



The Throne

Summary and Goal

Jesus summoned John into the throne room of heaven, where he saw God on His throne being worshiped and praised, as He rightly deserves. During this season, when it is so easy to become discouraged and distracted, worship helps to rightly order our desires.

Main Passages

Revelation 4:1-11

Session Outline

1. A Peek Into Heaven (Revelation 4:1-2)
2. Holy, Holy, Holy (Revelation 4:3-11)
3. Priority of Worship (Revelation 4:8)

Theological Theme

Worship is knowing and responding to the supreme worth of the glory of God. This passage gives the reader a peek into the activity inside of God's heavenly throne room. Here we see created beings whose continual labor is to worship the God who is holy, holy, holy.

Christ Connection

For Christians, worship is responding to the worth, beauty, and glory of God in Christ. Worship is being completely satisfied in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Missional Application

Christians are both a missionary people and a worshipping people. Christians go, preach, share, and plant for the ultimate purpose of building groups of people that know and treasure Christ and rejoice in Him in worship.

Historical Context of Revelation

Purpose

Much of the book of Revelation focuses on events at the end of the age (eschatology), more so than any other book in the Bible. But it also focuses on practical choices that believers and unbelievers must make in the course of their lives that have far-reaching consequences at the end.

Author

The traditional view holds that the author of Revelation is the apostle John, who wrote the Fourth Gospel and the three letters of John. Evidences for this view include the following. (1) The writer referred to himself as “John” (1:4,9; 22:8). (2) He had personal relationships with the seven churches of Asia Minor (1:4,11; 2-3). (3) His circumstances at the time of writing (1:9) matched those of John the apostle (who was placed in Asia Minor from about AD 70 to 100 by reliable historical sources from the second century AD). (4) The saturation of the book with Old Testament imagery and echoes implies a Jewish writer, like John, operating in overwhelmingly Gentile Asia Minor.

Setting

The initial audience that received the book of Revelation was a group of seven local churches in southwest Asia Minor (1:11; 2-3). Some of these congregations were experiencing persecution (2:9-10,13), probably under the Roman emperor Domitian (ruled AD 81-96). Others had doctrinal and practical problems (2:6,13-15,20-23). Also behind these surface problems was the backdrop of unseen but powerful spiritual warfare (2:10,14,24; 3:9).

Special Features

The resurrected, glorified Jesus Christ revealed himself to the apostle John, who had been imprisoned “on the island called Patmos” (1:9). Christ’s twofold purpose was: (1) to “unveil” a spiritual diagnosis for seven of the churches in Asia Minor with which John was familiar (chaps. 2-3), and (2) to reveal to John a series of visions setting forth events and factors related to the end times (chaps. 4-22).

The book of Revelation provides an almost complete overview of theology. There is much in this book about Christ, mankind and sin, the people of God (both the church and Israel), holy angels, and Satan and the demons. There is important material on God’s power and tri-unity (i.e., Trinity), plus aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit and the nature of Scripture.

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Session Plan

The Throne

? For Further Discussion

What do you think people are seeking to gain in attemptation to exactly identify when the return of Christ will take place?

Introduction

- ? What are some examples you know of those who tried to predict when Christ would return? Why is this something we should not seek to do? Why do you think this idea is so enticing?
- ? What are some ways people could and have become sidetracked by what is found in the Book of Revelation? What should our ultimate focus be when reading Revelation?

In Revelation 4, John was given a glimpse of the undergirding reality that should drive the churches to heed the words of Christ. John found himself looking upon the throne of God and a magnificent scene of worship. Revelation 4 is all about worship. In reality, all of creation for all of history has to do with worship: either worship of the one true and living God or the worship of a million other unworthy gods. In this passage we are given a great gift that will help us become better worshipers. We see the culmination of heaven, we are reminded of the nature of the object of our worship, and we are encouraged to order our lives around that which ought to be priority. Let's look more closely at the passage.

1. A Peek Into Heaven (Revelation 4:1-2)

The overarching theme of Revelation 4 is worship. The main point of this passage is that there is only One who is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. Of course, much of the book does focus on the return of Christ, but the central concern of the book of Revelation and the Bible itself is the right worship of God.

- ? What has been your experience studying the Book of Revelation in the past? Why do you think it is so intriguing to people? Why is it wrong to see this primarily as a codebook of clues about the end?
- ? What would you say is the main point of Revelation 4? What does John describe concerning God's location and posture? What should that indicate to us?

2. Holy, Holy, Holy (Revelation 4:3-11)

Once we get a glimpse of God's infinite worth, everything else becomes secondary. Nothing is worth keeping if it detracts from our knowing God. No sacrifice is too great and no price is too high when the prize is as valuable as the One seated on the throne. Take note that we are not implying that God is some trinket to possess and control; quite the opposite. This great treasure is also Ruler and Judge. Our response to His value isn't ownership or manipulation but complete worship.

- ❓ How does John's description of God's worth compare with the value you place on God as the ultimate authority over your life? How does your life give evidence (or lack thereof) of this?
- ❓ How might a clear view of the value of God affect how we live? How has this happened in your life already? Where might you grow in light of this reality?

3. Priority of Worship (Revelation 4:8)

Worship of the one true and living God, the Creator of the heavens and earth, cannot be an afterthought or just a Sunday morning activity. It must be a priority of the first order in our lives. Worshipping our God ought have the highest priority in our lives. This doesn't mean that we spend all of our time singing the song that the angels sang. But, it does mean that we live our lives knowing, treasuring, and responding to the infinite worth and beauty of God.

- ❓ How does the pattern of worship in heaven compare to the pattern of worship in your life? Think about not only your pattern of attending a worship gathering but in how you live each day before God.
- ❓ What are some ways you might grow in worship of God throughout the ordinary patterns of your daily life?

Conclusion

- ❓ When you think of worship, what comes to mind? How has today's lesson challenged your understanding of worship?
- ❓ How might you grow in a right view of God as one who is continually worthy of worship and praise?
- ❓ How does reflecting on the gospel message prepare your heart to worship God?



Expanded Session Content

The Throne

Introduction

A man named Edgar C. Whisenant was a Bible student and former NASA engineer. You may have never heard of him, but if you have it is most certainly in relation to his prediction that the rapture of the church would occur on September 13, 1988. He even wrote a book entitled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. This probably doesn't come as a surprise, but Edgar was wrong. Instead of realizing the foolishness of claiming that he knew what Jesus Himself said that no man knows (Matthew 24:36), Edgar doubled down. When the date passed without incident he changed his prediction to September 15, 1988. Then, he selected another date in 1989, then another in 1990, and again in 1991. Of course, by that time, not many people were giving his words credence.

- ❓ What are some other examples you know of those who tried to predict when Christ would return? Why is this something we should not seek to do? Why do you think this idea is so enticing?
- ❓ What are some ways people could and have become sidetracked by what is found in the Book of Revelation? What should our ultimate focus be when reading Revelation?

All of history culminates at the throne of God. In our passage today, Revelation 4, we get a glimpse into the activity within the heavenly throne room of God. It is pure worship. Worshipping God in spirit and in truth, being satisfied in all the He is for us in Christ, responding to His beauty and glory with praise and adulation is the essence of why we exist and what we are being restored to in Christ. This Christmas, we are called to worship. As you purchase gifts for your loved ones, worship. When you decorate the house, worship. When you go visit family, worship. As you prepare food for loved ones, worship. A right order of life starts with a worshipful heart turned toward a glorious God.

Session Summary

In Revelation 4, John was given a glimpse of the undergirding reality that should drive the churches to heed the words of Christ. John found himself looking upon the throne of God and a magnificent scene of worship. Revelation 4 is all about worship. In reality, all of creation for all of history has to do with worship: either worship of the one true and living God or the worship of a million other unworthy gods. In this passage we are given a great gift that will help us become better worshipers. We see the culmination of heaven, we are reminded of the nature of the object of our worship, and we are encouraged to order our lives around that which ought to be priority. Let's look more closely at the passage.

1. A Peek Into Heaven (Revelation 4:1-2)

Interest in the book of Revelation can be fervid and has often led into unhealthy and unbiblical systems, interpretations, and predictions. Few topics stir up more interest than eschatology, and no book has been examined more intensely for clues about the end-times than the book of Revelation. One could spend months and years sorting through all the teachers who read the book of Revelation in one hand and the newspaper in the other looking for clues as to the arrival of the Antichrist, the identity of the beast, the meaning of 666, or the schedule of the millennium.

No doubt that discussion of eschatology is a worthy and helpful endeavor when carried out with the right perspective and posture. However, if the end-times are all that we see when we come to the Book of Revelation, we will overlook critical parts of John's testimony.

Several portions of the book of Revelation aren't concerned with eschatological questions, but focus on the events of heaven, specifically God's heavenly throne room. Revelation chapter 4 is one of these passages. There is no need here to try to decode any imagery in order to better predict the second coming of Christ. No, this passage is a glimpse into the most significant events in the universe. The curtain was pulled back for John to witness angels and their worship of the Lord in heaven.

-  What has been your experience studying the Book of Revelation in the past? Why do you think it is so intriguing to people? Why is it wrong to see this primarily as a codebook of clues about the end?
-  What would you say is the main point of Revelation 4? What does John describe concerning God's location and posture? What should that indicate to us?

The Seven Churches of Revelation

The book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ, authorized by God the Father and mediated by John to the seven churches. In the second and third chapters, the Lord Jesus Christ addressed the seven churches directly. He exhorted Ephesus to return to its first love, Smyrna to be faithful until death, Pergamum to repent of its misdeeds, and Thyatira to no longer tolerate the woman Jezebel. Jesus urged Sardis to wake up and strengthen the things that remain, Philadelphia to hold fast to what they had, and Laodicea to be either hot or cold. Jesus promised that those who overcame would be rewarded.

The overarching theme of Revelation 4 is worship. The main point of this passage is that there is only One who is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. Of course, much of the book does focus on the return of Christ, but the central concern of the book of Revelation and the Bible itself is the right worship of God.

John described one who was seated on the throne. God being seated on the throne represents His authority to be Ruler and Judge over all of creation. This symbol is used several times in the book of Revelation. For example, in Revelation 3:21, Jesus said, “To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” The throne of God stands in contrast with the thrones of Satan (2:13) and the beast (13:2).

God resides in glory upon His throne from which He commands and rules His church and the entire world. All earthly thrones and authorities are under His jurisdiction and must give account to Him. The throne is not empty. John saw that there was one upon it who rightfully and fittingly occupied it: God Himself. He is the only being who may legitimately occupy the throne of heaven.

Paul on the Surpassing Value of Christ

But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead. - Philippians 3:7-11

2. Holy, Holy, Holy (Revelation 4:3-11)

John’s description of God is telling. First of all, he didn’t describe God Almighty’s appearance with precise language. We can safely assume that His appearance defied description. God’s greatness always goes beyond our ability to fully comprehend. John does, however, use language to describe God’s appearance: “The one seated there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian stone” (v. 3). John compared God’s appearance to those things (precious stones) that are most precious and valuable in the material world.

God is infinitely valuable and precious. We are to seek God and His kingdom “like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46). When John saw this Being, God himself, seated upon the throne, John was overcome by God’s perfect nature: eternity, immutability, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, wisdom, power, goodness, truth, love, grace, and mercy. He could only think of precious stones to put words to what he saw. John’s description in verse 3 reveals to us that God is worth more than anything in all of creation. He stands above all that we will ever know as supremely valuable.

It’s impossible to gain a clear view of God’s value apart from being born again into God’s family through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God the Son, on the cross. Once a person has been raised with Christ and

indwelt by the Spirit, his eyes are opened to the infinite worth of God, the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Once we get a glimpse of God's infinite worth, everything else becomes secondary. Nothing is worth keeping if it detracts from our knowing God. No sacrifice is too great and no price is too high when the prize is as valuable as the One seated on the throne. Take note that we are not implying that God is some trinket to possess and control; quite the opposite. This great treasure is also Ruler and Judge. Our response to His value isn't ownership or manipulation but complete worship.

-  How does John's description of God's worth compare with the value you place on God as the ultimate authority over your life? How does your life give evidence (or lack thereof) of this?

-  How might a clear view of the value of God affect how we live? How has this happened in your life already? Where might you grow in light of this reality?

Both John and the angels described God as glorious. The angels who were worshipping God simply described Him as "Holy, Holy, Holy." It is worth noting that the seraphim in Isaiah 6 were the same creatures in Revelation 4, and in both instances they proclaim the holiness of God using the same words, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

Not only is God infinitely worthy and valuable, but He is supremely pure, sinless, spotless, and faultless. God is completely holy. There is no darkness in Him at all. God Almighty, who is seated upon the throne in heaven, is continually praised and glorified and the proclamation that is continually repeated is in regards to God's holiness. The holiness of God stands in stark contrast to the sinfulness, corruption, and fallibility of mankind. John no doubt was struck with fear because of his own unworthiness. He may have even been tempted to cry out like Isaiah who said, "Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

Yet, in recognizing our own uncleanness and unworthiness before God, we are not without hope. We have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1) who intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). As the writer of Hebrews wrote, "For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27).

3. Priority of Worship (Revelation 4:8)

We would be correct in saying that the theme of Revelation chapter 4 is worship. A more precise description, however, would be to say that the theme of this passage is the preeminence of worship. Don't forget that this chapter doesn't describe what will happen sometime in the future. No, this passage describes what was happening when John was alive and it describes what is happening now. It is a picture of the regular rhythm of heaven. Heaven, indeed all of creation, is centered on the worship of the one true and living God.

The Bible says, "Day and night they never stop." Think about that for a moment. The worship that John witnessed wasn't the daily hour of praise. He didn't just happen to show up during a service time. The angels worship God continually, day and night. They never cease. The fact that these supernatural beings exist to fulfill the role of offering up continual worship to God should be an indicator to us just how seriously God takes worship.

Worship of the one true and living God, the Creator of the heavens and earth, cannot be an afterthought or just a Sunday morning activity. It must be a priority of the first order in our lives. Worshipping our God ought have the highest priority in our lives. This doesn't mean that we spend all of our time singing the song that the angels sang. But, it does mean that we live our lives knowing, treasuring, and responding to the infinite worth and beauty of God.

-  How does the pattern of worship in heaven compare to the pattern of worship in your life? Think about not only your pattern of attending a worship gathering but in how you live each day before God.
-  What are some ways you might grow in worship of God throughout the ordinary patterns of your daily life?

Our worship now is a foretaste of heaven. When we worship our great God in this fallen world, we anticipate that we will, like the angels, worship the Lord face-to-face, free from the fetters of the effects of sin forever.

Conclusion

When John was given a peek into heaven he witnessed pure, unadulterated worship of the one true and living God who is seated upon the throne. There is nothing more fitting or right than for creation to respond to the glory of God with praise and adulation. Further, there is nothing more comforting to the creation than to know that the Creator is seated upon

His throne wielding all power and authority. No matter what may come to pass here below, the one true and living God is seated upon His throne forever.

The God that John encountered is indescribable. The best that John could do was compare His appearance with precious stones. These were the only things in John's mind that even began to reflect the glory, worth, and splendor of this Being on the throne. The angels simply repeated, "Holy, Holy, Holy," reminding us of the purity and goodness of God compared with the sinfulness and corruption of our own hearts. But this also reminds us of our great High Priest who makes intercession for us and is an advocate for us before the Father.

What John witnessed wasn't a vision of the future or a special occasion. John witnessed the ongoing worship of God by the angelic beings. They have worshiped God since the unknown past, they were worshipping God when John was given a glimpse, they are worshipping God now, and one day we will join them in worshipping God forever. Further, we can join them now because of Christ's work on our behalf. We have access to God's throne and are able to worship in spirit and truth. There is nothing more fitting or appropriate than the redeemed people of God worshipping their Redeemer. This must be a priority in our lives. We are worshippers, and we continually worship something, whether God or something lesser. We must discipline ourselves to see the infinite value and beauty of our God and give ourselves over to Him in continual worship.

-  When you think of worship, what comes to mind? How has today's lesson challenged your understanding of worship?
-  How might you grow in a right view of God as one who is continually worthy of worship and praise?
-  How does reflecting on the gospel message prepare your heart to worship God?

Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to make you a person who worships Him continually in spirit and in truth. Ask God Almighty to give you insight into His value, glory, and power. Take time now to worship Him in prayer.

Additional Resources

- *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family and Church* by Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty
- *Rhythms of Grace* by Mike Cosper
- *True Worshipers* by Bob Kauflin

For Next Week

Session Title

- Worthy

Main Passages

- Revelation 5:1-14

Session Outline

1. No One Worthy (Revelation 5:1-4)
2. Worthy is the Lamb Who Was Slain (Revelation 5:5-12)
3. Worthy is the Lamb Who Stands in the Midst of the Throne (Revelation 5:13-14)

Memorize

*Our Lord and God,
you are worthy to receive
glory and honor and power,
because you have created all things,
and by your will
they exist and were created.*

-Revelation 4:11

Daily Readings

- Monday - John 1:29
- Tuesday - Revelation 13:8
- Wednesday - Isaiah 53:7
- Thursday - Revelation 12:11
- Friday - 1 John 2:2
- Saturday - 1 Peter 1:18-19

Extended Commentary

Revelation 4:1-11

4:1-2 The phrases after this and what must take place after this signal the beginning of the body of the book (4:1-22:5) spoken of in 1:19, in the wording, “what will take place after this.” Even though John was told to come up here, it is not clear whether: (1) he was actually taken up into heaven (with the same command in 11:12 the two witnesses were taken to heaven), or (2) he was still “in the Spirit” (see note at 1:10) on the isle of Patmos (1:9-10). What he saw of the heavenly throne room in chaps. 4-5 is trustworthy either way, since the vision came from the Lord.

4:3-4 Jasper is an opaque jewel also mentioned in the description of the new Jerusalem (21:11,19). Carnelian stone is a vivid red color. A rainbow is God’s covenant sign that he will never again judge the earth by destroying every creature in a flood (Gn 9:8-17). The Apocalypse tells of God’s just judgment of the world by other means. The twenty-four elders could refer to angels, but since there were elders as leaders in both Israel (Nm 11:16) and the church (Ti 1:5), it is more likely that twelve of the twenty-four represent the tribes of Israel and the other twelve the apostles of Christ, previewing the reference to the twelve tribes and twelve apostles in the new Jerusalem (21:12,14). Elsewhere in Revelation, white clothes and golden crowns make up the attire of victorious believers (3:5; 6:11; 7:9; 19:8,14).

4:5 Flashes of lightning . . . and thunder coming from God (the throne) represent the first mention in Revelation of phenomena that intensify and spill over from heaven to earth as part of God’s just judgment (8:5; 11:19; 16:18,21). On the seven spirits of God, see note at 1:4.

4:6-7 The four living creatures resemble the cherubim in Ezk 1 and 10, though there are differences as well. Covered with eyes means that very few things escape the notice of these watchful angelic creatures. The imagery of the lion . . . ox . . . man . . . and eagle has strong linkage to Ezk 1:5-10 and may represent animate creation.

4:8 The mention of the creatures having six wings and the words holy, holy, holy echo the description of the seraphim in the heavenly throne room in Is 6:1-3.

4:9-10 The heavenly throne room is characterized by unceasing joyful praise, thanksgiving, and worship toward the Lord by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders.

4:11 The beginning point of worship is to recognize that God is completely worthy to be recognized for his unrivaled glory and honor and power, and his work as Creator and Sustainer of all things.¹

References

1. *CSB Study Bible: Christian Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.