

Crowning the King

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
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Scripture: Revelation 4 & 5

Today I want us to look at giving from God's perspective.

This is relevant because we are approaching the giving season. More gifts are bestowed at Christmas than any other time.

Friday was the busiest shopping day of the year.

Most of the items that were purchased will be presented as gifts.

In addition to the presents we give to family and friends, December is the major month for giving to charities.

In the next few weeks we will receive letters from many Christian organizations appealing for end of year gifts.

Our own church relies on our December offering to meet our needs for missions and ministry.

This should be a time of joy and generosity but instead it is often a season of stress.

So I thought it would be helpful to look at this spiritual discipline of giving from a biblical viewpoint with the prayer that our giving to God and others is characterized by gladness.

So please turn to Revelation chapter 4 and 5 in your Bible and take out your message outline as we look at the thrilling subject of Crowning the King.

In this remarkable passage we see **THE PICTURE OF GIVING IN HEAVEN**

The Apostle John is exiled on the Greek Island of Patmos when he has a vision of heaven. He describes it for us.

"At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it." (4:2)

We are now in the command center of the universe.

It is dominated by a throne.

The throne speaks to us of majesty and authority and we learn that someone is sitting on it.

Isn't that good news? There is a person in charge.

This world is not running randomly. There is a King in control.

Emanating from the throne is a light and sound show.

A rainbow encircles the throne.

Lightning flashes and thunder peals. This draws our attention to the power and dominion of the occupant.

But then we notice he is not alone for, **“Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.” (4:4)**



As we watch this mysterious and magnificent scene there is a sudden flurry of activity. These 24 elders rise from their 24 thrones. They make their way over to the large throne and prostrate themselves before it.



They then carefully remove their own golden crowns and place them before the throne of God. And John writes, **“The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay down their crowns before the throne.” (4:10)**

Here is how William Blake imagined the scene.

It is an extraordinary and holy moment and it captures the spiritual significance of what it means for a Christian to give. In giving we are crowning the King. That is a picture to guide us in our giving this Christmas.

As we present our gifts to friends and family or we make an offering to the Lord's work we are laying down a crown before the throne.

This understanding of giving is remarkable in itself but it gets even better when we delve into the text and ask three questions.

First, **who are the 24 elders?**

They are the people of God through all the ages.

We arrive at the number 24 when we take the 12 tribes of Israel and add on the 12 apostles. This represents the people of faith of both the Old and New Testament. In other words if we belong to God the twenty-four elders are you and me.

Where did they get their crowns?

We are told the answer back in chapter 2 when Jesus says,

“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (2:10)

During their pilgrimage on earth these believers remained faithful to Christ until one day they found themselves in his presence. He welcomed them by saying, “Well done you good and faithful servant. Enter the joy of your Lord.”

Then he took a crown and placed it on their head.

That is the prospect that every Christian can look forward to.

In addition to the crown Jesus also gives us a throne for he promises, **“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (3:21)**

So **why do they give their crowns away?**

After all these elders have earned their crowns and Jesus has told them, **"Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." (3:11)**

The elders don't need to give their crowns away.

There is no requirement for them to do so.

Yet these twenty-four elders, representing all the people of God, gladly give away their crowns and they tell us why in the speech they make to the occupant of the throne.

First, they give away their crown because **God is worthy.**

They lay their crowns before the throne and say, **"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power." (4:11)**

God is worthy because he is eternal.

Every other throne can be shaken but not God's.

His throne is permanent and secure. He lives for ever and ever. The praise of the living creatures around the throne is ceaseless.

God's worthiness is the refrain of the inhabitants of heaven.

In chapter 5 we hear two songs with this same theme.

The first begins, **"You are worthy" (5:9).**

The second sung by thousands and thousands of angels starts, **"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain." (5:12)**

God is worthy because he gave us Christ and Christ is worthy because he was slain for us.

Isn't it remarkable that all over the world billions of people will be giving presents this Christmas because Christ is worthy.

They may not understand that fact.

They may not even believe in Christ.

But they are celebrating a holiday that bears his name.

If you want an interesting conversation this week ask a colleague at work if they plan to give gifts this Christmas?

They will almost certainly answer "yes".

Then ask them "Why?"

They will probably say, "Because everybody does."

Ask them again, "Why?"

The answer is that we give because God gave.

In the Old Testament Isaiah prophesied, **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." (Isaiah 9:6)**

In the New Testament John tells us, **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son." (John 3:16)**

We give in response to God's greater gift.

This is the origin of Christmas presents.

Second, the elders gave their crowns away **because God is creator of all.**

The elders declare, **"For you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (4:11)**

These 24 elders understand that they only existed because God willed it. By his word he brought the world into being.

By his electing grace he gave them salvation.

The crown is theirs only because he placed it upon them.

Not only did God create us but he sustains us and preserves us. The elders acknowledge this when they tell God that in him they "have their being." We hear echoes of Paul's words to the Colossians, **"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17)**

We are dependent for our next breath on God.

This fills us with gratitude and gratitude leads to generosity.

Then the elders gave their crown away because **Christ purchased us.**

They sang, **"You are worthy . . . because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests, to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (5:9-10)**

The elders did not deserve to be in that heavenly multitude.

They had no right to those thrones. This was all God's doing. Christ purchased them with his blood on the cross, a sacrifice that reaches to every people group on the planet.

He saved them to serve. He made them a kingdom of priests.

A priest is one who has access to God and each one of God's people share that privilege.

We can boldly approach God's throne of grace.

So in gratitude they give up their crowns.

Notice what they do with them.

At the end of Revelation we are given a description of Christ.

There we are told, **"His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns." (19:12)**

Now where did those many crowns come from?

Let me suggest that after the elders took off their crowns and laid them at the feet of the one on the throne, they then picked the crowns up again and placed them on the head of the Lord Jesus.

They crowned him with many crowns the Lamb upon the throne.

Last week a giant statue of Jesus was dedicated in Poland.

At 108 feet tall it is the largest in the world.



On the head of Jesus rests a gold crown 6 feet tall.
 These Polish Christians have their theology right.
 At this time of the year we usually see Jesus in a cradle.
 But that was 2,000 years ago.
 Now we need to see Jesus with a crown.

The 24 elders gave Jesus the best they had.
 Their crowns were precious to them because they represented eternal life
 and because of the person who had given them. There was nothing more
 valuable.

Every year at Thanksgiving The Butterball Turkey Company has a hotline.
 A lady called in and asked, "I have a turkey that has been in my freezer for 23 years, is it still
 good?"
 The representative said, "The turkey is still probably okay but the flavor and texture will be
 spoiled."
 The lady replied, "That is what I thought. I will give it to my church instead."
 Sometimes we give God the junk.
 The elders gave him their jewels.

But, of course, we are not living in heaven but on earth.
 So with this picture from heaven in minds let us apply these truths to **THE PRACTICE OF
 GIVING ON EARTH.**

How do we make this coming month of giving God-honoring and faith building?
 Well we reject three secular reasons for giving and embrace three spiritual reasons.
 So we **give not for guilt but for grace.**

It is easy to give out of guilt.
 We pass the Salvation Army Red Kettle for the fourth time in a day of shopping.
 We try and avoid the eye of the person ringing the bell.
 Then out of guilt we take a dollar from our wallet and put it in the kettle hoping the guilty
 feeling will go away.

But that is not why we give as Christians.
 The 24 elders did not give because they had to but because they wanted to.
 Paul writes a letter to the Corinthians instructing them how to give saying, **"Now, brothers,
 we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.
 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in
 rich generosity." (2 Cor. 8:1-2)**

It is God's grace that causes generosity.
 The more we know of grace the more generous we will be.

Then we **give not for the taxman but for the God-man.**
 At the end of the year it is natural to look at our financial situation and see how it can be
 improved by our tax deductible giving. It is wise to be good stewards of our finances.
 We are blessed to live in a country that allows us to deduct from our taxable income what we
 give to God.

That is not true in most other nations.

But the taxman is not the best reason to give. The God-man is.
The elders gave their crowns to Christ.
They had no ulterior motives.
There was no advantage to them except the sheer joy of giving.

Paul tells us to give to the God-man, **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."** (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Of course things were different for the 24 elders.
They could give their crowns directly to Jesus.
Perhaps we say "I would do the same if he were here."
So how can we put our gifts into the hands of God?
Jesus reveals the extraordinary truth that when we give to people in need we are actually giving to him.

In the lovely parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus explains that when we give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty and we invite the stranger in. When we clothe the naked and look after the sick and visit the prisoner we are giving to him.

Or as Jesus puts it, **"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."** (Matthew 25:40)

Then we **give not grudgingly but cheerfully.**

Paul tells the Corinthians, **"Each man should give what he had decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."** (2 Cor. 9:7)

God wants our giving to be hilarious.
There will be lots of giving like that this Christmas.
When we love someone deeply we enjoy taking great care and time to find the perfect gift.
We don't begrudge the cost. Rather we welcome it.
We look forward to their delight when they unwrap our gift on Christmas Day. Along with the gift there will often be the verbal explanation, "I did this because I love you."

That is the attitude of these twenty-four elders who represent you and me. Out of hearts filled with love and gratitude to God they take the very best they have, the golden crown that has been placed on their head by Christ. They are glad to do so.

If we don't have that joy in our giving let's look at this scene again in heaven. Let's worship before the one on the throne and give our praise to the Lamb who was slain.
Let's remember that before we came to Christ we had no hope in the world. We were utterly lost but now we have been found.

Last week three teenage boys were found by a fishing boat in the South Pacific. They had been lost at sea for 50 days since the engine on their motor boat packed in.

Don't you think they were grateful to the tuna fisherman who found them?

Well we have been rescued by God in an even greater way.

Our giving is in response to him saving us.

So we have seen the picture of giving in heaven and the practice of giving on earth. Now let's consider **THE PLACE TO BEGIN.**

The place to start is not with our gifts but with ourselves.

That is what the 24 elders did.

They presented themselves before they presented their crowns.

This is what the Macedonian Christians did and Paul commends

them for it when he explains, **"They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."**

(2 Corinthians 8:5)

That is what God wants from us, the gift of ourselves.

And isn't that utterly appropriate?

We would have nothing apart from him.

The old offering prayer put it well when it acknowledges, "All things come from you, O Lord, and of your own have we given you."



Jesus tells us how to begin our giving.

He says **"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."** (Revelation 3:20)