

***Worship: God on the Throne*** – Rev. 4 & 5 – FMC – Feb. 14, 2009

I had a seminary professor who constantly said,  
“You’re asking the wrong question.”  
Correct answers to the wrong question have no value.

For instance, if you’re driving in your car on the highway,  
and suddenly a big truck coming toward you swerves into your  
lane, you could ask the question:  
“Is that a Kenworth, a Volvo, a Mack, a Freightliner, or a Peterbilt?”  
Wrong question, even if you answer it correctly.  
The correct question is, “How do I get out of the way?”

Whether on the highway, or in business, or in politics,  
or in interpreting the Bible,  
you must start with the right question,  
if the answer is to be helpful.

For instance, if you’re the president, and you have concerns about  
our country’s healthcare system,  
you have to decide what the question is.

Is it: How can we bring costs down?  
Is it: How can we cover EVERYBODY?  
Is it: What do the American people want?  
Is it: What do the American people need?  
Is it: What’s possible politically?  
Is it: What will advance the cause of my political party?  
Is it: How can we make sure we don’t make the insurance companies mad?  
Is it: How can we do justice?

The right answer to the wrong question is not helpful.  
And perhaps this last year has taught us that asking ALL those possible  
questions at the same time just gets confusing and makes  
everybody mad.

No matter what the situation, no matter what the arena,  
it’s best to ask just one question.  
So make it the key question, and make it the right question.

One of the most common problems with interpreting the book of Revelation is that the wrong question is asked.

With a book like Revelation, it's easy to get side-tracked.

All kinds of questions suggest themselves,  
and you can spend a lifetime trying to answer questions that  
are either unanswerable, or that don't get you anywhere.

The symbolism of Revelation, the codes, the metaphors,  
the magnificent and sometimes bizarre visions can cause confusion.  
They can lead us to major in minors.  
We can get hung up on details.  
We dissect the trees and miss the forest.

In Revelation 4 & 5 there are doors and thrones and trumpets.  
There are rainbows, emeralds, lamps, thunder and lightning,  
harps, and bowls of incense.  
There are elders, living creatures, spirits and angels.  
There is a scroll, and Lion, and a Lamb.

So now I ask you, What's the question?  
What question should you ask of this text?

Lots of people choose this question: "When? When will this happen?"  
If that's your question, you'll gather your calculators and your  
calendars and your commentaries and try to figure out God's  
timetable of the End.

Or you could ask the question: "What was in that scroll?"  
That will lead you to speculate, to study, to compare what all the  
experts say, and to try to figure out what nobody else has ever  
been able to figure out.

Or, you could decide that the key question in Rev. 4 & 5 is "Who?  
Who are those elders? What are their names?"  
And then you could graduate to the question of "Why?  
Why are there 24 of them?"

If you read books about Revelation you can find many answers to those  
questions, and they're all different. Nobody knows for sure.

Or perhaps you'll decide that the key question is "Where?  
Where is the throne room of God? Is it up there, out there,  
or perhaps no 'there' at all?"

You could also ask, "God's throne—what material is made of?  
Gold? Crystal? Some material unknown on earth? No material at all?"

Or you could ask: "Why is there a crystal sea in front of the throne?"

Or, "How can you resolve the contradiction between 5:6 where it says that  
the Lamb is **STANDING** in the **CENTER** of the throne,  
with 4:3 where it says that someone else is **SITTING** on that  
same throne?" Figure **THAT** one out!

All very interesting questions—if you like trivia.  
ALL of those questions lead us away from the only question that matters  
in Revelation 4 & 5.

And thankfully, the key question, the big question, the only question  
that really matters **DOES** have an answer.

The only question that matters is this: "WHO is on the throne?"

If the book of Revelation does not move you to worship,  
you've asked it the wrong question.

If the book of Revelation does not stimulate you to explode into doxologies  
of praise—and there are 5 such explosions in these 2 chapters—  
then you're spending too much time on questions that don't matter.

The Good News of Revelation 4 & 5 is this: God is on the throne.  
**GOD** is on the throne!

That is the answer to the only question that matters.

To the saints in the 7 struggling churches in Asia Minor,  
the Good News is that **GOD** is on the throne.

To the poor church at Smyrna,  
to the morally lax church at Thyatira,  
to the dying church at Sardis,

to the lukewarm church at Laodicea,  
to the small but faithful church at Philadelphia,  
to the church that meets along highway 4 outside of Beatrice,  
the Good News is that GOD is on the throne.

God is not dead.

God lives.

God shall always be.

God is still in charge of the direction of history.

The outcome of history is in the hands of the one who sits on the throne,  
and therefore we need not fear.

[ congregation: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is,  
and is to come." ]

The throne is the center of power in the universe.

All rule and authority are centered on the throne and on the One who  
occupies that throne.

The One who sits there is the One who has the power to bring the entire  
universe into being by simply speaking the Word.

There is REASON for worship!

[ congregation: "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." ]

And then there's this Lamb who has the powerful effect of a Lion.

The slain Lamb—the slaughtered Lamb—who, in all of heaven,  
is the ONLY one able to open the scroll.

And again, the question is NOT "What's in the scroll?"

The correct question is "Who? Who is worthy to open it?"

And the answer is:

the One whose defenselessness is his strength,  
the One who defeated evil through his own suffering,  
the One whose powerlessness defeated the powerful—  
that one—the Lamb—Jesus—HE is worthy!

[ congregation: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.” ]

5:9 says that this is a NEW song, and 5:12 says that all heaven continued to sing this new song with LOUD voices:

[ congregation: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” ]

What we have here is a grand heavenly choir.

Here’s the picture: God—on the throne—is at the center.

Surrounding God and Christ the Lion-Lamb on the throne, making a complete circle around the throne, are the 24 elders on their 24 thrones.

Surrounding the 24 elders are angels—thousands upon thousands—ten thousand times ten thousand.

Don’t bother to multiply that out—that’s the wrong question.

They’re all facing the center, all facing God on the throne, all singing the new song: “Worthy is the Lamb!”

But that’s not the extent of the choir.

5:13 shows us a picture of EVERY creature in heaven,

EVERY creature on earth,

EVERY creature under the earth,

EVERY creature in the sea,

EVERY created thing singing praise to the one who sits on the throne.

[ congregation: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!” ]

Don’t try to figure it all out.

Don’t ask the wrong questions.

Just join the choir. Join the choir.

That’s what it’s all about. That’s the invitation.

Join the circles of praise around the throne.  
Join in worshipping God and the Lamb.

Don't analyze; harmonize!! It's time to worship!

And the reason for worship is this: God is on the throne.  
And that means that life is not meaningless.  
That means that history is going somewhere.  
That means that there is always hope.  
That means that the future can be different from the past.

Every time you gather here for worship you are rehearsing  
for the day when that choir will be complete,  
when ALL will sing—no exceptions.

But you're not just rehearsing.  
Every time you gather for worship in this place  
you are—at that very moment--part of that great circle of singers and  
worshippers around the throne of God.

When you worship,  
when you sing praise to God and when you crown Jesus as the worthy king,  
every time—today—you are already part of that choir.

Our primary task on this earth is to invite everybody to that choir—  
everybody.

For that choir, nobody is tone deaf.

No monotones, no scratchy voices.

For that choir, all can sing because all can worship.

No one has become all God created them to be until they're singing in  
that choir.

Our job on earth is not finished until we've invited all our friends and  
neighbors to sing with us,  
to rejoice and worship together because we know the right  
answer to the only question that matters:

Who is on the throne? God is.

That's why there is always reason to sing.