

Reasons to worship God

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Rev 4:8

After the general introduction of Revelation in chapters 1-3, which comprises statements about the glory of Christ and the role of the churches in reflecting Christ, we come to statements regarding the tribulation of the church and are given a indication of the scenes in heaven at this time. It is here we learn of the rapturous worship of God and see the actual content of this praise.

The praise is offered by the Cherubim (living creatures) which stand in the place of the full number of redeemed until the day that they are received in heaven. It is also offered by angels, and by elders, who represent the covenant community in heaven. Finally John has a glimpse of the last Day when the whole Earth is filled with the praise of God's glory.

These passages give us clear reasons to praise God. It is the duty of all men to praise their creator and Lord and the first stage of sin is the proud rebellion against this duty. Thus there is much to learn by looking at these passages in order to inform our own praise.

The worship of the Cherubim or 'living creatures' – praise of God as God

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'

Rev 4:8

We cannot discuss the nature of the four living creatures here, suffice to say that these are the same as the Cherubim mentioned in the Old Testament, especially in Ezekiel. They are not angels but represent the fulness of the redeemed creation who surround God's throne in heaven and who hold their place in the divine purpose until the redeemed actually appear in heaven after the Final Judgment. God must be worshipped and his chosen vessel of worship is the redeemed community; until the redeemed appear in heaven (all the elect and the restored creation released from bondage) the Cherubim hold this vessel of praise. What is important for our purposes here is what these creatures say.

The natural position of heavenly creatures is to praise God. These immaterial beings have not been redeemed and know nothing of any salvation, apart from what they witness occurring on Earth, yet they are filled with praise.

The reason for their praise is simply who God is. God is holy, the Almighty, the unchanging self-existent one, and this is enough reason to offer continual praise. The Cherubim do not rest but continually offer up praise to God simply because he is God.

The first reason for us to worship God is that we know him. He has brought us into understanding who he is, and that is enough for us to be continually praising him before we even thank him for what we have received. The foundation of all praise is that God is God and must be worshipped. Creatures must worship their Creator.

The worship of the 24 elders – the praise of the human creature for his Lord, God and Creator

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and

worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.' Rev 4:9-11

The 24 elders represent the church, especially those who, as at this time, have died in Christ and wait in heaven for the restoration of all things. There is complete unity in heaven and so when the Cherubim offer praise to God, so does the covenant community.

The church must praise the one who is on the throne, the Lord. We not only worship God because he is God, but because he is our Lord and Master. The worship of the church involves complete submission, pictured as the casting down of crowns. The Cherubim appear not to possess any free will, being creatures specifically made for a single purpose, but the elders have a will of their own, and this will is subjected to the Lordship of God.

A fundamental aspect of the worship of the church, like that of the Cherubim, is reverencing God as God and Creator. God is worthy of glory and honour because he is God and also because he created us; he owns us. Material creatures subsist merely due to the will of the Creator; this deserves worship.

The new song of the Cherubim and the elders – worship of Christ for his work

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.' Rev 5:8-10

This is the first mention of any singing, and this is due to the fact that it is the song of the redeemed. The singing follows the revelation of the Lamb that was slain and the redemption by blood. Angels are never mentioned as singing praise but only of saying it (Lk 2:13; Rev 5:12); only those who have been redeemed are able to sing of redemption in Scripture.

Worship again involves complete submission – the Cherubim and the elders fall down before the Lamb (Christ). The worship involves music in the form of singing (symbolised by the harp), prayers (symbolised by the incense) or spoken praise, as well as a new song.

The song of worship regards the specific work of Christ in fulfilling the decree of the Father (the scroll). No one but the Son could do the work required by God's eternal purpose to redeem the elect. This work involved dying for sin and thus the cross is a central plank of worship in heaven. The sacrifice of the Son of God for his elect creatures will always be a focal point of heaven's praise.

Another feature of worship is that which God has blessed us with. Not only have we received salvation from sin but also we have been made ambassadors for God – kings and priests who reign for him on a renewed Earth. This has yet to be finalised and thus we must worship God not only for who he is, not only for what he has done but also for what he has promised to do in the future.

The spoken praise of the angels, Cherubim, and elders – worship of Christ's authority

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honour and glory and blessing!' Rev 5:11-12

At this point the elect angels in heaven join in with the spoken praise of the Cherubim and the elders. The point of worship is centred on the Lamb, but this time to speak of his worthiness to receive all the glory for his work on Earth fulfilling God's plan. We worship Christ who is worthy to hold all the authority in the universe as its Lord.

The spoken praise of every creature – unified worship of God and the Lamb

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honour and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!' Then the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. Rev 5:13-14

This envisages a vision of the fulness of God's decree worked out – the unified worship performed by all creation in harmony. The central purpose of God's plan is the worship of himself by willing creatures in heaven and on Earth. Here all creatures join in unison in praising God for who he is and for his divine government, which is what the scenes of worship began with. But now there is the added focus of also worshipping Christ the Son who fulfilled the decree of God in obtaining salvation and redeeming the elect.

This is the cycle of praise come full circle.

Conclusion

Praise is the eternal occupation of the elect. It is the reason why we were created and it forms the basis of our being chosen and redeemed. There is great value in studying the praise of God that is recorded in Scripture, but particularly of the praise that occurs in heaven. Revelation should not be a neglected book.

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