

HEAVENLY CROWNS



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All words spoken by Jesus Christ are in **red text**.

Most of us like to be recognized for our accomplishments. As children we liked hearing our parents respond to our behavior and activities with accolades, such as “You did well on your school grades,” and “I’m proud of what you did.” We’d like hearing our friends say “great hit,” receive “high fives” as we crossed home plate, and receive a team trophy for finishing at the top of the league. As we get older our desire for recognition does not decline. However, the source and opportunity for recognition changes. We appreciate receiving “rewards” for our productive work, such as when our boss tells us “Good Job, I appreciate your effort.” Other types of recognition may include a diploma; a pay raise; for athletes an Olympic gold, silver or bronze medal; and if you’re in the entertainment industry, an Emmy or Oscar. Sometimes we like to reward ourselves. For example, we may decide to purchase something we always wanted when we achieve a personal goal in life (an expensive meal, a vacation, a new car, a larger home, jewelry, etc.). For in truth, we feel good on the inside when we receive a reward for our various achievements in life.

However, although recognition for our accomplishments is nice to achieve and receive, Christians should perceive earthly rewards from a proper spiritual perspective. For example, earthly rewards:

- Can be a source of self-pride (Look at what I did!).
- Will provide us with no value in the Kingdom of God.
- Will eventually lose their luster, and will decay.
- Can misdirect one’s heart and life away from God.

Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

The only rewards that are eternal, and are not subject to decay and thievery are those given to us by Jesus—which are earned because of what we do for Him in obedient faith for the glory of God.

In Matthew 5, verses 14-30, Jesus spoke of two faithful servants who used what they had been given to increase their master’s wealth. The master rewarded both servants when he said to them, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” Those of us who are born again and actively seek to save the lost via the gifts we have received, have a living hope within us to hear these words from Jesus when we pass into Heaven and receive our inheritance.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3-9

Spiritual Rewards and the Intent of the Christian's Heart

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." Jeremiah 17:9-10

God designed us with an attribute of skepticism—which may be simply defined as doubting the truth of something or someone. Skepticism will raise an internal "uneasy feeling" or "red flag" warning that something is not right, will cause us to hit a "pause button" that stops us from believing what we see or hear, will cause us to not accept what is presented at face value, and will cause us to evaluate the validity of what we are witnessing.

Spiritually, skepticism leverages discernment and analytical thinking as a means to protect us against harmful and evil influences. Without this God-given attribute we would believe (and accept as true) everything we see and hear. As such, skepticism is a good thing as long as it is used properly and does not overwhelm our perception.

But what's more, we can also use our skeptical attribute to evaluate the intent of our deceitful hearts. As such, Christians should pray and ask for enlightenment regarding the true desires of their heart when they perform a charitable deed. For example, is the motivation of the heart based upon seeking a reward of recognition from others, or is it based upon doing those things that will please God?

What's important to understand...God is more interested in the intent and desires of our heart than He is with our behavior. Even if we do all the right things—but have the wrong intent—what we accomplish will not be spiritually recognized and rewarded. However, when we do even the smallest of charitable deeds—with the right intent—it will be recognized and rewarded by the only One who really matters.

Jesus said, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." Matthew 6:1-4

Take a moment and think back to a time when you performed a charitable deed for all the right reasons.

- How did you feel on the inside?
- Did you experience an indescribable and wonderful feeling that seemed to well up from the depths of your soul and spirit?
- Did you find yourself praising God for what you were able to do for Him?
- Did joy brighten your countenance for others to see?
- Can you identify any earthly reward that compares?
- Was this experience a blessing and a reward from Him who sees in secret?

Heavenly Recognition

Christians who perform charitable deeds for the right reason may receive (in the short term as a “deposit”) an immediate spiritual blessing. However, in the “long term,” there will be a heavenly recognition and reward that will occur during the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment is not for entrance into Heaven because our “ticket” for entrance into Heaven was paid for by Jesus. However, we will be judged for our works. That which is done with the wrong intent will not endure testing by fire. That which was done with the right intent will be rewarded.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

Before we discuss the five crowns, it is important to understand the true and accurate meaning of the crowns. For they are not a badge of honor for the one who wears the crown, but rather, a recognition of the only One who is worthy of such honor.

In Revelation 4:9-11, John describes an amazing event he witnessed in Heaven. When glory, honor and thanks was given to Him who sits on the throne, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him and cast their crowns before the throne. The twenty-four elders then rightfully declared God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power; for He created all things, and by His will they exist and were created.

In truth, any Christian who receives a crown will do so not because of their own abilities and good deeds—but by their faith in Jesus Christ and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. In the same way we are unworthy to receive God’s grace and mercy, we will be unable to declare ourselves as responsible for what we had done to receive any heavenly reward. This is why the elders cast their crowns before the throne—because God alone is worthy of recognition. For it is He who has changed us from within, sanctified us, and declared us righteous. We are justified (just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned) because of our faith in what His Son did for us on the cross: dying and shedding His blood as a sacrificial lamb for our sins.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Romans 5:8-11

Those who receive a crown will fully understand they are unworthy; who alone is responsible; and who alone is worthy of the praise, honor, and glory the crown represents. Praise God in that His grace, His mercy and His love are unmeasurably greater than our unworthiness.

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

The Five Crowns

The Greek word for “crown” is *stephanos*. *Stephanos* is defined as a prize; a symbol of honor; an identifier of royalty or exalted rank. However, as opposed to an earthly crown, a spiritual crown is eternal (not subject to decay and thievery). But more important, it is a reminder of God’s holiness, grace, mercy, love, and glory.

The Bible describes five different crowns that one can receive as a reward. In addition, each crown correlates to the active behaviors of the daily Christian walk and life.

Crown	Scripture	Active Behaviors of Christian Life
Imperishable	1 Corinthians 9:25-27	Demonstrates disciplined perseverance
Rejoicing	1 Thessalonians 2:19	Experiences joy regardless of the situation
Righteousness	2 Timothy 4:8	Is transformed from the bondage of sin to sanctification
Life	James 1:12; Revelation 2:10	Crucifies the desires of the flesh
Glory	1 Peter 5:4	Takes care of His sheep

Imperishable Crown

“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. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Paul used a comparison between running in a foot race and spiritual servanthood. Both require disciplined perseverance against forces (i.e. pain, exhaustion, trials, etc.) that cause doubt as to the worthiness of the prize. Paul provides instruction for Christians in that they should run (live their life) in a way where they may obtain not a perishable earthly crown (any earthly recognition, reward, or prize), but an imperishable spiritual crown (awarded by Jesus Christ Himself).

Crown of Rejoicing

“But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” 1 Thessalonians 2:17-19

It is difficult for anyone to rejoice when they are in the midst of life’s challenges. Too often the negatives associated with trials will overwhelm our thoughts and emotions, and will stifle our hope and joy in the Lord. As such, as a means to overcome and rejoice, Paul compels Christians to look beyond that what seems monumental today, to something that is far greater in the future: we will be in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He returns! For those who rejoice when faced with perceived insurmountable obstacles, they will be rewarded accordingly.

Crown of Righteousness

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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.” 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Sanctification may be defined as a process of freeing someone from their bondage to sin, purifying them, and making them holy. Personally, I consider sanctification as a process of continual “internal cleansing” to where we increasingly reflect more of Jesus and less of ourselves. This process is sometimes difficult as our flesh fights against the Spirit. But those who yield to the Holy Spirit and are transformed from within will receive a crown of righteousness.

Crown of Life

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” James 1:12

Jesus said, “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.’” Revelation 2:8-10

There are two references in the Bible to the Crown of Life. The first is by James, the second by Jesus. Both references are related to overcoming temptation. Christians are tempted in various ways. For example, a Christian may be tempted by the lusts of their flesh. However, at various times in history (including now and in the future), Christians have been tempted by Satan to renounce their faith via persecution, the threat of bodily harm, and death. However, note how both James and Jesus declare those who endure and are faithful will receive a Crown of Life.

Crown of Glory

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” 1 Peter 5:2-4

After Peter denied he knew Jesus three times, Jesus restored Peter by asking him three times “Do you love me?” John 21:15, 16, 17. Each time Peter responded with an affirmation of his love for Jesus, and each time Jesus told Peter to take care of His sheep.

A shepherd’s primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of the flock. The shepherd will lead the sheep to areas where they may graze, will direct them away from poisonous plants, and will fend off predators. Likewise, those who willingly shepherd God’s sheep will look after their safety and welfare, guide them away from poisonous sin, and protect them from the attacks of Satan. Those who fulfill their calling as a humble shepherd and example of Jesus Christ will receive a Crown of Glory.

Additional Biblical References to Crowns

The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus after he had been scourged. “When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’” Matthew 27:29

Driven by satanic influence, the Roman soldiers did not know their sarcastic declaration was true. They not only kneeled before the King of the Jews, they were also in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords who would rule for eternity.

When Jesus returns, he will wear many crowns—which were earned because He was Faithful and True to the will of the Father, and to all of mankind.

“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns.” Revelation 19:11-12



As we encounter daily challenges of life, too often our flesh “gets in the way.” As such, I pray this lesson has revealed the importance of taking time to consider and evaluate the intent of our heart in we do for Jesus.

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” Revelation 3:11

All for His Glory,
Harold D. Thomas

Do you know of anyone who may benefit from this lesson? If yes, pass it on!