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**The Crown of Life and Having a Mind to Suffer
 (Revelation 2:10)**

Pastor Gene Giguere

Introduction

- 1) As you know, we’ve been studying undeserved suffering and last time we looked at Hebrews’ description of those who had suffered for the sake of Christ.

They are called in **Hebrews 11:38**, “[People] of whom the world was not worthy.”

Then, the very next chapter in Hebrews tells us to remain faithful to Jesus, to ‘run the race set before us with patience’ because we are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.”

Today is the *Day of the Christian Martyr*. According to tradition, tomorrow, June 29, will mark the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Apostle Paul.

And so, today, Christians around the world pause to honor the legacy of those who, like Paul, offered their lives for the advancement of the gospel.

Although persecutors sought to silence their witness, these believers remained faithful and bold under great adversity. And so, today, we too want to pause and thank the Lord for their example of lived obedience and faith. There is more information on the *Voice of the Martyrs*’ website (www.persecution.com), for those who are interested.

- 2) This morning, I want to tell you the stories of some of the witnesses of the first few years of the Christian faith. Some you may have heard, at least in part; some, perhaps, you have not.

These are stories with a wide area of sources. Some are drawn directly from Scripture – so, no worries there. Others though are more difficult to prove – they’re from the earliest histories or traditions of the Church.

Some are drawn from Eusebius, the first historian of the Church after Luke. Others are drawn from ancient documents further removed from the actual events, but which were widely accepted by the Church as true.

I’m not going to footnote each statement as meticulously as I usually do. I’ll only cite my sources broadly, or I’d be footnoting virtually every sentence.¹

3) Now, *why* am I doing this?

- ✠ I’m doing this because I want each one of us to receive a ‘full reward.’ In **2 John 8**, the Beloved Apostle encouraged us with these words: “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”
- ✠ I want us to develop *a mind to suffer*, to glorify God, counting it all joy when it pleases Him to visit suffering upon us (**Phil. 3:10, James 1:2**).
- ✠ So that no one of us would be surprised by the fiery trials that come upon us (**1 Peter 4:12**), but would see them as the divinely-mixed *poterion*, which is God’s perfect will for our lives (**John 18:11**).
- ✠ So that no one who is a part of the *Harvest Community Church* family will shrink back in shame when our Lord appears (**1 John 2:28**). Amen?

¹ Besides the obvious primary sources, for this study I’ve leaned on five resources:

Needham, Nick, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*, revised edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016).

Schaff, Philip, and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1910).

Bennett, William J., *Tried by Fire: The Story of Christianity’s First Thousand Years* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016).

Water, Mark, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Martyrs* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Pub, 2001).

Shelley, Bruce L., *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1995), p. 212.

The First Great Persecution of Christians: Nero

- 1) The first great persecution of the church began in A.D. 64 under the emperor Nero. On the night of July 18, A.D. 64, a great fire erupted in the south-eastern end of the Circus Maximus, a popular area in the city of Rome for commerce and entertainment. It quickly swept through the city, incinerating three districts and severely damaging seven others.

The emperor at the time was twenty-seven years old, descended from a wealthy and very powerful line of emperors.

According to the Roman historian Suetonius, Nero was known for his insatiable lust, avarice, and brutality.

His rise to power began with matricide. He attempted to kill his mother, Agrippina, by putting her in a rigged, self-collapsing boat. When this failed, and she swam to shore, he simply sent soldiers to stab her to death.² Nice guy!

Now, Nero had decided to build a palace, the Domus Aurea (Golden House), on the site where the fire began. So, rumors quickly spread around Rome that Nero had set the fire on purpose to make space for his new palace.²

To put down the rumor, Nero decided to target the young Christian community in Rome. This terrible purge would be the first state-sponsored persecution of Christians in history; but it would certainly not be the last. Tacitus paints a terrible picture of this first wave of persecutions.

Christians were arrested and tortured and were urged to confess to plotting to light the fire under threat of death. Many were sentenced to death, deaths which were humiliating and excruciating. Tacitus wrote:³

² Emperor Nero killed his mother, Agrippina the Younger, in A.D. 54 through a series of escalating plots. After a failed attempt to drown her on a rigged, self-sinking ship, Nero sent assassins to her villa to stab her to death, framing the murder as a suicide. The dramatic assassination unfolded in several stages. First, the 'trap ship.' Nero invited Agrippina to a banquet in Baiae (near the Bay of Naples) and sent her home on a specially designed collapsible boat with a heavy lead ceiling. The boat broke apart, but Agrippina survived by swimming to shore. Then, realizing his mother knew of the attempt on her life, Nero sent his guards to her country villa. According to Roman historians, when the assassins arrived, Agrippina bravely pointed to her womb and told them to "Strike here," expressing regret for birthing an emperor who would turn on her.

³ Tacitus, *Annals*, book 15, chapter 44 (written around A.D. 116) describes the horrific executions of Christians that the Emperor Nero ordered in Rome after the Great Fire of A.D. 64.

“Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle ...”

The Calling of Paul to Suffer

- 1) From the mid-30s A.D. onward, Saul of Tarsus who was later called Paul, devoted himself to telling the world about Jesus, a Jewish carpenter from a small town called Nazareth in Judea.

Initially, Saul himself was a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish religious teaching class. And he had been a *zealous* persecutor of those who followed Jesus. “Saul was ravaging the church,” says the book of Acts. “Entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (**Acts 8:3**).

Then, as Luke records in **Acts 9**, probably the year 33 or 34, Saul set out for Damascus, in Syria. He was searching for Jews who were members of this Jesus-sect, which was then called “the Way” (**Acts 9:2**). His goal was straightforward: find them and haul them off to prison in Jerusalem for violating Jewish religious law.

But while on the road to Damascus, Saul was blinded with a glorious light; he fell back off his horse and to the ground. From the light a Voice spoke and asked, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul replied. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the voice replied (**9:4–5**).

Saul eventually reached Damascus and remained blinded for three days, until a Syrian Christian named Ananias came to heal him. Ananias was terrified to go to Saul, knowing how zealously he was persecuting Christians. But he was compelled to go because God Himself had commanded him to do so:

“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (**Acts 9:15–16**).

Ananias laid hands on Saul, and ‘scales’ of spiritual blindness fell from his eyes and his vision was restored – not merely his physical vision, but his spiritual vision as well (**Acts 9:18**)! The very next day Saul stepped into the local Jewish synagogue and preached Jesus “boldly in the name of the Lord” (**Acts 9:27**).

Saul then traveled to meet the other disciples in Jerusalem. Initially, they were afraid of him, not believing he was truly a follower of Jesus, and for good cause.

But, before long, Saul, now Paul, was accepted because of his powerful preaching. Paul began visiting synagogues, teaching Jewish congregations about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – and that He was the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament.

The book of Acts says, “And all who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?’” (**Acts 9:21**) But Paul kept declaring that Jesus was the Christ.

After a long series of missionary travels (Athens Cyprus, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.), Paul would finally arrive at Rome; a Rome that was under Nero’s leadership. He planted multiple churches across the Mediterranean world and had led many converts to Jesus, but now, arriving in Rome in A.D. 67, his faith would again be tested.

Nero’s persecution was raging. Although we lack contemporaneous written records of Paul’s last days and martyrdom, early church tradition claims that Paul was beheaded there at Rome during Nero’s persecution.

Paul wrote his last known letter, **2 Timothy**, from a dark, cold prison cell in Rome, shortly before his martyrdom. Unlike his earlier Roman house arrest, this final imprisonment was severe, with Paul anticipating his impending execution. He wrote to Timothy,

“Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica ... ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments ... ¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me

and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So, I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:9-10, 16-18).

A letter written a few decades later (about A.D. 90) by Clement of Rome, says this about Paul's death:

"After he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith ... He departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance."

Yes, he endured suffering for Jesus joyfully – and had glorified God in it. And what motivated Paul to embrace suffering and death for the name of Jesus? Certainly, being a Christian brought him no earthly rewards: no money, no social acceptance, no comfort in this life. No. You see, Church, first-century Christians understood that suffering was a part of their calling in following Jesus. And their death was an opportunity to testify powerfully of His goodness before going to see His face.

Peter and Quo Vadis

- 1) After denying that he even knew Jesus, Peter, as we know, became one of the greatest of the Apostles. He boldly proclaimed Christ to the total disregard of his own safety.

He was there, of course, on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit, "like the blowing of a violent wind," swooped down from Heaven and filled the Church with His presence (Acts 2:2–10). It's interesting to me that Stephen, the first official martyr of the Christian church, incited a mob of Jewish leaders into a frenzy by saying, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

Well, these Spirit-filled believers rushed into the crowds and began preaching. All who had gathered for the feast of Pentecost from far-flung places heard the

Gospel in his or her own dialect through the magnificent manifestation of the gift of tongues that had come upon believers. Some who heard the commotion thought these believers were drunk. It was Peter who stood up and delivered *the first sermon of the nascent Christian Church*:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain,” he said, “that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (**Acts 2:36**).

The preaching was powerful; **Acts 2:41** reports that “about three thousand were added to their number that day” (**Acts 2:41**).

- 2) Luke tells us that the Apostles were understood by the Jewish authorities to be “uneducated and common men.” Yet, continuing to boldly proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, they were eventually arrested and thrown in jail where they awaited a trial before the Jewish council (**Acts 4:13**).

Afraid to have them killed, the council demanded that they stop preaching Jesus immediately. But Peter and John refused. “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard,” they replied (**Acts 4:20**). So, beginning what would be a long pattern of physical abuse, the council “beat them and charged them [again] not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go” (**Acts 5:40**).

And what was Peter and John’s response to this beating? We read it in verse **41**: “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.” *Early Christians had a different mindset about suffering than we do, Church!*

Another time, recorded in **Acts 12**, Peter was arrested and put in prison, only to have an angel appear and miraculously free him under the watching eye of 16 Roman guards. When Peter was discovered to be missing, and after “no small commotion,” the sixteen – four squads of four soldiers each – (**12:4**) were executed for their dereliction of duty (**Acts 12:18–19**).

- 3) There are lots of stories about Peter’s life and ministry outside of the Bible – many of them are likely legendary. There is an early Christian text called *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter* that collects many of these fantastical stories.⁴

⁴ One of my favorites tells of a showdown between Peter and Simon Magus. Peter is apparently being taunted by the flamboyant heretic magician Simon who challenges Peter to a flying contest around the Roman Forum. Peter, with a

But there is one story at the end of the text that has always captured my imagination – it has to do with his martyrdom.

You might remember that Jesus appeared to Peter and a few of the other disciples after His resurrection – and He had a moving, if uncomfortable, conversation with Peter. They’d gone out fishing. Now, in **Matthew 28:7**, an angel had promised that Jesus would meet with His disciples again soon in Galilee. Well, they were on the Lake of Galilee and it was soon after His resurrection.

Early in the morning, “just as day was breaking,” Jesus appeared on the shore (**John 21:4**). They didn’t recognize Him at first. Then the light came on! *It was Jesus!* John got it first. He exclaimed: “It is the Lord!” Peter couldn’t wait! He just jumped in and started swimming to shore!

But, after breakfast, things got *really* uncomfortable. Because it was then that Jesus asked Peter: “Simon, son of John, do you love me *more than these?*” (**John 21:15a**) He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you” (**John 21:15b**). Awkward, right? Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs” (**John 21:15c**)

This was, in a sense, Peter’s recommissioning. *Even though he’d denied Him, Jesus wasn’t done with Peter.*

- 4) But the reason I wanted to revisit this this morning is because of what happened next. After the three ‘*Do you love Me/Feed My sheep*’ exchanges, Jesus said to Peter:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me” (**John 21:18-19**).

Jesus was telling Peter in no uncertain terms that he would die as a martyr. And AFTER telling him this, He said, “follow Me.” And that brings us back to a story in *The Acts of Peter* that has reverberated throughout Church tradition and history. At the end of this text, we read that Peter decided to leave Rome when

coolness that would impress Clint Eastwood, prays a prayer that causes Simon to crash embarrassingly to the ground, proving to one and all that Simon’s powers are no match for Peter’s!

it looked like his life was in grave danger. Nero's persecution was raging; Peter does *not* want to die. He does not want to be martyred, so he decided to flee Rome and head off down the Via Appia, the main road that led out of the city.

But, according to the text, something unexpected happens – something that is certainly not inconsistent with what we find in the New Testament. As Peter is walking out of Rome, he saw another Man traveling the other way. He's going *into* the city as Peter's leaving it – and that other man was clearly Jesus.

Peter asked Him, “Where are you going?” Jesus replied, “I'm going to Rome to be crucified again.” And it was then that Peter remembered Jesus words at breakfast ...

“[Peter,] when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. ... Follow me.”

It was at that moment that Peter realized that he could not run away from his *poterion*, God's perfect will for his life. He would not deny Jesus again! The words, ‘where are you going’ are ‘quo vadis’ in Latin. There's a beautiful medieval church in Rome called the *Church of Quo Vadis* which sits at the spot where Peter is supposed to have met the Lord again.⁵

But, in **John 21**, Jesus said to Peter, “Follow Me.” And He told him that *after* He told him how he was to die. Peter did follow Jesus; I don't think this great apostle ever denied Jesus again.

Like his Lord, Peter too was crucified. Tertullian and Origen, scholars in the third century, report that Peter, believing himself unworthy to die the same death as his Master, was crucified upside down at Rome.⁶ One modern historian has placed Peter's death as occurring three months after Nero's great fire in A.D. 64.⁷

⁵ Visitors to the site are shown a bit of marble pavement which they say miraculously preserves Jesus' actual footprints (obviously, it does not).

⁶ Cf., *1 Clement* 5:4; 6:1; *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, 2.25.

⁷ This specific chronological placement originates from the research of Italian archaeologist and epigraphist Margherita Guarducci, who proposed that Peter was martyred on October 13, A.D. 64—roughly three months after the Great Fire of Rome in July 64. The Great Fire occurred in July A.D. 64. According to Guarducci's dating, Nero blamed Christians for the fire and subsequently rounded them up, meaning Peter's martyrdom would have taken place

Now God’s will for your life may not be the same as it was for Peter – but, mark it down, God does have a will for each of our lives. And each time we encounter the Lord, I think we should expect to hear Him say, “follow Me!” E.A. Blum writes:

“Obedience to Jesus’ command, *Follow Me*, is the key issue in every Christian’s life. As Jesus followed the Father’s will, so His disciples should follow their Lord whether the path leads to a cross or to some other difficult experience.”⁸

Church, if we are going to follow Jesus, we have to ask, even as Peter is said to have asked, ‘*Where are You going?*’ Because, as Jesus said in **John 12:26** – the passage we launched off from – “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.”

Now, I have more stories to share with you next time, but I want to pause here and consider one of the most amazing aspects of Christian undeserved suffering: *the promise of the Crown of Life*.

The Crown of Life

- 1) Smyrna was a Church which suffered greatly. Of the seven letters to the seven Churches Jesus dictated to John in **Revelation 2 & 3**, Smyrna is the *only* Church for which Jesus had no rebuke. To the saints there He said,

“[These are] the words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. ⁹ I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested ... Be faithful unto 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. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death”” (**Revelation 2:8-11**, ellipsis).

in the first half of October. She linked this to October 13, which was an important anniversary for Nero known as his *dies imperii* (the day he ascended to the throne). This dating has been a subject of scholarly discourse. While Guarducci and other researchers argue for the year 64, many early chroniclers and historians traditionally place Peter's death later, in the year 67.

⁸ Blum, E. A., in *John* in J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985) vol. 2, p. 346.

Now, *Smyrna* was a Church that suffered greatly in the early years of Christendom. In fact, Polycarp, whom I spoke about last week, was the pastor there. He was martyred in the Roman arena – bound to the stake to be burned, but stabbed when the fire refused to consume his body.

As I’ve taught many times, the seven letters to the Churches in Revelation 2 & 3 represent a sort of timeline of Church history from the Apostolic Era to the Church of the end times. We are currently living in the Laodicean Age, the very last period of Church History. Laodicea is a Church in name only – true believers of this age are the remnants of the Philadelphian Age.

Seven Churches

CHURCH	HISTORIC PERIOD
Ephesus	The Apostolic Age
Smyrna	The post-apostolic era of persecution
Pergamum	The Catholic era, during which the priesthood developed
Thyatira	The Dark Ages
Sardis	The Reformation
Philadelphia	The “true church” of every age
Laodicea	The “lukewarm” church of the 20 th century

Well, Jesus tells the saints at Smyrna, “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich).” The last Church Jesus addresses is *Laodicea*, which represents the Church of the Last Days – the Church where Jesus is literally on the outside knocking to come in (**Revelation 3:20**). To Laodicea, Jesus says, “You say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,’ not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (**Revelation 3:17**).

The poor suffering Church which God praises and the self-proclaimed rich and independent Church which Jesus warns! What a contrast! He says to Laodicea, “I counsel you to buy from me ... white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen ...” (**Revelation 3:18**). And, “You are neither cold nor hot ... ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm ... I will spit

you out of my mouth” (**Revelation 3:15-16**). “He who has an ear,” Jesus says, “let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (**Revelation 3:22**).

- 2) Jesus said, to the Church at Smyrna, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (**Revelation 2:10**).

What is the “crown of life”? In their suffering the believers at Smyrna were exhorted to be faithful, even to the point of death. While their persecutors could take their physical lives, it would only result in their receiving the crown of life. “The crown of life” is one of several crowns promised to Christians (cf. **1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 4:4**).

The Greek word **στέφανος** (stephanos) refers to “a wreath made of foliage or designed to resemble foliage which was to be worn by one of high status or held in high regard.”⁹ In the ancient world, the **στέφανος** was the reward for winning either (1) in battle or (2) in the athletic games. Paul used the athletic games as a metaphor for the Christian life in **1 Corinthians 9:24-25**:

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath (**στέφανος**), but we an imperishable” (**1 Corinthians 9:24-25**, cf., **Daniel 7:7-8, Revelation 13:3; 17:3, 7**).

The **στέφανος**, then, is used biblically to describe the greatest honor that God can bestow upon believers.¹⁰ It is a fitting symbol of heavenly reward that God will give to all who love Jesus to the disregard of themselves.

Jesus wore a **στέφανος** too – one that was a symbol of His great suffering. He wore a **στέφανον ἐξ ἀκανθῶν**, a ‘crown of thorns’ (or prickly plants) (**Matthew 27:29, Mark 15:17, John 19:2, 5**).¹¹

⁹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 943.

¹⁰ The Roman *corona* (Latin) was the highest decoration in the army and is the exact equivalent of the Greek **στέφανος**.

¹¹ Jesus, the “one like a son of man”, is also seen wearing a golden **στέφανος** in Revelation 14:14: “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown (**στέφανος**) on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.”

- 3) The “crown of life” is rewarded to all those who persevere under trial, thus manifesting their true love for the Lord.

Revelation 2:10, ellipsis: “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested ... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

James 1:12: “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life (τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς), which God has promised to those who love him.”

Notice it: “*when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life*. And notice this too: the crown of life is given to “those who love Him.” The word “test” in **James 1:12** is δόκιμος (dokimos) which refers to something *proven to be genuine on the basis of testing* (i.e., it’s been *approved*).¹² This approval comes *only* through testing.

So, who gets this crown? All believers? NO! This crown is given only to those who, through testing, have proven that they love Him. What does it mean to love Jesus? **John 14:15**: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” True love for Jesus *is shown* by our obedience to the Lord regardless of the circumstances. In **Luke 6:46**, Jesus asked, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

This magnificent “crown of life,” then:

✠ Is promised by Jesus to all who love Him, and

✠ Is rewarded because of “the proven genuineness of our faith” (**1 Pet. 1:7**).

- 4) In **Revelation 3:11**, Jesus speaks to the *remnant* Church of the last days (the remnant of the Church of Philadelphia living in the age of the unsaved Laodicean Church), and He wants to encourage them. And so, He reminds them of the soon-coming Rapture. He says,

¹² Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 256.

“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (**Revelation 3:10**).

And then He says something we might easily miss! “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, *so that no one may seize your crown*” (**Revelation 3:11**). A few obvious facts from this statement:

First, there is a crown that Jesus referred to as “*your crown*” (τὸν στέφανόν σου).

Second, it can be taken from you.

Jesus is speaking to this faithful remnant of the last days and He only has ONE command for them!¹³ What is it? “Hold fast what you have!” He’s saying,

‘Don’t give up! Tough times are ahead. But persevere. Keep loving Me! Don’t lose sight of the reward! The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal!’

Being a Christian means that we will have to suffer – but being a *faithful* Christian means that we’ll have *a mind to suffer*.

- 5) Now, please understand this: the Crown of Life, which is also known as the ‘Martyrs’ Crown’ is not only for martyrs. *It’s not only for those who die for their love for Jesus; it’s for all who are willing to.*

“Hold fast” is the present active *imperative* of κρατέω - *you MUST continue to produce the action of holding on to what you have!* We must not give a single inch to any of these things that would steal our crown! *We must hold fast to what we have!*

Jesus, the One who declares, “I know your works,” says, *I have a crown waiting for YOU!* **HOLD ON TO WHAT YOU HAVE WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT LEST SOMEONE TAKE YOUR CROWN FROM YOU!**

¹³ Fanning, Buist M., *Revelation*, ed. by Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), p. 178.

Notice, this crown is not something that you simply lose; it's something that's *stolen from you*, ripped from your hands! Oh, how the Devil loves to steal, rob and destroy! Is it any wonder that Jesus pleads, "I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" (**Revelation 3:11**)?

Oh, Lord, let *Harvest* be a Church that holds fast to what we have! A Church that remains faithful! That perseveres under trials! That receives the Crown of Life which you have promised to all who love You! Let us be found faithful when He returns for us, busy about the work of the Kingdom. Let us not be among those who will "shrink from Him in shame at His coming!"

1 John 2:28: "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming."

Oh, no Lord, not us! Let us be marked by holiness and a holy zeal – proclaiming the truth and waiting, faithfully, for the Rapture. Let us be those who *love His appearing*! And may we receive every crown You desire for us to have, if only that we may cast it again at your feet. that You might be all in all!

Amen.