

Point of Death and Crown of Life: Three Accounts Related to Revelation 2:10 by Sam Crabtree, Executive Minister, Bethlehem Baptist Church

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10

1. On the Slave Coast of West Africa in 1880, a land governed by witchcraft and superstition and where human life was cheap, torture by poisoning and boiling oil was the order of the day. Twins, believed to be children of the devil, were abandoned to die, and the mothers banished. But into that suffering came a woman who had been afraid to cross the street alone, who once refused to cross a field because there was a cow in it, who was terrified of crowds and public speaking. She immediately contracted malaria, responding with, "Heaven is now nearer to me than Britain." Many times she looked death in the face — everything from crocodiles to angry witch doctors with cauldrons of oil. Meanwhile she began saving twins from slaughter. If all the twins she rescued had remained alive, they would make up a big town, and it was her own money she used in all this endeavor. She said Christ had sent her with the Gospel and that He would look after the results.¹

2. Shortly before being burned for his Protestant convictions, a man was visited and urged to consider that life was sweet and death was bitter, and that if he would recant to the queen he might be permitted to do much good. He replied, "True it is that death is bitter and life is sweet, but the death to come is more bitter and the life to come is more sweet... I have settled myself through the strength of God's Holy Spirit, patiently to pass through the torments and extremities of the fire now prepared for me, rather than to deny the truth of God's word."²

3. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor himself decreed the punishment of forty men who refused to bow to his image. "Strip to the skin! Now go stand on that frozen lake," he commanded, "until you are prepared to abandon your Nazarene-god!" Forty naked men marched out into a howling storm on a winter's night. There, they lifted up their voices and sang:

*Christ, forty wrestlers have come out to wrestle...
To win from Thee the crown.*

Near the end, one man broke from the group, ran into the temple and prostrated himself before the image of the Emperor. The captain of the guard, who had witnessed the faithfulness of the other men, removed his helmet, disrobed himself, and took the place of the man who had weakened. The compensation was not slow in coming, for as the dawn broke, there were forty corpses on the lake.³

Desiring the courageous outcomes of anticipating the crown of life with you,

Sam Crabtree, Executive Minister

1. Mary Slessor, as described in *More Than Conquerors*. John Woodbridge. editor.
2. Bishop John Hooper of Gloucester, from *Sketches in Church History* by S.M.Houghton.
3. The name of the soldier is unknown to man but not to God; published in *Keys to Happiness*, Cathedral Press.

The Bethlehem Star a publication of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN
55415, October 17, 2000