

## 2019 WCCC

### Brother Godwin Sun

## Seek After The Crown Of Righteousness (1)

I believe brothers and sisters are already aware that the burden I received in this conference is to share about the pursuit of the crown of righteousness. I found that many brothers are interested in this topic. This is wonderful, of course. We ought to focus on the crown of righteousness. Let's begin by reading some of the Lord's words.

*2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

*Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

*1 Corinthians 9:24-27 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. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

I think brothers and sisters are all very aware that 2 Timothy 4 is about an important exhortation from Paul in his later years. This is obviously not only for

Timothy, but also an exhortation for all the saints. When we read about Paul's life, it was a turning point when he was on the way to Damascus. The Lord showed Himself to Paul, after which Paul was very much attracted by the Lord Jesus. He used to love Judaism and the world. But since the encounter, the Lord became Paul's only source of attraction in his life. Not only did he receive God's vision and revelation, he also understood the meaning of Christ. He knew that the mystery of God is Christ. He had written many important epistles, and they all showed he had such great insight. In his epistles, not only did he explain the meaning of Christ, he also had a deep impression regarding the return of the Lord. Therefore, the return of the Lord was mentioned many times in his epistles.

There is an important Greek word in the New Testament: Parousia. This word "parousia" refers to the return of the Lord. This word is mentioned 24 times in the New Testament, 14 of which are found in Paul's letters. Paul had a very clear understanding of the Lord's return. The word, parousia, appeared many times in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians in his early days. This means Apostle Paul started paying attention to the return of the Lord, even in his early ministry. And he also encouraged brothers and sisters to focus on the return of the Lord. We can say that Paul's later life and ministry all took place in the light of the return of the Lord. And he had a deep love towards the return of the Lord. He also had some unique insights. Not only did he know that the Lord is to return soon and not only did he encourage Timothy to love the return of the Lord, he also received a precious calling. This is what we find in Philippians 3. There was an upward call from God for Paul to receive a prize. We know that we will see God face to face when He returns, which is very precious. However, there will also be this matter of prize when He returns. Dear brothers and sisters, this had a major impact on Paul. In order to gain this prize, we find in the book of Philippians, Paul said that he presses on toward the goal, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, because this call had a very great impact on his life.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is Paul who told us that God has a heavenly call for us to receive this prize. We know it is good to receive a prize. In this world today, there are all kinds of prizes in the workplace or in school. Of course, we are happy when we receive a prize. Getting a prize is also a glorious matter. People are also envious of you when you get a prize. That is the reason many people work hard, it is to get a prize. This prize is a recognition of our diligence and our accomplishment. Today, God is also giving us a calling. Of course, the price is not worldly, but heavenly instead.

Paul's whole life and his work were impacted because he heard this call. Not only did he love the appearing of the Lord, he also wanted to receive this prize, which is the crown of righteousness according to 2 Timothy. So, brothers and sisters, have we heard this call? Have we heard this call? May the Lord open our inner ears so we might hear this upward call. Paul followed the Lord diligently on earth because of this call he received. He paid a great price to follow the Lord.

So, brothers and sisters, Paul in his latter years, encouraged his young coworker, Timothy, to follow and love the Lord diligently.

We find in 2 Timothy 4, Paul mentioned three important matters. His life focused on these three matters. These are three important principles, by which Paul pursued the Lord diligently. I believe all brothers and sisters are familiar with them. First, he said he had fought the good fight. What battles are we fighting? Paul said we ought to fight the good fight. Why are there battles in spiritual matters? It becomes very clear when we read the Scriptures. It is because there are conflicts in life. There are the old life and the new life within us. And there are conflicts between the old life and the new life. The old life is the one that has fallen. Today that fallen life is the enemy's workshop. The devil can work in that old life. Within the old life, there is the good and there is the bad. No matter if it is good or bad, it is something the devil can use. So, Paul refers to this as the old man. In the boundary of this old life, there is nothing God can use. I hope we can understand this: God cannot use your wisdom, your goodness, etc. When we are saved, God has already given us a new life. And because we want to live in this new life, we find there is a great conflict. We know God's will can only be perfected in this new life. So Paul tells us we have to fight the good fight. How do we fight the good fight? We have to hold fast to that new life. We have to live in the new life. I think we can all understand this because we are fighting this fight almost every day. The new life within us draws us to love the Lord. The old life within us draws us to love the world. There are many internal conflicts. So, Paul tells us to hold fast to that eternal life and to fight the good fight. Paul said he had fought the good fight because he knows he was about to be martyred. So, brothers and sisters, in order to obtain the crown of righteousness, we have to fight the good fight.

Secondly, Paul said he had finished the course. We know that God not only has a glorious purpose, God has also determined the path by which we can reach that purpose. God has determined that path Himself. That was the reason, when Jesus came, He said, "I am the way. No one comes to the Father but through Me.". Therefore, we know this matter of the way is very important. Not only do we need the Lord to open our eyes so we understand God's eternal purpose, to see the purpose of God's work, we also need to know this way. We know this way is straight in heaven, but this way is very winding on earth and in the church. Therefore, we have to run towards that goal. Brothers and sisters, God has already determined the way. Not only do we run on this way, we have to run on the correct course. There are many ways in this world, and even in Christianity. We have to run on the right way. If we run on the wrong way, Paul tells us that we have run in vain. This is a really important matter.

Not only do we have to be on the right way, we cannot stroll leisurely on this way. You have to run to the end. Our Lord has measured for us the course in our life, and we have to finish it. Sadly, we have seen some brothers and sisters

who did not finish the course measured for them. Paul said, "I have finished the course." Over the years, I have been encouraging brothers and sisters to focus their eyes on the Lord's way. I often say that there is only value if we do the right things on the right way. There are a lot of things we Christians consider right nowadays. It is good to preach the gospel. It is good to encourage others to read the Bible, and to live a good life. But these good things need to be accomplished on the right way. Today, we see in the world some Christian organizations are big and prosperous. But the way is not right. We should not be seduced by these things. We also see some Christians or people who serve the Lord have very good behavior. They love the Lord and they consecrate themselves. But the way is wrong. And this is very sad. The person is good but the way is wrong. Dear brothers and sisters, God has determined His own way. You have to walk on His way and run upon His way with diligence. Then and only then can we gain the crown of righteousness.

Thirdly, Paul said, "I have kept the faith." What did Paul believe in? He said he has held fast to what he believed. If you look at his thirteen epistles, you see how great the vision he received. He believed Jesus is the Christ. He knew Jesus is the Savior and the Lord. He understood the Lord Jesus's crucifixion accomplishes salvation. Not only did He save us from sin, the way of the cross also changes us completely. This cross has fulfilled God's purpose. Not only these, Paul also understood God's purpose is Christ. He also believed the Church is the body of Christ. It is not a religious organization. The church is the body of Christ, the bride of the Lamb. He also believed that Jesus rose from the dead and one day He will return. And when the Lord returns, everything would be summed up in Christ. We see in the life of Paul, he held fast to all these in his faith. Sadly, we see that some of the children of God only hold fast to some of these. In the life of Paul, there are many other important aspects. Paul said, "I have kept the faith." We can see that Paul focused his life in these three principles.

Paul encourages all the children of God, including Timothy, to hold fast to these three principles. This is Paul's pursuit before the Lord. Paul said this is the way to receive the crown of righteousness. We know in Paul's ministry, he was able to use the most profound language to explain God's highest mysteries. But in his letters, he also uses common analogies to encourage saints in their daily living and pursuit. Paul used a very easy-to-understand analogy to encourage us in our pursuit. When you read Paul's letters, you will find that Paul was very interested in sports. He used examples of an athlete's living and training to illustrate our spiritual pursuit. He used an athlete's pursuit in sports as an example to illustrate how we can gain the prize.

We know in Paul's time, the Olympics did not exist yet. But in Greek culture, people had high regards for sports. At the time, they had a famous athletic event called the Isthmian Games. I read some descriptions of the event and I will describe it briefly. There are three specific sports mentioned by Paul: running,

boxing, and wrestling. Some said the Isthmian Games was very simple at the time, and it probably only included these three events. It is not like modern-day Olympic Games where there are many events. Their running race was quite interesting. We know that the city of Corinth was along the coast, and across from Corinth there was a small island. When the tide was high, it was an island. During certain seasons, the tide would recede, and there would be a path that allowed you to walk to the island. So, they conducted the games in these seasons. They would run from Corinth to the island and back. Whoever finished the race first received the prize. Because the path was submerged under water most of the time, it was a muddy trail and difficult to run on. They held these games in that setting.

In Corinthians 9, Paul said, “I run as not without aim.” The aim was that island. There was some meaning behind it. At the time, these games attracted Paul’s attention. According to historical records, Paul was not in great health, so he could not have been an athlete. But he liked sports, just like some brothers and sisters like to watch games today. Paul took the requirements of a good athlete and applied them to spiritual matters.

You can find this in Paul’s epistles. In order for one to become a good athlete, first you have to have a healthy strong body. If you are weak, you cannot be an athlete. All the athletes trained hard and had strong muscles. As a spiritual athlete today, it is not about how strong we are physically. Of course, it is good to be healthy. But being physically healthy does not qualify one to be a good spiritual athlete. How can we be good spiritual athletes? What does it mean to be spiritually healthy? Paul tells us our inner man has to be strengthened. In Ephesians 3, he prays that their inner men might be strengthened. For us to be good spiritual athletes, our inner man, our spirit needs to be strong. It is through God’s glory and the work of the Holy Spirit, our inner men can be strengthened.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, even though our outer man is decaying, our inner man is renewed day by day. What happens when our inner man is beginning to be strengthened? We will start to pay attention to what is not seen. We will start to have an interest in spiritual matters. When the inner man is strengthened, we will be interested in spiritual matters. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul says Christians need to exercise godliness. Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things. Therefore, a good athlete needs to have a strong healthy body. A good spiritual athlete has to be strong in the inner man. This is the first requirement.

The second requirement is that we need to have great skills. Athletes spend many hours training. Sometimes a small movement has to be practiced thousands of times. I once read about a report about a swimmer. In order to win a gold medal in the Olympics, he spends eight hours a day in the water. He has to practice his skills so that he does not make any mistakes during the competition. So many athletes train daily in order to hone their skills.

How do we practice? First, we have to know God's words well. We have to read the Bible daily. Not only do we familiarize ourselves with it, we have to be able to apply God's principles skillfully.

We see within the church today, there is a big difference between those who are well trained and those who are not. When situations arise, some who are well trained can use God's words and resolve problems. Our problem is that when the situation arises, we don't know how to handle it because we don't know God's words.

God has given us many gifts today. Every gift has to be exercised. We see some brothers don't know how to preach in the beginning. But through many years of training they get better and better at preaching, and they become more and more experienced. Spiritual gifts have to be exercised. We have to keep using them. The more we use them, the more mature we become. So, as an athlete, we have to have refined skills.

Third, there has to be restrictions in our lifestyle. A truly good athlete has to have a disciplined lifestyle. This is something we can easily understand. We see when the athletes are training, the time they go to sleep and the time they get up are all disciplined. There are restrictions on what they can eat and what they cannot eat. These athletes would weigh their food in order to consume the right amount.

Paul speaks of how an athlete needs to have self-control. Today as believers, having self-control is also a very important training. Paul said that in order to receive that reward, he buffed his body and make it his slave. This is what athletes do. He trains to a point that his shoulders and his legs listen to him. He buffets his body. So, Paul was also learning self-control. I know nobody likes to be restricted. But for us to obtain that crown, we have to be restricted. The Bible tells us that we need to carry our cross and follow the Lord. We have to learn the lesson of denying ourselves. In Galatians 5, Paul tells us to allow the Spirit to constrain us so that we can learn self-control.

Forth, athletes have to have this must-win attitude. Every athlete must have this attitude. They need to have this attitude that they will win. We see the athletes in the world today have this must-win attitude. I recently learned a term from my son because he likes to watch ball games. There are some basketball players, when they play a game, they have to win. People say these athletes have a "killer instinct". I think the younger people understand that term. When they enter the sporting arena, they have to win. They will not rest until they win. Paul was like that. We see that Paul pressed on to go forward to follow the Lord.

It is no wonder when you read Paul's letter, there is only first place and no second place. He often talks about being first. If you look for being second, you will not find it. Paul had this determination to win.

Today, we cannot just speak of victory, we also need to have the determination to win. How is it possible that we can have such a strong will? We need to have a strong prayer. Today, we find many children of God are quite relaxed in their prayer life. That is why we do not have strength. The more we pray, the more we are strengthened within. So, brothers and sisters, for us to be a good spiritual athlete, these are the requirements that we need to have.

Fifth, we have to familiarize ourselves with all the rules. We cannot commit violations. Every athletic event has its own rules. You have to know the rules. This is very important. This is a very important principle and I will save it to share in detail in my second message.

Paul, in his days on earth, he saw how the athletes trained and lived their lives, and he felt these should also be principles in a Christians' pursuit. He turned the training of the athletes into spiritual principles. It is very interesting how Paul talked about these aspects in his writing.

Brothers and sisters, to be a good athlete, we have to be strengthened in the inner man, we have to have a good spiritual skill set, we have to allow the Holy Spirit to constrain us in our daily living, we have to have this fierce desire, and we have to be familiar with the rules. Perhaps many brothers and sisters feel that these are too difficult to achieve. Brothers and sisters, we are not the only ones who cannot achieve it, Paul cannot either. Because this is not achieved by our natural strength. We know in the training of an athlete, there is something he/she cannot do without: A good coach. A good coach can train someone to become a good athlete. It is no wonder a good coach has a very important role in sports. If a team has a good coach, they will be able to win. Who is our coach today? Do you know who your coach is? The Holy Spirit. The Lord has sent the Holy Spirit to reside in us. He is the best coach. A good coach can not only teach the athletes good skills, most importantly he can encourage the athletes to have a strong desire to win. He can encourage the athletes so that they can give their all in the arena.

We know the theme of this conference is *All who have loved His appearing*. We know we ought to love His appearing. But do we sometimes feel we don't have the strength to love? This is a very serious problem today. We have had over thirty years of this conference. Many brothers and sisters have heard these words. We know these are precious words, but we lack the strength to pursue. We need to look to the Lord's mercy. We need to ask this good coach to help us. We know that a good coach can motivate the athletes. We need to have this desire today. But we cannot love with our natural love. Brothers and sisters, we need the love of the Lord.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:5, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit." We need the Holy Spirit to pour out God's love into our hearts. When God's love is poured out into our hearts, then our love can be stirred up to love our Lord. Forgive me for using an example from my younger

days. I believed in the Lord at the age of sixteen. When I first believed, I thought everything was great at church, except I was terrified to pray. It was difficult for me to pray. I also could not stand it when someone prayed for a long time in the meetings. With some of these lengthy prayers, I could not sit still. The worst is when some saints would cry when they prayed, then I really could not stand that. The older brothers taught us that we had to have a broken and contrite heart before the Lord when we pray, so all the prayers were very sorrowful. Therefore, many cried when they prayed. Sometimes even if they were not crying, they prayed with a crying tone. As I am sitting there, it really made me uncomfortable, I couldn't take it. But as my spiritual life started to mature, I began to change from this person who was feeling fearful and uncomfortable to becoming a person who had some desire. As a result, when I heard the saints crying when they pray, I actually had an admiration within. And I asked the Lord, "How come I don't cry?" No matter how I tried, I did not even have one drop of tear. As much as I desired to squeeze it out, I was not able to shed a single tear. So, I felt very guilty, and I told the Lord, "Perhaps my heart is too hard." For a long time, I had the admiration but I was not able to do it.

But thank the Lord, I remember it very clearly in the summer of 1964, our elderly Brother Kaung returned to Taiwan, and we had a special youth conference. I remember very clearly our Brother Kaung's sharing on Psalm 23. He used 6 sessions to speak on Psalm 23, and he used his own experience to speak on Psalm 23. And I cannot forget, it was a Thursday morning, he spoke on how he learned the lesson of the cross. He talked about how he left his dear father in order to serve the Lord with Brother Nee. This matter had become something very difficult between father and son. His father, of course, was pained; and of course, our Brother Kaung was also pained. I remembered when our brother was speaking on this matter, he was in tears. As he spoke, at that very moment, God poured forth His love through the Spirit, and the entire congregation was filled with tears. The whole congregation was crying. Every brother and sister was weeping. I will never forget that scene. I was sitting there, and all of a sudden my tears were gushing out like a spring. I could not hold back that emotion. I was not someone who could cry easily, but my tears came out like water from a spring that day. It was the Holy Spirit pouring out the love of God. Dear brothers and sisters, from that day on, there was a long period of time I could not mention the name of the Lord. As soon as I said, "Lord Jesus", my tears would gush out like a spring. I also could not stand it if someone else said, "Lord Jesus". If I heard someone else saying the name Lord Jesus, my tears could not be stopped.

God pours out the love of God within our hearts through the Holy Spirit. From that day on, those who would not pay the price were willing to pay that price. Even for those who did not want to pursue, they would pursue. Those who did not like to read the Bible became those who loved the word of God. Brothers and sisters, we cannot love God with our own strength. It is only when God pours out His love through the Holy Spirit, then that love can spring forth within.

Today, the day of our Lord's return is drawing near. We all need the Spirit to pour out God's love. May it happen in this meeting, that the Spirit pours out God's love. May it occur today, that every heart is softened and be filled with love. I thank the Lord, starting from those days, the Lord led me into a different path in my spiritual pursuit, because only love is true motivation. It does not work if all you have is doctrine. There has to be this motivating love. Paul said he was constrained by the love of God. Because God's love has captivated Paul in such a way, that Paul was able to follow the Lord, even putting his life on the line. The greatest difficulty could not stop him. There was no power that could deter him. Paul followed the Lord as if he was insane.

It is because of the love of the Lord. Dear brothers and sisters, how we need the love of God to be poured out in us. We cannot only have this doctrine of loving the appearing of our Lord, we have to have this love to fill us.

1964 was a great turning point in my life. I was just a child and Brother Kaung had no idea who I was. He had no idea what a great impact his message had on a young man in 1964. In 1968, I consecrated myself to serve the Lord. Those of us who are a little bit older might know what happened in the Far East between 1966 and 1970. A great difficulty arose within our assembly. It was a beautiful home that we admired. There were wonderful services that were greatly admired. All of a sudden, everything changed overnight. Many brothers and sisters backslid. They became cold and was discouraged. But in this environment, the love of the Lord captivated me, and I was willing to offer myself up to the Lord. Dear brothers and sisters, only the love of the Lord can be our motivating within. Without the love of the Lord, there is no way we can love His appearing. At the time, many tried to dissuade me and told me the environment was too dangerous and difficult. They told me not to be foolish offering up myself for the ministry. And yet, the attraction of this love within was too great.

Today, God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. This Spirit is the best coach. We cannot encourage brothers and sisters with man's words or fervency. We can only rely on the Spirit, that He may pour out the love of God. We hope that in these last days we would pray fervently. Let us ask our God to show us mercy and pour out this love through the Holy Spirit so that every brother and sister might be stirred up, and in the remaining few days that we will pursue the Lord well.

The Holy Spirit dwells within us, and leads us to live our lives according to the will of God. The Holy Spirit restraints our living, and we learn to be obedient to Him. In these days, there is this most fundamental truth we cannot afford to lose: We need to learn to submit to the teaching of the anointing in our daily lives. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to reign in our lives, and we need to follow the Lord carefully and closely.

I will never forget what the words of Sister Jessie Penn Lewis: We have to follow the Holy Spirit in a cold-blooded manner. What does it mean to follow in

a cold-blooded manner? It means that we have to follow the Holy Spirit even in the smallest feeling. Never reason with the Holy Spirit. If He moves you, obey. Brothers and sisters, there is not much time left. These are our last opportunities. If in this short period of time, we can follow the Spirit closely and obey all His leading, then we may likely be able to receive the crown of righteousness as Paul did. May the Lord give us wisdom that we would allow the Holy Spirit to restrain us in our daily living. In the past, our brothers have given us this wonderful phrase, "The government of the Holy Spirit." We need the Holy Spirit to lead us. We have to pray and look to the Lord that the Spirit of truth may lead us into all reality. We do not want to only hear these messages. We need to say to the Lord, "Lord, we are not satisfied with just these messages. May Your words be fulfilled in our lives." We need strength. We need the motivation within. Dear brothers and sisters, we thank the Lord that the Holy Spirit trains us in our daily lives. Not only do we have gifts, we will be able to become experienced in using these gifts so we may serve our Lord well. We know the Lord gives us gifts not to build up our own achievements. They are not to be used so we can spread our name for fame. The Holy Spirit gives us these gifts to build up God's house. It is for God's glory.

We thank the Lord for this opportunity to gather before Him. When I think about that small amount of grace the Lord bestowed upon me in my early days, and look at our condition today, I am filled with sorrow. Brothers and sisters, the return of our Lord is so imminent, and we look at our condition, just like our elderly brother asked us this morning, "Are we ready?" Let us look upon our Lord's mercy.

We thank the Lord, in Paul's life, not only did he have this understanding, he was a good example to us. He was faithful unto death. When his martyrdom drew near, he wrote these very deep feelings to his beloved co-worker Timothy. Sometimes when we read these letters, our hearts are heavy. We thank the Lord, His requirements are high, and we cannot reach them. But He enables us to reach them. Every brother and sister ought to have such faith. Brothers and sisters, do you believe the Lord can enable you to do this? May the Lord help us to believe in Him. May the Holy Spirit work in our midst in these days, that every brother and sister be filled with the love of God, so we will be in a good condition when He returns. We hope that we will be like Paul, receiving the crown of righteousness.

Let us bow for a word of prayer. Lord, our hearts are full of thanksgiving. Even though we are extremely weak, You have not forsaken us. You have gathered us here, not only have You spoken to us, You will also work in our lives. Oh Lord, may You hear our prayer. Revive Your church in these last days. Pour out Your love within us. Give us the strength to run. Let us take hold of these last opportunities to follow You. May we not be cast aside on the day of Your return. Lord, we look to Your mercy. Lord, we pray that as You are doing Your

work in many, Lord, do not pass me by. May You gain me. Please listen to our prayer. We pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

West Coast Christian Conference