

This morning, we are continuing through the New Testament book of Revelation, the final book in the Bible. Revelation was written by John, either the apostle John who wrote the gospel and the letters 1, 2, and 3 John, or by another John, an elder in the early church. It was written late 1st century, and is primarily concerned with encouraging Christians who were undergoing persecution in the Roman Empire. The biggest key to understanding this book is to read it according to its genre. It belongs to the genre called “apocalyptic literature.” In apocalyptic literature, matters of the future or the spiritual realm are unveiled, usually through the agency of angels, in lurid colors and with many crazy symbols. Apocalyptic literature is very visual. Instead of saying “Jesus is the judge” it shows Jesus with a sword coming out of mouth. Instead of saying Jesus is sovereign over his church, it shows him holding seven stars in his hand, which are the angels of the seven churches. Instead of saying that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of all the churches, he writes that they are the seven spirits before the throne. And instead of saying that the churches are lights, it depicts them as seven lampstands. In other words, do not read Revelation literally, but recognize that it is communicating in most cases familiar truths in very unique and highly visual ways.

This morning we’ll be in chapters 4 & 5, looking at a vision John has of the throne room of heaven.

Revelation 4:1 - 5:14 - *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."*

² *At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. ³ And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. ⁴*

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. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. ⁶ Also before 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." ⁹

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ 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: 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." ^{NIV} **Revelation 5:1** Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 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." ⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" ¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" ¹⁴ The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Two main things we learn from this throne room scene:

- 1) **There is a God, and we were created to worship Him**

John sees a vision of God on the throne, looking like precious stones, and all around Him, worship is happening.

⁴ *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.*

The 24 elders are commonly thought to refer to the 12 tribes of Israel, which represents the people of the Old Testament, and the 12 apostles, which represents the people of the New Testament. In other words, the 24 elders are likely angels representing all the people of God.

⁶ *Also before 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." ⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ 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: 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."*

The four living creatures are cherubim, types of angels, who are heavenly representatives of all animate life – wild animals, domestic animals, humans, and flying animals.

In other words, all creation is worshiping God, saying "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*" and "*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.*"

Lord, you are perfect in every way, unlike us. You are eternal, sovereign over history. You deserve all glory, for you are the creator and sustainer of all that is.

This is the picture John sees of heaven and tries to put into words for us. But I would imagine that for some of you, you're not attracted. Is heaven just one never-ending church service? And why does God need to create beings who will worship Him? What are we missing?

No one has done a better job explaining worship than C.S. Lewis in his book *Reflections on the Psalms*.

“We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence, or delightfulness; we despise even more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand... worse still was the statement put into God’s own mouth, ‘whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me’ (Psalm 50:23). It is hideously like saying, ‘What I most want is to be told that I am good and great.’”

*“But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that **all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise** unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.*

Praise is a natural thing – when we enjoy something, we want to praise it. When you feel that someone is beautiful, you want to tell them. If someone has made you proud, you want to tell them. If you read a great book or watch a great movie, you want to praise it to others. If you love a team or player, you want to talk about how great they are. When you experience a beautiful sunset, or breathtaking mountain view, or incredible waterfall, you want to praise it, share it with others. When we enjoy something, we naturally want to praise it.

Lewis continues:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with... The

worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully to “appreciate”, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude.

When we enjoy something, our delight is incomplete until it is expressed. Ever watch a movie by yourself? See a moving video? Listen to an amazing song? Read an inspiring article? What do you want to do? Tell others about it! Post it on Facebook or share it on Instagram! Express to others how amazing it is and hope that others join you in praising it! Shout it from the rooftops so that others will join in praising and share in the enjoyment! Share it with others so that they can join you in praising it.

Lewis continues:

*It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine that “Heaven” is a state in which angels now, and men hereafter, are perpetually employed in praising God... To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression, our joy no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” But we shall then know that these are the same thing. **Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.**”*

If we were to discover the most perfectly beautiful thing, and if we were able to perfectly enjoy it and express our enjoyment of it and share that joy with others – that would be heaven.

We were created to worship. We naturally praise that which we enjoy. When we find joy in something, we want to praise it, to tell it how amazing it is, to share it with others so that others might enjoy it with me. We want to study it, learn about it, and know everything we can know about it.

Does this help you understand worship? Worship is not a needy, petulant God demanding that people tell Him how amazing He is. No – worship is God inviting us to enjoy Him, His love, His beauty, His joy, His peace. And the more clearly

you see Him, the more accurately and intimately you know Him, the more you will love to praise and worship Him. That, my friends, is heaven. That is why all who are gathered around the throne can not stop praising Him.

So that is what worship is. What do we learn from this passage about worship? Look at what they say and what they do:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

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."*

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

He is perfect in every way. We owe everything to him. We owe our salvation to him. They praise God for who He is and what He has done.

And what do they do? In v. 10, we read:

They lay their crowns before the throne...

They lay down their pride, their glory, their rights, their kingdom, and give it all to the king. Worship involves giving everything up. Consider this short parable of Jesus:

Matthew 13:44 - *"The kingdom of heaven is like **treasure hidden** in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."*

It's like living near a barren field that costs \$50,000. It would cost you everything to get it, so you have no interest. But then you learn that there is treasure hidden in

that field. Millions of dollars of treasure. Suddenly that \$50,000 seems like nothing to give up – in fact, you are eager to do it. That is worship. When you find the true treasure, Jesus, you realize that it is all His. Your money is his. Your time is his. Your sexuality is his. Your dreams are his. Your past is His. Your relationships are his. That is worship – realizing that all your heart desires is in Him, and being willing to lay everything else down so that you might have more of Him.

There is a God, and we were created to worship Him.

2) **Jesus has fulfilled God's plan of salvation, and therefore we have hope**

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

Who is worthy to open the scroll? The scroll contains God's plan of judgment and redemption. Who has sovereign authority over this plan? Who can execute this sovereign plan?

A person must open it, but no person was worthy because all are sinners and stand under the judgment contained in the book.

It's like a wealthy relative dying and leaving a fortune, but writing that only someone who has met certain standards can open and execute the estate, and no one meets those standards.

John weeps because God's glorious plan will not be carried out. Why does he weep? **Think about what it truly means if there is no one to carry out God's plan of salvation.** It means there is no hope for restoration with God. No new heavens and new earth. No justice for those who have suffered. No judgment on the oppressors. No restoration with loved ones. It means that death is the end. It means that evil wins. It means that all is lost.

The harsh reality is that apart from what Jesus has done, life is essentially meaningless. You can try to create all the meaning you want, but in the end, everyone you love will be taken from you, you will cease to exist, and the world

will eventually be destroyed and all will be forgotten. That is why John weeps – no one is worthy to carry out God’s plan of salvation.

But then there is hope:

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." ⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Seven horns symbolizes fullness of strength. Seven eyes is from Zechariah, and refers to God’s ability to see throughout the earth.

⁷ He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

We reign with him, we minister to God and to others.

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" ¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" ¹⁴ The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

He hears the elder speak of the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Genesis 49:9-10 - You are a lion's cub, O **Judah**; you return from the prey, my son. Like a **lion** he crouches and lies down, like a lioness-- who dares to rouse him? ¹⁰

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

He turns and looks, and sees a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. Passover lamb in Exodus 12, and the lamb from Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53:6-7 - We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

We have hope because by his suffering, death, and resurrection, he has fulfilled God's plan of salvation, making a way for us to be right with God again. And we have hope in the midst of our own suffering because He conquered through His own suffering.

And we have hope because He is on the throne. We see him on the throne before we hear about the suffering that is to come. We need to know that He is on the throne. Like a radio in a concentration camp telling of the victorious army and the certain defeat of the enemy. The temporary reign of evil kings will be taken away from them. God will reign eternally, while they will be judged.

There is a God, and there is a Savior. He is on the throne. Worship Him and put your hope in Him!