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Bridgeway Community Church
Series: “Crowns Over Frowns”
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CROWNS OVER FROWNS:

“The Crown of Life”

I. OPENING COMMENTS

Praise the Lord, Bridgeway! (3 xs)

Today I am beginning a new 3-week series on the rewards we will receive when we get to heaven called **CROWNS OVER FROWNS**.

- Today, I will talk about the “*Crown of Life*”
- Next week, I will preach on the “*Crown of Righteousness*”
- And then we will end the series with the “*Crown of Glory*”

GREAT SERMON CONVERSATIONS ANNOUNCEMENT:

Before I start the sermon, I want to tell you about an opportunity that we have for you as a congregation to discuss the sermons over the next 3 weeks.

Starting today, you will be able to join in with a small group of others, either online or in-person within 48 hours of the sermon.

So, sometime between the end of the sermon today and Tuesday evening, we have groups with trained facilitators that will create a space for you to discuss God’s word and how it may have impacted you.

We will do this for the next 3 weeks. Please take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. I have often said that “*Comprehension begins with conversation.*” I hope that this opportunity for conversation will be a blessing to you all spiritually and relationally. Just go to Bridgeway.cc/groups to see times and locations.

Let's Pray

II. SERMON INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches us that a faithful life to God in this life will be rewarded in the life to come. The Christian life is not always going to be easy. In fact, Jesus promises that there are times when people will hate you, because they hated him.

He promises that there may be times when you will be persecuted.

On His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

- *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10 NIV84)*

It doesn't stop there. Jesus goes on to say...

- *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” (Matthew 5:11 NIV84)*

Question:

Have you ever been talked about?

Have you ever been insulted because of your faith?

Have you ever been persecuted because of your faith?

Has anyone ever falsely accused you?

As the old folks in my growing up church used to say: *“I've been buked and I've been scorned just as surely as I was born.”*

If you live long enough and hold onto your faith, you will be *tested*...

You will be “*tried*”! You will go through *trials and tribulations*...

I wish I could tell you that if you place your trust in Jesus you will never have to go through *trials, trauma, tragedy, troubles, or turmoil*.

But the reality is, when you live for Christ there are times where you are going to have to go through something.

- There will be times when it will be required of you to “*Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him*” (**Matthew 16:24 NIV84**)

O how I wish that I could tell you that all of your troubles will be gone once you accept Christ as savior!

- *All of your bills will be gone.*
- *All of your enemies will fall away*
- *All your foes will disappear.*

O how I wish I could preach that you will never have to worry about *sickness, sadness, or pain!*

O how I wish that I could tell you that your heart will never be broken again and that your addiction will never rear its ugly head again!

But I love you too much to *tell you what your itching ears want to hear.*

I love you too much to please your sensibilities to be satisfied with a “feel good” sermon that *promises you a CROWN without CROSS!*

- Every now and then I have to remind you that following Christ will cost you something...
- Every now and then I have to remind you to “count the cost” of your salvation...

- Every now and then I have to remind you to examine yourself and make sure you are in the faith...
- Every now and then I have to remind you that only what you do for Christ will last!

EVERY NOW AND THEN, I HAVE TO STEP ON MY OWN TOES WITH MY GOOD PREACHING! HALLELUJAH.

It doesn't always feel good, but I would rather hear the truth and know the truth.

- Jesus said that “*You shall know the truth, the truth will SET YOU FREE!*”
(John 8:32 NIV84)

Does anybody want to be SET FREE today?!

Someone say:

“Set me free, Jesus!”

THOSE WHO PREACH *PROSPERITY* WITHOUT *REALITY*, WILL LEAVE YOU WITH *A THEOLOGICALLY-SICK MENTALITY!*

Amen?

And that was just my INTRODUCTION!

Sermon in a Sentence:

The crown of life is awarded to those who persevere through the crucible of life's trials

In order to make it through this Christian life, we must PERSEVERE.

A couple of weeks ago Pastor Ei, here in Columbia, and Kevin Turpin, at our Owings Mills Reisterstown campus, preached about *perseverance*.

There is no way to get around it - IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE VICTORY IN THIS CHRISTIAN LIFE, WE MUST PERSEVERE!

God promises to reward us as we cross the finish line of faith. In order to finish well, we must persevere all the way to the end.

Here's the good news, the Bible promises us that if we persevere we will be rewarded...

Question:

What rewards will believers receive?

Answer:

The Crown of Life

The crown of life is awarded to those who persevere through the crucible of life's trials. Let's look at this further. I invite you to turn with me to our Scripture text for today, **James 1:12**...

- *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12 NIV84)*

III. THE CROWN OF LIFE

We see this promise again in the **Book of Revelation** when Jesus is talking to the Church in Smyrna in his seven letters to the churches.

These 7 churches may represent the churches of Jesus Christ in the last days and could be a word just for us on this day...

This is what Jesus says...

- 8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the **CROWN OF LIFE**. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who **overcomes** will not be hurt at all by the second death.” (Revelation 2:8-11 NIV84)

The “Second” death is talking about spending ETERNITY in Hell...

You are an OVERCOMER! Can you say: “*I am an OVERCOMER*”?

God is telling us to hold on! Hang in there...

- Persevere through *persecution*, and you will be rewarded...
- Persevere through *trials*, and you will be rewarded...
- Persevere through *testing* and you will be rewarded...

IV. 3 THINGS WE ARE TO DO WHEN GOING THROUGH TRIALS

Let’s go back to James 1 and learn what we are to do when we are going through trials and tests...

1. Consider it Pure Joy (James 1:2)

1 “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith

develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:1-4 NIV84)

- Testing of your faith develops perseverance (v. 3-4)
- Perseverance is pushing you toward maturity and completeness (v. 4)
- Perseverance is pushing toward “no lack”, meaning you have everything you need to succeed. (v.4)

On the other hand, the devil wants to steal your joy!

He is hoping that the trials you go through will cause you to quit, give up, or walk away from your faith in God.

Main Point:

Joy is a deep-seated confidence in knowing that God is in control

J.O.Y means - **J**esus **O**verflowing in **Y**ou!

If you consider trials as pure joy, then the devil doesn't have a leg to stand on!

*Seriously, like a snake, the devil doesn't have a **LEG TO STAND ON!** (Get it? Dumb joke :-)*

Remember, friends, the devil has been defeated!

Seriously though... I am glad that the serpent has literally been DE—FEETED.
(I'll be here all morning, folks :-)

Question:

HOW? How do you consider it pure joy?

“**Consider**” is an accounting term, AKA: “*count*” it as pure joy.

- It means to make a judgment and mark your trial down in the joy column or the joy side of the ledger (*not the happiness column*)
- It means to calculate, to think, or to mathematically count trials as something that will turn out good for you
 - *In the end, there will be a PLUS side.*
 - *This takes faith to believe it.*
 - *This takes wisdom to see it.*

It's another way of saying... GOD'S GOT THIS!

2. Ask God For Wisdom (James 1:5)

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5 NIV84)

- God will give it generously (**v.5b**)
- God will not judge you (**v. 5b** “*without finding fault*”)
- Ask God to give you wisdom in the way that you view the trial you are in.
- Ask God to help you see what He is trying to do in order to mature and grow inside of you
- Ask God for wisdom to know how to hold on when you want to give up
 - **E.G. Bible College administrator Prayed for Wisdom -**
When my dad died, I was 21 at college. The VP of the school

(Dr. Howard Whaley) put his arms around me and prayed for me. As he prayed, he asked God to give me WISDOM...

- I had always wondered why he prayed for wisdom and not just comfort.
- Then, it became clear that my emotions would make everything cloudy and I would be disoriented in the days to come; not sure which way to go.
- Then, God would bring Lady Amber into my life through my father's death.
- She wrote me a comforting note that touched me deeply at a very sensitive time of pain and loss.
- That note was the wisdom I needed at the time, while I was also in the middle of breaking up with *another gal who was pulling on me during that vulnerable time period in my life!*

I needed WISDOM!

It takes wisdom to NOT make any major decisions when you are in the middle of trials, grief, loss, etc. It takes wisdom to know whose arms to rest in for comfort when you are going through trials.

Everybody who is comforting you may not be "there for you" for the right reasons.

- *We need wisdom!*
- Ladies, don't let just any prince in shining armor pay your bills while you're in a financial trial.
- Every prince isn't a true prince in shining armor

- It could be the *Prince of the Power of the Air*
- It could be the *Prince of Darkness* moving in on your vulnerability

We need wisdom!

- Gentlemen, just because she's got outer beauty doesn't mean that she is beautiful on the inside.
- Her motives to comfort you while you are going through a trial, a separation or divorce, may not always be pure.
- When you are in a relational crisis, you need to make sure that you are not being confused by her beauty... or her booty.

We need wisdom!

What have we said so far? When you're going through trials...

- Consider it pure joy (**Jas. 1:1-4**)
- Ask for wisdom (**Jas. 1:5**)

Third...

3. Stay Humble (James 1:9-11)

9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wildflower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. (James 1:9-11 NIV84)

If poor, realize that you are rich in God (v. 9)

If you are rich, realize that you are in a low position when compared to God (v. 10)

Bottom line:

Regardless of your class or your status, whether rich or poor, as believers we will
all go through trials!

- Don't think because you have money, you can be exempt from trials.
- Don't think because you are poor, you are deserving of an exemption from trials.
- Realize who you are in Christ, and take heart that your identity and value is in him alone...*(not your financial or social status)*
- As humans in this fallen world, none of us are exempt from the crucible of life's trials.
 - *"It rains on the just and the unjust. The sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous."* (Matthew 5:45 NIV84)

Stay humble!

I know that hearing this from a guy that has his own song may be hard to believe, but I do mean it... *(Staying humble, that is, NOT the "David is the Best" song)*

(If you ever need me to sing it for you, just check with ECW Karen Walls. I believe she has the video :-)

Listen, trials can *harden* your heart or *humble* your heart.

The testing of your faith can reveal a hardened heart.

Remember, this is the *"testing of your FAITH"*!

Question:

Ask yourself, *What is this trial/test revealing about my FAITH?*

- **E.G. Tea Bags** - We are all like tea bags. We're no good until we have gone through some hot water! It is the hot water that reveals what the contents inside the tea bag are. Likewise, the hot water of trials and tribulations reveals the contents of our true faith!

If we do these three things, then we will receive the crown of life when we get to the other side.

Sermon in a Sentence:

The crown of life is awarded to those who persevere through the crucible of life's trials!

V. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Allow me to tell you a couple of practical things that James says we should NOT do during trials...

1. Do Not Doubt God's Character (James 1:6-8)

"But when he asks [for wisdom], he must believe and not doubt because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." (James 1:6-8 NIV84)

Don't doubt the character of God and His goodness...

That's just the devil trying to get you off of your game...

This is the devil trying to make you *double-minded* in your faith...

I am not saying that we can never doubt anything regarding our faith, *but bring those doubts to God so that He can minister to those doubts* like He did with Thomas after the resurrection.

- **E. G. Thomas the disciple** – God showed Thomas his side. God will show you evidence when you doubt, if your doubts are honest.

Quote:

“When I can’t see His hand, I can trust His Heart.”

It takes faith over doubt to believe that quote. Specifically in this passage, the prohibition is that we don’t doubt that God will give us wisdom!

Ask for it and believe that He will give it to you. Don’t doubt God!

And remember this... “*Never undo in doubt what you did in faith!*”

Remember this is the testing of your FAITH!

- The enemy wants you to doubt the *character* of God
- The enemy wants you to doubt the *sovereignty* of God
- The enemy wants you to doubt the *wisdom* of God
- The enemy wants you to doubt the *word* of God
- The enemy wants you to doubt the *love* of God

The enemy is always searching to find out what it will take to cause you to doubt God. It is different for everyone...

- Will it take a *financial* trial?
- Will it take a *relational* trial?

- Will it take a *medical* trial?

What will it take to cause you to doubt God's very existence?

What will it take to cause you to doubt God's love?

The devil is asking... *What will it take to make this believer "double-minded" instead of singularly focused on my goodness & my glory?*

2. Do Not Accuse God Of Tempting You (James 1:13-16)

13 "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me'. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."
(James 1:13-15 NIV84)

God will *"test your faith,"* the enemy will *"tempt your flesh."*

These are 2 different things!

God tempts no man! God wants you to win; not lose. The devil is the tempter and he wants you to lose.

God will test your faith so that you will persevere and become more spiritually mature. The devil will tempt your flesh so that you will fall, fail, and falter

- One leads to LIFE (*testing*)
- The other leads to DEATH! (*temptation*)

Two very different outcomes! Testing is trying to *make you better* Temptation is trying to *make you worse*...

Testing is trying to lead you to *maturity*. Temptation is trying to lead you to *depravity*...

Ask God:

“Is this a test or is this a temptation?”

They can both be a “*trial*.”

Ask Yourself:

“Is this the devil trying to make me fall or is the the Lord trying to make me strong?”

Either way, whether you get the answer or not, you **MUST PERSEVERE!**

The crown of life is awarded to those who persevere through the crucible of life’s trials. This section of scripture ends with *affirming the character and the goodness of God*. It says...

- “*Don’t be deceived, my brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*” (**James 1:16-17 NIV84**)

Every good thing you have is from your heavenly father of lights.

This is just another way of saying...

GOD IS GOOD, ALL THE TIME. ALL THE TIME, GOD IS GOOD!

Don’t let the devil steal your joy or your confidence in God!

VI. SERMON CONCLUSION

What have we learned today?

Three Things We Are To Do When Going Through Trials...

1. **CONSIDER IT PURE JOY (James 1:2)**
2. **ASK GOD FOR WISDOM FROM GOD (James 1:5)**
3. **STAY HUMBLE (James 1:9-11)**

Two Things We Should Not Do When Going Through Trials...

1. **DO NOT DOUBT GOD'S CHARACTER (James 1:6-8)**
2. **DO NOT ACCUSE GOD OF TEMPTING YOU (James 1:13-16)**

Remember that this life is temporary, but there is a full life of glory on the other side. So don't give up. Don't give in. Do not let your hearts be troubled!

Jesus is coming back!

He promised his disciples, and promised you & me, that HE IS COMING BACK AGAIN! Jesus said in **John 14**...

- 1 *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. 2 In my father's house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. 4 "You know where I am going." 5 "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (**John 14:1-6 NIV84**)

FRIENDS, this life is NOT all there is...

- There is eternal life.
- There is a real heaven and a real hell
- If you place your life and faith in the finished work that Jesus Christ did on the cross where he died for your sins and rose again from the dead, you can have eternal life.
- God is ready to welcome you into heaven whenever your time is up here on earth.
- There is a “crown of life” waiting for you on the other side.

OH HOW I WISH —

Earlier I said “OH, HOW I WISH” I could promise you that trusting in Jesus would mean that there would be *no more pain, or sickness, or sorrow*.

Well, I can’t promise you that in THIS world, BUT in the life to come, the bible does promise that there will be a time when there are no more trials and tribulations. There is a time when war will be no more!

In the Book of Revelation, John writes...

- *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. 5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will*

walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.” (Revelation 21:1-5, 23-27 NIV84)

Here’s the million dollar question...

Question:

IF YOU WERE TO DIE TODAY, DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WOULD
SPEND ETERNITY?

- Is your name written in the Lamb’s book of Life?
- Place your faith in Jesus Christ today. (PRAY SINNERS PRAYER)
- Jesus will give you the strength to persevere!
- If you persevere to the end, you will receive the crown of life.

Sermon in a Sentence:

The crown of life is awarded to those who persevere through the crucible of life’s trials!

AMEN & AMEN!