

## **Worship: The Point of Everything Revelation 4-5**

The pastor received a call that was all too familiar. His parishioner had fallen into one of her bouts with depression. The cycle was predictable. Periodically she would call and confess to him that she just didn't feel like going on. She would say that she felt "down and depressed." Part of the routine was a visit from this pastor where he would visit her home and pray with her. During such times she often said that his visits made her feel better.

But this time was different. God had been moving in the pastor's heart through his own study of Scripture. Such study moved him to a different strategy, a strategy of confrontation rather than comfort. He said to her, "I want to apologize. I have been treating you as if you had some sort of illness. But how do I know that? Here you are, sitting in your half-million-dollar house, all that the world has to offer you, and yet this doesn't appear to be enough. You seem to be in grief, as if you were expecting more. I wonder why you think you deserve more, that life could be even better for you than it is. Many people think Greenville is a great place to live. I wonder why you look for more." (Will Willimon, Pastor, p. 92.)

At that moment this pastor pastored this woman. Wherein she wanted comfort, he provided a holy confrontation which challenged her to consider that the Lord might be pushing her to explore a different reason for her existence. Perhaps life was about "more", but not the kind of "more" she had been looking for. Perhaps it is about the more that reminds that we were not made to be satisfied with what this world offers, but to be satisfied in the one who has made this world. Such is the goal of worship!

Eugene Peterson writes, "People who do not worship live in vast shopping all where they go from shop to shop, expending enormous sums of energy and making endless trips to meet first this need and then that appetite, this whim and that fancy. Life lurches from one partial satisfaction to another interrupted by ditches of disappointment. Motion is fueled by the successive illusions that purchasing this wardrobe, driving that car, eating this meal, drinking that beverage will center life and give it coherence."

Why was this woman depressed? Why do many of us struggle with depression and anxiety and disappointment? It is because we have not learned that the point of our life is worship, that we should live to adorn our Creator and Redeemer. He is the great point of our life. It does not matter if we are struggling in high school with the unmet desires of youth, or the early career frustrations of not having enough money, or the mid-life challenges of not having made a difference in our lives, or the loneliness which comes in the twilight years; if our lives are not centered by the worship of the Lord we will seek to center them upon something else from this world.

In Revelation 4-5, Jesus gives John and us a view into the point of life as he gives us a glimpse of life in heaven and life as it will be in eternity. Here he shows us that life finds its great point in the worship of the living God who is the sacrificed lamb. **In worship we find the strength to endure persecution and suffering that could lead to death and to resist compromise that could lead to forsaking the faith.**

As we have seen over the last six weeks, these are the challenges that were facing the young, first century church. Amazingly, these remain the challenges that face the church today.

- **Will we suffer and endure the challenges that our Christian identity calls for from us?**
- **Will we resist giving ourselves to the easy way of compromise?**

We struggle with **depression and anxiety** because our **desires remain unmet**. We **compromise our convictions** because we **do not believe there is anything better to live for**

**than the moment.** The answer is not to try to get more, become more efficient or reach higher. The answer is not to find a new group of friends. The answer is not anger and criticism of your spouse or your co-worker. The answer, youth and parents, is not to switch youth groups. The answer is worship. For only in the context of worship is our heart re-wired to the perspective of heaven and the Holy of Holies. Worship confronts my worldly and compromised heart and invites me to true rest in the wonder and love of my God. This is why Sunday morning, corporate worship is the most important thing our church does.

According to verse 14, Jesus has opened the door. Will we enter and see what the grand point of our lives? We will find ourselves around the Throne and before the Lamb? What does it look like to worship?

### 1) Entering into True Knowledge (4-5)

The first thing Jesus invites us to, is an entry into true knowledge—the true knowledge of **God as Sovereign and God as Savior.**

- **God as Sovereign: (4)**

Immediately John beholds a throne in the midst of heaven and upon the throne sits the Lord God Almighty. Here we have the picture of the Lord as the Sovereign ruler of history.

Notice that he is not described, because no eye can see the Lord God Almighty. Instead he is imagined with precious stones and the beauty of the rainbow symbolizing his royalty and his covenant love for creation. It is clear that the purpose of chapter four of Revelation is to remind the reader that the Lord God almighty is the great source and sustainer of all of creation.

Around the throne sit the twenty-four elders representing the Old Covenant people of God together with the New Covenant people of God, the people of the promise and the people of fulfillment.

In addition the four living, angelic creatures are gathered around the throne representing the scope of creation—the lion as the noblest of creatures, the ox as the strongest, the eagle as the swiftest and highest and man as the wisest lord of creation. Along with the seraphim of Isaiah's vision, they declare that the Lord God is thrice holy and is the one who was, and is and is to come.

1. The point of chapter four is to remind us that God is the great **object of worship.** Even as our worship begins with the announcement of God's greatness, so must begin all true worship. We find meaning not when we put ourselves at the center of the universe, but when we acknowledge that God is at the center. He is the one on the throne, not us. Worship begins when we are, in the words of Marva Dawn, "reduced."

One of the reasons worship at Redeemer may frustrate you is because we are not gathering to make you happy. You are not the person we are pursuing; it is the one on the throne!

2. The point of chapter four is to remind us that as our Sovereign, **God rules over history.** Even though it looks like life may be too much for us handle, **because our God is Sovereign he is in control of history. We have nothing to fear.** Only worship can point us to the one who is in control of history. If you think about it, every idol is a way of seeking to control history, seeking to control some outcome in our lives. Yet worshiping the Lord reminds us that he is the one who knows how to orchestrate our lives best.

Everything we do in worship at Redeemer is a reminder that God is the point of our lives and he is the one who sustains and controls our lives.

Kevin Spacey's character in the movie *The Usual Suspects*, says, "I don't believe in God, but I'm afraid of him." Such inconsistency of belief reflects a heart that already knows God enough to recognize his sovereignty, but not enough to enter into his worship.

Each of us can intuitively recognize the truth of what I'm saying. We know that the idols of success, money, beauty, relationship, etc. are powerless to rule our hearts. Yet we don't know and give ourselves to them anyway. **Today is the day to not be afraid, but to enter into true knowledge and give ourselves to Lord God Almighty!**

- **God as Savior: (5)**

"There's a place in *Lord of the Rings*, my favorite novel, where the hobbit Pippin is standing at the gates of the city, and in comes the great witch king, the demon king. He comes through the gate, and he's about to destroy the city, when off in the distance Pippin hears the horns of the riders of Rohan. They have come to the rescue. Even though the king of Rohan rides to his death that day, the city is saved. We're told that for the rest of his life, Pippin could never hear a horn off in the distance without bursting into tears. Why? Because every time he heard a horn in the distance, it reawakened the memory of his salvation and the memory of the one who died for him." (*Tim Keller, from the sermon "How Sin Makes Us Addicts," Preaching Today Audio, Issue 258*)

Keller's point reminds us that sovereignty displays itself in the sacrifice of salvation.

This is the point of chapter five. Here we are presented with a troublesome beginning. Who can open the scroll of history? Who will be able to bring about the Lord's purposes? It seems as though no one is worthy in all the host of heaven. So distraught, John begins to weep.

Then we see the revelation of the Lion of Judah, the Root of David and the One who has conquered. Amazingly, this conquering Lion is presented to us as a sacrificial Lamb. In verse 6, the Lion who is also a Lamb who was slain to ransom the people of God is alone worthy to bring about the purposes of God. The Lamb alone saves the people of God.

Even as Pippin remembered the horn that announced the salvation of the King of Rohan, so John sees the Lamb who announces our salvation.

The point of chapter five is to remind us that worship must always be Christ-centered. Jesus is the one who enables us to worship. In other words God is **not only the object of worship, he is also the subject of worship**. By that, I mean we cannot approach God apart from the grace given in Jesus Christ. Worship should always be pointing us to Jesus Christ and the grace of his sacrificial work.

- Power-team worship
- Worship that is a rush

The focus is often on raw power, not power that is found in Jesus. Worship de-centers us and de-thrones us. It not only makes us small, it reminds us that we are **needy and dependent upon grace**.

## **2. Experiencing the Gift of His Presence: (4-5)**

But worship is more than simply true knowledge it must also be **the experience of the gift of his presence**. In other words, John not only gains a right understanding he experiences a right

understanding. Not only is his intellect engaged, but his whole being—body, mind and soul. Chapters four and five give us something of the emotion of worship a sense of what it must be to be in the presence of God. It is a veritable panorama for the senses:

- Sights to behold (everything in these two chapters)
- Smells to breathe in (incense to breathe)
- Creatures to touch (angelic beings, elders, thrones)
- Words and sounds to hear (peals of thunder, voice of Jesus and the elder)
- Sacrifice to taste (the body of Christ)

Worship is not only seeing the truth, it is the experience of truth. It is entering and experiencing the gift of the presence of God.

Such experience is captured in these chapters with the word of song. The passage emphasizes song, but **singing is the reflection of hearts captured by the object of their affection.**

I love that moment in the movie *Jerry Maguire* where he has just landed his first major deal as an independent sports agent. He replays a perfect guy moment. He gets into his car, begins to drive at a high rate of speed and flips the radio station to the perfect song so that he can sing as the expression of his joy. He is worshipping!

Such is the purpose of song; it expresses hearts that not only know something, but are experiencing something. There are five songs in these two chapters.

- **Old Songs:**

Some of our old songs like the song from verse 8 which repeats the words of Isaiah, chapter 6. Old songs and hymns remind us that we join a chorus of worship that has been going on long before we arrived on the scene. Old Songs remind us that there is a worship service we are called to join, not create.

This is why we use hymns and ancient forms of liturgy at Redeemer.

- **New Songs**

But there are also new songs to sing—new songs which reflect the marvelous truth of redemption secured by Jesus Christ. Such is the song beginning in verse 9. Such truth reminds us that worshipers must always be engaging salvation in a very personal way. **It is not only that there is singing, I must become a singer. I don't become a worshiper until I start to sing.**

That is why chapter five is so important. It tells us what will make us sing—it is the sacrifice of the Lamb. Only the Gospel of grace can conquer my heart and set it free! Singing is simply the metaphor for the vibrancy of worship that is to be carried into all of life as a Christian. This is why we say at Redeemer our worship must be both filled with truth and expressed with vibrancy.

What this means is that it is possible to know lots of truth about worship and still not be a worshiper because you have not joined the chorus of praise. It is not enough to know about God you are supposed to worship, you have to experience his presence as a worshiper in the person of Jesus.

- If I don't sing, it means that the Gospel has not conquered my self-consciousness.
- If I don't witness, it means that the Gospel has not conquered my fear.
- If I don't give to the church, it means that the Gospel has not conquered my wallet.
- If I don't forgive and accept, it means that the Gospel has not conquered my self-righteousness.

- If I don't want to hear God's word, it means that the Gospel has not conquered self.

In other words, if you don't worship it means you have not met the Lamb of chapter five!

"In 1958, a U.S. soldier wandered the streets of Berlin to see the sights. Despite the bustling new life in parts of the city, reminders remained of the destruction of World War II. Walking through a residential area one evening, across the cobblestone street he saw an open space edged with flowers. In the center stood the stone front of what had been a church. The building was no longer there, but the rubble had been cleared away in an attempt to fill the empty space with a little park. The former church's main door was shaped in a Gothic arch, and over it was carved into the stone in German: HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY.

As he stepped through the arch where the doors had once been, of course he wasn't inside anything. What was once a place of worship had been reduced to a patch of stone pavement and open sky. Not so with the Door that John invites us to see. It is none other than the door who is Jesus Christ! (Coleman L. Coates, Cadmus, Michigan. *Leadership*, Vol. 9, no. 4.)

Worship is about entering into the truth about God and this world and experiencing the gift of his presence. Such is what should happen every Sunday as we taste a little bit more of what heaven will be like!