

## CROWNS WON AND CROWNS LOST

*Reading: "I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).*

First of all we ought to look at these words and get hold of their implications, for things are implied here which are rather impressive, certainly very serious.

### **A crown offered**

There is first, if not a positive statement, it is as good as a positive statement, that there is something related to the life of the child of God which is called a crown, his crown, her crown. You notice that the application of the exhortation is personal — "He that hath an ear, let him hear." It is not just a general application even to a local church. The thing is brought down to the individual, and therefore we are permitted, at least permitted, to reach this conclusion, that with every individual child of God there is bound up something in the mind and purpose of God which is called his or her crown, the crown of his or her life. That brings into view a time when every child of God should, in the will and purpose of God, have that great seal set upon their lives which was God's intention, when He will say, This is the thing for which I marked you out, this is the thing which I had in view for *you*, this is the thing for which I called you, this is the end for which I laid My hand upon *you*, this is the very crown of all my thoughts, desires, intentions, where you are concerned! Now that is not straining what is here, it is not exaggeration, it is stated here that to him that overcometh, there is that which is his crown, her crown.

So first of all we want to allow this to come right home to our hearts. You and I, each one of us individually in God's thought, is marked out for something which is called *our* crown. What that crown is, we will not stay to try and enquire. Paul speaks of several crowns, but we will leave exactly what the crown is, only reminding ourselves that Paul himself was one who recognized this truth in those great words in Philippians 3. You remember he said, "That I may apprehend, that I may lay hold of, that for which I have been laid hold of by Jesus Christ." "I press toward the mark of the prize of the on high calling." The prize of the on high calling — I press toward that! We may come back to that passage again presently, but Paul saw this that, in that day on the Damascus road it was as though the hand of the Lord Jesus came and took hold of him — he called it being apprehended, the hand of the Lord came on him — on that day it was with a purpose in view, a crown in view, an on high calling, a prize, and he said, I have been laid hold of, I have been apprehended by Christ Jesus and now my one business in life is to lay hold of the thing for which I have been laid hold — the prize.

Let this come home to your hearts very strongly. I remember what a strength and help and inspiration these words were to me as a young Christian when I first as a young fellow took a very definite stand for the Lord in the midst of surroundings which were anything but spiritually helpful, very much to the contrary. In the midst of a great many difficulties and a good deal of cost, I took a stand for the Lord. These very words, in the light of what I am saying now, were a tremendous strength to me. There is a crown which is your crown, which belongs to you in the purpose of God. Now then, it is your business that no one takes your crown. Well, that is the first thing.

### **The possibility of losing our crown**

Then, of course, the second thing which does so clearly arise from this statement is that it is possible to lose *our* crown. I am not thinking now of losing our eternal salvation but that which is called the crown, the prize of the on high calling. It is possible; these words, if they mean anything, mean that. “That no one take thy crown.” It is possible for us to have our crown taken by someone else, for us to lose it. It is terribly and really possible that we should reach that day which should be our crowning day and there not be the crown for us that the Lord intended.

Now, Paul lived in the light of that possibility also. As you remember, he said on one occasion — “lest having heralded others (our version is “preached to others”, but the word is “heralded”) I myself should be rejected”, turned aside, cast away, I myself should miss (1 Cor. 9:27). “Lest ...” — that is a word of precaution.

Well, the second thing is the terrible possibility that we should lose the thing for which the Lord has laid His hand on us.

Then another thing which runs with that is this — someone else can get what we were called to. God intended something for us, He called us in relation to something. Someone else was not in the first place called to that particular crown, that was not their crown, but by double faithfulness on their part, that is by faithfulness to their own calling and by faithfulness where we were unfaithful, they have got their own and ours as well. That is implied here, isn’t it? Someone else can get the crown we were called to. That is terrible. I will tell you how that happens. We will not go to the application yet. Just look at the text. There it is.

The next thing, of course, putting that round the other way, is this, that we can get someone else’s crown as well as our own. That is, we can get a double reward; we can excel in this matter. We are not wanting other people to lose their crown, I am sure we do not want to take another’s crown, we would sooner everybody had their crown. We are not ambitious in this sense that we want to do anybody out of their eternal glory, not a bit of it, but there it is. Here is the word, and there is a great deal that supports it, that there are those who are forfeiting what the Lord meant for them and someone else is taking that. The word here is so clear and so simple, so precise — “that no one take thy crown”. Cut it right down if you like — “one take thy ...”. Well, we can come in for something of double glory by faithfulness where the Lord is being disappointed in others. Whether that appeals to us or not, in outworking that is a very great reality.

Here are our words. “Hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.” *Thy* crown. Now, you have only got to take the words singly and you get all the thoughts that I have suggested. Crown; thy crown; one take thy crown; that no one take thy crown. Crowns won and crowns lost. We have seen a lot of people lose their crowns as we have gone through this life. I can go back over years and I can just array a number of people whom I know positively have lost their crown; I know they have lost it. There is no doubt about it, and they can never recover it. I think of a young man who I know, if ever I knew anything, was called of God to serve Him in a distant part of the earth. His whole being was consumed with that thought; he gave himself in every way to be prepared for that. You could never meet him but what that was the one thing. He was the authority on that one thing. He could have well said, For me to live is China! It was so. A young woman came into his life who had no such sense of divine call, but who had interests on this earth, ambitions here, and gradually that relationship twined round him. He never went to China, he lost his vision, steadily lost his spiritual life, gave himself to business, got on fairly well in business, but the Lord has gone out, and there is nothing there for the Lord, all gone, his crown lost. I could go right on like that touching so many who I know have lost their crown. It is a terrible truth that is set forth here: that there is a crown and that it can be lost.

But, on the other hand, there is that side which has the shadow and dark background to it, which nevertheless has its own glory. How often have we seen someone stepping in and in that double measure of faithfulness and devotion to the Lord, you could almost see that one taking the thing that you knew was the thing that belonged to someone else. The Lord was calling, was working, and the Lord desired

that one for such and such a thing, in such and such a way, and you could almost see the Lord cherishing that tree, doing all that He could to get that tree to respond, and you had a sense of what it was called for, what that life was for, what God had called that life for. No, careless, slothful, unresponsive, not taking the matter seriously at all. Then you saw someone coming, and you could almost see it happen, the preparation of another earnest out-and-out life, one that meant business with God, meant to go the whole way themselves, and you almost could see, in the realm of things spiritual, that one take what this other one was called to, and in the outworking the one has gone out and the other has gone on. All you can say is, Well, the interpretation of those two lives is that this one took that one's crown! You saw the Lord offering this one a crown and the other one taking it, while the one dallied. It is possible, if this word means anything, that you and I should take a crown that is not intended for us in the first place, but it is available. We are not shut out from it, it is available, but what a warning it is and yet what an exhortation — double glory, glory more than was really meant for us, but yet open to us.

Ah yes, well in the earthly races or competitions, one man can take all the prizes. Some of us have seen that sort of thing happen. We remember in our school-days how one fellow seemed to take all the prizes; if there was any prize going, it went his way. Those prizes were for the rest of us, everybody, they were for all.

## **How crowns are lost**

### ***1) The danger of compromise***

But now, how are crowns lost? Well, of course, in many ways, and one can only draw upon the experience of temptation and what has been not only felt but seen in one's own experience and in the lives of others as to how crowns are lost as well as how crowns are won. I think one of the ways in which crowns are more frequently lost perhaps than any other is by compromise, keeping strictly, of course, to the spirit of the word. I am thinking of this great master of crowns, Paul, and if there was one thing about Paul more than another thing, it was this, that he was a man of no compromise. Compromise, you know, has many forms and many shades and it can be found under many very good names. For instance, what a lot of compromise is hidden behind that phrase — "broad-mindedness". Broad-mindedness is one of those great big trees spreading in all directions and great dimensions, and any bird of heaven can find a home in that tree, Compromise. It means calling things by other names than their true names. You know how, in the world, they cover up evil by wonderful phrases. The whole terrible iniquity of gambling in horse-racing, for instance, is covered up by the great and noble business of preserving a noble breed of horse, and that is the way in which all this iniquity, ruined lives by the millions, devastated homes, hungry children — passes as something noble. We have got to be careful that we call things by their right name, and especially the younger people have got to be careful. You get out in the world and you know what the world thinks about Christians and Christianity, and then the temptation at once is in some way to be broad, not to be too particular, too singular and different from everybody else — be broad-minded! That broad-mindedness is the curse of compromise which has robbed many a young Christian or his or her crown for all eternity. We are not going, of course, to go to a wrong extreme, you understand that, in the other direction, but let us be careful. Compromise has many forms, but the essence of it where Christians are concerned is an ashamedness of Jesus. Oh, let us call it by its right name — ashamed of Jesus! That is the right name for it. Call it anything else and it comes down to that. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in his own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26): crown gone, Jesus ashamed of us. Why? We were ashamed of Jesus, but we would not call it that. We would call it by some name of compromise, broad-mindedness, being all things to all men — the wrong application of a right principle. Oh yes, crowns are lost like that, but I do urge upon you, especially my younger friends, this word — "that no one take thy crown", have no compromise, no

letting go for anything whatever; no advantage that you can gain by any form or degree of compromise can ever bring you that which will deliver you from terrible shame and remorse in the day of Jesus Christ. Well, compromise is one thing and I say it works out in so many ways and it has so many connections with it.

## **2) *The danger of 'success'***

Crowns are lost imperceptibly in the beginning of things. For instance, there is the terrible peril of success. If there are dangers in adversity, I think the dangers of success are infinitely greater. I am speaking out of knowledge in certain directions. I am thinking of certain people who have lost everything of God's great calling which I knew to be theirs, and concerning which they gave such wonderful promise at one time, so bright and promising for the Lord, and it all turned upon this — they got promotion. It brought them into a new circle where they were made a fuss of, where they were something. That was their undoing, but imperceptibly. If, at the time, you had challenged them — Look here, you are losing something, you are losing out! — They would not have listened, would not have had it. Not at all: it was working subtly, imperceptibly, slowly, but it did the work. The crown has gone, gone for ever. Maybe that the majority of us here will not have to stand that awful test, the test of prosperity. I am not anticipating that peril myself! Perhaps most of you will not be put into that fire, but there are some of you younger folk who may yet, and before long, be in that real testing where you will be in a position of influence, where you will be made something of. That is your hour of peril, and the hour when your crown is in peril. I would like to be faithful with you in the light of a lot of tragic experience. Remember the perils of becoming something, being something, being made something of, having a position of importance or any kind of success.

## **How crowns are won**

### **1) *An undivided heart***

I trust this is a word to everybody but you will realize that my heart is going out to younger brothers and sisters particularly just now. This is a day of very great trial for the younger folk; our hearts are very much with you. This is a new phase of things. We are going to be scattered, called upon to do what no previous generation has had to do. I do want them to take a word for these coming days that may help them in the time of trial when the crown is at stake. May I say this to you? If only you will eliminate, or ask the Lord to enable you to eliminate, every element of mixture in your life, so that your flame is one clear pure flame, it will save you an enormous amount. I think it will save you 99% of the trouble. If you have got a double motive, if your heart is divided, if you have got two things working at the back of you, if there is internal conflict, if there is civil war, you are going to lose, and therefore, in the light of the glorious issue, it is always the wisest thing right from the outset to take a clear and unmistakable position so that everybody knows exactly where you are, they have not got to find out, they know that is where you stand right at the beginning. No mixture — get rid of any double element at work in your life — that you want to stand well with both sides, you do not want to let the Lord down secretly on His side, at the same time you want to stand well with others, you do not want to have them against you. Well, there is a wisdom that God can give which will save us from doing that sort of thing in a way that leads to unnecessary trouble. I think we can be foolish even in that matter. It says about the Lord Jesus that He grew in favour with God and man, and you say, Well, can a Christian do that? I think probably the explanation is that there was a wisdom which did not unnecessarily and foolishly put peoples' backs up. A lot have done that sort of thing in an unnecessary way, and they have done mischief quite unnecessarily. You understand what I mean. There is a wisdom which may save from a lot of that sort of thing. Ask for that wisdom. Read the eighth chapter of the book of Proverbs, read and reread it, and go

to the Lord and say, Give me that wisdom! Ask for wisdom, but at the same time, while asking for and seeking to be governed by real wisdom in your position and relationships and attitudes, do at the same time have no double interest, no double motive. Let it be clear as to the line you are taking, as to where you stand, and that from the outset.

## **2) *Endurance to the end***

Well now, we must draw this homily to a close. Here is this word which helps us. “Hold fast that which thou hast that no one take thy crown.” Hold fast! — That is only another way of saying what is said so very many times in the New Testament, Be steadfast, hold fast or endure. Crowns are so often lost just for want of a bit of real “stickability”, holding on, letting go too soon. Oh, how much this matter of the divine crown, the reward at the end, is bound up in the New Testament with that word — endure. “He that endureth to the end ...” (Matt. 10:22). “If we endure ...”. Endurance is a great test. There are many who can make a great spurt at the outset, make a show on the first lap, and you would think by their beginnings they are going to carry it on. We know quite well it is not always those who get ahead at the beginning. It is usually those who can hold on to the end, who hold fast. This word, you notice, is to the church at Philadelphia, and the Lord is saying — “... the hour of tribulation which is coming on all the earth ... hold fast”. Yes, it is just that holding fast in tribulation that is the great factor of the crown.

You know, I have been having a good deal of time in recent weeks for thinking and reading, and I have been reading a number of very interesting things. I read Admiral Byrd’s story of that wonderful advance camp in his Antarctic expedition; the story of the salving of the American submarine, Squallus, thirty men out of fifty trapped over two hundred feet deep, and several things like that I have been reading, and I have been moved to my depths, as probably you have, with stories like that, moved to the very depths. What men will do, what they will endure, just to add a little bit more to the knowledge, the information and the usefulness of such information, in the great store of scientific research in the history of this world. What they will do — the unspeakable suffering! No one could read that story of Admiral Byrd’s without feeling that we do not know anything about suffering. A man will go through all that just to give a little more information to the world as to currents and wind force and so on. You cannot think of their sufferings. But the thing that has impressed me is this. I expected before I got to the end of those stories, I expected Byrd to say, Let me get out of this, you will never catch me on this again! All those men trapped down there two hundred and forty feet in the ocean in a helpless submarine, shivering in the intense cold with hope slowly dying and never being recovered — Let us get out of this, you won’t catch us in a submarine again! The thing that impressed me was that Byrd must have another expedition. Practically dying, collapsing, such cold as to touch something meant to strip the very flesh off your hand, yet he is no sooner back than he is working a new expedition. The men down there in the Squallus, no sooner having been rescued just when they were losing consciousness and beginning to view the last hours, no sooner rescued and their submarine salvaged after three months’ hard work than they say, We want no other life than a life on a submarine, we choose to go back!

That is something that you and I have got to stand up to, and I have to think, Hullo, where are we Christians? Don’t we often feel, If only I could get out of this, O Lord, deliver me from this, and I will never put myself in the way of it again! Are we like that over our Christian life or, as Paul evidently did and as these men looked at their work — We are on the business, the great business, we are on a line that matters in the long run, it is something which added to the whole is going to be of tremendous value and we are in it to the end, to the last drop; we get out of one scrape, well, we will get into another, but we are going on, we are not going to quit! — That is the point. We are not going to quit and seek a softer job. So Paul says, “Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). It is only another metaphor for the same thing. Hold fast, do not quit, do not let go, hold fast that which thou hast that no one take thy crown.

Will you just sort this out a bit at a time? Thy crown; no one take thy crown; hold fast and watch all those ways, those subtle ways, by which crowns are lost. I hope that every one of us here at any rate in the great day, whether we are known here as being of any account or of no account, may receive at the Lord's hand that crown for which He apprehended us, and while we do not want to take other peoples' crowns, let us be faithful that where the Lord is not being satisfied in others, He may be doubly satisfied in us.

The Lord help us to hold fast that which we have.

*Note to the reader: the editing of brother Sparks himself was not completed in this message.*