

REVELATION 5:11-14

WORSHIPPING THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!’ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshipped.”¹

“**A**nd the elders fell down and worshipped.” The eternal preoccupation of the saints in heaven will be worship. Angels in Heaven worship the Son of God day and night [REVELATION 4:6-8]; and as they worship, the redeemed of the ages will join them in joyfully worshipping the Son of God [REVELATION 4:9-11; 7:13-17]. The worship that is described, and which we anticipate as redeemed people belonging to the Living God, is neither contrived nor strained. It is natural; it is joyous. That heavenly worship is enthusiastic; it is spontaneous and it is refreshing.

So often we who are Christians are deterred from worship because either our efforts fail to stimulate the intellect or speak to the heart. When our effort to worship becomes forced, or when it is carried out by rote, it ceases to be true worship and becomes a performance. Tragically, few modern evangelicals know what it is to worship; and if they do worship, it is intermittent, occasional, sporadic. Though there may be a fading memory of a time we worshipped, we do not often have either the burning desire to worship as we gather on a Sunday morning or the knowledge that we are meeting the Living God.

As we continue in our Advent series of messages, we will review the worship that we shall present in eternity in order to equip us to worship in time. The study will take us back to a time when Magi brought rich gifts in order to worship the newborn Son of God, before moving us forward to a time when we will joyfully worship before the throne of God.

WORSHIP BEFORE THE SON OF GOD —What is worship? Before proceeding any farther in this message, it will be helpful for us to think about what worship is ... and is not. Worship is not a feeling. Though the feelings may be engaged in worship, what is felt follows the act rather than being the act itself. Thus, worship is not ecstasy or contentment, though worship may lead to ecstatic feelings or even to a sense of settled contentment.

Worship is not singing, though singing may be included in worship. The Magi worshipped [MATTHEW 2:11], though there is no indication that they sang. The angels in heaven worship, though they are never said to sing. In the text, we read that the angels (together with the cherubim and the redeemed of heaven) worship, “saying ... ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing’” [REVELATION 5:12]. The 144,000 Jewish evangelists sing a “new song before the throne” [REVELATION 14:3]; and those redeemed out of the Great Tribulation “sing the song of Moses” [REVELATION 15:3], and we who are now redeemed will sing a new song [REVELATION 5:9, 10].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

There are, among contemporary evangelical Christians, a multitude of people who attempt to worship, but offer what is unacceptable to God. It is possible to have a religious experience, even confess to hearing the voice of God, and yet be lost and therefore offer unacceptable worship. Cain heard God, but he rejected what God commanded. He attempted to worship in his own way, according to his own thoughts, and God did not accept him. It is not experience that saves us; it is the blood of Jesus Christ that saves us.

Worship is not a matter of the length of time we invest in the effort, nor is it whether we are sufficiently solemn or not. Worship is not an issue of whether we recognise the brevity of days allotted on earth and the length of time in eternity. Worship is the spontaneous response of one who is redeemed, of one who recognises God as God and himself as a sinner saved by the mercies of Christ the Lord. Worship is giving to God that which rightfully belongs to Him.

Years ago, I read a marvellous description of worship provided by A. W. Tozer. Tozer was, in the truest sense of the word, a Christian Mystic. He was a prophet who endeavoured to bring his readers into the presence of the majestic Lord of Glory. In a series of messages that were published in a booklet entitled “Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church,”² Tozer described worship. His words, delivered before the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada are worthy of our consideration to this day.

The elements of worship, as Tozer saw them, are *boundless confidence, admiration, fascination* and *adoration*. Think of these elements of worship before moving deeper into the message this day. *Boundless confidence* implies that you trust Him who is worshipped. You do not worship One whom you do not trust. You will not ask for anything of Him, because you have no confidence either that He will hear you or that He will give what you ask. However, John has written, “This is the confidence that we have toward [Christ Jesus], that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him” [1 JOHN 5:14, 15].

John’s words are but an iteration of Jesus’ promise to His disciples, “Whatever you ask in My Name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My Name, I will do it” [JOHN 14:13, 14]. Jesus also promised those who follow Him, “Whatever you ask of the Father in My Name, He will give it to you” [JOHN 16:23].

When we are confident in Him whom we worship, we come before Him with *admiration*. In saying this, Tozer said that we must appreciate the excellency of God. We are made in the image of God, and therefore, more than any other creature which God created, man is qualified to appreciate God. We are astonished at His majesty, humbled by His grace, and find ourselves in awe before His glory. The god of modern evangelicalism is pretty tame; He seldom astonishes anyone. He is very well behaved, loyal to denominations and very much one of us. We cry out to him when we have a problem, expecting that he will perform just as we ask. He watches over us as we sleep and pretty much leaves us alone to pursue our own interests. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to respect this god.

The Risen Son of God is not at all like that. Confronted by the Risen Saviour while in exile on Patmos, John “fell at His feet as though dead” [REVELATION 1:17]. The One whom he encountered was awesome indeed! When Jesus appeared to His disciples following His resurrection, their reaction was similar [LUKE 24:37]. Likewise, when He appeared on the beach, the disciples dared not ask who He was, because “they knew it was the Lord” [JOHN 21:12]. They were in awe of Him in His glorified body.

² A. W. Tozer, **Worship: The Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church**, (Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, PA nd) 26-30

Fascination is the next element in true worship, according to Tozer. What he means is that one is filled with moral excitement, that one is charmed, captivated, entranced. To be fascinated with the Saviour is to find yourself able to be excited in His presence—excited, neither with the size of the congregation nor with the names of those present nor with how much money was brought in, but stuck with wonder and astonishment at the fact that you are in His presence.

Truthfully, when did you last find yourself lost in fascination with the character of the Master? When I was a new Christian, I threw myself into serving the Lord Christ. I visited the lost, telling them of the salvation that I had discovered in Christ the Lord. I rode forty-five miles each Sunday afternoon, riding a 500 cc Suzuki in order to preach at a Texas prison farm.

Once a week, I met with a young man named Don Beasley to pray after we had visited lost people. As we prayed, we were almost always awe-struck. Seated in the front seat of a 1964 Chevrolet Impala, Don and I would worship the Lord. Before ever a word was spoken, we simply and quietly worshipped. We were humbled and awed by the knowledge that Christ the Saviour was with us. That knowledge has often sustained me in the intervening years, creating in me a longing for Heaven where I know that I will be in His presence because of His grace.

Occasionally, I still find myself awed by the knowledge of God's presence. At such times, I may weep as I realise His mercy to me though I am a sinner. At other times, I may find myself filled with joy and compelled to praise Him openly for His goodness. At yet other times, I may simply find myself silenced as I contemplate His power and His might. The great sorrow of my life is that I am not more fascinated with the Risen, Living Son of God.

Finally, Tozer spoke of *adoration* as an essential element of true and acceptable worship. Such worship is nothing less than loving God because He is God. It is yearning for God with overpowering yearning; it is loving Him to the point that our love is both painful and delightful. Adoring God is to be lost in wonder and awe because of His majesty and power and grace.

Worship as Tozer described it is seeing the Master as God, and not as the One who supplies our need. Jesus our Lord does supply what we need, but He is so much more than that. He is the infinite God! He is the One who is perfect in wisdom and knowledge, the One who is able to bring all things into existence through the power of His glorious Word, the One who gives life and sustains all life. He alone is worthy of our finest thoughts, worthy of constant praise, worthy of our most devoted service. Yet, the contemporary Christian is content to treat the Master as though He were a convenient means to grant our desires whenever we are unable to secure what we want through our own puny efforts.

WORSHIP BEFORE THE ROYAL THRONE — The setting for the study that is now before us is heaven, where we see gathered before the Royal Throne of the True and Living God the angelic host of heaven and the raptured saints of God. As we saw in a previous message, believers will shortly be removed from this world as evil appears to have triumphed and as God prepares to judge earth dwellers for the wickedness they have perpetuated.

It is a statement describing our eternal occupation, for throughout eternity the people of God will worship before His throne. If the prospect of eternal worship appears stupefying or boring, it is only because we are ignorant of true worship. If the prospect of eternal worship seems somehow dull and dismal, it is because we have not yet worshipped. For had we worshipped, we would be excited at the possibility of true worship. Our disappointment at the knowledge of our eternal labour is the outgrowth of our failure to know the presence of God. Ignorant of His majesty, we are disappointed, even disgusted, at the thought of eternal worship.

The scene that John portrays is one of majesty and glory. Around the throne are the cherubim and the redeemed from this present Church Age, together with all the angels of heaven. John hears this assembled host of creation saying with one voice and one heart, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” Responding to the united voice of mankind and angels, John heard all created beings, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!”

Earlier in the book, John heard all heaven worshipping God because He is Creator. Reading the Word of God, I find it interesting to note that there are no evolutionists in heaven! There, the people of God and the angels of God worship God because He is Creator. Listen to the worship offered by the sanctified hosts of heaven.

“Worthy are You, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for You created all things,
and by Your will they existed and were created.”

[REVELATION 4:11]

Now, we witness those same glorified saints and the holy angels worshipping God as worthy to receive all that His creatures are able to give—“power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.” When these all worship, the cherubim respond, “Amen!” and the raptured people of God fall down and worship.

Falling down speaks to a vital, though neglected, aspect of worship. I am not advocating that loss of control is essential to worship, nor even that simply losing one’s balance is evidence of worship. Unlike some who imagine that a loss of control resulting in fainting, uncontrolled laughter or involuntary muscle movement is worship or evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, I believe that we are responsible to worship with our mind, as Paul implies when writing the Corinthian Christians [see 1 CORINTHIANS 14:15, 19].

However, I do notice that when the Son of God appears in unveiled glory, the natural response is to fall prostrate before Him. This was John’s immediate response when he first encountered the Risen Son of God before writing the Apocalypse [see REVELATION 1:17]. Whenever the redeemed of this present dispensation worship together with the cherubim, they fall before Him [e.g. REVELATION 5:8; 11:16; 19:4]. When Jesus was transfigured before His disciples and the Father spoke, those who were with Jesus “fell on their faces and were terrified” [MATTHEW 17:6]. His majestic presence is awesome and terrifying.

Our language in these final days of the Church Age has degenerated to the point that it has become insipid and at times almost meaningless. People make inane statements, and the unthinking response often is, “Awesome.” There is no one who is awesome, save for the Living God; there is nothing awesome except for God’s majesty.

Again, when an explanation is offered to a question or when responding to a query, the increasingly common response of thoughtless people is, “Perfect.” There is no one perfect, except for the Master; there is nothing perfect but His will. Consequently, I note that language reflects the loss of awe for that which is holy and a loss of appreciate for Him who is perfect. However, in heaven, we will be in awe of Him who redeemed us and we will worship Him, holding Him in awe. Perhaps it is that we will be most awed by the knowledge that His grace has accepted us and included among the glorified saints of heaven.

ASCRIBING TO THE SAVIOUR WHAT IS HIS — There is another aspect of eternal worship that this brief vignette brings to our attention. As the assembled saints of this present age worship, they ascribe to the Master what is rightfully His. Now, man apports to himself power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing that is not his to appropriate.

Almost unconsciously, we admire the powerful and the wealth within society. A movie star comes to town, and people are dumbstruck to see them. They don't know how to respond. On one occasion my eldest daughter was hurrying to catch a bus in Vancouver when she ran into Bryan Adams. He caught her and asked, "Do you want my autograph?" Her response perhaps caught him off guard, she said, "No! Do you want mine?"

As she hurried away, a bystander stopped her momentarily and asked, "Do you know who that was?"

"No," Susan said.

"That was Bryan Adams," the woman gushed.

The appropriate response was, "So?"

In 1993, Bill Clinton came to Vancouver to meet with Mikhail Gorbachev. While in town, Mr. Clinton attended one of the local churches on a Sunday morning. The building was packed as people came to "worship" with the President of the United States. As I stood to speak that Sunday, I addressed my own congregation, reminding them that we were met before the Living God and before the Redeemer who loved us and gave Himself for us. Frankly, I could not understand why the building was not packed, for we were in the presence of the Lord God.

Thoughtless earth dwellers and untaught Christians adulate and adore the powerful. Young girls faint in the presence of powerful politicians and young men want to share in the glory of musicians whose lyrics are utterly degrading. They imagine that the lustre of being in the presence of such august personages somehow adds to their own benighted importance.

Likewise, we defer to the wealthy. It was not always that way. I am always amused at the story that is told of Peter Cartwright. Peter Cartwright was a Methodist preacher of an earlier era. He was not well educated, but he was saved and aflame for the cause of Christ Jesus. He had a burning desire to see the glory of the Lord and to hold the salvation of Christ before the lost. On one occasion, Cartwright was preaching in Nashville. He was just beginning his sermon when a minister seated behind him tugged at his coat.

Somewhat annoyed, Cartwright turned and asked, "What is it?" The minister seated behind him had observed that General Andrew Jackson had entered the building, and he said, "General Jackson just came in."

Turning again to the congregation, Cartwright spoke loudly, asking, "Who is General Jackson? If he don't get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as he would a Guinea negro." The minister seated behind Cartwright tried to make himself as small as possible, while the congregation (General Jackson included) laughed at his expense.

Cartwright was warned that the General would undoubtedly chastise him when he next encountered him, to which the feisty preacher responded, "General Jackson, I have no doubt, will applaud my course; and if he should undertake to chastise me ... there is two as can play that game."

The following morning, the city preacher sought out the General to make apology for what he considered to be the rude conduct of the visiting evangelist. Shortly thereafter, Cartwright met the General whilst they were each walking in the city. Somewhat to the surprise of the evangelist, the General approached him and extended his hand.

“Mr. Cartwright,” said the General, “you are a man after my own heart. I am very surprised at Mr. Mac, to think that I would be offended at you. No, sir; I told him that I highly approve of your independence, that a minister of Jesus Christ ought to love everybody and fear no mortal man. I told Mr. Mac that if I had a few thousand such independent, fearless officers as you were and a well-drilled army, I could take old England.”³

To Christ alone belong power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. He alone deserves acknowledgement of power. This Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by His resurrection from the dead” [ROMANS 1:4] According to His own Word, He will return immediately after the Tribulation, “coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” [MATTHEW 24:30]. Because He has power, He is able to promise that His disciples shall also have power [see LUKE 24:49; ACTS 1:8].

Not only does the Lord Christ have power, but He has authority. You may recall that The Master asserted, “All authority in heaven and one earth has been given to Me” [MATTHEW 28:18]. Because authority is His, He therefore confers it on those whom He chooses. Thus, He says, “Go therefore and make disciples” [MATTHEW 28:19]. We who are disciples go into the world bearing authority from Christ the Lord. Announcing life in the Beloved Son for all who believe, we become, as the Apostle declares, “the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” [2 CORINTHIANS 2:15, 16]. Christ says that the Father “has given all things into His hands” [JOHN 3:35]. Christ alone has “authority to execute judgement, because He is the Son of Man” [JOHN 5:27]. He has authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him [JOHN 17:2]. Man kneels before Christ because He has all power.

Wealth is His. God lays claim to every beast of the forest and to the cattle on a thousand hills [PSALM 50:10]. We imagine that we are the source of what we hold; in our mind, our strength, our ingenuity, our ability is the source of the wealth we hold. However, God says He is the One who gives us even the power to acquire wealth. When cautioning Israel, Moses wrote, “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day” [DEUTERONOMY 8:11-18].

Wisdom belongs to our Saviour. Paul says that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” [COLOSSIANS 2:3]. Indeed, to us who are called, Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:24]. For us, He has become “wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:30]. Therefore, the Word of God declares, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:31].

³ W. P. Strickland, **Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher** (Carlton and Porter Publishers, New York 1857) 192, cited by William P. Grady, “The Conversion of Andrew Jackson” (art.), <http://www.biblebelievers.com/Grady1.html#endnotes>

He is the mighty God, and thus honour and glory and blessing shall be ascribed to Him. Though in heaven we will ascribe to Christ the Lord what is due Him as God, there is no reason we should wait until that time to worship. Writing the Philippian Christians, Paul asserted that “though He was in the form of God, [Christ] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God,” affirms the Apostle, “has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11].

Why would you wait to confess Him as Lord? Why would you delay? Confess Him now, glorifying His Name and giving Him the praise that is due His Name. He died because of your sin and was raised for your justification. Therefore, believing Him and confessing His Name brings the rich benefit of life, adoption into the Family of God, and assurance that you have a place in eternity before Him.

WORSHIP BEFORE THE HUMBLE MANGER — “He made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” The Son of God became a man. It is difficult to imagine more humble and degrading circumstances that those chosen by the Father for the first Advent of His Son. Born in such a way that tongues were certain to wag uncontrollably, He faced the ridicule of thoughtless individuals throughout His days in the flesh. Jewish leaders thought they could deter Him from confronting their wickedness by accusing Him of being illegitimate. “We were not born of sexual immorality,” they gloated on one occasion [JOHN 8:41].

A sheepcote belonging to a stranger and situated in a strange town was His first home on earth, a manger his first crib. Surrounding by decades of accumulated dung from multiplied beasts, the Son of God was born in what can only be described as squalor. No midwife attended His birth, though a mighty angel had announced His advent to His mother and to His father. No members of the extended family came to coo the newborn infant and to laugh in joy at the good fortune of the little family, though angels did announce to shepherds that He had been born.

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased,”

[LUKE 2:14]

was the announcement the heavenly entourage made to the wondering shepherds.

Though no powerful leaders—either foreign or from among His own people—realised He had been born, magi, astronomers from Arabia or possibly from Mesopotamia, observed a new star and concluded that the phenomena heralded the birth of a king. They travelled to Bethlehem so that they could worship the child that was born. Finding the child with Mary His mother, “they fell down and worshipped Him” [MATTHEW 2:11]. As part of their worship, they brought gifts of “gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

God chose the most demeaning conditions anyone could have imagined for the first Advent of His Son. Paul describes God’s thinking in this way, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:27-29].

There, before an infant born into a family that can only be described as dysfunctional, unknown men worshipped. Before a child that lived in what can only be described as poverty, both learned men and rude shepherds knelt and worshipped. Mere mortals were for the first time worshipping the Son of God, and though they could not fully realise the significance of what they did, they gave to Him what rightfully belonged to Him alone.

God has declared:

“I am the LORD; that is My Name;
My glory I give to no other.”

[ISAIAH 42:8]

Again, He affirms, “My glory I will not give to another” [ISAIAH 48:11]. And yet, we discover that “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... glorified His servant Jesus” [ACTS 3:13]. Indeed, He is now “exalted at the right hand of God” [ACTS 2:33]. Now He is seated “at the right hand of [the Father] with angels, authorities and powers ... subjected to Him” [1 PETER 3:22]. This is the One whom we worship; this is the One whom we will worship throughout eternity. This is the Lamb who is praised.

At Christmas we Christians celebrate, not the birth of a mere child, rather we rejoice in the knowledge of the entrance of God’s own Son into our world. According to the Word of God, “When [God] brings the Firstborn into the world, He says,

“Let all God’s angels worship Him.”

[HEBREWS 1:6]

And if the angels worship Him, it is only appropriate that we who recognise Him as the Lord God should join in that worship. For us who are the redeemed, this shall be our eternal and joyful occupation.

This raises a serious question. Have you ever worshipped? Do you recognise Christ, the Lord of Glory? Have you been in His presence? He invites all who now depend upon their own merits, all who imagine that they are sufficient in themselves to please the Father, all who live for the tawdry accoutrements of this dying world, to receive the life that He alone offers. He calls all men to repentance and faith that leads to life and the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus the Lord was born so that He could provide His life as a sacrifice because of sin. Having offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin, He was buried and then rose from the grave on the third day. After that, He appeared to those “chosen by God as witnesses” [ACTS 10:41]. These were commanded to preach to the people, testifying that He is the One appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. Indeed, “to Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name” [ACTS 10:43].

And that is our invitation to you. The Word of God clearly promises, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For it is with the heart that one believes and is saved, and with the mouth that one confesses and is saved.” The invitation of God is extended to all without discrimination, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13 free translation].

What better time to begin to worship the coming Son of God than at this Christmastide when we remember His first Advent and worship before Him. Receive His grace and be saved. Do it now. Do it today. Amen.