

A RIGHTEOUS CROWN RIGHTEOUSLY GIVEN

A SERMON

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“But unto all them also that love his appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:8

WE have this morning to try to set forth another, or rather two very essential and important parts of our text. The first is that of *character*. Never forget that the promises of God are to character; and that God is no respecter of persons; but every one that fears him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him; and he that does not work righteousness is not, at least in the manifestation thereof, accepted with him. I shall have this morning, then, in the first part of my subject, to be very close in the discrimination of character; and then the next point will be that of *the crown of righteousness that awaits all those that love his appearing*. Our text says, “*all* them that love his appearing.”

First: I notice then first, CHARACTER. First there is the man without any religion at all; of course, the crown is not for him. And then there is the man with a false religion; of course, the crown is not for him. Then there is the man with the true religion; now the crown is for him. So that when we deduct the numbers that have no religion at all, and then the numbers, if we could do such a thing, that have only a false religion, I fear it would leave comparatively few to whom this promise belongs. First there are some that have no religion at all. And such persons rather boast of it; and they are proud of it; they speak highly of themselves, because they make no profession of religion at all. Well, it certainly is better that you should make no profession of religion at all, than that you should make a false profession; but nevertheless recollect that although you escape the evil of making a false profession, and consequently cannot ultimately be dealt with as a hypocrite, recollect there are other characters destructive to the soul in which you can and will be dealt with, apart from that of hypocrisy. And let me say to such, do you know how it is you have no religion? Why, the answer simply is this; that originally you had religion, for by creation you were righteous, and holy, and upright; but you have apostatized from God. And such persons may boast of having no religion when they have no sin; such persons may boast of having no religion when there is no wrath of heaven hanging over their heads; when there is no hell awaiting them; such persons may boast of having no religion when their bodies shall cease to be what they are, namely, mortal, and hastening every moment to the dust. It is therefore, a fearful thing to be without any religion at all; for while many have a religion that is a false religion, yet we are sure that if you have no religion at all, are not concerned about your souls at all, not concerned about salvation at all, not concerned

about eternal things at all, this just proves that you are under God's wrath, though you know it not; that you are under sin, and under death, and your state is more awful than language can describe. The promise, therefore, is not to you. Think not that God will trifle, or compromise matters; there stands the declaration, "You must be born again and it is nothing but that change that can bring the soul into that state described in our text, namely, into a state of reconciliation to God, and of sincere love to Christ. The apostle Peter takes a very solemn view of this same subject; he says, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it begins at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God, that make no profession at all, that have no religion; if it first begins at us; if we ourselves, some of us may go a long way, and yet not be real children of God at the last; what then shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel? "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Ah, say you, but I am not ungodly; for though I make no profession, yet I am a very moral man. Well, so far so good; but then do not lose sight of the apostle's other words; he says, "the ungodly *and the sinner*;" so that if you are not ungodly morally, yet you are a sinner naturally; so that if you look at the one clause, and say, well, that threatening has nothing to do with me, or I am not ungodly; yet the next clause has to do with you; for it says, "and the sinner," "If the righteous scarcely be saved;" if their escape be in many respects apparently scarce; "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" We know where they will appear; they will appear at the Savior's left hand; they will appear under God's law, under God's wrath, under all their sins; in a state of privation, in a state of everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Such then were some of you; but you are justified, you are sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Whereas some of you once had no religion, now your religion is the very treasure of your existence. I do not wonder at the apostle saying that he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. So, then the promise, I say, is not unto such; that is, not living and dying in that state. But secondly, we may have a religion, and that religion nevertheless may be false. The apostle Paul gives us to understand that there are persons who were once enlightened, and yet not regenerated; that there were persons who tasted of the heavenly gift, that there were persons that were partakers of the Holy Ghost, as Balaam was, and as king Saul was; partakers in the letter of the word, and of the gifts of the Spirit, but not of the graces of the Spirit; and therefore, although such persons were partakers of the Holy Ghost in some of his gifts, and in the letter of the word, yet they were not partakers of him as a Spirit of grace and of supplication. So then they may be enlightened without being regenerated; and consequently the enlightenment is unaccompanied by any soul trouble; and they may taste of the heavenly gift without being killed to the law, and Christ becoming their first fruits; and they may be partakers of the Holy Ghost in the testimony of his word, and in his gifts, and may for a time run well, and promise well; nevertheless, being destitute of the Spirit of grace and of supplication; they have never so partaken of the Holy Ghost as to be led to look on him whom they have pierced, and to be in that soul bitterness from which a Savior's blood alone can release them, and to be in that house of mourning out of which the Savior in his great mission alone can bring them. To this they are strangers. They have tasted the good word of God, they have been delighted with the minister; delighted with the Bible; delighted with the word in some shape or another; perhaps even in its order, as regards the doctrines; they have tasted the word, and it has been very pleasing to them. Judas tasted the good word of God, as the stony ground hearer did; but when the Savior rebuked Judas, because he (Judas) rebuked the woman, when she came beforehand to anoint the Savior unto the burial; her love was real, and her love was devoted; very different from some professors that we meet; there are some professors that make it their very life-time business to be nuisances to their ministers;

and then when the minister dies, they will come forward and snivel, and clothe themselves in black from top to toe, and make such a do about it; the hypocrites; they ought to have been kind to him while he was alive, and not have treated him in the way they did, and then make a fuss over him when he is gone. But the Savior says, "This woman is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying and so devoted is her love, so real is her love, so sympathetic is her love, so acceptable is her love; so pleasing is this expression of her love to me while I am as it were within her reach as the man of sorrows I shall soon be beyond the reach of all as the man of sorrows; when I shall not have to partake of any personal kindness; so pleasing is this love to me that "whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout all the world, this also that she has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her;" as well as for an example; And that so offended Judas that away he went, he could not endure the rebuke; if you will read carefully, you will see that he went away immediately, and accepted the thirty pieces of silver to get rid of the Lord Jesus Christ; as though he should say, after he has spoken to me like that, I will be revenged on him. And yet previous to this he had hidden himself so completely from the other disciples that we have no evidence that any of the other disciples had the least suspicion of him. Thus, my hearer, there is no doubt that Judas was enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly gift, and was made a partaker perhaps of the Holy Ghost in his gifts, and tasted of the good word of God; and the powers of the world to come. Now the apostle says, "if these fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." It is grievous to think of, that some men, even some that I think well of, and some that I do not think well of, have interpreted that scripture to mean that the apostle is there arguing for the impossibility of the true Christian falling away. But the apostle does not place the impossibility into connection with the falling away; he places the impossibility into connection with the restoration. He says, it is impossible again to restore him, to renew him again to repentance; then take out the other words, the parenthetical words, "those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come;" look at these words as parenthetical, leave them out, and then bring the word "impossible" into its own connection and then it will read in this way: "It is impossible, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance;" because their fall is just such a fall, if not the same in form the same in spirit, as that of Judas; "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Here then, my hearer, we learn that a man may go a long way in a profession of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet may by and bye turn out an enemy to him. Thus then, the promise is not unto such. And it is not always easy to distinguish between the two; and yet there are marks by which the apostle distinguishes between them. The character spoken of in the 6th of Hebrews is evidently the same character spoken of in the 10th of Hebrews. And the apostle then goes on in order to distinguish the two characters by a metaphor; a contrastive metaphor; and he then arrives at a certain conclusion, the minister's consolation; and then shows the way in which the real child of God, notwithstanding the emptiness of these professors, is to be encouraged. Hence, when he would describe under a metaphor the real child of God, he says, "The earth which drinks in the rain that comes often upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessings from God." What is the rain spiritually which this earth drinks in? The 32nd of Deuteronomy, as well as other scriptures, will show us what this rain is. My doctrine," and you know what that doctrine is, that it is the stability of Christ, and the perfection of his work; "my doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Here is a thirsty soul; here is a man that drinks in the truth, is softened by it, refreshed by it, brings forth by it love to God, to Christ, to his people. Ah,

but not only in feeling, but also in practice, as the apostle very beautifully goes on to show. And then when he would by another figure of speech point out the professors, the apostates, whom he had before described, that they could not be renewed again to repentance, he says, "That which bears thorns and briers," that is descriptive of the false professor, bearing thorns and briers, malice and enmity; for enemies are compared to thorns and briers; and the Lord says, "Who will set these thorns and briers," these ungodly "against me?" I will "go through them, and burn them up;" "that which bears thorns and briers is rejected." But what are we to understand about the impossibility of renewing them again to repentance? I understand there that it is impossible by the ordinary means to renew them again to repentance; whereas when the child of God gets into error, he feels uncomfortable. I am sure those of you that are established in the truth, if your judgment should at all be beguiled, if your minds should at all be beguiled from the majesty of the Gospel, if you should begin to give up some part of it, and put some human invention in its place, you would be wretched, you would feel a cloud between you and the Lord; you would feel you had given up that gospel that opened up a way of access unto God without a cloud or a veil between; that you are gone away in some measure from that gospel that meets you in every possible necessity, let those necessities be what they may; and that you have adopted a system that depends partly upon yourself and partly upon the Lord; let the real child of God get into that state, and you may depend upon it he will be as miserable as ever he can be. And then in the Lord's own time rebukes and troubles shall cure him of this his fault and he shall be renewed again unto repentance. But the mere professor cannot be renewed again unto repentance by ordinary means. But I do not apprehend when it is said it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, that it means they are finally lost; I must differ from the greatest and, best divines we have had upon that question. They hold, and even the great Huntington I think held the idea, that such an one is finally lost¹. Well, I can hardly say that: because a man may take up a profession, and apostatize, and become one of the enemies there described; and yet after that almighty grace may lay hold of that man, and discover to that man his sinner-ship in a way in which he never saw it before; may bring that man down with a broken heart, and broken bones, in a way he never was before; so that for me to assert that it is impossible for God to call him by his grace after he has thus apostatized, I think we have no scripture authority to say that; for after all, there is not any very great difference between personal apostacy and uniting with an apostate church. Why, take for instance the apostle Paul, or rather Saul of Tarsus; the Jewish Church was originally the church of God; it was planted a noble vine, as the Lord says; and the Lord planted a vineyard, gathered out the stones, built a tower therein, and made a fence round it; but then it apostatized, and Saul of Tarsus belonged to the most zealous branch of this apostate church, and yet Saul of Tarsus, with all the malice and enmity that he had as an apostate, for he joined an apostate church, he had the spirit of apostacy; and yet he, this enemy, we find the Lord called him by his grace. I think, friends, we ought to distinguish between impossibility by ordinary means, and impossibility with the great God; we ought not, I think, to say anything to discourage. As I have sometimes said, all the time a man is on earth we know not what the Lord may do; and on the other hand, if I am speaking to any now that have ever thus acted, then if you are now brought to a concern, that is an evidence of what I say, that it is impossible to bring you back by the ordinary means; if God should bring you back, he would do something more than that; he would give you a repentance you never had before, work such a change as was never worked before, and constitute you a new man. Now before this it was new

¹ Wells goes on, I believe, to explain his reasoning very clearly and correctly. Anything short of what he states is contrary to the sovereignty of God. Paul's meaning, it is clear, is that, with man it is impossible but we must remember that all things are possible to God. (Richard Schadle)

wine put into an old bottle; it was a new religion patched upon your old garment; but now you become a new man, he has constituted you what you never were before. Those of you, therefore, I say that have no religion at all, be assured you will find that a miserable shelter; and those that have a false religion, have not the truth, have not the Spirit of Christ, how tremendous will be the deception that they themselves must meet with. But the apostle would not discourage the real children of God. He says, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." And he seems to place the evidence upon a twofold ground; first upon personal work, and secondly upon the nature of the gospel which they loved; "for," he says, "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints;" and it was not a mere transitory expression of sympathy; it was not that they gave something at a collection for the poor and needy of God's children seven years ago; it was not merely that they showed some kindness to the afflicted of God's children seven years ago; no; he says, "In that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister;" you show no inclination to be weary in well doing. "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Thus, then the man that is regenerated has a practical sympathy with the people of God, with the saints of God, with the honors of the great Jehovah's name. And what was the kind of Gospel that such persons loved? Now brethren, as though he should say, I have spoken rather discouragingly to you, rather distressingly, rather closely; and perhaps, although I have told you that God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed, toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do; nevertheless, as though he should say, I know the Gospel you love; and it is this, he says, that "when God made promise to Abraham;" now this is the Gospel that the real Christian loves; "because he could swear by no greater he swore by himself." He says, "men verily swear by the greater; and an oath of confirmation is to them an end to all strife;" that is a sweet expression, "an end of all strife." In order to understand this, notice that God interposes by the priesthood of Christ, by an immutable oath; and that puts an end to all strife; sin is put to silence, Satan is put to silence, death is put to silence, and tribulations will be put to silence; everything put to silence; there is an end of all strife; and eternal tranquility must reign. Therefore, said the apostle unto such, "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Thus then, first, here is the non-professor; secondly, here is the false-professor; and thirdly, here is the real-professor, that is brought into practical sympathy with the saints, that receives the great truths there set before us, and is constrained by those truths to every good word and work. The apostle also describes in the 10th chapter of the Hebrews the apostate; and then, after doing so, he again speaks to the people of God, and encourages them. "If we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth;" ah, my hearer, if that meant any fleshly sin, it must have cut off all the Old Testament saints, and all the New Testament saints too. The sin, therefore, is a sin which a good man cannot commit willfully; may be beguiled to a certain extent, or through the fear of man, as Peter was; "if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth," a mere dry speculative knowledge, there remains no more sacrifice for sin." Just contrast this with the words of John; and you will see at once that the two sins are different. John says, "If any man sin,

we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and his blood cleanses from all sin:" Paul says, "If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins." John says there is, Paul says there is not. What shall we do this morning? Shall we fall into the fashion of the world, and make the Bible contradict itself, and say we cannot reconcile it? God forbid we should ever fall into that ditch of making the Bible a self-contradictory book. John is there speaking of the infirmities of the saints, and to encourage them, to show that with all their infirmities and drawbacks, the blood of Jesus shall keep pace with their infirmities, and that they are not thereby to be sunk into despair, he says therefore, "We have an advocate with the Father." But the apostle Paul is not speaking of the sin of the flesh, or the sin of infirmity; he is speaking of the sin of malicious apostacy; "there remains no more sacrifice for sin." Let us hear the apostle's explanation; "But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy," here is the sin, "who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace." There is a great variety of ways in which that may be treated; and I dare not branch out to describe that variety of ways; suffice it to say that there is not a sin that you can name in the whole range of existence from which the child of God stands at a greater distance than he does from that sin; "count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." What, Jesu's precious blood; what the Surety's precious blood; the Great Shepherd's precious blood; the blood of the everlasting covenant; oh God, behold my heart and soul, and see if you know not that I through your grace, am at an infinite distance from any such feeling. You know, O you Most High, you Holy One, you Searcher of hearts, that I stand before you as a sinner without a particle of hope apart from the precious blood of your dear Son. Know you not that Christ speaks of the love of God the Father to him in his death in a way that he does nowhere else? There is not a scripture in all the Bible in which Christ speaks of the love of the Father to him in the form, and in one sense with such emphasis, as he does in connection with his death; showing that there is all God's delight. The Father loves the Son; blessed truth; loved him before the foundation of the world, blessed truth; there the love is simply declared; but here in the death of Christ, and it is where his death is placed in a suretyship position too; his death is often spoken of without any apparently immediate connection with his suretyship position; but here it is connected with it. "Other sheep I have, them also I must bring;" it is not whether they will come or not, that has nothing to do with it; I must bring them; I dare not appear at the end of time without them; I dare not give in at the last a testimony that there is one, only one, given to me in the ancient counsels of eternity, that I have not; I must bring them. And there is to be onefold, mark that, and one shepherd; that shows where he will bring them to; he will bring them all into one free-grace home, and into the bond of one pastoral suretyship security. And now mark, "therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life." Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy that could count such a life unclean, unholy? "Therefore, does my Father love me, because I lay down my life." He nowhere else speaks of his love in such a form as he does there. It stands between the two great points; his suretyship responsibility, and the perfection of his atonement; "I lay down my life; no man takes it from me." I lay it down myself; I am not a poor creature like you, tossed about by man's caprice; I have power to lay it down, personal power; and personal power to take it again; and I have relative authority to do so too: "This commandment have I received of my Father." Thus, then the true child of God finds his everlasting all where the mere professor trifles and finds nothing. Then the apostle after reminding these persons that trifled with the Savior's death, these

apostate professors, that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” goes on to say a word or two of encouragement to the real children of God. He says, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which after you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, while you were made a laughing stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly while you became companions of them that were so used.” Ah, that is a noble spirit, to choose to suffer affliction with the people of God; Moses never repented it, and the children of God never will. Then the Apostle says, “Cast not away your confidence, which has great recompense of reward.” Well, but, Paul, we are afraid we are mere professors. Well, but you to whom I am speaking now are something more than enlightened; you are convinced of your state as sinners; you have something more than tasted of the heavenly gift; Christ is your life; living a life of faith in the Son of God; you are something more than partakers of the Holy Ghost in the mere letter of the word, in his gifts; you have praying hearts; you do something more than taste the good word of God, you live upon it, and long for it, and seek for it; you have found it sweet to the taste, yes, sweeter than honey and the honey comb. You have done something more than taste the powers of the world to come; you are come into the world to come; you are born of God, and brought into the kingdom of God and of Christ, and that is the world to come; only we are now in the grace part of it; by and bye we shall be in the glory part of it. Do you mean to say, then, that you can tread underfoot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing; that you can despise the Spirit of grace? No; is it not rather your great delight that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of grace; and is not your only trust in the sacrifice of Christ?

Second: Having thus then noticed the character, I now make a few remarks upon THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT AWAITES ALL THOSE THAT LOVE HIS APPEARING. Here is a crown of righteousness to be given; which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give. Although angels will attend the judgment day, and perhaps will be instrumental in driving the wicked together to where the Lord will judge them; yet the award of the righteous is not left with the angels. “Even unto the angels has he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.” The crown of righteousness is only one of those forms of description we have in the Bible of the ultimate reward of the righteous. Only remember that reward is of grace; founded first upon the mediatorial work of Christ; that is the ground of equity, Christ’s work, by which the reward will be regulated. But then the character is identified by those distinctions I have described this morning; namely, that they are brought to know their lost condition, brought to receive the truth in the love of it, in the practice of it. “The righteous Judge;” righteous because Jesus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness; righteous because his atonement is the end of sin; righteous because he has entered into a solemn oath, which he will never violate, to bless his people to all eternity. I should like to have said a few things upon the character of the crown here given. You will at once perceive there is a great deal of attraction about it. “A crown of righteousness.” It means first, that everything shall be right, not one wrong thing. Here we have so many things to be sorry for; so many afflictions, losses, and trials; so many things to bear us down, and make us unhappy; and apparently so few things to be glad for. But there, not a single thing shall be wrong. There will be carried out that scripture which I cannot explain as I would wish to do, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” When you are crowned with that ultimate righteousness, and everything is made ultimately right in the gospel sense I intend, you will then see that God has made such a use of your sins that they wear an aspect whiter than snow, that they wear an aspect as wool; and you will bless God that he suffered the fall to take place, because it gave occasion for him to display the

exceeding riches of his grace. **I do not believe that a saint in heaven will be able to heave one sigh, shed one tear, express one regret, or feel any pain at anything that has ever taken place, so right will everything be.** "A crown of righteousness:" crowned with right; circumstances right, the way you have come right; wrong, by the mediatorial work of the Savior, turned into right under the skillful management of the Most High; everything made right; crooked things straight, rough places plain; mountains lowered, valleys exalted; darkness shone away by the brilliancy and glory of his presence; the salvation of God revealed, and his name glorified forever. Why, who can be afraid to die in that case? The more we are kept in these things, the more peace we shall have with God, for peace reigns nowhere else. Only this same delightful truth I am now stating may be held presumptuously and in a unhallowed manner; I cannot help that; if we preach not the truth in the real freeness of it until men cease to abuse it, we shall never preach it at all. And I am sure if God never gave us another harvest, if God never gave us another vintage, if God never made the wealth of the different nations of the earth to reach our shores, until none in this island should abuse the bounties of his providence, when should we have another harvest, another vintage, when would wealth from foreign parts reach us? No; he makes his sun to shine on the just, that is the happy man, and on the unjust. Let others abuse his bounties, whether in providence or in grace, his people must be fed spiritually and temporally; they must be sustained; they will not abuse the same; if others abuse it, that has nothing to do with them; they are not to be starved because others abuse it.

Thus, then the promise is to character; here lies the crown of righteousness before us; this crown, expressive of a thousand things, I have neither name nor time for.