

The Crown Of Life

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Some call the Tower of London "the Cradle of the English Race." It is well named, for it was there that England had her beginnings as a nation. It is the oldest palace, fortress and prison in Europe, dating back 900 years. Housed within its walls in the underground Jewel House beneath the Waterloo Barracks are the Crown Jewels of England. The incomparable collection of crowns, scepters, orbs, swords and other regalia is displayed in a specially designed vault and display case surrounded by heavy security. As one walks into the vault, one can see the sparkling light reflecting off the jewels in the crowns and onto the dark walls of the vault's interior. The gasps of "oohs" and "ahs" of the visitors getting their first glimpse at the Crown Jewels enhances the breathtaking sight of the dazzling golden, jeweled crowns.

The most recognized is the *Imperial State Crown* worn by the king or queen for the annual opening of Parliament and other state functions. It is framed in gold with silver settings for the jewels. The crown weighs two pounds thirteen ounces, and boasts 2,873 diamonds, 273 pearls, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds and 5 rubies, including one huge ruby and one huge sapphire. The jewels are of great antiquity and historical significance. The oldest jewel is Edward the Confessor's sapphire, believed to have been worn by him in a ring (c. AD 1050). It is now mounted in the cross atop the crown.

Another of the crown jewels is *St. Edward's Crown*, the crown used for the coronation of every king or queen of England since AD 1269. In recent history, the only time Queen Elizabeth II officially wore St. Edward's Crown was at the climax of her coronation. It weighs just under five pounds, and is made of pure gold and various jewels.

During the coronation ceremony, the Archbishop of Canterbury holds St. Edward's Crown aloft, and speaks these words, dating back to AD 973:

God crown you with a crown of glory and righteousness, that having a right faith and manifold fruit of good works, you may obtain the crown of an everlasting kingdom by the gift of Him whose kingdom endureth forever.

Notice that the blessing that is requested of God during the actual crowning does not ask for power and rulership. Instead, the Archbishop asks for a crown of glory and righteousness through a right faith and good works. The crown used at the climax of the coronation is less a crown of rulership than it is a symbol of righteousness, glory and honor.

"Diadem" and "Crown"

Today, the terms "diadem" and "crown" are used synonymously. However, it is important to understand that there is a difference between them. The difference has spiritual connotations to the future glorified sons of God.

The diadem is a symbol of royal power and rulership. Originally, it was a linen or silk band around the brow, and over time, it changed to a flexible band of gold. The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, eleventh edition, remarks, "The [modern] crown seems to be an evolution from the diadem rather than the

lineal descendant of the older crowns." *Webster's Dictionary* defines *diadem* as "crown: specifically a royal headband; regal power or dignity."

Conversely, *crown*, means "a reward of victory or mark of honor; especially the title representing the championship in a sport." The verb form of the word, not only suggests coronation as a monarch, but also "to recognize officially; to bestow something as a mark of honor or recompense; adorn." These definitions fit remarkably well with how "crown" is used in Scripture regarding our future reward. If we are faithful and showing the fruits of good works, by the grace of God we will be crowned at Christ's return with the crown of life, **not** the diadem of life.

What does the "crown of life" represent? "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). "Proved" comes from the Greek word *dokimos*, meaning "stood the test; tested to be trustworthy; of sterling worth, like metal which is cleansed of all alloy." *Dokimos* or one of its forms describes the successful testing of precious metals and coins, as well as the approval of the tested objects as genuine.

"Crown" is translated from *stephanos*, which in turn derives from *stepho*, meaning "to encircle, to twine or wreath." *Stephanos* describes the victor's crown, the symbol of triumph in the public games or a contest. It can also be the reward or prize given to honor a person. Though the word can denote a crown of royalty, its more usual sense is the laurel wreath awarded to a victor or a festive garland worn when rejoicing.

In early times, it was a token of public honor for distinguished service. At other times, it symbolized the joy of a wedding or the gladness of a festival, especially at a king's coronation. These early crowns were woven as a garland of oak, ivy, parsley, myrtle or olive branches. Later, these natural wreaths were imitated in gold.

Overcoming

In James 1:12 the apostle is saying that the man who overcomes trials becomes a man of sterling worth and emerges strong and pure spiritually. But what must we overcome? In Revelation, each of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor contains the phrase "to him who overcomes." Later, in a summary statement near the end of the book, Christ says, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7). It is obvious that overcoming is a prime activity in a Christian's life.

Paul says we are in a warfare against "spiritual wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12, KJV). He also writes that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7) and that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (verse 8). John says those who "overcome the wicked one" are strong (I John 2:14), and then he says we are not to love the world or its lusts and pride (verses 15-16).

We have, therefore, three general areas in which to overcome:

1. We must overcome Satan, his demons and their evil influence.
2. We must overcome this world and its ways.
3. We must overcome our fleshly, carnal, human nature.

The way that Christ taught to overcome is not only to avoid sin, but to do what is good and right. Paul explains this succinctly to the Christians in Rome, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). So we see that the crown of life is a crown of righteousness, and *righteousness* can be defined simply as "right doing." An overcomer is victorious over sin!

When it is used in the Scriptures, *stephanos* does not emphasize rulership. Rather, the New Testament writers used *diadema* when they wanted to symbolize royal power, authority or dignity. It is revealing to notice where *diadema* is used in the Bible:

- » In Revelation 12:3 the Dragon, who is Satan, wears seven diadems. In another place, he is called "the god of this world" (II Corinthians 4:4, KJV).
- » In Revelation 13:1 it describes the ornaments of the "beast rising up out of the sea." The Beast is later shown to have "authority . . . over every tribe, tongue and nation" (verse 7).
- » In Revelation 19:12 *diadema* is used for the crowns that Christ wears when He returns as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (verse 16).

In each case, the diadem symbolizes power and rulership over others.

This does not mean that the saints will not have a position of rulership in God's Kingdom. The Bible clearly states in Revelation 20:4 that the saints "lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (see verse 6). Christ says to the church in Thyatira, "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26).

The emphasis of the "crown of life," however, is victory, righteousness and honor. The apostle Paul writes that the crown of life depicts victory in I Corinthians 9:24-25:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown [*stephanos*], but we for an imperishable crown.

In the days of the apostles, the crown of laurel leaves was the honor an athlete coveted most of all, since it meant he had been victorious in the public games.

As Paul neared the end of his life, he looked back over his life as a Christian in a letter to Timothy:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (II Timothy 4:7-8)

The apostle had endured strong temptation and terrible persecutions. He had been faithful and had dedicated his life to doing good works, specifically preaching the gospel among the Gentiles. He was certain that he had indeed overcome and would be given his crown of victory and honor when Christ returned.

The crown of life consists of eternal, imperishable living! It represents victory over our earlier, perishable life of sin. In the Millennium and for all eternity, we will wear our crown of life as an emblem of victory, righteousness and honor as befits those who have been obedient and faithful to Christ.

As we continue in our lives of trial and overcoming, we can be encouraged by the words of Paul in Hebrews 12:1-2:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

If we follow this advice, we *will* be given the crown of life!