

**WORKING FOR A CROWN
I PETER 5:1-4**

NEED: TO BE FAITHFUL IN OUR MINISTRY TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

**PROPOSITION: THOSE WHO SERVE GOD'S PEOPLE FAITHFULLY
WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF GLORY.**

**OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD THE WORKERS IN THE CHURCH TO WORK FOR
A CROWN BY BEING FAITHFUL.**

INTRODUCTION:

All believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ. This appearance is scheduled for the time immediately after our Lord's second return. When He makes His next appearance in history, we will all make our appearance before Him.

When we appear before Him, some Christians will receive a crown. Peter promised to the faithful described in our text the unfading "crown of glory." The crowns associated with the judgment seat of Christ are not the kind of crowns worn by kings and earthly political authorities. Rather they are the crowns worn by those who have been successful in warfare or victorious on the field of athletics. The crown is associated with distinction and honor. Some of God's people will be uniquely honored at the judgment seat of Christ and will receive a crown of glory. Whether the crown is actually a crown or this is a symbol of something greater, we cannot be absolutely sure. However, we can be sure that everything associated with the crown makes it worthy of the aspiration of the child of God. All of us ought to be working for a crown. We should each be seeking to live the kind of life and do the kind of work that will prompt our Lord to give us honor when we stand in His presence.

This paragraph from the pen of Simon Peter is addressed to "the elders." In my understanding the "elder" is the pastor of the church. In fact in this passage the word "elder," "bishop," and "shepherd" are used with reference to the same person. So the first impression might be that "the crown of glory" is reserved only for those involved in pastoral ministry. However, I believe that would be a wrong understanding of the passage. We must not read back into the New Testament our complicated church structures of the 20th century. The Christian churches in that early

day were very simple organizations under the leadership of men who had come out of the congregation itself. They were the older and more mature men that had been selected to carry the burden of leadership in the church. It can be demonstrated from scripture that all of the children of God are involved in the pastoral ministry to one degree or another. Surely in a congregation like ours the deacons, the Sunday School teachers, the ministry leaders, and others bear a part of the pastoral burden for this church. There is no way that one man like me could ever shepherd a congregation with almost 6,000 resident members. Surely the opportunity for a crown belongs to all of the people of God. In a strange mixture of images God intends that all of His sheep become shepherds along the way.

As we look at this paragraph in its larger context then, we can see what is involved in working for a crown. These things are involved whether you are a part of a professional church staff or you are just in your own eyes a lay person in the congregation.

I. WE WORK FOR A CROWN BY WORKING AT THE RIGHT TASK.

There are some tasks that are more important in the eyes of the Lord than other tasks. The crown of glory is reserved for those who have distinguished themselves at the right task. The imperative in this passage is, “Be shepherds of God’s flock.” Our word “Pastor” comes from the word “shepherd.” So, the basic responsibility laid upon the elders in those Christian assemblies was to be shepherds of God’s flock.

1. God’s people are His sheep.

This imagery of the “flock” has a rich background in both the Old Testament and in the teaching ministry of Jesus. The familiar 23rd Psalm puts God’s people as sheep under the shepherding care of God. Jesus described Himself as “the good shepherd” and His disciples as His sheep.

It would be helpful to each of us if we realized that as a congregation of believers we are “God’s flock.” So whatever is done for the members of a congregation is done for the flock of the Lord.

2. Shepherds meet the needs of sheep.

We must not make this shepherding task too complicated. A shepherd does whatever the sheep need. From the development of this metaphor in scripture we know that sheep need guidance, feeding, protecting, and many other things. A shepherd is someone who acts in a way to meet the needs of the sheep. Sometimes they need counsel and guidance. Anytime you offer counsel, guidance, or encouragement to one of the members of the flock, you are acting as a shepherd. Sometimes they need feeding. Any time you open the Word of God and share it in a way that the spirits of the sheep are built up in the Lord, you are acting as a shepherd. Sometimes they need protecting. Any time you act in a way to stand between a child of God and some danger that is coming their way, you are acting as a shepherd.

In a real sense each of us are shepherds to each other. There are times that I am your guide, but sometimes you are my guide. There are some times I can protect you, but there are other times that you protect me. There are some times that I feed you, but there are times that you feed me from the Word of God. We are shepherds to each other. As we are faithful and effective shepherds to each other, taking advantage of our opportunities to minister to each other, we are at the task that can result in a crown. So if you want to work for a crown get involved in the right task - the shepherding of God's people. If we would get our eyes off of ourselves and our needs, and get our eyes on others and their needs we would soon be involved with the "Chief Shepherd" in the right task that leads to a crown.

II. WE WORK FOR CROWN BY WORKING IN THE RIGHT MANNER.

Peter spends most of his time in this paragraph dealing with how we do what we do rather than what we do. He leaves the work of the shepherd to our imagination but he is rather specific about how we are to go about our shepherding of each other.

1. Willingly

Peter's first admonition is, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must but because you are willing." The contrast in this admonition is between doing something "by way of

compulsion” verses doing something “willingly according to God.” Some people do their work in the church by compulsion or of necessity. They feel pressure from the pastor or a staff person or their family or the expectations of others to do what they do. Ministry performed under such compulsion will never lead to a crown.

The ministry that leads to a crown is ministry performed “willingly.” The person doing the ministry has a desire to do it in their hearts. They believe that this desire has been given to them by God. They respond to that inner desire by doing what they do deliberately and intentionally and freely. They are at their task with a whole heart day by day. They are willing workers.

2. Eagerly.

The second contrast in manner suggested by the Apostle is “not greedy for money, but eager to serve.” Since this is a word that was addressed to the “elders” or pastors in those Christian assemblies, this is a helpful word. Some of them may have seen their work with God’s flock as being their job. They did what they did because of the monetary return that they expected to receive from it. However, ministers are not the only ones who have done what they do in the church because of monetary expectations. There are others who involve themselves in the church because they believe it will be something that will help them in their career. If you are doing what you do in the church because it will help you some way in your career or help your reputation in the community and thus translate into monetary returns, you will never receive a crown.

Those who are to receive the crown are those who do what they do eagerly. They are “eager to serve.” The word translated “eager” has in it the idea of something coming from the heart or the spirit. It denotes something being done with zeal and great eagerness. It is done with a high level of enthusiasm. They approach the task of ministering to others as the flock of God with great readiness of spirit and enthusiasm. These are the folks who will receive a crown. The child of God does not have to stir up enthusiasm like the world, but we surely need enthusiasm. I heard about a sales manager who told his sales staff how to make a call. He said to them, “Pop your fist into your hand and shout aloud three times ‘Boy, am I enthusiastic!’” It would seem like a silly exercise at the

time, but one salesman commented that he learned that it was very effective. He was playing a trick on his unconscious mind this way. If you and I will simply give consideration to the task we are doing, I believe that there will be enthusiasm enough to keep us eager at the task.

3. By example.

The third contrast that the Apostle puts before us is, “Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” This speaks to the manner which we are to do the work. There is an approach to shepherding others that would involve manipulation and control. This is forbidden! Those who perform their work in the church so that they can have control of things, can Lord it over others, will not receive a crown.

Those who receive the crown will be those who motivate others and lead them by example. They so embody what they want others to become that their example itself becomes persuasive.

So if you are going to work for a crown, you must give attention to how you do your work in the family of God. The task is shepherding and the work is to be done in the spirit of the good shepherd Himself.

III. WE WORK FOR A CROWN BY WORKING FOR THE RIGHT PERSON.

Peter emphasizes that it will be the “Chief Shepherd” who will give the crown. This is a title that belongs to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is not only the “Good Shepherd,” He is also the “Chief Shepherd.” This is a reminder to us that all of us work under Him and are accountable to Him for the work that we do. We do the work that we do as we are assigned by Him and thus we do it for Him.

That Peter would include this word is not altogether surprising. It is a reminder of the last extended conversation Peter had with Jesus before He went back to heaven. You will recall on that occasion Jesus asked Simon Peter three times, “Simon, Son of John, do you love me?” Each time Peter responded to Jesus with an affirmation of his love.

His affirmation was always tempered with humility because he carried with him the painful memory of his denial of the Lord three times.

In response to Peter's affirmation of love, Jesus made the assignment, "Feed my sheep." He was assigned a shepherding responsibility over the flock of God. So Peter knew what he did he did for his Lord. He did it as an expression of His love for His Lord. It must always be that way with us.

Someone tried to put this into poetic form. They wrote,

Father, where shall I work today?
And my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed out a tiny spot,
And said, "Tend that for Me."
I answered quickly, "Oh no, not that.
Why, no one would ever see,
No matter how well my work was done,
Not that little place for me!"
And the word He spoke, it was not stern,
He answered me tenderly,
"Ah little one, search that heart of thine,
Art thou working for them or me?
Nazareth was a little place,
and so was Galilee."

The work that will receive a crown is the work that is done out of loving, devotion to Jesus Christ. The crown will not be determined by the prominence of the work that is done, or even the amount of work that is done, but rather by the spirit of love and devotion in which it is done. Who knows that dear Sunday School teacher who shepherds a class of 8 year olds on Sunday morning because she loves the Lord and thus loves His little ones, may receive a

crown even before the Pastor who shepherds the whole congregation but for other motives? He may be doing it for Himself, and if he is there will be no crown. For there to be a crown it must be done for the right person.

Russell Conwell became a well-known Christian Baptist minister and philanthropist in the nineteenth century. He gave an inspirational speech called "Acres of Diamonds" hundreds of times across the country. It was distributed to millions in a small booklet. He was also the founder of Temple University.

The editor of the newspaper in this hometown of Philadelphia received word that Dr. Conwell was retiring from his work, and he thought it would be a good idea to send a reporter to interview him, and to run a story in the paper about his retirement. He sent a young cub reporter named, Bruce Barton out to get the story.

Bruce made an appointment with Conwell and approached the interview with some anxiety. Conwell was a famous man, and an influential man.

As he was concluding his interview with Dr. Conwell, the reporter asked him about his feelings as he came to the end of his years of work. Conwell answered him thoughtfully, and said, "Bruce, let me answer your question with a story. When I was eleven or twelve years old, my Dad said to me one evening, 'Russell, I will be gone tomorrow all day. I have some things that I need for you to do for me while I am gone. There is a break in the fence around the pasture and some of the cows have gotten out, I need for you to get the cows back in and to repair the fence. Then I want to finish the plowing the in bottom field over near the river. Then if you have time, I would like for you to grease the wagon, because we must take some grain to the mill the next day.'

When my Dad returned evening it was late, but he asked me about the day. I told him, 'Dad, if found the cows, returned them to the pasture, and fixed the fence. Then I finished the plowing of the field just as you requested. I have just finished greasing the wagon and it is ready to go to the mill tomorrow.'

When I was finished, my Dad put his arm around my shoulder and said, 'Russell, a good day's work. A good day's work.'"

"Bruce, I think when I stand before my heavenly Father He will put His arm around my shoulder and say, 'A good day's work, Russ, a good day's work.'"

Bruce Barton said, "I tipped out of the room. I felt like I had been on holy ground."

What Mr. Conwell was saying to the young reporter was, “I expect to receive the crown of glory.” I pray for you and for myself that as we come to the end of our lives, that we will have so carried out our assignment from the Lord, that we can leave this world with the expectation that the Chief Shepherd will give us the crown of glory. It is worth working for. Let me encourage you to find the right task, do it in the right manner, for the right person! If you do, you will win a crown.

If we receive nothing more than a kind word of recognition from Him, it will all be worth it.