

**“APOCALYPSE SOON”****“Worship in Heaven” (Revelation 4:6b-11)**

The focus in the chapter is the throne and the One who sits upon it. He is the central figure of all of human history. Everything began with Him, everything is upheld by Him, everything will be brought to its ultimate consummation by Him, and everything is for His glory. This is set forth in great clarity in this chapter.

*and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: (v6b-8a)*

We are now introduced to four beasts placed around the throne. The Greek word *ζωα* that is translated “beasts” has the idea of living ones (We get the words “zoo” and “zoology” from this Greek word). John attempts to describe them using comparative terms, “*And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.*” There are many striking parallels with Ezekiel 1 (and Isaiah 6) that must be noted. There they are described as “*four living creatures*” and are clearly some type of angelic creatures like cherubim.

**Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. (Ezekiel 1:5-11)**

There has been much speculation concerning what these four beasts represent. Many commentators see them as representing the totality of creation – the lion symbolizes wild life, the calf symbolizes the domesticated animals, the man symbolizes intelligence and reason of humanity, and the eagle symbolizes bird life. Some have taken this further and argue that they represent the four Gospels. A. R. Fausset notes,

“The Fathers identified them with the four Gospels, Matthew the lion, Mark the ox, Luke the man, John the eagle: these symbols, thus viewed, express not the personal character of the Evangelists, but the manifold aspect *of Christ* in relation to the world (*four* being the number significant of world-wide extension, for example, the four quarters of the world) presented by them severally: the lion expressing *royalty*, as Matthew gives prominence to this feature of Christ; the ox, *laborious endurance*, Christ’s prominent characteristic in Mark; man, *brotherly sympathy* with the whole race of man, Christ’s prominent feature in Luke; the eagle, *soaring majesty*, prominent in John’s description of Christ as the Divine Word.”

We are told concerning these four beasts, *“each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within.”* These expressions such as, *“full of eyes before and behind”* and *“each of them six wings about him”* indicates that these beasts were alert and ready to rush to serve the One on the throne. In fact we are told, *“and they rest not day and night....”* (v8b)

*and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, (v8b-9)*

These beasts were continually engaged in worship directed to the One on the throne, *“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come...”* There will be no need for rest in heaven! We are given an insight into the forms of worship in heaven in these two chapters. There are at least 5 different hymns of praise. In this first hymn of praise there is an emphasis on the holiness of God and the immutability of His character. It is worship that is for God alone, *“give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne.”* It involved proclaiming God’s perfections, *“give glory and honour”* as well as declaring the creature’s thankfulness for His gifts to His creation, *“and thanks to Him.”* God’s holiness and His perfections are the standards of our worship, *“praise Him according to His excellent greatness”* (Psa. 150:2).

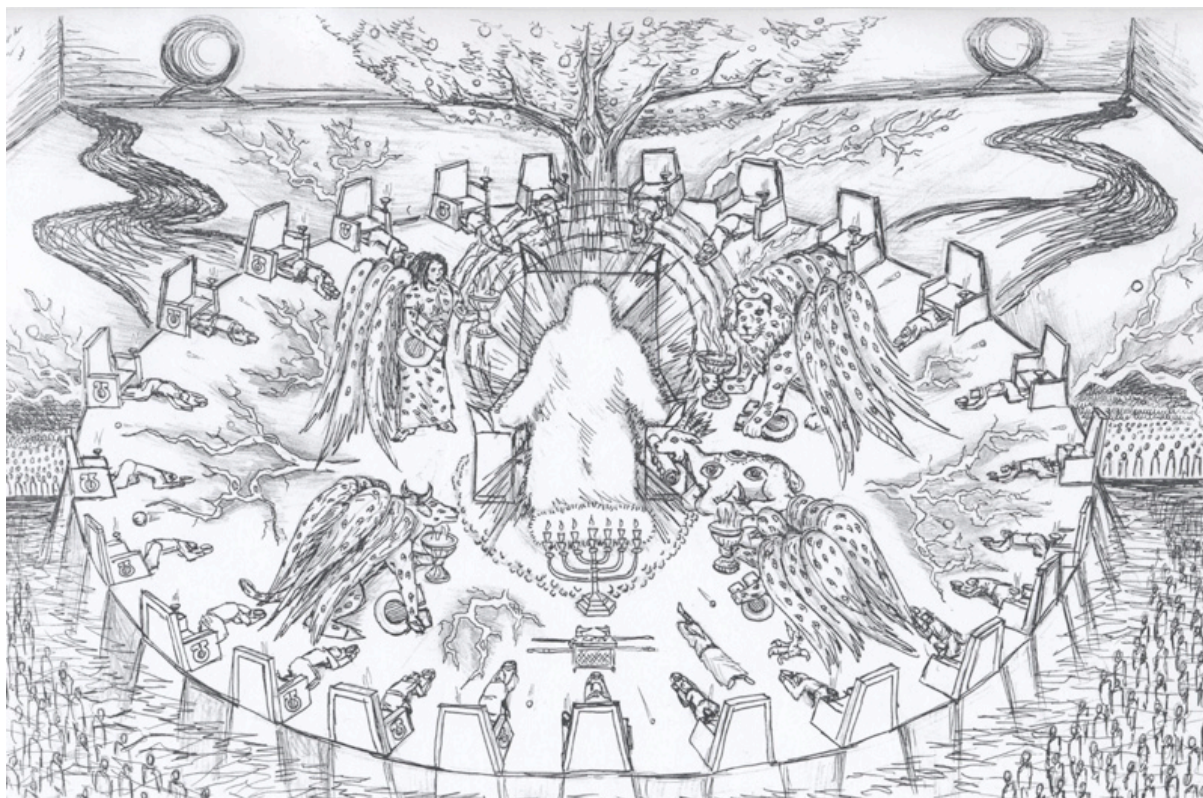
This threefold proclamation, *“Holy, holy, holy”* is also used in Isaiah 6:3 likely speaks of the holiness of the Trinity. Johnson also notes, *“In Hebrew, the double repetition of a word adds emphasis, while the rare threefold repetition designates the superlative and calls attention to the infinite holiness of God.”* If there is one word that describes the centrality of God’s character it is this word – holy. God is absolutely pure and separated from sin. One of the ways God will demonstrate this holiness in the subsequent visions will be in His apocalyptic judgments upon sinners and His separation of the righteous from the unrighteous.

*The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created. (v10-11)*

The worship of the four beasts inspired a response from the 24 elders. These men fall down and cast their crowns before *“before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever”* in reverential submission (cf. Isa. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 7:15). The Greek word for *“crowns”* here is *stephanos*, which indicates that these crowns were ones that were given to victors rather than royal ones given to monarchs, which was a *diadema* crown. A *stephanos* is more like a wreath or a garland that was awarded for achievement to the victors by the ancient Greeks in athletic games (like the ancient Greek Olympics).



The casting of the crowns was a symbolic gesture that their authority and honour is a delegated one from the authority and honour of God. A true understanding of grace leads them to the conclusion that any blessing they have in heaven is from Him. This worship is done unashamedly and in perfect harmony. No one forced them to do so but is a seemingly natural response to their God's presence as it is not about their glory but His glory. These worshippers are lost in wonder, love and praise! The focus of their action is not each other or the 4 beasts but, "*Him that sat on the throne.*" They are caught up in His glory and praise. We must assume that since the worship of the four beasts is continual then the worship of the 24 elders must be also.



The 24 elders sang a further hymn of praise, "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.*" This hymn acknowledged the fact that only God was truly worthy of worship. It also proclaimed His glory in creation, "*for Thou hast created all things.*" The world is his world. This fact leads to the direct conclusion that He alone has the sovereign right to seek glory from creation, "*and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.*" It was God's sovereign power that created and sustained all things and it was God's sovereign will that planned and brought into being all of creation; thereby giving true meaning to it all. Another implication from such doctrinal truth is that as the Creator He alone has the right to judge His creation in any way that He sees fit to do so. The failure to acknowledge this is a sin. It was a sin that Belshazzar was judged for, "*and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified....*" (Daniel 5:23)

## WORSHIP

The word "worship" is derived from an old English word that has the idea of worthiness or meritoriousness. True worship means giving to the Lord the recognition He deserves, as revealed

in His Word. Worship is expressed by the lips in praise and by the life in service. Two Greek words commonly translated “worship” in the NT also help us understand the theology of worship. These words are:

(1) *proskuneo* – this word literally means to kiss toward. In the times of the Greeks they would show respect and homage to a monarch by kissing his feet or hand in a prostrate manner. Some would even fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence. So *proskuneo* signifies an act of prostration and submission towards a superior. It may involve holding a person’s feet (cf. Matt. 28:9) or kneeling (cf. Mark 15:19). The outward posture is to reflect the inner heart’s attitude of respect and humility. When we worship God we are to have a low view of self and an elevated view of God.

(2) *latreuo* – this word has more the idea of to render service or to render homage. In the NT it normally carries more of a connotation of serving as a priest to the Lord whereas *proskuneo* is more associated with our attitude to a superior like a king. Priests served the Lord in acts of worship by offering up sacrifices and incense. When Abraham went to offer a sacrifice to the Lord Genesis 22, the offering was termed worship. As NT priests (cf. 1 Peter 2:5,9), every believer offers himself as a “*living sacrifice*.” (Rom. 12:1). Worship includes true service to God (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24; Philp. 1:11).

The Lord Jesus Christ brought these two Greek words together in Matthew 4:10 when He declared, “*Thou shalt worship (proskuneo) the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (latreuo).*” Worship directs the mind and emotion upward toward heaven. It will include dignity, awe, reverence, humility, submission and service to the Lord.

The Westminster Longer Catechism Question 104 is: “*What are the duties require in the First Commandment?*” The answer given gives us a helpful summary of what worshipping the Lord truly means,

“The duties required in the First Commandment are, the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly, by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honouring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of him; believing him; trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in him; being zealous for him; calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please him; and sorrowful when in anything he is offended; and walking humbly with him.”

The heaping up of verbs here summarises the essence of true worship. The forms we use in corporate worship reveal our true view of God. Worship is our highest calling as the Larger Catechism explains, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully enjoy Him forever.” When God said, “*Thou shalt the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve,*” He meant it.

## CONCLUSION

It has been well said, “Those who praise God on earth will feel at home in heaven.” The picture we have of this awesome and glorious worship in heaven provides the backdrop to the chapters that will follow. We can imagine how these chapters revealing God in sovereign control of this universe lifted the hearts and minds of the saints of the Apostle John’s day as they faced the

mighty onslaught of the Roman Empire in persecution. It is also one that exemplifies for us today what it is to truly worship God in spirit and in truth. The humility, reverence, unity, passion, and God-centred worship is one that we should aspire to have. CH Spurgeon made a pertinent application to us,

“Our text says they *all* cast their crowns before the throne. There are no divided opinions in heaven, no sects and parties, no schisms there. They are all in perfect harmony and sweet accord. What one does, all do. They cast their crowns, without exception, before the throne. Let us begin to practice that unanimity here. As fellow Christians, let us get rid of everything that would divide us from each other, or separate us from our Lord. I do not read that there was a single elder who envied his brother's crown, and said, 'Ah, I wish I were such an one as he is, and had his crown.' I do not read that one of them began to find fault with his brother's crown, and said, 'Ah, his jewels may be bright, but mine have a peculiar tint in them, and are of greater excellence.' I do not read ought of dissension; they were all unanimous in casting their crowns at Jesus' feet. They were all unanimous in glorifying God.”

Worship is at the centre of the life of a Christian. There is a distinct trend to determine worship by autonomous man's feelings and desires. The Westminster Confession of Faith in chapter 21, section 1, explicitly states,

“The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”

The Bible makes it clear that there is a *right* way to worship the Lord and a *wrong* way to worship the Lord. God rejects all worship that He has not commanded. He is very concerned about both the outward and the inward aspects of worship. There are also severe consequences to worshipping wrongly. Lucifer was cast out of heaven for seeking an alternative way to worship. The devil is still seeking people to worship him (cf. Matt. 4:9). Worship matters to God and it should, therefore, matter to us.

If worship is the highest calling of the saint, **how are we living up to our calling?** One of the saddest things is God has given us so much and loves us so much yet we are so apathetic and begrudging in our worship towards Him. Our hearts should be so overcome with the grace of God toward us that we should be spontaneously responding in worship towards Him. We should echo the heart of the Psalmist when he cried, “*I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth....O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together*” (Psa. 34:1, 3).

All too many are simply going through the motions like a ritual in corporate worship. Don't be half-hearted in worship. We live in this world but we also live in union with Christ. We are one day closer to the eternal city, whose builder and maker is God. Discover the awesome reality of worshipping the Lord of Hosts. God told His people in ancient days, “*I am a great king*” (Mal. 1:14). If that reality ever grips you, then your worship will be transformed. Our days are numbered here on earth. Start using your time wisely by beginning today to make worship a way of life. One wonderful day we will join the great worship service in glory, which will last for all eternity. Let us rehearse for it here.

**Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,  
To his feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like me his praise should sing?  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Praise the everlasting King.**