

Text: Revelation 4-5

Title: “Worship Unveiled ... Worthy of Worship”

Before I get started today let me remind our men that Call of the Wild Sportsman’s Dinner is this Thursday night and you need to get your tickets today. This is a huge event for reaching men. It’s done with excellence. There’ll be great fellowship and the Gospel will be proclaimed, so plan to come and bring a guest.

By now you’ve probably heard that we are taking a bold step in our experience of worship together at our church. On Sunday, March 20 we will move to a new format where each week we will all worship together in one unified service in the Sanctuary at 10:45am. I know this raises a lot of questions about how we will deal with the different preferences people have when it comes to worship. **CARTOON 1.** Here’s how one pastor dealt with the temperature issue. How in the world can you please everyone? **CARTOON 2.** Then here’s what happened in one church. We’re not going to let that happen.

Yes, this change will require us to think not just about what pleases us, but what is best for others. And as we go through this together, the Bible shows us how we are to handle this. This is all about unity. And one of the greatest churches in the NT, the church at Philippi, was challenged at the point of unity. Here’s what the Apostle Paul wrote to them:

Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Now we come to passages like this and some people will say, “Oh yeah, I know that’s what the Bible says but I just feel so strongly about this so don’t ask me to conform to that truth.” No! It doesn’t work that way. Christ must rule in our dealings with others or our faith is a sham.

Open your Bibles to Revelation 4. To prepare our hearts for this new day I am preaching a brief series from Revelation entitled “Worship Unveiled.” Typically when we read Revelation we are looking for what it has to say about prophecy and the future. But there’s also a tremendous amount said about worship. The word “worship” appears more often in Revelation than in any other book in the NT. The Apostle John is given visions of Christ that are intended to encourage believers who are suffering for their faith in Christ. And one of the most important things we need to know in difficult days is what is true about God ... He is in control, church! Last week we saw how Christ revealed Himself to John personally, and the worship that exploded out of his heart. Here in Revelation 4 John has another vision:

Revelation 4:1 - After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

So John is supernaturally taken into a realm where he sees what’s going on in heaven.

ILLUSTRATION – When I was a kid we would go to visit my grandparents who lived at the time on a farm in Louisiana. Not far from their house there was a little country Pentecostal church. They happen to be having a revival and we could hear the music coming through the woods to my grandparents’ house. So my sister and I decided to check it out. We walked up to the church building and looked into the window to see what was going on in there. As you may know, Pentecostals have a rather distinctive style of worship and that was strange to us. I’ll never forget the experience of peeking into that church to see what was going on.

What would happen if God left the door open for you to look inside heaven to see what’s going on there? What would you see? You would see God being worshipped. And being that it is heaven, we would expect that worship happening there is exactly the way it is supposed to happen. You see, heaven is filled with amazing worship because every feature of heaven reminds us of what is true about God and the Gospel. When anyone sees God with this kind of clarity the inevitable result will be rapturous worship. Notice what we see about...

1. THE ONE WHO IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

The book of Revelation is a form of literature that is different from most of the rest of the Bible. It is called apocalyptic literature. The very first word of the book is the word *apocalupsis* which means “the unveiling.” So with mysterious symbols and images, many of them mixed, we have unveiled the truths about God, about the future, about the Gospel and about worship.

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

The most prominent feature of heaven is the throne, and more importantly the One seated on the throne. Now immediately John does not see specific features about God, as he did about Christ in Revelation 1, but he is immediately struck with the radiant glory that surrounds God and His throne. In v.3 he can only compare it to the brilliance of precious jewels and a full rainbow surrounding the throne.

Revelation 4:4 - 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.

We’re not certain of the identity of these 24 elders seated on thrones. Some believe they may represent the people of God ... 12 tribes of Israel of the OT and the 12 apostles of the NT. Or, as I am starting to believe, they may be a very high order of angelic beings. But it doesn’t really matter; the picture is the same. God is surrounded by beings with great authority, but we’ll see later they bow in worship to God. There’s lightning flashing and the deafening roar of thunder, lots of lights and sounds.

Revelation 4:5b - Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

God exists in the three Persons ... Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Later the Son comes into the throne room scene, but here we have the presence of the Holy Spirit shining like blazing lamps. Spreading out before the throne is something like a sea of glass that reflects the flashing of lightning and the blazing glory of the Spirit of God. It's all dazzling. Then John sees...

Revelation 4:6b - In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

This again is another high order of angelic beings with all kinds of unusual features that reveal their power and ability to serve God on the earth and in the heavens. And one of their greatest assignments is to offer praise to God.

Revelation 4:8b - Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

Next there is a cascading wave of worship that continuously flows through heaven. **Read Revelation 4:9-11.**

Those who are closest to God (these powerful angels) see what is true about God and cannot do anything but worship. They *see* what is true about God and then they *say* what is true about God. That's what supposed to happen in all timeless worship.

Now as the vision continues on in Revelation 5, another figure comes on the scene. John sees that the Father seated on His throne is holding a scroll in His right hand. I don't have time explain this in detail, but the scroll contains the purposes of God for the future of all things in heaven and on earth. The future is in His hands. So in this setting of God's all-consuming holiness an angel cries in v.2, "Who is worthy (who is important enough) to approach such radiant holiness and to open the seal and reveal the eternal purposes of God?" Apparently there is no one worthy, and John is crushed by this. He weeps like a baby. But wait!

Read Revelation 5:5-6. So there's the Father on the throne and the Spirit next to the throne and now the Son comes on the center of the throne ... the Trinity. He alone is worthy to approach God on the throne of the universe and take from His hand the scroll. Now let me just read the rest: **Read Revelation 5:8-12.**

So all of heaven explodes with worship. Church, that's timeless worship. That's the kind of worship God *deserves* and that God *desires*. Imagine a choir of 100 million angels singing with deafening volume, "Worthy is the Lamb..." So that is the One who is worthy of all worship. Notice next ...

2. THE FEATURES OF WORTHY WORSHIP

We want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. So in heaven things are the way they're supposed to be. One day God will make all things new ... the New Heaven and the New Earth. In the meantime our aim should be for our lives on earth to conform to God's will in heaven. And this is true in our worship. So whether it is a small group of believers in a hut in India or a throng of God's people gathered in a church building like ours there are features of timeless, worthy congregational worship:

FOCUS – Everything in heavenly worship is focused on God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And the focus in our worshipping minds has to be God Himself ... and all that is true about Him. Now what does it mean when the angels say...

Revelation 4:11a - “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power

Revelation 5:12 - “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

It means, “God you are worthy to receive praise for your glory, honor and power, displayed in the creation of the universe. Lord Jesus, you are worthy to be applauded for your power, wealth, strength, honor, glory and praise.” Our congregational worship should be focused on honoring God for who He is and what He has done. Is that the focus of your mind and heart today?

TRUTH – In the worship that is going on in heaven everything that is said about God is true. The angelic beings are in the closest proximity to God and have an unobstructed vision of God. Thus they are able to speak and sing what is absolutely true about God. We engage our minds to think what is true about God and our salvation; then we say and sing what is true.

BEAUTY AND ORDER – The description of the way the angelic beings are arranged and worship indicates that there is beauty, symmetry and order to the way in which they worship. There are things that are repeated over and over. Timeless worship is multi-dimensional; and in our new worship format we will experience that together. The primary concern in the structure of our worship is not what makes us feel good, but what accurately reflects God's glory.

SPEAKING AND SINGING – The four living creatures over and over were *saying*, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty...” (4:8). The first reference to singing is in 5:9 where it says, “They *sang* a new song: You are worthy...” And you hear singing all the way through the Revelation. But there is at least as much *spoken* about God as there is *sung* about God. We make such a big deal about music, but music can become a crutch for us. Thank God for music, but we ought to be just as blessed to *speak* what is true about God as we are to *sing* what is true about Him. Don't worship the music.

GIVING – The twenty-four elders lay their crowns before the throne (4:10), submitting to God. The living creatures *give* glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne. And the 24

elders say to the Lord, “You are worthy to *receive* glory, honor and thanks” (4:11). Worship means giving ... giving our financial offerings to the Lord, giving our praise and giving our thanks to the Lord.

VOLUME – It says in 5:12 that the angels in heaven sang with a loud voice. The word “loud” is used at least 18 times in Revelation. The volume in heaven comes primarily from the energy of our speaking and our singing. Obviously in a larger room there is some amplification needed if we are to hear all we need to hear. But when God’s people are as full of the praise of God as the angels are, then there will be volume to our worship. By the way, later in Revelation we learn that there was silence in heaven. Yes, there’s a place for silence in our worship.

INSTRUMENTS – The voice of Christ sounds like a “trumpet” (4:1) and the four living creatures and the 24 elders each have “harps” (5:8). The instruments add to the speaking and the singing.

PRAYING – In 5:8 the angels are holding golden bowls that are full of incense which represents the prayers of the saints. So these angelic beings assist in the prayers of the saints reaching to the throne. We’ll have more to say about this later in the series.

MOTION – It says that the elders “fell down and worshipped...” (5:8,14). And we are to worship with the movements of our body. We may stand or kneel or sit, bow our heads or turn our faces upward, raise our hands or cover our faces. Now there should be freedom in our worship, but we don’t ever want to allow our freedom to become a stumbling block or a distraction for others. On the other hand, we don’t judge others. The main question that should be in your mind throughout congregational worship is not, “What does God think about what that person is doing?” Your thoughts aren’t where they should be. We should ask, “God, what do you think about the worship I’m offering you right now? Are you pleased? Is it worthy worship?”

Read Revelation 5:13-14. The angels were created for that purpose. In fact, you and I were created for that purpose. The Bible says every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God.