

REVELATION – SERMON 28

CASTING DOWN THE GOLDEN CROWNS

Revelation 4:4,9-11

INTRODUCTION

- The ancient nature worshipping paganism is being popularised today under the guise of the Green Movement
- It is known as the Cult of Gaia – the spirit goddess that sustains life on earth
- Organisations such as the UN praise paganism for its deification of nature, and condemn Christianity for separating man from the rest of creation and removing its sacred qualities
- The overarching theme of the Bible is the glory of God
- From the creation of Genesis 1 to the new heavens and earth in Revelation 22, it is all about God's glory
- In all his works, God is glorified, but his glory is most manifest in his redemption of sinful man through the Lord Jesus Christ
- The Bible is a record of the great struggle in his creation over who is glorified and worshipped
- Man was created to worship, yet most of mankind refuses to worship God, instead giving worship to other beings and things
- God is seeking for true worshippers to worship him (John 4:23)
- The book of Revelation is fundamentally a book of worship

- Twenty-four times in these twenty-two chapters is the word “worship” used
- It is also a book of songs; and might be regarded as the “psalter of the New Testament”
- Revelation shows us the importance of song in worship, and especially the corporate singing of God’s people
- Churches would do well to look to this book as a guide by which we should pattern our worship, but sadly, most are looking to the world for inspiration, seeking to imitate and emulate their sentimentalism, their sensuality and their banality
- Today we will consider the twenty-four elders, their identity, and their worship around the throne of God

I. THEIR DESIGNATION AS GLORIFIED CHRISTIANS (4)

A. Their name – “elders”

1. The Greek *presbyteros*
2. This term is elsewhere used to denote aged men (1 Peter 5:5), and officers in the synagogue (Matthew 26:57) and church (Acts 14:23)
3. It is never used of angelic beings

B. Their number – twenty-four

1. Some see this number representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve apostles (cf. 21:12,14), which in turn encompass all the redeemed of the Old and New Covenants

2. However, the resurrection, rewarding, crowning and enthroning of the Old Testament saints will not take place until after the seven years' tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2)
3. The "twenty-four" may have reference to the twenty four divisions and twenty-four courses of the Levites for performing priestly duties, established by David in 1 Chronicles 24, and thereby represent the priesthood of New Testament believers (1 Peter 2:5,9)
4. They are depicted in chapter 5 performing priestly duties of music and song, and offering vials of incense (prayers)

C. Their clothing – white raiment

1. Christ promised the overcomers (true believers) that they would "walk with me in white" and "be clothed in white raiment" (Revelation 3:4-5)
2. White raiment speaks of justification and the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer, having "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:13-14)
3. The elders sing about their redemption by Christ's blood in 5:9

D. The position – sitting upon seats about God's throne

1. Angels are never said to "sit" in the presence of God (cf. Revelation 7:11)
2. The believer is said to, even now, be spiritually seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but in glory he will be physically seated before God's throne (Ephesians 2:6)
3. Their "sitting" indicates that they have entered the promised rest (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 6:11; 14:13)

4. The Greek for “seat” is *thronos*, indicating lesser thrones around God’s throne

E. Their crowns – golden

1. Angels are never said to be wearing crowns, but believers are frequently promised crowns as rewards for faithful service (1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; 3:11)
2. This is not the crown of royalty (*diadem*), but the crown of victory (*stephanos*)
3. These crowns indicate that the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10) has already taken place, and believers have received their rewards
4. The scene of these glorified, rewarded and enthroned believers at this point in the chronology of Revelation is further proof that the rapture is pre-tribulational (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:9)
 - a. They are in heaven while saints are being martyred during the tribulation (7:11-14)
 - b. They are in heaven when the seventh trumpet sounds prior to Christ’s return (11:15)
 - c. They are in heaven when the 144,000 are gathered at Sion (14:1-3)
 - d. They are in heaven when Babylon is destroyed (19:19)

II. THEIR DEVOTION IN GIVING THEIR CROWNS (9-10)

- A. The four beasts initiate the worship

1. The heavenly choir begins with four (4:8); increases to 28 (4:10); to which is added myriads of angels (5:11); and is completed with every creature in heaven, earth, under the earth and in the sea (5:13)
2. The theme of the worship in chapter 4 is God as Creator; while in chapter 5 it is God as Redeemer

B. The elders fall down

1. Six times in Revelation do the elders fall down before the throne (4:10; 5:8,14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4)
2. This is a posture of deepest reverence

C. The elders worship him that liveth for ever and ever

1. The Greek for “worship” is *proskuneo* and means “to kiss the hand towards another, in token of reverence”
2. They worship God the Father as the eternal God, without beginning or end, the “uncaused cause”

D. The elders cast their crowns before the throne

1. These crowns are the rewards given to believers by Christ
2. Yet their adoration of God is so all-consuming that they have no regard for their own glory, righteousness, honour or achievements
3. It is a demonstration of the perfection of love, humility, gratitude and reverence – something we could never attain to in this life, yet should always aspire to
4. The attitude of even the greatest of Christ’s servants, who has done all he has been commanded to do, is “We are unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10)

5. While rewards are a motivation to the believer for faithful service (Matthew 6:19-21), there ought to be no selfish ambition in desiring after them, as we will give those crowns back to the Lord in gratitude and worship
6. Note the unanimity of the saints in glory – *all* cast their crowns

III. THEIR DESCANT IN GRATEFUL CHORUS (11)

A. God is worthy

1. To receive glory, honour and power
2. Our worship ought to be objective and God-focussed, not subjective and man-focussed
3. Note that the worship of the beasts and the worship of the elders is essentially the same

B. God is Creator

1. This is an acknowledgement of the eternity, power and supremacy of God over all things (Psalm 100:3)
2. The Greek word for “pleasure” is *thelema* and is usually translated “will” (cf. Matthew 6:10)
3. All things, including man, were created to fulfil the will of God (Proverbs 16:4)

CONCLUSION

1. The elders were clothed in white before the throne; are your garments white through the blood of Christ?
2. Heaven is a holy place for holy people (Hebrews 12:14)

3. We are told that the redeemed worshippers in heaven will fall on their faces before God in worship
4. Will such a practice be utterly foreign to you? Or will you be well acquainted with it upon your arrival there?
5. It may be today when trump sounds and the voice from heaven is heard and believers are called to heaven to be with the Lord.
6. If you are not ready; if you have not repented and put your faith in Christ; if you have not been born again by the power of God, then you will be left behind to suffer the wrath of God.
7. Those heavenly crowns are more valuable than anything in this world, yet the saints in glory willingly surrender them for the love, devotion and worship they have to God on his throne
8. What folly it is for us to allow our attachments to the passing things of this world to draw our hearts away from God!
9. May we strive to use our lives to earn many heavenly crowns, so that we may in love and gratitude cast them before our Lord's throne in glory!