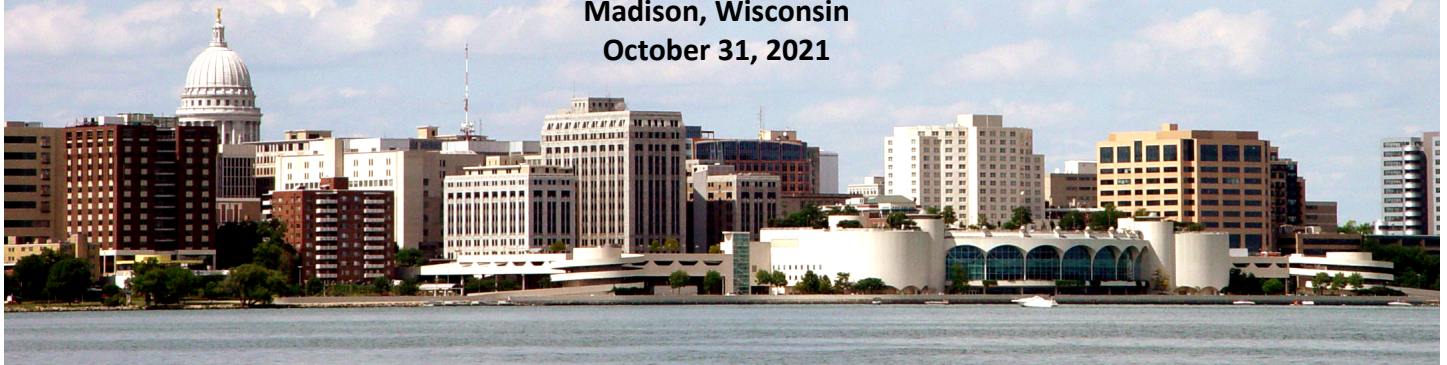


Worship in Revelation

PART 4 • WORTHY IS THE LAMB • REVELATION 5:11-12

Baxter T. Exum (#1616)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to be together this morning! As usual, I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper, as John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after we study together this morning. And then, Noah/John will be leading in several songs before we dismiss [for class].

We do have something new today, a virtual visitor card! We are using a QR code. This can probably be opened using the camera on your phone. I played around with it this morning, and I could get it to work all the way from the entryway – it did help to zoom in on it and then make the image darker. Most phone cameras should then give you the option to click to go to the website. If you cannot get it to work with the QR code, you can also go to fourlakescwc.org/visitor. We have a very simple form there, asking for your name and email (these two are required), and then if you want to tell us more – where you are from, your home congregation, how many are with you today, and then we ask if you have any questions or comments about today's service. Due to the virus, we did away with the cards in the back of each pew, although we do still have some actual cards on the back table – but this should give us a way to follow up with our guests.

"What must I do to be saved?" is perhaps the most important question anyone could ever ask. And thankfully, God answers that question in scripture. God sent his only Son to this earth to die for our sins, and in response, we believe the good news, we turn away from sin, we publicly confess our belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be immersed with the Lord in the act of baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

And once again, we do have an example this morning. Several days ago, I saw a post from Aaron Davis, who lives in Pikesville, Kentucky, and Aaron says, "Today Davey Williams and I baptized our high school baseball coach, Coach Mike Collins, into Christ! He won some 400 games as a high school baseball coach...Today he claimed his Victory in Jesus Christ!" Amen to that! We are thankful, then for Mike's decision to obey the gospel, we are looking forward to meeting Coach Collins someday, and we share this today by way of encouragement: What Mike has done a few days ago, you can do today. If you have any questions, if you would like to study further, please pull me aside after worship today; or, get in touch with John or Aaron. Our contact information is always on the front of the bulletin each week (on the wall right inside the front door).

This morning, we are continuing in our brief series of lessons where we are focusing on worship in Revelation 4-5. We are looking at a series of what might be described as “songs” or maybe “statements of praise” in these two chapters. After introducing himself in Chapter 1, and after sending messages to the seven churches of Asia in Chapters 2-3, the Lord (in Revelation 4) invites John to step through an open door into heaven, which he does, stepping into God’s throne room. He immediately sees the four living creatures praising God continually, saying, ***“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”*** God, then, is ***“holy”*** in every way.

We then came to a second statement of praise, and the twenty-four elders join in on this one. They cast their crowns before the throne in worship, as they say, ***“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.”*** We learned, then, that as our Creator, God is worthy of worship. He deserves everything we have to offer.

Last week, we crossed over into Revelation 5, and we came to a third statement of praise, the first to be described as a ***“song.”*** We saw John weeping at the scroll with seven seals, because no one could be found to open it, until we are introduced to Jesus as the Lamb of God. At this point, we see our prayers (pictured as incense) ascend before the throne. So, we are included in this one. We’ve been describing this as a “crescendo of praise,” as an “avalanche of praise,” as more and more groups join in on this worship in heaven.

And this is a message we need to hear, the reminder that when we worship, we are joining in on a behind-the-scenes reality. John may be feeling alone on the island of Patmos, but he is not really alone, is he? And the same goes for us today. We may feel alone and cut off sometimes. We look around us, and things are not right; the world around us is not okay, sometimes we are not okay, so we need the reminder that no matter what happens here in this life, God is still on his throne, and he is still worthy of our worship. And today, what I hope we notice is that all of this is voluntary! The creatures, and the elders, and now the angels are not compelled to worship, this isn’t forced on them in any way, but they see God and they worship.

This morning, then, we come to Revelation 5:11-12, and we come to the fourth statement of praise. I would encourage you to follow along in your own copy of the Bible. We will put the text on the wall as we look at it together, but then we will come back to the mountains up here as we move through it. As we start, though, let’s look together at Revelation 5:11-12. The words of the apostle John in Revelation 5:11-12,

***¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,
¹² saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”***

As we look at this fourth example of worship in Revelation 4-5, as we have done over the past two weeks, I’d like to divide our thoughts into two basic categories, starting with what John SEES on this occasion (what is happening here, the setting), and then we will move along to what John HEARS around the throne (the statement of praise offered by the elders and the four living creatures and now the angels down in verse 12).

I. But we start with what he SEES on this occasion.

And I know, in verse 11, John says, ***“Then I looked, and I heard,”*** but before he gets to what he hears, he tells us what he sees. We’ve already seen the living creatures and the elders, and now we come to the angels. The angels are also gathered around the throne, ***“...and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands.”*** As I understand it, John basically uses the largest numbers available to him in the Greek language, and then he throws in some multiplication. As some of you know, my opinion is that words and numbers should never mix. In my mind, terrible things happen when we start combining letters and numbers – algebra, for example, terrible middle school word-problems about trains heading toward each other, and so on (and here I am, married to a middle school math teacher)! But here (in Revelation 5:11), John describes the number of angels as ***“myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands.”*** “Ten-thousand times ten-thousand,” as some have tried to translate this. But like the Lord telling us to forgive not just seven times, but seventy times seven, the answer here is not that there are literally 100 million angels in heaven (he doesn’t stop to count these angels), but the point is: John is completely overwhelmed with the number. They are innumerable! The throne is surrounded by an ocean of angels, stretching for as far as the eye can see.

As far as angels themselves, we know that the word ***“angel”*** literally means “messenger.” Angels, then, are God’s messengers. We know from scripture that angels are not eternal, but they are created beings. Contrary to popular opinion (and contrary to “It’s a Wonderful Life”), angels are not human beings who die and “get their wings.” We know from scripture that angels are swift (they are fast). They do not age. They appear as men. They do not marry. They rejoice at the salvation of a soul. We also know from scripture that angels are powerful. We have a record in 2 Kings 19, for example, of Hezekiah being surrounded by an enemy army, he approaches God in prayer, and in response, the ***“angel of the Lord”*** visits the enemy camp, and in the morning 185,000 Assyrian soldiers basically “wake up dead.” One angel takes out 185,000 well-equipped enemy soldiers. And if we think that’s powerful, we just need to imagine the power that created the angels – and not just one, but ***“myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.”*** We could go on and on; we could probably study angels every Sunday for a year and still not learn everything the Bible teaches about these creatures. But what we learn here in Revelation 5 is that angels worship.

They are not to be worshiped, but they are the ones doing the worshiping. Many times in scripture, people see an angel, and they fall down in worship, but the angel tells them to get up and to worship God instead (or something like that). We see it later, in Revelation 22:8-9, where John falls down to worship the angel who is guiding him through this vision, but the angel says to John, ***“Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.”***

And in a similar way, here in this passage, instead of being worshiped, the angels worship; they worship Jesus, the Lamb of God. And they do this, because angels understand who Jesus really is. For a number of years, I attended a number of public lectures, offered on the UW Campus by the “Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions.” The three world religions that claim Abraham as their “father” are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and every few months, this group would host a public lecture to promote understanding between these three groups. I think about these three groups, though, and yes, we can certainly be nice to each other, there is certainly a benefit to learning, but we will never have true unity, because of Jesus. Is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God? Did Jesus really die on the cross? Did he come back from the dead? Those questions will very quickly demonstrate that we are not on the same page, at all; we are not even in the same book. Well, Jews, Muslims, and Christians all believe in angels; the angels, though, clearly come down on the side of Jesus. They know. They know that Jesus is worthy of worship. And so, if you respect the angels, then do what they do, and worship the Lamb of God.

Before we get to what John actually hears, I should probably also point out something that surprised me several years ago. I mentioned it in our Wednesday class when I first realized this, but as far as I can tell from scripture, angels are never described as “singing.” Angels don’t sing! Now, we sing about angels singing, “Angels are singing redemption’s sweet song,” “Hark! The herald angels sing,” and so on. But in the actual word of God, I can’t seem to find a single reference to angels ever singing. If you find it, please let me know, but I’ve tried and failed to find a reference to angels actually singing. Here in this passage, then, instead of the angels singing, John says (in verse 11) that he **“hears them saying with a loud voice.”** So, they are speaking; or, more accurately, perhaps, they almost seem to be shouting. And they are speaking in unison, but it is not described as singing.

II. **Anyway, this brings us to what John HEARS (in verse 12), as he hears WHAT THESE ANGELS ARE SAYING.**

With a loud voice, they join in and say, **“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”** The crescendo continues! And this time we have these seven statements of praise. I don’t know how significant this is, but while the elders sang directly to the Lamb, **“Worthy are You to take the book,”** and so on (in verses 9-10), the angels seem to be speaking not so much TO the Lamb as they seem to be speaking ABOUT the Lamb. And it might be because (unlike the elders), the angels have not been redeemed themselves. The elders are singing with an intense sense of personal gratitude, while the angels are praising the Lamb based on what they have observed to be true.

As to the seven statements themselves, some have suggested that at least in some sense, these are things the Lamb gave up in order to come to earth. He came to this earth as a nobody, born into a poor family, with virtually no power, he limited himself in his wisdom, he had no glory and honor, no blessing (for the most part, people did not speak well of him at all). He was rejected, even in his own hometown. In heaven, though, it becomes more and more obvious that the Lamb is truly worthy of these things...

...starting with **“power.”** On earth, he had the power to perform miracles, to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to raise the dead. And then, in Romans 1:4, Paul refers to Jesus being **“...declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.”** As the Lamb of God, Jesus deserves to be praised for his power. This has been a challenge for me: Are these angels GIVING Jesus these things, are they saying he DESERVES these things, are they saying he is the SOURCE of these things? I don’t know! Maybe all of the above. I keep coming back to the word “ascribe” in my mind, “to attribute something to.” It’s not in this text, but we do use the word “ascribe” in some of our songs.

The Lamb is also worthy to receive **“riches.”** And again, this is something he gave up to come to this earth. Most of you know by now that my favorite verse in the Bible is 2 Corinthians 8:9, where Paul says, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”** Jesus gave up the riches of heaven, but now, he is worthy to be praised for his riches.

He is also praised for his **“wisdom.”** He certainly didn’t give up all wisdom to come to this earth, but he did limit himself. In Colossians 2:3, Paul refers to Christ, **“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** In 1 Corinthians 1:24, Paul says that **“...to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”** He is to be praised for his **“wisdom.”**

He is also worthy to be praised for his ***"might."*** In 1 Peter 3:22, Peter refers to Jesus, ***"who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."*** He is praised for his strength, for his capability. He is able (as we learned a few weeks ago).

He is also praised for his ***"honor."*** This is the idea of placing a value on somebody. We think about appraising a house or a car. Somebody inspects the house, perhaps compares it to other houses in the area, and then says, "This is how much it is worth." In a similar way, when we ***"honor"*** somebody, we are saying that they are valuable to us; they are worth something to us. In the Bible, we are told to ***"honor"*** our parents. Well, perhaps in a similar way, Jesus deserves all ***"honor."***

He is also praised for his, ***"glory."*** This is the word John uses in John 1:14, when he says, ***"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** His reputation is well-deserved. We might think of a doctor who heals us of some terrible disease. We tell people about it. The Lamb of God is majestic and glorious. He deserves our praise.

The Lamb is also deserving of ***"blessing."*** This is the word we might recognize as being the basis of our English word "eulogy." It refers to speaking well of somebody. At a funeral, we normally try to remember the good things about the person, and so we speak a good word about them. Jesus is worthy of being spoken well of. By the way, perhaps you have seen the meme floating around recently, suggesting that the things normally said at funerals should probably be said at birthdays instead. What a great thought! Instead of waiting until somebody is gone to speak good words about them, why not speak those words now? Imagine being alive at your own funeral as people say all kinds of good things about you. That would be great! And if this is true of those we know and love here on this earth, how much more true this is of Jesus! This word was used by the crowds in Mark 11:9-10. As Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, they were shouting, ***"Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!"*** Jesus deserves our ***"blessing."*** He deserves a "good word" from us.

All of the qualities that a ruler needs to have, Jesus is worthy of possessing. He is worthy of all ***"power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."*** Today, some who have these qualities will abuse their power, and riches, and so on. But the Lord is ***"worthy"*** of these things. He has the power to carry out his plans, the riches to fund every program, the might and strength to overpower adversaries, the honor and respect of those who follow, the glory or reputation of someone in such a high position, and the blessing or approval of those who love their king and support him.

Conclusion:

John, then, steps through this open door into heaven, he sees God praised as being HOLY, God is praised as being our CREATOR, and now the focus has shifted to Jesus who appears as a LAMB. He is praised for being qualified to open the seals, and the worship continues in today's passage with millions of angels joining in on this seven-part statement of praise. The Lamb is worthy.

So what? What does this mean for us? Something that keeps coming to my mind as I look at this passage is this: The more we know about the Lord, the more we are able to worship. If I don't know Jesus, it's a bit hard for me to say that he is worthy of all ***"power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."*** However, the more I get to know him, the more I study, the more I understand that he truly is worthy. I would take this passage as an invitation to get to know the Lord as these angels do. They know, and so can we. And

when we know, we give him POWER over our lives, we allow him to control all of our RICHES, we look to him for WISDOM, we lean on his MIGHT, we give him HONOR personally, we dedicate our lives to giving him GLORY, and we SPEAK WELL of him.

As we sometimes sing,

*Worthy of praise is Christ our Redeemer, worthy of glory, honor and pow'r!
Worthy of all our souls adoration, worthy art Thou! Worthy art Thou!
Lift up the voice in praise and devotion, saints of all earth before Him should bow;
Angels in heaven worship Him saying, worthy art Thou! Worthy art Thou!
Lord, may we come before Thee with singing, filled with Thy spirit, wisdom and power;
May we ascribe Thee glory and honor, worthy art Thou! Worthy art Thou!
Worthy of riches, blessings and honor, worthy of wisdom, glory and pow'r!
Worthy of earth and heaven's thanksgiving worthy art Thou! Worthy art Thou!*

We will leave it here for today, and hopefully next week we can pick up with the last few verses, as we conclude our study of these songs in Revelation.

As we close our study, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for once again allowing us into your throne room this morning. We are so thankful for the opportunity to learn more about you and your Son. Thank you for giving us your inspired word, so that we can get to know Jesus better the longer we live. He is truly worthy of our praise.

We come to you this morning in the name of your Son, Jesus, who gave his life for us. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com