**Worship and God’s Mission**

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No other writing in the New Testament evokes the wide range of reactions and emotions than the last book of the Bible, Revelation. No doubt it conjures up controversy, confusion, and even fear. I am not an expert in Revelation. I don’t know if I am a pre-millinialist, post-millinialist or a-millinialist. I am like most of you, I just try to pick and choose the parts of Revelation that I like and leave the rest alone, saying that John must’ve had too much sun when writing the book. However, Revelation was canonized as part of the Bible with the rest of Old Testament and New Testament so we do need to try to understand it best we can.

Revelation is referred as apocalyptic writing. Now, when you hear that word, apocalypse, your mind goes straight to how the world is going to come to an end. We have the wrong understanding of the word apocalypse. Apocalypse actually means revelation. The other place we find apocalyptic writing in scripture is in the book of Daniel. Both Revelation and Daniel use visions, symbols, and ancient myths to convey their message. They are mainly pictorial and symbolic language. We should not approach Revelation as if John was writing prose or a personal letter to us. The language of Revelation is mysterious and paints pictures of what we do not know more than pictures of what we do know.

Therefore, I do not approach Revelation as prophecy that is to come. I don’t believe it predicts the future or gives us the order of events that will happen. You might think I am a heretic but I read Revelation through the lens of God having full control of the future, no matter what happens and how it happens. More than telling us how the world is going to come to an end, Revelation teaches us how we are to live. It teaches us about how we should worship. Worship should reverberate with voices of hope and assurance that God is worthy of worship. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”

Knowing why we do what we do matters. We should know the purpose behind our actions and that purpose should drive how we do it. I am sure Michael gets sick and tired of me asking the question of “why!” Why do we do what we do with our children and youth? Why do we have Wednesday nights? What is the purpose of this program or that program? The purpose we are trying to accomplish should drive what we do rather than tradition or even our preferences.

So, why do we worship? What is the purpose of worship? Sometimes, it is easier to answer this question with what worship is NOT, rather than what worship is. First, worship is not a spiritual pep rally. Our corporate worship is not a filling station for you to be filled so you can make it through the workweek without losing your religion. Worship is not a place where you receive information and receive good teaching. Worship is not for you to get something out of…meaning that it is not for your enjoyment or for your edification. Worship is also not to pass down our faith to the next generation or preserving our own faith. It is certainly not something you come to out of obligation and it is not even aimed at saving the lost. It is kind of silly to even think that worship is about attracting others to join the church. So what is the purpose of worship?

The purpose of worship is to offer our praise, adoration and thanksgiving to our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Friend and to align ourselves with God’s mission. Worship is directed toward God, constantly being led by the Holy Spirit who is drawing us to the presence of God. That is what is happening in Revelation 4. John is seeing a vision of what worship is like in the presence of God. In his vision, God is seated on a throne with the appearance of precious stones encircling the throne. There were twenty-four elders dressed in white and with golden crowns on their head. A sea of glass surrounded them. In the center surrounding the throne were four living creatures, one like a lion, one like an ox, one like a man and the final one like an eagle. Each had six wings and were covered with eyes.

What is important in this passage is what these creatures and elders were doing, not what they represent. We could spend time today parsing what theologians guessed the four living creatures represent or who the twenty-four elders depict. I am sure there was some meaning behind these images but that is really not pertinent to our text. What is more important is that the four creatures were crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” That was their sole purpose. Their purpose for existence was to cry out “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” over and over again. Then the twenty-four elders laid down their crowns at the Lord’s feet and cried out, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” These twenty-four elders humbled themselves and worshipped God because he is worthy of worship!

So as we offer praise, adoration and thanksgiving to God in worship, God aligns us with the purpose of our existence. Here is what I mean: God’s mission is to build his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. When I consider the kingdom of God, I picture the Garden of Eden. I picture this perfect place where we are in perfect relationship with God, with one another and with creation.

In Genesis 2, we read an account of the Garden. “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters…The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it…Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.” (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-20)

When I read that account, I envision this perfect place, filled with God’s creatures living in harmony, scenes of serenity everywhere and constant state of equilibrium. Nothing was out of kilter until everything was out of kilter. When the serpent persuaded Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge, everything in the world changed. Sin entered into the world because Adam and Eve wanted to be God, rather than simply loving God in relationship. Brokenness became the state of God’s creation.

God could have left us in the state of brokenness. Yet, God loved his creation so much, he made a way for his creation to once again experience perfect communion with the Lord. That is the image that we see in Revelation 4. It is the image of perfect communion with God that results in worship, pure, unadulterated worship. Worship where we continually cry out, “holy, holy, holy!” Worship where we lay aside our own crowns and offer praise, adoration and thanksgiving because God is worthy of worship.

So, if God’s mission is to build his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, a place where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev. 21:4), then our mission or purpose for living is to help bring about his kingdom. This is where the purpose of worship and our lives intersect: worship prepares us for the kingdom work. Worship includes celebration of what God has done for us through the redemptive work of Jesus. When we worship together as the body of Christ, the work of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection is the bond that ties us together. We come together to celebrate not only what Christ has done but how Christ is living through us. We come together to give thanks to God, knowing that all good gifts come from the Lord, which puts our hearts in proper perspective. We know that our value is not found in what we accomplish on our own efforts but how we are used by God to bring about his kingdom.

Therefore, everything we do in corporate worship is for God to prepare us for kingdom work. We hear God through reading of scripture, reciting of prayers, singing hymns together, sacrificing our resources and listening to the words that are proclaimed in his name. Everything we experience in worship is to help us better understand the mission of God for our lives, wherever we might find ourselves during the week.

Worship is not for our entertainment or even for our enjoyment. Worship is not to attract non-believers or to check it off our religious duties list. It is not for what we might get out of worship but rather what we put into it. Worship is for us to express our gratitude and thanksgiving for God’s work in our lives. Worship is for us to lay down our own golden crowns, our pride, our efforts, our accomplishments and to take up the cross of Jesus that we might be used by God to bring about God’s kingdom as it was meant to be.

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!”