

Revelation 4.1-5.14

- I. Raising the issue: Failure to worship
  - A. What is worship?
    1. Enjoyment of God through Christ by the Holy Spirit
    2. Declaring the beauty of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit
    3. Remembering the saving works of Christ
  - B. What prevents our worship today, especially our corporate worship?
    1. Boredom due to our formed need to be constantly entertained
    2. Hard hearted inwardness, individualism
    3. Ignorance of Christ and the gospel
  - C. What can lead us to true worship?
    1. A fresh vision of God's sovereignty
    2. A different perspective on God's worthiness
    3. A reminder of Christ's work on the cross as the fulfillment of OT promises
  
- II. **Proposition**: Christ must be worshipped as the king of the universe because He alone is worthy to receive all honor and authority from the Father because He purchased us by His blood.
  
- III. **Organizational Sentence**: This call to worship is accomplished in a *two* act play, a drama, that unfolds for us as the stage upon which the rest of the book will unfold.
  
- IV. Context and Introductory Issues:
  - A. Chapters 4 and 5 follow the 7 letters to the churches. Remember that we do not think that Revelation is in chronological order but rather shows overlapping cycles that speak to past, present, and future events.
  - B. This means that we understand that our text today does not follow chronologically the 'church age' represented by the 7 letters. Instead, we understand that whereas we were given an earthly view of the state of the church through the letters, we are now getting the heavenly picture. In fact, what we see today could in one sense be understood an event in the past, which occurred when Christ ascended into heaven and received all authority from God the Father and sat down at His right hand. Or, we could understand that this drama is not intended to represent a specific event, but rather paint a picture of the authority and sovereignty of Christ that makes him worthy of worship throughout the church age. What we must not do is understand this passage to refer merely to an event in the future, following the church age.
  - C. Dispensationalists make this mistake. They argue that the 7 letters symbolically represent the 7 stages of the church age, where the church in different era's struggle with the problems John addresses in his letters. Some Dispensationalists

do not think the letters refer to specific ages, but they still insist that what occurs in chapters 4-22 must follow the church age.<sup>1</sup>

- D. In fact, because they insist that Revelation must be read chronologically, and issue we have addressed previously, they believe that the rapture of the church is symbolically represented in John's catching up into this heavenly vision.<sup>2</sup>
- E. Listen to what Tim LaHaye says: "It was no coincidence that the first thing to happen after John described the seven churches was his conveyance into heaven. John's perspective of the Tribulation is the same as the Church – in Heaven."<sup>3</sup>
- F. There is no indication from the text that this vision follows chronologically the letters. There is no indication that the Church is raptured.
- G. Daniel 7 is the background of these chapters and provides the underlying structure.

#### V. **Act I: A vision of the throne room of God, the Almighty (Revelation 4)**

A. John is taken up into heaven, (4.1)

**Revelation 4:1** After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

- 1. 'After this' refers to John's personal chronology. After he received the first vision with the letters he was to write down, he received this next vision. This does not support a chronological reading of the book.
- 2. John hears the voice of Christ which resounds like a trumpet. Like in chapter one, the trumpet has the connotation of judgment and kingly authority. Christ's voice itself sounds like the trumpet.
- 3. John is told to 'come up here,' so that he can be shown 'what must take place after this.'
  - a. This is often used to support the futuristic reading of Revelation, that is, the view which argues chapter 4-22 is all future to us. This is based on chapter 1:19 where Jesus tells John to write down what he has seen, what is, and what will be. Again, we must remember that this does not spell out the framework of the book.
  - b. Instead, we must see that this is an allusion to the book of Daniel chapter 2. As I mentioned two weeks ago, this phrase refers to the 'last days' that Daniel looked forward to. He saw the last days as one time period. The New Testament teaches that we are in the last days. What must take place after this refers to the whole church age. This becomes more clear when we see that this vision pictures the enthronement of Christ at His ascension.

B. John sees the one seated on the throne in heaven. (4.2-3)

**Revelation 4:2-3** <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John. *Because the Time is Near*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007, pg. 14, 107-108.

<sup>2</sup> LaHaye, Tim. *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, pg. 75-76. Also, Walvoord, John. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, pg. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible, KJV. AMG Publishers, 2000, pg. 1371.

1. This catching up that John experiences where he is 'in the Spirit' is not some sort of Charismatic experience, but aligns John with the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel who were both caught up in the Spirit to the throne room of God. This is how the original audience would have understood it, not as a secret rapture.
2. At the center of this vision is the throne of God. If you read carefully, you get the sense that the throne of God stands at the center of heaven with circles of characters around him.
3. John sees the indescribable majesty of God. John uses precious stones and a rainbow like an emerald to describe the beauty of God which he cannot fully do. These elements are to be taken together as a whole. The stones don't stand for anything, but as we see at the end of Revelation, they paint a picture of God's beauty. Like a diamond, when you look at God from different angles, you catch a new glimpse of His beauty.
4. The key to this vision is that John reminds us that there is a throne above all thrones on which the glorious creator sits with all power and majesty. To a suffering church, it is good to know that God sits on the throne above all.

C. John sees the 24 elders around the throne. (4.4)

**Revelation 4:4** <sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

1. Then John sees 24 elders sitting on thrones around the one throne of God.
2. Who are these elders?
  - a. 12 tribes + 12 apostles = the whole people of God
  - b. 24 angels = holy royal angels with authority (crowns) and purity (white garments)
  - c. 24 angels representing the whole people of God = this combines the two views by arguing that the function of these elders is key.
3. Elders = angels who represent the people of God.
  - a. They function as worshipers in the book of Revelation.
  - b. They function as intermediaries and interpreters.
  - c. They are distinguished from the saints throughout the book.
    - 5:8 they hold the prayers of the saints
    - 7:13-14 they explain to John who the victorious saints are
    - 11:18 they thank God for rewarding the saints
    - 14:3 the saints sing a song that the elders cannot learn
    - 19:4 they join the heavenly chorus of angels
  - d. So, the elders are holy angels with royal authority who worship God, stand as intermediaries between John and God, and interpret the vision for John. God is separate from us. The more important you are, the more separate you are. All these circles around the throne show the separateness and importance of God.
    - God is distant in chapter 4, which makes chapter 5 all the more significant because Christ brings us near to God.

D. John sees the separateness of the one seated on the throne. (4.5-6a)

**Revelation 4:5-6** <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, <sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

1. From the throne come flashes of lightning and thunder. This represents the judgment of God. Throughout the bible, God's judgment is identified with great natural power. Before the atom bomb, there was nothing more powerful than lightning and thunder, wind and rain.
2. Before the throne is the Holy Spirit, represented by the 7 torches of fire. Just like in chapter 1, this is an allusion to the 7 candles in the temple representing the Spirit of God, and an allusion to the 7 fold Spirit in Isaiah. The point here is that though the Spirit reveals God to us, this shows that we do not have direct access to God. The Spirit mediates his presences to us.
3. The sea in Israel was always associated with evil and chaos. Israelites were not sailors, which is why the story of Jonah is so dramatic. This is also why Jesus calming the storm is such a big deal. The sea represents the evil and chaos of the world. But, here, the sea not calmed as many translations have it, but it is reflecting the raw power of the lightning of God's judgment. In the New Heavens and the New Earth, we see that there is no sea, showing us that chaos and evil is gone.
4. These three pictures together help us to see that the chaos that exists due to the sin of the world separates us from God. Again, this makes chapter 5 even more important.

E. John sees the four living creatures. (4.6b-8)

**Revelation 4:6-8** And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

1. These creatures come from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. The vision combines the images from these two passages. The creatures represent the whole of animate creation.
  - a. Lion = noble king of animals
  - b. Ox = strongest
  - c. Man = wisest
  - d. Eagle = swiftest
2. The point is that, the whole animate creation of God is under his control. The eyes all around, in front and behind, represent the omniscience of God. As God's agents, they represent the divine omniscience of God.
3. The main function of these creatures is worship. They worship God because He is holy and eternal.

F. John sees heavenly worship. (4.9-11)

**Revelation 4:9-11** <sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

1. The creatures led the worship, and now all of heaven joins in to praise God.

2. They worship God because He is worthy of worship.
3. Why is He worthy?
  - a. He is holy.
  - b. He is the creator.
  - c. He is the king.

## VI. Act II: A Vision of the Enthronement of Jesus Christ (Revelation 5)

A. John sees the scroll and longs to see it opened. (5.1-4)

**Revelation 5:1-4** Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup> and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

1. In Daniel 12:4, Daniel is instructed by an angel to write down the things which must take place after this in a scroll until the end. Now, John sees this scroll in the hand of the one who sits on the throne.
2. The contents of this scroll contain the events of the last days.
3. The seven seals represent the progressive unfolding of its contents. As we see in the rest of the book, each seal unfolds another element of that which must take place in the last days. The fact that there are seven seals shows the perfection of the contents of the book.
4. To open the scroll and its seals is not only to reveal its contents, but to bring them to pass as well. The one who opens the scroll is also the one who must bring to pass that which is written.
5. This is why John weeps. He fears that no one is worthy to open it, and therefore, the things which Daniel looked forward to (the establishment of God's kingdom, the victory of the saints, the vindication of the saints, the judgment on those who opposed God's people, etc.) would never come to pass.

B. John hears the elder explain who is worthy. (5.5)

**Revelation 5:5** <sup>5</sup> And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

1. An elder explains that there is one who is worthy.
2. The Lion of the tribe of Judah comes from Genesis 49:9 where Jacob gives a prophecy that a Messiah king will come from Judah's line. David is the first king from the tribe of Judah. That the Messiah is understood as a divine warrior is evident from several OT passages (Job. 10:16; Isaiah 31:4; Jer. 50:44; Hos. 5:14; Amos 3:8).
3. The Lion who is the root of David comes from Isaiah 11:1-10. Here in this passage, the image is of a tree that has been cut down. Jesse is the father of David who God promised to establish with an eternal dynasty. But, due to the rebellion of the nation of Judah, God cut off the Davidic line for a time. The image is of a tree that is cut down so that a stump alone remains. Isaiah 11:1-10 talks of a root or a shoot springing up from the stump. This is a Messianic text which Jesus fulfills.

C. John sees the Lamb who is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. (5.6)

**Revelation 5:6** <sup>6</sup> And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

1. But, instead of Jesus conquering as a mighty warrior in the way we expect from the image of the Lion and the root of David, Jesus conquers as a slain Lamb. Jesus conquers the enemies of God through death on the cross.
2. The Lamb imagery comes from both the Old Testament Passover Lamb that is slaughtered so that the angel of God will not take the firstborn of the household and also from the Isaiah 53 suffering servant who sheds his blood for the healing of Israel.
3. The 7 horns represent the perfect power of the Lamb.
4. The 7 eyes represent the omniscience which belongs to the Lamb because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of the Lamb.
5. We see here that the things said of the one on the throne are also being said of the Lamb who is Jesus. This is highly Trinitarian language.

D. John sees the Lamb receive all authority and power from the Father. (5.7)

**Revelation 5:7** <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

1. This verse pictures the giving of authority from the Father to the Son. Daniel 7 pictures this when it says that the Son of Man received authority from the Ancient of Days seated on the throne.

**Daniel 7:9-14** <sup>9</sup> As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. <sup>11</sup> I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. <sup>12</sup> As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. <sup>13</sup> I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

2. This verse is one reason why I see this vision not following the church age, but preceding it or being symbolic of the whole church age. Jesus here is receiving all authority from God to exercise judgment on the world. From the rest of the New Testament, we see that Christ received this authority at His ascension into heaven before Pentecost. Christ ascended into heaven and gave us gifts through the Holy Spirit. He is presently reigning and carrying out judgment. He will return one day for final judgment, but He has already received authority.
3. Dispensationalists read this and see this as dealing with only end times events, separate from the authority given at the ascension. But, the New Testament tells us that all authority has already been given to Him.

E. John sees the worship of all creation that is due the Lamb. (5.8-14)

**Revelation 5:8-14** <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the

sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

1. The result of Jesus, the Lamb, receiving all authority in heaven is worship.
2. The living creatures and the elders hold bowls full of the prayers of the saints for vindication.
  - a. Ps. 141:3 connects incense to prayers
  - b. Rev. 6:9-11 & 8:3-4 talks about the prayers of the saints for vindication
3. The living creatures and the elders worship Jesus Christ for His redemptive work on the cross.
  - a. You were slain, and by your blood, you ransomed people for God.
  - b. You ransomed people from every tribe, language, and people, and nation.
  - c. You made them a kingdom.
  - d. You made them priests to God.
  - e. They will reign on the earth. (or, They reign on earth.)
4. This redemption bought by the Lamb brings us close to the distant God we saw in chapter 4.
5. Then the myriads and thousands upon thousands of angels join in the worship.
6. Then the whole of creation joins in the worship. This last group is curious because we are told that all of creation will worship Christ at His return, but this vision seems to be dealing with the past ascension of Christ and the present reign. Now we have a sense in which we are looking at the future. This shows us that the vision contains elements of the past, present, and future, just like the whole book. The point of the vision is not to see the future, but to see God and to realize that He sits on the throne and is worthy of worship.

## VII. Applications:

- A. We struggle a lot with boredom, in life and in church. But what if we gained a fresh vision of Christ on the throne in all his beauty. What if we focused on the beauty of the gospel, where God triumphed over His enemies and over sin not through warrior like victory, but through the humble Lamb, Jesus Christ.
- B. As we go to worship this morning, let us worship God because he is above every other power and authority in all the earth. Yes, there is Kim Jong-Il who might have nuclear weapons. There is Mahmūd Ahmadinejād who wants to go to war with the U.S. because we support Israel. There is Barak and Clinton. There is McCain and Romney. But in the end, none of these powerful people is outside the authority and control of God in heaven. He is the creator who sits above us all, and He is worthy of our worship. He is distant, but the Lamb has brought us close.
- C. In all our trials, we must remember that our prayers for vindication are before the throne, before the God who has given authority to the Lamb who bought us by experiencing suffering on the cross. The Lamb knows our pain, and He will come one day soon and judge the world.