

Subject: Give It Up- Worship Revelation 4:2-3

True spiritual worship is perhaps one of the greatest needs in our individual lives and in our churches. There is a constant emphasis today on witnessing for Christ and working for Christ, but not enough is said about worshipping Him. To worship means "to ascribe worth" (Rev 4:11; 5:12). It means to use all that we are and have to praise God for all that He is and does.

- ✓ Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." NIV
- ✓ Rev 5:12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" NIV

Heaven is a place of worship, and God's people shall worship Him throughout all eternity. Perhaps it would be good for us to get in practice now! A study of Rev 4-5 will certainly help us better understand how to worship God and give Him the glory that He deserves.

If Rev 1:19 is God's inspired outline of this book, then Rev 4 ushers us into the third division: "the things which shall be hereafter." In fact, that is exactly what God said to John when He summoned him to heaven! It would appear that, in this experience, John illustrates what will happen to God's people when the Church Age has run its course: heaven will open; there will be a voice and the sound of a trumpet; and the saints will be caught up to heaven (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:13-18). Then, God's judgment of the earth can begin.

- ✓ 1 Cor 15:52 In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. NIV
- ✓ 1 Thess 4:13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. NIV

But before God pours out His wrath, He gives us a glimpse into glory and permits us to hear the worshipping creatures in heaven as they praise God. Two aspects of their worship are presented for our instruction and imitation.

Are You a Functioning Member?

As we all grow older we feel the pains that creep into our once strong and fluid joints. Our hands hurt when they do their work. Our knees creak when we stoop down. Our backs and necks are sore when we

sleep wrong. The ailments we suffer from are seemingly endless. We are aware of those faulty parts, are we not? When we have a pain in any portion of the body we tend to focus on that area. We aren't so mindful of the hundreds of other parts that don't hurt. We do that because we go to the aid of the weakest members. They need the attention, or at least they demand it. The spiritual implications of these thoughts are many.

Paul, in describing the role of the church's relationship with its Head, Christ, said, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16). As the church, the body of Christ (Eph 1:22 f), functions to serve the head, it acts as a unit made up of many members (1 Cor 12:27). Each part functions on its own, up to its own ability, yet, all the parts function together in harmony to produce all proper reflections of the Head. This places each member in a position to strive for personal spiritual excellence, as well as for all to work with each other towards the ultimate goal of glorifying Christ. Christian Messenger

They Worship the Creator (Rev. 4)

The key word in this chapter is throne; it is used fourteen times. In fact, this is a key word in the entire book, appearing forty-six times. **No matter what may happen on earth, God is on His throne and is in complete control.** Various teachers interpret Revelation in different ways, but all agree that John is emphasizing the glory and sovereignty of God. What an encouragement that would be to the suffering saints of John's day and of every age in history.

Using the throne as the focal point, we can easily understand the arrangement of this exciting chapter.

God is still on the Throne!

On the throne - Almighty God (vv. 2a). This is God the Father, since the Son approaches the throne in Rev 5:6, and the Spirit is pictured before the throne in Rev 4:5. There is no possible way for human words to describe what God is Like in His essence. John can only use comparisons. Jasper is a clear gem (Rev 21:11) and the sardine is red. The Lord is robed in light, according to Ps 104:2 and 1 Tim 6:16. Both the jasper and the sardius (sardine) were found in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex 28:17-21).

Around the throne - a rainbow (v. 3 b). This rainbow was a complete circle, not merely an arc, for in heaven all things are completed. The rainbow reminds us of God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:11-17), symbolic of His promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. God's covenant, as we shall see, was not only with Noah, but with all of His creation.

Judgment is about to fall, but the rainbow reminds us that God is merciful, even when He judges (Hab 3:2). Usually, a rainbow appears after the storm; but here, we see it before the storm.

- ✓ Hab 3:2 O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. KJV

Around the throne - elders and living creatures (vv. 3-4, 6-7). The rainbow was around the throne vertically, while these heavenly beings were around the throne horizontally. They are, as it were, the king's court.

Who are these twenty-four elders seated on thrones? It is unlikely that they are angels, because angels are not numbered (Heb 12:22), crowned, or enthroned. Besides, in Rev 7:11, the elders are distinguished from the angels (see also Rev 5:8-11). The crowns they wear are the "victor's crowns" (the Greek word *stephanos*, Rev 2:10); and we have no evidence that angels receive rewards.

These elders probably symbolize the people of God in heaven, enthroned and rewarded. There were twenty-four courses of priests in the Old Testament temple (1 Chron 24:3-5,18; also Luke 1:5-9). God's people are "kings and priests" (Rev 1:6), reigning and serving with Christ. Note especially their praise (Rev 5:9-10). When Daniel (Dan 7:9) saw the thrones set up (not "cast down" as in the King James Version), they were empty; but when John saw them, they had been filled. Since there were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve Apostles, perhaps the number twenty-four symbolizes the completion of God's people.

The white robes and palm branches speak of victory (Rev 7:9). These are the "overcomers" who have conquered because of their faith in Christ (1 John 5:4-5).

Also around the throne, John saw four "living creatures" ("beasts" in the King James Version) who were nearer to God than the angels and the elders. They resemble the cherubim that the Prophet Ezekiel saw (Ezek 1:4-14; 10:20-22), but their praise (Rev 4:8) reminds us of the seraphim of Isa 6. I believe that these special creatures symbolize God's creation and are related to God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8-17). The faces of the living creatures parallel God's statement in Gen 9:10—His covenant is with Noah (the face of the man), the fowl (the face of the eagle), the cattle (the face of the calf), and the beasts of the earth (the face of the lion).

These creatures signify the wisdom of God ("full of eyes") and proclaim the holiness of God. They are heavenly reminders that God has a covenant with His creation and that He rules His creation from His throne. The presence of the emerald rainbow further enhances this image, since the rainbow was given as the sign of the creation covenant. No matter what terrible judgments may fall on God's earth, He will be faithful to keep His Word. Men may curse Him during the judgments (Rev 16:9,11,21), but nature will praise Him and magnify His holiness.

The cherubim described in Ezekiel I seem to have a part in the providential workings of God in the world, pictured by the "wheels within the wheels." God uses the forces of nature to accomplish His will (Ps 148), and all nature praises and thanks Him.

Some students see in the four faces described (Rev 4:7) an illustration of the fourfold picture of Christ given in the Gospel accounts. Matthew is the royal Gospel of the King, illustrated by the lion. Mark emphasizes the servant aspect of the Lord's ministry (the calf). Luke presents Christ as the compassionate Son of man. John magnifies the deity of Christ, the Son of God (the eagle).

Finally, the name used by these creatures, "Lord God Almighty," emphasizes the power of God. As mentioned in chapter 1, the name Almighty is used nine times in Revelation. The only other such usage in the New Testament is 2 Cor 6:18, but it is found at least, thirty-one times in Job, a book that magnifies the power of God in nature.

Out of the throne - storm signals (v. 5 a). "And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder" (NASB). These are indications of a coming storm and reminders of God's awesome power (Ex 9:23,28; 19:16). These "storm signals" will be repeated during the time of judgment, always

proceeding from the throne and temple of God (Rev 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). God has indeed prepared His throne for judgment (Ps 9:7; 77:18).

Our world does not like to drink of God as a God of judgment. They prefer to look at the rainbow around the throne and ignore the lightning and thunder out of the throne. He certainly is a God of grace, but His grace reigns through righteousness (Rom 5:21). This was made clear at the cross where God manifested both His love for sinners and His wrath against sin.