

## Crown of Life

03/10/24

In 1958, the International Tchaikovsky Competition was started in Russia. The first specialties were for the Violin and the Piano. This competition is done every four years and is an important event in the world of Classical music. Since 1958, other specialties have been added to the competition such as the cello and singing performances. The 1958 competition was famous because an American musician won the first competition on Russian soil and the Cold war was going on at that time. This musician was Van Cliburn, a pianist, who was born in 1934 in Louisiana. He played his first concert in 1947 with the Houston Symphony. At the age of 24, this young musician wowed the Russia people with his romantic playing. A recording of Cliburn's interpretation of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto #1, which he had played during the final round of competition became the first classical album to reach platinum status ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)). A Gold medal is given to the winner plus money. If musicians would have to pick between the two, many would rather have the Gold medal that represents the Tchaikovsky Competition because it is held at such a high level of accomplishment. When I played the violin, I wasn't that great, but in my senior year, I was chosen with two more from our high school orchestra to go to Lehigh Valley College and play with other students chosen in York County. We practiced all day with the guest conductor from the Baltimore Symphony and we did a concert that night in front of many people. That is one part of my life I will always cherish. It was an award for playing the violin for all those years in school. I'm sure all of you can think of something you accomplished in life. Do we understand that those who are true followers of Christ will receive an award when our visitation on this earth is over?

Last week, we started our journey in James and we'll continue with James today as well. Let's turn to James 1: 12 where James states this, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (NIV)". We had talked last week about how James tells us that we are to count it pure joy whenever we face trials, sufferings, and temptations. We talked about how this can only be done through the help of the Holy Spirit that is within us. We also

talked about how we are to ask the Lord for His wisdom which will transform our thinking to be able to handle suffering and trials with the right frame of mind. That was in James 1: 1 – 4. Now we have James coming back again to trials. James knew the people of the Church were going through some tough times because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Many people around them were persecuting them and Satan didn't want this young Church to be successful. The Christians of James' day were going through tough times. James knew they needed something to look up to - to give them strength and hope. Don't we need that today? I took a class this week in Harrisburg at the police school that was geared toward faith-based organizations. Their topic was Domestic Violence and Extremism. The teacher was a detective from Greensboro Police Dept. in Virginia. That department has 900 sworn officers and his specialty was this field that he taught. The instructor started the class by stating that if you feel bad now about what is happening in our world, you will feel worse after this 8-hour class is over. He was right. Most of the class was about how the children of today are being attacked in every direction through the internet. In the past year, there has been a major uptick of children between the ages of 12 and 18 joining all kinds of hate groups online either through social media or game sites like Roblox and Discord. A new group called 764 is going after these kids to send them pictures of themselves disrobed and they hold these pictures as ransom. If these kids don't do what they say, they will spread their pictures all over the internet. For girls, they have them cut themselves and take pictures of it. For boys, they have them kill and butcher animals or do sexual acts. This group is a Satanic group. Many of these children don't want their parents to know so police are seeing an uptick in children killing themselves. The detective stated parents have no idea how bad it really is getting with school children. He was asked what can we do to stop it? He stated the bus already left the station. AI or artificial intelligence is blowing this out of the water. The only hope is to shut down the internet and that is not going to happen. It's happening all over the world. Our park has seen an uptick in graffiti dealing with a group called 2116, a Nazi youth group. A new group that has been formed for children through the internet. Folks, this is real and we can't take this lightly. If you have children, you better be policing their phones and teaching them about the evils of the internet. As I was sitting there, I was thinking why can't God send His Son now and stop all this evil. However, I remember Jesus telling us in Revelation how bad it will get on this earth so I shouldn't be surprised by all this.

We have to understand we need to persevere or patiently endure what we are going through today. While Jesus was in Jerusalem waiting to fulfill the Will of His Father by going to the cross, Jesus warns His disciples this in Matthew 24: 9 – 14, “Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because of your allegiance to me. And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will lead many people astray. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But those who endure to the end will be saved. And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then, finally, the end will come. (NLT, 1458)” Jesus is telling us very plainly here how bad it will be. This is pure truth from Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus tells us that those who endure, will be saved. This goes right with what James tells us. If James was here today, he would tell us the very same thing he is telling the Church of his day. In fact, James states that blessed is the one who perseveres under trial in verse 12. Persevere and endure is the same thing. Jesus commands us to endure till the end and James is reminding the Church of his day the same thing. So, let’s break down James 2: 12 a little bit more. We see the word “Blessed” is used here for those who endure under trial. The Greek term is “Makarios” which means fortunate in position of favor and feelings associated with receiving God’s grace (Strong’s Concordance). In other words, those who endure through Christ the trials and sufferings because of original sin in this world is blessed. Why are we blessed? What is this gift of grace from the Lord that we are blessed with? James tells us that we will receive the “crown of life”. Crown in Greek means item that is sign of victory (Strong’s Concordance). Life in Greek can mean life and eternal life (Strong’s Concordance). When we endure the trials and sufferings of this earth for Jesus, we will be blessed with the Crown of Life or victory of (eternal) life. This is promised to those who love Jesus. Jesus told us in Matthew that those who will endure will be saved and eternal life is part of being saved. James is only repeating what his Half-brother Jesus stated which is absolute truth.

There are two things we need to focus on here. First, we need to get into the mindset that we need to endure or persevere under the trials and sufferings we will face on the earth. The second is we must make sure we love Jesus. James is telling us we must endure because if we don’t, what chance do the people of this

earth have if Christians stop being examples of Christ? If we go back to last week, we talked about having the right mindset and that is needed here. The detective painted a black picture where one didn't see any light at the end of the tunnel and you might ask why bother trying. The police are reaching out to churches hoping they can save a few children from the evil grips of the groups that prey on children. He stated that if one child can be saved because of the one day class we had, then it was worth it. He had the right mindset. Paul is right when he tells us in Romans 12 about allowing God to change the way we think. We need this to be able to endure what we're going through or what we're going to go through. I already told the Wednesday Bible study about this, but I had court this week. I had two people in a vehicle with heroin, meth, and other drugs. All of it belonged to the woman and her boyfriend has been trying to get her to stop. As I heard the story, the boyfriend is at a crossroads and he stated that the woman had given up the will to survive. He knows it is only a matter of time till she dies from an overdose. They are from New York and the state supplies all the supplies she needs to do heroin. New York doesn't want her to use used needle because she might get HIV. They don't care about the heroin issue. It makes no sense and it really makes you think about giving up. Why bother when even the government helps with their addiction. Yet, we have to endure because even they need to hear about Jesus from us. We must endure. Without us working, who else does Jesus have?

The other thing we have to focus on is on our love for Jesus. If we love Jesus, we are going to want to endure for Him. Like we talked about last week, God's wisdom and understanding helps us to understand our need for His love in our life and our need to love Him back. The crown of life is promised to those who love Him. We can call ourselves Christians, but do we love Him? Maybe James remembers the story of Peter where Jesus questions Peter's love for Him three times? Do I really love Jesus or is it just empty words coming from a cold heart? If we have victory and eternal life is part of that, how humbled we should be. We humble ourselves before Him out of love for what He has done, is doing, and will do in the future. Easter should be a time we humble ourselves before Jesus out of love for Him. Why? Because Easter is all about victory. We should want to endure for Him because eternal life is the award and that is only possible because

of the cross event. There is another reason why we want to endure till Jesus tells us it's finished.

This week I heard and seen a lot of negative stuff. I told someone in the one class I think I really want to become a monk where I can live in a building and keep the outside world out. Sometimes we just want to wait and do nothing while we wait for our time on earth to end. Jesus wants us to endure for a reason. Not just because we'll receive the crown of life, but Jesus makes it very plain to us if we go back to Matthew 24. He tells us in verse 13 that we are to endure and we'll be saved. Then Jesus adds to that statement by saying, "And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then, finally, the end will come. (NLT, 1458)" We have to endure not just because we'll get a crown of life, but also so that the Good News can be preached throughout the whole world. Do you see how important we are right now to this world? Do you see how important we are to all those who are following the same footsteps as the young woman who has a good chance of dying from an overdose this year? Do you see how important we are for all those children who will be brainwashed by evil people on the internet? We know the road to victory. We know how to get there and we know how great and perfect that victory is. That victory in Jesus can break all chains that can bind people in sin. Jesus wants us to endure so the Good News can be preached throughout the whole world. We can't stop and play dead. We endure out of love for Him, because we live in Victory and we want other people to enjoy it as well. Do we really love Jesus?

*NLT Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

*The Strongest Strong's Concordance.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001