**1 Thessalonians 2:19**

slide 1

**The Crown Rewards of Christ**

***17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.***

* In my last message I spoke to you about a very serious and sobering subject that Paul addresses in v. 18 . . . the disruptive and destructive role of Satan in the world.
  + He is our sworn enemy and does everything that he can to impede the progress of the gospel in the world
* This morning, as we examine v. 19-20, we come to a much more positive subject . . . the subject of Christian victory.
* In v. 18 . . . which we examined last week . . . I explained that Paul was lamenting the fact that he had been unable to return to Thessalonica because Satan was aggressively **impeding his return** by using the Jews and Gentiles of Thessalonica to aggressively prevent his return.
  + Now, in v. 19-20 Paul teaches us that in spite of Satan’s efforts, the Thessalonian believers were continuing to flourish under the leading and protection of the Holy Spirit.
* Having stated that ***Satan hindered us***, meaning that Satan was doing everything within his power to impede Paul’s ministry, Paul then makes a statement in v. 19-20 that show that Paul is not despairing over the situation. Far from it. In fact, in v. 19-20 Paul shows that he has complete faith and confidence that the Thessalonians were firmly established in their faith and were flourishing.
  + Paul’s confidence in the faith of the Thessalonian believers is stated in v. 19 in the form of question . . . ***for who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation?***
* In thinking about why Paul would compose this statement in the form of a question, I am of the opinion that Paul does this to instill confidence in the Thessalonians that although Satan had successfully ***hindered*** his return to them, Paul has great confidence in their faith, even in the face of severe persecution.
  + In addition, by composing this statement in the form of a question, Paul uses the answer as an opportunity to teach them a point of doctrine. In the answer to his question Paul’s answer states that ***you are our hope, joy and crown of exaltation in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming. 20 For you are our glory and joy.***

**3 Outcomes of the faith of the Thessalonians**

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* Here in v. 19, in this statement-in-the-form-of-a-question, Paul points to **three specific outcomes of the faith of the Thessalonians**. The first two are straight-forward, while the third makes a significant doctrinal statement.
* **First**, Paul states that the Thessalonian saints are ***our hope***.
  + The word ***hope*** means “confident expectation.” Paul is saying here that he has the confident expectation that the Thessalonians will persevere in their faith because he knows that **the foundation of their hope is the Lord.**
  + The Thessalonian believers were steadfast in their faith, despite all that they had been subjected to.
* **Second**, Paul states that the Thessalonians are ***our joy*** . . . their faith and faithfulness were truly a matter of great joy to Paul and his missionary brethren.
  + It must have been a matter of very great pride and joy that knew that the Thessalonian church was flourishing, despite his absence.
* As I said, those first two points are pretty straight-forward. Paul is expressing his great pleasure and personal satisfaction in the ***hope and joy*** that the Thessalonians had been to him in their faith.
* But now we come to the **third** point in v. 19. Paul tells the Thessalonians that ***you*** ***are our crown of exultation in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming***. Though the NASB uses the word ***exultation***, I prefer the synonymous word . . . ***rejoicing***.
  + There are two important theological points that need to be explained and understood here.
  + The first is an understanding of what **the *crown of rejoicing*** is. The second is **the *coming of our Lord Jesus***.
* Here in v. 19 we encounter a term that is found nowhere else in the Bible . . . **the *crown of rejoicing***.

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* + In the New Testament there are **2 terms** that are translated ***crown***. . . the Greek words *diadēma* and *stephanos*.
  + The Greek word *diadēma* refers to the ***crown*** worn by a king. *Diadēma* is a word that always symbolizes **kingly or imperial dignity**, and, as such, would **never worn by anyone but a king.**
  + The other Greek word, *stephanos*, means “**of exalted rank**.”
    - In the time in which Paul lived, the *stephanos* was a term to denote “the victor’s crown.”
    - The Greeks and Romans placed great importance upon athletic achievement. The original Olympic Games were contested in antiquity and the modern Olympic Games born out of the ancient Greek games.
    - In the Greek athletic games the winners of the various events were given a *stephanos* to commemorate their victory in the same way that medals are given today. The *stephanos* was a wreath or garland that was placed on the head of the winner.
    - In the Isthmian games the winner’s *stephanos* was of pine leaves, in earlier competitions it was of laurel leaves, in the Olympian games the *stephanos* was made of wild olive leaves. We look at such a simple wreath of leaves and ask, “what’s the big deal?” But in ancient Greece, such a winner’s crown was the most coveted honor in the whole Greek world. It wasn’t the wreath of leaves they coveted, but what that *stephanos* represented . . . the champion.

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* As I mentioned, reference to **the *crown of rejoicing*** is found only here, in v. 19, in the New Testament. **But there are references to other *crowns*** found in the New Testament. Specifically, there are a total of **5 crowns listed in the New Testament that are bestowed on believers when the Lord comes**.

**#1— The Believer’s Crown**

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* The **first crown** is what is commonly called ***the incorruptible crown***. We find this crown referred to in 1 Corinthians 9:25, using the metaphor of the athletic games . . .

***1 Corinthians 9:24-25— 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.***

* + Paul’s point here in 1 Corinthians 9:25 is that while natural men compete for a crown of leaves that quickly withers and fades, the crown we receive from the Lord is imperishable . . . it will never fade.
  + Also notice that while **only the winner of the race receives the winner’s crown, in heaven all believers receive the crown for having finished the race.**

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**#2— The Diligent Christian’s Crown**

* The **second crown** is the ***crown of righteousness***, found in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 . . .
  + ***2 Timothy 4:7-8— 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.***
  + Where the ***incorruptible crown*** is received by all believers, the ***crown of righteousness*** is a crown that is given to those believers who been faithful and demonstrated a hunger for Christ and look forward, with great anticipation to His return.
  + The ***crown of righteousness*** is for the faithful Christian who has not allowed his initial zeal and “boiling” love for the Lord at the time of his salvation to cool to a comfortable “simmer” as he settled into the Christian life.
  + The “comfortable Christian” is faithful, but may have lost some of the zeal he first experienced when he was saved.
  + For Paul, who was daily tested and suffered greatly, it was his zeal for the Lord that strengthened and equipped him to endure his persecution, while maintaining his white-hot love for the Lord. Every day Paul lived as if the Lord were going to appear that day. Paul always lived in preparation and anticipation of meeting his Savior.
  + Those who receive the ***crown of righteousness*** are those Christians who live with the excitement and zeal that Paul embodied.
  + **Those who suffer** persecution and severe trials are most often the Christians who have this greatest zeal for the Lord’s appearing because they are in daily need of the Lord’s grace in their lives.
  + **Those of us who don’t daily suffer** as some of our brethren can easily fall into the trap of becoming comfortable and complacent in our daily lives. We love the Lord, but without trials to keep us dependent upon Him, He recedes from our constant prayers and desires.
  + The ***crown of righteousness*** is for the Christian who does not allow him or herself to become complacent, but maintains the white-hot zeal for the Lord and every day looks for the return of the Lord.

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**#3— The Martyr’s Crown**

* The **third crown** is the ***crown of life***, found in James 1:12 . . .

***James 1:12— Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.***

* + As James describes, the ***crown of life*** is the crown bestowed on the Christians who have suffered great trials and persevered in their faith. The ***crown of life*** is also known as **the martyr’s crown** because the suffering of those who receive the ***crown of life*** is often suffering that results in death.
  + We see this crown referred to by the Lord in His commendation to the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:10 . . .

***Revelation 2:10— 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

* + The ***crown of life*** is awarded to those Christians who have endured an inordinate amount of suffering and persecution for the name of Christ and have persevered.

**#4— The Faithful Shepherd’s Crown**

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* The **fourth crown** is the ***crown of glory***, found in Peter’s instruction to church leaders and teachers in 1 Peter 5:1-4 . . .

***1 Peter 5:1-4—1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.***

* + Here in 1 Peter 5 we have Peter’s specific instruction to pastors and elders regarding how to properly lead their flocks, as under-shepherds of the Lord.
  + Peter is very specific on what elders should and should not do in discharging their duties properly. Unfortunately, the instruction given here is not followed and the result is destructive upon a church.
  + But for those church leaders who faithfully discharge their God-given responsibilities of leading and guiding God’s flock, there is the promise of the reward of ***the unfading crown of glory*** to those leaders and teachers who faithful and obediently lead their congregation.

**#5— The Soul-Winner’s Crown**

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* The **fifth crown** is the ***crown of rejoicing***, found in our text for today . . .

***1 Thessalonians 2:19— For who is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?***

* + Here in v. 19 the meaning behind the word ***rejoicing*** is the faithful Christian’s response to **seeing others walking faithfully with the Lord**.
  + It is an infinitely gracious gift that God saves any of us. But the gift that is almost equal to our own salvation is the gift of being permitted to participate in the salvation of someone else.
  + Here in v. 19 Paul is saying that on the day the Lord returns to take us to be with Him forever, those who have served Christ and our fellow man by evangelizing and participating in winning their soul to Christ will receive this special ***crown of rejoicing***.
  + This means that if you have served Christ by leading someone else to Christ by your life and words, you will receive this crown.
* In declaring that the Thessalonians were **their** ***hope, joy and crown of rejoicing***, Paul is saying that the great faith of the Thessalonians was the source of his, Silas’ and Timothy’s ***hope, joy and crown of rejoicing***.
  + As their spiritual fathers and leaders, Paul, Silas and Timothy had the joy of knowing that their efforts . . . especially in the midst of great persecution and suffering . . . were going to result in their award of **the *crown of rejoicing*** when they stood before the Lord.
* While we can only imagine and speculate what that scene will be like, just imagine the number of people who will be standing in heaven in testimony to work of the apostle Paul in bringing the gospel and salvation to them. It will probably be tens of thousands of souls that will have been personally evangelized and saved as a result of Paul’s efforts.

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**How many souls will stand as witnesses of your efforts at soul-winning?**

* It is very likely that virtually every Christian has had the honor of leading someone to the Lord. After all, God has chosen the evangelism as the primary means that knowledge of Christ is transmitted. Every single one of us was evangelized by someone. And that someone will receive the ***crown of rejoicing*** as a result.
  + My question for each of you this morning is . . . will you receive the ***crown of rejoicing*** for your efforts in evangelism? If you do, how many souls will be standing with you as witnesses of your efforts? Dozens? Hundreds?
  + When this earthly life is over and you depart to be with the Lord . . . when you leave your earthly treasures behind . . . **what evidence will be left behind of your work in service to the Lord? And when you stand before the Lord to receive your crowns, how many souls will be standing with you to testify that you were an instrument of their salvation?**

**How can I work toward receiving one of these crowns?**

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* While there is no amount of work that any of us can do to merit God’s favor, **there is much work that we can do in service to the Lord.**
  + Having received the benefit of someone else’s efforts and service on our behalf, it should be our heart’s desire to serve someone else in the same way.
  + As Paul so powerfully and beautifully states in Romans 10 . . .

***Romans 10:14-15— 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.***

* + The gospel of Christ and of salvation comes to every man by the instruction of faithful witnesses and evangelists. Without evangelism, men and women will forever remain in darkness.

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**“But I’m not good at evangelism! I don’t enjoy evangelism!”**

* Yet, despite the fact that ***faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ***, many Christians are very poor witnesses. A great many Christians refuse to teach others about Christ.
  + And the two main excuses that are given by those who refuse to teach the gospel to unbelievers are . . . “I’m not good at evangelism” and “I don’t enjoy evangelism.”
  + The primary problem with evangelism is that people are fearful of rejection. Nobody likes to rejected or to be told that their message is not believed . . . especially by a stranger.
  + Speaking to strangers on a subject that is likely to be rejected . . . perhaps even angrily rejected . . . is certainly uncomfortable. **But is your personal discomfort with the process of evangelism a valid reason to not do it? Is that the reason you will give the Lord when He asks why you didn’t evangelize the lost?**
    - **“Lord, I didn’t want to tell unbelievers about you because it made me uncomfortable.”**

**When will these crowns be given?**

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* As we learn about the five different crowns that are given to believers by the Lord, one of the questions that arises is, “**when will these crowns be given?**”
* Though we are not told the specific time in which these crowns will be rewarded by the Lord, we can use Scripture to make a strong argument for the time.
  + Here in our text today we have one clue. Notice in v. 19 that Paul says . . . ***who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?***
  + In v. 19 the phrase ***at His coming*** tells us **the time of the Lord’s returns will precede the giving of the rewards.**
    - In other words, ***at His coming*** refers to the time in which the ***crowns*** are given.
  + Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul reveals some of the events that occur after the Lord’s return.

***2 Corinthians 5:10— For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.***

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* Unfortunately, many people misunderstand the purpose of ***the judgment seat of Christ***, probably because of the word **judgment**.
  + In fact, the purpose of ***the judgment seat of Christ*** is **solely** for the purpose of dispensing **remunerative justice** . . . the giving of rewards.
  + No punishment is dispensed at ***the judgment seat of Christ*** because the only people who appear before the Lord at ***the judgment seat of Christ* are Christians**.
  + And since Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins, no punishment is possible. **Jesus paid it all**.
  + This statement . . . that there is no punishment at ***the judgment seat of Christ*** is further affirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 . . .

***1 Corinthians 3:12-15— 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.***

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* + In v. 14, when Paul says that ***if any man’s work which he has built on remains, he will receive a reward*** **includes the crown rewards.**
  + **Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 is that those works of men that are of no value are burned up, but what the Lord judges to be worthy of praise and reward will remain and be rewarded.**
* But while **Christians will receive only remuneration at *the judgment seat of Christ***, at the Great White Throne Judgment, which occurs at the end of the Tribulation is for retribution . . . punishment . . . of unbelievers. We see this specifically revealed in Revelation 20:11-15 . . .

***Revelation 20:11-15— 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***

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* + While **believers will only receive** **remuneration . . . rewards . . .** at ***the judgment seat of Christ***, **unbelievers will only receive retribution . . . punishment . . .** at **The Great White Throne Judgment.**

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**Do we cast our crowns before the Lord?**

* In the study of these 5 crown rewards, there is a belief among many Christians that upon receiving our crown rewards from the Lord that we will then **“cast them before the Lord”** in return, as if to say “only You are worthy of such praise.”
  + This view is probably based upon the event recorded in Revelation 4:9-11 . . .

***Revelation 4:9-11— 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."***

* + But notice in Revelation 4 that the two groups of creatures spoken of are ***living creatures*** and ***twenty-four elders***. Both of these groups of creatures are **classes of angels**.
  + Contrary to the view that these ***twenty-four elders*** are human, **they are not**. They are one of the highest classes of **angelic creatures**.
  + Therefore, when the ***twenty-four elders*** ***cast their crowns before the throne***, **only** these angels are doing so. We Christians are not included in this verse. Therefore this is no reason to believe that we will give our rewarded crowns back to the Lord. The crowns are intended as rewards for faithful service rendered during our lives and will remain ours and in our possession.

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* Today we have examined the crown rewards described in Scripture because one of those crown rewards, the ***crown of rejoicing***, is revealed here in v. 19.
  + But there is another important component of v. 19 that I only briefly mentioned . . . the phrase ***in the presence of the Lord at His coming***.
* The Greek word for ***coming*** is *parousia*. This word is used torefer to **the Lord’s return** and is found 17 times in the New Testament. 6 of those 17 occurrences are in the Thessalonian epistles . . . 4 in 1 Thessalonians and twice in 2 Thessalonians.
  + The ***coming of the Lord*** is a major subject of these epistles, and the reference in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 is the first in this letter.
* Because ***the coming of the Lord*** is such a significant subject, I decided to spend this week addressing the subject of the crown rewards and will address the subject of ***the Lord’s coming*** next week.
* It’s amazing. As you read 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, it would be very easy to read these two brief verses and move on to chapter 3. But when you consider the significant doctrine and theology contained here, you marvel that Paul can pack so much of importance into these two short verses.

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**The benefit of Christian fellowship**

* In light of this morning’s subject of crown rewards for faithful service to the Lord, I want to take a few moments to use the lesson of this morning to put in a plug for our upcoming “Men’s Breakfast.”
* Next Saturday we will be having our first quarterly “men’s breakfast.” The theme of this first meeting is to explain the importance of biblical fellowship so that men will be better equipped to be the spiritual leaders in their homes and to be better equipped to teach others about Christ.
* **When you think of Christian fellowship, what does that mean to you?**
  + Unfortunately, most men think that Christian fellowship is a group of Christian men getting together to talk about worldly things. “How ‘bout them Braves!” “Think Georgia can beat Alabama next year?” “I hear that Callaway has a new driver out. Have you tried it yet?” “I hear you bought a new gun. How do you like it?”
  + The object of Christian fellowship is not to discuss the things of the world. Christian fellowship should be an opportunity for “iron to sharpen iron.” To teach and exhort one another.
  + In fact, **at our first men’s breakfast, next Saturday,** **the subject will be “4 essentials for the practice of biblical fellowship.”**
* I will tell you that one of the primary goals of biblical fellowship is to exhort one another to become more knowledgeable in God’s word and to be better equipped to serve the Lord.
  + Each of us has certain areas in which we are stronger and more gifted and certain areas where we are lacking. The goal of our men’s ministry will be to help men identify areas that they need work and to help strengthen them.
  + For example, some men . . . like Matt and Chuck . . . are gifted in the area of evangelism. One of our goals during our men’s breakfasts will be to train up the men to become more confident in evangelism and in seeking opportunities to step out of our comfort zones to teach others about Christ.
* I mention the men’s breakfast because it is coming up next week and I would really like to see as many of the men of the church as possible attend.
  + But we are also seeing very edifying Christian fellowship occurring in our teens as Pastor Matt leads them through a Sunday evening class in theology and doctrine.
  + This class is critical to establishing a sound foundation upon which these young people will continue to build up their faith.
  + **After all, how can you teach others about Christ if your own theology and doctrine is lacking?** In order to be good evangelists, you first need to have a sound personal knowledge.
* Likewise, there is a women’s Bible study going through a study of 1 Peter. This study is, likewise, building a solid foundation of doctrine.
* It is my hope and my goal that everyone in this church will have an opportunity . . . **an make an opportunity . . .** to seek out and enjoy Christian fellowship . . . fellowship with one another with God’s word as the focus of our time together.
* Fellowship is not a formal ministry of the church. Fellowship occurs when Christians get together, either in a church activity or in an informal setting, and take the time to invest time in other another, exhorting one another in the word of God to love and good deeds.
* My hope is that when the men gather next Saturday morning, most of the men of the church will attend and bless one another . . . that next Saturday evening we will gather together here in the fellowship hall to celebrate Jeremiah Frazier achieving the rank of Eagle Scout . . . and next Sunday afternoon to enjoy a **Fellowship meal** after the worship service.
  + **I encourage you all to attend and make it a time of true Christian fellowship.**