

## The Realm of Perpetual Worship

Rev. 4:4-5:14

11.29.16

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From the time I was a small boy, my family attended church - first at a Methodist church and then later, a Presbyterian church - and it was at the Presbyterian Church (where I became a christian); and different though these churches were theologically, both congregations held one thing in common - their hymnody - and one of the hymns sung at both the Methodist and the Presbyterian church - is a song we also sing together at West Hills - and the first two stanzas proclaim:

*"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our sing shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity.*

*Holy, Holy, Holy, all the saint adore Thee; casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and Seraphim, falling down before Thee; Who were, and are, and evermore shall be."*

I remember singing this great hymn from the time I was a small boy - and I also remember how, whenever we sang that hymn, I was always struck with the great truths proclaimed - but more than that, I was always struck with a sense of awe over the Lord God Almighty we were singing about; and I must say, it is the same today whenever I sing this hymn - whether alone but especially in the midst of a congregation, who have gathered to worship the Lord.

This hymn - titled Holy, Holy, Holy, is hymn number 48 in the new Hymns of Grace hymnal and hymn 70 in Great Hymns of the Faith; and we learn from these hymnals that the stanzas of this hymn were put together by Reginald Heber, who lived from 1783 to 1826. BUT, the words used, at least in the first two stanzas, existed long before Mr. Heber decided to put them to music. For the concepts Heber used for the first two stanzas of his hymn were taken from a particular scripture text - and that text is none other than Revelation chapter 4 and verses 8 to 11.

As we have seen from prior weeks, Revelation four and five form a single scene, as the Revelation of Jesus Christ unfolds - and we might say Revelation four is to chapter five what a stage, set up for a theatrical drama is to the stage play. And so Revelation chapter 4 sets the stage for the drama that will begin to unfold in chapter five. What is the scene set up, found in Revelation chapter four?

We learned from vs. 1 that after the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor were completed, John the writer saw a door standing open in heaven and he heard a voice telling him 'Come up here' - and immediately he was in the Spirit (v.2) and found himself in another realm, if I may use that descriptor - and the realm he found himself in was a throne room - and we learn from vv.2-4 that this was like the throne room of God, with God seated on a throne. We also learn that John was to come up in order to learn "*what must take place after this*". - that is, John was going to be shown events that would take place *between the first and second coming of Christ, including events that were unfolding as John wrote*. The visions introduced, then, in 4:1 and which continue through Rev. 22:5 concern events throughout the church age, past, present and future to John - and for us the same applies - some events have taken place already, some are taking place and some are still to take place in the future.

As John went up, he saw in the Spirit the throne and He who sat upon the throne - and he described He who sat on the throne by likening Him to objects found in the physical - the temporal world. In other words, John uses temporal objects to explain eternal realities about God and about what is taking place in His realm - that is, in the timeless realm of eternity. What is taking place? What is taking place is **perpetual worship**. Or put another way, in chapter four John has been transported in the Spirit from earth and into the realm of perpetual worship - the very presence of God; and John describes that worship to us BEFORE he moves on to the drama that is unfolding - the drama of Redemption - the drama of the coming King and His conquering kingdom.

Now, this scene of worship is fantastic. First, John shows us the stage setting (vv.2-7); then he shows us the action of worship of a particular group of creatures (vv.8); and then he reveals the worship action of another group (vv.9-11). That is the stage setting.

**First**, the stage for this worship is found in vv. 2-6a. We have a throne, he who sat on the throne with a description (vv.2-3); and we have the thrones surroundings (vv.4-6a).

a) Twenty four thrones with twenty four elders on them clothed in white and wearing gold crowns. The white garments represent purity and the crowns represent royalty - but, WHO are these elders? There have been various understandings of who these elders are.

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1) 24 orders of the priests found in 1 Chronicles 24:3-19;  
2) 24 gatekeepers 26: 17-19;  
3) 24 levitical worship leaders 1 Chr. 25: 6-31;  
4) It is most likely however, that the 24 elders are a reference to the sum total of the people of God throughout the ages - the entire church at worship.

b) From the throne there are lightnings and peals of thunder as well as seven burning torches of fire - which is the Spirit of God (v. 5); and there is what looks like a sea of glass before the throne;

c) And finally, there are four living creatures like man has never seen before (vv.6-7). What are these creatures? We meet these same creatures in a couple of places in the OT - Isaiah 6:1-2 and Ezekiel 1:10. And we learn from those scriptures that the creatures in Revelation 4 are Seraphim and Cherubim - mighty angels - with wings, and eyes all around, and four different faces - that LIKE a lion, like an ox, like a man and like an eagle in flight. Notice the use of the word 'LIKE' - John uses that word with the respective descriptors because he is trying to describe eternal realities using temporal language;

**Next**, John describes the action of worship of these living creatures in v. 8;

**Third**, John describes the worship of the elders in vv. 9-11; and the way he describes this scene shows that this worship goes on and is repeated over, and over, and over, and over, and over - all the time.

**Can you imagine that?** The four living creatures and the 24 elders worship God perpetually - and as they do, they do the same thing and say the same thing, over and over, each time. Do you think you would grow weary and board of this receptive worship, over and over and over? Some of us might think we would, and this is due to the way we think. And on the surface of this text, it seems rather boring. But with further examination, we see why it is NOT boring. Let me explain to you what I mean, using a question.

**Have you ever been in a significant lightening storm?** One where there are lightening bolts searing the sky from earth to heaven and at the same time, there are lightening flashes running horizontally through the sky? I have seen this type lightening storm - in Tennessee, in Africa, and once diving from Gilroy to the church for a meeting one night. And if you ever have witnessed this type lightening storm, you will know that no two lightening bolts or series of bolts are the same, right? And if the atmosphere is very, very active, one can watch the lightening for an hour or two - and never grow bored. Why? Because with each new flash, we see yet another aspect of glory - the glory of lightening.

Now, look with me at v. 5. We have lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder - and one thing this symbolizes - and especially the lightening - is the perpetual, constant, overwhelming glory of God, revealed. The same is true of God appearance being like jasper and carnelian. And the same is true of the sea of glass - each of these reflect the glory of the living GOD - and with each reflection of the glory of God, the four living creatures and the 24 elders gain a new and a fresh and a deeper glimpse of the God's glory - and this results in perpetual worship, of which they never grow bored - for the revelation of God's glory is never OLD but is EVER NEW!

And did you notice what the living creatures and the elders say, as they worship. First, the living creatures proclaim:

**Holy, Holy Holy, IS the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!**" and as they proclaim they fall down. Why is the word HOLY repeated? Well, there is one "HOLY" for each of the three persons of the Godhead - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - all of whom are present in chapter 4 and 5.

This sounds like the first and second stanza of Holy, Holy. Holy, doesn't it?

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty! Cherubim and Seraphim, falling down before Thee; Who were, and are, and evermore shall be.*

And whenever the living creatures do this, the 24 elders follow with worship, falling down before he who is seated on the throne as they cast their crowns before Him and they proclaim:

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**“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”** - and that sounds a lot like the opening stanzas of Holy, Holy, Holy:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, all the saint adore Thee; casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.*

John was in the realm of perpetual worship - in the very presence of God; and chapter four sets the stage for the drama that begins to unfold in chapter five - which begins to unfold ALSO in the midst of worship. Let me show you what I mean:

Verses 1 to 7 add a dimension to the scene John sees in heaven - a dilemma and a solution;

Verses 8-10 add a new dimension of worship to the scene;

Verse 11-14 add yet another dimension of worship to the scene in heaven;

And if a reader pays close attention, what is revealed is God in both His creating splendor and in His redeeming splendor, receiving worship, from ALL creation, ALL the time! Chapter four ends with worship due to the creator and chapter five ends with worship due the redeemer - and chapter six will open by beginning to show what all this means for those who love God and for those who do not.

And there are a couple of practical lessons I want to point out to you as we close.

First of all, it is important to note that in God's presence there is perpetual worship;

Second, it is from within this reality of perpetual worship that redemption was born, is offered and flows out to the world;

And finally, it is back to this reality - or perpetual worship - that redemptions brings us - those of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know God the Father, through Jesus the Son, by God the Holy Spirit. Oh, He is so worthy of our worship, our life, our all; and the revelation of God's glory, to those who know God and walk with Him by faith is never OLD but is EVER NEW; and for those who have spiritual eyes to see, the hymn I referenced at the start of our time tonight makes for a fitting close. For of Him, the Triune God, we can honestly proclaim in word or in song:

***Holy, holy, holy! Tho the darkness hide thee, tho the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see; Only thou art Holy, there is none beside thee, Perfect in power, in love and purity.***

***Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea; Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty! God in three persons, blessed Trinity!***

May each and every one here tonight, come to know this God - and if He is known, may we so live before Him so as to offer Him worship, for He is worthy of worship - perpetually.