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# CHRIST-CENTERED WORSHIP: GOD'S HISTORIC & ETERNAL GOAL (REVELATION 4&5)

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- Defining **Worship**:
  - “Worship” comes from the West Saxon word “weorðscipe” referring to something worthy –
  - The sense remains in our Christian usage of the word “worship” referring to “ascribing” worth (*not* “making” or “giving” worth).
  - Immediately, worship is more than singing or music: the ascribing of worth is a heart/body/life disposition: singing and music is a subset of a context of “all-of-life” worship.
  - With that in mind, our study will determine implications of theology on corporate worship.
- There are many places to go to develop a theology of worship in Old and New Testament. Many volumes have been written that are more comprehensive than what we can accomplish in a brief study.
- Heaven (specifically, the eternal state) is what all blood-bought, spirit-transformed believers look forward to. It is the place and time of which all human worship is a faint mimic. So to reset our minds about what our own worship must look like, what better opportunity than to peel back the veil of the future and look into heaven itself!
- Revelation 4 & 5 gives us this opportunity, and from these two chapters, we want to derive two fundamental lessons about our own worship.<sup>1</sup>
  - The transcendent God of old is the God of now (Revelation 4)
  - He is immanent because of His Son (Revelation 5)

## GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP: THE HEART OF HEAVEN (REVELATION 4)

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- John is taken up into heaven and beholds the throne room of God himself. Points to note:
- Revelation 4 is setting the stage, the action is Revelation 5. Still, there is much to learn from Revelation 4.
- This language of description is not to be literally drawn.
  - John is using the language of his age to describe ineffable realities. Heaven cannot be properly described in the language and the experience of any human generation – all we can do is use comparative language (like explaining television to a primitive tribe). So we ask, what do the words represent?
  - Secondly, the language of apocalyptic literature is highly symbolic. While there are literal realities behind the symbols, often, to describe the scene, metaphors will mix (e.g. Lion/Lamb) to explain the reality fully. The intention is not to draw a picture, but to get a glimpse of supernatural transcendence.
- Let's examine the text:

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to D. A. Carson for his lectures in Revelation

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## WORSHIP MUST REFLECT THE INDESCRIBABLE MAJESTY OF GOD (2B-4)

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### 1. The Throne & Angelic Thrones represent God's reigning majesty (2b)

- a. Isaiah 6
- b. Psalm 47:8
- c. V4 – elders (probably angels)<sup>2</sup>
  - i. They are seated on thrones
  - ii. They have golden crowns
  - iii. Their function: praise. Angelic “powers and authorities” are tasked with ascribing praise to one greater than themselves. Surely, this is a great king! One's greatness is known by one's lackeys. God's lackeys are the great powers and authorities in the heavenlies.
  - iv. This God is BIG.

### 2. The Splendor represents God's indescribable glory (3)

- a. Jasper: opal/diamond – uncut, they glitter
- b. Carnelian/Sardinian - red stone
- c. Emerald – green
- d. Rainbow – vertical display of colored light (allusions to Noaic covenant)
- e. How do you describe the view of a God who is infinitely beautiful, awesome in power, supreme in love, perfect in all his ways? How do you use language of earth to describe infinite glory?
  - i. Psalm 104:1-2
  - ii. 1 Tim 6:16

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## WORSHIP MUST REFLECT THE TRANSCENDENT HOLINESS OF GOD (V5-8A)

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### 1. Three Indicators demonstrate the inaccessibility of God (5-6a)

- a. *Lighting and Thunder* (5a)
  - i. Nature unleashed – the greatest demonstration of power accessibly for humans before the atomic age.
  - ii. Recalls to mind Sinai (Exodus 19:16)
- b. *Lamps* (5b) either:
  - i. The Spirit of God (“seven” representing fullness)
  - ii. Seven angelic beings tasked with carrying out God's will
  - iii. In any case, the sense is one more preventing layer before once can access God's very throne.
- c. *Glassy Sea* (6a)
  - i. Literally “glassy” – not transparent (omniscience, usually represented by eyes), but reflective – shiny, sparkling.
  - ii. The sea before the throne, recalls OT thought
    1. Chaos, confusion, turmoil, the fallen order
    2. Remember Rev 21,22 – in the new heavens and new earth, there is no sea. – no sin, no fall, no danger, destruction, decay
  - iii. Here, humanity's very fallenness separates man from God as a sea.

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<sup>2</sup> Carson provides six good reasons for angelic view. (a) 5:9 – “people for God” (b) 5:8 – to offer prayers of God's saints to God is an angelic function (c) 14:3 – elders cannot sing a “new song” (personal redemption) (d) Acts 1:10. Matt 28:3 – white is common angelic raiment (e) Thrones/principalities – here they have thrones (f) 7:9-11 (19:1-4) – the elders sit in the “ring” between high order angels (Cherubim/seraphim and angels)

- iv. Amis the (misguided) talk of the “God of grace of the OT” we must not forget that the God of old is the God of now. He is dreadful, and supreme, and terrible in his presence, and utterly separated from humanity.

## 2. Four worshipping beings demonstrate God’s sovereign control (6b-7a)

- a. *The language in Revelation 4 combines Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1:10*
    - i. Isaiah, Seraphim, “burning ones” – 6 wings
    - ii. Ezekiel, Cherubim
    - iii. Four creatures, around the throne – the idea is a characterization of the administration of God’s rule.
  - b. *The creatures (v7):*
    - i. Lion: The Royal Throne
    - ii. Bull: Strength, Endurance, Stabliity
    - iii. Man: Wisdom, Intelligence
    - iv. Eagle: Provident Care (Ex 19:4 – eagles and their young)
  - c. *The descriptions (v8):*
    - i. Wings (from Isaiah): two for reverence/humility (eyes), two for modesty (feet) and two for speedy obedience (flying)
    - ii. Eyes: omniscience
- Remember: John had to navigate all these being, events and items to get to the very presence of God.

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## WORSHIP MUST REFLECT THE STUPENDOUS AWE OF HEAVEN (8B-11)

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### 1. Like heaven, our worship must reflect a true representation of God's sovereignty over all (v8b-9)

- a. *Holy, Holy, Holy (v8b)*
  - i. This word is not an *addition* to the prior descriptions, it is a *summary statement* of the heavenly scene.
  - ii. Holiness:
    - 1. Separateness?
    - 2. Morality?
    - 3. The divine adjective – “Holy”
      - a. He is alone Holy – separate, transcendent,
      - b. and therefore whatever he demands for his service is separate to him – the vessels for worship (OT) the people who worship (Rom 12:1-2) and their lifestyles.
- b. *Unending Worship to an Eternal God (8c-v9)*
  - i. He is self-existent – was, is, is to come: as long as he is, praise is.
  - ii. He lives forever (v9)

### 2. Like heaven, our worship must reflect a true representation of ourselves before God (v10-11)

- a. *All glory is derived (v10)*
  - i. They are beings of great glory.
  - ii. They fall down – greater glory is here
  - iii. They cast down crowns – all glory is given, not owned. Highest thrones ascribe him worth.
- b. *All existence is from him (v11)*
  - i. Worthy – a cry for when an emperor was crowned. Here, highest heavenly beings cry worthy. Why? Their reasons:

1. He created all (v11b) – he is maker, we owe allegiance and submission.
  2. All things exist because he wills it (11c) – we would not be were it not for his desire.
- ii. An utter God-focused outlook. Here there is no “my way”.

**What lessons should we take about our corporate worship from this scene so far?**

## CHRIST-CENTERED WORSHIP: THE ENTERPRISE OF ETERNITY (REVELATION 5)

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- As we step onto the stage of this heavenly scene, we behold the Son. But we must realize that what we see in Revelation 4 & 5 is the fulfillment of what has been outlined throughout God’s revelation.
- Jesus himself summarized all of history’s worship to point to himself as the location of worship:
  - John 2:19
  - John 4:21-22
- So we see the unfolding here in eternity. What breaks into the scene of an ineffable, transcendent God is the victorious lamb. Let’s look at the passage:

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### THE VICTORY OF THE SON IS THE CENTER OF GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE (V1-5)

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- 1. The scroll represents the fullness of God’s eternal purpose (v1)**
  - a. In God’s right hand – it is associated with power, therefore a powerful purpose
  - b. Written within and without – a comprehensive legal document
  - c. Sealed with seven seals – opened in stages from Ch. 6 onwards.
  - d. Main idea: the unfolding of the fullness of God’s purposes for salvation and judgment. This is the final chapter, the culmination, the full completion of God’s plan
  
- 2. The challenge is for one worthy to carry our God’s eternal purpose (v2)**
  - a. The strong angel cries out a challenge – who is worthy?
    - i. Not just to begin the unfolding of God’s fullness of purpose,
    - ii. but even to read the scroll
  - b. Recall the barriers to God’s throne:
    - i. The sea, the separateness
    - ii. The storm and splendor, the glory
    - iii. The beings of majesty
    - iv. Who is exalted in rank, full in perfection, perfect in holiness enough to cross through and take the scroll
  
- 3. The tragedy is that no creature is able to meet this challenge (v3-4)**
  - a. *Crisis:*
    - i. Not in heaven – no heavenly being, none earth-bound
    - ii. Not earth – no human
    - iii. Not under the earth – (abode of the dead) no spirit, no power
    - iv. All are created all exist by God’s will. None meets the challenge, for they are part of the plan, not apart from it.

- b. *Tears:*
  - i. John weeps as he realizes the significance
  - ii. Existence is meaningless unless God's purposes of redemption and justice are unfolded – what is left is grief.
  - iii. More specifically, unless the Son enters history, there is no joy, only tears.

#### 4. **The Lion represents the triumphant Son, appointed to be God's agent of redemption (v5)**

- a. *The Lion's symbolism:*
  - i. From the beginning. Gen 49:9-10 Judah, the Lion's cub. Even in inter-Testamental writings, the lion is connected to the Messiah
  - ii. "The lion" very much known to be David's greater Son.
- b. *The Lion's Description (v5):*
  - i. The lion of Judah
  - ii. The Root of David:
    - 1. Root: Isa 11:10 – the who precedes David is the *eternal* Son
    - 2. Shoot: Isa 11:1 – the one who is the seed of David is the *incarnate* Son
    - 3. So Rev 22:16 – shoot and root.
  - iii. He has conquered – a triumph through great suffering, as will be seen.
- c. He is able to open the scroll and the seals. He is fit, because He is God!

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### THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS THE CENTER OF THE SON'S HEAVENLY GLORY (V6-14)

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#### 1. **The Son appears as a lamb who triumphed through a sacrificial atonement (v6-8a)**

- a. *The lamb represents the centrality of Christ's cross work*
  - i. The lamb is a sacrificial lamb
    - 1. As if slaughtered (v6) – symbolizing sacrifice
    - 2. Yet alive! Triumph! Revelation 1:18
  - ii. The lamb *is* the lion
    - 1. Isa 53:7 is true, yet this is no fallen lamb! Utmost power, utmost self-sacrifice
    - 2. Notice: v6 Standing
    - 3. v6b – seven horns (full power), seven eyes (omniscience)
    - 4. v6 – standing in the center of the throne and the four creatures – he emerges *from* the throne. Who else can stand there? None of the creatures do! This is God himself. Trinitarian language (John 1:1).
- b. This is the lamb "from God" (John 1:29) who is powerfully able to take away the sins of the world. Simply because he is God himself – none other is able.

#### 2. **The transformed worship of heaven is described as a "new song" of redemption (v8b-14)**

- a. *The "new song" is a redemption song (v8b-10)*
  - i. The only-worthy lamb takes the scroll, and there begins worship (v8b).
    - 1. Notice who they fall before, as contrasted with 4:10. From here on, Revelation describes the almighty often as God and the Lamb.
    - 2. The worship of the Son is inseparable from that of God, for He is God revealed!
  - ii. The harps represent joyful, triumphant celebration

1. Psalm 137:1-4
2. Does this have bearing on the music wars? It may be time to move away from too much discussion on style toward what contributes toward a scene more reflecting Revelation 4&5!
- iii. The golden bowls of incense are prayers of the saints
  1. "Sweet smelling aroma" related to the OT worship
  2. Here, the picture is of Christ's triumphant work opening up the possibility for heard and answered prayer.
  3. Because of the lamb, even the saints have access to the transcendent God!
- iv. So consider the new song in light of the old!
  1. 4:11 – sovereign of creation
  2. 5:9-10 – heaven's song changes because of the Lamb, and he is central! Heaven is full of worshippers precisely because of the lamb, is this not a reason for harp-celebration?
  3. Some aspects of the new song:
    - a. Redemption purchased by sacrificial death – by your blood you ransomed people for God
    - b. Redemption which covers a broad multitude – notice the application of the redemption, "you ransomed people... from every tribe and tongue and language and people and nation" – no racism/casteism in heaven or in the Gospel!
    - c. Redemption which is God-centered – "ransomed for God". It is for his own renown that he works (Eph 1:12,14) and his redeemed are his own possession, not their own (1 Peter 2:9)
    - d. Redemption which is triumphant – See what he works for us, the elect – v10: kingdom of priests who reign on earth! These mediate God to the world through the Gospel, and the world to God!
- b. *The "new song" is sung in increasingly growing chorus (v11-14)*
  - i. First, all of heaven sings (v11)
    1. The fullness of perfection is sung (v12)
    2. Notice: seven fold chorus
  - ii. Then, all of the universe sings (v13-14)
    1. All creatures, all nature – this worship meeting is a significant event. Why?
    2. All of the universe is marred, groaning (Rom 8:22-23), because of the fall and sin
    3. Here is restoration being fulfilled, which will culminate in Revelation 21 & 22 in a new heavens and new earth.
    4. The Son is the one who brings this about. So at the cusp of this new reality, everyone joins in – to Him who sits on the throne **and to the lamb...** (cf 22:1)

**What lessons should we take about our corporate worship from this completed scene of heavenly worship?**