

The Feelings and Employments of Saints in Heaven.

by Edward Payson

The sermon explores the significance of the twenty-four elders casting their crowns before the throne, highlighting the importance of humility, love, gratitude, and reverence in preparing for heaven.

Scripture: Psalm 111:10, Psalm 138:6, Psalm 145:3, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, 1 Peter 5:5, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 4:10, Revelation 5:10

Topics: "Heavenly Worship", "Christian Humility"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the vision described by John in Revelation 5:10, where the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne of God and the Lamb. This action symbolizes the humility, love, gratitude, and reverence that the redeemed in heaven possess towards God. It serves as an acknowledgment that all glory and honor belong to God alone, and that every reward and blessing received is a result of His grace and sovereignty. Payson emphasizes the importance of imitating the heavenly mindset on earth, preparing for the eternal kingdom by casting ourselves and all that we have at the feet of our Savior.

Transcript

"And cast their crowns before the throne"

Revelation 5:10

John, in this chapter, describes a vision, with which he was favored, of the heavenly world. After presenting to our view the throne of God, in the midst of which Jesus Christ appeared, as a lamb that had been slain, he proceeds to inform us by whom this throne was surrounded. Among those who surrounded it, he saw four and twenty elders, clothed in white robes, and having on their heads crowns of gold. These elders represented the whole church of Christ in its perfect and glorified state, as it will appear in heaven, after the consummation of all things.

Their white robes were an emblem of the spotless purity with which it will then be adorned; while their golden crowns represent the regal dignity, the glory, honor, and immortality, with which, agreeably to the often repeated promise of our Savior, all his real disciples shall be invested in heaven. In our text the apostle informs us what use they made of these crowns. They cast them before the throne, or at the foot

of the throne, on which sat the Father and the Son. This action, like every other part of the apostle's vision, was symbolical, or figurative.

It is not however on that account less full of instruction. It illustrates in a very clear and striking manner, some of the principal traits in that character, which all the redeemed will possess in heaven. Let us then, endeavor to ascertain its import, together with the feelings which prompted it, and of which it was an expression. In attempting this, it is necessary to recollect that all the rewards, which await the righteous in heaven, are often summed up in the comprehensive expression of a kingdom.

I appoint unto you a kingdom, said our Savior to his disciples, as my Father hath appointed unto me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am seated with my Father on his throne. In allusion to these and other similar promises, St. Paul says, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also which love his appearing. And in the same spirit all the redeemed in heaven are represented as saying to Christ, Thou hast made us kings unto God, and we shall reign forever and ever.

As the rewards of heaven are thus called a kingdom, and as a crown is the distinguishing badge or ornament of royalty which is worn by kings alone, it follows that, as has already been intimated, the crown mentioned in the text represented every thing which the righteous had received as a reward. Casting these crowns at the foot of the throne, was, therefore, the same as casting their kingdom, with all its dignity, glory and honor, at the feet of God and the Lamb. Hence it is easy to perceive the import of this action and the feelings which prompted it.

In the first place, it was an acknowledgment of what God is, and of what he deserves from his creatures. The Scriptures inform us that he is one, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. All things are of him, as their Creator, and First Cause; all things are through him, as they are preserved, sustained and affected by his constant agency; and all things are to him, as they are designed for his pleasure and glory. Of all these truths the action, which we are contemplating, was an acknowledgment.

They who performed it, declared by its performance, a full, heart-felt conviction, that all which they were, and all which they possessed, was from God, and that therefore all ought to be rendered to him alone; that all the streams which issued from this fountain ought to flow back to it again. Were there any doubt that such was in fact the import of this action, the language with which it was accompanied must remove it. 'While they cast their crowns before the throne, they exclaimed, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast made all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.

And as they uttered this ascription, they cast themselves also before the throne; thus in effect saying, From thee, O Lord, we derived all that we are, and all that we possess; and to thee, therefore, we bring it back. To thee belongs all glory, and honor, and power, and to thee therefore we ascribe it. And while this action expressed a general acknowledgment, that all glory is due to God, it implied a more particular acknowledgment, that to him all the glory of their salvation belonged.

It was as if they had said, From thee, O Lord, we have received these crowns; but we are wholly unworthy of them; to thee alone they belong; for by thy sovereign grace alone were we prepared for them; by thy grace alone were we enabled to perform the good work which thou hast been pleased thus to reward; and by thy grace were we brought to the enjoyment of these rewards. Grace prompted the plan of our salvation, and grace carried it into execution. Grace prepared for us a Savior, and chose us in him before the foundation of the world; grace inclined us to choose, and to follow the Savior thus provided; and grace

has finally crowned us with eternal glories.

To thy grace then, O our God, thy free, rich, sovereign, distinguishing grace, belongs all the glory of our salvation, and to that grace we ascribe it. In all that we offer, or can offer, we do but present thee with that which is thine own. Not one gem in these celestial crowns belongs to us; not one will we retain. Thou art all in all, and we are nothing; nothing but shadows painted by thy beams, nothing but sinful dust and ashes, deserving of everlasting destruction, whom thou hast rescued, pardoned, sanctified, preserved, and raised to glory.

Having thus considered the import of this action, let us attend, in the second place, to the feelings which prompted it, and of which it was an expression. In the first place, it was prompted by, it was an expression of, perfect humility. This quality has never existed on earth in perfection, except while our Savior resided here, since the fall. Ever since the fall, man has been a proud creature. Indeed the exercise of pride was one essential part of his fall. Not content with the honor and immortality with which he was crowned, he proudly desired to become as a god, knowing good and evil.

The same proud disposition has ever since constituted a principal feature in the character of fallen man. It essentially consists in a disposition to exalt and arrogate glory to ourselves, and thus withhold it from him to whom alone it is due. Hence the constant struggle which has ever existed among fallen men for pre-eminence. Hence the love and desire for the chief room, and the uppermost seats. Hence, too, the little success which attends the preaching of the gospel. Pride forms the principal obstacle which exists in the heart of man to the reception of its humbling doctrines.

And even after the pride of the heart is so far subdued as to admit these doctrines, it still maintains its existence, and occasions the Christian more trouble than all other sinful propensities united. It is the very last of his internal enemies, over which he obtains any victory; and many, many victories does it previously obtain over him. In his breast it usually assumes the form of spiritual pride, the most absurd and detestable form which it can assume. An exemplification of it in this form we see in our Savior's first disciples.

It prompted their frequent disputes respecting the question who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It prompted the request made by two of them, that they might sit, one on the right hand, and the other on the left of our Savior, in his kingdom. In a thousand similar ways it has operated in the hearts of Christians ever since. If their Savior is graciously pleased to grant them any peculiar, though yet wholly undeserved manifestations of his love; to favor them with any unusual consolation, to furnish them with more than ordinary gifts for the benefit of the church, or to crown their endeavors to do good with success, immediately this busy sin begins to operate; self-complacent thoughts and feelings begin to rise; and a vain, wicked elation of mind ensues, which obliges their generous benefactor either to withdraw his gifts, or embitter them with some attendant infirmity or affliction.

Thus even St. Paul himself, after being favored with a rapture into the third heaven, was obliged to have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure. In Christians of smaller attainments, favors incomparably less than he enjoyed, are sufficient to exalt them above measure, and to make a thorn in the flesh necessary for their humiliation. The exercise of more than ordinary generosity, or a little more than usual fluency and fervency in prayer, or one instance of conversion effected by their instrumentality, may produce such consequences.

Nay, they may be proud even of their humility, proud of the manner in which they confess, and of the earnestness with which they pray against the operations of pride. To this fruitful, accursed source of mischief must be also ascribed, all the discontent and mournings of which they are guilty; for a man free from pride would be always contented and thankful; all the censorious remarks which they make respecting others, for a perfectly humble man can never be censorious; all the dissensions which prevail among Christians; for only by pride cometh contention.

This evil farther leads them to overrate their own attainments, conceals from them their deficiencies, and thus in various ways retards their progress. Nothing is a greater obstacle to prayer than pride; nothing more effectually prevents us from receiving answers to prayer; for why should God bestow further favor upon one who is proud of those which he has already received? Should any of you my hearers, employ a servant to carry your alms to the poor, and should you find that he appropriated part of the money designed for this purpose to his own use, or that he gave it to your pensioners in his own name, and thus diverted their gratitude from you to himself, would you not cease to employ him?

And can we then wonder that God should withhold his gifts from those who make use of them to nourish pride, and who take part of the glory of them, to themselves? Indeed this is the grand reason why we receive so little. God is abundantly able to give, willing to give, disposed to give his people far more than they receive; but he is obliged to withhold from them his gifts, to hide his face from them, to turn his smiles into frowns, lest their pride should be increased. But this pride must all be left behind forever, when they leave the body.

No particle of it will ascend with them to heaven. There they will have no wish for the chief places, no desire for admiration and applause. There they will keep back no part of the glory which belongs to their Creator and Redeemer; but, like their representatives seen by John in the vision before us, will cast their crowns and themselves, without the least reserve, before the throne of God and the Lamb. Nothing within them will say, I was saved because I deserved salvation.

Nothing in them will say, we were in part the authors of our own salvation; but the language of every heart will be, My salvation was wholly of the Lord. Jesus is the author, the finisher, and rewarder of my faith. In the second place, the action which we are contemplating, expressed, and was prompted by perfect love to God and the Redeemer. Not the understandings only but the hearts of those who performed it, said, God is infinitely lovely, infinitely worthy of all the affection which we can feel, of every proof of affection which we can offer.

Now I need not inform you that every man will choose to crown or adorn that object which he best loves. Naturally the object which every man best loves is himself. Hence he wishes to crown, adorn, exalt himself. Thus pride springs from selfishness, and the one is always in exact proportion to the other. But every Christian begins, when he becomes such, to love God supremely. Of course he begins to wish that God may be glorified and exalted. But in the present life, this love, and, of course, its effects are not perfect.

As there is some pride, so there is some selfishness, in the heart of the most holy Christian on earth. But in heaven there is none. There the redeemed love God perfectly, love him with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; love him far better than they love themselves. Of course their whole desire is to glorify and exalt him. They are far better pleased to see their crowns at his feet than upon their own heads. At his feet, therefore, they cast them, and in performing this action express, in the most striking manner,

perfect love.

In the third place, this action was prompted by, and expressed perfect gratitude. The natural effect of gratitude for favors received, is a wish to make some return for those favors; and to make such return is, of course, its natural expression. The more numerous and valuable these returns are, the greater is the gratitude which prompted them presumed to be. Look then at the return which these redeemed spirits make to God for his goodness. They bring themselves, their crowns, all that they are, and all that they have, and cast it at his feet.

The language of this action is, Lord, we would fain make some return for all thy goodness to us. But we have nothing except what thou hast given us. All this we bring to thee, and consecrate it without reserve to thy service. Did we possess more, we would consecrate it to the same use. It is enough for us to see and promote thy glory, to be instruments of thy pleasure, and to have thee accept our worthless services, our inadequate returns. Lastly. This action expresses the most profound reverence.

Had they felt nothing more than love and gratitude, they might have attempted to place their crowns on the head, or at least in the hands of him who was the object of these affections. But they regarded him also with the most awful veneration. This they expressed by casting their crowns at his feet. It was as if they had said, that which is the brightest ornament of our heads, is barely worthy to lie at the feet of Jehovah. At his feet we ourselves are scarcely worthy to be. But since he permits us to be there, we esteem that place as the highest honor we can enjoy, and prefer it to all earthly thrones, prefer it even to a throne in heaven without our God. REFLECTIONS

1. From this subject it may easily be made to appear that the views and feelings of Christians in this world resemble those of the redeemed in heaven, and differ from them not at all in kind, but only in degree. They resemble them just as the opening blossoms and immature fruit of a tree, resemble the perfectly ripe fruit of the same tree. Every Christian, who has listened to these remarks, can scarcely fail to have felt a consciousness, that he possesses in some degree the views and feelings which have now been described.

He feels something of the same love to his God and Redeemer, of the same gratitude for his goodness, the same reverence for his character, which are manifested by his brethren made perfect in heaven; and he is so far possessed of humility, as to be sensible and ashamed of his pride, and to hate and pray and struggle against it. He also expresses these feelings in a similar manner. He ascribes, he loves to ascribe glory to God, and the Lamb, and he wishes to ascribe it to them more perfectly.

He wishes to cast himself, and all that he possesses, without reserve, at their feet; and he is ashamed, he feels self-abhorrence, he repents, when he finds himself withholding any part of their due. Never is he so happy, as in those favored moments when he can make the nearest approaches to the temper, and engage most earnestly in the employments of the heavenly world. How plain, how undeniably evident then is it, that he is preparing for that world and destined to enjoy it.

He is here in the school of Christ, going through a course of education to fit him for it. This course will be completed, and as soon as it is completed he shall be raised to join those who have passed before him through the Christian seminary, and whose education for heaven is finished. Hence, 2. Every one present may easily learn whether he belongs to this happy, highly favored number. In order to ascertain this, you have only to inquire whether you are conscious of possessing views and feelings similar to those which have now been described; whether you possess a kindred spirit with those celestial beings who are now

casting themselves and their crowns before the throne of the Eternal; whether, while you contemplate them, your hearts say, Were I among them, and possessed of a crown like them, I well know what use I should choose and rejoice to make of it; and especially whether you prove the sincerity, the reality of these feelings by aiming to glorify God on earth, and cast yourselves and all that you possess at his feet.

If so, you do indeed belong to the family, a branch of which we have been contemplating, and ere long you shall be among them, wear a robe and crown like them, and with them exultingly cast it before the throne. And remember the more you do for God in this world, the brighter will your celestial crown be. And will you not wish it to be bright, when you cast it at the feet of the Redeemer? Will you not wish to be able to make large returns for all his favors? Can you be contented that your crown should be the least glorious of all which will be cast before him?

If not, daily strive to brighten it now. Every good work which you perform, every acceptable prayer which you offer, every right feeling which you exercise, every sincere attempt to grow in grace and knowledge, will add one to the gems which adorn it, and help to render it less unworthy of being cast at your Redeemer's feet. 3. How evident does it appear from this subject, that no self-righteous character, no one who trusts in himself, or in his own merits for salvation is preparing for heaven, or possesses any thing of its spirit, or without a change in his disposition can be admitted there.

Such a man, instead of casting the crown at the feet of Christ, places it on his own head, and wears it there; and there he would wear it even could he enter heaven. He has none of the views, none of the feelings, which animate its humble inhabitants in performing the action before us. Indeed, according to his views, it would be perfectly proper that he should wear it; for if he gains it by his own wisdom, strength and goodness, why should he not retain it? who, besides himself, has any right to it?

He has fairly won and therefore ought to wear it. But no such self-won crowns will ever be seen in heaven. All the crowns which will ever be seen there, are crowns which Christ merited, and which his grace assisted his people to obtain. All the white robes ever seen there, will be robes which were washed and made white, not by our tears, nor in any fountain which human wisdom ever opened but in the blood of Christ; the fountain in which all may wash and be clean. Finally. Let us now, my professing friends, while we come around the table of our Lord, endeavor to render this place, as much as possible, like heaven, by imitating the temper of heaven.

This table is an earthly representation of the rainbow-encircled throne, which John saw in Vision. Here our God and Savior sits on a mercy seat to accept our vows and offerings. Bring yourselves then, and all that you possess, as an offering, and with love, gratitude, humility, and reverence, cast it down at his feet. Thus by anticipating the employments of heaven, you will be increasingly prepared to join in them; you will carry away more of a heavenly spirit, and will obtain fresh courage to maintain your Christian warfare, animated by the assurance, that neither selfishness, nor pride, nor any other enemy, which now assails you and defiles your services, shall be able to follow you to heaven.

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