

Revelation As A Model Of Worship

Around AD95 was a time of great stress for Christians.

In previous decades Paul and Peter had been martyred.

Now the Emperor Domitian claims divinity and demands that he is worshipped and the state mercilessly persecutes those who refuse.

The apostle John is arrested and exiled to Patmos, [**Revelation 1:9**].

The Creator God inspired the apostle John to write Revelation to God's people to encourage them.

John reminds all Christians that Jesus Christ is their Saviour, and that victory, despite the current trouble, is assured.

John's prophecies outline the work of the Son of God in the panorama of history all the way through to ultimate victory.

John encourages all Christians to stand fast.

Throughout Revelation John reminds all Christians that the Creator God is in charge and is working out His plan for humanity.

No obstacle, even the powerful Emperor Domitian, can thwart the great Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is the context and encouraging central message of the Book of Revelation, a message nowhere more dramatically presented than in chapter four.

In this chapter we are given one of the most powerful visions of all in the Christian Bible.

Within this vision we are both encouraged and shown how to worship our Great Creator God.

Revelation 4:1-2 [New King James] *“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”*

In vision, John was transported into the presence of the omnipotent God who rules over all, the God who directs the events of history towards the culmination of His great plan for all humanity.

John is using the language of earth as he seeks to describe a heavenly reality.

Revelation 4:3-8 [New King James] *“And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’”*

In this description the apostle John is using the imagery of the Old Testament.

The vision is of God's majesty, and the power of the heavenly hosts who do God's bidding.

Notice what these great beings in God's presence are doing.

Revelation 4:9-10 [New King James] *“Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:”*

In vision, John has been ushered into a scene of heavenly worship.

We see in these verses recorded in the fourth chapter, a heavenly model that is an encouraging and motivating example of true worship of the One and only true God.

This is a model that focuses worship on four aspects of God's greatness.

True worship addresses God's holiness –

Day and night the heavenly creatures never stopped saying, *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.”*

As John illustrates, true worship begins with the acknowledgement that God is holy.

These words take us back to a similar vision in Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:1-3 [New King James] *“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’”*

Why the focus on God's holiness?

It immediately places God high above us. God is holy and **not** human.

We are to approach God as He is, **not** create for ourselves something to worship.

God calls us to come to terms with His reality.

This helps us to focus on what God is in comparison to what we are.

Isaiah 6:4-5 [New King James] *“And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: ‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’”*

This humility deepens even further when we realise the holiness of God in contrast to our unholiness and our helplessness.

Such a perspective causes us to focus on God's grace.

Isaiah 6:6-7 [New King James] *“Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.’”*

Worship begins with the humble recognition that we have come into the presence of a holy God, the God of awesome greatness and unlimited grace.

What must be our response?

Psalms 145:21 [New King James] *“My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever.”*

With this perspective we are brought to reverential silence, and then we are led to joyful praise.

With God’s holiness clearly before us, worship never becomes common, trite or irreverent.

This is how all worship must begin, but notice how it continues.

True worship addresses God’s eternity –

Revelation 4:10 [New King James] *“the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:”*

Having acknowledged the holiness of God, true worship then acknowledges His eternity.

To understand God’s eternity is to understand that the great and awesome God has no limitations.

He has for example no limitations of time, for He created time and is not a part of it, [2 Peter 3:8].

In contrast, there was a time when we did not exist and there could be a time when we might not exist.

We as human beings are locked into time.

There was never a time when God did not exist, and there will never be a time when He does not exist.

God is the eternal I AM.

In contrast our existence is temporal.

Our immortality will always be dependent on the eternal God’s grace and His unchanging will.

Understanding this brings us to the third aspect of true worship.

True worship addresses God’s activity –

Revelation 4:11 [New King James] *“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”*

This is a mind-boggling statement.

The Greek carries the meaning *“because of your will they [all things] continually exist and have come into being.”* [‘Expositors Bible Commentary’; volume 12, page 464].

True worship not only acknowledges that God is the Creator, the originator of all things that exist, but that their existence is continually dependent on God’s will.

God continually sustains what He has created.

Colossians 1:16-17 [NIV] *“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

Only because God wills it does this universe continue to exist.

Hebrews 11:3 [New King James] *“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”*

The physical creation came into being by the invisible Word of God, [**Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, etc.** “And God said”].

Job 12:7-10 [New King James] *“But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?”*

Job clearly understood this total dependency of all creation on God’s will.

Acts 17:25, 28 [New King James] *“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.” ... “for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”*

Our existence is continually dependent on God.

In true worship we affirm and confess that God is both Creator and Sustainer.

This is true of our physical existence, and it will be true of our immortal spiritual existence.

Our eternal lives will always be dependent on the unchanging will of God.

Indeed, in **Revelation 4** the twenty four elders bow before God, declaring that all things have their existence because of His will, [**verse 11**].

As if to emphasise this point, an emerald rainbow, symbolic of God’s life-sustaining promise to Noah, surrounds His throne, [**verse 3**].

The vision continues in **Revelation 5**, which tells of God’s saving activity through Jesus Christ.

Revelation 5:9 [New King James] *“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,’”*

Our worship of God, whether in private devotions or in public worship, should focus on these saving acts of God in Jesus Christ.

Is this how we approach worship?

Is that the focus of our prayers and in our songs of praise?

It should be and with this vision as our guide it certainly can be.

Revelation 5:13 [New King James] *“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”*

This shows us how we should respond to God's saving work.

True worship addresses God's authority –

The throne of God is mentioned 12 times in Revelation chapter 4.

God's throne signifies His authority, the eternal Sovereign authority and our worship must recognise this.

We owe the Creator God every honour that is in our power to give.

Revelation 4:10 [New King James] *“the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:”*

In the vision, all authority is placed under God. Crowns represent authority, and we see that the angelic authorities and powers are subject to God's Sovereignty.

When we worship we must do the same, submitting all we are and all we have to God.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

The Greek word translated “bodies” is “soma” which refers to our total life, body, mind and human spirit, [**Job 32:8**].

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 [New King James] *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”*

We do **not** belong to ourselves but to God our Lord and Master.

Worship is adoration surrender to the Creator God.

Conclusion –

What an awesome scene of heavenly worship we have just studied.

This vision given to John demonstrates how to reach up to our Creator God in true worship, [**John 4:23**].

Worship, whether public or private, **must** acknowledge God's holiness, eternity, activity and authority.

Let this study of the vision given to the apostle John inspire us to more purposeful and praise-filled worship of the One and only great God.