

God's Best Is Himself

by A.W. Tozer

God's best gift is himself, and he dispossesses people of everything less than himself to give them himself in experience.

Duration: 39:50

Topics: "God's Best"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a conversation with his father about two different types of people: those who make money and keep it, and those who give away what they have. He emphasizes that the character of the Lord's people is characterized by giving generously. The speaker also criticizes a woman who claims to have the power to heal by touching people's heads, stating that true power belongs only to God. He then mentions a song that supports this belief. The sermon concludes with the speaker sharing a personal experience of asking his congregation to release him from a vow and giving authority to the board and building committee. The speaker also discusses the concept of possessing material wealth and how it relates to Abraham's faith.

Transcript

This morning I want to talk on this theme, that God's best gift is himself. And I have two texts here, they say almost the same thing. Numbers 18-20, and the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them.

I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And then in the 10th chapter of Deuteronomy, verse 9, it explains, therefore, that Levi has no part nor inheritance with his brethren. The Lord is his inheritance, according as the Lord thy God promised him.

And then the importance of this is indicated in that, over further, this time in the book of Ezekiel, 44-48, it says, God is speaking and says, I am their inheritance, I am their possession. That was many hundreds of years later, showing that this was not a stray thought, but it was a positive truth taught here by the Holy Spirit for the enrichment and blessing of his people. Now, the historical background is that God is dividing the promised land to the twelve tribes.

And to each one of the twelve he gives, by surveying it and laying out the land, he gives a portion, an equal portion of the land. But there is a strange tribe in Israel. It is the priestly tribe.

And that priestly tribe was to have no land in Israel. God was to be their possession. They weren't to have any other.

I am their inheritance, I am their possession, I am their part. Those three expressions show that God was trying to say to the world that would listen, to all believing faith everywhere, that God would give property and land, all right, but that he wanted to teach that there is something better than earthly possession. And particularly to the priestly people that can understand it.

That is, he gives himself to such people. And in giving himself he gives everything else. Now, that's the background.

And this is applicable to us because we are a royal priesthood, a peculiar people and holy nation. I believe in the priesthood of the believer. I believe that every born-again Christian is a priest and is as capable of entering the presence of God through the blood of the everlasting covenant as any bedecked and beribboned priest ever anywhere in the world.

The humblest, simplest, most unlearned child of God. By virtue of his being a priest of the Most High God, can enter the very presence of God and talk to God and receive instruction from God and fellowship with God as certainly, I say, as any priest anywhere on the earth. So that this instruction is for us.

Now, this is the wonder-filled truth. That there is on earth a dispossessed people. They have very little and mostly what they have they give away.

My dear father, now long in heaven, wasn't converted yet when he said this, but he was terribly distressed and couldn't understand it. He referred to me and to my older brother, who is still living, a doctor in Florida. And he said, I have two boys.

I said, I don't know. He said, one of them makes all he can get and takes it, and the other won't take anything, and what he gets, he gives away. Well, I rather enjoyed that.

I thought that was very delightful. It was a little compliment that burst out of my father's heart. Worried about a boy.

I was a boy then, I was much younger, you know. Forty years makes a lot of difference. But he said, I have these two boys.

One is making money and keeping it, and the other is not making any, and what he gets he gives away. Well, now that characterizes the Lord's people. You ever stop to think how much money some of you people could have laid up if you weren't giving anything to the church or anything to the Lord's work? You ever think of that? You ever think what vast churches they could build? And some do build who don't give to the Lord's work.

Well, these are dispossessed people. But God has given them that which is better than anything else. God has given them himself.

Now, this is taught throughout the Old Testament, and it is taught more clearly in the New Testament. For in the New Testament it says, He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him. The man loveth me, and he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and

make our abode with him.

The true believer actually has God. Then Jesus in his prayer here says, That they may all be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, they also may be one in us, and I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me. Now, this only is two passages from the rich treasury of New Testament teaching on the fact that God belongs to his people.

When we say, My God, My God, or when we say, My Father, we are not simply victims of an idiomatic expression. It is an actual truth. God belongs to his people.

Now, God wants to give himself to us in experience. God seeks to dispossess us of everything less than himself, either actually or in spirit. He actually dispossessed Job of everything.

Job had been a rich man, and God dispossessed him, took everything away from him, including his family. So Job stood or sat or crouched alone on the ash heap, covered with sores, a man totally robbed and stripped and spoiled. He had nothing, but he had God, and soon he had God and everything that he had lost.

But God had to strip him in dispossessing, that is, actually take it away from him. And we well know that our Lord Jesus had not where to lay his head. We also know that Paul had nothing.

Actually, they were dispossessed. But not always does God dispossess people by taking everything from them. Sometimes he only takes it away from them in spirit, so that they have no sense of possessing anything.

That is, Abraham. Abraham was a man who was very, very rich, and yet God summed up everything in God's Son, everything. Listen, you have children, and you remember the children that are now grown that once toddled around your house.

Am I right in saying to you that if you had before you a choice, you had either to give up your child in death, or you had to give up everything you possessed down to the clothes on your back. There isn't one person listening to me that wouldn't say instantly, I would rather give up everything and stand alone with nothing except clothes enough to be decent in, rather than give up my child. Now, God said to Abraham, Thine only Son, whom thou lovest.

That was Isaac. And in Isaac, all summed up, was everything that Abraham had. And Abraham loved Isaac more than he loved all of his herds of camels and cattle and sheep, and all of his gold and silver and rich possessions and servants and all that they held, the forms of wealth they had in that day.

He would have given all of it instantly with a stroke of his pen. He'd have signed it all the way to keep Isaac. And God said to him, Take thine only Son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and slay him on the mountain as a sacrifice.

He took him up there and raised the knife so that in doing this he was saying to God, Oh God, everything is summed up in Isaac and Isaac's going to die. Thus I'm giving you everything but my blood and you can have that. And God held his hand and grabbed his wrist and said, Don't you touch the boy.

I didn't mean for you to kill him. I only want to know whether you would. In other words, Abraham, I am more to thee than thy possessions.

I am more to thee than thine only Son, whom thou lovest. That's all God wanted. And that's all God wants of us.

He doesn't care about the amount of the property. He wants to know where it is. Is it his or is it yours? Is it between you and God? Or is God's purse and everything else marginal? So he let Abraham have plenty because he knew that God was everything to Abraham.

He let David have plenty. David was a king, wore his crown, had his robes and his scepter and his throne and ruled over men and was rich as kings were in those days. And yet David didn't have anything.

Read David's prayers and see how he stripped himself when he prayed, cleared down to his simple garments. He had nothing. God was everything to him.

He said, I shall be satisfied when I awaken thy likeness. What have I on earth beside thee? He said, or whom in heaven but of thee. God was everything to David and yet David had everything.

So I say, these strange people, these Levites, these priests of the Most High God, God dispossesses them of everything either actually or in spirit so that they have nothing but God. And in all redemptive acts, God gives himself. God's attributes are nothing but God.

We can distinguish, but we cannot divide God from his attributes. And we cannot divide God from himself. We cannot distinguish, we cannot, I mean divide, though we can think apart, thus distinguish, but we cannot think apart any of the attributes of God.

God's love and his holiness and his power and all the rest, we call them attributes, but they're simply facets of the unitary one God, our Father which art in heaven, so that God gives himself to his people. And these attributes, as we call them, are simply God pushed out into the field of our awareness. He's simply God becoming consciously present to us.

In Canada here, you use a verb and make it out of a noun that I had never heard before coming here. I don't know whether it's British or whether it's strictly Canadian or where it comes from, but the pastor used it this morning in his prayer, and I've heard others. They say, Ask God, O God, presence thyself.

Now, presence is a noun, but we turn it into a verb, and our prayer is, O God, presence thyself. Make thyself consciously present. Thou art present, O God, but, O God, we don't ask thee to come, for thou art here, says the prayer, but we want thee to make us conscious that thou art here.

That's what we mean, that's what the pastor meant, and that's what we mean when we use the verb presence instead of as a noun, a verb. We want God to make his presence consciously realized. Now, I tell you this.

I've said this before. It may be put down as just old-fashioned stuff, but I tell you more. I tell you this once more, that the presence of God consciously felt in a congregation is more wonderful, more satisfying, more elevating, more glorious than anything that man can bring together.

I don't care who the preacher is, I don't care how famous, I don't care how great, I don't care how brilliant the singer, I don't care what it may be, nor how high in authority the speaker might be in his church or in

politics, nor how famous he may be in the literary or art world. The most inexplicably wonderful thing is for God to presence himself. Now, I mean that.

For God to be consciously present in a congregation. It was the fact that the Lord Jesus was there that gave the lift and enthusiasm and fire to those early Christians. And it is the fact that he is not consciously with us nowadays that causes us not to have the fire.

The ashes of a lost hope are poor substitutes for the fire of a living presence. Now, God gives himself, I repeat, and it's impossible for God ever to answer your prayer without giving himself. You may, you may, in your imperfection, immaturity, you may ask God for a gift of some kind and God may give it to you, and thus you may lose the primary wonder of that answered prayer.

You may lose the first. If you ask God for a job, you don't have a job that you're satisfied with. You want a better position.

And you go to God honestly and ask God and say, Now, Father, you know that my money's thine and my family's thine and I'm thine. Oh, Lord, lead me to a position that will be good and satisfying and lucrative that I can have to supply my needs and the needs of my family and give to thy work round the world. Lord, give me a good position.

The Lord may have somebody call you before the sunset or get a letter the next day. God will answer prayer if it's his will to do so. And these things are his will.

But if you spend your time thinking about that and forget something else, that in giving you that answer to prayer, God gave you himself, which is infinitely more than the highest position in Canada. He gave you himself. Those who have been healed dramatically of sicknesses, all of them will testify to the same thing.

Back in the early days of the Alliance, when they talked a great deal more about healing than they do now, they always said, and all the teachers who taught said, it isn't the healing of the body that's the wonderful thing. It is the experience with God that's the wonderful thing. That this is what's wonderful, that God comes and does this.

We have God when we're healed. That was the thing that moved the people in those early days. So God answering prayer is God giving himself.

And the love of God is simply God moving in love. And the kindness of God is God moving as our needs require. And the mercy of God is simply God moving as our sins require.

And the peace of God is the God of peace imparting himself to us. And eternal life itself. I preached at a seminary last week.

And I told them there that eternal life is not a thing. Eternal life is God the eternal imparting himself. This is eternal life, that we might know thee the only true God in Jesus Christ who now is sent.

This is life eternal. So the knowledge of God, that is the experience of God. That's what knowledge means there.

Not theology he's talking about. Though theology is necessary before the knowledge of God can come. Some amount of it is necessary anyhow.

We must know the basic truth concerning God. He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and he's a rewarder of them that seek him. So we must have that much knowledge of God through Christ.

But it's not necessary to have a profound knowledge of theology. The knowledge of God is not an intellectual thing only. It is an experiential thing.

It is of the soul. That they might know thee the only true God in Jesus Christ who now is sent. So eternal life is a knowledge of God, an experience of the eternal God.

What is holiness? Now holiness is God living in the personality. That is to us, that's what it is. The idea that you can go to an altar and kneel down and pray and say, Lord God make me holy, and God makes us holy, and we go up, we go our way having been made holy, cleansed and made holy, very much as you drive a dirty car to a minute wash and turn it over to the man and he drives it through and charges you a dollar and a half and your car is clean and you get in and thank him and don't even know his name.

You just pay him and drive it away. Now that's some people's idea of holiness. To go to a camp meeting or a church or somewhere and go to the altar and kneel down and ask the Lord to make them holy and they say he does it, praise the Lord, and they get up and go their way.

That's not holiness, my brethren. Holiness is God living in the personality. Living there.

If you could imagine cleanliness. If you could imagine that you could take your car to a place called the fountain of cleanness and you could dip it in that fountain of cleanness and that fountain of cleanness would enter every part of the car so it couldn't get dirty, that would be a little closer to the idea of what holiness is. It is the God, the fountain of life and the fountain of holiness living in the personality of his people.

I in them and thou in me, said Jesus, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Know ye not that Christ dwelleth in you indeed, except ye be reprobate. So God gives himself in holiness and God gives himself in power.

I preached some weeks ago in a place where there was a strong element of what we would call the Pentecostal, or tongues. And while the leaders were not, and most of the people were not, some were, and one old lady was out. She got very mad at me.

I didn't even know she existed and don't know yet, never saw her except I heard she was there. I said something and she didn't like it. But I didn't mind that.

Batting average isn't bad if you've got several hundred people and only one of them gets mad at you. But I say and say to you that she was putting her hand on people's heads, you know, and just giving out power and healing just all directions. Just come over and mum would lay her hand on you and you'd go.

It doesn't work that way, brethren. It just doesn't work that way. Once, said David, have I heard, twice have I heard it, power belongeth unto God.

And God is called Almighty God, God the Almighty One. And so all power belongs to God and any power that God gives us is simply himself. He lends himself to us.

Did you find the song himself, please, for me there? I want to read a stanza or two of it. Show you that Dr. Simpson also believed this. Now, closing, God is our only legitimate quest.

Doesn't that sound mystical that I ought to be on a long robe and be barefooted and go to a monastery? No, I don't think so. The society to which you belong used to teach that. God is our only legitimate quest.

Men have searched for other things. They've searched for visions. But I think I have an understanding with God.

Oh, God, I don't want any vision because I can't have thee in it. Others want voices. Others want tongues.

Others want gifts. Others want evidences. I ask for no evidence except God because any evidence must be mediated to me through my intellect.

If, suppose, if, suppose, the Lord said, think of it, the Lord said, now I'm going to make the tips of your fingers glow bright orange and you'll know I've blessed you when your tips of your fingers glow bright orange. I'd pray and pray and pray and then open my eyes and look, goody, they're glowing bright orange. Now I have the blessing.

Well, now I have been reasoned into that, you see. I have been told as soon as your fingertips are bright orange, you're blessed. Now as soon as I see them bright orange, I'm blessed.

You see, that's a logical conclusion. And anybody that can be reasoned into such a conclusion can be reasoned out of it by a better thinker. If somebody else who's a better thinker comes along and says, now wait a minute, the fact that your fingertips glow bright orange does not mean that you're blessed.

Pretty soon the fellow would say, well, they're still glowing, but I'm not blessed. I have had myself reasoned out of it. So any evidence of any kind that God is blessing me is necessarily mediated through my intellect, through my sense of logic.

And therefore I've got to always be reminding myself, I know I'm blessed because, I know God loves me because, I know because, always I've got that because there. But my brother and sister, there is such a thing as holy intuition. There is such a thing as God making himself known to you in spiritual experience, above all visions and gifts and evidences and all the rest, so you know you have God in you, the hope of glory.

And Christ becomes livingly real to your spirit. It is not a question now of logic and reason and evidence and testimony. It is a living intuitive reality.

So remember, God is never to be sought for secondary reasons, only for himself. Whoever seeks God for something else is all wrong. God, the man who seeks God alone will find God in Christ and through Christ.

And then finding God to his utter wonder, he'll find he has everything else too. The businessman who seeks God for himself is very likely to find that he not only found God, but that God's blessing his business way beyond his hopes. And so with everything else.

God gives himself first. And that's his first and best gift. And all these other things shall be added unto you.

I suppose you know this. We're not going to sing it now. We'll stay by our program until we have a better song selected for the occasion.

But to close this, he wrote, Simpson wrote, Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord. Once it was the feeling, now it is his word. Once his gift I wanted, now the giver owns.

Once I sought for healing, now himself alone. Once I hoped in Jesus, now I know he's mine. Once my lamps were dying, now they brightly shine.

Once for death I waited, now his coming hailed, and my hopes are anchored safe within the veil. He published an article not long ago in the Alliance Witness to the Effect that we have shifted our emphasis in the latter days, in this hour, we've shifted our emphasis in the second coming from Christ's coming to the program of Christ's coming. And we got some pretty bitter letters over that.

Some people were really angry all over, not many, but a few. I stand by it, my brother. Paul and his friends and Peter and his people and all the rest of them had not as much to say about the details of his coming as they had to say about the fact of his coming.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, he was coming. And so they said, he's coming. They got wrong ideas and Paul had to write and straighten them out and try to straighten them out the best he could and get the details straightened out because people run to details like a duck runs to a water pond.

But he said, he's coming, he's coming, he's coming. And that's what matters, dear friends. Communion service means that Jesus is coming.

We look back to his death and forward to his coming. And when he comes, you will find after all, and I hope it won't be a disappointment, that what he has given you is himself forever and ever and ever. And the result was, you know, there'll be always, if you build a new church, your missionary offering will fall off.

Build a new church, this will happen, never say I. Everybody said I, you know, they just said I and we were free. But that's what we got. The timid gloomy brethren often cause the true Christian to be blue.

I don't think we ought to be. Consistently I wonder about his mental condition. But there ought to be, there ought to be what, what the great English lexicographer and writer Samuel Johnson called, said he found in, that he'd never seen anywhere.

I keep them giggling, hopeful and optimistic. An optimistic outlook. It's wonderful.

You don't know what you do for a man. You don't know what you'll do for that little man behind me. You'll call him sometime and say to him, instead of saying that you felt we shouldn't have sung number nine, that was a poor choice or the usher was just discourteous and he turned his back on me or something.

You don't know what yesterday's service did for me. I would just bless and lift it up. Spill around, they don't say it like that, but the general import of it is that I never should have been born.

Just saying that you can help a man by being careful. Then, fifth and the only last one I'm going to mention, the cause of spiritual discouragement is reading about the exploits of the saints of old. You say, well, it is and it isn't.

Well, I suppose it's encouraging, but if you're a serious-minded Christian it's likely to make you feel pretty bad. As you see, everything that's good about them was put into the biography and everything that wasn't so good was carefully edited out. So you get the idea that here at last was born the perfect man.

And then you compare yourself with him and you say, well, I wonder if I'm even a Christian. Not good, brethren, not good. A biographer usually takes the warts off and if there's a cast in the eye, straightens the eyes.

And if the fellow had a stoop, he straightens a man. And everything that was wrong with his idol, he straightens out before he prints his book. And the result is the average biography is just not so.

There may be things in it that are true, but the general tenor of a book. Wherever the Bible gives us biography, it gives us both sides. It says David was a good man and after God's heart.

But David walked on the roof one day and saw Bathsheba. It shows both sides and I can read the life of David and not be discouraged. It tells us that Jacob wrestled with the Lord all night.

And it also tells us that Jacob was a crooked man and that Jacob didn't cheat, but he came pretty close to cheating his father-in-law out of a lot of cash. He could be a saint, but also a faker if it's written by the man's wife. I say, oh God, help me.

I'm awful. I'll never make it as long as four or five others. But I'm reading two things.

One of them is the life of Whitefield. At least until you get older and can take it. That man, that man, what a, what a, I think it's wonderful if I preach four or five times a week and he preached four or five times a day.

And I'm also along with that reading the letters. And I read Samuel Rutherford. Radiant.

Wonderful. I grieve that I have not felt that. But I settled it one day and took some notes.

I'm going to write on it. I settled it one day. Oh God, I'm not as great as Whitefield, but I'm like tens of thousands.

I can preach to some of the best people in the world. They had their time. Optimistic.

They might have got a little blue too. But the point is, don't, don't give away to it. And beside that, suppose these men were as great as they are supposed to have been.

They're dead. So come up to me, you know, to compare me to Dr. Simpson. It's embarrassing because I don't compare.

That great Canadian preacher was, he was one of them. But Dr. Simpson is dead. And I am alive.

And he can no longer preach. That silver voice, the silence in my gravelly voice, is still able to be heard. I'm just going to keep right on giving my witness till the Lord comes.

Then, anything that depends on a dead man's got to fail. Anything. The Lord can't say, Dr. Simpson, I want you to go to Toronto and preach to the people of Avenue Row.

But he could say it to me. He couldn't say it to a man who was sleeping, the sleep of the jump. But he can say it to a man who's fighting the fight of the just, still alive and able to talk.

I'm going to read a passage of Scripture here for you. 50th of Isaiah. For the Lord God will help me.

Therefore shall I not be confounded. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifies me.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is my adversary? You get your chin up, elevate, in and out and up, but continue to do it. Keep on teaching them.

God Almighty who made them and put, He'll see they get them through. You'll be surprised in a serious moment how much they're learning. They'll wiggle and bring bugs to Sunday school class, you know, and all sorts of things.

And you think, oh, I might as well quit. Don't quit, brother. Get on your knees and thank God that you're able to preach and teach the word of the Lord till it'll wiggle and be still, be still.

He speaks to thee. Be still and know that I am God. Be still.

Be still. Be of good cheer, as he has said, I will be with you. Fear no will.

His eyes are on thee. O praying soul, be still. Be still.

He cannot break his pledged word. Seek down into his blessed will and wait in patience on the Lord. O waiting soul, be still.

Be strong. Though he tarry, trust and wait, doubt not, he will not wait too long. And fear not, he will not come too late.

Be still, O troubled heart, be still. Fear not thy father's arms enfold thee. Pick up thy cross, lay down thy will.

Be in his presence in cheerful hopefulness. Rise from your knees with a good optimistic outlook. Let the weather inside your soul be cheerful, hopeful, filled with faith and expectation.

And the little flowers that couldn't come out before will begin to come out and begin to bloom. Weather change, a little, not much, but a little. And if you'll get a change of internal weather, you'll find the lily of the valley and the rose of Sharon will begin to bloom and you'll be fragrant.

And the people will turn their nose in your direction and sniff and say, where's that sweet fragrance coming from?

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