

VII. Gospel Worship In Biblical Perspective

Worship God!

“Seven Essentials in Acceptable Worship”

Revelation 4, 5

Dr. Harry Reeder

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The book of Revelation opens with Jesus calling John into a vision. Jesus tells John that He is about to show him something and He gives him a vision of His glory in Revelation 1. Then He tells him that He wants to show him the things that are and He shows him the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Then Jesus tells John He will show him the things that come after these things and that begins in Revelation 4. Now let's look at what He says in Revelation 4 of the things that are yet to come.

Revelation 4:1-11 says, *[1] After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice (Christ), which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” [2] At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. [3] And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. [4] 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. [5] From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, [6] and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: [7] the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. [8] And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

[9] And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, [10] the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, [11] “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I will be reading Revelation 5 in a moment but before I do I would like for you to navigate back with me. Each year we try to take one thread of Gospel truth and bring all of our members to focus upon it, to know it, embrace it, and focus together on that throughout a year's time. This year our Gospel truth has been 'Worship God.' So we began a journey in understanding what the Bible says about worshipping God. We are on the journey of the Gospel pursuit of God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Bible-shaped, and Holy Spirit-empowered worship of the Triune God of Glory. None of us have arrived. We are on that track and we know that worship is not by imagination but by Divine

revelation. It is not our intuition or imagination that defines worship, in fact God forbids that. He says “Make for yourselves no graven images.” We go to His Word to find out what acceptable worship is.

Beginning this year we went through six sermons. We laid down some journey markers. Why do we worship? Who do we worship? Where do we worship? When do we worship? How do we worship? We looked at the ‘that’ of worship, the purpose of worship. If you want to review those six journey markers you can find them on our website at www.briarwood.org. Now I’d like to hit one more section from the study of God’s Word about worship for the next four studies. I want to look at four Divine services of worship in the Bible.

Here are the prototypes. When the markers are followed this is where it ought to lead us. Here is displayed before us God glorifying, Christ centered, Christ exalting, Bible shaped, Spirit empowered worship. The first one we are looking at is in this study today and it’s in heaven. The last one of the four we look at will also be in heaven. We will also cover two more as well.

This first one is in Revelation 4 and here we begin to see the portrait of worship that is displayed before us as we see its perspective as well. I can’t imagine what it must have been like for John when this vision came to him. Jesus, Himself, with a voice like a trumpet, summons John to second vision. Jesus has already given John one vision in Revelation 1. Jesus is about to tell John and unfold for him what is going to take place between His ascension and His second coming and He brings us into a new heavens and a new earth. The first thing He does is He calls John up into heaven. In other words, Jesus does for John what He did for Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah. He gives them a glimpse of heaven, but He doesn’t give them a glimpse of heaven from earth. He catches him up into heaven so that John will look at heaven and earth from heaven. This isn’t John getting a perspective of heaven. This is John getting caught up and getting a right perspective over all of the creation.

How do you see the creation? How do you see the redeeming work of God? He catches him up so that his perspective is from heaven. As John arrives there with this vision of all of God’s creation from heaven, the first thing John sees is a throne. The Triune God sits upon the throne. Around the throne are four living creatures. I don’t have time to do an in-depth study on the four living creatures but to sum it up the four living creatures represent all of creation. They represent the domesticated animals, the wild animals, the birds in flight and humanity, all creation represented around the throne. This is God and here is His creation. With these word pictures John is able to see all of creation with all of its glory and majesty, now surrounding the very presence of God. The Triune God is being exalted and all of creation is surrounding the throne. Then beyond the creation is 24 elders upon 24 thrones and here He is bringing forth all the redeemed by grace from the Old Testament, the twelve patriarchs, all the redeemed by grace from the New Testament, the twelve Apostles, which were all anticipating the promises of God fulfilled in Christ. These redeemed now surround the creation and they join the creation with the four living creatures and now all of them representing all of creation engage in one singular vocation and occupation – worship!

They break into song, singing “Holy, holy, holy...” It’s not just holy or holy to the comparative but holy to the superlative. “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*” He is omnipotent. It is the God who is eternal. Now

the elders take it up and add a song of praise singing *“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”* He has flung the stars out. He has put in place the sun. There is the beauty of it rising in the sky. The beauty of it is setting. Here comes the moon reflecting it. All of His creation is magnificent as the very spring breaks forth with life, as the heat of the summer gives nourishment and growth, as the fall gives harvest and as the winter puts things in dormancy to prepare again. He knows the stars by name. He spoke and everything was brought into existence. Everything had a beginning and the One who began it is the God who was and is and is to come.

Now you see the purpose of why He brought it forth and that is to praise His holy Name. As the elders, redeemed out of that creation, see it, they take up its chant and you see the personal relationship. For You created all things and You upheld it by the Word of Your power, they exist. So we see them in this singular occupation and there are some things that stand out in that chapter. The centerpiece is a throne. The One who is enthroned in majesty is the God of glory. The text tells us He is eternal. When did God begin? Wrong question! He began all the beginnings. He is! He doesn't fit in His creation. He made His creation. He is not boxed in by time and space. He is infinite. He is omnipotent. He is almighty. He is over all. He is enthroned. Here is the One who is wholly unique, wholly other. There is none like Him. He is the Creator, the Eternal God and all of His creation is there to worship Him and give Him praise.

Now John's vision gets turned to the Hand of the One enthroned. There is a problem and then a solution. Revelation 5:1-8 says [1] *Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” [3] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it (no one living or dead), [4] and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [5] And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”*

[6] *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns (meaning power) and with seven eyes (meaning omnipotent and omniscient), which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

Here is a problem. There is this glorious picture where all of creation, and the patriarchs, the elders who represent all of those who were saved out of the creation, are there in the singular occupation of extolling the majesty of a sovereign God who is over all and enthroned. Yet John is to be told the things that are to take place after these things and here is the scroll that unfolds the glory of God in redemption. What is going to take place that brings everything to consummation with a new heavens and a new earth where God is all, over all, in all, and through all and His people will be with Him forever? That narrative, that scroll that unfolds all of that is rolled up with seven seals and of all of those gathered around the throne, can anyone open the scroll? There is NO one who can

open it. There is no one living, no one dead, no one to come, no one who is living and no one who may live. John's response is an audible wailing because this glorious His-story of redemption, coming to consummation to the glory of God in His grace, cannot be looked into, proclaimed, declared and then a nameless one of the 24 elders from his throne now stops his singing.

He looks at John and says "Weep no more! The Lion of Judah, son of Abraham, son of Judah, son of David, has conquered!" The King of the kingly line, the King of Kings of all glory has come among His people and now among the creation, there is One who is worthy and He is not simply worthy because of who He is, as glorious as that is, but He is worthy because of what He has done. He has conquered all of His enemies. He has conquered everything that rises up against Him. He hasn't destroyed it yet. The Book is going to unfold for He will come again to destroy it but He has already come and He has defeated Satan, the kingdom of darkness, sin, hell and the grave. This One has conquered and He is worthy. He takes the scroll and when He does, now the elders are moved to praise. The reason they are there is because of the Lamb. See, behold the Lion of Judah! Behold, the Son of David, the line of majesty, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I looked and I saw a Lamb, his throat slit, standing as if slain, a Lamb that fought and conquered to the death but He is not dead. See, the Lamb is standing! He has won the victory. He has given Himself for the battle to redeem His people out of a fallen creation and He is worthy because He has conquered to the grave, and though having the marks of our redemption, this Lamb is standing! He is risen, He is victorious, He has conquered and is worthy to open the scrolls.

So what is the response? They sang a new song! This God has come into a broken world. He has sent His Son and His Son has conquered so now we have a new song. We not only have a song of a majesty of a Creator who is Almighty but we have a song of a Redeemer, a song of redemption. Revelation 5:9-14 says [9] *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."* [11] *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* [13] *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"* [14] *And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Now the problem has been faced, the solution by God's grace and in His Son, who comes as a King and humbles Himself to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and now this Son has won the victory. He is worthy to unroll the scroll and the result is not only do the living creatures worship and sing to Him but now the elders now sing another song, a song of redemption that there is a Lamb who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll that redemption might be accomplished for the people of God to bring them to the glory of God in the presence of God for all of eternity. So worthy is that Lamb to receive glory, honor, praise and blessing evermore

forever and ever and ever. As they sing it, now the angels who long to be able to sing the hymn of amazing grace take up the refrain of the redeemed.

So this worship has gone from four creatures to 24 elders and then to another whole level of song and praise to God only as Creator, Eternal and Almighty but now Redeemer of a people. This great praise begins to expand gloriously and the angels join in the chorus. It rises and rises as they sing with a loud voice, "Praise to God, who is worthy to receive glory, honor, blessing and power now and forevermore!" As that benediction rises up to God, now the elders come back in and say "Amen, so be it forever!" That's what we get the opportunity to see. Our praise should be a reflection of this on earth, we the redeemed reflecting the glorious worship around the throne. We are going to keep building on this in the next three studies but I want to leave you with seven things from this text.

There are seven things in this acceptable worship that you can't miss. The first one is acceptable worship is to be the appointed response of all creation. All creation stands to the glory of God. All creation exists to His praise. It declares His glory as it unfolds in the seasons, as it makes its Light shine, as it goes into its shades, as it shows all of its colors, as He works within our hearts, made in His image that we can appreciate and declare beautiful what God has made good, true and beautiful. No, beauty is not in the eyes of the beholder. Beauty is revealed and declared by God. Do we have eyes to behold His beauty? All of creation is for His glory.

The second thing is the purpose of redemption is to bring worship. Why are these patriarchs redeemed? Why are these Apostles representing all of us? Why are they redeemed? We have been redeemed to the praise and glory of His grace. That's why we were saved. We weren't a bunch of people that needed a hand up, because we were in the intensive care unit of sin. We were dead sinners and God under no compulsion but by His own free grace and unmerited love gave His Son to save us for His glory, for His praise.

Thirdly, acceptable worship is God centered and Christ exalting. Seventeen times in Revelation 4 and 5 the word throne is used and the Triune God – Father, Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit who caught Him up – the Triune God is at the center of our worship because it is by the Triune God that we were created. We were created to worship and it is by the Hand of God's grace through the Triune God that we are redeemed. How were we made? The Father authored our existence and if He made us through His Son, in Him all things were created and then His Holy Spirit superintended the creation to bring chaos into cosmos and order. How does God save us? The Father authored our salvation, the Son accomplished our salvation, the Holy Spirit applied and brought us from death unto life to Christ who brings us to the Father, as the Firstborn has many redeemed brethren. So we praise God, Creator, Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We praise God, Redeemer, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We praise the Triune God who sustains us for by His will we exist and we're given breath day after day after day. There around the throne the sovereign and majestic God is the absolute consuming focus of worship, not the worshippers, but God Himself is gloriously exalted.

How is acceptable worship? The fourth thing is that it is reverent but unrestrained. There is adoration and there is action. There are five songs of praise that they sing. Hear the prayers rising up in praise. See the songs of praise rising up. Hear the proclamations of the glory and majesty of God as Creator and Redeemer. There is

adoration and action. See them praying, see them weeping, see them rejoicing. Hear their loud voices, hear them confessing. See them singing, bringing an offering, and casting their crowns before Him. There is adoration not simply as contemplation in the heart but adoration because the truth of who God is that has now been revealed sets on fire the heart and it erupts in the lips and the lives of His people. That's what worship is when it happens. It is not manipulated emotion. It's solid 16 ounces to the pound Biblical Truth of who God is as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer and those who have been moved by His grace, when that truth lays hold of their heart, it's like a fire in their bones. The passion erupts from the heart through the lips and with the actions they bow, praise, cast their crowns and give praise, glory and honor. They are not detached. They lift up praise to Him with all of their hearts and when they hear the truth they not only speak it, they affirm it, "Amen, forever!"

Many times in the name of reverence we end up with worship services that feel like warmed over morbid moments in a funeral home. Then in the name of unrestrained I've been in worship services that are nothing more than a three ring circus with the ring leader up manipulating everybody. Somehow in the heavens as we see this worship and God's grace as we could grow in it, there is reverence where before the King, the God of glory, He is holy, holy, holy yet unrestrained. If I need to weep I weep audibly. If I need to rejoice I rejoice audibly. I sing and there they come with the loud voice of praise into His presence. No formula can get that for us. No worship leader, no praise team, no choir, no nothing can get that for us. It has to come from the heart where you know you stand in His presence and you are full of awe yet unrestrained joy fills the soul.

Number five is that it is Divinely designed. We will take a lot more time with this as move forward but for now you worship God the way He says. Everything that God says for us to do in worship we do. In fact, everything we did today is found right here in your Bible. They proclaimed the Word. We had reading from the Word. They brought an offering by casting their crowns. They sang doxologies, hymns and songs of praise. They confessed truth just as we did a while ago or did we confess or just mumble? Were we engaged? This is truth. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, dead and buried. Here is the summation. On that cross all of hell was poured out upon Him and He drank it to the bottom for me. I believe in the resurrection. I believe in the communion of the saints. They confessed it with their heart. They sang it with their soul. It came out of their lips. All of those elements have been precisely what we have been doing today – adoration, doxology, offering, praise, confessions, prayers – all of them are right here. They did it embracing it reverently and rejoicing.

Sixthly, the gathered worship of God's people is foundational to life in Christ and for Christ. Starting in Revelation 6 you'll see war, battle, tribulation, martyrdom, death, struggle, all in all until He comes again and He overthrows death, hell and the grave and He destroys what He has already defeated. Before you get to Revelation 6 through 21 that brings you to the consummation, in all of the trials as the evil empire strikes back against our Victorious King and many of us will be casualties in those days and we'll all die to ourselves in that day but before you ever enter in to that life for Christ, He brings you to the throne to worship. Worship is foundational to live for Christ.

Do you know why pastors long for you to be in a worship service? It's not for the attendance record. First of all I know that God deserves to be the priority of your life. I know for many of us He is not. I believe in Providential hindrance. I know if you're sick you can't assemble. I believe in works of mercy, of necessity and all of that but for many of us our absence from the gathered worship of God's people before the throne of grace is not simply because of Providential hindrance or a call to mercy or ministry. It's just simply that we have something more important to do today than to give praise to the One who made you, saved you and gave His Son for you, who says "I seek true worshippers." It's on my heart because He deserves to be praised by His people. If you have drunk of His grace then it ought to burn in your heart. I will not forsake the assembling of myself with His people, but all the more as the Day approaches.

Here is another reason. I know your life worship is directly related to your gathered worship. Before we get to Revelation 6 and holding fast to Christ who conquers, He says "Let Me give you this worship service." The gathered worship of God's people is foundational to life worship. We didn't come here to say "How did Harry do? How did the choir do? How did this do?" Nobody is here to perform today. We are here to worship. Some are called to preach, some are called to sing but all of us are to sing together. We're called to pray, confess and we have come together today to give Him praise because "Worthy is the Lamb!" Worth-ship, worthy is the Lamb for by Him I was created, by Him I am saved and through Him I'm sustained day after day after day. It is foundational to my life. It's not an add-on. We lift up praise to Him. Jesus isn't just something to check off and hope that when I get to a service it's a good spiritual happy hour. We have come to give Him praise and glory for He is worthy and it is foundational as to how I live and worship. Whether I eat or drink or whatsoever I do, I do to the glory of God. It sets the thermostat.

Finally, acceptable worship is the surrender of self-denial to Christ and the engagement of exalting the Savior. When they see the Lamb they give Him their crown. They throw it in front of Him. They don't hold anything back. The very crown of my head, the crown You gave me, I now give to You. I exalt You! Behold the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb, not of a piece of me or a part of me or an hour of the week but You have my life and as I have assembled with Your people, I without restraint yet with reverence, demonstrate that God is gloriously worthy to be praised.

I'll close it this way. God does not need me. God does not need my praise. I need Him and I need to praise Him. I was made to praise Him. If you leave today and think I've gone crazy and you don't want to have anything to do with Christianity, you will leave here today and you will worship. You were made to worship. You will worship but it's whether you'll bring acceptable *latria* (worship) or fictitious *idolatria* (idolatry). You will bow and surrender yourself to sin, sex, to using some woman's body, to using technology, you'll surrender to something and it will be absolutely empty. It isn't going to work, but more than that the things of this world that are here are not to be worshipped. God gave good gifts to use for His glory. So sex is this glorious gift of God in the intimacy, to the praise of God, in a marriage bed and let it be held in honor among all. Work won't give me life but it's a dignified way to do my work heartily unto the Lord. This gathered worship leads me into true worship of the living God and keeps the idolatry of life from creeping into my life.

God doesn't need me but yet God gave His Son for me. I needed God but He didn't need me. I didn't want Him but He wanted me and He saved me by giving His only Son. See the Lamb, He's not a Passover lamb where God passed over death. Behold the Lamb who came and defeated death! Now that I see Him in all of His glory I exalt Him. If you have been saved by God's grace, then you were made and saved to praise His holy Name in a way that pleases Him. As you exalt Him and deny yourself, He will make you kings and priests and with Him you will rule and reign forever in a new heavens and a new earth. You exalt Him because He saved you and when you exalt Him, He will exalt you at the right time. Praise His Name forever! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for this time together in Your Word. Thank You for the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, Your Son, our Savior. He was slain for us, raised in glory. Praise His Name! Christ be exalted! Father be adorned! Holy Spirit do and have Your way that we might make much of Jesus, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.