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A0528 – July 10, 2005 – Revelation 4:7-11 – The Worship of the Father

Last week we crossed from the second major division of the book; **the things which are** to the third major division of Revelation; **the things which shall take place after these things**. Importantly, this places the completion of the church age *before* the events of the Tribulation. That is a major doctrinal point. For if we are not looking for Christ we are looking for Antichrist and should be bracing ourselves against the Tribulation judgments. Although the pre-trib Rapture is not explicitly taught in Rev 4:1 we do have Rev 3:10 which can only harmonize with a pre-trib Rapture. *“I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth”*. The “hour of trial” is a set period time that corresponds to Israel’s 70th week of Daniel, also known as the Tribulation. There are two ways in which Christ will keep all church saints from “the hour of trial”. Either...

1. by *physical death* before the “hour of trial” begins
2. by *removing* church saints from the earth before the “hour of trial” begins.

He will not preserve us through the “hour of trial” for that is inconsistent with the grammar of Rev 3:10 and the theology of Rev 3:10. The bottom line is that no church age believer is destined for “wrath” but “for obtaining salvation” (1 Thess 5:9-10); The Church cannot and will not be on earth during Israel’s calendar time. The body of Christ, the Church, which began on Pentecost in Acts 2, will be complete at the pre-trib Rapture at which point she will be “snatched up” to meet Jesus Christ in the air and then will go with Him to the Father’s house in heaven where He has been preparing dwelling places for her (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:13-18). We will remain in heaven during the entire Tribulation period and will return with Christ to earth at the second coming to rule as kings and priests upon the earth (Rev 5:9-10).

There are only three theological positions that hold to a pre-trib Rapture; 1) Classic Dispensationalism (Acts 2), Pauline Dispensationalism (Acts 9), and Ultradispensationalism (Acts 13 or 28). The difference between these three theological

positions is when the Church began and which epistles are written to the Church. I proved to you a few weeks ago that the Church began in Acts 2. That means I hold to what is called Classic Dispensationalism. Jesus said in Matt 16:18, “*I will build my church*”. In 1 Cor 12:13 we learn that “*by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*” so that Spirit baptism is necessary to enter the “body”. We learned from Eph 1:22-23 that “*the church...is his body*” and finally, we learn from comparison of Acts 1:5 with Acts 11:15-17 that Spirit baptism began on the Day of Pentecost. That argument ought to be memorized and it ought to stabilize you theologically so that you are very clear on the point that Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples in God’s one eternal purpose. If you don’t get that point you will forever be confused about the Bible. Every other theological position teaches that the Church began in the OT. But the Bible does not support that assertion. That is an *a priori* assertion. The Bible teaches that the Church began on the Day of Pentecost and that God’s earthly program with the Church will be complete at the pre-trib Rapture. Then God will commence His earthly calendar with the people of Israel during the 70th week of Daniel. That program is going to start in Rev 6 when the first of seven seals is broken by the Lamb of God and His judgments come upon the earth.

So, chapters 2-3 described the earthly church age, now we are changing gears in chapters 4-5 and moving into the heavenly preparations that precede the seal judgments. Therefore, in 4:1 John enters into his 2nd ecstatic vision (cf 1:10). For this vision John’s human spirit is transported through a door into the 3rd heaven. He is transported to this new location to see what **must take place** after the Church has been raptured. The phrase **what must take place** signifies that these are fixed events. Who is in control of history? The first thing John sees is the Father’s throne. This throne room is within the heavenly temple along with the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant. The Father is the one sitting on the throne and He is portrayed as holy (*jasper*) and just (*sardius*). Because of His holiness and justice He must judge the earth. Yet even though He is holy and just, necessitating His wrath, there is also an emerald rainbow that encircles His throne and portrays His mercy. This rainbow reminds us of the Noahic Covenant where God promised He would not destroy all flesh. The judgments will be severe but they will not destroy all flesh. Sitting around the throne on 24 thrones are 24 elders; redeemed representatives of the Church. They are wearing white raiment and golden crowns which imply they have already been to the judgment seat of Christ and rewarded. Out from the throne come terrible noises and sights signaling that this throne is a throne of wrath. Before the throne the Spirit of God is portrayed as a consuming fire, marked and ready to destroy wickedness. Finally, John sees something like a sea of crystal clear glass. The crystal clear sea of glass symbolizes God’s purity and separation from the wicked world. In the midst of the throne are four living creatures. These four living creatures are angelic beings that move about in a circular

motion around the throne (Eze 1:12). Now, let's trek forward to verses 7-11 as the four living creatures are described further and the worship of the Father ensue.

The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like an ox, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

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, 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."

THE APPEARANCE OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (4:7-8a)

Revelation 4:7 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like an ox, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

In verse 6 we discovered that all four living creatures are **full of eyes in front and behind**. This is similar to the living beings in Ezekiel 10:12 who had eyes in their “whole body, their backs, their hands, and their wings”. The phrase **full of eyes** signifies supernatural intelligence and extreme alertness. Can you imagine having eyes all around? Some children think their mothers do have eyes in the back of their head. This high order of angelic being actually does have eyes all over them so that nothing in their realm of responsibility escapes their detection. Here in verse 7 each **creature** is described individually. All four descriptions describe the face only even though only the third creature is explicitly stated as descriptive of the **face**. The **first creature was like a lion**. Remember, last week I warned you that we were going to come across the word **like** a lot. The word means “similar too but not identical”. In other words, **the first creature** was similar to a **lion** but not identical to a **lion**. The **lion** is known as “the king of the jungle” and generally represents

that which is most noble among animate creation. **The second creature was like a calf** or better an **ox**. The **ox** is known for its great strength in the animate creation. **The third creature had a face like that of a man**. **Man** is known for his intelligence and reasoning capacities. Mankind is the wisest of the animate creation. **The fourth creature was like a flying eagle**. The **eagle** is the swiftest in animate creation. "Together, then, the four living beings picture all animal life from the perspectives of greatest nobility, strength, wisdom, and speed."ⁱ

INITIATORY WORSHIP OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (4:8b-9)

Revelation 4:8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

John returns to a corporate description in verse 8a. He describes **each one of them** as **having six wings**. This brings to mind the seraphim of Isa 6. The absence of any explanation of the **six wings** here allows us to explain them from **Isaiah 6:2** "*Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*" "In Isa 6:2, two wings covered the face, denoting awe, because the seraphim dared not look at God; two covered the feet, denoting humility, because they stand in the presence of God; and with two they would fly, denoting obedience, because they are ready to carry out His commands."ⁱⁱ

John repeats the fact that they **are full of eyes** but this time he adds the phrase **around and within**. By way of reminder, **full of eyes** signifies supernatural intelligence and alertness. It calls to mind the description of the cherubs in Eze 10:12 who had eyes "in their whole body, their backs, their hands, and their wings". The phrase **around and within** has troubled many expositors but it simply means **around** their bodies. The adverb **within** refers to the underside of their **wings** which lie next to the body. With eyes under their wings they can fly without disrupting their vision.

The activity of the four living creatures is described next. **Day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."** The fact that **they do not cease** to offer this worship does not mean that this is all they do continually. If the author wanted to communicate that idea he would have used an accusative but here he used a genitive of time which means that they worship during the **day** and they worship during the **night**. In

fact, the four living creatures do engage in other activities in Rev. For example, in Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7 each “*of the four living creatures*” summons one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse to “*Come*” and release the judgments on the earth dwellers. Therefore, the point here is that whenever they are not carrying out God’s will in other areas they are consumed with worshipping the Father.

The praise they offer focuses on three attributes of God: His holiness, His omnipotence, and His eternity. First, the ascription “**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**”. This ascription is known as the *Trisagion*. It is identical to the praise of the seraphim in Isa 6:3. The holiness of God is what separates God from His creation. The three-fold repetition of the word “**HOLY**” is used to emphasize this attribute. God’s holiness distances Him from His creation which has chosen wickedness.

Second, the praise is to **THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY**. This is a title of the Father used in Rev 1:8 that emphasizes His omnipotence. He has the power to release wrath upon the created order in order to re-take what is rightfully His. The creation has rejected the holiness of God and God Almighty is going to return to take it and cleanse it.

Third, the title **WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME** was used in Rev 1:4 of the Father to emphasize His eternity. His enemies on earth are temporal creations but the Father is everlasting (Ps 2). “As the absolutely holy one, He is thoroughly entitled and has ample might to initiate stringent measures against His own creation in order to return it to its original holy state.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Revelation 4:9 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 activity of worshipping God is what stimulates the 24 elders to **fall down and worship** God the Father. To be specific, verse 9 says **when the living creatures give glory and honor, and thanks to Him who sits on the throne** it signals the 24 elders to fall down and worship the One who sits on the throne. The **living creatures give** three things to the Father. *First*, they give Him **glory**. Glory is the word *doxa* and means “weight”. They give “weight” to the essence of God; the essence of God which they just declared in v 8. *Second*, they give Him **honor**. **Honor** is the word *time* and means “price” or “value”. They give high price or value to Him who sits on the throne. Both **glory and honor** refer back to the attributes of God in verse 8: holiness, omnipotence, and eternity. The *last* word **thanks** looks forward to His gift of creating **all things** as noted in verse 11.

Again, the one **who sits on the throne** is God the Father, not the Lamb of God (cf Rev 5:5-7). And once again, He is described as the one **who lives forever and ever**. This ascription points to the Father's eternity and was used of the Son in Rev 1:18.

RESPONSIVE WORSHIP OF THE 24 ELDERS (4:10-11)

Revelation 4:10 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,

The 24 elders do not initiate worship. They only worship when the sign is given by the four living creatures. This proves that the **day and night** praise of the **four living creatures** is not a continuous, unbroken praise, but rather a repeated praise that is done whenever they are not carrying out other tasks.

In response to the praise of the **four living creatures** the 24 elders have three responses:

1. **fall down**
2. **worship**
3. **cast crowns**

Their *first* response is **to fall down before Him who sits on the throne**. The word **fall down** (*pipto*) means to be lie prostrate before the eternal God who sits on the throne. This position is taken in order to **worship** the one who created all things for His own glory. *Second*, they **worship** (*proskeuno*), meaning they “do reverence to” the eternal God. They are not concerned with their blessed estate, they are not proud to be seated just before His throne. Rather they are humbly devoted to and totally infatuated with the One who they owe all their adoration and praise because He is the creator and sovereign of all. *Third*, they **cast their crowns before the throne**. The fact that they already have **crowns** shows that they have already been to the judgment seat of Christ and been rewarded. The fact that they **cast them before the throne** signifies that they are ultimately His **crowns** because they could not have done the good works apart from His power. Rewards cannot be gained in our own strength, even after we become Christians. We may desire to do the good but we do not have the ability to carry out the good (Rom 7). The means of carrying out the good is always the power of God administered by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8). For apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:1ff).

Everything revolves around the throne and Him who sits on it; this is the center of attention in this heavenly scene.”^{iv}

Revelation 4:11 "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."

The song sung by the 24 elders is recorded in Rev 4:11. First, they directly address God by saying **worthy are You, our Lord and our God**. The word **worthy** (*axios*) was used when an emperor walked in a triumphal procession. Biblically, if anyone is proclaimed **worthy** besides God it is blasphemous. Christianity says you only worship the one true God. No one else is **worthy** of worship. God and God alone is **worthy**. He is both **our Lord** which means **our Master** and **our God** which means our Sovereign.

What is He **worthy...to receive** (or take; *lambano*)? Three things: **glory and honor and power**. Both **glory and honor** were discussed in the previous song of the four living creatures. **glory** means “weight” of essence. Weight of God’s character. **Honor** means “price” or “value”. He is worthy to have His character reflected by His creatures and He is worthy of the highest value. The third word is different; it is the word **power** (*dunamis*). This is the Greek word for kinetic energy, energy at work. We get the English word *dynamite* from this word. But *dynamite* has an explosive and destructive power. This word in the Greek is not an explosive, destructive power but “power under control”. It is God’s power of creating and organizing the original starting materials for making the universe as well as the power required to sustain the universe. That deserves praise.

Many find it odd that there is no praise for God’s redemption in this song. But in the next song He is praised for redemption (Rev 5:9-10). The two themes God is praised for the most are “creation” and “redemption”. If we think about it God must first be praised for “creation” for apart from it there is no “redemption” nor is there a grand picture of God’s power in “redeeming” men or the “creation”. Creation is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Besides, “This song prepares the way for the climactic announcement that the long-awaited redemption of creation is on the brink of fulfillment.” It is not only men that are redeemed. The whole creation is awaiting redemption (Matt 19:28). It is not just the elect that Christ died for but for the whole created order. Christ’s death on the cross provides the basis upon which the creation will be re-created and also the basis upon which responsible creatures who reject Him are condemned. So, the cross applies to all men in one of two respects: redemption or condemnation, but it certainly was for all men. If not for all men then on what basis are unbelievers condemned?

There is a three-fold expression here that focuses on the fact that God created **all things**.

1. **You created all things** (*aorist active*)
2. **because of Your will they existed** (*imperfect active*)
3. **because of Your will they...were created** (*aorist passive*)

First, **You created all things**. Grammatically this is an *aorist active* verb. This means God's direct involvement in creation at a definite point in the past. This refers to the six days of creation (Gen 1:1-2:4). How would creation by means of evolutionary processes over billions of years fit this grammar or context? The context is emphasizing God's creative **power**. Remember, the word for **power** here is not an explosive power such as the Big Bang but "power under control" of a personal God. What was the means of **creation of all things**? Genesis describes God's creative work as operative through His spoken word, through language. The language of God is a creative instrument which has the capacity to create time, space, and matter out of nothing.

Second, **because of Your will they existed** describes the fact of their existence (*imperfect*) and gives the reason for their existence (*dia* with the accusative). All things exist **because of God's will**. It was a choice on the part of God to create. He did not have to create to have a companion or to express His divine attributes because He is a Triune God. The Father ever had the Son, the Son ever had the Spirit and the Spirit ever had the Father, etc...(John 14:24). God did not have to create but He chose to create. The fact that He did create means that what He created **existed**. One should not doubt his/her existence as the logical positivist Alan Greenspan. We exist because we have been created. For what purpose were all things created? For His own pleasure (Col 1:16).

Third, **because of Your will they...were created** explains that there was a beginning to all that **exists**. Consistent physicists and scientists teach that matter is eternal and uncreated. But in so doing they detach God's attributes from God and attach them to the universe. The universe is god for consistent scientists. Men are free to reject the God of the Bible but they are not free to reject all gods. Inevitably, men must attach the attributes of God to something. No man is neutral in this respect. Either they worship the Creator or the creation. The Bible teaches that matter did have a beginning and that beginning was **creation**. God is eternal meaning He has always existed; He has no beginning or end. But space, time, matter, things visible and invisible are all created and have a definite beginning. Scientists talk about the "origin" of the universe" but by that they only mean to speak of the beginning of the present state of the universe. What they do not tell you is how

matter originated. The only explanation is that it is eternal. But, the Bible teaches that the ultimate backdrop of reality is not impersonal matter but the personal Triune God. God gave all things existence by an act of His own power. He did not take eternal matter and form it into all that now exists but He created space, time and matter out of nothing. We call this *ex nihilo* creation. We also sometimes mention *inter nihilo* creation which means God created into nothing. There was nothing into which God created, no space in other words. There was God and God alone and then He spoke and things came into existence.

A word on biblical worship since it is the subject of this passage. Biblical worship is modeled in these two ascriptions of praise. And this model says there must be three elements and only three elements to qualify as “Biblical Worship”.

1. Proclamation of who God is (His attributes which make up His essence)
2. Proclamation of what God has done (creation, redemption, etc...)
3. Accuracy

Biblical worship does not require instrumentation or singing. In fact, both the four living creatures and the 24 elders **say** (*lego*) the worship in this chapter. Neither **sing** the worship. There is a Greek word for **sing** (*ado*) but it was not used to describe what John saw in heaven. Instead, he heard verbal ascriptions of praise in unison. From these two elements of worship it follows that worship can come in a number of forms: 1) teaching, 2) song, 3) exhortation, 4) prayer, etc... Most people think of singing and prayer as worship but very few think of teaching as worship. Yet teaching is the primary form of worship. However, the all-important thing is that worship has three elements: proclamation of who God is, proclamation of what God has done, and all done accurately. These three elements are indispensable elements of worship. What this means is that every other element is dispensable. As long as the form is not inconsistent with the message then it constitutes biblical worship.

ⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 360.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 363.

^{iv} Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 366.

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