

Receiving the Crown – I Peter 5:1-4

I. Introduction:

- A. Peter reminded the pastors of the churches in Galatia, Cappadocia and Bithynia that their primary duty was to feed God's sheep.
1. Then he concluded his thought by saying there is a reward for faithfully carrying out that duty.
 2. *"When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*
- B. Someone might think, *"Well that has nothing to do with me, because I'm not an elder."*
1. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind in that regard:
 2. First, we should be able to learn important Biblical truths by studying subjects not directly linked to us.
 - a. For example there are lessons to be learned from the study of angels, Israel and Satan.
 - b. You are none of these things, but it is good to spend time thinking about our enemy and our helpers.
 3. And then you want me to preach the gospel again and again because you yearn for people to be saved.
 - a. You were born again years ago, & perhaps the next gospel message is something you well understand.
 - b. Yet, you not only tolerate, but actually enjoy, hearing more about your Redeemer and your salvation.
 - c. You are okay with hearing the gospel again and again, since you know that someone else might be hearing that essential good news for the first time.
 4. In a similar way, you should want God to call young men into the ministry to carry on the work of the Lord into the next generation.
 - a. Therefore, you shouldn't be too upset to hear a message about elders and the Christian ministry.
 - b. And **verse 4** in particular could be useful in God's speaking to the heart of some young Christian.
 5. And then there is one more thing: I will always try to make every lesson relevant to you in some way.
 - a. Tonight's lesson will be no different. I may not be totally successful, but I will try.
 6. *"When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye (elders) shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

II. Again, to whom is Peter speaking? This is directed towards **ELDERS**.

- A. And as I tried to show in an earlier lesson, those elders are also called *"bishops"* and *"pastors."*
1. Their primary responsibility is to feed the flock of God over which the Lord has made them overseers.
 2. They are *"shepherds,"* searching for the best pasturage, while keeping an eye out for predators.
- B. Have you ever thought about the fact that shepherds haven't been given the task of creating sheep?
1. If he's out gathering new sheep for the flock, he must leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness to do so.
 2. That may be all right for the Chief Shepherd, but the under shepherd doesn't have the same powers.
 3. And from where will he get these new sheep?
 - a. Think about literal sheep and literal flocks for a moment.
 - b. If the shepherd is going to find more sheep for his flock, most likely they would have to come from other people's flocks.
 4. In reality, from where do new sheep come? They come from older sheep – parent sheep – within the flock.
 5. The shepherd's primary job is to keep the sheep healthy and well-fed, so they can flourish and reproduce.
 6. I'm not saying that it is never the elder's job to evangelistically go out into the highways and hedges, but it is one of his secondary responsibilities.

III. In verse 4 Peter refers to a reward which the faithful elder shall receive: a crown of glory.

- A. There are two kinds of crowns in the New Testament.
1. This gives us the opportunity for an interesting study, but we're not going to dig too deeply this evening.
 2. The most important crown is the *"diadem,"* the crown that only a king should wear.
 - a. In **Revelation 19** John looked into the future, *"And I saw heaven opened, & behold a white horse; & he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war."*
 - b. *His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns (diadem); and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*
 - c. *And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God."*

3. Admittedly earthly kings, and even wicked earthly kings, may wear a royal diadem, but only one person truly deserves one: He whose name is *“the Word of God.”*
- B. But Peter does not refer to this diadem. He speaks of the *“stephanos,”* or the victor’s crown.
1. This is that award which was given to the winner in the foot race or to the victorious army general.
 2. These crowns were often made of plants and flowers, so they were temporary – corruptible.
 3. Perhaps this was to remind the winner to keep on winning.
 4. Paul speaks of athletes in ***I Corinthians 9:25*** where he says, *“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”*
 5. Among all the scriptures which speak about crowns to be given to Christians, they are always victor’s crowns and not royal crowns.
 6. They may be eternal and incorruptible, but they are not royal diadem.
- C. I said that this could be made into an interesting study.
1. For example, we could ask whether or not Peter is speaking of a literal crown or just a metaphorical reference to some sort of honor.
 - a. ***Philippians 4:1*** and ***I Thessalonians 2:19*** use the word *“stephanos”* in a non-literal way.
 - b. Paul referred to *“Brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, (his) joy and crown.”*
 - c. Using that reference, someone might say that the elder’s crown was not real; it was a virtual crown.
 2. But then in ***Revelation 4*** we see the twenty-four 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 honour and power...”* That sounds to me like real crowns.
 3. Without going into further depth, I’ll just tell you that I believe Peter is referring to a literal crown.
- D. But are elders the only servants of God to be given these victor’s crown? Not at all.
1. ***John*** heard in ***Revelation 2*** that those who are faithful unto death will be given a *“crown of life.”*
 - a. If that is an allegorical or virtual crown then the lesson would be that only those who are faithful unto death will have an honored life – eternal life.
 - b. Since that isn’t true then that crown must be literal.
 - c. Eternal life is the gracious gift of God and not in any way dependent on our faithfulness.
 2. ***James*** tells that there are crowns for all those who endure trials & temptations in a manner which glorifies the Lord – (***James 1:12***).
 3. And ***Paul*** said in ***II Timothy 4*** – *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”*
 4. Do ***you*** love the thought of the return of the Lord – His appearing? Do you look for it and expect it?
 5. Then there is a special crown for you.
 6. The saints of God may receive other rewards for their service, but crowns are a part of them.

IV. Peter tells those elders that their crowns will be distributed at the APPEARING of the chief Shepherd.

- A. The Lord Jesus is returning to this world, and I believe it will be very soon.
1. The saints who love His appearing are ready to receive him. They are anxiously awaiting Him.
 2. And the wicked world appears to be ready as well, in the sense that it’s wickedness appears to be full.
 3. Prophetic scriptures seem to suggest that Christ could be here at any time.
 - a. *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*
 - b. *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

B. I believe that shortly thereafter *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body (in his life), according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” – II Corinthians 5:10.*

1. *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*
 - a. *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;*
 - b. *Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.*
 - c. *If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.*
 - d. *If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”*
– I Corinthians 3:11-15.
2. This is not the judgment of the lost, which is described toward the end of the **Book of Revelation**.
3. This is not a judgment to determine whether or not someone is saved or if he is worthy to enter Heaven.
4. This is a judgment of Christian lives and Christian works.
5. This is a judgment under which every Christian will come – you, me and your Christian neighbor.
6. And among the throng, there will be thousands of church elders who will hear whether or not the Lord considers their service to have been carried out faithfully and for His glory.

V. **HOW will that bishop’s service be tested? How will our service be tested?**

- A. Scriptures tell us that it will be put to God’s refining fire.
 1. This will be no blast furnace, or even a goldsmith’s refining pot; this won’t be a glazier’s kiln.
 2. This will be the special fire of the righteousness of the Lord.
 - a. And this fire will be fed by the Word of God itself.
 - b. *“Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD” – Jeremiah 23:29.*
 3. If your sacrifice and service has been given to the Lord in accord with the Word of God...
 - a. And if your service has been rendered in faith and with faithfulness...
 - b. If what you have done for the Lord has been Christ-centered, you will receive Christ’s rewards.
 4. I can’t describe them all; I can’t tell you about their extent or their glory.
 5. But among them will be those victor’s crowns.
 6. There will be rewards for faithful ambassadors and for victorious soldiers for Christ.
 7. Those who have been faithful Christian priests, interceding for others, will receive the Lord’s honor.
 8. There may be a great variety of rewards and crowns, and among them will be some for the elders.
- B. Going back to the Lord’s parables of the talents and the pounds, we are reminded of another important lesson.
 1. We will not be judged or rewarded for the number of talents we have been given by God.
 2. Obviously, some will receive more and some less out of the Lord’s sovereign will.
 3. God’s judgment will be based on what we have done with our 5 talents or 10 pounds, or just one.
 4. That levels the field. The elder will not be given a pass when it comes to the examination of the Lord.
 5. I am quite sure that there will be humble Christian ladies whose rewards will exceed those of negligent and unfaithful church elders.
 6. Some pastor’s wives may be more highly honored than their husbands.
 7. The Lord’s judgments will be thoroughly just.
- C. And because of that justice, I fear that there will be a great deal of disappointment in that day.
 1. How much dirt must be dug up and run through the gold miner’s mill to find a single ounce of gold?
 - a. I have read that on average, only 1 gram of gold is present in 1 ton of gold ore.
 - b. And not all dirt is gold-laden ore.
 2. How much of our service will be burned away as dross when the Lord’s fire is applied?
 3. I wouldn’t be surprised if the dross doesn’t far exceed what actually remains.

- D. We need to ask ourselves today: how much of our service is rendered to the Lord out of habit, or guilt, or selfishness?
1. How much of our service is given to God without faith or without an eye to the glory of the Lord?
 2. In other words, how much of our service has been made up of wood, hay and stubble?
 3. The question is as much for the elder as it is for anyone else.
- E. I am afraid that at the judgment seat of Christ there will be far more loss than gain.
1. Many a pastor will come into that judgment hall, expecting to push out a wheel barrow out full of crowns of gold, silver and precious stones.
 2. But when he actually leaves, he'll be rejoicing with nothing more than that salvation is by grace.
 3. How many bishops serve the Lord for 40 years and then retire into 20 years of oblivion, disobeying the Lord who tells them to be faithful unto death?
 4. The same is true of all of us.

VI. I will close with more question: *WHY* will Christ grant these rewards?

- A. You know that the Lord doesn't owe us anything, not even if we die for the cause of Christ.
1. So why does the Chief Shepherd come with crowns to distribute?
 2. Does Peter answer that question for us? I'm not sure, but perhaps he gives us a hint.
 3. Does Peter exhort those elders, saying, "*Strive to earn your elder's crown?*"
 4. Does he dangle a crown out in front of the pastor, enticing him to do a better job than he has been doing?
 5. It may be only my imagination, but Peter seems to be doing nothing but stating a fact.
 6. "*When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*"
- B. Why will the Lord reward His servants – you, me and the missionary who dies as a martyr?
1. Why will He give to you, who love His appearing, a crown of righteousness?
 2. It will be like everything else: it will be out of His grace. He is under no obligation.
 3. But perhaps mingled with that grace will be His justice.
 4. He will not discount your sacrifice for His name; nor your hospitality, your generosity or your witness.
 5. But we all need to examine whether or not our service has been for His glory and through faith in His name.
- C. Peter tells us there will be special crowns for the elders who have been faithful in feeding the flock.
1. They will not be the only people honored by the Saviour, but there will definitely be something special for them.
 2. That some pastors turn their backs on that promise and walk away from their calling is beyond me.
 3. Christ Jesus has said, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"
 4. That statement wasn't to pastors only. It is a promise to all of us.