

Sunday Nov. 22, 2020
 Lesson 12: Worship at the Throne
 Scripture: Revelation 4: 1-11

Context:

Our scripture lesson this morning comes from the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is the closing book of the New Testament. While contemporary groups have used the book for apocalyptic purposes of determining the end of the world, the book is actually hopeful with visions to help us understand the power of worship.

In this part of John's vision for the book of Revelation, John is taken to a throne room. For John and the early Christian audience, this would have given hope to the readers. This scene is theocentric as God is on the center of the throne, a physical presence shrouded in mystical elements.¹ Yet the other elements of the scene act as a foil to the world John lives in.

The vision parallels the contemporary world John live in. The word "throne" is a political term as the chant and twenty-four elders are similar to the courtly scenes of the numerous Caesars including Domitian and Nero, rulers during the period of the early church.² The correlation of imagery from the imperial cult displays how John and others understood the depth of their God who transcended human powers and principalities. Thus, the scene goes into great details with the jewels and the clothing. While Rome may be powerful, Rome cannot be compared to the majesty of God.

Other elements help to promote this scene of worship. The throne hosts numerous flashes of lightening, voices, and thunder, echoing the imagery from God's appearance at Mount Sinai and numerous prophetic visions.³ There are also the seven spirits of God, which could be translations of "torches," "angels," and "eyes," taking upon the fluid imagery characteristic of John's revelatory language.⁴ Both the sea and rainbow are multilayered and yet have ties to the Genesis narrative where God makes the waters rise and fall and then seals a covenant with a rainbow.⁵ All of these give awe to the throne.

Around the throne are the creatures. These creatures represent all of the animals God created and the twenty-four elders represent humanity. The Gnostics, a group in the early church, advocated for the earthly realm being at times unimportant and separating the physical from the spiritual. John is stressing the point to the Gnostics of how God is

¹ Boring, Eugene A. "Revelation," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 103.

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵ *Ibid.* 105.

the source of all creation; God loves this earth God created and all things belong to God.⁶ This scene reminds us there is one Lord of all the earth, deeply in love with creation and humanity.

Application

If one could have feelings for a book of the Bible, I've often thought I would have pity for the book of Revelation. It has been turned into a book full of conspiracy theories and riddles left up to the loose interpretation of whoever gets ahold of it. If we read deeper into the book of Revelation, we see the book as one primarily about worship and hope. God is in this vision and gives us a glimpse into the majesty and awe of God.

John's vision provides to us a glimpse into the power of worship and coming to stand before God. As we dive into his vision, we realize we are given an understanding to how worship brings us into the glory of God and we receive a taste of heaven here on earth. As we read into this vision we also realize the political nature of worship.

Often times, we relegate politics to the secular understanding of them thinking about topics such as political parties or who sits in positions of power like the Oval Office of the White House. The word "politics" means "the affairs of the city" and deals with the power forms of relationships between individuals and groups making decisions. We naturally assume politics should stay in the realm outside of the church.

Yet politics does play a role in the church. How we worship provides a glimpse of how we come to honor and glorify God. As we worship, we name to whom we belong and to whom we give our lives.

If there is anything we learn in this passage, it is the importance of worship as the community of faith. There is a need for any congregation to offer what they have to God and to participate in worship together. In whatever season of life we find ourselves in, we are called to glorify and honor God.

From this scene, we learn of liturgia, the works of the people, or as we know it, liturgy. Once, I had someone complain how liturgy "did nothing for them," and if it were up to them, there would be no responses from people during worship. The statement saddened me as I do not think they understood the power of people stating and participating in the vows and prayers found in God's Word. When people come to worship, it is not just about the preacher, the band, the choir, or the worship leader; it is about the people of God participating together and rejoicing in the sight of God.

Perhaps one of the greatest joys I see in powerful worship services is not "perfection." I love it when I see people of different ages and with different gifts leading whether this is the young teenager honing their guitar skills or the older adult using their years of public speaking to be the liturgist in worship. There is the joy of seeing people excited to offer what they have to God and participate in the ancient rituals of the church in both established and innovative ways. All forms of worship whether traditional, contemporary, ancient future, blended, or whatever I am missing, should include all the people of God offering up praises to God.

This scene from Revelation gives us a guide for worship today. This scene is not saved for the end of time. This scene is to speak to us today. We are to look at how we worship and to remember in any worship of how God is the one who is to be the object of

⁶ Ibid., 107.

our adoration and praise. God is to be praised by all people and with all the people of God responding in some way.

Where do you find hope in this scene? How do you think we can find best practices for worship in this scene? How do you participate in worship in your local congregation? What are ways you can include people of different ages and with different gifts in worship? Why is it important to invite all people with a chance to praise and worship God?

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