

Glimpse of the Throne
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Revelation 4:1-11 (ESV)

What comes to mind when you think about the word “worship?” What does it mean to worship God?

Some questions:

- Is worship a weekly obligation, or an every hour of every day privilege?
- Has worship become a tradition like saying the pledge, or singing the national anthem? Or is it the spiritual fuel of your Christian life?
- Is it exciting or boring? When I worship, do I struggle to keep my seat, or struggle to stay awake?
- Am I growing as a worshipper of God, or just going through the “motions?”
- This passage gives us a glimpse into what worship will be like for followers of Christ through all eternity. Worship will be a central part of eternity for Christians. It's should be a central part of our Christian life today!
- That's why we need to know how to worship. Has anyone ever taken the scriptures and taught you about TRUE worship? This morning we will!
- This passage also contains some of the most vivid imagery in Revelation: God on a sparkling throne; a sea of glass; strange living creatures; elders who fall at God's feet; flames of fire; the colors of jewels; the glory of God.
- We'll look at all that and at true worship, as we study what this passage says; what we believe it means; and what we need to do about it.
- God gave John His own outline of this book He told him to write:

Revelation 1:19 (ESV)

19. Write therefore the things that you have seen [*what John already knew about Jesus*], those that are [*the present state of the churches in Asia Minor at the time of the writing*] and those that are to take place after this [*the prophetic future. In chapter four, John shifts to the future.*]

4 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.” ² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ 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.

- Wow! What a scene. John was transported “in the Spirit.” His body was still on earth but his spirit was moved by God's Spirit into the throne-room of God.
- There is a main throne in the center surrounded by twenty-four smaller thrones. Everything is focused on “he who sat” on the main throne: God Almighty (v.8). “*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.”¹

- A rainbow is around the throne, probably vertically. “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...was not only with Noah, but 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).”²
- The rainbow is not a half circle as we know it, but a full circle. Showing God’s complete mercy for all mankind.
- John uses the word “*like*” over and over. In verse three he uses, “*the appearance of.*” **Why do you think he uses this phrasing?**
- John is struggling to describe this incredible scene, especially the indescribable glory of God. All he could do was compare it to things humans could understand. Jesus voice was “like” a trumpet. God the Father had the “appearance” of jewels, etc. John was before the throne of God and it was hard to capture on paper.
- Here’s an exciting truth: We’ll all be there one day too! We’ll experience what John saw in person!

4 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.

- We wonder, “Who are the twenty-four elders?” There’s much speculation.
- *The two major views are (1) that they represent the church raptured prior to this time and rewarded in heaven, or (2) that they are angels who have been given large responsibilities.*³
- *Since there were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve Apostles, perhaps the number twenty-four symbolizes the completion of God’s people.*
- *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).*⁴
- Chuck Swindoll speculates they might be a “select number of the redeemed who have been chosen to worship and serve before the throne of God. Are they a permanent number or a rotating office? Are there ever more or less than twenty-four? Old Testament saints or New Testament saints – or both? These questions are left unanswered.”⁵ So, Swindoll advises we not speculate.

5 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, 6 and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

- Verse five: Thunder and lightning. Signs of God’s power and judgment.

- The seven torches or lamp stands of fire are the seven spirits of God.
- One commentator writes: *“These should be understood to represent the Holy Spirit rather than seven individual spirits or angels, with the concept of the sevenfold character of the Spirit (Isa. 11:2–3; cf. Rev. 1:4; 5:6).”*⁶
- We have the Father, the Spirit, and in chapter five the Son will join them.
- Verse six: A sea of glass like crystal. In that day glass was rare. Clear glass extremely rare! This image may represent the perfect purity of our holy God.

6b And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7 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. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within,

- Four strange flying creatures covered in eyes. A lion; an ox; a man; an eagle.
- Some believe, *“...the four living creatures symbolically represent the attributes of God including His omniscience and omnipresence (indicated by the creatures being full of eyes)—with the four animals bringing out other attributes of God: the lion indicating majesty and omnipotence; the ox, typical of faithful labor and patience; man, indicating intelligence; and the eagle, the greatest bird, representing supreme sovereignty. Another possible view is that they represent Christ as revealed in the four Gospels: in Matthew, the lion of the tribe of Judah; in Mark, the ox as the servant of Yahweh; in Luke, the incarnate human Jesus; and in John, the eagle as the divine Son of God. Another alternative is that the four living creatures are angels (cf. Isa. 6:2–3), who extol the attributes of God.”*⁷
- The point is not what these creatures were but WHAT THEY CONTINUALLY SAID as they flew around God’s throne:

Revelation 4:8 (ESV)

8b ...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!”

- We may not know the meaning of the creatures, but we sure know the meaning of their mission: To continually worship God because of who he is!
- Verse eight says they worship because God is HOLY (times three!) He is the Lord God Almighty...He has power over EVERYTHING and EVERYONE. He “was, is, and is to come,” He is ETERNAL and EVERLASTING.
- These flying creatures can’t help themselves. They can’t behold such a sight and not cry out in passionate praise of WHO GOD IS! Their passion spreads.

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 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,

11 “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.”

- The living creatures and the twenty-four elders DEFINE worship for you and me. If you really see God for who He is you can't help but worship Him because He is HOLY; ALL-POWERFUL; ETERNAL; the CREATOR of everything and WORTHY to receive GLORY and HONOR and POWER.
- **What does this passage teach us about how to worship God?**
- **What does the “casting of crowns” teach us about worshipping God?**
- **How does our view of who God is help or hinder our worship of Him?**
- **What do fans at a game, a race, or concert have in common?**
- **If we can get a picture of the Grand Canyon, why travel to it?**
- **What prevents us from worshipping God like the beasts and the elders?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

The “Big Book of Small Groups” gives us six reasons worship is essential.

1. God is worthy of our praise, thanksgiving and offering of self.

2. There is joy in worship. If someone is a great figure skater, we don't compliment that person on basketball playing. We speak truth when we affirm his or her skating abilities. It is the same with God. We worship God because the things we say about him are true. He is faithful, loving, powerful and kind. He offers salvation through Christ, and he enters the life of the believer. When we begin to grasp the truth of God, we are that much closer to letting God's truth touch our lives. And when God touches our lives, there is joy—and worship.

3. Worship is essential to life. Christians struggle because we, like the rest of the world, are led to believe that material possessions, or power, or other worldly offerings, can give happiness in life. But over time, through worship, we realize that there is joy and peace only through living in God's will. By focusing our lives on God, we are able to bring relationships, thoughts and actions, and lay them at God's feet as our spiritual offering. As we do this, we fulfill our natural earthly desire for worship. You've got to worship someone (or thing)—it might as well be God!

4. We are practicing for heaven. Whenever the curtain that hides our view of heaven has been pulled back a little, it always reveals one action in progress. Worship. Revelation 4:8–11 gives this snapshot of heaven.

5. It is a sin not to worship. If we were indeed created to worship God, then it is a sin to ignore our calling. (Read how Romans 1:21–23 connects a lack of worship with immorality. When we forget to worship God, it is easy to lose connection with what is important in the world, who provides and cares for us, and what he expects from us. Our focus becomes me-centered, as opposed to God-centered. When we don't worship, we sin.

6. The devil hates it when we worship God. ...when we become God-centered, the devil cringes because our praise, thanks and very lives become focused and meaningful. His role is to sidetrack and frustrate, while God is there to give meaning and joy.⁸

- Whether we're joining together in the worship center, or alone in our prayer closet, I hope we'll imitate the passion and enthusiasm of these strange creatures and white-robed elders.
- Let's use God's word and God's creation to give us a good look at who He is.
- Remember, you never see bored fans at a game, a race, or a concert. God help us not to be cheering fans for men but not daily worshippers who praise the Lord God Almighty!

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 582). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 582). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 943). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 582). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Insights on Revelation (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 15) by Charles R. Swindoll

⁶ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 943). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 944–945). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ Arnold, J., & Black, S. (1992). *The big book on small groups*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.