

*"Hold on to what
you have, so that
no one will take
your crown."*

Reinhard Bonnke

The Lord's letter to the church in
Philadelphia (Revelation 3:11)

Transformed Mode of Existence

"In this world, the greatest requirement to win a crown of glory is to be dead." The world honours the dead more than the living. God has a different policy. He honours both.

What an assurance, that life need not peter out, but bring a crown! In Scripture a crown is always figurative for reward. It may well be that in the Resurrection our heads may be honoured, glorified with all the pulsating splendours of Divine life, but it will certainly be more than a coronet or diadem encircling our brow.

It seems wrong that trees grow for a few centuries yet human's life persists only a few decades. What are we? We know one

thing - that the drama of Christ on earth shook heaven, and it took place for us, not for trees. But why this vast Divine focus for creatures of such short existence?

The answer is in the question. In Christ we are crowned with life. Our brief natural life is exchanged for eternal life as new creatures living by the power of Divine immortality. We are predestined to enjoy a transformed mode of existence.

The apocrypha's "Wisdom of Solomon", says *"Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they are withered"*. Is that it? Just the fading honours of the world? For the only possible crown, the future is in Christ. He is today the only One in the world with arms open saying "Come to me!" He never casts us out. Christ is the door. He promised *"Knock and it shall be opened."* His Father's house is ready, welcoming, bright and warm. *"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."* "Enter" is the great welcome from God, all through Scripture "Enter!" *"Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet!"* Matthew 11:28, 7:7, 25:21; John 6:37; Luke 15:22.

The Crowning Reward is in Christ

In the Revelation letter we have Christ's warning that there are enemies, thieves, frauds and that we can be robbed of our gift of immortality, imperishable gold. Jeremiah's aching cry in Lamentations 5:16 was *"The crown is fallen from our heads. Woe to us, for we have sinned."* Beyond everything, that must not be. What is the use if, after carrying out life's tasks, no profit accrues to our labours? The crowning reward is in Christ. Whether we are "in Him", or we stay out. The choice is ours. We decide our destiny, either to die in our

sins or die in Christ, to end either with a coffin or a crown, years of effort buried with us or translated into endless reward.

God told Abraham *"Do not be afraid, I am your very great reward"*. Genesis 15:1. To live for Christ, or to die for Him, means every inclination of good, every cup of cold water given in His name, is recorded for the Day of days to bring life for evermore in His presence where is fullness of joy. James 1:12 promises us: *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."*

He did not say "Blessed in the man who suffers trial", but the man who perseveres, stands the test and retains faith in God. James has been saying that *"the testing of your faith develops perseverance"* and now perseverance produces blessedness and a crown. James cites job later as an example of a man who had patience in trial but who persevered and refused to curse God. James 5:11.

James followed v.12 with the next verse to show how we can forfeit our crown. *"When tempted, no one should say 'God is tempting me'"*. If we blame God for our trials, we have lost the trick. *"When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord"*. Proverbs 19:3. Adam began the dishonest business of blaming God. Genesis 3:12: *"The woman you put here with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate it"*. James reminds us that the crown is the reward of those who love Him. Nobody who thinks God is trying to trip them up can either love Him or have faith in Him. God does not play games with us. He only gives *"good and perfect gifts."* James 1:17.

Our own Hands can de-crown us

The letter of Jesus said *"Hold on to what you have so that no-one takes your crown."* What did the Philadelphia church have to hold on to? The Lord spoke of their open door, a little strength, they had kept His word and command, and some individuals were pillars in the Temple of God. With such assets their crown was firm on their heads, but marauders stalked them.

Jesus wrote to the Smyrna church assuring them that martyrdom would win them a crown. The apostle Paul, awaiting execution, was certain that: *"There is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day."* The "righteous judge" would balance out death and compensate even martyrdom.

The Roman Empire robbed many rulers of their throne and crown, yet all their might could not shake the divine and royal diadem of a single Christian believer. But what Rome could not do, something else might. Our own hands can de-crown us. The notable Bible example is Esau, *"who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son"*. He defrauded himself.

Threats come from only three directions, the world, the flesh and the devil, but this three-pronged attack is launched from every angle against every point of our character. It becomes hydra-headed. Love itself can be a corrupt love of money.

The author of Hebrew 12:14-17 lines up the tragedy of Esau with godlessness and sexual immorality. Denominational records illustrate the special danger in which spiritual leaders stand. Disappointment with church folk or lack of success has

turned pastors around to feel God has not helped them. They have become like Demas *"having loved this present world"*. They echo the cry from the Cross *"Why have you forsaken me?"* God had not forsaken His Son, as was powerfully evident three days later. Galatians 6:1 hints at the danger. *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him, gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."*

Pastors and leaders often necessarily are on terms of intimacy with church members, some of whom may be emotionally disturbed. Such circumstances render him peculiarly vulnerable. He can be too loving and not wise, developing into family betrayal, then self-remorse and finally haunting torment. It is wonderfully true that God always forgives, and He makes it the task of the "spiritual" not to crow over the fallen but to "restore" them, re-set the bones, bind up the wounds, pour in the oil and the wine. God says *"Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more"*. That is the miracle of mercy which is ministered also through the church. But sins boomerang. God may wipe our failure from His memory, but we are not God and cannot work the same miracle on our conscience. The hardest person to forgive is one's self. Like Jeremiah said: *"The gold has lost its luster."*

The Crown of Service

These are enemies of the crowned, but they are legion. The crown to be won for our service and faithfulness to God can also be lost. Paul expressed his anxiety *"after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified"* (NIV) "disapproved" or "reprobate". He added

"I press on to toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus". Philippians 3:14

How can such a loss happen when we stand with the Word in our hands before the people? Can the Bible teacher lose his crown? One temptation besets all preachers, which is self-glamorisation, an ego-trip. A man met an eminent preacher leaving the pulpit and said "That was a great sermon." The preacher replied. "I know. The devil just told me." Church leaders jockeying for place, putting themselves centre stage, perhaps standing on another man's shoulders, "to be seen of men" as Jesus said. What then? We read *"Each one should be careful how he builds. If any man builds using gold, silver, costly stones, [OR] wood, hay, stubble, his work will be shown for what it is. It will be revealed with fire. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping the flames."* 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

Whole ministries can be carried on "out of selfish ambition or vain conceit", careerist motivated, just wood, straw, or 3-ply, using the Gospel as scaffolding to their own story. It is reduced to ashes when motives are exposed. But the light from the Cross is not the limelight for any preacher. Christ did not die for any of us to make our name, only His name. The man who tries to be humble must think he is great, but he isn't. He is acting. Jesus didn't try. He just was. *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who, being in the very nature of God, made himself nothing".* Philippians 2:5,6.

The Bishop of Seleucia, Simon bar Sabba'e, being martyred prayed "Give me this crown Lord, you know how I long for it, for I have loved you with all my heart and being." Work for Christ's crown, and you win your own.