

2019 WCCC

Brother Godwin Sun

Seek After The Crown Of Righteousness (2)

Time goes by quickly, and we are coming to our last evening. The Lord has not returned yet. The Lord is still giving us opportunities. We hope that from this conference forward, every brother and sister will take hold of this final opportunity to press on. I will continue to share on the theme of pursuing the crown of righteousness. Let us begin with reading the Lord's words. Let us read 2 Timothy 4:8. I believe many of us have memorized this verse by now.

2 Timothy 4:8 "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."

2 Timothy 2:5 "Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."

Matthew 5:17-18 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

Philippians 3:9 "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith".

Philippians 3:13-14 "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."

2 Thessalonians 2:7-13 “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”

In the previous section we mentioned that from the writing of Paul we can clearly see he had a deep understanding of the return of the Lord. I mentioned the term “parousia” was most used by Paul. Our brother has previously shared with us that “parousia” referred not to a single event, but a sequence of events. And the most important event in these series of events is the appearing of our Lord. We see that in the early days of Apostle Paul’s ministry, he had already had a deep understanding of the return of the Lord. We can say his life and his service were focused on the Lord’s return. We can say that he lived and he served In the light of the Lord’s return. Not only did he understand the Lord was returning, he loved His appearing. He desired for the Lord to return soon. Therefore, he would often mention in his letters that the day of the Lord’s return is near.

From his epistles, not only do we see that he had the desire to see the Lord face-to-face and to bow at the Lord’s feet, but in Philippians 3, he told us when he learned about the returning of the Lord, he heard this upward call of God. He told us there is “the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” So when the Lord returns, not only will He appear to everyone, He also has a prize for God’s people.

When we come to 2 Timothy 4, we are clear that this prize refers to that crown of righteousness. We know that when the new testament speaks of this crown, it mentions several types of crowns. Paul said, “You are my joy and crown.” The Bible also mentions the crown of life, and the crown of glory. Of course we know that this crown of righteousness will be a crown of life. And the crown of righteousness will be a crown of glory. And of course, it will be a crown of joy. So why does Paul use the phrase “crown of righteousness?” We shared last time, when Paul spoke about reward, he used the experience of an athlete competing

in an event as an example. We know that in the athletic arena, every athletic event has its set of rules. All those who participate demand justice and fairness. That is why there are referees in every sporting event. In some events there are many referees. They are there to ensure a just and fair competition. Brothers and sisters, righteousness means that the rules of God must be followed. We have to compete according to God's rules. It is only by Christ Jesus' righteous judgement can we obtain the crown of righteousness. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul wrote, "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules." I mentioned last time, in order for us to be a good athlete, there are many requirements. We have to have a healthy and strong body. We have to have a good skill set. We have to have restrictions in our lifestyle. We have to have that strong desire to win. A good athlete has to be familiar with the rules of competition and cannot commit fouls.

Paul used the conditions in an athletic arena to describe how Christians can receive that crown of righteousness. We know that in competition, if you commit a foul you can be kicked out. A few years ago, I was watching a track and field competition in the Olympics. I don't remember which country the runner was from. He made two mistakes in the race and he was cast out of the competition. I saw how sad he was. He was full of pain. He banged his head against the wall. I felt sorry for him. He had trained hard for years and tolerated so much restrictions just for that moment. And it was in that moment, he committed two mistakes. All of his diligence was for nothing. So brothers and sisters, in the matter of following the Lord, we might be cast out of that competition if we commit an error. This is a very important matter. I believe this athlete was not just sorrowful at that time, but he will continue to regret that moment for the rest of his life. Don't you agree?

Brothers and sisters, the brothers have reminded us, if you commit a foul today, if you are cast out, this regret will not be short-lived. It will be the regret of a thousand years. It will be a regret of weeping and gnashing your teeth in the darkness. What a serious reminder! So brothers and sisters, Paul used a very simple analogy as an illustration. In the athletic arena, you have to compete according to the rules. If you do not compete according to the rules, you will not win the crown. In the athletic arena on earth we have these requirements. In spiritual matters, the Lord has even higher requirements. The Bible reveals to us that our God is a God of laws. And He works according to these laws. We know that He has given His laws. He also follow these laws. This is an important reminder that we cannot go against God's laws. We know today that God has created all things and all of creation is under the government of God's laws. In the invisible realms, there are many laws at work.

For example, we know that there are natural laws in this physical world. We know clearly if you break these natural laws, if you break God's laws, you will be cursed. We have come to understand there are many laws you cannot violate. A brother told me that scientists have discovered if the temperature of the ocean increases by 1 degree, the forces of typhoons and hurricanes will increase by four-fold. And they will bring along a great amount of rain. We understand the whole world is under the greenhouse effect. As the temperature increases, it becomes dangerous. It is the result of rapid economic development and environmental destruction. Whenever we break these natural laws, what comes next is curse.

God has also established laws in human lives. The Bible tells us a man is a man and a woman is a woman. Each gender has its laws. But now we live in a society where men are not like men and women are not like women. This is a violation of God's natural law of life. This will bring about great disasters and will bring us into a place of curse. We see in God's created world, God has established His laws. In the spiritual realm, God pays even more attention to the laws. I think many Christians are not clear on this point so I will provide some explanations. I hope that we will understand this matter because this is very important. It has a tremendous relationship with whether we can receive that crown of righteousness in the future.

We see clearly in the Bible, the devil was the first who broke God's laws. Therefore, the devil is referred to as the lawless one, the one who breaks God's laws. When you read Ezekiel 28, it is stated clearly that he was originally created by God as a beautiful being and gave him much glory. He was the anointed cherub who covered the ark. Some brothers said he covered the throne. But because he broke God's law, God has cast him out of the holy mountain, and he has lost his glory and became Satan. He has fallen under God's curse. This is clearly stated in the Bible.

The devil is not the only one under the curse. Our elderly brother explained very clearly this morning the story of the garden of Eden. And I would like to share on this also. The devil is very wicked. He has broken God's law. And when he saw God has created man, he wants man to break God's law also. We see the story in Genesis 2 and 3 that God tells Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's words are clear, "In the day you eat from it you will surely die." Of course these words were spoken before Eve was created. We assume Adam may have passed these words to Eve. We don't know if Adam said them clearly, because sometimes we do not speak clearly when we pass messages on. On the day the devil came to tempt Eve, he said, "Did God really

say you shall not eat it or touch it?" What did Eve say? Eve said, "We shall not take of that fruit or touch it lest we die." You see the words were changed. God said, "You shall surely die." Perhaps Adam was not clear, or Eve did not hear clearly. The words of the Lord were changed. So, immediately the devil takes hold of this opportunity. The serpent said, "You surely will not die." You see it was a few sentences that were passed, but these words had broken God's laws. God's word is the law. God's word is the rule. You cannot change even a little bit of it. Because of the small change, Adam and Eve were cast out. And because of the fall of Adam and Eve, the earth was cursed and man lives under the environment of the curse. We see from this picture a stern reminder. Remember what our Lord said in Matthew 5:18, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." So may the Lord give us a heart of reverence. Not only can we not twist God's words, we cannot compromise either.

God is God. God is not man. He demands perfection and will not accept what is imperfect, even to the slightest degree. We might say, "Wow, He is so strict!" But we see this is the case in the athletic arena. If you have a false start in a race, you will be cast out. God's requirements are very strict. This picture gives us a very important reminder. Not only do we believe the Bible is God's word, we have to follow God's word without cutting corners. We have to do according to God's words no matter what. This is a very important matter.

After God has chosen the nation of Israel, He brought them out of Egypt. God brought them to Mount Sinai where some great events happened. We know God gave them the Ten Commandments and the law. This law is God's rule. From that time on, God's people had to live their lives and perform their services according to these rules. Dear brothers and sisters, those who understand the Bible know that in Israel's several thousand years of history, they frequently broke God's law. We will take a glimpse of this history. We know from the time of Moses to the time Joshua, it seems the nation of Israel was able to keep God's words. But after the death of Joshua and that generation of elders, a new generation arose. A crisis arrived. They did not know God nor know His words. That brought forth some 400 years of darkness during the period of the Judges. We see how the lives of the Israelites suffered. The enemies suppressed them. They were suppressed. The enemies bullied them. After 400 years, God raised up Samuel. Thank the Lord. Samuel is called the first prophet in the Old Testament. God has given him special training so that he could hear God's word, and he was able to deliver God's words. The Bible tells us that every word of God spoken by Samuel was fulfilled. That passage is interesting. It originally means not a single word of Samuel's fell to the ground. Often when we speak for God, many of our words fall to the ground. But all the words spoken by Samuel were

God's words. Therefore, he served the nation of Israel for 20 years and the entire household of Israel turned back to God.

He brought the nation of Israel back to the rules of God. From Samuel to David, we see the condition of the nation of Israel was good. They were able to live according to God's rules. But sadly, Solomon violated the laws in his later years. Afterwards, many kings after him were not able to do God's will. In that period, the Lord raised up many prophets. Why did God raise up prophets? When the prophets were raised up, they used different ways, whether it was through performances or speeches, to tell the Israelites they had committed errors. They had broken God's law and had turned their backs against God's will. Because these prophets saw the vision of God and knew what God wanted, so these prophets were there to correct the people of Israel. They had committed errors, but God was merciful. God continues to give them opportunities and hope that they might return.

We know in different sports there are different rules. For example, in basketball, do you know how many times you can commit a foul in basketball? Young people might know. You can have 6 fouls. When you commit the sixth foul, you are ejected. But we thank our God, He has infinite mercy. He loves His people. He hopes his people will walk in His way and so He raises up prophets continuously. Every prophet the Lord raised up would say, "You are wrong! You have committed fouls!" But did the nation of Israel like to listen? They did not. The kings especially did not like to hear this. That was why most of the prophets became martyrs. It is the same today. If you speak the truth, no one will like you. If you teach according to the Bible strictly, you will not be popular. It is because there is a conflict of interest. If you read the Book of Kings, you will find that many of the prophets were killed. It was because God loved His children that He raised these men in order for His people to leave the cursed situation and be brought back to God's blessing. But the Israelites were very stubborn.

When I read the story of the prophet Elijah, I find it very interesting. King of Israel, Ahab, robbed someone of his vineyard. And Elijah was sent by God to see Ahab.

Do you recall what Ahab said to Elijah? He said, "You found me, my enemy." Elijah said, "I have found you. God is going to judge him and you will die." Then there was a king who went out to battle. King Jehoshaphat said, "We ought to consult with a prophet. Is there not a prophet of Jehovah here to inquire of him?" At the time Elisha was in the army, even God's prophet was drafted to the army.

The king of Israel was not happy to see him because he never had anything good to say. And it is the same when we read the story of Jeremiah. He shed so much tears and tried so hard to persuade the people of Israel, in order to bring the nation of Israel back into the rules of God. We see in the history of the Old Testament, the Israelites committed errors repeatedly until the time of Malachi. So, God could only end the Old Testament. They did not want to listen to God's words. They followed man's tradition and turned service towards God into Judaism.

Then it comes the New Testament. During the New Testament, God continues to work according to the law. Today, God still wants us to follow the rules. Often time we comment, "This person loves the Lord so much!" How do we define loving the Lord? Some people are full of emotions. Some might have sweet words on their lips. Just as described by the prophet Jeremiah, "They do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain." When we read these words, we are pricked in our hearts. When we pray, we say, "Lord, how I love You." But as soon as we get up, we pursue our own matters. The Lord Jesus knows us well. In John 14:21, our Lord tells us, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me." If we keep His rules, we are the ones who truly love Him. This is not something we express externally. He esteems His rules highly. Brothers and sisters, God's commands are from His laws and His rules. We have to keep His rules. This is how we express our love to God. If we think about it, perhaps we will think this is too difficult. If you reflect back on the days of your salvation, have you really kept God's rules?

I confess, many times I have fallen short of keeping His commandments. I thank the Lord that, not only do we know, the Lord also knows. The Lord knows we cannot keep His commandments. We are like the Jews. The Jews cannot keep God's rules, and we cannot either. When we come to the New Testament, there is a change in the way God works. Our Lord Jesus, God's only son, the Word became flesh and came into this world. He came to the world and told us He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law, and every word of the law. Every word and stroke is fulfilled by the Lord. We thank the Lord. Our Lord Jesus, standing in the position of man, has fulfilled the law. Our Lord knows our weaknesses. Our flesh is a powerful force that deters us from following God's laws. We thank our Lord that He came to fulfill the law for us. When He was baptized and emerged from the water, the Bible says that it was on the Mount of Transfiguration the Heavenly Father spoke. He said, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." Dear brothers and sisters, today if we are to keep God's rules, the most simple way is to hear Him. This is our most basic learning. Dear brothers and sisters, each and every one of us belongs to the Lord. We ought to hear Him. In this world there are a lot of sounds and a lot of noise. Of course, God uses man to speak to us, and we need to listen. Often times I feel, if we hear

Him, we will naturally live a spiritual life. If we hear Him, we will naturally know how to serve. A service is very simple in the beginning, but we turn it into something complicated. And the children of God feel that it is not an easy matter to follow the Lord. But if only we can listen to Him, we will be able to follow God's will. Dear brothers and sisters, this is a very important and basic learning. After the Apostle Paul was saved, we find in Galatians 1, he said he served God not from man, not through the experience of a man. He even said those who were of high reputation did not benefit him. These words sound a little bit prideful. I actually met some young people who were this way. They were very proud.

For someone like me, only someone like Jessie Penn-Lewis can help me. Only someone like Theodore Austin-Sparks can benefit me. Brothers and sisters, this is not what Paul meant. Of course, it is easy and we like to follow those who are of high reputation. But the most simple calling in the Bible is to hear Him. Even if you have heard His words, you still have to hear Him. Dear brothers and sisters, this is extremely important.

I remember when I was younger, I did not know much doctrines but I was sure that I was saved. I knew the Lord Jesus abided in me. In those early days, many things were not taught by man but was by the Lord Himself. Some of you have heard my testimony. The Lord would teach me lessons even in the smallest matters. At the time I was a high school student. I was passing by a street one night and there was a traffic light. The light was red but I crossed the road anyway. In those days, not many obey the traffic rules. In those days, it seems everyone jaywalks. I was a young person, I did not have a high moral standard, so I just walked. So many decades have passed, but the impression it left on me is still so deep. As I was walking halfway across the road, suddenly there was a voice within me. I heard a voice, "Did you not see the red light?" I said, "I did." Then the voice said, "If you saw it, why did you walk?" I said, "This is how I have always done it." The voice within me said, "You are now a Christian so you cannot do it. You have to follow the traffic rules of the country." Immediately I knew it was the Lord who spoke within me. So, I said, "Lord, I am sorry, I committed an error." But as I was saying this, I kept walking forward. You don't know how heavy my legs were. It was difficult with each step I took. I was a teenager, what did I know? There was no police officer nearby. There was no one else and not much traffic. It was at night. So, I kept walking. I was walking and at the same time saying to the Lord, "Lord, I am sorry. I won't do it next time." And I crossed to the other side. When my footsteps reached the other side, I could not walk any further. I stood there. I was just a teenager but something had happened in my heart. This is a Christian. I stood there and said, "Lord, forgive me. I am wrong. I won't do this anymore." The Lord said, "No. It won't do." I said, "If it won't do, what can I do?" So I stood there and asked, "Lord, what should I do?"

The voice again was clear and the Lord told me to go back and cross the road again.

It was at night, no one was around. But something happened within me. I knew Christians had to obey. So, I turned around, waited until the light was green, and walked back. As I crossed back to the other side and turned around, I saw the light was red and I couldn't walk. I waited until it turned green, then I crossed the road again. Brothers and sisters, when my feet reached the other side, I stood there and was exceedingly joyous. The Holy Spirit poured out the joy of the Lord. I was overjoyed. I was a teenager and the happiness I had experienced before was not like this. It was true joy. Dear brothers and sisters, many decades have passed, I can say I have never crossed the street on a red light on purpose since that time. The word of the Lord has such power. Teachers cannot teach this. Parents cannot teach this. No one can teach this. But the Lord only needs to speak. That is power and that is strength. I thank the Lord.

I did not truly understand at the time. I thought, "Lord, You are so mighty, but You would even care that I jaywalk?" Later, I understood. Brothers and sisters, someday when we enter into eternity, the Book of Revelation tells us, we will reign with Christ. So the spiritual education we receive in this life is a king's education. Will a king jaywalk? No. During those times, the Lord had taught me lessons even in the smallest matters. It was very effective. Later, I understood even more. Because the Lord has placed the honor upon us. He has added to us His glorious character. Our life was originally base and disobedient, and we commit fouls easily. Now, the Lord works in us through these small matters. We thank the Lord, the Word became flesh and came to this world and fulfilled God's law. Every letter and every stroke was fulfilled. As long as we listen to him today, brothers and sisters, we will be able to keep God's laws.

Sometimes it is not enough to just know the doctrine. We know that when we are saved, the Lord sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within. I mentioned last time that in the spiritual arena, the Holy Spirit is the best coach. Not only can He encourage and stir up the athletes, the Holy Spirit also pours out the love of God into us. Because of this pouring out of the love of God, it makes it easy for us to love God and gives us strength to love Him. Not only does He encourage us and pour forth this love within us, He also trains us to walk according to God's rules.

In John 14, God introduces this Comforter. He tells us this Comforter will be the indwelling Holy Spirit and He will dwell with us forever. When does He start abiding in you? It is from the moment you are saved that He dwells within you.

Brothers and sisters, do you know the Holy Spirit dwells in you? It is something that is real. He lives within. We know that in the Old Testament, the prophets had already prophesied this. Ezekiel tells us, God gives us a new spirit. When we are saved, the new life enters in and the new spirit awakens. The Holy Spirit resides within this new spirit. Through our spirit, God instructs us within this new life. So we ought to follow the sense of life. How can a Christian prove that he is alive? He has feelings. We human beings have feelings. When a Christian lives in this new life, he should be very alive. But, sadly, many children of God do not know how to follow this sense of life. As a result, their spiritual life is not lively. Often the Holy Spirit within us grieves. The Spirit who dwells within us is also called the spirit of truth. He brings us into the reality of God's words and causes God's law to be realized in our lives and we can follow His rules. The leading of the Holy Spirit is so important. Especially in this day and age, our environment is so complicated. The church is complicated. But we don't need to be afraid, we can follow the Spirit within. I often say to brothers and sisters, in Christian living, there are two things that never change. One is the Bible in our hands. The Bible never changes. The other is the indwelling Spirit. If you follow these two things, we will be able to live a spiritual life naturally. Throughout the church's history, there were many times people deviated. But there was a group of people who followed the Spirit, they read God's words seriously, and the Lord brought them back from the error of their ways. So brothers and sisters, what a precious thing. The Book of Hebrews tells us when we come to the New Testament, the law is not something external. It is not written on a stone tablet. The law of God is written upon our hearts. The law of the New Testament is the law of life. It is an internal law. Christians do follow external laws to live our lives.

Yet sadly many Christians live by these outward laws and rules. If you follow these, there is no life. There was a brother, who was a college professor, he told me, "Brother Sun, you told me to follow the Holy Spirit. It is too difficult and I don't know how to do it. Can you give me 8 or 10 rules in the Bible, then I'll know how to be a Christian." I said, "Brother, I can't do that. You have to follow the Spirit within. If you follow that life within, then you are a living Christian." Over the years, I have been reminding brothers and sisters this: We Christians are not to do but to live. Some Christians after they are baptized would say, "From this day forth, I'll be a Christian." We have tried to do, in order to be a Christian, for many years now. Is it easy? It is very difficult. The more we try to do, the more sorrowful we find ourselves. Brothers and sisters, there is no need to do, live. Follow the Holy Spirit. Follow the sense of that life. This should be something very natural. The Holy Spirit leads us from within.

John, in his latter days, looked at the children of God. He was an elderly person so he looked at the children of God as kids. He saw the children of God

struggling in their daily life. So he wrote 1 John, “You need to follow the teaching of the anointing.” The anointing is real; it is not a lie. The anointing is the way the Holy Spirit leads us. In the Old Testament, if you are anointed, it is a tremendous thing. Only kings and prophets can be anointed. The oil was precious oil. It was very fragrant. We thank the Lord, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit leads us in a way as if we are being anointed with cream. The sisters understand better about the matter of applying cream. It is a soothing sensation. I had used cream on my body when I was younger. It felt very good. It is a very delicate matter as you need to apply the cream carefully. In the same way, the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives is very delicate. Every little thought, every little speech, every little action is governed by the Spirit. His guidance is very delicate and detailed. Brothers and sisters, we thank our God, the Holy Spirit anoints us with this anointing. John told us if we can follow the leading of the anointing, we will abide in Him naturally, and we will enjoy the fullness of Christ. If we follow the teaching of the anointing, you will not need anyone else to teach you.

When I read this previously, I thought John was quite bold in his statement. If no one is teaching us, it is going to be chaotic. Brothers and sisters, how John knew the heart of God. Indeed, we see there were only a few apostles in the early church. They could not be here one day and another place the next day. They could not stay with the saints in any particular location for a long time. John said it did not matter. Man might not be able to be with you, but the Holy Spirit abides within you. If you are obedient to the teaching of the anointing, you will understand naturally. Brothers and sisters, do we believe these words? Perhaps we have read these words many times, yet we rather rely on man. I remember when I was younger, there was an elderly sister. She knew the Bible very well. When we listened to her sharing, we were filled. And the sisters would go to her and ask, “Can you explain this to us?” She would say, “I don’t know how.” They said, “You know the Bible so well. How come you don’t know how?” The sister then asked, “Sister, have you been saved?” “Of course. I’ve been saved for 30 years.” “Does the Holy Spirit abide in you?” “Of course!” “Then it is simple. Go home and ask the Holy Spirit.” She would not explain it. She would always bring people to the Holy Spirit. Our sister understood the teaching of the anointing is far better than the explanation of man. This is the grace from our Lord. This is the simple and easy way. Yet, it is often neglected by us. We know that without the Holy Spirit explaining the word of God to us, we cannot understand at all. Throughout church history, those who could explain the Bible the best was because the Holy Spirit was doing the explanation. If the Holy Spirit did not explain it, how could they understand? So, brothers and sisters, whether individually or as a church, we ought to honor the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. He would govern us in all things. Forgive me for saying this, sometimes when individual fellowships are weak, it is because man’s hand is too firm. When we become responsible brothers, we are too responsible. When we sit together and

pray, we might think, “Why doesn’t Joe open his mouth?” “Why doesn’t that sister pray?” One time someone gave me a good suggestion. He said, “Brother, do you have too many responsibilities in the assembly? You are sitting there, and yet your mind is all over the place. You need to learn one thing. When we enter into the meeting place, we turn over all the sovereignty to the Holy Spirit.”

If we allow the Holy Spirit to lead the meeting, that meeting will be different. Brothers and sisters, we thank our Lord. For us to keep God’s laws and rules, it is indeed difficult. But our Lord has accomplished this for us. He teaches us through the Holy Spirit within so we can obey God’s rules and live according to God’s laws. When the Holy Spirit moves us, it’s very important. We have to learn to be submissive.

The crown of righteousness is for those who compete according to God’s rules. We see in the Book of Revelation, there is a group of people who keep God’s commandments and testify for God. We have to work according to God’s words. May the Lord give us a strong love. May God pour out the love of God through the Holy Spirit. We know that we don’t have many more opportunities. May we all take hold of the remaining opportunities and satisfy God’s righteous requirements. We were not able to do it previously, but now we can. Because it is not by our strength, but by following the guidance of the spirit within. According to what the Lord has accomplished, we keep God’s law. If we look at it this way, everyone has an opportunity to receive the crown of righteousness. Dear brothers and sisters, when we read the church’s history, we often have a deep sighing within. We know history confirms one thing, which is, man commits fouls easily. Sometimes we cannot even get out from our errors. Whenever we are not abiding by the rules, God cannot use you. When we look at the early church in Jerusalem, 3000 and 5000 people believed when Peter preached. Perhaps the number of believers increased to several thousand very quickly in the church in Jerusalem. But when they went against God’s rules, God cast them aside, and the work of the Holy Spirit moved on to Antioch. So, brothers and sisters, God esteems highly the laws He established. The crown of righteousness is for those who obey the will of God. The Bible tells us clearly that we are all brothers and we are all children of God. But many of God’s children have turned believing in Jesus into a religion. We have become a religious organization.

We are the children of God. The Bible tells us we are all priests. In the church there should not be any hierarchy. But we see in church history there is the clergy system. Most of God’s children are stilling living under this condition today. The Bible tells us that the church is the body of Christ. We have this relationship as members of one body. We should be serving coordinately as

members of the body, in harmony. And yet we let others substitute for us in our service. Brothers and sisters, many failures in the church have been passed down. The Bible tells us that we ought to remember the Lord's death. We ought to break bread and remember Him. But we see the church in this world today has neglected this. The Bible never tells us to celebrate His birth. And yet we hold great celebration. We keep all of these traditions. Many treat God's servants as idols. We pay attention to tradition. We pay attention to things that are passed down. We see so many errors throughout church history. These are fouls. If you commit fouls, then you cannot receive the crown of righteousness. We need the mercy of God, especially in these last days. Our brothers have read previously that these last days are perilous times. When we read the New Testament, do we notice in the building up of the church, there were two periods of times that were particularly dangerous? One was when the early church was being built up. In the Book of Acts, we see Satan used all his power to destroy the church. And then there was another period. It is when the church is nearing completion. Satan used all his might to resist. The Book of Revelation tells us that there will be much peril in those last days. When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he told the saints in Thessalonica the mystery of lawlessness was already at work. We know it is working even more fiercely today. Sometimes the devil does not cause us to commit great sins, but he would cause us to commit a foul. He knows that if we break the rules, we will not receive the prize from God. Lawlessness means God's law is violated.

This is happening all over the earth. Even though there are millions of churches today, many are following the wrong things. So, Paul reminds us that the mystery of lawlessness is the fierce work of the enemy. As Paul was writing these epistles to the early church, he reminded the children of God to stand firm. Paul has this worry because these churches have just been built up. These are baby churches, as our brother calls them. Paul was worried whether they could stand firm. He wrote to the church in Thessalonica to encourage them to stand. We thank the Lord, the church in Thessalonica was able to stand. He wrote to the church at Corinth, encouraging them to stand firm. He wrote to the church at Galatia to tell them to stand firm. He wrote to the church at Colossae to stand firm. He wrote to the church at Philippi to stand firm. We see Paul had such fervency to want the children of God to stand firm in an environment surrounded by enemies. Standing firm means rejecting outside influence and keeping God's rules. Paul encouraged Timothy in the last days. Paul was to about to be martyred. He had this assurance that he would receive the crown of righteousness. He encouraged Timothy and also encourages all the saints that this crown of righteousness is for all who loved His appearing. Paul told us if a man cannot compete according to the rules, he cannot receive the crown. So, brothers and sisters, you should know by now what this crown of righteousness is. We look to the Lord's mercy that He would give us a true love in the depths of our heart. We need to return from all the things that are outside of God's will.

We will follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and do according to God's righteous requirements. Then, when the Lord returns, not only will we welcome Him with exceeding joy, but we will also receive the crown of righteousness.

Let us close in a word of prayer. Lord, we give You all the thanksgiving in our hearts. Even though You have not yet returned, we know that You are not tarrying. You are patient towards us. You are giving us opportunities. Lord, although we long for You to return soon, we admit that we are not ready. Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You. You have completed all things for us on the cross. It is You who have fulfilled the law of God for us. Today, You have given us this life and You have given us the Holy Spirit. Lord, in these remaining opportunities, may we work according to Your righteousness. May we be obedient to all the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Not only do we love Your appearing, we hope to receive the crown of righteousness. May You bless Your people. Please hear our prayer. We pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.