

# Crowns at the Judgment Seat

## II Corinthians 5:10

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**Introduction:** Consider the words of Christ in Revelation 22:12, "*And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*" This verse speaks of Christ's return ("*I come quickly*"), His reward ("*my reward is with me*"), and His requirement ("*according as his work shall be*"). Mention of Christ's return involves the **promise** of His return (for He comes surely, Acts 1:10-11 and John 14:1-3), and the **preparation** for His return (for He comes suddenly, Matthew 24:42-44 and Luke 12:35-43). The believer will either have confidence when Christ returns or he will cringe in embarrassment, depending on his abiding in Christ at that time. John says, "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (I John 2:28). The reward of Christ implies both the *rewarding* with crowns (for the believer's faithful service) and the *rendering* of the crowns (to the faithful Savior). When will this event (the judgment seat) take place? Luke 14:14 speaks of the believer being "recompensed at the resurrection of the just." That resurrection is described in further detail in I Thessalonians 4:13-17, referred to as the "Rapture." Paul told the Corinthians that judgment should be withheld "until the Lord come," for it will be at that time that "every man shall have praise of God" (I Corinthians 4:5). In II Timothy 4:8 Paul connects the receiving of a crown with "that day" which is identified as "his appearing." According to Revelation 19:7-8, when the Lord comes in glory to make war and then to reign, His bride with Him has already been rewarded. Though unable to be pin-pointed exactly, the time of the judgment seat appears to follow shortly after the rapture of the Church. Mention should be made of the nature of the crowns to be awarded at that day. Most writers speak of five specific crowns.

### I. The **definition** of "crowns"

A. The word used for the believer's crown is "*stephanos*."

1. Illustrated and identified in I Corinthians 9:24-27 > Paul refers to wreathen crowns awarded to the victorious athletes at the Corinthian games.
2. "*Incorruptible*" crown of the believer, in contrast to the "*corruptible*" crown of the athlete.

B. The word used for a kingly crown is "*diadema*."

1. It is used of the crowns of Christ, spoken of in Revelation 19:12.
2. This is the kingly or imperial crown.

### II. The **description** of the "crowns"

A. I Corinthians 9:25 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.*" [Servant's crown]

1. The incorruptible crown is defined in verse 27 as one awarded to those who win mastery over the flesh ("*...keep under my body, and bring it into subjection...*").
2. The imagery Paul uses is interesting - the athlete's reward was simply a wreath of leaves. There was no real value in the crown itself, rather it was the honor of being recognized by the one on the "bema" that constituted the greatest significance.

Note: So too, when believers are rewarded at the judgment seat, the greater reward is not found in the value of the crown, but in the recognition given the believer by the Lord Himself.

B. I Thessalonians 2:19-20 says, "*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*"

[Soulwinner's crown]

1. This crown is promised to those who lead souls to Christ (see also Daniel 12:3).
2. This crown is pictured in the song "Must I Go Empty-handed?"

- C. James 1:12 says, "*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.*"  
**[Sufferer's crown]**
1. For those who endure trial, at times leading to martyrdom, there is the crown of life.
  2. For those who seal their witness with death, Revelation 2:10 says, "...*be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"
- D. II Timothy 4:8 says, "*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.*" **[Separatist's crown – "living beyond this life"]**
1. This crown is promised to those who not only look and long for, but who also love Christ's appearing.
  2. This crown is pictured in the parable found in Luke 12:35-40.
- E. I Peter 5:4 says, "*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*" **[Shepherd's crown]**
1. This is the only one limited to a particular group of believers, the elders (missionaries?).
  2. This is the crown awarded those men who faithfully feed the flock, follow the Savior, and further the gospel.

**Conclusion:** In their Eschatology class notes, Braithwaite and MacLachlan identify the above crowns respectively as: "the servant's crown, the soul-winner's crown, the sufferer's crown, the separatist's crown (for living beyond this life!), and the shepherd's crown." Since it is the faithful Savior Who has enabled the believer to be faithful (I Thessalonians 5:24) and empowered him to be useful (Philippians 2:13), it is to Christ that the crowns are rendered, cast before His throne. Revelation 4:10-11 says, "*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 honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*" Having considered the definition and description of the crowns, it is important also to note their "departure" (that is, the danger of losing rewards). John gives such a warning in his second epistle, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (:8). Notice the admonition John declares (:7-9), that is, the recognition of false teachers (:7 and 9) in order to enjoy the reception of full reward (:8). There is an apparent danger of losing rewards by one who does not follow the actions John describes (no welcome of hospitality, vs. 10-11 and no wish of health, vs. 10b). What John feared here came unfortunately to be fulfilled later by the churches of Pergamos (Revelation 2:14-15) and Thyatira (Revelation 2:20). But those who heed John's warning about the danger of losing rewards can experience the delight of receiving rewards. In Revelation 3:11, the Lord offers this admonition to the church at Philadelphia, "*Behold, I come quickly; hold fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" The warning is to "hold fast" (to keep a firm grip on) to what they have. This seems to refer back to the church's faithfulness (or even possibly to the promise of the crown of life similar to that for Smyrna, 2:10). The idea is not that their crown would be stolen, but that they would forfeit their reward. As has been previously noted, the believer will cast his crown(s) before the throne in recognition of his faithful Savior. But will there be any lasting evidence of crowns won? Pentecost suggests, "Inasmuch as reward is associated with brightness and shining in many passages of Scripture (Dan. 12:3; Mt. 13:43; I Cor. 15:40-41, 49), it may be that the reward given to the believer is a capacity to manifest the glory of Christ throughout eternity. The greater the reward, the greater the bestowed capacity to bring glory to God." The story is told of Queen Victoria attending a performance of the "Messiah" at Albert Hall in London. Upon hearing the Hallelujah Chorus, she arose quickly to her feet. After the performance, she was asked why she had stood. Her reply: "My Lord is coming one day. I would love for Him to come now, so that I could, as Queen of Britain and Empress of India, take my crowns and lay them at His feet." Whether this story is accurate or apocryphal, such devotion will be the instantaneous response of believers when they stand before the throne at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Will you have crowns to cast at the Savior's feet in that day?

"Must I Go Empty-handed?"

Must I go, and empty-handed, thus my dear Redeemer meet?

Not one day of service give Him, lay no trophy at His feet?

Not at death I shrink nor falter, for my Savior saves me now;

But to meet Him empty-handed, thought of that now clouds my brow.

O the years in sinning wasted! Could I but recall them now,

I would give them to my Savior - to His will I'd gladly bow.

O ye saints, arouse, be earnest, up and work while yet 'tis day;

Ere the night of death o'ertake thee, strive for souls while still you may.

Chorus: Must I go, and empty-handed? Must I meet my Savior so?

Not one soul with which to greet Him - must I empty-handed go?