

Heart of Worship

Lesson 12: Worship and the Glory to Come -- Revelation 4:1-11

John was an old man on a hard island, exiled to Patmos for the word of God, cut off from the churches he loved. And then a door opened. "After this I looked," he writes, "and behold, a door standing open in heaven!" A voice like a trumpet called him up, and in the Spirit he was caught into the throne room of the universe. Everything he had suffered, the exile, the loneliness, the persecution of the saints, suddenly stood under a new and greater reality. There is a throne in heaven, and Someone is seated on it, and around that throne, unceasing, rolls the worship of all creation. The first thing John is shown about the future is not a battle or a beast. It is worship.

He reaches for words and can barely find them. The One on the throne shines like jasper and carnelian; a rainbow like an emerald encircles him; from the throne come flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. Around it are twenty-four other thrones with twenty-four elders in white, with golden crowns, and four living creatures covered with eyes, who never cease to cry, day and night, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" This is the center of all reality, the throne that was never empty, the God who reigns now and forever, surrounded by a worship that has never paused and never will.

And watch what the worship does to the worshipers. Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the One on the throne, the twenty-four elders fall down before him, and they cast their crowns before the throne. They take the symbols of their own honor and lay them at his feet, saying, "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." Heaven's worship is the glad surrender of every crown to the only One who is truly worthy. Nothing is held back. Every honor is returned to its source.

This is where our study has been heading all along. We began with worship in spirit and truth, and we have walked through the assembly, the Supper, the singing, the giving, the prayers, the word, reverence, and the whole-life offering. Now John lifts the curtain and shows us the end of the road: an eternity of worship around the throne of God. The worship we offer now, imperfect and interrupted, is a rehearsal for that. One day faith will give way to sight, and the people of God will join the song that never ends. Read John's vision slowly, and let it lift your eyes from the small worship of an hour to the glory that is coming.

Group Discussion: The first thing John is shown about the future is not a battle or a kingdom on earth, but the worship of God around his throne. What does it tell us that heaven's central activity is worship, and how might keeping that eternal scene in view change the way we worship now?

Personal Reflection: The elders cast their crowns before the throne, surrendering every honor to the only One who is worthy. What "crowns" do you tend to hold onto, your achievements,

your reputation, your sense of control, and what would it mean for you to lay them before God in worship? Which is hardest for you to surrender?

Read Revelation 4:1–11

Study Questions

1. The first thing John sees through the open door is “a throne standing in heaven, with one seated on the throne” (v. 2). Why is it significant that the vision of heaven centers on a throne, and what does the throne tell us about who God is and how he relates to all of creation and history?
2. John’s vision of the throne reframed all his suffering on Patmos by showing him who truly reigns. When your own troubles loom large, how might fixing your eyes on God enthroned in heaven change the way you see them? What current burden looks different under the reality of his throne?
3. The four living creatures never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty” (v. 8). What does the threefold cry of “holy” declare about God, and why is his holiness the heart of heaven’s worship?
4. Heaven’s worship is unceasing, “day and night,” while our worship is easily interrupted and crowded out. What most often crowds worship out of your daily life, and what would it look like to let a spirit of worship run more continually through your days?
5. The twenty-four elders “cast their crowns before the throne” (v. 10), surrendering their own honor to God. What does this act reveal about the nature of true worship, and why does genuine worship always involve giving glory to God rather than seeking it for ourselves?

6. We are all tempted to keep our crowns, to hold onto our achievements, status, and self-importance. Which crown do you find hardest to lay before God, and how might surrendering it free you to worship him more fully?
7. The elders praise God as worthy “for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (v. 11). How does God’s work as Creator ground his worthiness to be worshiped, and why does all creation owe him glory?
8. If God created all things and sustains them by his will, then everything you have and are comes from him. How does recognizing God as your Creator and sustainer shape your sense of dependence and gratitude, and where do you need to live more consciously as his creature?
9. John’s vision shows God already enthroned and reigning, surrounded by ceaseless worship, the throne that was never empty. The kingdom of God is not a future earthly political reign still to be set up; Christ reigns now at the Father’s right hand, and his people worship the God who “was and is and is to come” (v. 8). How does this scene assure us that God is sovereignly on his throne in the present, even amid suffering and apparent chaos, and how does it point us to the consummation, when faith gives way to sight and the redeemed worship God forever? Why is the worship of the throne, rather than any earthly reign, the true hope toward which history is moving?
10. Look back over this whole study and over John’s vision of the throne: worship in spirit and truth, in the assembly and in all of life, now lifted up into the eternal worship of heaven. Name one specific way this glimpse of the glory to come is reshaping how you worship today, and one concrete step you will take so that your worship now becomes a faithful rehearsal for the song that never ends.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Revelation 5:9–14, the new song to the Lamb who was slain, joined by every creature in heaven and earth; Revelation 1:10, John in the Spirit on the Lord's day; Isaiah 6:1–4, Isaiah's vision of the Lord high and lifted up, with the seraphim crying holy; Hebrews 12:22–24, we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem and the assembly of the firstborn; Colossians 3:1–2, setting our minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.