

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Creation's Proper Response to God **Revelation 4**

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PowerPoint Presentation included: None

SermonAudio Blurb: There is much discussion in various circles of the need to give praise and worship to God. Each Sunday people gather for that very purpose. But seldom do we ask why we must consistently teach and exhort one another to do so. In Revelation 4 we have John brought into the presence of God in His throne room. And in that vision we have the proper, natural response to God—true worship.

I. Introduction.

- A. Today we have the privilege of getting a glimpse into heaven and the very throne room where God dwells.
- B. Heaven and most books on heaven are unsatisfactory to understand for many people. The reason is built into the very idea of several things: mortality, sin and its effects, sheer unknown, symbolic language that can only use what we know to describe what we don't know.
- C. These two chapters (4-5) go together.
 1. Ch 4 shows us the sheer "otherness" of heaven and the presence of God.
 - a. It is making a sharp, incredibly sharp contrast to chs 2-3 where worship is something we must work at and where worship is not the norm.
 - b. In other words, ch 2-3 speak of the need to worship properly to the churches and ch 4 shows how natural it is in heaven.
 2. Ch 5 shows us the need for the righteous judgment of God and God's plan to implement that judgment in its fulness.
 - a. Lord willing, next week we will see, in light of today, why it is good and right for God to judge humanity.
 - b. And we will also see an aspect of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is often not considered by the church—that because He was the true sacrifice for sin and death and because of Jesus' resurrection, He is the one who unleashes the wrath of God upon creation and He is the one who sits in perfect judgment.

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D. Central to this chapter are vss 8-11.

II. Exposition of Chapter 4.

A. Symbolism is very helpful when you deal with transcendent things.

Example, imagine you are transported to a remote culture in the deep Amazon jungle. Incredibly backwards and ancient in their practices, with essentially no contact with the outside world.

You spend years learning their language and now you are trying to now communicate with them. Now you have to try to explain to them electricity. Now, how do you do this? You will be forced to use symbolic language. The challenge is not their stupidity, but the difficulty in describing what they have never experienced electricity in anything but lightening.)

Remember this as you read for if it is hard to do this among humans, describing things humans have made, then how much more is it a challenge to describe the very throne room of God?

B. Apocalyptic literature.

1. A very unique genre into which Revelation falls.
2. Characteristics:
 - a. Mixed metaphors—if you try to separate them, you mess up the meaning of the text. Example is lion and lamb.
 - b. There are symbols that this genre uses that almost always means certain things.
 - (1) “Horn” = King or kingdom.
 - (2) You will see repeatedly the term “like.” We must see that these are not literal terms.
3. This is important in our study of Revelation because in many circles this book gets twisted in every possible manner.
 - a. Because there is symbolic and apocalyptic language many take it to extremes.
 - b. It is common to read or hear explanations about the use of numbers in Revelation in either a very symbolic manner or in a dismissive manner.
 - (1) Example: 1,000 years means a long time of undetermined length.

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- (2) Example: 144,000 Jewish males in Revelation 7 really means all of those people who are saved by God over all time, male or female; Jew or Gentile.
- (3) However you approach this book, especially chapters 4-22, how you deal with symbols and things you think are symbolic, have a very big influence in how you then understand the message and direction of the whole book.

C. The text:

1. There was a door opened in heaven and John was invited to enter to see and learn what must take place. . . .
 - a. Notice also the certainty of the words. These things shall take place, they “must.”
 - b. This is part of the blessing of 1:3—these things are certain to come to pass so hear them and heed them.
2. 4:2.
 - a. ‘. . . come up.’
 - (1) It is basic apocalyptic language that is consistently used to speak of the writer having a vision.
 - (2) And John is now invited into the very throne room of God.
3. What does John witness?
 - a. The absolute centrality and majesty of our Lord.
 - (1) “Throne” is a key word in Revelation. It is used 45 times in this book and only 11 times in the rest of the New Testament.
 - (2) It speaks of control, of sovereignty, of power. God is in control. We must realize that no matter how powerful the “thrones” on earth may be, they are all under THE THRONE.
 - (3) John may be exiled. He may be suffering. The Church may be being persecution. But God is seated in absolute authority.
 - b. The presence of these many, unique creatures (will deal with later in sermon).

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- c. Notice the other images that are presented that help create distance between John and the throne of God.
 - (1) Lightening and thunder.
 - (a) An allusion of the giving of the Law on the mountain (cf. Exodus 19:16).
 - (b) But it also gives the image of a fierce, powerful thunderstorm that is awe-inspiring.
 - (c) The forces of nature unleashed are the most basic expression of power.
 - (2) Seven lamps.
 - (a) Not lampstands of chapter 1, these are torches.
 - (b) This speaks of the Spirit.
 - (3) Sea of glass.
 - (a) “sea” in Jewish apocalyptic literature would represent chaos.
 - (b) The bible frequently speaks of the sea in negative terms, as an adversary, a destructive force.
 - (c) What are some ways you can think of where this occurs? Creation account, Jonah, and the Red Sea are examples.
 - (d) The point of this is to describe the fallen creation.
 - (e) 21:1, notice the very first thing about the New Creation. . . .
 - (f) And it again separates us from God, for we are still in this sea.
- D. The nature of angelic beings, especially the four living creatures but also the 24 elders.
 - 1. We witness the highest angelic beings overseeing the worship of God.
 - a. The images are a conglomeration of the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel.

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- (1) Strange images.
 - (2) They probably represent four key attributes of God—kingship, strength, intelligence, either the speed to execute God’s commands, or God’s care.
 - b. The eyes represent omniscience and awareness of all things.
 - c. The 6 wings, from Isaiah 6.
2. The grandeur of God’s throne is made all the more glorious by the presence of other thrones (4).
- a. 24 elders—a much talked about topic.
 - (1) Many will say this represents the Church.
 - (2) Others will say that the number 24 represents the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles, representing the totality of the people of God.
 - (3) There is the view that this represents the Old Testament priestly orders.
 - (4) Other see these as angelic beings. The argument here is that in apocalyptic literature that angels are usually present in the visions to interpret the vision.
 - (a) This last one is probably the best view.
 - (b) In each other passage they are referenced they are grouped with other angels and so they are probably a subgroup of angels, like the 4 creatures, the seraphim, etc.
 - b. The purpose of the elders are to worship and praise God.
 - c. They are enhancing the throne of God. To try to approach the throne of God requires you first go past these many smaller thrones all pointing to the greatness of the main throne.

Transition

So, having seen the various components to this vision of John’s we need to now consider carefully the core point that is made. We must see the worthiness of God to receive worship and

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the failure by humanity, and even the demonic realm, to offer it. For behind all of this is the justice of God and how terrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God without Jesus Christ. If you don't grasp the message of this chapter then you will struggle with the message of chapters 6-19.

III. The Core Message of Chapter .

- A. The point is that God is very, very great and is quite removed from man.
 - 1. This is all setting us up for chapter 5.
 - a. Chapter 4 transitions from the events/reality on the earth with the churches to heaven. With this there is a huge contrast that is made.
 - b. Below, on earth is suffering, evil, false teaching/lies, murder, weakness, and failure. The church is besieged both from without and within.
 - c. And then there is heaven.
 - 2. How should we begin to think about what we have read so far regarding God?
 - a. Consider the serenity of God, not worried, not agitated.
 - b. Consider the contentment of God.
 - c. Consider the utter lack of need for us.
 - (1) All of the angelic hosts are crying out in praise, adoration, and worship.
 - (2) The flashing forth of lights, colors and lightening adding to the power of this moment. It oozes power and sovereignty.
- B. The attributes and actions of God declared (8-11).
 - 1. First, the constant declaration by angelic beings of certain key attributes and actions of God:
 - a. Holy (8a).
 - (1) The emphasis here is that He is not like us.
 - (2) He stands above and beyond us. He is glorious and transcendent in the fullest sense possible and then beyond.

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- (3) Holiness in God is going to be seen in chapters 6-19 and we need to be prepared for it.
 - b. Almighty (8b).
 - (1) “The Lord God Almighty” is basically the New Testament way of saying YHWH/Lord of Hosts.
 - (2) This name appears seven times in this book but no where else in the New Testament.
 - (3) It is emphasizing Him as the Creator and Sustainer over all things that exist. Everything.
 - c. Eternal/self-existent(8c).
 - (1) Nothing/no one else can make this claim of eternity.
 - (2) In reality it is just a word because not one of us honestly understands it for we are creatures bound by time.
 - (3) But it also emphasizes that therefore there is nothing outside of the person of God which He needs.
 - (4) Paul captures this in Romans 11:34-36 very well: “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”
 - d. But these should not be taken individually to see them correctly. Rather, the key point is that nothing else possesses these realities and it shows His sovereignty.
 - e. He is Creator (11a).
 - f. He is sovereign (11b).
 - (1) All things are ultimately under His care and control.
 - (2) You and I exist simply because He willed that we should exist.
- C. The appropriate response to God (8-11).
- 1. We sing about the glories of God (8).

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- a. Frankly, song is often the best medium to express our praise and worship together. And it is worth noting how this event John sees is a corporate one.
- b. In those times where the Holy Spirit seems to bring you to a sense of overwhelming fullness you will find that song is the natural outlet.
2. They give glory and thanks (9).
 - a. Such a simple idea here, a spirit of thankfulness to our Lord and God.
 - b. Yet are you and I honestly marked with thanksgiving?
3. They fall down and worship Him (10).
4. Why? (11b “for”).
 - a. How aware, honestly, are you of the fact that He made you, He owns you, and He is worthy of your fullest expression of love and worship?
 - b. He made all things, this is a reason we must seriously stand firm against evolutionary thinking.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. All day, every day, this is heaven’s response to their Creator—praise and worship and thanksgiving.
 1. It is natural.
 2. It is spontaneous.
 3. It is unfettered.
 4. It is proper.
- B. All day, every day, this is not this world’s response to their Creator—godlessness, unthankful, praise and worship to creatures.
 1. Think of how often in one way or another we are exhorted, encouraged, commanded, and instructed to worship and give thanks to God in the bible.
 - a. Instead we find ourselves discontent or grasping—though we often deny that. When did you last hear this as a prayer request in your CG?

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- b. We are afraid to lose our possessions and hold tight to them. Of course we call it “being a good steward.” But really? Are you a man or woman known for generosity in money and talent?
 - c. We often operate and decide out of fear but we call it being prudent or careful.
 - d. And we are the Church! This is the stark difference between here and heaven.
2. And even more so is this found missing in the life and heart of the non-Christian (cf. Romans 1:18ff).
- C. Beloved, this needs to sink in very deeply to your mind.
1. We are fast approaching the bible’s description of God’s righteous, yet horrific, wrath.
 2. And it is not going to make sense unless you see how twisted everything is here in this age we live in.
 3. But if it settles into your soul then when God’s ordained point in time when that wrath and judgment comes you will see it is good and right.

V. Benediction/Doxology.

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Small Group Questions

- **Summer Break**