

Heavenly Worship
Revelation 5:11-14
2/1/2015

When you drop a stone into a smooth, calm lake, there are ripples that start going from the entry point outward. Those ripples will eventually extend all the way to the outer edge of the lake, even if they do get less and less noticeable as they go. The reason these ripples happen is that the stone displaces a certain amount of water, which must then go up and out, and does so in a wave-like fashion. I'm sure you've seen the famous slow-motion drop of water falling into other water. This beautiful image is a great analogy for what we find in our text today. The worship of God is like a stone cast into a calm lake. It casts ripples outward from the epicenter. Those ripples can be felt even here on earth. The ripples are there even now, even before Christ comes back. One of the most important things we can learn about our worship is that it is a ripple of the heavenly worship that takes place around the throne constantly. We worship because all those in heaven worship, and we join in their worship.

As we have mentioned in past sermons, emperor worship was on the rise during the time when John wrote this book. We have evidence that when the emperor desired a special occasion, the people would actually pray to them, not just for them. Some ancient kings liked to have the people shout out something like this: "health, salvation, victory, and power" be unto him that sits on the throne. Another ruler was praised this way: "He is the all-wise, all-powerful, all-virtuous, divinely ordained ruler." As one commentator puts it, "Using such language to praise the crucified Jesus as the slaughtered Lamb heightens the [contrast] between the claims of the visionary world and those of the readers' social worlds." It is supposed to jar us when we think of a mighty Roman emperor getting praised this way, and then the slaughtered Lamb getting praised in much more thorough ways.

In the literary context of the rest of the chapter, what we have seen in the last two sermons is that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb that looks as if it has been slain. That mightiest of all warriors is worthy to open the scroll. He has both the power and the wisdom to accomplish God's plan, and to make it known. The only logical response is worship. It reminds me of the famous beginning of Romans 12. It starts with the word "therefore." It means "in light of everything we have seen in chapters 1-11, offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God, for this is your logical act of worship." It only makes sense that we should be reduced to a boneless wonder and be driven to our knees in the light of the mighty salvation that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has bought with His own blood.

So our passage starts with a very impressive sight. Myriads of myriads of angels are worshipping God. The NKJV has rightly translated the Greek word

“myriad” by the numerical equivalent “10,000.” The only difficulty with the NKJV translation at this point is that the Greek is plural. So, it should run something like this: “ten thousands times ten thousands.” That means that there are at least several hundred million angels worshiping God at this point in Revelation.

There are a couple of interesting points to notice about this worship service. First of all, the angels worship God because of what Jesus has done for us. Obviously, the angels do not see us as a threat to their status, even though they know that one day we will have more authority than the angels. Instead, they rejoice whenever a sinner repents. The more, the merrier, according to the angels. The angels love God's people. In fact, the main job of most of the angels is to minister to us. Now, that does not mean that every single person has their own guardian angel, as popular piety would have us believe. That idea is nowhere taught in Scripture. It is more like there are many, many angels to minister whenever necessary! Remember the story of Elisha in 2 Kings 6, where the king of Syria sent a large army of horses and chariots to take Elisha and his servant. The servant was terrified. Elisha reassured his servant, saying, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then the mountains and the hills were filled with horses and chariots of fire. The angels were there when the Lord protected His prophet from those who would destroy him. If they minister to us, and there are hundreds of millions of them, then we need never fear that the spiritual forces of darkness will overcome. They cannot. Even if God were by Himself against all the forces of evil, one single word would destroy them. But God knows how weak our faith is, and the angels exist to bring honor and glory to God through ministering to God's people, and to God Himself. Not only do we have God on our side, but we also have hundreds of millions of angels on our side. That should be of great comfort to the Christian.

So what are these myriads of angels singing? They sing a seven-fold praise. If you count the number of things they ascribe to the Lamb in verse 12, you will see that there are seven. That is not accidental. Seven being the number of completeness, they are offering complete praise to the Lord God. The fact is, however, that some of these things are a bit curious. Why would wealth be something that the angels praise the Lamb as being worthy of receiving? Also, can the Lamb possibly receive more wisdom, power, honor, glory and blessing than He already has? What is the answer to this little puzzle? Well, the answer is that Jesus Christ is both God and man. As God, He does not need any of those things, and those things cannot be added to Him. However, Jesus is not just God any more. He is also fully man! As the God-man, he has received all these things in principle. As we know, however, He has yet to return and claim these things in a final way. In other words, this praise is simply another way of saying, “Thy kingdom come.”

Here again we must observe that it is the Lord who is worthy of receiving these things, and not us. Our only worthiness comes from being connected to

Christ by faith. I think if we were honest with ourselves, our sin nature would really rather prefer that we receive these things than that Jesus receive them. We get jealous of Jesus. The answer, however, is simple. Jesus does not just keep these things for His own use, and for no one else. After all, the four living creatures just got through singing about the kingdom of priests that the Lamb had established, and how they shall reign on the earth, in verse 10. The more Jesus has, the more He has to offer us. What we are going to find out in the new heavens and the new earth is that what Jesus will give us will surpass our wildest imaginations here on earth.

Why is the Lord Jesus worthy? The key is in the word “receive,” which is actually the same word used in verse 7 to describe the Lamb's taking the scroll from the hand of the One who sits on the throne. The taking of verse 7 is the proof that the Lamb is worthy. The word itself can be translated either “take” or “receive.” So the taking of the scroll in verse 7 results in the receiving of all glory, honor, and power in verse 12. They are very closely connected.

It is in verse 13 that we see the ripple effect in all its glory. There cannot be so much worship by so many millions of heavenly beings without there being some kind of echo on earth. There is something quite remarkable about this description, because it includes the sea. Normally, the sea is symbolic of chaos, until it is turned to glass, as in chapter 4:6. Here, however, there is a forward-looking glimpse of the time when all is put right again. Of course, God never loses His control even over the seemingly chaotic sea. Nevertheless, on the level of the imagery, the fact that even the sea creatures will praise the Lord indicates that the last battle is in principle already won. All of those creatures, everything in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, and even in the sea, will praise the Lord God. They repeat the last four words that the angels use in verse 12.

The lesson for us from verse 13 is simple: since there will come a day when all creation is put right, we should join confidently right now in that worship that is begun around the throne room of God. We can worship as if the battle is already done. Why? Because God has told us that the battle belongs to Him. And there is nothing in all of creation that can overturn the Lord God, when He comes in majesty and awe to make all things right. A single word of His can make the demons and Satan disperse like so many clouds of smoke. There is, therefore, no need to fear Satan and his demons. Yes, they can still do a lot of damage here and now. We must not under-estimate him either. However, he is already beaten in principle. All that remains is for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again, and all demons will be gone, banished forever to the lake of fire.

One other doctrinal thing can be gleaned from this text, and that is that the number of God's elect is a number no one can count. Sometimes Calvinists are accused of being so narrow that they don't believe in a very large number of the elect. You know how the Calvinist is ridiculed. Words are put into their mouths to

the effect that “the true church only consists of you and me, and I'm beginning to have doubts about you.” No doubt there are people who are like that. They make the door of the church so small that no one can enter it, except those who know the secret handshake. Folks, if you ever believed that, then know this for certain: the Bible describes Abraham's offspring as more numerous than the stars in the sky. Revelation says it is a host no man can number. So, let's make sure we focus on the right question. The right question is not really whether the number of the elect is large or small. The Bible says it is a large number. The real question is whether you and I are part of that number. As we saw with the children, counting to a large number takes quite a while...for a human. God can number, and has numbered, all His children from all eternity, and knows them all, one by one. Does He know you? Have you surrendered your will to Christ? For that is the only single real requirement of being part of Christ's church: that you believe Jesus died for your sins and in your place so that there is now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus.

Finally, it becomes sealed by those who are closest to the throne: the four living creatures and the elders. The four living creatures say “Amen.” The word “amen” is not just the caboose on the end of the long winding train of our prayers. It actually means “so be it.” In many ways, it is the single best word for describing faith. If you believe God's word, then you put your seal of faith on God's Word by saying “Amen.” If God has said it, then you say “amen” when you believe that God means what He says, that everything He says is completely true, and that everything God has said He would do, He will in fact do. One way of illustrating the word “amen” is by looking at what S. Lewis Johnson once said about the relationship of the cross to the resurrection. He said, “The resurrection is the Father's 'Amen' to Christ's words 'It is finished.'” Have you said your “amen” to God's promise that anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has passed from the death to life, and will live forevermore?

If you have, then that “amen” of yours will have a ripple effect in all your life. It will reach out its waves to every corner of your life, and nothing will remain unchanged. Just as the worship of God has ripples, so also does your faith have ripples. These are all good ripples! May God alone receive strength, honor, glory and blessing. AMEN!