



Part 14: Faithful Worship and Witness

Revelation 4 & 5

Worship is God-centered, for all people, to reign with God and to fall down.

The Apostle John is exiled on the island of Patmos, where he receives a vision of heaven. Twice in the beginning of Revelation 4, it says, *idou*, “Behold!, Look!” Just as John was calling the church to look, he calls us to look and worship.

Question: What is worship? Who do we worship? How do we worship?

“For no other book of the Bible presents us with the fundamental issue of discipleship, and, therefore, the fundamental issue of life, as sharply. It is the fundamental issue that was facing those who received the document in the first century: Whom will I worship? ... The powers of the present age or Jesus Christ? To whom will we give our ultimate allegiance? In the imagery of the book - to the beast, with the seductive offer of pleasure and wealth, or to the slaughtered Lamb, with his offer of life? Who will we follow as we make our way through this world? By whose value system will we walk? ... What will shape my lifestyle? The kingdom of God in Jesus Christ or humanity in rebellion against God?” Darrel Johnson, “Discipleship on the Edge”

Revelation 4 and 5 are beautiful pictures of Heaven, yet with freaky looking animals all worshipping God. In chapter 4, God is worshiped as Creator, and in chapter 5 as Redeemer. We see that the Almighty One is also the Merciful One. We see this stunning and shocking image of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who is the slain lamb. And God wants us to have a foretaste of this heavenly worship now.

Worship is God-centered. Worship is for all people. Worship is to reign with God. Worship is to fall down.

WORSHIP IS GOD-CENTERED

God-centered worship is at the very core of worship. As Darrel Johnson says, our worship can easily be “need-centered,” “issue-centered,” or “experience-centered.” At times we come to worship primarily to have all our needs met. Or we worship to be a part of some great social issue. Or we worship to get a certain kind of spiritual “high.” It tends to be all about us and not God at the center. It tends to be us sitting on the throne of our lives rather than God on the throne.

The throne is the dominant image of Revelation – 47 times total, 10 times in Revelation 4. It is a brilliant and beautiful image of worship centered by the throne - “on the throne, from the throne, behind the throne, in front of the throne, and around the throne.”

In Revelation 4:2, we see that there is someone seated on the throne. We soon learn that it is the Lord God Almighty. In verse 3, we see a description of the throne using earthly imagery of beautiful gems and a rainbow. In verse 4, we see that there are 24 thrones surrounding the throne. This most likely represents the redeemed people of God: 12 tribes of Israel plus 12 apostles of Jesus. It is the church, the old, and the new surrounding the throne. In verse 6, we see a brilliant and dazzling picture of God’s power and might. And finally, in verse 7, we see a sea of glass, clear as crystal. The sea in Ancient Near East culture represented chaos. Here we see God bringing calm to the chaos.

You might ask, “What difference does this make to me?”

From John’s perspective, this is huge. In AD 95, the year before John is exiled, the Roman emperor Domitian killed 40,000 Christians. Even Timothy, Paul’s disciple, was beaten to death. John’s world was falling apart, and it felt like Domitian on his throne with his rule and reign was killing everyone and destroying the Christian faith. And so, when John looked and saw God seated on His throne, it gave him hope and life. For God is the one who is on the seat of authority and power. He is the one who sits on the control center of the universe.

But what does it mean to us? Simply - God reigns! The Almighty and merciful reigns. The Lion, who is the lamb, reigns. So, when you don’t get into the school or get the job you want – God reigns! When you lose your job – God reigns! When there is financial uncertainty – God reigns. When you have a health crisis – God reigns. When your marriage is struggling – God reigns. When your kids have walked away from the faith - God reigns. When a loved one dies – God reigns.

I often find that we truly know who is on the throne of our lives by our response to deep loss in our lives. On November 28, 2010, the Buffalo Bills faced off against their rival, the Pittsburgh Steelers. In overtime, the Bills’ QB, Ryan Fitzpatrick, bombs a beautiful pass to Buffalo Bills wide receiver Steve Johnson to win the game...but Johnson drops it. Shortly after the game, Johnson tweets, “I praise You 24/7!!!! And this is how You do me!!! You expect me to learn from this??? How??? I’ll never forget this!! Ever!!

Thx Tho.” Wow, he is ticked off at God. Here’s the problem; he is reducing his relationship with God to a formula: if I do all this for God, He should do this for me. He wants to reign.

I don’t think any of us are making millions of dollars playing football and have dropped a game-winning touchdown. But we have had loss in our lives. How do we respond?

WORSHIP IS FOR ALL PEOPLE

Because God is the center, all of creation should be centered in Him, worshipping Him. As Revelation 4:11 says, “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 ultimate goal of God in all of history is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. His goal is the gladness of his people because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” - John Piper

WORSHIP IS TO REIGN WITH GOD

Worshipping God is not about becoming chubby baby angels and playing harps for eternity. It is about being a part of God’s reign in the new heaven and the new earth. Revelation 5:9-10 says, “and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

We will all have jobs creating and cultivating the flourishing life He desires for all. It like a new garden of Eden. There will be gardeners, carpenters, chefs, artists, and engineers. I don’t think there will be lawyers ... don’t tell Doug that. The fullness of us in the fullness of God’s presence in the fullness of the new heaven and earth.

God’s reign is also now. Jesus inaugurated His ministry with these words, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” And when we say the Lord’s prayer together, we say, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We are asking for His rule and reign now as a foretaste of it in the new heaven and new earth.

WORSHIP IS TO FALL DOWN

There is a striking image of falling down in worship. Three times in Revelation 4:5 it refers to the elders, which is a depiction of all the redeemed people falling down in worship. Rev. 4:9-10, 5:8, 5:14. The Elders falling down and laying their crowns before the throne is a beautiful picture of them laying their sense of esteem, rule, and power before God. The reality is that all we have is really a gift from God. It is all grace. And how does it compare to being in the fullness of God’s presence?

At the end of Revelation, after the apostle John has received this vision, it says in Revelation 22:8-9, may we fall down and worship God.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- With this imagery of heavenly worship represented in Revelation 4 and 5, what resonated with you and what confused you?
- How have you responded to loss in your life? What is most difficult for you in worshipping God?
- How do you worship in a God-centered way? What next step do you think God might be calling you to take?