

LEARNING TO WORSHIP

Revelation 4:1-11

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. God wants us to worship Him. He is looking for people to worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24). Worship is what we gather to do on Sundays.
2. But what is biblical worship, and how can we make sure that our worship pleases God?
3. If what we call worship isn't actually biblical worship, and doesn't actually please God, then we are wasting our time.
4. We know there is a type of worship that displeases God.
 - i. **Matthew 15:7-9** "Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said: This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands."
 - ii. Jesus was talking about the Jews of His day. They worshipped in vain. In other words, worship was supposed to accomplish something, to please God, but it wasn't hitting the target. They were missing the point of worship.
5. What about your worship? Do you worship in vain? Does your worship please the Lord. Do you need to grow as a worshiper? What about our church? Does our church need to grow in worship? Can we get better at worship? I want us to be a church that excels at worship. I want to be a man who excels at worship.
6. Today we are going to learn how to worship in a way that pleases God.

II. CONTEXT

1. In Revelation 2-3 Christ sends very personal letters to each of the seven churches in Asia.
2. In Revelation 4 we are given a small peek into the worship of heaven. By observing how God is worshiped in heaven, we can learn how God should be worshiped on earth.

III. TEXT: Rev 4:1-11

1. *After this I looked, and there in heaven was an open door. The first voice that I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."*

- i. After John was given the letters to the seven churches, Jesus showed him an open door in heaven.
 - ii. Jesus invited John into heaven. “Come up here.”
 - iii. “I will show you what must take place after this.” In the future. Not the distant future, but the near future (Rev 1:1-3).
- 2. *2 Immediately I was in the Spirit, and there was a throne in heaven and someone was seated on it. 3 The one seated there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian stone. A rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald surrounded the throne.*
 - i. John was “in the Spirit.”
 - 1. NIV Study Bible: “In a state of heightened spiritual awareness by the power of the Spirit.”
 - 2. The Spirit was helping John to see a vision.
 - ii. John sees God seated on the throne.
 - iii. John describes God’s appearance in terms of lights and colors, rather than shapes and forms. Remember that God is a Spirit and does not have a body.
 - 1. “He had the appearance of jasper and carnelian stone.”
 - 2. “A rainbow that has the appearance of an emerald surrounded the throne.”
- 3. *4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones sat twenty-four elders dressed in white clothes, with golden crowns on their heads.*
 - i. This is where Revelation gets tricky. We are now introduced to two different groups – the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures. And we have to try to identify them.
 - ii. Who are the twenty-four elders? They represent all Christians in heaven. Why? They have all the things that Christians are promised by God.
 - 1. They sit on thrones (Rev 3:21),
 - 2. wear white garments (Rev 3:5),
 - 3. and have golden crowns (Rev 2:10), and these are all rewards promised to Christians.
 - iii. What about the number “twenty-four”? 12 represents and the twelve tribes of Israel, and 12 represents the twelve apostles. So twenty-four elders represent all of God’s people in heaven from both the Old and New Testaments.

4. *5 Flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder came from the throne. Seven fiery torches were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.*

- i. The lightning and thunder evoke memories of the book of Exodus, when God descended on Mt. Sinai to give the Ten Commandments to Moses (Ex 19:16-19). It shows that God must be feared. You don't want to be on His bad side.
- ii. Before the throne were seven torches, which represent the seven spirits of God, which was John's way of describing the Holy Spirit. Seven is the number of perfection, of fullness, of completeness. Revelation was written to seven churches, and the Holy Spirit is active in every church at the same time – He is omnipresent.

5. *6 Something like a sea of glass, similar to crystal, was also before the throne.*

- i. This is not a literal sea, but describes the floor in the throne room of God. It was like a clear crystal pavement, and it was massive, stretching out like a great body of water.

6. *Four living creatures covered with eyes in front and in back were around the throne on each side. 7 The first living creature was like a lion; the second living creature was like an ox; the third living creature had a face like a man; and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings; they were covered with eyes around and inside. Day and night they never stop, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come.*

- i. Now we come to the four living creatures. The Bible describes several different types of angelic, celestial beings.
 1. Angels are ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). They often deliver God's message. The word "angel" means messenger. An example is the angel Gabriel who appeared to Mary and told her she was going to give birth to Jesus (Lk 1:26).
 2. Seraphim are heavenly beings that were seen by the prophet Isaiah in his vision of the throne room of God. They were above the throne of God, each with six wings. With two they covered their faces, with two they covered

their feet, and with two they flew. And they said, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth.”

3. Cherubim are heavenly creatures described throughout the Bible.
 - a. A cherub was stationed at the entrance of the garden of Eden with a whirling, flaming sword, after Adam and Eve were kicked out (Gen 3:24).
 - b. Pictures of cherubim were used to decorate the ark of the covenant, the curtains and veil in the tabernacle, and throughout the temple.
 - c. In Ezekiel’s vision of God, he describes four cherubim, each having four faces, a man, lion, ox, and eagle; they had the appearance of a man. They each had four wings, two to cover their bodies, and two to fly (Eze 1, 10).
4. Here in Revelation 4 it we have more angelic creatures. It’s hard to tell if they are seraphim or cherubim or another angelic creature because they share features of both. They each had six wings. They each had a different face – a lion, ox, man, and eagle. They were covered with eyes in front and back.
 - ii. They never stop worshiping God. “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come.”
7. *9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one seated on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before the one seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne and say,
11 Our Lord and God,
you are worthy to receive
glory and honor and power,
because you have created all things,
and by your will
they exist and were created.*
 - i. In response to the worship of the living creatures, the twenty-four elders worship as well.

- ii. Let's look more closely at the worship that is happening in heaven and learn how to worship in a way that pleases God.

IV. WORSHIP THAT PLEASES GOD

1. Give Him glory, honor, and thanks.

- i. The passage tells us what the four living creatures were doing.
- ii. **Revelation 4:9** "Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one seated on the throne...."
- iii. What does it mean to give God glory?
 - 1. Praise Him for who He is. Compliment Him. Verbally adore Him. Declare God's attributes in an adoring way.
 - 2. The Greek word for worship, *proskuneo*, means to adore.
 - 3. We see the living creatures doing this.
 - 4. **Revelation 4:8** "Day and night they never stop, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come."
 - 5. The living creatures worshiped God by praising three of His attributes.
 - a. His holiness:
 - i. This is called the trisagion (tri-sion), or thrice holy.
 - ii. It is the only one of God's attributes that is repeated three times. It's the word the Bible uses to describe God more than any other word. It is the supreme attribute of His being.
 - iii. The repetition is for emphasis.
 - iv. God's holiness refers to His
 - 1. Moral purity. God never sins, and cannot tolerate any form of sin.
 - 2. Difference. God is different from creation.
 - b. His omnipotence:
 - i. "The Almighty."
 - ii. He is all-powerful. God can do whatever He wants.
 - c. Eternality:
 - i. "Who was, who is, and who is to come."

- ii. God is different from us in that He had no beginning. He always was. He always existed.
- 6. To worship God is to glorify Him, or to praise Him. This is what we are supposed to do on Sundays. Compliment God. Adore Him.
- 7. We do this primarily through song.
 - a. **1 Chronicles 16:9** “Sing to him; sing praise to him; tell about all his wondrous works!”
- 8. The Bible says much about how we are to sing and praise to God:
 - a. **Psalm 33:3** “Sing a new song to him; play skillfully on the strings, with a joyful shout.”
 - i. With joy.
 - ii. With skill.
 - iii. With musical instruments.
 - b. **Psalm 9:1** “Hallelujah! I will praise the Lord with all my heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.”
 - i. Sincerely, with your whole heart. Don’t just say words, but mean what you say.
 - ii. In church.
 - c. **Psalm 47:1** “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a jubilant cry.”
 - i. With clapping.
 - ii. With shouting.
 - iii. With enthusiasm.
- 9. Sunday worship should not be dull, lifeless, depressing, boring. It should be loud, and joyful, and celebratory, and passionate. We are cheering for the king of the universe; the Savior of our souls.
- iv. What does it mean to honor God?
 - 1. The living creatures gave glory, honor, and thanks to God.
 - 2. To honor is to respect, or to revere God.
 - 3. The Greek word for “worship” can literally mean to show respect, to fall or prostrate before.

4. We can see the twenty-four elders showing deep respect for God in verse 10 when they “fall down before the one seated on the throne and worship.”
5. Our worship should be respectful.
6. Think about how we can be respectful when we worship on Sundays.
 - a. Get plenty of rest the night before.
 - b. Arrive early.
 - c. Don’t cut up and distract others.
 - d. Dress appropriately.
 - e. Sing and play as skillfully.
- v. What does it mean to thank God?
 1. The living creatures gave glory, honor, and thanks to God.
 2. We all know about giving thanks. It’s about thanking God for what He has done.
 3. The key to effective thanksgiving is to be specific. Don’t just say, “Thanks, Lord.” Instead, specifically thank Him for the many things He has done for you.

2. Worship all week long.

- i. **Revelation 4:8** “Day and night they never stop, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come.”
- ii. The cherubim never stop worshiping God. And we shouldn’t either. Our worship should continue...
 1. Every day, not just Sunday.
 2. Everywhere, not just at church.
 3. Every minute, not just during church.
- iii. **Psalm 34:1** “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.”
- iv. **Psalm 35:28** “And my tongue will proclaim your righteousness, your praises all day long.”
- v. Does this mean we are supposed to be singing non-stop? No. But we can have an attitude of praise and thanksgiving all the time. We can live a lifestyle of worship. You can praise and thank God before every meal. You can praise and thank God throughout the day. “God is good. God is great. God is awesome. Thank you, Lord.”

3. Submit to His authority.

- i. **Revelation 4:9-10** “9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one seated on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before the one seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne”
- ii. Back then that was the ultimate expression of total submission. **William Barclay** “When one king surrendered to another, he cast his crown at the victor’s feet. Sometimes the Romans carried with them an image of their emperor, and when they had reduced a monarch to submission, there was a ceremony in which the vanquished one had to cast his crown before the emperor’s image.”
- iii. An essential part of worship is not just praise, but submission. Surrender yourself to God’s rule. Lay down your crown. Get off the throne, and put God on the throne of your life.
- iv. Notice that the twenty-four elders said that God is worthy of our worship.
 1. **Revelation 4:11** “Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.”
 2. Why is God worthy of our submission? Because He is the creator. He is the author of life. Author is the root word of “authority.” As our creator, God has rightful authority over us; He has the right to impose obligations; He is worthy of our obedience; He deserves our obedience.
- v. When we praise God from a rebellious heart, our worship is in vain. God doesn’t accept it.
 1. **Psalm 33:1** “Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous ones; praise from the upright is beautiful.”
 2. Don’t live in rebellion all week long and then come to church to praise God. God doesn’t accept that kind of worship.
 3. That’s like being unfaithful to your wife and then telling her how much you love her. She’s not stupid. Those are just empty words.

4. Real worship goes beyond words to your lifestyle.
- vi. This is one of the ways that we can praise God constantly. Worship isn't just words, it isn't just songs, it isn't just an attitude of praise and gratitude, but a heart of submission; a heart devoted to obedience; a heart committed to God's will.
 1. **Romans 12:1** "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship."
- vii. A few years ago Casting Crowns released a song called "Lifesong." The key phrase is, "May the words I say and the things I do make my lifesong sing; bring a smile to you." The idea is that your actions speak, so let your lifestyle be a song of worship to God through holiness, righteousness, and obedience.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Every Sunday we gather for worship. How can we worship in a way that pleases God?
 - i. Give Him glory, honor, and thanks.
 - ii. Worship all week long.
 - iii. Submit to His authority.