

# **Winning the Crown of Life**

John Monsell's hymn focuses on the virtue of true commitment:

Fight the good fight with all thy might;  
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right.  
Lay hold on life, and it shall be  
Thy joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
Lift up thine eyes, and seek His face;  
Life with its way before thee lies,  
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside, lean on thy Guide;  
His boundless mercy will provide;  
Trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove  
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

What did James write as the opening chapter of God's New Covenant people? Simply this, a clear and simple way of life that reflects **A MATURING WALK OF FAITH.**

As Christ was received by faith, so the way of life flowing from His presence in a life would be reflected in the walk of faith. So James gives 12 clear indicators of how the walk of faith is going. You are headed toward Christian maturity when these areas are in line:

James: Twelve Tests of Spiritual Maturity (1:4)

970727AM-1 (1:1) "James and the 1<sup>st</sup> church at Jerusalem"

- I. A Maturing Walk of Faith **ENDURES** troubles 1:2-11
  - A. 970803AM-2 (1:2-4) "The Truth about Pain & Problems" Maturing saints see Trials from God's perspective a source of purifying faith builders. This gives life a whole new orientation.
  - B. 970831AM-3<sup>rd</sup> (1:5-11) "Our New Perspective" Maturing saints have a whole new standard for assessing personal-worth. God clarifies the new valuation has nothing to do with money or comforts of life.
  - C. 970907AM-4<sup>th</sup> (1:9-11) "The Rich Poor and Poor Rich"
  - D. 970914AM-5<sup>th</sup> (1:9-11) "Extravagant Giving"
- II. A Maturing Walk of Faith **DEALS** with temptation 1:12-18
  - A. 970921AM-6<sup>th</sup> (1:12) Maturing saints are "Winning the Crown of Life". v. 12

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1968 Americans were reeling from the capture of the US Navy ship Pueblo, the riots in Chicago and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. On that same day, few of us heard about the brutal and savage martyrdom of two missionaries, Stan Dale and Phil Masters. Their bodies riddled with arrows fell on a remote riverbank in the dense jungles of Irian Jaya the victims of Christ-less cannibal savages. Their last moments were witnessed by hundreds of warriors. Two of these men later were converted and retold the story I am about to share with you now. One Nalimo, helped to kill them. The other Yemu was a helper and guide who tried to prevent their murder. The story<sup>1</sup> picks up on the second visit these two Regions Beyond Missionary Union missionaries have to these remote tribesmen. On the first visit they had been severely shot with arrows and had several agonizing months of slow recovery. Undaunted, they had returned tried to reach the tribe. The tribe refused to listen and now as we pick up their story, they were heading back to their families.

One-and-a-half hours from their last campsite, Phil and Stan passed beyond the last signs of human habitation in the northern Seng.

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<sup>1</sup> Richardson, Lords of the Earth, p. 301-305.

Looking up toward the west, Stan caught sight of a 10,000-foot pass 3,000-feet above them.

"From the top of that pass, we'll almost be able to see the airstrip at Ninia," Stan said to the Danis, to encourage them. Everyone quickened his pace, although the terrain was now very tough.

The large force of Yali fell back out of sight. Yemu thought, *Perhaps they've given up, perhaps they've all gone home!* But in the next moment, a great war cry resounded somewhere in the forest behind them, and Yemu's heart sank. *This is it!* he thought.

"Hurry, my father!" Yemu pleaded. "I fear they will kill you now!"

"No, Yemu, I'll stay behind. You go on ahead and help Phil make good time," Stan replied calmly. *He knows, Yemu thought. He heard that shout too, and he knows that this time they really mean to kill!* But Yemu stayed with Stan. The three Danis had gone ahead with Phil. Beyond Yendoal, the river grew shallow, flowing over a wide, stony bed. They waded through it for another 300 yards, and reached a gravel beach. Beyond the beach the trail left the river and climbed directly upward to the pass. Just another 2000 feet of climbing and they would be over and on their way down to safety. But the war cry resounded again, much closer now.

Suddenly they came floundering through the river, bows held high. Others streamed down through the forest, their floppy rattan coils rattling. Stan and Yemu stood at the lower end of the gravel beach, facing them. Phil was alone at the other end, 50 yards distant. The three Danis waited another 30 yards beyond Phil. As they all looked back in horror they saw Stan raise his staff, grimly facing the Wikboon horde.

"Yemu! Leave me!" he shouted over his shoulder. He kept his staff raised, not to strike but to form a barrier against the advancing tide of warriors.

"All of you, turn around and go home!" he commanded.

A priest of *Kembu* named Bereway slipped around behind Stan and-at point blank range-shot an arrow in under his upraised right arm. Another priest, Bunu, shot a bamboo bladed shaft into Stan's back, just below his right shoulder.

Yemu was crying now and shouting at them to stop. As the arrows entered his flesh, Stan pulled them out, one by one, broke them and cast them away. Dozens of them were coming at him from all directions. He kept pulling them out. Breaking them and dropping them at his feet until he could not keep ahead of them. Nalimo reached the scene after some 30 arrows had found their mark in Stan's body.

*How can he stand there so long? Nalimo gasped. Why doesn't he fall? Any one of us would have fallen long ago! A different kind of shaft pierced Nalimo's own flesh-fear! Perhaps he is immortal!* Nalimo's normally impassive face melted with sudden emotion. Because of that emotion. Nalimo said later, he did not shoot an arrow into Stan's body.

Stan faced his enemies, steady and unwavering except for the jolt of each new strike. Yemu ran to where Phil stood alone. Together they watched in anguish at Stan's agony. As some 50 or more warriors detached from the main force and came toward them, Phil pushed Yemu behind him and gestured speechlessly-run! Phil seemed hardly to notice the warriors encircling him. His eyes were fixed upon Stan.

Fifty arrows-sixty! Red ribbons of blood trailed from the many wounds, but still Stan stood his ground. Nalimo saw that he was not alone in his fear. The attack had begun with hilarity, but now the warriors shot their arrows with desperation bordering on panic because Stan refused to fall. *Perhaps Kusaho was right!* Perhaps they were committing a monstrous crime against the supernatural world instead of defending it, as they intended.

"Fall!" they screamed at Stan. "Die!" It was almost a plea, *please die!*

Yemu did not hear Phil say anything to the warriors as they aimed their arrows at him. Phil made no attempt to flee or struggle. He had faced danger many times but never certain death. But Stan had shown him how to face it, if he needed an example. That example could hardly have been followed with greater courage.

Once again, it was Bereway who shot the first arrow. And it took almost as many arrows to down Phil as it had Stan.

Yemu and the three Danis waited until they knew Phil was too badly wounded to survive. Then they ran.

Remember our text? James 1:12 *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.* NIV

Fifty years later the Apostle John records Jesus as saying: Revelation 2:10 *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.* NIV

## FIVE CROWNS

In Glory all will shine in varying degrees of splendor [I Cor. 15:40-42]. We all will be happy servants [Mat. 20:1-16] of One Lord:

- The **STEADFAST RACER** that resists all Disqualifiers gets the Unfading Crown in I Cor. 9:25-27. This is for Mastering our old nature.
- The **UNSELFISH WORKER** who faithfully wins souls gets the Crown of Honor in I Thess.2:19; Phil 4:1. Because the faithful proclaim the truth, there is promised a 'crown of exultation' (1 Thess. 2:19-20).
- For those who have true saving faith and thus are faithful to live in hope until Jesus comes, there will be 'the crown of righteousness' (2 Tim. 4:7-8). The **VICTORIOUS WARRIOR** who faithfully watches for Christ gets the Crown of Righteousness in II Tim. 4:8. The crown of righteousness is God's reward for a faithful and righteous life; and our incentive for faithfulness and holiness is the promise of the Lord's appearing. Because Paul loved His appearing and looked for it, he lived righteously and served faithfully. This is why Paul used the return of Jesus Christ as a basis for his admonitions in this chapter (see 2 Tim. 4:1). We are not called to be apostles; yet we can win the same crown that Paul won. If we love Christ's appearing, live in obedience to His will, and do the work He has called us to do, we will be crowned.<sup>2</sup>
- The **FAITHFUL EXAMPLE** who faithfully shepherds gets the Crown of Glory in I Peter 5:3-4. This is for feeding the flock. Because of the service of the redeemed, the reward given is 'the unfading crown of glory' (1 Pet. 5:4)."
- For all who love the Lord there will be "the crown of life" (James 1:12). The **FAITHFUL WITNESS** who is loyal unto death gets the Crown of Life in Revelation. 2:10; James 1:12. This is for enduring trials.

All of the metaphors Paul uses for the Christian life portray a difficult struggle against [agonidzomai]. Hence his word pictures of warfare,

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

paces, struggles, and building. So all of life is a struggle [agony] to please Christ. Listen to Eric Sauer<sup>3</sup> in his helpful book *The Arena of Faith*:

“Is not the whole an astonishing, many-sided picture of the race and completion of the spiritual life? The arena of faith, the training, the self-control, the ruthless denial of self, the herald, the entrance to the racecourse, the different kinds of contests, the racing to the goal, the boxing, the wrestling, the rules of the combats, Christ the umpire, the danger of being disqualified, the appearance of the victor before the exalted throne of the divine Judge on the great day of the distribution of prizes.

- It is out of His hands the victors will receive the wreath and the palm.
- The list of the victors ‘the book of life’, the triumphal entry in the homeland, the banquet, the festival, the gifts, the place of honor-- in fact, scarcely one essential feature of the whole course of the games has escaped the writers of the New Testament and not employed in their figure of speech.”

In all this, however, keep clearly in mind:

1. FINISHING WAS REQUIRED: He only received the prize who had carried through the full requirements of the contest. “For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (20). Therefore “I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (14). Whoever after rounding the course seven times crossed the starting line even one step, indeed one foot, ahead of the rest carried off the prize.
  - David failed one well remembered time, but he finished the race.
  - Moses failed one memorable time at the rock, but he finished the race.
  - Peter failed to stand for Jesus once, but he finished race.
  - Paul failed early on and struggled all through life, but he finished the race.
  - Are you planning to finish the race or are you going to cut back so you can “enjoy life” instead of “enjoying Christ”?
2. ENDURING WAS REQUIRED: No relief was allowed.
3. OBEYING WAS REQUIRED: Not the slightest shortening of the course. All must press forward without pause. No one must permit himself to be detained. All must be careful not to stumble in this obstacle-race. For Christ can preserve us.

Crowns are for Christians. There are five. Will you get one?

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<sup>3</sup> p. 61

- I. The CROWN OF LIFE to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and persevere to the end. The perseverance of saints is the proof of salvation. Thus the Faithful Witness who is loyal unto death gets the Crown of Life in Revelation. 2:10; James 1:12. This crown is especially for those endure suffering loving Jesus all the way. This means having the desire that He be glorified through our response to trials. LOVING GOD
- II. The CROWN OF REJOICING is also called the soul winners crown and it consists of people won for Christ. The unselfish Worker who faithfully wins souls gets the Crown of Honor in I Thessalonians 2:19; Phil 4:1. Note the background of this crown. The only things we can take with us are people! Are you taking anyone with you? Who, your friends, neighbors, children? DISCIPLINING OTHERS.
- III. The UNFADING CROWN OF SELF-CONTROL is for Steadfast Racer that consistently brings the flesh under the Spirit's control, resisting all that disqualifies. This one gets Imperishable Crown in I Corinthians. 9:25-27. This is the crown for holy living as in Romans 6:6-14. This is the crown for focused living as in Hebrews 12:1-2, where all self-sufficiency, spiritual independence and indifference are forsaken. This crown is for those who VALUE RELATIONSHIPS with people OVER AND ABOVE FINANCIAL GAIN Phil 4:1; I Th. 2:19-20. Are you holy and focused? On what? Is it on DICIPLINING and LIMITING the rule of SELF so that the Holy Spirit can rule?
- IV. The CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS goes to those who faithfully watch for Christ each day living with eternity's values as their own. These get the Crown of Righteousness in II Tim. 4:8. Remember Paul is now at the end of his life. He is in the depths of Mamertinum. This crown is for anticipating Christ. Are you? This crown is for following to the finishing line the course the Lord has given you? Are you? FINISHING THE RACE TO THE END.
- V. The CROWN OF GLORY is promised to those who live as an Example to the Flock. Faithful undershepherds get the Crown of Glory in I Peter 5:3-4. This is for ministering to the flock of the Lord Jesus Christ in keeping with the elements of verses 2 and 3: Willingness, sacrificial dedication, humility and living as an example for Christ. It is for living the life as men and women in I Tim 3:1-13 and I Peter 3:1-5. SERVING CHRIST'S CHURCH

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THEM ?

Is your life all wrapping paper?

Or is it a crown for Jesus ?

Look at Revelation. 4:9-11 And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (KJV)

- Are you saved? Do you have the crown of life?
- Are you soul-winning? Will you get this crown of rejoicing?
- Are you Spirit controlled? Will you get the unfading crown?
- Are you Seeking Jesus? Will you get the crown of righteousness?
- Are you serving Christ's church, His sheep? Will you get the crown of glory?

The blood that drenched that gravel and sand along a remote river in Irian Jaya sprang up in the salvation of those head hunters.

Stan and Phil will be crowned as good and faithful servants of Christ.

Are you planning to finish?  
Are you seeking His crown?

The consequence of practicing or teaching disobedience of any of God's Word is to **be called least in the kingdom of heaven**. I do not believe, as some commentators suggest, that **called** refers to what men say about us, but to what God says about us. Our reputation among other people, including other Christians, may or may not be adversely affected. Often other people do not know about our disobedience, and often when they know they do not care. But God always knows, and He always cares. It is only what we are **called** by God that is of any ultimate importance. It should be the concern of every believer who loves his Lord that He never have cause to call him **the least**.

Determining rank in **the kingdom of heaven** is entirely God's prerogative (cf. Matt. 20:23), and Jesus declares that He will hold those in lowest esteem who hold His Word in lowest esteem. There is no impunity for those who disobey, discredit, or belittle God's law.

That Jesus does not refer to loss of salvation is clear from the fact that, though offenders will **be called least**, they will still be **in the kingdom of heaven**. But blessing, reward, fruitfulness, joy, and usefulness will all be sacrificed to the extent that we are disobedient. "Watch yourselves," John warns, "that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward" (2 John 8).



It is possible to lose in the second phase of our Christian lives what we built up in the first.

To disdain even the smallest part of God's Word is to demonstrate disdain for all of it, because its parts are inseparable. James teaches that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2: 10). To ignore or reject the least of God's law is therefore to cheapen all of it and to become **the least** in His kingdom. Such Christians receive their rank because of their ill treatment of Scripture, not, as some imagine, because they may have lesser gifts.<sup>4</sup>

This is what Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27. "Any man who enters an athletic contest practices rigid self-control in training" (Phil. 3:14, WMS). If the athlete breaks training, he is disqualified; if he breaks the rules of the game, he is disqualified. "No contestant in the games is crowned, unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5, WMS). The issue is not what *he* thinks or what the *spectators* think but what the judges say. One day each Christian will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10–12). The Greek word for "judgment seat" is *bema*, the very same word used to describe the place where the Olympic judges gave out the prizes! If we have disciplined ourselves to obey the rules, we shall receive a prize. Bible history is filled with people who began the race with great success but failed at the end because they disregarded God's rules. They did not lose their salvation, but they did lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:15).

It happened to Lot (Gen. 19),  
Samson (Jud. 16),  
Saul (1 Sam. 28; 31), and  
Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

And it can happen to us! It is an exciting experience to run the race daily, "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:1–2). It will be even more exciting when we experience that "upward calling" and Jesus returns to take us to heaven! Then we will stand before the *bema* to receive our rewards! It was this future prospect that motivated Paul, and it can also motivate us.<sup>5</sup>

470 footsteps of Jesus  
183 beneath the cross

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<sup>4</sup>MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

<sup>5</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

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