

**Text: Revelation 7:9-17**

**Title: “Worship Unveiled ... Worship in Suffering”**

Three weeks from today is our Easter celebration. By then we will be in our new unified service and it will be exciting to fill this room with our members and guests worshipping the risen Lord. However, parking will be a challenge. So to accommodate all of our guests we need 250 cars to park off site. We have arranged for shuttle service from the TCU parking lot at McCart and Berry. Please sign up so we can make sure we have plenty choosing that option. Then just two weeks from today we move to our new format for congregational worship. Now there are going to be some adjustments for us all. Great Room crowd, you've been used to sitting close together and hearing one another sing. So here's what we want you to do. Typically people like to sit at the back. **CARTOON #1.** We want you to lean in, not kick back. So we're asking you to fill in the front section of the Sanctuary. Now the other thing I'm looking forward to is for us to have a little more breathing room in our services ... so we don't have to feel that we're on a stopwatch. **CARTOON #2.** I saw this cartoon, and I feel this way many Sundays. The important thing is for us to be steady and patient.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Nan and I went to a movie recently, and before they started showing the previews, there was a reminder to everyone to turn off their phones. There's nothing more frustrating than for the light of the screen on someone's phone distracting from the movie screen. The video announcement said this: “The big screen is more important than your little screen.” How true that is.

I'm preaching this series called “**WORSHIP UNVEILED.**” The book of Revelation is filled with many truths, but the greatest of all is the glimpse we get of what is true about God and His throne in heaven, now and for eternity. You see, worship is going on now in heaven, and will be for eternity. Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven, “May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” So the worship that goes on in heaven, revealed in Revelation, should be the pattern for our worship here on earth.

Open your Bible to Revelation 7. The Apostle John has been exiled to a place called Patmos for his faithfulness to the Gospel. And God gives John a vision that is to be communicated to certain churches in his day ... and through the Scriptures to churches like ours today. John sees God seated on His throne in heaven, and amazing angelic worship that is focused on God. God is holding in His hand a scroll representing His eternal purposes that are played out in history. But the scroll is rolled up like a sheet of paper, sealed with seven seals, and apparently there is no one who is worthy to approach God, take the scroll, open it and reveal what's inside. But then the Lamb of God, Jesus, appears before the throne and takes the scroll from the hand of God.

In Revelation 6-8 each seal is opened revealing events that will unfold as God's purposes play out. With the opening of each seal there is great suffering and trials that come upon people on the earth. There is a break between the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals. And John gets a glimpse

of what's going on in heaven. While there is great trouble and suffering on earth, worship is still happening in heaven. **Read Revelation 7:9-17.**

While everything on this earth is in upheaval, God is still on His throne and worthy of worship. And when things in this life get so crazy and so confusing, it's very important for us to keep our eyes on God and what is true about Him and the worship that He deserves. In our world there will be increasing chaos. The church must never stop worshipping wholeheartedly. Worship goes on *through* our trials, not *instead of* our trials.

Let me start by reminding us of ...

## **1. THE ONE BEING WORSHIPPED**

At the beginning of this vision John sees in Revelation 4:2 that there's a throne in heaven ... and one sitting on it. The throne of the universe is not empty. The cockpit of the universe is occupied by God the Father. Everything in heaven is focused on the One seated on the throne. This is the throne that is above every earthly government. Heavenly worship is focused on God alone. And there are angelic beings all around God on His throne who never stop saying...

**Revelation 4:8b – “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”**

God is infinitely more holy than we can imagine. God existed in eternity past, He exists today and one day He will come again in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. So the second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, comes into view in John's vision.

**Revelation 5:5 - Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”**

This is the long-expected Messiah who came and lived and died. And by His death and resurrection has won the victory. And with loud voices the mighty angels join in the praise to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ...

**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!”**

Jesus is the Lamb who was sacrificed for our sins. He is worthy to be applauded. The angels are so captivated with the vision of God and the His Son that they explode in worship. You see, we worship in response to God's revelation of Himself to us. We don't discover God; He reveals Himself to us, and the only appropriate response from humans and angels is to worship. That should be our occupation.

But also in this vision John sees...

## 2. **THE ONES WORSHIPPING**

Up to this point all we have seen is angelic worship, but here in Revelation 7 we see there are other inhabitants of heaven who are worshipping.

**Revelation 7:9 - After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.**

First, I want you to notice the appearance of this huge throng of people, more than anyone could count. They are wearing white robes and they're holding palm branches. Both of those are symbolic of victory. Down in v.13 one of the elders asked John...

**Revelation 7:13-14 - "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

This is a picture of the Church that has endured great sufferings through persecution and trial on earth, but they're not standing around signing autographs. They're worshipping. And church, this is us! We're in that crowd.

The basis for our worship is our redemption. We are made white in the blood of the Lamb! He is our purity. He is our victory. How can we not praise and worship Him? Amazing! Robes washed in red blood come out white as snow. And we wash our filthy lives in the blood of Christ through repentance and faith in Christ. Then we are made white. And we are worshippers.

This crowd was so great no one could count them. Church, sometimes we feel like we're so *outnumbered* by the world. But let's not forget that we are *unnumbered*. We're part of something huge. Don't forget that. Notice the diversity of the ones worshipping. According to v.12 they come from every nation, tribe, people and language. Humanly speaking their differences are as wide as an ocean, but in the presence of God those differences dissolve. They were standing before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

So John sees the One being worshipped and the ones worshipping, but he also sees...

## 3. **THE WAY THEY WORSHIPPED**

Again, we want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Heavenly worship is the pattern for our earthly worship.

## TOTAL PARTICIPATION

Again, in v.9 there's participation of a great multitude that is as diverse as any group could be. We need to be reminded that the Gospel is not just for people like us. God is calling out people to His Son Jesus Christ and populating heaven with people from every imaginable distinctive. So as we sit shoulder to shoulder with people of different generations from different nations ... Africans, Hispanics, Asians, Anglos ... we are reflecting God's design and desire that worship come from all of creation and from every nation. There is also...

## ENERGETIC ENGAGEMENT

I can't help but notice how engaged people are in worship in heaven. In v.10 it says that this countless throng of people cried out in a loud voice. I remind you that the word "loud" is used about 18 times in Revelation. The loudness of heaven comes from the energy of the worshipping voices of angels and humans.

And in v.11 the angels surrounding the throne fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God. Worship is not a spectator sport. There is energetic engagement by all the inhabitants of heaven, humans and angels. When God is that real to us we can't help but energetically worship with our bodies, our minds and our emotions. And then there is...

## VERBAL PRAISE

Notice that in this particular glimpse of worship there is no reference to singing or music. The praise is spoken. In v.10 the countless multitude cried out in a loud voice. In v.12 the angelic beings fell on their faces before God "saying." Now music is a gift from God. We are to sing and make music in our hearts to the Lord. But it's the truth about God and the thoughts about God that we speak that are at the heart of our worship.

Notice that there is a response in the angelic praise.

**Revelation 7:12 - "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"**

Worship is responsive. When God reveals Himself through His Word we need to be alert to what is said and echo an "amen" or "yes" or "right on" or "oh my" or whatever. And we offer an invitation at the end of each worship time. It is a response to the word that has been preached and the praises that have been sung. But also there is...

## WORSHIPFUL WORK

**Revelation 7:15a - Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple..."**

Because of the work of Jesus on the Cross they are before the throne. This is our destiny as those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb ... to be before the throne of God serving/worshipping Him day and night for eternity. The word “serve” essentially means to serve in worship. So in heavenly worship there is activity ... endless activity for the glory of God. This is what we will do for eternity.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Now when you think about serving God day and night forever, how does that make you feel? Do you feel a yawn coming on? It’s like being asked to be a volunteer and the next fifth and sixth grade lock-in. You might do it because you love our children’s ministry, but you’ll be glad when it’s over. But can you imagine being so overwhelmed with God that when you serve and worship Him time flies? You’re so enthralled with His glory that you never think to look at your watch. (I’m pretty sure our watches won’t work in heaven anyway.) So let’s start preparing ourselves for that kind of worship.

And that leads me to last thing about heavenly worship.

## **SATISFYING PROVISION**

### **Read Revelation 7:15-17.**

The presence of God in heaven will be totally unobstructed. We will be face to face with the full-on glory of God. We will feel His love like we can’t imagine here in our earthly condition. God spreads His tent over these dear saints who have come through the fiery trials of suffering. The one who came and took up the tent of a human body and dwelt among us now spreads His tent over us. One day there’ll be no more hunger, thirst and scorching heat. Now they are under the care of the Lamb and they’re drinking from the springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear they have shed in their sufferings here on this earth. That’s then, but now we can still know the satisfying provision of God in our worship.

**Psalm 16:11 - You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last week we took our youngest granddaughter Eleanor with us on a trip to see her cousins in Colorado. She was away from her mom and dad for four days, which is a long time for a three year old. When we got off the plane and started walking toward the baggage claim area we told her to start looking for her mom and dad. Sure enough as we walked along the concourse she caught a glimpse of her mom and dad on the other side of the glass wall. Oh the sheer delight! She was giggling and jumping and patting on the glass. But for a moment there was this glass wall between them. Then we walked through the revolving door and their reunion was complete as she jumped into the arms of her mom and dad. Friends, God is eternally satisfying, and we get a taste of that in this life. But there’s a glass wall still there. We can see Him, but we won’t feel His full embrace until that day. We suffer trials in this life and we know He is there for us, but we know it is not yet complete. In the meantime we worship.