

## Revelation 4:1-11, CEB

<sup>1</sup> After this I looked and there was a door that had been opened in heaven. The first voice that I had heard, which sounded like a trumpet, said to me, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in a Spirit-inspired trance and I saw a throne in heaven, and someone was seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> The one seated there looked like jasper and carnelian, and surrounding the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Twenty-four thrones, with twenty-four elders seated upon them, surrounded the throne. The elders were dressed in white clothing and had gold crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came lightning, voices, and thunder. In front of the throne were seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Something like a glass sea, like crystal, was in front of the throne.

In the center, by the throne, were four living creatures encircling the throne. These creatures were covered with eyes on the front and on the back. <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion. The second living creature was like an ox. The third living creature had a face like a human being. And the fourth living creature was like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings, and each was covered all around and on the inside with eyes. They never rest day or night, but keep on saying,

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is coming."

<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one seated on the throne, who lives forever and always, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall before the one seated on the throne. They worship the one who lives forever and always. They throw down their crowns before the throne and say,

<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, because you created all things. It is by your will that they existed and were created."<sup>1</sup>



## Sermon

August in Kansas sometimes means we're caught between seasons. Summer isn't quite finished with us, but fall is already sending advance notices through school supply displays and fall sports practice schedules. Many of us are still watering gardens - some thriving despite the heat, others looking like they've had quite enough of this Kansas summer, thank you very much. We live in two seasons at once, neither fully here nor there.

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This in-between place shows up in our spiritual lives too. We balance checkbooks while believing in heaven's promises. We schedule meetings while sensing something eternal calling us. Have you ever had one of those moments when your whole perspective suddenly shifted? Maybe you've been to Coronado Heights and seen the land spread out like a patchwork quilt. Maybe you witnessed a birth or sat beside someone taking their last breath. In those moments, our usual worries - the broken air conditioner, the work deadline, what's for supper - suddenly seem less urgent. We glimpse something bigger.

Today, God invites us to see our lives, our resources, and our church's future from heaven's own throne room. John's vision offers us new eyes to see what really matters.

Last Sunday, we began our "New Eyes" journey meeting Jesus among the lamp stands - present in our everyday struggles, walking through our congregation just as he walked among those first-century churches. We discovered Christ isn't distant but deeply invested in our daily lives, knowing our challenges intimately.

Today builds on that foundation with a dramatic shift in perspective. The same voice that spoke comfort to struggling churches now says "Come up here," and John suddenly sees from heaven's vantage point. Here's the beautiful truth: the Jesus who walks beside us in McPherson also reigns from heaven's throne. These aren't contradictory views - they're complementary. The Christ who understands why we worry about grain prices and medical bills also holds ultimate authority over all creation.

This complete picture matters especially today as we consider our Tomorrow First campaign coming this fall. When we're making decisions about sacrificial giving, when we're wondering what God might be calling us to do, we need both perspectives - Christ with us in our earthly concerns and Christ above us with heaven's unlimited resources. Let me remind you of a story from the gospels that captures this idea.

Picture a young boy that morning, watching his mother carefully wrap five small barley loaves - the poor person's bread - and two small fish, probably dried and salty. Not much, but enough to keep hunger away during a long day following this teacher everyone was talking about.

Hours later, surrounded by thousands of hungry people, the boy heard the disciples discussing the impossible situation. Andrew was asking if anyone had food to share. The boy looked at his little lunch, then at the ocean of empty stomachs around him. Everything in him said "Keep quiet. Hide your basket. What difference could five loaves make among thousands?"

But something about being near Jesus made him brave - or maybe foolish. He stepped forward, offering his entire lunch, probably preparing to go hungry himself. What happened next is history's most famous picnic. Jesus took that simple offering and multiplied it beyond all logic - everyone ate their fill, and twelve baskets of leftovers remained.

Like those elders we'll meet in Revelation who cast their crowns before God's throne, this unnamed boy threw down his "crown" - his security, his mother's loving provision. He discovered what heaven knows: when we release our grip on our small resources, we participate in God's unlimited abundance. I wonder if he ran home that night, pockets bulging with bread, heart bursting with joy, trying to explain to his mother how her simple lunch had fed thousands of people..

That boy's discovery of heaven's economics prepares us for John's even more dramatic revelation. When John wrote Revelation around 95 AD, he was stuck on Patmos - a rocky prison island where Rome sent its troublemakers. Emperor Domitian had declared himself "Lord and God," demanding worship from all citizens. Christians faced an impossible choice: burn incense to Caesar or face persecution. In this pressure-cooker moment, God pulls back heaven's curtain to show John what's really real.

Revelation 4 marks a dramatic shift in John's vision. After delivering messages to seven struggling churches, John suddenly sees an open door in heaven. What follows reads like a divine art gallery - a throne surrounded by an emerald rainbow, lightning flashing, mysterious living creatures with eyes everywhere, and a sea of glass like crystal. But here's what captures John's attention: twenty-four elders, dressed in white with golden crowns, doing something extraordinary.

Every time the living creatures praise God, these elders get up from their thrones, fall before God, and throw their crowns at God's feet. This isn't forced submission - it's joyful recognition. These aren't defeated enemies but honored leaders who understand a fundamental truth: every crown, every achievement, every resource comes from and belongs to God.

This crown-casting scene appears nowhere else in scripture, making it uniquely powerful for understanding generosity. John's readers, familiar with temple worship, would recognize elements - the sea of glass echoing the temple's bronze basin, the "holy, holy, holy" recalling Isaiah's vision. But voluntary crown surrender as worship? That was radically new, just as radical as a boy giving away his lunch.

This heavenly crown-casting scene illuminates core Methodist beliefs about possessions and generosity. John Wesley, our tradition's founder, revolutionized how Christians think about money. Wesley taught that everything we have is a "sacred trust" from God - we're managers, not owners. He lived this dramatically, earning significant income from his writings but keeping only enough for basic needs, giving away the rest. His famous rule was "Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

For Wesley, those elders throwing crowns perfectly pictured Christian stewardship. We're trustees of God's resources, which transforms everything about money. It's not about guilt or meeting quotas but joyful recognition that we're handling what already belongs to God. Wesley discovered what modern psychologists now confirm - generous giving actually increases our happiness and spiritual vitality, freeing us from materialism's anxious grip.

United Methodists understand giving as a “means of grace” - a practice through which God’s grace flows into our lives, just like prayer, scripture reading, and holy communion. Those heavenly elders found supreme joy in releasing their crowns. Similarly, we grow closer to God by opening our hands rather than clenching them. This shifts our question from “How little can I give?” to “How much can I joyfully release?” - a complete reversal of our culture’s grasping mentality. Today, we’re invited into this same crown-casting joy.

Wesley’s insights speak directly to our modern struggles. Consider financial anxiety - those 3 AM wake-ups worrying about medical bills, farm prices, or having enough for retirement. Here in McPherson, where agricultural uncertainty meets rising costs, that anxiety feels real. But when we see those elders freely casting down their crowns, we’re reminded that security comes not from our bank balance but from the God who owns cattle on a thousand hills. A single parent working two jobs discovers peace not through bigger paychecks but through trusting God as the ultimate provider.

Also, our culture constantly measures worth by possessions. From high school parking lots to country club conversations, we’re pressured to display success through stuff. But heaven’s throne room reveals different metrics. Those crowned elders find their identity not in their golden circlets but in whose presence they inhabit. A teenager at McPherson High feeling pressure to have the latest everything can find freedom here - you’re valuable because God created you, not because of your brand names.

If you’re anything like me, we sometimes wrestle with “enough.” When is enough actually enough? A farming family wonders if they’ve saved enough for the next drought. Young parents question if their kids have enough opportunities compared to their cousins. But heaven shows abundance isn’t about amounts but about source. When we see God as provider rather than our own efforts, “enough” becomes less about numbers and more about trust. Whether we’re struggling financially or blessed with plenty, heaven’s perspective offers a different way forward.

The good news is that God’s throne room reveals the universe runs on abundance, not scarcity. From creation’s first moment, God made too much - billions of stars when one would do, countless species beyond necessity, harvests that multiply from single seeds. God provided fresh manna every desert morning, multiplied a boy’s lunch into a feast, and ultimately gave us Jesus - heaven’s crown jewel cast to earth for our salvation.

This changes everything about generosity. We don’t give from obligation or guilt but from overflow. Christ shows us that self-giving love brings more joy than self-protecting fear. When Jesus surrendered his life, he gained resurrection. When he poured himself out, he filled the universe with grace that still flows today through places like McPherson.

The gospel liberates us from the lie of scarcity that haunts our economy. God’s kingdom operates on different principles than the stock market. In God’s realm, five loaves feed five thousand with baskets left over. A widow’s small coin outweighs wealthy donations. Crowns thrown down become worship that fills heaven with endless joy.

Whether you're facing financial hardship or enjoying prosperity, God invites you into this abundance mindset. Generosity isn't reserved for the wealthy - it's for anyone who trusts God's provision. This good news transforms giving from loss into gain, from duty into delight, inviting us to join God's joyful work of provision and care in our community and beyond.

Heaven's abundance calls for our earthly response. So, here are a few specific ways to practice throne room living this week:

**Begin each morning naming three specific gifts from God** - not vague categories but particular blessings like "the cardinal singing outside my window" or "coffee with my neighbor yesterday." This gratitude practice rewires our brains from scarcity to abundance.

**Choose one spending area to examine this week.** Could simplifying here create margin for kingdom generosity? Perhaps it's dining out, entertainment subscriptions, or impulse purchases at Walmart. Small redirections create significant giving opportunities.

**Offer your best skill freely to someone this week.** Repair something, teach something, create something for another without payment. Your abilities are crowns worth sharing in Christ's name.

**Practice "reverse hospitality"** - instead of always being the host, ask someone to teach you their special skill or share their story. This generous receiving builds unexpected friendships across our community's usual dividing lines.

Each generous act, however small, aligns us with heaven's reality where giving multiplies rather than diminishes joy.

Like that boy who discovered abundance by releasing his lunch, we find freedom when we view life from heaven's throne room. The elders show us that our crowns - whether money, talents, or time - find their true purpose when offered in worship. Today, we're invited to catch heaven's perspective on our giving. What looks like sacrifice from ground level looks like joyful worship from the throne. When we give with throne room vision, we join the eternal song: "You are worthy, our Lord and God." The view from the throne truly changes everything about how we see our resources and our future together.

Will you pray with me?

God, give us heaven's eyes to see abundance where we fear scarcity. Free us to cast our crowns joyfully before your throne. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In crafting today's sermon, I employed AI assistants like Claude and Apple Intelligence, yet the ultimate responsibility for its content rests with me. These tools offered valuable perspectives, but the most influential sermon preparation hinges on biblical study, theological insight, personal reflection, and divine guidance. I see AI as a supportive aid to enrich the sermon process while ensuring my own voice in proclaiming the Word of God.