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WORSHIP IN HEAVEN (PART 2) Revelation 4:6-11

There are many people in the world who are interested or fascinated with doomsday scenarios. There is an expectation that life, as we know it will come to an end.

In the church this fascination spills over into end times prophecy. The question is, “What will the end times be like?”

In fact, over the centuries people have been expecting the end of the age and asking questions about the end times. There have been various scenarios offered over the years.

In modern times these scenarios are brought to the big screen. What are the scenarios that we have seen offered over the years?

In War of the Worlds or Independence Day, aliens attack the earth.

In Deep Impact or Armageddon, It is a comet or meteor headed toward the earth.

In The Day After Tomorrow, global warming leads to super arctic hurricanes that impact the northern hemisphere.

And now just out this past Friday, is the movie 2012. I haven't seen it yet, but it offers yet another doomsday scenario for the end of the earth.

2012 explores the idea of a global doomsday event coinciding with the end of the Mayan Long Count Calendar's current cycle on or around 2012.

This movie depicts a global cataclysm, which involves the Earth's crust displacement causing cracking along fault lines, eruption of super volcanoes, massive earthquakes and enormous tidal waves.

While most of these movies make for great entertainment, they are not the real end time's scenario.

The truth of the end of the age is detailed precisely for us in the book of Revelation. It is in the book of Revelation that Christ reveals through a series of visions to the Apostle John what is to come.

So this morning we will pick up where we left off in July in Revelation chapter 4.

Remember that the key verse for the structure of this book is in Revelation 1:19, where Christ says to John, “*Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*”

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- *The things, which you have seen* refers to John's vision of Christ in Revelation 1.
- *The things, which are* refers to the status of the church at the time of John's exile as described in Revelation 2-3.
- Thus *the things, which will take place after these things* refers to the remainder of the book of Revelation (chapters 4-22) and it is these chapters, which speak of future things; the end times.

So, here in Revelation 4, we have begun to examine actual end-time events. Let's read Revelation 4:1-11.

As we began to examine last time I spoke, Remember that in Revelation 4:1-11, John provides us with a three-fold description of a future worship service in heaven.

What does John describe regarding this future worship service?

First, remember that John describes his summons to heaven (Revelation 4:1-2).

John was granted the immeasurable privilege of having a glimpse of heaven and fortunately for us he was given permission to record what he saw.

Remember that John records what he saw, heard and experienced in verses 1 and 2. READ.

Remember that here in Revelation 4:1-2, John is doing the best that he can do to explain his experience of being transported spiritually into the reality of heaven for the purpose of giving divine revelation.

It is through this unusual experience that John is able to see these future events and record this revelation for us.

Second, remember that John describes the scene in heaven (Revelation 4:3-7).

Remember that John begins the description of this scene in heaven by directing our attention to the central focus of this vision.

What is the central focus of this vision? John says, "*behold a **throne** was standing in heaven.*" The throne is the central focus of this passage.

John describes this scene in heaven in relation to God's throne. In fact, the term **throne** is used eleven times here in chapter 4 alone.

Remember that John provides us with 5 different observations of the heavenly throne room.

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We have already covered four of these observations. What observations does John make that we have covered already?

Observation #1- Remember that John describes the One who is on the throne (Revelation 4:2-3).

Remember that this description of God as like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance speaks of the flashing, glorious, splendid magnificence of God's glory.

Remember also that the context of this worship scene develops into God's judgment upon the unbelieving world in the tribulation through the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments.

Thus, the holiness, righteousness and glory of the Lord will shine through and penetrate, revealing the utter sinfulness of those who have not trusted him.

Observation #2-Remember that John describes what he sees around the throne (Revelation 4:3-4).

Remember that John sees a rainbow around the throne that is like an emerald in appearance; and this emerald ring or essence likely symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy and grace.

Remember also that John informs us that there were 24 elders upon 24 thrones surrounding God's throne; and that these 24 elders represent the church.

While the unbelieving world is facing tribulation, judgment and cataclysmic events upon the earth; we as believers in Christ will be worshipping God in heaven.

Just as the apostle Paul teaches in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 (READ); we as believers will be removed from this world into the presence of God for all eternity...so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Observation #3-Remember that John describes what was coming out from the throne (Revelation 4:5).

Remember that flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder in the Old Testament describes the manifestation of God's glory.

While in the book of Revelation it accompanies the 7th seal, 7th trumpet and 7th bowl judgment and is associated with the firestorm of God's righteous fury about to come upon a sinful Christ rejecting world.

Observation #4-Remember that John describes what is before the throne (Revelation 4:5-6).

Remember that the seven lamps of fire is a reference to the Holy Spirit as it is drawn off the imagery of Zechariah 4:1-10.

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And, the sea of glass refers to a vast pavement of glass, shining brilliantly like sparkling crystal, which adds to the glorious splendor of the heavenly throne room by reflecting the flashing light coming forth from the throne.

Now that is all review. That is as far as we got last time. Now we move on to Observation #5.

Observation #5-John describes what is in and around the throne (Revelation 4:6-7).

John's fifth observation is that of four living creatures. He begins by identifying the location of these living creatures.

John says that they are "in the center and around the throne." This means that they were immediately near the throne. They were stationed in the inner circle nearest the throne.

The Greek text is probably better translated, "four living beings" or "four living ones." But, what are these living beings or living creatures?

John provides us with a detailed description of what these four living creatures look like. How does John describe them?

First, notice their eyes. John says that they are "*full of eyes in front and behind.*" While they literally are full of eyes, most believe that these eyes represent their keen awareness, alertness and comprehensive knowledge and perception.

However, it is important to note, that although they may have such comprehensive knowledge and perception, they are not God and thus are not omniscient. However, it is important to keep in mind that this likely just a physical description of their appearance.

Second, notice their faces. one has the appearance of a lion, a second the appearance of a calf, a third the appearance of a man, and a fourth the appearance of an eagle.

This description has created numerous interpretations especially in regard to possible symbolism.

1) Some have suggested that they represent four types of creatures:

- 1-The lion represents wild animals;
- 2-The calf represents domesticated animals;
- 3-The man representing God's human creation;
- 4-The eagle representing flying creatures.

2) Others have suggested that these represent Christ through the four Gospels:

- 1-The lion representing Jesus portrayed in the book of Matthew as the lion of the tribe of Judah.

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- 2-The calf representing Jesus portrayed in the book of Mark as a humble servant.
- 3-The man representing Christ's humanity as portrayed in the book of Luke.
- 4-The eagle representing Christ portrayed in the book of John as the divine Son of God.

3) While still others see them as emphasizing the attributes of God:

- 1-The lion emphasizes God's omnipotence.
- 2-The calf emphasizes God's humility, patience and service.
- 3-The man emphasizes God's intelligence and rational power.
- 4-The eagle emphasizes God's sovereignty and supremacy.

With that said, it is important for us to keep one principal in mind when we interpret prophecy, actually any portion of Scripture.

When the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense!

It is my understanding that this is a literal description of four living beings in the center and around the throne.

John says, "The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature was like a calf, and the third creature had the face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle."

These creatures were not a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle. They simply looked like a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle.

This is more than likely just a physical description of these four living beings and nothing more.

There really is no suggestion in the text that any kind of symbolism is meant here. If you simply take it as a literal description, it makes good sense.

If you seek to add some sort of implied symbolism to the description, then it becomes confusing and leads to multiple interpretations of what was meant here.

John's description continues in verse 8.

Third, notice their wings. John says, "*And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within...*"

Not only, do they have eyes in the front and back; not only do they look like a lion, calf, man and eagle; but each one of them has six wings.

It is clear that John does not know what these living beings are, so he gives a detailed description of what they look like. In so doing, we are able to connect the dots from previous references in Scripture.

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The six wings of these beings in John's description seem similar to the seraphim of Isaiah 6. READ Isaiah 6:1-2.

However, Ezekiel provides us not only with another detailed account of these beings. He identifies what these beings truly are. Turn with me to Ezekiel 10:3-22.

Clearly these four living beings in John's vision are the same as Ezekiel's Cherubim.

Now in verse 8 John concludes with the third and final description of this future worship service in heaven.

Third, John describes the songs in heaven (Revelation 4:8-11).

Here in verse 8, John moves from what he is seeing to what he is hearing. He has described the scene, now he describes the sound.

He now diverts his attention to what is being directed toward the throne. What does John hear? What is being directed toward the throne? Songs of worship!

John highlights two particular songs of worship here in chapter 4.

First, John hears a song of worship, proclaiming God's attributes.

This first song of worship is produced by a heavenly quartet. The four living beings (cherubim) are offering up a song of glory and honor and thanks to Him Who sits on the throne.

They are essentially praising God for His great attributes. In fact, they choose to sing about three of God's attributes.

What attributes do they offer up praise to God for?

1-They praise God for His purity!

They begin their song of praise by singing, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God...*"

The term in its primitive meaning means, "to be set apart, separated, elevated, or lofty."

Tozer says, "Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, all His attributes are holy; that is whatever we think of belonging to God must be thought of as holy."

With the basic meaning of holiness being, "set apart" or the idea of separation, a couple features must be embraced in regards to the holiness of God.

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It has a transcendent emphasis, indicating that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty.

But, it also has an ethical emphasis, indicating that He is separate from moral evil or sin. In other words God is pure and righteous.

We can learn a great deal about God's holiness in the Bible. What can we learn about the holiness of God as highlighted in the Scripture?

1-Leviticus 11:44-45 emphasizes that God's character is holy.

2-Psalm 47:8 emphasizes that God's rule is holy.

3-Psalm 11:4 emphasizes that God's temple is holy.

4-1 Peter 1:15 emphasizes that God's people were to be holy.

1 Peter 1:15 says, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior..."

As believers in Christ we should strive to be like God. We should strive to be holy. We should strive to be set apart from sin, not just in one area of our lives, but in every area. All means all!

This is not easy! We are trapped in bodies of flesh and live in a sinful world. Yet, we are to strive to be holy in all of our behavior just as God is holy in His character.

This song of praise does not end with God's holiness being proclaimed. The heavenly quartet moves on.

2-They praise God for His power!

They sing in verse 8, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty...*" Not only is God's purity a cause for worship, but also His power as He is referred as the Almighty.

In other words, He is the infinite sovereign of the universe. God first identified Himself as the Almighty to Abraham in Genesis 17:1.

It is a term that identifies God as the strongest, most powerful being, utterly devoid of any weakness, whose conquering power and overpowering strength none can oppose.

It is a term that emphasizes God's Omnipotence! There are many passages of Scripture that highlight/illustrate the power of God.

-In Genesis 1-2, the creation account demonstrates God's power (creation out of nothing).

-In Exodus, the exodus from Egypt demonstrates God's power (parting of the Red Sea).

-In the Gospels, the miracles of Christ demonstrate God's power (Calming of the storm).

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-According to 1 Corinthians 6:14 both the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of believers demonstrates God's power.

We could go on and on. Clearly God is Holy and God is Omnipotent and worthy of all our praise. But the heavenly quartet moves on.

3-They praise God for His perpetuity!

They continue to sing in verse 8, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.*"

The four living creatures praise God for His eternity here. This phrase, "who was and who is and who is to come" really emphasizes the fact that God is eternal.

God is infinite in relation to time. He is without beginning or end, free from all succession of time, and is in fact the cause of time.

In fact Scripture repeatedly affirms God's eternity. One of my favorite verses in this regard is Psalm 90:2, which says, "*Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*"

It is hard to be more emphatic than that. God is from everlasting to everlasting. He is eternal and thus worthy of all our praise.

Verse 9 says, "*And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne to Him who lives forever and ever...*"

This describes their worship of God. They offer up glory, honor and thanks to God.

By offering up glory they are attributing glory to God. In other words, they recognize His glory.

The term honor means, "to place value on or attribute worth to." They are recognizing God's worthiness to be praised. He is worthy because He is holy, almighty and eternal.

Finally, they offer up thanks to God. Have you ever thanked God for His attributes? What an example for us to follow!

Just as this heavenly quartet offers up praise and adoration to God for His attributes of purity, power and perpetuity, we too should be driven to sing God's praises, to attribute value or worth to God and to offer up thanksgiving to God for who He is; because He is holy, He is omnipotent and He is eternal.

After the heavenly quartet proclaims God's attributes, **John hears a song of worship praising God as Creator (Revelation 4:10-11).**

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John in Revelation 4:10-11 notices a new activity. An additional song of praise pours out of the first song of praise.

However, this is not a quartet that is singing this new song. It is not the four living beings who are now breaking forth into song.

John says, “the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created.”

This song of praise is an outflow from the song of praise offered by the 4 living beings.

This last scene of worship from the twenty-four elders can be broken into two sections.

1-First notice their deeds of worship (Revelation 4:10).

This is not simply singing or verbal agreement, but these twenty-four elders are driven into action.

What do they do? First they fall down before God. This is actually the first of six times that they fall down before God in the book of Revelation.

This action or deed is a sign of reverent worship, and is a natural response to the majestic, holy, awe-inspiring glory of God.

In Joshua 5:14, Joshua fell on his face in reverence before the pre-incarnate Lord.

In Ezekiel 1:28, the prophet Ezekiel fell on his face after witnessing a vision of the glorified Lord.

In Revelation 1:17, the apostle John fell at the feet of the glorified Lord.

These twenty-four elders don't just fall down before God, but they also cast their crowns before the throne.

If you remember from last July, these twenty-four elders represent the church. The crowns on their heads represent their reward from God.

It is this reward that they now cast before the throne. John MacArthur says, “Aware that God alone is responsible for the rewards they have received, they divest themselves of all honor and cast it at the feet of their King.”

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They are not preoccupied with their own excellence. They are not concerned about their own honor or reward. All those things pale into insignificance and become meaningless in light of the glory of God.

2-Second, notice their declaration of worship (Revelation 4:11).

This passage concludes with one last song of praise. This time the emphasis shifts from God's character to His role as Creator.

While the four living beings praise God for His attributes of purity, power and perpetuity, the twenty-four elders are driven to acknowledge God's worth as Creator.

They sing, *“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed and were created.”*

This passage along with others in Scripture highlights the fact that God alone is the creator of the universe. Just as explained in Genesis chapters one and two or re-emphasized throughout Scripture, God created it all. He created all things!

We owe our very existence not to the process of evolution from a single celled organism, not to the event of some big bang in our solar system setting things into motion, but to the very personal creation of God, who created all things.

Because He created all things, He is worthy to be praised.

It is interesting that the twenty-four elders don't simply sing praises to God because He is creator, but they emphasize His purpose in creation. They sing, *“because of Your will they existed and were created.”*

He is to be praised because He created all that has existed based solely upon His good will and pleasure.

This should drive us to respond in like fashion. We should fall on our very faces before God, offering up praise and glory and adoration to Him because of His good will and pleasure.

While the world looks forward to various doomsday scenarios, the future of the believer in Christ is different. We have a blessed hope!

We will not face a doomsday scenario. We will not face the wrath of God being poured out upon the earth in the tribulation.

Rather we have something better; something greater; something more exciting.

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For the true Christian, there will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, no more fears, There will be a day when the burdens of this place will be no more and we'll see Jesus face to face!

There will be a day when we will cast our crowns at God's feet and we will worship Him in Spirit and in truth!

My hope and prayer is that we take advantage of the here and now, and that we will be driven to worship in spirit and in truth regardless of our circumstances, all the time longing for this future time in heaven.