

Receiving the Prize: The Crown of Life

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 1:9-10 tells us that God wants to join together everything that is in heaven and earth. He wants to bring the two realms together. That is what Ephesians 1 says, that He is going to bring all things together in heaven and earth.

THE UNION OF TWO REALMS

Paragraph B. Heaven speaks of the supernatural realm where God's power is openly manifested in His presence. The earth speaks of the physical realm: the place where natural processes take place, the place where human emotions and physical sensations are expressed. The Lord wants to bring the two realms together forever on the earth. That's called heaven, heaven coming to the earth.

HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM FACE TO FACE

Paragraph C. God's purpose has always been to live together with His people face to face on the earth. That is a huge statement. He is focused and determined that, when this thing is established, God the Father is going to dwell on the earth in an open display of His glory, in relationship to the natural realm with people who have material bodies. They will not only be material: Our bodies will be resurrected, but they will still be physical, material bodies.

God wants to come down on this earth, is what I'm talking about. This is the most difficult, but it's the ultimate reality in God's salvation purposes. God's purpose was never for us to get saved and go far away to heaven. His purpose was always to set up a situation where He came to the earth and brought the entire earth under His order, and used His people to bring the earth under His own order.

“THE TABERNACLE OF GOD IS WITH MEN”

He is going to bring His habitation to the earth. Revelation 21—we know it well. It says that God will dwell with them. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them” (Rev. 21:3).

This is the most astounding declaration from heaven. It's not saying we're going to heaven and living with God. He's saying that God is coming down to join the supernatural and natural together.

He will dwell on the earth, and the unspoken point, the dilemma that has been solved by Jesus on the cross, is that when the Father comes on the earth, He won't destroy the earth when He comes because of His blazing holiness.

That is the unspoken dilemma in this passage that John is talking about: He's coming to the earth.

THE RENDING OF THE VEIL

We think, “Well, cool. We’ve known that for years. We sing songs about it. Wait, there’s no need for a veil!”

In the Old Testament tabernacle, there was a veil. The glory of God was behind a veil, because if it wasn’t, it would consume the nation of Israel.

The glory of God is behind a veil right now; the veil is the separation of the natural and supernatural realms. That is a veil. If that veil was opened right now, the earth and all the nations would be consumed by the presence of God in a negative way.

LEADERSHIP TO THE NATIONS

Jesus did something so radical, so effective. We are in the process, and that is what the millennial kingdom is about. Jesus is coming down to the earth as a man in a physical body; yes, a resurrected body, but a physical one.

As a man, as a Jewish man on the earth, He is going to give leadership to the issues to prepare the nations to receive the Father, and He will bring the nations to substantial righteousness so that the Father can come down.

In the way that the Father sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, Jesus is here with His leadership team, if you will, which is the people from this age who were faithful.

He’s going to put them in leadership, and they’re going to do such a work in the anointing of the Spirit that they are preparing the way for the Father to come to the earth.

So Jesus is looking for a leadership team right now.

THE LORD IS LOOKING FOR LEADERS

Paragraph E. Jesus is looking for a leadership team, and He’s looking over 6,000 years, approximately, from Adam to the second coming. He’s looking over all of human history, and those who have been faithful to Him, and true; I don’t just mean those who have been saved, but those who have been faithful.

He is choosing them to be on His leadership team to prepare the earth for the Father to return. All the saints get to be involved, but He’s looking for leadership right now.

That’s what the message of the crown is about. That’s what the message of reigning and ruling is about. It’s reigning and ruling on a physical earth, with a physical Jesus, to prepare the nations in righteousness, so that the Father Himself can come at the end of it.

Then it goes to a whole new realm when He comes, but it's a 1,000-year period, the Scripture says. To the Lord one day is like a thousand years, so it's the one grand day of human history, the one grand day that Jesus rules the nations, for 1,000 years.

His leadership will be sufficient to pull this thing off, to establish it with such clarity and righteousness. The Father will actually come to the earth and dwell there forever. It's this earth. The new earth is this very earth here, transformed and renovated, and it's still this very earth right here.

It's amazing what we're involved in, called the kingdom of God.

THE NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL REALMS

Paragraph E. Jesus will rule the earth with the natural processes not suspended, yet significantly enhanced by the supernatural dimension of the Spirit.

We automatically assume that at the second coming Jesus comes, and everything that is natural will somehow evaporate. No, the natural realm, the earthly realm, God created it and said, "It is good." He likes it. He wants the earthly realm and the spiritual realm to come fully together, forever, on the earth.

THE REDEEMED, THE REPROBATE, AND THE RESISTORS

Paragraph F. There are three types of people who will be on the earth when Jesus returns at the second coming.

When He comes in the sky, there will be three types of people: the redeemed—the redeemed will be raptured at the time of the second coming. The reprobate—those are the ones who take the mark of the beast. They will be killed, but there's a third category called the resisters. That's my term; you can use whatever term you want. They don't take the mark of the beast, but they have not been saved.

That is the group that will get saved, converted, trained, and repopulate the earth with natural bodies. With resurrected bodies we will interact with them, and disciple the nations in the fullest sense of the Word.

SON OF GOD AND SON OF MAN

Paragraph G. As Gentile believers, we most naturally think of Jesus as God—good—in the supernatural conditions of heaven. That is where He is right now. We emphasize His deity; we emphasize worshipping this God in the supernatural conditions of heaven. We emphasize Him as the Son of God.

All of that is good. But the Jewish paradigm is quite different. They think of reigning with the Messiah as a man in the natural conditions of the earth. The Jewish mindset is very different from the Gentile, but the truth is the combination of both of those paradigms.

Neither of them is completely true. Israel is looking for a man to come to the earth to rule it, and they want to rule it with Him. Gentiles are looking to go far away to worship and leave here. They want to worship God.

We think of Jesus as the Son of God; they think of the Messiah as the Son of Man. The truth is both. He is coming to the earth as fully God, fully man, and bringing both realms together.

THE VIBRANCY OF HEAVEN

OK, let's go now to receiving the prize. That's just the little introduction I like to give often, because as fundamental as that is in the Bible—you'll find this is supported from Genesis to Revelation—most believers I talk to are clueless as to six or seven of the ten points I make about it.

They're thinking, "Huh, I'm just going to be whisked away, and I'm going to worship Him on a cloud, and hope in a million years that I don't get bored. I'll apologize to God if I do." They're worried about heaven. They know it's going to be good, but they're a little nervous that the Lord hasn't really connected the dots. "Lord, we have really active minds! I hope You have something planned for us up there."

He does. He is bringing heaven to the earth at the second coming, and we are going to have dominion. We are going to exercise dominion and bring the fullness of what is in God's heart to pass on the earth, in the natural realm and the spiritual realm together.

THE LORD IS CHOOSING HIS LEADERSHIP TEAM

It's exciting, and the Lord Jesus right now is picking His leadership team. For 6,000 years, from Adam to the second coming, He's picking the people who will lead in ruling and reigning and doing the things that are near and dear to His heart in that one grand day of history.

This is really important to Jesus, that He does it right. He doesn't get two chances. He has one chance, and He's not doing it Himself; He's doing it through His people, and He will choose those who are faithful to impart righteousness to those who are in the natural realm at that time.

He will only choose those who were faithful in the natural realm, only without resurrected bodies because their mandate is to bring the nations that are completely in the natural into righteousness. He's only choosing people who chose that when they were in the natural, and only in the natural realm during this life.

STRIVING TO OBTAIN A BETTER RESURRECTION

This was very clear to Paul the apostle. Paul had a really clear goal in his mind: He wanted to be involved in the establishing of the kingdom on the earth, and the kingdom age when Jesus returned to the earth.

You'll see in a few minutes that Paul was really focused on this. This was not a secondary idea to Paul. Paul's main goal in life was not to get as big of a ministry as he could on earth, and then

take his chances in the resurrection. His biggest goal was to do things in the earth in a right way to please the Lord, to win people to the Lord, and to live in righteousness. But he wanted to be involved in bringing the kingdom to the nations in the full sense of the word that was necessary to bring the Father back, so that the Father would actually dwell on the earth one day.

“WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING”

Paul talked to the saints and prayed several times—I have the verses in other places on the notes here; if you didn’t get the notes, you can get them in the back or on the website—but one of his big points, and he said this a number of times, was that he urged them to walk worthily. He meant to be worthy so that they could be involved in the establishing of the kingdom in the age to come.

He said, “Walk in a way that is worthy” (Eph. 4:1). He said, “Even if you die, even if you are suffering, do not worry. As long as you are worthy, it will be alright.”

Paul isn’t talking about being worthy of being forgiven. No one is worthy of being forgiven. Forgiveness is a free gift. He’s talking about being faithful so that the Lord will choose him, and the people he’s praying for that the Lord would choose them to be involved with Jesus in establishing the kingdom of God in a leadership role in a primary way.

BRINGING GOD’S PURPOSES TO THE EARTH IN THE AGE TO COME

Of course the first objection that people have is, “I don’t want to be faithful so that I can do something later.” They have the idea that, “I don’t want a big ministry where I’m rich and famous in the age to come.”

It’s not about that; it’s about having a function that is near and dear to Jesus’ heart, and working together with Him to bring God’s purposes to all the nations of the earth. It will be real, just as He was really talking to the apostles: He really met with them and helped them bring the kingdom to Israel in that elementary, initial way of His first coming.

Jesus is going to be interacting with His people in the same dynamic way. I’ve heard people say, and it’s a contradiction that they don’t see: If you ask them to rule with reign with the Lord, they say, “I don’t really care about that stuff.”

“Would you have liked to have been one of the twelve apostles?”

“Oh, that would have been awesome!” Well, that’s the exact same dynamic: He’s looking for a leadership team to work with in the natural and spiritual dimensions to bring righteousness to the nations. He wants to work with people. It’s about working with Him.

“WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST”

I. We know this; I’m just giving you the verse. We’re not even going to go through them.

Paragraph A. All believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

I give several verses there. This isn't to determine if you're saved. If you're not saved, you will not be at the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat is the Greek word, the bema seat, which was the reward seat. It was the seat of rewards where the Olympic judges gave the gold medals, or gave the crowns out to the athletes in the ancient days.

That's what the bema seat is: It's the place of reward. It's the place where the trophies are handed out. Every believer will stand before the bema seat, but not every believer will receive rewards. We will only receive rewards according to our consistency in faithfulness to the Lord, particularly in the secret place of the heart; the part of our life that no one sees. They may see you doing it with their eyes, but they don't know what's going on in your heart.

DIFFERENCES IN OUR CAPACITIES TO EXPERIENCE GLORY

Paragraph B. There will be a vast difference in our capacity to experience the glory of God in the age to come. We won't all have the same capacities; we will all have diverse capacities. Our capacities will be related to our obedience in this age.

It won't matter how big your ministry was in this age; it will only matter how big your heart was in righteousness.

When I stand before the Lord, He isn't going to say, "Did you preach in stadiums?"

He's going to say, "What is the measure of the obedience of your heart and the measure of your meekness and your revelation of the Word before Me? What was it?"

That's all that He's going to ask me. He's not going to ask me how big things were. Yet we are so locked into getting a bigger following. The Lord says, "Get your mind off of that."

It's good to have people impacted. I like big; I like big it's more humans being touched, not because bigger helps anything to any of us at the judgment seat of Christ and the bema seat.

"ONE STAR DIFFERS FROM ANOTHER IN GLORY"

We're all on a race, and we're all going to stand before the judges. There's only one Judge, but I'm using the Olympic analogy. The runners will run and the athletes will participate, but they will stand to receive their trophy on that day according to how they ran.

Of course, the race is decades long; it's the race of our life in the faith. Someone who met the Lord late in life, their race is short. It's our life after we're born again; that is our race. We have one race to run, and it's goes on through decades in many cases. It's one race.

"One stars differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead" (1. Cor. 15:41-42).

A CATCH-22 OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Now, people don't like this. Well, they do and they don't. I've been talking on that for years, so I've run into many so emotions. They don't like it because it really matters what they do, but then they really like it because it really matters what they do. So the pressure that it really matters is the very thing they want.

They want their life to really matter.

So many people—it's very normal if you're like this—are caught. "If it's true, oh no! But it's true, then everything I do in my heart is important, no matter how mundane the day is. Every single hour of my day is important to the Lord," meaning it has value. I don't mean every hour is serious and weighty, but every hour has value to God.

So many have read the Bible in a wrong way, where it doesn't matter. It's all the same when we get there. People usually have a reason they want it to be that way, because of unsettled issues in their lives. They don't want it to matter; they want it all to be the same when we get there.

But then if it's all the same when we get there, which many people like to think, even though that's completely not a biblical idea, then they're bored in their lives here because they have nothing that really matters. So they're really in a catch-22.

CORRECTING DISTORTED VIEWS OF THE GOSPEL

Others have said, "Man, this is heavy!"

I say, "That's right."

"This troubles me."

"That's good; you're getting it. That's called the fear of the Lord."

"No, this is really heavy!"

"That's called, 'Blessed are they who mourn; blessed are they who have poverty of spirit.' You're getting it."

If this doesn't trouble you, then you have not understood the gospel in its most fundamental dimensions. I say this with sadness in my heart: The majority of the Body of Christ in our nation has a distorted view of what the message of the gospel is even about.

I'm talking about the broad strokes across our nation. Millions understand it, but many millions more are confused by it. They think it's somehow getting hold of the grace of God, so they feel more comfortable while they're sinning, and they take their best shot hoping for heaven. They try to get as many friends, as much fun, and as much as they can get on this side, and maybe a few people will listen to them in their ministry, but that is not what the kingdom of God is really about.

RECEIVING A CROWN IN THE AGE TO COME

II. Receiving a crown in the age to come. Paul was focused on this. Crowns are not given to every believer. I know that is troubling to some people because they think, “Oh no, then it really matters what I do,” and that is absolutely right.

This is something that Paul the apostle was really focused on. Paul was locked into getting the prize of the upward call in his life. He wanted the highest call God had for his life. We will get to that in a minute.

Paragraph A. There are nine references to believers receiving heavenly crowns. It’s called “the crown of life” in James 1; it’s called “the crown of righteousness” in 2 Timothy 4. It’s called the crown of glory.

These titles, I believe, refer to the same reward. I believe they are all the same crowns. I believe they are different nuances, different dimensions of the one crown.

BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Jesus is talking to the Church in Revelation 2, and He says, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer... The devil is about to throw some of you into prison. Here is what I want you to do: Be faithful until you die” (Rev. 2:10, paraphrased).

This is Jesus in the resurrection visiting John on Patmos. “John, go tell them. Some of them are going to prison. It’s the devil doing it, and some of them will die in prison.”

I can see John saying, “Lord, do I really need to tell them?”

“Yes, it’s really important, because it’s really going to happen.”

I can imagine being the pastor who communicated that to the congregation: “Be faithful until you die, and if you do, I will give you the crown of life.” He’s not talking about being born again right now; He’s not promising them they will be born again. They are already born again. That is why the devil is coming after them, to test them, because they are already born again.

Paragraph B. The crown of life is a crown for the way we lived our lives on the earth. The Lord is going to give us a crown because of how we lived in this life, and it’s a crown that’s releasing the life of God in the age to come.

So it’s a twofold dimension: It’s the way we lived this life, and it’s a crown that depicts the measure of the life or the glory of God, the life of God and the glory of God that He is going to give you in the age to come.

The crown of life refers to a heavenly reward a believer receives for faithfulness. It’s not synonymous with being born again. I’ve taught this over the years: I’ll teach this for a few weeks

in a row, and I get a lot of people stirred up about it. They're desperate for it to be equal with being born again so that every single person is the same, so that it doesn't matter, so that there are no implications to what they're doing right now once they prayed the sinner's prayer.

They want to follow the Lord, pretty much, but they don't want to follow the Lord to this degree, to where it really matters.

The days of our life matter. Beloved, you cannot, like an ostrich, put your head in the ground and hope the Bible changes.

The Bible isn't going to change if Americans don't vote for it. I get people together and I say, "You cannot move the Bible. You cannot shift truth because it's unsettling to you. You have to shift. The Bible will not shift. It just will not."

TWO KINDS OF CROWNS

Paragraph C. There are two Greek words—we've gone over this a number of times lately—that describe crowns in the New Testament.

One is a diadem: That is the crown of a ruler, but that's a crown that the rulers inherited, mostly. They didn't do much; they were just born into the royal crown, and they received the crown. They were local rulers, governors, and mayors, and then the emperor, but most rulers inherited it, and they passed it down through their line, or through friendships or deals.

There's another kind of crown, the *stephanos* crown, and the *stephanos* crown had nothing to do with whom you knew or what family you were born. The *stephanos* crown was only won by what you did in the race, 100-percent based on your performance.

THE STEPHANOS CROWN

It's a totally different type of crown, the *stephanos* crown. It wasn't whom you knew; it wasn't what family you were born. You did not inherit it; you earned it. You earned it in the sense of how the athlete ran the race and worked out.

We don't earn it in the full sense of the word, because there's nothing we can do to get paid this well. There's nothing you or I could possibly do that would merit our getting this kind of kindness from God.

However, God does require that we obey Him in our heart, but we are not earning it by any sense of the word. We are giving God a little, and He is giving us a whole lot: He is giving us the eternal city, eternal life, and His own heart.

We say, "Yes," and try to walk in humility a little. We press into growing in it, and the Lord says, "I will give you everything if you do that. If you don't do it, it will be trouble."

Paul says in 2 Timothy 2, “If anyone competes in athletics, he is... crowned” (2 Tim. 2:5) —he gets the stephanos crown. Of course, this is only if he competes according to the rules.

This was not the diadem; he did not receive the diadem. He received the stephanos crown because it was earned. It was gained through the performance in the games.

ENDURING TEMPTATION TO RECEIVE A CROWN

Paragraph D. The stephanos crown is not given to all believers, but only those who endure temptation by consistently walking in obedience.

It says here in James 1, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation” (Js. 1:12). You understand that temptation must be endured. We say “no” to temptation today, and it is unrelenting. It is there tomorrow; it must be endured. We must resist it over and over.

PERSEVERING THROUGH TRIALS

You’ve heard it for years, some of you who have been in the kingdom for a while. I’ve heard this for many years: “I can’t take it anymore. I am worn out.” Of course, I always say—I try not to say it as the first thing I say, but I try to get around to it—“Well, your options are not very good if you quit. You don’t have very good options.”

When a person says, “I just can’t do it anymore. I’m too tired; I’m too worn out,” the only other option is to let the devil destroy them. There really is only one other option.

You hear it all the time: The temptation wears people down. Temptation must be endured. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved” —that is, by the Lord; when the Lord, at the Olympic judge’s table, so to speak, as the Judge of the races, approves a person for that crown—then only those people get that crown.

If they have been personally approved by the Lord, because it’s a crown, that has authority. It has authority in the age to come; it has a dimension of glory, and only the Lord can approve a person to have that crown.

It says the Lord will give the person who has been approved a crown of life, and it’s the stephanos crown. It’s not the diadem; it’s the crown that has been gained through participating with the grace of God by running the race with diligence and endurance and patience, etc.

THE CROWN HE GIVES TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM

James 1 tells us that God has promised that crown to the people who love Him. The crown that you receive, by the grace of God, is the statement of the measure of the love that you have for Him.

Because you are the only person who can give God your love. Your love is unique. No one else can give God your love besides you. He wants it, and the love is expressed in adoration, for sure,

but the love that He's wanting is more than adoration. He wants love that chooses obedience under the fire of temptation.

That's what He says in John 14:21. You can just write it down: It's to the person who keeps His Word. That is the person who loves Him. He said, "The person who obeys My Word, that is the one who loves Me" (Jn. 14:21, paraphrased).

It's good to come together and give affectionate declarations of our love and affection to Him. That's good. He likes that, but it's not that costly to say words to God in a worship service, though it's still meaningful to the Lord.

What is costly is that you endure temptation in the secret place in your heart, and then you say the words, "I love You; I love You; I love You." The crown is the measure of the love that you expressed in the fires of temptation.

You don't have to look for temptation; temptation is everywhere. All the powers that be want us to sin more and to quit following God hard. I mean the voices all through the body of Christ: "Just pull back; just relax; don't worry about it." The voices are everywhere. "Seek God less, and live in compromise more." The voices are in the Church and outside the Church, and the devil sees it.

A CROWN FOR THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS

Paragraph E. 1 Peter 5. This is a crown He gives to those who are faithful in leadership.

If you have never been in leadership, you might think, "Hey, I want to be in leadership." I encourage leadership if you want to be in leadership, to go with that. Go for it. Just do it the right way. Don't manipulate and push and get mad at people who don't recognize you. Serve and serve and serve.

Peter tells the elders in verse 1, "The elders who are among you... shepherd the flock of God" — how? — by "serving... not by compulsion but willingly" (1 Peter 5:1-2) — not because you get in trouble if you get caught not serving.

He says, "Do not serve them by human compulsion because you get in trouble if you get caught because you lack diligence. Serve them willingly, and serve them eagerly," he says. That is hard work, having been a shepherd for thirty years. To do it willingly and eagerly takes a lot of resolve in a man's or a woman's heart.

Being on the staff of a church, or being a full-time ministry, isn't what it's talking about. It's talking about what you do in that position. Serve eagerly and serve willingly, and in all things, serve. Don't do it for yourself. Serve! Get connected to their purpose in God and God's purpose for them.

THE CROWN OF GLORY

Peter goes on to say, later on in verse 3, “Be... examples to the flock” —don’t lord it over them and be bossy; be examples in your righteousness, and if you do this, verse 4, “when the Chief Shepherd appears” —Jesus—“you will receive the crown of glory” —the crown of life (1 Peter 5:3).

Only the leaders who actually pour themselves out in this way receive the crown of glory. I don’t believe it’s a special crown for leaders, but I believe that leadership has its own unique fires for conflict, and whether you’re a leader over ten, or 100, or over 1,000, either realm, it doesn’t matter. If you’re over ten, then you have enough conflict to know what I’m talking about. If you’re over ten people, I guarantee you, you have heard regularly, “You’re wrong! I don’t like your spirit! Why do we have to do that? I’m not going to go that direction.”

So you don’t have to be a leader over a thousand. If you lead and stay willing, serving, and eager, it’s an amazing testimony of the grace of God that you have endured temptation.

THE ELDERS WILL CAST DOWN THEIR CROWNS OF GOLD

Paragraph G. The crowns speak of one’s accomplishments. It speaks of the acts that are done by the grace of God in responding to faithful obedience to the Lord.

The crowns will be cast down before the Lord. The crowns aren’t talking about their born-again experience. The elders aren’t casting down their crowns before God—the fact that they’re born again. They’re taking what was earned, what they labored for in the grace of God, and they worked together.

RETURNING TO GOD WHAT WAS GIVEN US FROM HIM

What I mean by “earned” is, I always mean that with an asterisk. I don’t mean you earned it, you deserve it, because we do level one and God pays us level ten. It’s never fair. It’s exaggerated to the extreme in the grace of God.

A crown is those accomplishments you have achieved in the grace of God. More often than not, they are accomplishments at the heart level. Whatever we have gained at the heart level in obedience is our crown, and that crown is cast before the Lord, before His throne.

I believe that when the elders cast down their crowns, they mean it. It’s not show. They mean, “Whatever we have gained in the grace of God, it is literally Yours. It is Yours;” and they put it at His feet.

Of course you cannot out-give God; the Lord is the ultimate giver. The Lord says, “I receive it; it is really Mine, but I am really giving it back to you because I have plenty where that came from.”

My point is that the elders, and I believe many in eternity, will take that which is theirs, and they will be so in love with God, and so grateful for His goodness, because whatever dimension they

have achieved, they brought a one and God brought a ten. God paid them with a ten for a one's worth of effort.

They do have to give the effort. The effort is real, but it's nowhere really comparable to earning like an athlete would earn it, even though the analogy Paul uses is that of an athlete.

THE RARITY OF THE CROWN

Paragraph H. I believe that a relatively small percentage of believers will receive this crown. I assume the number is in the millions, but compared to all the believers in history, there are probably two to three billion counting the great harvest at the end of the age. We don't know, but I'm guessing two to three billion. So I believe the percentage is small.

Paul compared the receiving of these crowns—we'll get to that passage in a minute—to winning a crown in the ancient athletic games. In the athletic games, only a small percentage won crowns. Not everyone who ran the race, only a few people, won crowns in the athletic games, and that is the analogy that Paul draws from, purposefully.

I just did a quick study on the Olympics. In the Olympics, less than ten percent get medals, and there are about 10,000 to 11,000 athletes, so less than 1,000 get a medal.

I'm not making that a spiritual percentage. My point is that it's obvious that when 10,000 run or 10,000 participate, and only 1,000 win, it's obvious even in the natural, and that is the analogy Paul is using.

THE CROWN, A SYMBOL OF TRIUMPH

Paragraph I. The point of a crown is to indicate those who won a victory in the race. Of course, the victory we want to win isn't against someone else, so that's where the analogy breaks down. We're not racing against another person; what we're competing against is the darkness growing in our lives. The resistance of darkness is what we're competing against.

We're not competing against one another. The Lord doesn't have a small number of crowns in heaven. He has plenty of crowns, but He's not going to give them if people haven't been faithful.

You know, there are thousands running in the Boston marathon. I don't know the number, but only a few of them get the top prizes. Though all the believers are born again, of course, they all run the race, there's only a certain kind of response to which the Lord gives a crown.

AN EXPLANATION FOR THE EXHORTATION

I want that to trouble you. The reason I want it to trouble you is because I want to be a good shepherd. I don't want you to be shocked by this one day, and say, "Well, I lived in Kansas City for two years, and I never heard that."

I want to trouble you because I care about you. I want to trouble you because I am contending for your greatness before God. I'm not trying to put a burden on you; I'm trying to connect you to

reality because reality will not change because the modern American church doesn't like the reality that the Word of God says.

It is not going to change. Faithfulness is required for the crown.

BECOMING PERFECT IN OUR OBEDIENCE

Paragraph J. I talk a little about how people think the crown of life is synonymous with justification by faith.

The context of James 1 is not justification by faith. The context of James 1, receiving the crown of life, is enduring trials and not giving up. That is the context of the passage—James 1:2-12. He's talking about resisting temptation as a believer, and becoming perfected in our faith, in our obedience.

He's not talking about unbelievers becoming born again; he's talking about believers being perfected and matured in their obedience, their responding to trials in a godly way. That's what the entire first part of the chapter is about.

Each one of these—the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory—is in the context of maturing believers. None of them is in the context of believers getting saved, or the offer of being born again. None of them is in that context. You study them out.

LET NO ONE TAKE YOUR CROWN

Paragraph K. Crowns can be lost. Jesus is talking in Revelation 3:11. He says, "Hold fast what you have; hold it fast. You are going to have to" —it's the same idea as enduring temptation—"endure; make sure no one takes your crown" (Rev. 3:11, paraphrased).

What an interesting concept. How could another person take your crown? Here's how a person could take your crown. They can give you, as I say in K, a seductive doctrine, and it's always a doctrine of grace that they seduce people with.

People don't seduce others with a doctrine of hardship. "Come over here and I'll tell you a secret doctrine of how you'll get judged." No one gets seduced by a doctrine of hardship or difficulty. People get seduced by false doctrines with the term of the grace of God all the way through it.

It is prophesied in the Word of God many times that in the last days, the preaching of the Word of God would be turned into licentiousness. It would be turned into that which promotes lewdness—the teaching of the grace of God.

EXPOSING DARK DOCTRINES OF GRACE

This actually happened in the early Church, and it's going to happen at the end as well. The way that a man can take your crown is by winning you over to deceptive doctrines of grace, and you losing your zeal in God, and your perseverance and your endurance, and then you lose it and it's real.

It can be traced down to the influence of someone who seduced you theologically, and there are huge ministries all over this nation who are seducing multitudes of people with perverse presentations of the grace of God. It is perverse. It's the idea that a person can be saved if they come up and say a prayer.

You cannot be saved unless you repent.

REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

A person comes up and says, "Lord, I receive You into my heart; forgive me." Jesus says, "No, I will not. You have to repent. I am not going to forgive you because you prayed the prayer. I will forgive you when you repent, and when you line up with My kingdom and My Word."

I have no doubt that Jesus has turned down multitudes of people who have prayed prayers. I don't watch TV that much, but I hear it here and there: "If only you'll pray this prayer, then you can have assurance!" and I say, "Ahh! No! No!"

Then they walk out and say, "I'm saved." No, you're not; I mean, you might be. The Lord is good enough that sometimes it really connects. Sometimes, I have seen people mumble a prayer, and then the witness of the Spirit hit them. Their life was changed and transformed.

Praise God! You think you have it all figured out, and then it all just goes the other way. I love that, though.

We need to talk about the Jesus who says "no" to the person who asks for forgiveness. He doesn't promise forgiveness to those who ask; He promises forgiveness to the people who repent.

It's really true. Saul pleaded for forgiveness, and the Lord rejected him. Esau pleaded for forgiveness. The Lord rejected him because there wasn't truth in it.

SUFFERING LOSE, AND BEING SAVED THROUGH FLAME

Paragraph M. Well, no, I guess we have to hit L; it's right there. Some who are justified by faith will suffer loss, but they will still be saved.

Look here at what it says in Corinthians: "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). That person is still born again, but they have suffered loss.

Loss of what? How can you be born again and suffer loss? He's talking about loss of reward, loss of their crown. That's what they're talking about; they're not talking about loss of their salvation in this passage.

LOOK TO YOURSELF, THAT YOU RECEIVE A FULL REWARD

It says in 2 John 8, “Look to yourself” —I like the NASB, the New American Standard, and the NIV—“Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully” (2 Jn. 8, NIV).

The King James Version, I believe, messed this one up. They said, “Look to yourselves, that we...” and it has John working with them. I’m sure John worked with them, but I think the burden of it is, “Look to yourself.”

I am going to ask you a question. Are you looking to yourself? Do you look at yourself? I don’t mean morbid introspection. Are you asking the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you? Are you reading the Sermon on the Mount and measuring your heart?

Are you looking to yourself, so that you don’t lose the things you gained and worked for, so that you receive a full reward? Because the truth is that a believer can receive less than a full reward, and it’s not talking about receiving less than full forgiveness.

The forgiveness is settled, but there’s a full reward. There’s forgiveness, and there’s reward, and then there’s full reward. Paul the apostle wanted the full reward in his life.

Paragraph M. Many teachers will arise in the Church in the end-times with large followings, who suddenly and dangerously distort God’s grace. They promote deceptive doctrines of grace.

They pervert God’s grace by reducing it to receiving forgiveness without repentance, or they seduce the grace of God by making people comfortable while they’re sinning without repenting. It’s a grace of God that makes people comfortable while they’re sinning.

That is not the grace of God. That is a perversion! That is a dark doctrine, a deception.

It says here in Jude 4, “Certain men have crept into your midst unnoticed” (Jude 4, paraphrased). These are teachers, and back in Jude’s day, meaning the apostle Jude, they didn’t even know they were false teachers. They crept in; they were in their midst; they were teaching. No one knew they were off-base.

He says, “They are ungodly. They are not showing you their ungodliness when they’re in the pulpit; they’re doing it somewhere else. Here’s what they do when they’re in the pulpit: They teach the grace of God in a way that causes the people to have confidence to walk in lewdness. They teach grace in a way that gives confidence to sin instead of confidence to repent.”

When we teach grace, it gives people confidence that the repentance will be received, and that the Lord will give us a new beginning, yet a thousand times in a row. He will still give us a new beginning. True grace-teaching gives us confidence that our repentance is worth it and that it matters, but we must repent for grace to operate.

Paragraph N. Eternal life talks about receiving the crown of life.

Eternal life is the Greek word *zoe*. Most of you know that the *zoe*, the life of God, is so much bigger than forgiveness. When it says “the crown of life,” it doesn’t say “the crown of forgiveness.” It’s the crown that is related to the entire life we have in the age to come. It’s called the crown of life.

Some have reduced the crown of life to the crown of forgiveness, though that’s not what it says, because in their minds they have made God’s life, they have made eternal life, about forgiveness only.

Forgiveness is the way in, but the life of God, sharing life with God is obedience and intimacy and partnership with God forever and forever. That is what the life of God is about: sharing heart and partnership and agreement and obedience to Him. That is what the life of God is about: feeling His love and being empowered to give it back.

Some verses, and I really appreciate these verses, emphasize the entry point into eternal life, which is forgiveness. I love the entry point; I love the forgiveness part, but the kingdom of God is not mostly about forgiveness. It is mostly about living together with God in obedience and intimacy and agreement, heart-to-heart with each other.

WHAT THE BIBLE IS REALLY ABOUT

Paragraph O. I just mention here that I read some commentators, and they reduce these passages to meaning being born again, because their whole lens of reading the Bible is mostly about getting forgiven for their sins, and then going to heaven to float on a cloud to sing worship songs.

What the Bible is about is a kingdom coming to earth and real people being selected from the human race to rule with Jesus and bring the whole world to righteousness so that the Father can return.

HE’S A KING, NOT A HIPPIE

The kingdom of God is about a king coming to the earth. He is running a kingdom. He wants God’s order established; He wants partnership. I love how Misty says it: She says, “He is a king; He is not a hippie. He is establishing a kingdom, not a hippie commune!”

He wants to establish a kingdom on the earth, and He wants people to come into righteousness with Him and work with Him to establish a kingdom, not a commune.

He’s not a hippie, He’s a king! He really wants us to do what He says. He means it, and He has the power to back it up, and He will back it up. It is not a joke to Him.

III. Let’s just read the passage. Paragraph A. We’ll read 1 Corinthians 9. This is just one of the classics. I won’t read my comments around it; you can read those on your own if you want.

THE PROGRESSION OF PAUL’S THOUGHT

Now, Paul writes this around 53 AD. The timing is important, and I have the timing; you don't have to get it right now. You can read the notes and get the timing. I'm going to give you three passages.

It is 53 AD. The next one is about 60-62 AD; about ten years later, he writes another time about this. Then, another five or six years later, he writes about it again. Each time, his thought progresses. The way he talks about himself changes each time he writes about this. It's important to get the approximate dates here.

It's not that you have to get the dates exact, but you need to know that there are three different seasons in Paul's life—these three passages: 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 3, and 2 Timothy 4. These three are critical chapters in understanding Paul's view of Paul's reward, and Paul's motivation for living for reward.

Those three chapters are massive.

RUNNING TO OBTAIN A PRIZE

Here he is in about 53 AD. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:24, writing to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run” —in the Boston marathon maybe a couple of thousand run—“but one receives the prize?” Only one receives the *stephanos*; only one person receives first prize.

Paul isn't telling the people in this passage that there's only one crown in the Body of Christ. He's not saying there is only one person who wins. There is only way to win, and that is wholeheartedness. That's the point: There is only one way to carry your heart in this age, and that is in wholeheartedness.

Paul goes on to say, “Run in a way that you may obtain it.” What is the *it* that you want to obtain? It is the prize.

What is the *it*? It's a prize. Paul is telling Christians to run so that they will obtain a prize. He's not telling them to run so that they can become born again; they are already born again.

THE CROWN THAT FADES NOT AWAY

In verse 25, he's going to develop it. “Now, everyone competes for the prize” (paraphrased) — now he has said *prize* two times. He hasn't told us what the prize is, but he will in a minute. It's a crown. The prize that he is running for is a crown.

He says, “Now the natural athlete is temperate in all things” (ibid, paraphrased), which is discipline. A marathon runner is disciplined in all things if he is a champion, a world champion.

“Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown” —a *stephanos*, a crown. It's a trophy. It was really a wreath; a temporal crown. He says, “We run to obtain an imperishable crown.” Right there he says it. The prize that he's after is the imperishable crown.

Paul is running with one thing in his mind in terms of his own personal receiving. He's running because he loves God; he's running because he loves people, but in terms of his own personal improvement, of his own life, he is going for an imperishable crown.

He calls it the *prize* two times; he calls it the *crown* here.

RUNNING WITH CERTAINTY

Verse 26. "Therefore," he tells us—he opens his heart—"I run thus: not with uncertainty" (1 Cor. 9:26)—not with lack of focus, because "I am very clear what I am after: I am after a prize, and that prize is called an imperishable crown."

Notice that in verse 26 he says the word *therefore*. He says, "I want you to connect my focused running with the idea that I want a crown. I want you to connect the two." The word *therefore* connects the two ideas. "I am not running just for the fun of it. I am running because there is a prize and a crown in my reach."

THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S PERSEVERANCE

Now he goes on and says, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection." Why? He says, "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27). "Because what if I preach to others about the crown, and I am disqualified? What if I proclaim about this race and this prize, and I myself do not receive it?"

Paul isn't talking about losing his salvation here. That's not what Paul is doing. He's already written a good portion of the Word; he's written a part of the New Testament. He's an anointed apostle. He's not saying, "I will become disqualified, and therefore, I will end up in the lake of fire."

That's not what's talking about; he's talking about being disqualified in the race to win a prize, which is an imperishable crown.

THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL

We are going to go forward about seven or eight years or so, eight or ten years. Let's just say that. Now it's about 60 or 62 AD. You can't quite get it nailed down, but it's seven to ten years later.

Now he's writing to the Philippians. Let's go to Philippians 3. This is eight to ten years later. He's going to talk about that prize again; he's going to bring it up.

In verse 14 he says, "I press toward the goal for the prize" —he's after that prize, and the prize is "the upward call of God." That's what he's going for here.

Paul says, "I want the upward call," meaning the heavenly call. The upward call is the heavenly call. He wants the call that lasts for eternity. He's not pressing in so he can become born again;

he's already born again. He has the assurance of his salvation. He's pressing in for what he calls the prize of the upward, or the eternal, or the heavenly calling on his life, and his calling is to work closely with Jesus in the age to come, to bring righteousness in the earth.

He says, "I want this; I want it desperately. I don't want to lose this. I don't want to be disqualified."

ATTAINING TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Now he goes on. We'll begin in verse 11, and follow along with that if you can. "If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:11). Again, he's not talking about the resurrection of the dead in the technical sense of being born again. He is talking about attaining the glory that is in the realm of resurrection. It's the prize he's talking about.

Imagine Paul. He's in prison, and I've read some commentaries that say Paul is hoping that he will be born again, and I say, "I'm sure that he is convinced he is born again." He's talking about attaining a dimension of glory that's in the resurrection realm.

That is what he's talking about, which is the prize.

LAYING HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH CHRIST HAS LAID HOLD OF US

"Not that I have already attained," he says, "or am already perfected" (Phil. 3:12) —"my obedience is not complete yet. I still have another lap to run in the race. My obedience, my race, is not over yet. My obedience is incomplete until the day I die. I am pressing on."

Can you imagine a man in prison with his focus, "I am pressing on?"

Why? Here he says it really clearly: "That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Phil. 3:12). That is the upward call. That is the call that is upward, the eternal or the heavenly call. He says, "I want to lay hold of the thing that Jesus had in His mind when He laid hold of me, and I have not laid hold of it yet."

He's not talking about being born again; he's talking about experiencing something in the age to come, his calling. It's his calling in the age to come. He is contending for his calling in the age to come by the way he lived in this age.

Look at that: "That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." I've only heard this preached a couple of times in years of listening to preaching. Most people say, "I want to lay hold," and what they're thinking about is, "I am going to press in, in my prayer life, until I can break through and have a revival in this age."

Paul is not talking about that. He is not talking about laying hold of more power in his current life, although he certainly wants it. He wants more power. He says, "I want to lay hold of the thing for which I was separated in the mind of God when He called me."

It is the upward calling. He is contending for his calling in the age to come.

FORGETTING WHAT IS BEHIND

“I don’t count myself to have obtained it yet; I have not laid hold of it.” He says, “I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind” (Phil. 3:13).

When you forget the things that are behind you, it’s the bad things, so there is no condemnation, but it’s also the good things, so there is no offense. “God, You are not treating me right! I have lived in prayer and fasting. I have obeyed You, and this is all You have done?”

Paul says, “I forget the things that I have done, the good and the bad, and I am just pressing on, focused.”

One guy is tripped over his guilt for the past, and another guy is tripped over the fact that he doesn’t think God is treating him right; he deserves more of the blessing of God right now because he is thinking of his past.

Both of them trip you if you go there. He says, “I forget the things that are behind. I do one thing. I reach for the things that are ahead. I press for the goal of the prize of my heavenly, or my upward, or my eternal calling.” That’s what he’s talking about.

BEING MATURE IN THIS MINDSET

Now if you think that’s just for Paul, read Philippians 3:15: “Let us, as many as are mature” — spiritually mature—“have this mind” —this mindset. My question is, do you have this mindset? If you are mature in the Word of God, you will have this mindset.

I’m not trying to be overly-negative; I’m trying to brace you for the difficulty of this. This mindset is very rare in the body of Christ in our nation. It’s considered weird.

I am not troubled by that, in one sense; I’m only saying it for your sake. People will really press against you if you go for this. They will not like it, because they will think you will be assuming they should go for it. Therefore, they think you are you judging them.

Here is what Paul said: “If you are mature in the Word, if you are mature in your character, you are going for this mindset,” what he just said here.

“I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE; I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH”

OK, one more passage. Paragraph F. Now’s it about six or seven years later. You have to put the three passages together: 1 Corinthians 9, Philippians 3, and 2 Timothy 4. They are each a few years apart.

Paul is in prison again; it’s his second time in prison. Well, he’s in prison several times. It’s his second time in a Roman prison.

Paragraph F. Paul is in prison. This is the final epistle that he writes, the final letter he writes. He says in 2 Timothy 4:6, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering” —he means in his imprisonment. He is a drink offering to God, offering to God his obedience in prison.

He says, “The time of my death, my departure, is here. I know I am going to die. I’m not getting out. The Lord has made it clear to me. I am not getting out. I fought the good fight; I have finished the race” (2 Tim. 4:7, paraphrased).

There it is! He loves it. He has been on this race for decades. Some of you have been on this race for five years, two years, ten or twenty years. “I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.” He doesn’t mean he was born again; he means much more than that. He means, “I stayed focused with confidence; I kept my confidence in the things I believed in that God told me.”

Look at 2 Timothy 4:8: “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.” He knows! See, back in Philippians 3, he says, “I don’t have it yet.” Now it’s six or seven years later, and he says, “I know it’s mine. It’s within my reach. I have the crown.”

“ALL THOSE WHO LOVE HIS APPEARING”

Some people get tripped up on this, and they read, “Which the Lord... will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8), and then you’ll read commentaries that say, “That means everyone.”

Most Christians I know don’t love the idea of the end times. “His appearing” is talking about the whole scenario the Word of God talks about of Jesus preparing the nations for His entry.

Most Christians have no interest in the concept of all that is involved in the appearing of the Lord. Most Christians love their life and their ministry, not His appearing; that’s a troublesome thing to them.

Now, the idea of His appearing to them means that He might show up today, and we all go up—they love the idea of an instantaneous rapture—but that’s not what Paul is talking about, because there is no rapture that gets us out of the trouble. We go through it.

His appearing is in the whole context of His coming to preparing the nations for the Father, and it’s a heavy-duty thing, and most believers I have known for years don’t even think of that scenario, let alone love it.

It says, “To the people who love His appearing,” and people go to the idea of, “I would love for Him to come tonight; He may come tonight!” I assure you that He is not coming tonight. I guarantee you He is not.

There are many things that have to happen. There is a clear, biblical plan, there is a scenario that has to be unfolded, not that I grasp it all, but there are some big things that you cannot miss.

Paul is saying, “If you love the whole scenario, the whole plan of God in Jesus’ returning to the earth to disrupt the nations, if you are totally committed to that and you love it, you will have this crown, because you will be a person of unusual dedication and focus and vigor toward the Lord.”

Well, I will give you one more, since we are at the end.

BEING COUNTED WORTHY OF THE CALLING

Paragraph H. Look at what Paul prays in H. He tells the Thessalonians: “When He comes in that day, He will be glorified in the saints” (2 Thess. 2:10, paraphrased). Verse 11: “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling.”

Now, Paul is praying that God would count them worthy. He is not praying that God would count them worthy of being forgiven of their sins. He’s talking about praying that God would strengthen them, so that He would see their obedience; that they would be counted worthy of the calling they will have when the second coming comes. He is talking about the calling that is released at the time of the second coming.

Beloved, did you know that you have a calling that is bigger than your calling in your seventy years on the earth? You have a thousand-year assignment after your seventy-year assignment. You have another assignment after the thousand-year assignment; I don’t know much about that one, but I know a little about the thousand-year assignment.

We have an eternal assignment coming after the thousand years, and do you know that there are some people who will not be counted worthy by God? They will be forgiven. They will be in heaven, but they won’t be counted faithful by God to enter into their calling in the age to come.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen. Let’s stand, but we’re going to pray for each other. That’s one thing that prayer is about. Paul said, “I am praying that you would be strengthened, that you would be obedient, that you would have a spirit of holiness so that you would be ready for your calling.” That is what he’s praying for: strengthening.

I realize I have a couple hundred folks who are new here tonight, and that is why I picked this message. I know we covered a lot of material, and I know I touched some things that are near and dear to some people, but here’s what I ask you to do: Check out the verses. I ask you to lay aside your preconceived ideas. Lay aside what your denomination taught you, and actually open up the Bible on your knees, throw a little fasting in, and take three months and check these verses out.

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. I’m sure I didn’t say it exactly right, but I feel confident that I am in the right vein of truth. Though this might be completely new to you, don’t throw away the Bible because it’s new to you.

Say, “Lord, I want to be a learner. I don’t know any of this stuff. I have to get going; I have to get locked in. I want to have this mind in me that Paul the apostle talked about.”

Amen. I am going to have the 150 from the OneThing leadership summit come up here. We’re going to pray for you. I love this! They came to Kansas City and said, “We are setting our soul to be a people of one thing;” not because of Kansas City, but because it’s in the Bible.

You and the Holy Spirit sorted that whenever, back then sometime, and you came here to help strengthen it. I appreciate that; I love it. I love it when people make resolves to go strengthen their spirit to be abandoned to the Lord.

I’m going to have a bunch of the rest of you come on up. We’re just going to soak them in prayer for a while. We are going to sing over them for a while. We ask that they would be found worthy in their obedience. Strengthen their spirits.

“In the last days,” says the Lord, “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy. They shall see visions; they shall dream dreams. On My men-servants and on my maid-servants in those days will I pour out My Spirit, and they will open their mouths and prophesy. They will speak, and My power will flow” (Joel 2:28-29, paraphrased).

In the name of Jesus, I ask for You to pour out Your Spirit on every one of these OneThing summit leaders, even now, Lord. Lord, pour out Your spirit of prophecy. Let it flow; let it flow, O God.

We ask You, Lord, to release the anointing of the prophecy. Pour it out—dreams and visions, open heavens. In the name of Jesus, pour out the spirit of prophecy. Release an open heaven over their lives. We ask You, God, for an open heaven over them, dreams and visions, the angels of God ascending and descending.

“Even you shall prophesy; even you! You shall see visions; you shall dream dreams. The spirit of Elijah will visit even the weak among you. The weak among My people I will visit. I will put My words in your mouth; you will speak My words.”

Break in, Lord, with a spirit of prophecy, a spirit of intimacy, a spirit of revelation—the unveiling of Your heart, Jesus.

“Do not say that you are too weak, for My Spirit will fall upon you. Even the weakest among you, I will draw you. I will help you. Just say ‘yes.’”

We declare the release, we release the spirit of prophecy.

Holy Spirit, come in power, we ask. Fall upon them tonight, this weekend even, Lord. Visit them, stir their spirits, Lord. Open up the windows of heaven; open up the gates of glory, we ask.

