

As we continue in our series in the book of revelation, we are going to be in Revelation 4. Turn there in your Bibles. To get us ready for the teaching, [take a look at this video from Bobby McFerrin. 0:14-0:48.](#)

The video goes on for several minutes, and wherever Bobby McFerrin goes on stage, the people's voices follow. He's the musician who wrote "Don't Worry, Be Happy." He did that presentation at a convention for neuroscientists at the World Science Festival to show people who study the brain for a living that when we were created, music was hard-wired into our DNA. He said, "Everywhere I go, every continent, every country, every culture, every age, everyone gets it. Music is in our bones." God created us to be able to sing. I believe he created us to be able to sing so that we would be able to sing to him.

Today, as we continue in our study on the book of Revelation, we turn to chapter 4, one of the greatest chapters, if not the greatest chapter, on worship in the entire Bible.

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "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."

The most influential theologian in my life is a scholar named NT Wright. He tells about a time when he was walking into a church service alongside his mentor. He looked at the bulletin, noting they would be in Revelation 4 that day. His mentor said, "One of the two greatest chapters in the entire Bible." NT Wright responded, "What's the second one?" "Revelation 5 of course." We are, right now, in some of the most rich, compelling, beautiful, inspiring verses in all of Scripture, and it's all about worship. Revelation 4 highlights six aspects of worship.

Worship elevates us. Like when we get in an airplane, rise above the clouds, and gain a perspective we did not have before, worship enables us to see the world in an entirely new way. "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here'" (Revelation 4:1). If John were focused on his surroundings and his circumstances, would he be inclined to worship? Where was John? He was on the island of Patmos. Why was he there? Not because he was soaking up the sun and getting some R and R on a beach vacation. He was sent there as a political prisoner because of his faith. He was suffering isolation and persecution. He

was away from his family, away from his friends, imprisoned on an island with his life in jeopardy. If he were looking at the situation around him, he would be complaining, confused and crying, dejected and demoralized and defeated, downcast with his head in his hands. John was not blind to his circumstances, but that's not where he placed his focus. Rather, he walked through the open door above him and set his eyes on heaven. As Scripture tells us, he set his heart and mind on things above, not on earthly things. With his focus on heaven, a holy God, robed in beauty and majesty, reigning on the throne, he could worship with all his heart and all his might, even amid the greatest trial of his life. That's what worship does: it elevates our focus above our surroundings and onto our creator, above our difficulties and onto our deliverer. Think about a humpback whale, which spends 99.99% of its life underwater. It swims throughout the seas and focuses entirely on what's happening in the ocean. But on occasion, it breaches the surface. When it does, it not only gets a vantage point of another realm, it also gets the breath and air it needs to survive another dive under the water. That's what worship is for us. When we worship, we set our sights on another realm, a realm that is just as real but as instinctive for us to see, and when we do, we inhale the air we need to live lives of faithfulness and devotion.

Worship captivates us. Worship is not a boring, bland, benign experience; it is rich, dynamic, and arresting. Look at what John sees when he enters the heavenly throne room: "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne" (Revelation 4:2-3). When John gets to heaven it's like he's peering through a kaleidoscope, with color and texture and vibrancy everywhere he looks. The one on the throne had the appearance of jasper and ruby. These are images that point beyond themselves. It's not as though God looks like precious stones; it's that precious stones are dazzling, they sparkle with beauty, and when you look at them in the right light, you can't look away. I remember picking out Keren's engagement ring. I got it maybe a week before I was going to propose. Eight times a day I would get it out of the box and hold it up to the light. I had personally never held anything that spectacular or that expensive. Think about the crown jewels. In many ways they are priceless because of their historical and cultural value to Britain, but if you strip that away, they are worth a combined 6 billion dollars. Diamond encrusted golden sword. Rubies and emeralds and sapphires. People stand in line for hours to see them and marvel at them. That's what John says it was like when he looked at the one sitting on the throne. He was captivated.

But it's not only the description of precious stones; John also says "a rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne." As soon as Keren and I got back from our honeymoon we did a two-week mission trip to Northern Ireland. We did Bible teaching every morning and evangelism every evening. But during the middle of the day, we could explore the countryside. One day we made our way to a place called Giant's Causeway. Because of the way the waves hit and send mist into the air, there is a near constant rainbow in the sky that you can stand over. The scenery and the rainbow is so beautiful, people will wait in line for hours to find a place to park in order to soak in this view. God is wrapped in captivating colors, but it's not just the blues and yellows and greens and violets that catch John's eye; it's the meaning of a rainbow. God gave humanity a rainbow as a sign that he would never again destroy the world by flood. It was a sign of his compassion, his mercy, his faithfulness. It's not just the colors that surround God; it's his character that shines. When anyone with eyes to see it catches a glimpse, they can't look away; they are filled with wonder. This is how John uses language.

Listen to what DA Caron says:

How do you describe a God who is purer than the driven snow, who is more magnificent than the most stunning sunset, who is more entrancing than a million twinkling stars, who is more nourishing than the best of foods, whose love is firmer and yet more tender than that of the wisest and best of parents, who is more awesome than all the unleashed forces of nature? How do you describe a God like that?

Worship humbles us. When John sees God seated on the throne, there is no doubt how powerful and capable he is, and in comparison, how small and insignificant we are. Revelation 4:5 says, “From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.” Before the days of nuclear bombs, there was nothing in the human imagination more powerful than a storm. Think about hurricanes. I remember visiting New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina—125 mile an hour winds, 392 lives lost, 70 billion dollars of damage. There is no stopping a storm like that. I remember visiting Joplin, Missouri, after an F-5 tornado ripped through the town. That tornado moved an entire hospital off its foundation. It snapped 100-year-old oak trees like toothpicks. When you stand before a storm, you realize there is a power far greater than you, and any delusions of personal grandeur are quickly wiped away and appropriately replaced with humility, reverence, and awe. There is a storm surging from the throne in heaven. You cannot control God, you cannot domesticate God, you cannot harness God for your own purposes. When you see his power and might the only appropriate response is like that of Moses, to take off your shoes and recognize that you are on holy ground.

Worship settles us. Worship not only humbles us but is also able to simultaneously settle us. We see God on the throne, emanating power beyond compare and beyond control, but we also know that because a good God is wielding that power, we can have confidence because he is in control. John tells us that “Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal” (Revelation 4:6). For ancient Jews, the sea equaled chaos. The Jews never learned how to build ships and sail the oceans. For them, the sea was a place of danger, a place from which enemy armies would often come. So it seems strange, doesn’t it, that there was a sea heaven? This is a picture of heaven as it is today, not heaven as it one day will be. In Revelation 21:1, in the final version of heaven, once Jesus returns, we are told there will be no more sea. No more chaos. No more evil. But today, that sea is still in heaven. However, the sea isn’t raging. The waves aren’t crashing. It’s a sea of glass, clear as crystal. The chaos is under control. Sometimes life feels very chaotic, doesn’t it? The chaos in your family. Chaos with your spouse. Chaos with your grown kids. Chaos in politics. Chaos with international crises happening all the time. Chaos is part of this present order, but God uses his infinite power to contain the chaos until he vanquishes it forever. That’s why worshipping God settles our hearts. It reminds us that God has everything, even the most difficult things in this life, under his sovereign control.

Worship aligns us. I bought my first vehicle when I was 17 years old. It was a 1992 long bed F-150 XLT. I loved that truck. But it had major alignment issues. If you’ve ever driven a car like that, you know what I am talking about. If you don’t keep your hand constantly on the wheel, it pulls you in one direction and will take you straight off the road. The sinful nature in all of us causes our lives to be misaligned. Sin in our hearts pulls us off the road into a ditch. Worship aligns our life with the purpose for which we were created. We see that in Revelation 4:6-8:

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.”

There is a lot to unpack here, so let’s take it piece by piece. First, it’s important to recognize that when John mentions four living creatures, this is very similar to the image of God’s reign described in Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6. These heavenly beings are covered with eyes in front and in back. Don’t imagine a literal 800 eyeballs on each creature. This is a picture that symbolizes something beyond itself—namely that God sees everything.

Some middle schoolers told me that at their cafeteria there was once a basket full of apples for the students. One of the lunch ladies placed a sign over it that said, "Only take one...God is watching." On the other end of the table was a tray of chocolate chip cookies. One of the students got out a sheet of paper and wrote, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples." God is not limited in what he watches. He sees it all. In 2008, three golden eagles were trapped and fitted with a GPS tracking device so that scientists could study their travel patterns. Over the next several years, they could see how each one traveled all around the northeast portion of the US and Canada. God knows the flight path of every bird that has ever lived in the history of the world. He knows the route that every fish that has ever lived has ever swam. He knows it all. Pick a given day in world history—say, October 17, 1402. God knows everything that happened that day in the entire world. The little girl in India who fell and scraped her knee. The young indigenous couple in South America who welcomed their first child into the world. An elderly man from Russia named Dimitri who died quietly in his sleep. He knows every word that was spoken on that day, every thought that was entertained, every interaction that took place. He knows everything, for every day, for all of time. He knows how fast your heart is beating this very second. Nothing ever happens about which God says, "I didn't see that coming." He sees and knows everything.

Take note of the other description given of these creatures: "The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle." The lion was considered the strongest of all wild animals. The ox was considered the strongest of all domesticated animals. Man is the strongest of all creatures, and the eagle is the strongest of all flying animals. These four heavenly beings represent all creation. And as representatives of all creation, what are they doing? They are worshipping God!

On Sept 6, 1995, Cal Ripken Jr. broke Lou Gehrig's MLB record for 2,130 consecutive games played. Many consider it the most important record in all professional sports. When he broke the record, everyone in the stadium gave him a standing ovation for 21 consecutive minutes. Twenty-one minutes! One of the things I love most about this scene from the heavenly throne room is that the four living creatures and the 24 elders, all creation and all God's people, is that their worship goes on and on and on. "Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty," who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). Even the greatest ovations in our world eventually reach a climax and come to an end. But in heaven, worship will endure forever.

Finally, **worship displaces us**. The four living creatures with eyes all around are not the only ones worshipping in the heavenly throne room. "Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads" (Revelation 4:4). Almost all scholars believe that whereas the four living creatures represent all God's creation, these 24 elders represent all God's people: twelve tribes of Israel representing the people of the old covenant plus twelve apostles representing the people of the new covenant equals 24 elders. They are dressed in white, which is a sign that their sins have been forgiven by the sacrifice of Christ, and it also means that they share in the victory of Jesus. White robes were worn by soldiers when they had won the battle and the war was over. The elders also had crowns of gold on their heads. Golden crowns were given to Olympic athletes as a prize for their victory and were worn by the emperor as a sign of his wealth and royal rank. God's people are wearing crowns, indicating that they have gained the ultimate victory and they are now true nobility. They are reigning with Christ and the crowns are a sign of their reward, which is wonderful. But what I find most important about this passage is not that God's people have been given crowns, but what they do with them: "They lay their crowns before the throne and say: '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'" (Revelation 4:10b-11). In heaven, all of God's people are given golden crowns, indicating their eternal victory, status, wealth, and honor, and what do they do with them? They fall on their faces and lay their crowns before the throne. They take that which is of greatest honor and value to them, and they use it to worship the living God! Whatever good, worthy,

and honorable things you have in life—your intellect, your humor, your personality, your wealth, your leadership, your network—realize two things: those are gifts from the almighty God, and the purpose of those gifts is to bring praise to him. When the elders worship God, they say, “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” (Revelation 4: 11). Worship displaces us because it forces us to fall down before God and declare we are not the creator; he is. We don’t sustain things, he does. We are not the one for whom things exist. It’s all about God! It displaces us from the center of our lives and gives him his rightful place and recognition.

One of Mark Twain’s most well-known quotes is: “The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” This vision into the throne room helps us realize why we were born, and why all creation exists. God put music into our DNA. On every continent, in every country, in every culture, music is in our bones. And now we know why—so we can worship God forever.