

We saw last week that Solomon and the Israelites got to see the fire falling from heaven.
But John saw something far better—he went up to heaven itself!
The Israelites got to see Solomon sit on David’s throne—that was good;
But John got to see Jesus standing in the midst of God’s throne.
That would be a pretty impressive sight.

But just as Solomon had assembled the elders,
the heads of the tribes,
the leaders of the fathers’ houses,
and “all the men of Israel” in 2 Chronicles 5:2-3,
and they all assemble, brining the ark—
God’s footstool—
into the temple,

so also now John witnesses the heavenly throne (not just the earthly footstool),
where there are assembled,
four living creatures,
24 elders
thousands of thousands of angels,
and indeed, every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea.

Are you a creature?
Then your voice was heard by John on that day!

What Solomon had done at the earthly temple
is now revealed in glory in the heavenly temple.

In other words, John saw in a vision the way things really are.
The throne of God is at the center,
and everything—including YOU—is centered on that throne.

We saw last week that there is a pattern of worship that is established in the Old Testament.
But so far we have not seen anything in the NT that would conclusively demonstrate
that the apostles followed that pattern.

But there is one more worship service that we must look at
in order to see that this pattern of worship is indeed the heavenly pattern.
All earthly worship must conform to the heavenly worship
if it is to participate in the worship of the Living God.

1. The Heavenly Assembly (4:1-11)

In Revelation 4.

God calls John to join in the heavenly assembly.

John comes before the throne,

and sees a picture much like that of Solomon

with all of the elders and chieftains of Israel;

with the Levites gathered to sing the praises of God.

In other words, Solomon's assembly was simply a picture of the heavenly assembly.

God is portrayed as sitting in the midst of the heavenly council,

surrounded by his elders and chieftains.

The picture of the four living creatures reminds us of another heavenly worship scene, in Ezekiel chapter 1, where Ezekiel sees the glory of God revealed.

The song of four living creatures is an echo of the song of the cherubim in Isaiah 6.

The throne of God looks very similar to what Ezekiel saw in Ezekiel 1,

when the four living creatures appeared to him,

and he saw the throne of God above the sapphire expanse (Ezek. 1:22-28).

We don't have time to go into all the details,

but we see the seven torches – the sevenfold lamp like in the temple – (Ex 25:31-40)

and we a sea of glass like crystal (the bronze sea in the temple was modeled after this!).

The description of the four living creatures echoes Ezekiel 1 and Ezekiel 10.

In other words, where the OT saints had seen the earthly footstool,

John now sees the heavenly temple.

It is not as though we imitate the OT worship.

Rather, they were imitating us!

Or better yet, they had shadowy pictures of the reality that we now participate in.

2. Entering Worship on the Basis of the Sacrifice (5:1-14)

So, here we have the heavenly hosts assembled for worship.

In Solomon's worship, the next item was entering the Holy of Holies through the sacrifice.

Of course there are no sacrifices in heaven,

heavenly worship wouldn't need a sacrifice, would it?

But wait...

John sees a scroll—written on both sides—and sealed with seven seals.

We will see in Rev. 6 that this scroll contains God's purposes for the history of salvation.

In other words, this scroll contains the Word of God.

But then a strong angel proclaims in v 2,

“Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?”

And no one comes forward.

The worship of God in the heavenlies, comes to screeching halt in 5:3,
because no one is worthy to open the scroll.

Redemptive history has no future.

Sin has made all men UNworthy to open the scroll.

John weeps, because he realizes that salvation is impossible
so long as the scroll is sealed.

But then the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David

(the one greater than Solomon),

the Lamb as though it had been slain,

comes and takes the scroll.

Forgiveness is obtained! Redemption is accomplished!

The Sacrifice has been offered.

NOTE that the sacrifice includes not only Christ's death,

but also includes his resurrection,

and indeed his ascension to the Father

—because until he is ascended to the Father, his sacrifice is not complete.

The sacrifice was slaughtered on the cross,

but the sacrifice is not complete

until the sacrifice is brought into the Holy of Holies

—only then is atonement fully accomplished—

when God himself has declared himself satisfied.

It is very important to understand that Revelation

does not show a dead Jesus at the heavenly altar.

It is the Lamb “as though it had been slain”—but now very much alive!

who stands in the midst of the altar.

It is the resurrected Lamb,

whom Death could not hold,

that now stands to offer the perfect sacrifice to the Father.

Part of the problem with all the OT sacrifices is that the lambs and bulls, and goats,

ALL stayed DEAD!!

The sacrifice of Jesus, however, was offered by the living High Priest.

Hebrews 9:19-26

But when the final sacrifice is offered

—when Jesus brings the final sacrifice to the heavenly throne—

Then all the hosts of heaven--the whole assembly of God's people--

sing the praises of God, and the history of redemption.

"For you are worthy..."

3. Hearing and Responding to the Word of God (chs 6-18)

Then the scroll is opened,
and the Word of God is proclaimed;
the history of redemption is set forth in awesome pictures;
and the promises of God are shown to be true and faithful.

After the seventh seal is opened,
the prayers of saints ascend to the throne (8:3-5);
and God even responds to those prayers with fire! (note v5)

Notice that the praise of God is sung at the end of the 7th trumpet (11:15-19)
as well as after the 7th symbolic picture (15:2-8).

The same sermon is repeated over and over again
--this is what life will be like between the first and second comings of Christ
and after each one you see something quite similar
to the fire descending from heaven in 2 Chronicles.
God answers the prayers of his people by sending blessings to them,
and wrath upon their enemies.

Some have said that since all of life is worship,
therefore there is nothing particularly important
about how we conduct our assemblies on Sunday morning.

Revelation reveals a different perspective.

Revelation shows us that all of life is indeed worship.

The entire history of redemption

from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ
is bound up in the heavenly worship.

In chapters 6-7, as the seals of the scroll are opened,
we hear the Word of God proclaimed.

As the Lamb opens the seals,
we hear what God has purposed for his people.

We hear in chapter six that there will be conquest, war, famine and death.

We hear (v9-11) that many will be martyred for the word of God,
but we also hear (v12-17) that the wrath of the Lamb will destroy the wicked.

Then, after the sixth seal has been opened
--after we have heard of what God has purposed for redemptive history--
in chapter 7 the vision returns us to the throne of God.

Having heard the Word of God proclaimed,

We are returned to the multitude around the throne as they sing praises to God.

In other words, the proclamation of the Word of God
prompts the people of God to respond with their prayers and praises.

And when the seventh seal is opened, in chapter 8:1-5,
notice what happens:

an angel comes with a golden censer, offering incense before God.

And what does this incense represent?

“That he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar.”

And when smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints comes before God,
then the angel takes the censer, fills it with fire from the altar,
and throws it to the earth.

Remember Solomon?

What happened after Solomon brought his prayers to the Lord in 2 Chronicles 6-7?

God sent fire from heaven—the sign that He has heard the prayers of his people.

Elijah on Mt Carmel saw the same sign.

The disciples at Pentecost received the same sign

—with tongues of fire poured out upon their heads.

If you go through the seven trumpets you will see the same pattern:

The trumpets sound forth the coming judgment of God

—God’s purposes in redemptive history—

which include both blessing for his people, and cursing for his enemies.

And when the seventh trumpet blows,

the people of God respond to the Word of God with their prayers and praises (11:15-19)

And notice once again, that the response is that the ark of the covenant is seen

“lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.” (v19)

Then the scene changes, and in the very center of the book, we have seven symbolic pictures
(Chapters 12-15):

we have redemptive history portrayed for us in another picture:

in chapter 12, we have the gospel proclaimed to us once again:

That Jesus has been raised to the right hand of the Father,

Which means that while the dragon may persecute us

—he cannot touch the church—our mother.

And while the beasts and their minions may seek to destroy us,

those who have the mark of the Lamb need not fear the power of Babylon.

And when the seventh picture is complete,

once again we hear the prayers and praises of the saints (15:3-4)

and once again we have the response of heaven to the prayers of the saints (v5-8).

Notice that the heavenly temple becomes so full of smoke

from the glory of God and from His power,

that no one was able to enter the temple

till the seven plagues were completed. (v8)

Again, just as in Moses day—just as in Solomon’s day—the glory of God

(For blessing and for cursing—or perhaps better—for salvation through judgment)

stops the priesthood from entering the temple.

Three times now we have seen the pattern:

the “sevens” proclaim the Word of God—the purposes of God in redemptive history

the “seventh” seal, trumpet, picture is followed by the prayers and praises of the saints

and God responds to the prayers and praises of his people with fire from heaven.

Then in chapter 16-18 we have the final “seven”—the seven bowls.

As these final plagues are poured out,
 we are given a vision of Babylon.
We had seen Zion—the city of God, in chapter 12 (following the seven trumpets);
Now we are given a vision of Babylon—the harlot—the city of the beast.
 These seven bowls—these seven plagues—
 are poured out upon Babylon—and the citizens of the earth bewail her fall.

4. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb (ch 19)

But in chapter 19, the “great multitude in heaven” rejoice: (v1-9)

Here, finally, the people of God are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.
 Redemptive history itself ends with a covenant meal.

However else you may interpret the book of Revelation,
 we should see that it shows us the heavenly worship.
We should see that, yes, all of life is indeed worship,
 because all of human history is the unfolding of the Word of God.

But if all of life fits into this pattern of the heavenly worship,
 then our worship should also follow this pattern.

There is a reason why our worship has the structure that it does.

 The heavenly worship is seen in a microcosm every Sunday.
 Every Sunday we are called together to be reminded that this age is passing away.
 We are gathered together to see the heavenly glory of our Savior,
 and to partake of his goodness and mercy.

Revelation shows us that redemptive history itself follows this pattern of worship.

 Or, more precisely, redemptive history is itself the pattern for our worship.
 We enter worship on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ
 (which includes his death, his resurrection,
 and indeed his ascension to the Father).

 We then hear the Word of God proclaimed—
 we hear who Christ is, what he has done,
 who we are in Christ, and what that means for our lives.

 We then respond to the Word with our prayers and praises,
 thanking him for what he has done,
 and asking him to continue to do what he has promised.

 We conclude by partaking of the covenant meal,
 in which we both proclaim his death,
 and also anticipate his return.

 We must remember that when we partake of the Lord’s Supper,
 we are proclaiming the Lord’s death, “*until he comes*”

When Paul says that the bread that we break is a participation in the body of Christ,

this does not only mean that we are partaking
of something that happened 2,000 years ago.
No—if it were merely a memorial of something that happened long ago,
then it would not be very important.
But when we partake of Christ, we are partaking of the Living Lord,
The Lamb who sits upon the throne.
We are anticipating the Wedding Supper of the Lamb,
because we share not only in the death of Christ,
but also in his resurrection life.

Conclusion: the Heavenly Pattern and Our Worship Today

There is no “thou shalt follow this pattern” in the New Testament.

Like infant baptism and the switch from Saturday to Sunday as a day of rest and worship,
there is no specific commandment to do this.

These are things that were so obvious in the first century that no one questioned them.

But it is interesting to observe that the early church
invariably followed this pattern without any debate.

They saw that their worship participated in the heavenly worship,
and so followed the heavenly pattern unswervingly.

Since the children of believers were always included in the covenant sign,
there was no question in the apostolic era that infants should be baptized.

Likewise, since every biblical worship service follows this pattern,
it was natural for the apostles and early church to continue it.

Why do we do what we do in worship?

I have suggested that there is a biblical pattern—or structure—to worship.

I have not gone into the details of whether to have a confession of sin every week,

Or where to put the collection of tithes and offerings.

Or where the psalms and hymns should go.

The reason is because Scripture does not give these details.

There is liberty to arrange the details within the overall pattern.

So long as the basic pattern is intact, there will be variety from church to church,
and from country to country.

You also may have noticed that I have not even mentioned worship “style.”

This is because I don’t think the question of “style” is worthy of mention in a sermon.

The Word of God says nothing about it—so neither will I!

I find it quite interesting that the “style” debates,
have been going on now for 300 years.

In other words, they have been going on
ever since the Presbyterian churches departed from this basic pattern of worship.

Since we have forgotten our theology of worship,

we have nothing better to do than debate style issues!

I believe that when this basic theology of worship becomes deeply ingrained in the church,
the question of style will become much less important.

Because this theology of worship is not just about “*making sure we do things just right!*”

I know a church that practices weekly communion,
but does not understand why they do it.

It is not enough to mindlessly follow the pattern,
this theology of worship must become engraved upon our hearts.

It is important to recognize that this *is* what is happening in worship,
whether we realize it or not.

We need to see that our worship together as the people of God,
brings us up to the very throne of heaven.

Here we are reminded who we really are.

We come into worship—and immediately
we are reminded of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ....

ah, that’s right—I’m not here because of anything I did,

I’m here because of what Jesus did

—and immediately it takes our focus off of ourselves and casts it onto Christ.

But of course, this brings joy to our hearts,

because if we are here because of the death and resurrection of Christ,

Then our sins are forgiven!

We are now united to Christ!

And as his glory fills his temple (US!!!),
we proclaim his praises.

Then as we hear the Word of God,

we are once again reminded of who we are,

and are strengthened and encouraged by the Word of God.

And as we saw last week, in Solomon’s prayer,

our prayers take all of the concerns of the week,

All the desires and fears and situations,

And bring them before the throne of grace.

And here, once again,

We are reminded who we are in Christ.

All those desires and fears and situations are placed in their true light.

Oh yes—that’s right!—whether you are facing

sickness or temptation or unemployment or even death,

all that you encounter is under the mighty hand of God.

And our God is a God who hears prayer—and fills his church

with his glorious Spirit to strengthen us in our time of need.

And the Supper also reminds us of who we are,

by—once again—refocusing us on Christ.

As we partake of Him who is our sacrifice,

we once again receive grace to strengthen us in the hour of need.

The heavenly worship follows the same pattern as redemptive history.

Therefore because your lives are bound up together with Christ;

Because your life is hidden with him in God;

All of life is to be lived as an act of worship to God.

And each week, our worship is to remind us of who we really are.