

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**May 8, 2011**

**Heavenly Worship**

Revelation 4:1-2, 6b-11

**Key verse: “At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!” (Revelation 4:2)**

What captures our attention ultimately makes us who we are. That is why true *worship and praise* is not a peripheral matter but a central concern. If we let our negative circumstances capture our attention, we will ultimately become sad, unbelieving people. If we set the focus of our hearts and minds on the One who is greater than our circumstances, that focus will form us into joyful and victorious believers.

John wrote the Book of Revelation on the island of Patmos, where he had been exiled to a Roman prison colony because of his faith in Jesus Christ. John wrote this book to the churches in what is now the country of Turkey at a time when Christians were being persecuted severely by the Roman authorities. Yet, John’s focus here is not on these negative circumstances. Instead, his focus is lifted to a higher, more permanent place—the throne of God. The message here is that we must see beyond our negative circumstances to the God who is ruling from His throne and who will have the last word in all of human history!

At the funeral of Luis XIV, the priest looked down at the coffin containing the body of the once-powerful ruler of France. Then the priest turned to the crowd and said: “My friends, only God is great!” We need to remember that, whatever our present circumstances, God is on the throne. And He alone will rule and reign forever.

When John sees God’s throne, he also sees that the business of heaven is *worship*. The “four living creatures” (v. 6) and the “twenty-four elders” (v. 10) all are worshipping the One who sits on the throne. These “four living creatures” probably represent all of the living creation. The “twenty-four elders” represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples and so stand for the whole people of God. In effect, all of God’s creation and all of God’s redeemed community are before God’s throne in worship.

John says that the living creatures worship God “day and night without ceasing,” as they sing out: “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (v. 8). Simultaneously, the twenty-four elders fall down before God on His

throne. As they worship God, they “cast their crowns before the throne” (v. 10). This act of worship—casting their crowns before God on His throne—is the elders’ way of saying, “God alone is worthy of our praise and worship!”

As the 24 elders fall down before God on His throne and cast their crowns before that throne, they are singing: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (v. 11).

An unbelieving world has always struggled to understand why Christians sing to God in the darkest of circumstances—when the money is all gone, when the food is running out, when the home is in foreclosure. The simple answer is that, in the singing, we are readjusting our focus. Instead of focusing on the negative circumstances, we choose to focus on the God who rules and reigns today and will ultimately have the last word in each of our stories and the last word in all of human history!

John looked up from the lonely exile of Patmos to the throne room of God. The message of Revelation 4, put simply, is this: “When the outlook is bad, try the uplook!”

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