

Worship in Heaven (Rev. 4:1-11), Worship on Earth

Oct. 20, 2019, Sunday School

Another time and another place I was in college. I was sitting outside the lecture hall where my Old Testament class was supposed to meet. As I was sitting there, probably reading, the professor came and sat down. This professor was also a pastor. We started a conversation and I commented on the church I attended and something going on and he responded, "Worship wars." I don't know where the conversation went from there, all I remember is "worship wars." I had never heard that phrase before. I am not criticizing what he called it, but I will be critical that it happens. We can have wars about many things, but not worship. Maybe part of the problem is that we worship the wrong things. We may worship our food, or our car, or even the past and miss the future.

Worship is our response to what we desire most. What do we most desire? We can follow the trail of our time, energy and money and then find out what we worship.

If our understanding of worship is wrong to begin with, then it will follow that we will have wars about worship.

I want to come back to this after we read the passage. Let's read Rev. 4:1-11 and talk about Worship in Heaven.

Our Theme is that in Heaven we see unashamed worship of God. This is unashamed exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Our Application is that we also worship God now as unashamed believers exalting Jesus.

Read Rev. 4:1-11:

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." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 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. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

*“‘Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”*

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all

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things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

- I. Let's briefly look at this passage in order to gain some understanding.
 - a. When I was going into third grade and we went to Myrtle Beach and I saw the ocean for the first time. I love, absolutely love looking out on the ocean. The ocean reminded me of how great God is and how big the world is.
 - b. We are little God is not just big, but amazing.
 - c. Compare a swimming pool versus the ocean. The pool is what man can do and the ocean is what God can do.
 - d. **If POSSIBLE PLAY JOHN PIPER VIDEO CLIP ABOUT THAT.**
 - e. Verse 1 has an inlusio in the Greek, “After these” it begins and ends with.
 - f. In this text John is trying to describe the indescribable.
 - g. Chapters 4 and 5 we see the the Heavenly vision. John is seeing things in Heaven.
 - h. Chapter 11:19-15:5: The second Heavenly vision, The Temple is opened.
 - i. Chapter 19:11: The third Heavenly vision. John sees Heaven opened.
 - j. The door, end of chapter 3:20, the Temple, Heaven.
 - k. The reality within the seven churches are experiencing their reality.
 - l. Verse 1 is the beginning of this vision. John says that there was a door and a voice like a trumpet said “Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things.”
 - m. In verse 2 John is “immediately” “in the Spirit.” This could mean that he was in the Holy Spirit, or Spirit just is a spiritual state.
 - n. So, it appears what he is describing in this passage is similar to Revelation 21:9 so it is possible that John is seeing the New Jerusalem right here and then he particularizes the New Jerusalem in chapter 21.
 - o. So, he describes a beautiful throne room with all kinds of jewels. Then he describes 24 thrones with elders on the thrones. The elders had crowns. I like the belief that the elders are reflecting all believers. For example, in Rev. 3:11 Jesus said not to let them take your crown. In Rev. 1:6 we are called a Kingdom of Priests. In the Old Testament there were 24 priests. 24 was an important number in Judaism. 1 Chronicles 24 we have a listing of the 24 orders of priests. The beginning of Luke's Gospel we see Zechariah's vision and we see Abijah was one of the 24 priests.
 - p. Verse 5 references flashes of lightning and thunder. These are always signs of God's presence. God is in the middle of this throne room. Remember what I said, John is trying to describe the indescribable.
 - q. Later in the new creation, why no sea? Then you look at the role of the sea in the Old Testament. The role of the sea in the Old Testament was the antagonist god. John is saying that there is no metaphysical dualism. This is an image of God's sovereignty.¹
 - r. In the temple we had the golden sea which was where the priests cleansed themselves before priestly duties. This meant that the priests uncleanness was left in the water. The sea represented the unholy or the realm of rebellion. This is a picture of God's sovereignty in rebellion.
 - s. Priests will no longer have to cleanse themselves. Robes are washed in the blood of the lamb.

¹ Dr. Mulholland's lecture at Asbury

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- t. John sees four living creatures. In the Greek it does not say “around the throne” but “in the midst of the throne.” That is where God is. In the circle around the throne. Four is the number of creation in the Jewish pole of imagery. 4 corners of the earth, etc. Now we see that there is no material dualism. There is no creation apart from God. Gnosticism would have been around and they said that material is bad. This 4 creatures are archetypes of creation:
- u. lion: may represent wild animals.
- v. OX: domesticated animals
- w. Human face: humanity
- x. Eagle: animals in the air
- y. full of eyes all around and inside:
- z. 6 wings:
 - aa. Imagery from Ezekiel's vision and Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1) the six wings: cover face, feet, fly
 - bb. John is trying to portray God's creation: God is present in creation, He is all seeing in creation in itself. Creation is not God, but God is present in creation.
 - cc. They never cease day or night: that is redundant. He could have stopped after never cease:
 - dd. Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God almighty who lives forever and ever. The 24 elders bow down and cast their crowns before the throne.
 - ee. John is seeing the essential dynamics of the Christian life.
 - ff. There are four living creatures that never rest. They are constantly worshipping the Lord. “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*”
 - gg. Up until now we have talked about the setting and Who was at the setting and that is God. God's presence was with them. Now, the response to the setting is worship.
 - hh. Look they say “Holy” how many times. Anyone, share how many times we see the adjective “Holy.” Three times. In Jewish language they could not say “holiest” so they would say something three times and that meant “most holy.” They are saying that God is most holy. He is the holiest. He Is Lord, He is God, He is most powerful or almighty.²
 - i. He is eternal.
 - ii. Then, whenever they gave glory, honor and thanks to God, the elders would throw themselves down. Wow!
 - iii. That is humility. Dr. Mulholland of Asbury Theological Seminary shared:
 - iv. We are not a bowing culture. When Dr. Mulholland enters the room the students do not bow to him, but when he taught in Korea when he came in they would bow and if a student came in late they would bow. Bowing acknowledges God as God.
 - v. Worship is allowing God to be God. Not just praising God and saying God you are God, but allowing God to be God.
 - vi. Next, these elders did not simply fall down. They offer their crowns before the throne. This is surrender. They cast their crowns. The crown represents role, authority. The Elders, who represent us, are surrendering their rule of their relationship to God, to God. Are we allowing God to be God on His terms or our terms. Casting crowns allows God to be God on His terms. John uses the

² Many of the above notes come from Dr. Mulholland's lectures at Asbury

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present tense, they “are casting.” They are continually casting crowns. Our relationship with God is a love relationship which means we are free to say “no.” This means that we continually offer our authority and power before God and surrender and say, “You are Lord and I am not.”

- vii. Lastly, they worship as well. *“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.”*

II. Some applications:

- a. Who is worthy to be worshipped? God.
- b. Who created all things? God.
- c. Your will they were and were created.
- d. John is seeing who we are and who all creation is, what all creation is.
- e. John is seeing that we existed in the heart of God's love before we were created.
- f. Ephesians 1:3: Paul notes that our lives are immersed in blessings. Verse 4: God chose us before the foundation of the world. “chose” this means to speak forth. Genesis 1: God spoke forth creation. We were in the heart of God before we were created, before anything created. There was no emergency in Heaven when we were conceived, maybe in our mother's life.
- g. Psalm 139
- h. By God's hand we existed and were created.
- i. We are not accidents.
- j. The only response is self-sacrificial worship. The only response is worship in humility.
- k. The only response is to join the elders, which we may be in that group anyways and say, *“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.”*

III. How can we let the devil make us fight over worship?