

"God Is Holy and He Is Worthy"

Do you believe that you can have faith and worship God when a lot of things in life are a mess? When the shooting took place in San Bernardino recently many people posted on social media that they were offering up "thoughts and prayers". But as you *may* know, there was a negative reaction to that. *The New York Daily News* published a headline that took up the whole front page and said; "*God isn't fixing this.*" It accused those who were tweeting "thoughts and prayers" of offering up cowardly and empty platitudes instead of taking meaningful action. The hashtag: "#godisn'tfixingthis" began trending after that on Twitter. There was a passionate debate about it as you can imagine.

I thought about all that this week because we have these issues going on in the world, and people have big issues hanging over their lives. I imagine you could read **Revelation 4** and wonder how all this sci-fi-ish imagery of God in heaven helps you face your life on earth. The truth is these truths from Revelation have helped people and can help you *if* you will see and hear what it is telling you about God and about life.

The details are fascinating but the truth is you don't even have to understand all the details and we don't have to agree on all their implications to get the message. This passage is telling us that...

I. THERE IS A GOD WHO IS MYSTERIOUSLY MAJESTIC.

When John says, **verses 1-2**, he saw a door open in heaven and heard a voice like a trumpet and was "in the Spirit", he's telling us what follows is a visionary representation of important spiritual truth.

One of the most important things we learn from this vision is that.

A. God's Glory Exceeds The Boundaries Of Human Understanding.

The descriptions here tell us that. The one on the throne had the *appearance* of jasper and carnelian, before the throne there was *as it were* a sea of glass, it's wasn't exactly a sea of glass but it was *as it were* a sea of glass. It wasn't crystal but it was *like crystal*.

D. A. Carson is a well known scholar of the New Testament who had a sister who worked with very primitive even pre stoneage people in New Guinea thirty years ago. Inspired by her experiences he says,

imagine going to a tribe like that and knowing their language fluently but having to explain something to them that they have never experienced like electricity. How would you even begin to do it? You might say, in America we have this power. It is like fire sort of. We can send it long distances through vines but they aren't really vines. We cut trees down and remove the branches and then we stick them back in the ground in rows and then we loop the things like vines from tree to tree and we attach the fire energy to one end and it travels across long distances. It comes down behind the walls and out into some small holes in our home. We stick another vine like thing in the hole and the electricity-fire-spirit-stuff comes out to make light or heat. How hard would it be to explain? We haven't even gotten to watts, volts, amps, ohms, transistors or circuit boards. It's not that those people aren't innately intelligent it's just that they don't have any categories for what you are saying. **Psalm 145:3**, says *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.* We can, as Paul says, see through a glass darkly but God's glory exceeds our experience and our human understanding. What we need to know we *can* know but we can't know it all - yet!

What we can know is that...

B. There is Spectacular Majesty to the Reality of God.

In verses 2-8 John sees five things.

1. The one on the throne. John doesn't depict any sort of human form. In **verses 2-3** he describes the one on the throne in terms of precious stones. The identification of the precious stones is uncertain. Modern jasper is a dull opaque but this stone is only mentioned in Revelation. It is described in **Revelation 21:11** which is talking about the city of God. It says, *"It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."* Some commentators suggest the jasper of Revelation is actually diamond. The carnelian is blood red. The emerald rainbow like an emerald today is a beautiful green. The sparkling jasper, the red carnelian the emerald they capture and reflect different aspects of the colors of light. **1 Timothy 6:15-16** describes God as, *he who dwells in unapproachable light...* What is clear is that we are giving a picture of a spectacularly majestic God on his throne in heaven.

2. What encircled the throne. Verse 3 says *a rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.* This is a familiar symbol of God's mercy and his covenant of grace. Perhaps another symbol of God's love is seen in **verse 4**. It says, *Around the throne were twenty-four*

thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. We will encounter these elders repeatedly in Revelation and talk more about them. I take them to be a class of angelic royalty who represent the people of God throughout all of history.

3. What came from the throne. In **verse 5** *Flashes of lightening and rumblings and peals (a prolonged reverberating sound) of thunder* display God's tremendous power and ability to bring judgment.

4. What was in front of the throne. In **verse 6** it says front of the throne are seven torches like the seven-branched menorah in the temple of God. Here we're told that this represents the seven spirits of God. Scholars are unsure if this is a figure of speech for the sevenfold fullness of the Holy Spirit or if it refers to seven unique ministering angelic spirits. But at this place in Revelation the point is not to solve every mystery but to confront you with God's majesty and to impress on you the bigness, the fullness of the power of God in Heaven. In front of the throne there was also *what looked like a sea of glass*. It isn't a sea of glass but it looked that calm and clear as crystal.

5. What was in the center? They are described in **verses 6-7** simply as *four living creatures*. They are covered in eyes they have six wings they look like a lion, an ox, one has the face of a man, and one is like a flying eagle. These spiritual or angelic beings, like the Cherubim of the prophet Ezekiel, are always close to the throne of God offering ceaseless praise. The lion, ox, man and eagle are symbols of what is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in nature. So together with the lightening and thunder, the rainbow and the light reflecting in the precious stones, and the sea of glass they picture *all* of creation serving and praising a spectacularly majestic God on his throne.

What all of this teaches us is that

II. GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP.

Look at **verse 8**, *Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."* God is holy, and Almighty and eternal.

Verse 11: *You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.* He is the creator and sustainer and he is worthy.

A. If God is Worthy than to Worship God is Healthy.

Psalm 147:1 says; *Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.* God wants us to worship him because only when we become worshippers do we come alive to the wonder of who God is and only then do we become who we are meant to be in relationship to Him.

Years ago I read an book titled *Christianity the True Humanism*. In it the authors, J. I. Packer a Theologian and Thomas Howard a professor of English literature, say the greatest fulfillment of our humanity takes place in authentic Christianity. *“The truth is that our supreme fulfillment, as moral beings made in God’s image, is found and expressed in actively worshipping our holy Creator. When the object of homage is noble, the rendering of homage is ennobling; but when the objects of homage are not noble, the rendering of it is degrading.”* As humans we will worship something. If we not worship God we will worship something less worthy and much worse for us.

I wish when we come together to worship, every single one of you whether you have had a good week or a bad week, whether you have a great voice or a bad voice, would just square your shoulders, take a deep breath and sing God's praises. Make a statement in your worship. And during your week, in the midst of each day, and maybe even especially when things are tough practice worship. Offer prayers of worship and songs of worship and a life of worship. God is worthy and worship is healthy.

If God is Holy to Worship God is Healthy.

B. If the World Seems Crazy to Worship God is Clarity.

It is clarity because it means that without denying all the craziness we don't panic or despair. We clearly see that God is ruling, working accomplishing his plans and purposes and making all things new! That is what the rest of Revelation is going to unfold. That doesn't mean we are indifferent. It *does* mean Christians who clearly see this will not be defeated in life, or in any kind of apocalyptic future tribulation. This vision of the throne in heaven is given to John to inspire courage and comfort as we fight the good fight. It's a vision of a majestic God on his throne worshipped by all of creation and all the while, in full command of all that is happening. The death of Jesus on the cross *seemed* like the ultimate tragedy and yet God brought good out of evil and raised him from the dead.

From a purely human and earthly perspective followers of Jesus and the church herself seems helpless to hold up under much less fight and conquer in the face of the enemy. However the course of history and the individual destinies of every person are not determined by circumstances on earth, or the powers of evil, or by oppressive governments or godless cultures - the one who rules over it all is our holy God and to see past appearances to *that* reality is clarity.

Conclusion

That clarity helps us live our lives every day. There is no conflict between prayer and action, as if it were impossible to pray while acting! This vision of God on the throne gives you strength to act. Knowing God is sovereign and knowing he will prevail can give you hope, to love, to fight, to repent, to rejoice. You read your Bible because in it this God has spoken and revealed himself. You follow Jesus because he is Savior and Lord, the king of kings. You fight off negative emotions, defeated feelings and seductive temptations because you belong to this God who is seated on the throne and who will in the end make all things new.

Do you belong to Him? Christ lived and died and rose again to restore lost people to a right relationship to their God. That's what Christmas and Christianity it all about. You don't earn this God's favor. You bow in humility and receive his grace. You trust Jesus as your Savior and this God becomes your Father.

Amen.