

*Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth*  
**A Glimpse of Heaven**  
Revelation 4  
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September 11, 2011

**Prayer.** This morning we start a new series titled *Worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth*. As many of you may know, this title comes from the fourth chapter of John's Gospel out of a conversation Jesus is having with a Samaritan woman. I really want to encourage you to go back and read that chapter sometime this week. It's a good one, for lots of reasons, and I want you to pay particular attention to the woman. You see, she's got a lot of issues and Jesus knows this. He knows she's been ostracized by her village which is why she's coming to get water in the middle of the day rather than in the morning or evening as was the custom. He knows she's had five husbands and he knows the man she's currently living with isn't her husband. He knows she's being exploited and used by these men and that she's put herself in this position. Jesus knows all this but he also knows this isn't really the heart of her problem. You see, her primary issue is not her taste in men, or her willingness to be exploited and used, or her isolation from the community. It has to do with worship. She isn't worshipping God in spirit and in truth. She isn't pursuing God, isn't giving him the honor and glory that He is due, He is not on the throne of her life and so she suffers. Now, I say all that because I think she is us. Everyone of us here today has similar issues. Some of us are facing bankruptcy, some of us are facing unemployment, and some of us hate the jobs we do have. Some of us are facing divorce, some of us are single and don't want to be, some of us have children with whom we are estranged, and others of us wish we could have children of our own. Some of us have issues with alcohol, drugs, pornography, you name it. We face a host of issues in our lives but at the root of it all,

just like the Samaritan woman, is our issue with worship. We do not worship God in spirit and in truth and therein lies our greatest issue.

Thankfully, there is good news. Jesus tells the woman, “The Father is seeking such people to worship him.” The Father is on the lookout, on the move, on the loose, seeking, pursuing, chasing after such people to worship him. People who will humble themselves before Him and seek His face. People who will cast down all their burdens before Him. People who will throw down all that they think makes them good or righteous or nice before His throne. The Father was seeking such people back then and He is seeking such people today. The Samaritan woman becomes such a person. That’s the Good News of the Gospel. We are never too far from God’s grace. Never so lost the Father cannot find us. But we do have to acknowledge right up front that this act of worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth is not easy for us. It cuts against the grain of our existence. It goes against our sinful human nature. And so as we move through this series, if you find yourself struggling at times, know that’s to be expected. It isn’t easy to cast down idols. It isn’t easy to be confronted by the Living God. As C.S. Lewis summed up so well in his children’s book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, he’s certainly not a safe God, but he’s good. Or later he writes, in what’s become my favorite quote, “People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time.” Friends, our God is good. He is gracious. He is merciful. His love is from everlasting to everlasting. But He is also awesome and holy. He will not be mocked or taken for granted or compete for our attention. He is both good and terrible at the same time. So my hope is that at the end of this series, our view of God has been massively expanded. I hope we come face to face with his glory, with his power, with his love, with his grace. I hope we put aside the ways we try and

reduce Him to our size and instead let Him overwhelm us with His presence. That's my prayer and I hope it is yours as well.

Let's open our Bibles to the book of Revelation, chapter four. Revelation means just that. It reveals. It uncovers. It shows forth. This book is not the revelation of John although some have titled it so. It is, as verse one of the first chapter says, the revelation of Jesus Christ! John is almost a bit player in this book and I think he would shudder to think that we might pay more attention to him than to the one He is pointing us to. This book is about Jesus. It is about the Kingdom of God. It is about the final victory of God. And in it, we get this picture of how life will be and even is now in the dimension we call heaven. **After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had 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 behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,**

**“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”**

Friends, even now, much of what we just read is already taking place. In the heavenly realm, there is worship. There is adoration. There is praise. There is glory. This is all happening right now all around us if we have the eyes to see. But of course, we can only have those eyes if they are granted to us by the Holy Spirit.

The first thing I want you to note in this passage is this...true worship can only happen at God's invitation. In the first verse, John beholds an open door. Now you need to know that at the end of the third chapter, Jesus has just finished telling the Laodicean church – a church known for its wealth and excess about whom Jesus doesn't have a lot of good to say – that he is standing just outside the door and he is knocking. He longs to come in. He longs to be with them. But they keep shutting him out because they think they are good. They think they can live their lives just fine by themselves. They are wealthy so they don't need God. They don't need to be dependent on him. And Jesus says, basically, when you're ready, open the door and I will come in. But then, almost like he can't wait, he goes ahead and opens the door! He throws it open and invites John to enter into the heavenly dimension so that he might see what is taking place and then share it with all of us. My friends, you need to understand this. This is critical. Worship, true worship, only happens when God awakens us. Absent the presence of the Holy Spirit, we're just singing songs. We're just reading words on a page. We're just eating bread

and drinking grape juice. We're just getting wet. Worship only takes place when God invades our hearts and directs our attention to him. It only takes place when the Holy Spirit comes over us with power and gives us eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to understand. Without that, we are just going through the motions. A colleague of mine was once called up by a student at a local college who had this assignment to shadow someone in their work. They could choose any occupation they wanted and the weirdest one she could think of was pastor. So she called Scott up and asked if she could shadow him on a Sunday morning. She wasn't a believer but she was intrigued as to what they did and why they did it. So she arrives and follows Scott all over that particular Sunday. After their worship services had ended, Scott took her out to lunch to ask how it went. She had all kinds of questions. Some of them were funny like why did Scott wear a dress...Scott was like actually it's called a robe. Some of them were poignant. Like why do you sing? She just couldn't get her mind around why these people gathered like this each week. You see, without the Holy Spirit, it does seem a bit strange what we do here Sunday after Sunday. But the Father is seeking worshippers and so he invites us in and he sends His Holy Spirit to open our eyes and our hearts. True worship begins at God's invitation.

The second image I want you to focus on is the throne. Not the thrones of the 24 elders but THE throne in the center of this vision. How do we ever lose sight of this? We get so focused on all the extraneous imagery in this book like trying to figure out who these 24 elders are or who the living creatures are that we forget what they are actually doing...praising God. Giving God glory. Ceaselessly. Never-ending. Eternally. That is the focus of this passage. That is what John is trying desperately to communicate. We live, we exist to praise God and to give Him glory. And so whether the twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles or the elect of the faith or some other group people, the point is that they

praise God. And whether the four living creatures represent the four Evangelists as an early church theologian named Irenaus thought or they represent the mightiest among the creatures of the earth as the rabbi's believed, or they represent the noblest, the strongest, the wisest and the swiftest among the creatures of the earth...again, the point is that they ceaselessly, without fail, gather to praise God. And they do it by praising God for His character, His eternal being, His creative power. They praise Him for His mighty acts. And perhaps the most important part of this passage is their posture. Look at verses nine and ten again, **And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne...**

You see, to truly worship the one on the throne, you have to come off the throne of your life. You have to abandon, abdicate, that place of power and control in your life. You have to let go and let God be the center of it all. If you don't, you cannot worship God. You cannot live for God. You cannot glorify God because you will be too busy glorifying yourself. You'll be too busy clinging to your own need to be in control. So let me share with you how this often looks in the church. Just one example among many I am sure we could think of. My grandmother was a gifted musician. She could play Beethoven and Bach by ear on the piano. She loved playing and often was called on to lead the choir or the music programs at the churches where my grandfather served as pastor. My grandfather, on the other hand, couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. He had a terrible ear for music. And the worst part about it was he didn't know or he didn't care, one or the other, I was never quite sure. And so when he and grandma would attend worship together and start to sing the hymns, my grandfather not only would sing off tune but he would begin to try and harmonize! Which was even worse! And it drove my grandmother

absolutely nuts! Until the day she realized he was authentically worshipping God. That true worship of God didn't always have to be in tune. That God loved my grandfather's worship because it came from the heart.

Perhaps you've heard this term, worship wars, before? Often it refers to the style of music we play in the church and the differences between traditional hymnity and contemporary praise choruses. I want to suggest that the real worship war that's going on is right here, in our hearts. The issue isn't what we sing or how we sing, it is the heart we bring. If our heart is critical, if we are constantly evaluating whether we like this or don't like that, if we are refusing to participate because we are afraid of what others might say or because this particular part of the service isn't our thing, then I have to say, dear friends, with all seriousness, we are not worshipping God. We are staying on the throne of our hearts.

Coming off the thrones of our lives...

- God doesn't want our opinion...he wants our worship
- God doesn't want our eval...he wants our adoration
- God isn't interested in what we think...he wants, demands, deserves our full attention...
- Grandma and grandpa story to lighten the mood...

Amen...saying yes to God, yes to all He is in our lives, Amen not the end of something but agreement with...all God's people say, amen...