do wonders to encourage and help someone through a difficult time. The support and encouragement we provide to each other can really make a difference! And finally, on this point of seeking our crown:

Revelation 3:11

¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Once again, we are warned to be on guard. This verse is also proof that there is a crown waiting for each of us. If there were no crown reserved for you, how could someone take it?

Our Awesome Future

In Revelation, we find a title we will receive to go along with our crown:

Revelation 3:9

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

We see in this passage that we will indeed receive rulership. What does it mean to be a king-priest? The people of this world, who are so adamantly opposed to any spiritual, or moral, influence over their lives, are going to be very surprised when they see the way Christ's government is set up when He returns to this earth, because this verse is speaking here about a theocracy! God's law will determine the way the world tomorrow is administrated!

King-priests are rulers bound to administer what is under their control according to the statutes of God's law. There will not be any need for attorneys, courts, or groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union. People will do things God's way or there will be swift and sure consequences. No appeals, no plea-bargains, and no refusal to accept responsibility for one's actions; God's law is very clear. But, God's law will be administered with love, mercy and compassion.

We have to be tested and tried now, before Christ returns, so that we will be ready to serve and carry out our duties when we are changed from mortal to spiritual. There will be an immediate need for rulers to restore order to a world that has been in utter chaos. God has to know He can rely on us completely and that we will obey Him and carry out His bidding without fail. There are other scriptures that also refer to future rulership.

Luke 19:11-27:

¹¹ Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. ¹² Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. (Christ is literally referring to himself here) ¹³ So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' ¹⁴ But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' (These are the people who reject Christ and his rulership over them) ¹⁵ And so it was that when he returned (This is the return of Christ at the beginning of the millennium), having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. ¹⁶ Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' ¹⁷ And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸ And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' ¹⁹ Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' ²⁰ Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. ²¹ For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' ²² And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. (you knew what I expected when you undertook this assignment) ²³ Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴ And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' ²⁵ ("But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') ²⁶ For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

27 But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' " (And this is the fate of those who reject Christ).

Here we see that the position we will occupy in the world tomorrow is dependent on what we do with the gifts God has given us. We must continue to grow and give God an increase in what He has invested in each of us. As we grow, God will add more to us. But, if we refuse to grow, we will lose far more than that which we have been given. And clearly, what is meant here, is that we will not receive our crown. We have an awesome, incredible future awaiting us!

1 Corinthians 2:9

9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

We cannot even begin to comprehend the incredible reward that God is keeping in trust for us. And then, finally, we see in 1 Thessalonians, that this will all come to pass in a most spectacular way.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always (forever, eternally) be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And it is comforting to know that for all we endure and suffer now, there is a priceless treasure laid up for us, a crown with our name on it. And when Christ returns we will rise to meet Him and accompany Him when his feet once again touch down on the Mount of Olives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us turn over once again to Paul's second epistle to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:7

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

It is God's earnest and heartfelt desire that each of us be there and be born into His kingdom. Jesus Christ Himself has prepared a place for each of us; there is a place there with each of our names on it. We know where He is, we know the way there, and it is up to each of us individually to stay on that path that will lead us into God's kingdom. So, let us all fight the good fight, let us all finish the race and let us all keep the faith. Paul says the righteous Judge himself will give us our crown on that day. You and I will receive a crown from the very hand of Christ, if we are there on that day. And when He places that crown upon your head, He will look you in the eye and say "well done good and faithful servant". Be there on that day...make it your goal, your focus, your life's pursuit...claim your crown!

(All scriptural references cited from the New King James Edition of the Holy Bible)