

Come, Let Us Adore Him! Revelation 4—5

The spiritual worship is perhaps one of the greatest needs in our individual lives and in our churches. There is a constant emphasis today on witnessing for Christ and working for Christ, but not enough is said about worshipping Him. To *worship* means “to ascribe worth” (see **Rev. 4:11; 5:12**). It means to use all that we are and have to praise God for all that He is and does.

Heaven is a place of worship, and God’s people shall worship Him throughout all eternity. Perhaps it would be good for us to get in practice now! A study of **Revelation 4—5** will certainly help us better understand how to worship God and give Him the glory He deserves.

If **Revelation 1:19** is God’s inspired outline of this book, then **Revelation 4** ushers us into the third division: “things which shall be hereafter.” In fact, that is exactly what God said to John when He summoned him to heaven! It would appear that, in this experience, John illustrates what will happen to God’s people when the church age has run its course: Heaven will open; there will be a voice and the sound of a trumpet; and saints will be caught up to heaven (**1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18**). Then, God’s judgment of the earth can begin.

But before God pours out His wrath, He gives us a glimpse into glory and permits us to hear the worshipping creatures in heaven as they praise God. Two aspects of their worship are presented for our instruction and imitation.

1. They Worship The Creator (4)

The key word in this chapter is *throne*; it is used fourteen times. In fact, this is a key word in the entire book, appearing forty-six times. No matter what may happen on earth, God is on His throne and is in complete control. Various teachers interpret Revelation in different ways, but all agree that John is emphasizing the glory and sovereignty of God. What an encouragement that would be to the suffering saints of John’s day and of every age in history.

Using the throne as the focal point, we can easily understand the arrangement of this exciting chapter.

- a. **On the throne—Almighty God (vv. 2-3a).** This is God the Father, since the Son approaches the throne in **Revelation 5:6**, and the Spirit is pictured before the throne in **Revelation 4:5**. There is no possible way for human words to describe what God is like in His essence. John can only use comparisons.

- i. Jasper is a clear gem (**Rev. 21:11**) and the sardine is red.

- ii. The Lord is robed in light, according to **Psalm 104:2** and **1 Timothy 6:16**. Both the jasper and the sardius (sardine) were found in the breastplate of the high priest (**Ex. 28:17-21**).

b. Around the throne—a rainbow (v. 3b). This rainbow was a complete circle, not merely an arc, for in heaven all things are completed. The rainbow reminds us of God's covenant with Noah (**Gen. 9:11-17**), symbolic of His promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. God's covenant, as we shall see, was not only with Noah, but also with all of His creation.

Judgment is about to fall, but the rainbow reminds us that God is merciful, even when He judges (**Hab. 3:2**). Usually, a rainbow appears *after* the storm, but here, we see it *before* the storm.

- c. Around the throne—elders and living creatures (vv. 3-4, 6-7).** The rainbow was around the throne vertically, while these heavenly beings were around the throne horizontally. They are, as it were, the king's court.
- i. Who are these twenty-four elders seated on thrones? It is unlikely that they are angels, because angels are not numbered (**Heb. 12:22**), crowned, or enthroned. Besides, in **Revelation 7:11**, the elders are distinguished from the angels (see also **Rev. 5:8-11**). The crowns are "victor's crowns" and we have no evidence that angels receive rewards.
 - ii. These elders probably symbolize the people of God in heaven, enthroned, and rewarded. There were twenty-four courses of priests in the Old Testament temple (**1 Chron. 24:3-5, 18**; see also **Luke 1:5-9**). God's people are "kings and priests" (**Rev. 1:6**), reigning with Christ. Since there were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles, perhaps the number twenty-four symbolizes the completion of God's people.
 - iii. The white robes and palm branches speak of victory (see **Rev. 7:9**). These are the "overcomers" who have conquered because of their faith in Christ (**1 John 5:4-5**).
 - iv. Also, around the throne, John saw four 'living creatures' ("beasts" in the *King James Version*) who were nearer to God than the angels and the elders. They resemble the cherubim that the prophet Ezekiel saw (**Ezek. 1:4-14; 10:20-22**), but their praise (**Rev. 4:8**) reminds us of the seraphim of **Isaiah 6**.
 - v. The author believes that these special creatures symbolize God's creation and are related to God's covenant with Noah (**Gen. 9:8-17**). The faces of the living creatures parallel God's statement in **Genesis 9:10**—His covenant with

Noah (the face of man), the fowl (the face of the eagle), the cattle (the face of the calf), and the beasts of the earth (the face of the lion).

- vi. These creatures signify the wisdom of God (“full of eyes”) and proclaim the holiness of God. They are heavenly reminders that God has a covenant with His creation and that He rules His creation from His throne.

No matter what terrible judgments may fall on God’s earth, He will be faithful to keep His Word. Men may curse Him during the judgments (**Rev. 16:9, 11, 21**), but nature will praise Him and magnify His holiness. Some students see in the four faces described (**Rev. 4:7**) an illustration of the fourfold picture of Christ given in the gospel accounts. Matthew is the royal gospel of the King, illustrated by the lion. Mark emphasizes the servant aspect of the Lord’s ministry (the calf). Luke presents Christ as the compassionate Son of Man. John magnifies the deity of Christ, the Son of God (the eagle).

Finally, the name used by these creature, “Lord God Almighty” emphasizes the power of God. As mentioned in **Chapter 1**, the name *Almighty* is used nine times in Revelation. The only other usage in the New Testament is **2 Corinthians 6:18**, but it is found at least thirty-one times in Job, a book that magnifies the power of God in nature.

- d. **Out of the throne—storm signals (v. 5a).** “Out from the throne comes flashes of lighting and sounds and peals of thunder” (NASB). These are indications of a coming storm and reminders of God’s awesome power (**see Ex. 9:23, 28; 19:16**). These “storm signals” will be repeated during the time of judgment, always proceeding from the throne and temple of God (**Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18**). God has indeed prepared His throne for judgment (**Ps. 9:7**; note also **77:18**).
 - i. Our world does not like to think of God as a God of Judgment. They prefer to look at the rainbow around the throne and ignore the lightning and thunder out of the throne. He certainly is a God of grace, but His grace reigns through righteousness (**Rom. 5:21**). This was made clear at the cross where God manifested both His love for sinners and His wrath against sin.
- e. **Before the throne—lamps and a sea (vv. 5b-6a).** The seven lamps connote completeness and symbolizes the Holy Spirit of God (**Rev. 1:4**; note also **Ezk. 1:13**). John also seems to suggest in Revelation that the ‘heavenly sanctuary’ follows the pattern of the earthly tabernacle and temple (see **Heb. 9:23**). The parallels are as follows:

<i>Earthly temple</i>	<i>Heavenly sanctuary</i>
Holy of Holies	The throne of God
Seven-branded candlestick	Seven lamps of the fire before the throne
Bronze laver	Sea of glass
Cherubim over the mercy seat	Four living creatures around the throne

Priests	Elders (kings and priests)
Brazen altar	Altar (Rev. 6:9-11)
Incense altar	Incense altar (Rev. 8:3-5)
Ark of the covenant	Ark of the covenant (Rev. 11:19)

- i. There is no temple in heaven in a material sense. All of heaven is God's sanctuary for those who serve before His holy throne. However, John indicates in **Revelation 15:5-8** that there is a special "sanctuary" of God. In the eternal state, there will be no temple (**Rev. 21:22**).
 - ii. A pure crystal sea symbolizes God's holiness, and the mingled fire speaks of His holy judgment. The crystal "firmament" in Ezekiel's vision also comes to mind (**Ezek. 1:22**); it was the foundation for God's throne. We shall meet this "sea of glass" again in **Revelation 15** where it is connected with Israel's victory over Egypt.
- f. **Praise to the throne (vv. 9-11).** Whenever the living creatures glorified God, the elders would fall before the throne and praise Him. The book of Revelation is filled with hymns of praise. The emphasis on praise is significant when you remember that John wrote this book to encourage people who were going through suffering and persecution!

The theme of this hymn is God the Creator, while in **Revelation 5** the elders praise God the Redeemer. The praise in **Revelation 4** is given to the Father on the throne, while in **Revelation 5** it is directed to the Son (the Lamb) before the throne. The closing hymn (**Rev. 5:13**) is expressed to both, another proof of the deity of Jesus Christ.

- i. If the twenty-four elders typify the people of God in heaven, then we must ask, "Why should God's people praise God the Creator?" If the heavens are declaring the glory of God, why shouldn't God's heavenly people join the chorus?
- ii. Creation bears constant witness to the power, wisdom, and glory of God (**Ps. 19**). Acknowledging the Creator is the first step toward trusting the Redeemer (see **Acts 14:8-18; 17:22-31**). "All things were created by him [Christ] and for him...and by him all things consist [hold together]" (**Col. 1:16-17**).

But sinful man worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator, and this is idolatry (**Rom. 1:25**). Furthermore, sinful man has polluted and destroyed God's wonderful creation, and he is going to pay for it (see **Rev. 11:18**). Creation is for God's praise and pleasure, and man has no right to usurp that which rightfully belongs to God. Man plunged creation into sin, so that God's good creation (**Gen. 1:31**) is today a groaning creation (**Rom. 8:22**), but because

of Christ's work on the cross, it will one day be delivered and become a glorious creation (**Rev. 8:18-24**).

It is unfortunate that the church today often neglects to worship the God of creation. The real answer to the ecological problem is not financial or legal, but spiritual. It is only when man acknowledge the Creator and begins to use creation to God's glory that the problems will be solved.

2. They Worship The Redeemer (5)

The focus of attention now shifts to a seven-sealed scroll in the hand of God. The scroll could not be read because it was rolled up and sealed (like a Roman will) with seven seals. John could see writing on both sides of the scroll, which meant that nothing more could be added. What was written was completed and final.

The scroll represents Christ's "title deed" to all that the Father promised Him because of His sacrifice on the cross. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [nations] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (**Ps. 2:8**). Jesus Christ is the "Heir of all things" (**Heb. 1:2**). He is our beloved "Kinsman-Redeemer" who was willing to give His life to set us free from bondage and to restore our lost inheritance (see **Lev. 25:23-46**; **the book of Ruth**; **Jer. 32:6-15**).

- a. As Christ removed the seals, various dramatic events took place. The seventh seal introduced the seven trumpet judgment (**Rev. 8:1-2**). Then, when the seventh trumpet had blown, the great day of God's wrath was announced, ushering in the "vial [bowl] judgments" that brought to a climax the wrath of God (**Rev. 11:15ff.**; **15:1**).
- b. A title deed or will can be opened only by the appointed heir, and this is Jesus Christ. No one in all the universe could be found worthy enough to break the seals. No wonder John wept, for he realized that God's glorious redemption plan for mankind could never be completed until the scroll was opened.
- c. The redeemer had to be near of kin, willing to redeem, and able to redeem. Jesus Christ meets all of the qualifications. He became flesh, so He is our Kinsman. He loves us and is willing to redeem, and He paid the price, so He is able to redeem.

Now we are able to enter into the worship experience described in the remainder of **Revelation 5**. And we'll discover four compelling reasons why we worship Jesus Christ.

- (1) **Because of who He is (vv. 5-7)**. Three unique titles are given to our Lord to describe who He is. First, He is *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*. The reference here is to **Genesis 49:8-10**, where Jacob prophetically gave the scepter to Judah and made it the tribe of the kings. (God never meant for Saul to establish a dynasty, because he came from the tribe

of Benjamin. God *used him* to discipline Israel because the people asked for a king; then He *gave them* David from the tribe of Judah.)

- a. The image of “the lion” speaks of dignity, sovereignty, courage, and victory. Jesus Christ is the only living Jew who can prove His kingship from genealogical records. “Son of David” was a title often used when He was ministering on earth (see **Matt. 1**).

But He is also *the Root of David*, which means He brought David (and David’s line) into existence. As far as His humanity is concerned, Jesus had His roots *in* David (**Isa. 11:1, 10**), but as far as His deity is concerned, Jesus is the *Root of David*. This speaks, of course, of our Lord’s eternity; He is indeed the “Ancient of Days.”

When John turned to see, he saw not a lion but a *lamb!* Jesus Christ is called “the Lamb” at least twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation (the Greek word means “a little pet lamb”) and the emphasis is not hard to miss. God’s wrath is “the wrath of the Lamb” (**Rev. 6:16**). Cleansing is by the “blood of the Lamb” (**Rev. 7:14**). The church is “the bride of the Lamb” (**Rev. 19:7; 21:9**).

The theme of “the Lamb” is an important one throughout Scripture, for it presents the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. The Old Testament question, “Where is the lamb?” (**Gen. 22:7**) was answered by John the Baptist who cried, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world” (**John 1:29**). The choirs even sing, “Worthy is the Lamb” (**Rev. 5:12**).

The description of the Lamb (**Rev. 5:6**), if produced by an artist, would provide a grotesque picture, but when understood symbolically, conveys spiritual truth. Since seven is the number of perfection, we have here perfect power (seven horns), perfect wisdom (seven eyes), and perfect presence (seven Spirits in all the earth). The theologians would call these qualities omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; all three are attributes of God. The Lamb is God the Son, Christ Jesus.

We worship Jesus Christ because of who He is. But there is a second reason why we worship Him.

- (2) Because of where He is (v. 6).** To begin with, Jesus is in heaven. He is not in the manger, in Jerusalem, on the cross, or in the tomb. He is ascended and exalted in heaven. What an encouragement this is to suffering Christians, to know that their Savior has defeated every enemy and is now controlling events from glory! He too suffered, but God turned His suffering into glory.

- a. But where is Christ in heaven? He is *in the midst*. The Lamb is the center of all that transpires in heaven. All creation centers in Him (the four living creatures), as do all of God’s people (the elders).

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- b. The angels around the throne encircle the Savior and praise Him.
- c. He is also *at the throne*. Some sentimental Christian poetry and hymnody dethrones our Savior and emphasizes only His earthly life—“the gentle Carpenter” or “the humble Teacher,”—but they fail to exalt the risen Lord!
- d. We do not worship a babe in a manger or a corpse on a cross. We worship the living, reigning Lamb of God who is in the midst of all in heaven.

(3) Because of what He does (vv. 8-10). When the Lamb came and took the scroll (see **Dan. 7:13-14**), the weeping ended and the praising began. God’s people and the representatives of God’s creation joined their voices in a new song of praise. Note that praise and prayer were united, for incense is a picture of prayer rising to the throne of God. What kind of song did they sing?

- a. To begin with, it was a *worship hymn*, for they said, “thou art worthy!” To worship means “to ascribe worth,” and Jesus alone is worthy.
- b. But this was also a *gospel song*! “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us [some texts read them] to God by thy blood.” The word translated slain means “violently slain” (**Rev. 5:6**).
- c. This song was also a *missionary song*. Sinners were redeemed “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (**Rev. 5:9**). *Kindred* refers to a common ancestor and *tongue* to a common language. *People* means a common race, and *nation* a common rule or government. God loves the whole world and His desire is that the message of redemption be taken to the whole world.
- d. This heavenly hymn was also a devotional hymn, for it announced our unique position in Christ as “a kingdom of priests.” Like Melchizedek of old, believers are kings and priests.”
- e. Finally, this song was a *prophetic hymn*: “We shall reign on the earth” (**Rev. 5:10**). When Jesus Christ returns to earth, He will establish His righteous kingdom for 1,000 years, and we shall reign with Him (**Rev. 20:1-6**).

(4) Because of what He has (vv. 11-14). In this closing burst of praise, all the angels and every creature in the universe joined together to worship the Redeemer. What a cascade of harmony John heard! In this hymn, they stated those things that Jesus Christ deserved to receive because of His sacrificial death on the cross. When He was on earth, people did not ascribe these things to Him, for many of these things He deliberately laid aside in His humiliation.

- a. He was born in weakness and died in weakness, but he is the recipient of all power. He became the poorest of the poor (**2 Cor. 8:9**), and yet He owns all the riches of heaven and earth. Men laughed at Him and called Him a fool, yet He is the very wisdom of God (**1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3**).
- b. He shared in the sinless weaknesses of humanity as He hungered, thirsted, and became weary. Today in glory, He possesses all strength. On earth He experienced humiliation and shame as sinners ridiculed and reviled Him.
- c. And blessing! He became a curse for us on the cross (**Gal. 3:13**), so that we can never be under the curse of the broken law. (Some translations read “praise” instead of “blessing,” but the Greek word carries both meanings.) He is worthy of all praise!

The worship service climaxed with the entire universe praising the Lamb of God and the Father seated on the throne!

And there was even a loud “Amen!” from the four living creatures! In heaven, we are permitted to say “Amen!”

Keep in mind that all of this praise centered on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. It is not Christ the Teacher, but Christ the Savior, who is the theme of their worship. While an unconverted person could praise the Creator, he certainly could not sincerely praise the Redeemer.

All of heaven’s praise came because the Lamb took the scroll from the Father’s hand. God’s great eternal plan would now be fulfilled and creation would be set free from the bondage of sin and death. One day the Lamb will break the seals and put in motion events that will eventually lead to His coming to earth and the establishment of His kingdom.

As you share in these heavenly worship services, do you find your own heart saying “Amen!” to what they have sung? You may believe in Christ as the Creator, but have you trusted Him as your Redeemer?

If not, will you do so right now?

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (**Rev. 3:20**).

Homework: The Seals And The Sealed. Read Revelation 6—7.

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