

# Heavenly Worship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now you know that I have half a medical degree, so what I'm about to say has good authority.

Singing to God is one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, that the human body was given vocal cords. It's there in Larynx 101.

There's a few nurses and doctors here tonight. They'll tell you that it's true. Our vocal cords are primarily here so that we might praise God in song.

Now, I might be a little bit biased. I love worship music. It's played a huge part in my engaging with God over the 13 years that I've been a Christian.

Ministry at church started for me when I played French horn in a band and then graduated to vocals, which we can all be very thankful about. I met Phil when some years later he joined the band to play drums.

[ 1 : 04 ] And leading singing at church was where I think God started to give me an inkling that maybe full-time church ministry was what he was calling me to. You see, I started doing links in between the songs that were longer than the songs themselves, and so I thought maybe I should give preaching a go.

But I do love singing. I love to stick my hands in the air. I love to shuffle about. I wouldn't call it dancing. But it just seems to be how I'm wired up. In the words of one Christian writer, I want to live a stone-hushen life.

Stone-hushen life. Comes from that story about when Jesus entered Jerusalem amid songs of praise by the crowds, and the Pharisees said to him, Teacher, rebuke your disciples.

And what did Jesus say? He said, I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. The outward public declaration of God's praise is so important to God that if the disciples don't do it, God will cause dumb rocks to cry out.

And I don't know about you, but I want to hush those stones. I want to sing and shout loud enough and long enough that those stones can do their silent, stony, rocky thing, and I can do what I was designed to do.

[ 2 : 29 ] I want to be a stone-husher. And so I was pretty excited when Paul and I worked out that we do a passage from the book of Revelation in this sermon series, because worship in the book of Revelation is constantly being expressed in song.

There's a great old song, a spiritual, called Up Above My Head I Hear Music in the Air, and that is a fantastic description of the book of Revelation. In the visions that were revealed to John that we've got recorded in this book, heaven is full of music.

It's full of singing. And it's not singing like we see in many of our Aussie churches. It's more like singing that we see at Aussie Rules football matches. It's passionate, it's physical, it's loud, it's heartfelt.

Let me give you an example. You might want to turn with me to Revelation chapter 4, verse 8. And we pick up in the middle of one of these visions.

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night, without ceasing, they sing, Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

[ 3 : 51 ] And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever.

They cast their crowns before the throne, singing, You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power. For you created all things and by your will they existed and were

created.

This is a vision of pure heavenly worship. The worship that God deserves and that God seeks. The language of the songs is about God's character and his deeds and the singers are heavenly beings. And so it's worship as we defined it very simply in the first week of this series as worthship, attributing worth and honour to God.

So in this vision in chapter 4 John sees two types of heavenly beings bringing such worship in song. The four living creatures are heavenly servants like cherubim or seraphim and their faces we read earlier in chapter 4 represent the entirety of God's creation.

[ 5 : 17 ] Wild animals, domestic animals, humans and birds or flying creatures. And they've got wings to be swift to whatever God commands. And they've got eyes all around symbolising ceaseless watchfulness and an abundance of knowledge.

But their primary job is to declare the glory of God's character who God is in himself. showing how important that is to God.

That's their job. God is so wonderful that his praises need to be sung day and night. So they declare his character attributing worth to him because of his eternal nature holy almighty who was and is and is to come.

The 24 elders are heavenly beings as well probably powerful angels who help execute God's divine rule in the universe. But despite this power they always respond to the declaration of God's glory by falling down before him in a physical expression of worship showing the honour that they give him. Falling down is literally what one of the Greek words as well as one of the Hebrew words that we translate worship means. It means to bow down to fall down to worship.

[ 6 : 48 ] The 24 elders are showing with their bodies in this vision what they are singing with their mouths. They are giving complete honour everything they are to God and they cast their crowns before him symbolising the fact that although they are so powerful they are not autonomous self-governing beings no they are servants of the only one who has the authority to rule the only king the only lord.

then as we keep going in John's vision in Revelation chapter 5 we see these two types of heavenly beings joined by angels myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands singing with full voice and then we read John say this then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them singing to the one seated on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and glory and might forever and ever and the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshipped this is a vision of the ultimate goal of history every heavenly creature and every earthly creature praising not only the father but also the son Jesus Christ who John sees as both the conquering lion and the lamb who was slain

Jesus is the one who reveals God's character his power majesty love most clearly and so he reveals God's worthiness to be worshipped most completely and it's this revelation that causes heaven and earth to respond to God the father and God the son in praise and this is worship as we've defined it during our series as well isn't it it's revelation and response God's plan of salvation is revealed and accomplished in Christ and in response to that all of creation will sing in worship we only give back to God out of that which he has already given to us so you can see why I was a bit excited to bring a message from the book of revelation tonight

I thought now I can really ride my hobby horse I can I can use these great lines that I've learnt in my worship leaders conferences you know I can say worship singing on earth is choir practice for heaven worship singing is the one thing that we know we do now on earth that we know for sure we'll also do in heaven and I can conclude we should do it well we should do it with passion everybody should shuffle like me we should really mean it we should make sure we have songs with lyrics that keep before us a vision of the glory of God and the worthiness of the sun before our eyes and when heaven hears us sing they will say amen what a great reason to come to church and sing now all of that is true but apart from the shuffling bit but then

I got to chapter seven at first it was okay the same heavenly beings are in the picture and they're worshipping in much the same way as John sees in his previous visions in chapter four and chapter five but why don't you turn with me to chapter seven verse eleven the angels and the elders and the four living creatures are all there worshipping with abandon falling down and singing praise around the throne but around them there is another group now a multitude that no one could count and these are the redeemed people from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and the lamb and it's exactly as Doug reminded us of fulfillment of Psalm

67 may the peoples praise you oh

[ 11 : 32 ] God may all the peoples praise you may the nations be glad and sing for joy this is a picture of the scope of the power of the cross of Christ it is so powerful so huge that God will ransom for himself saints from every tribe every language every people every nation and make them by his spirit into worshippers a kingdom and priests serving God worshipping God as chapter 5 puts it culture is no barrier language is no barrier skin colour eye colour hair colour none of these are barriers to the blood of Christ making worshippers who will worship around the throne in heaven and as an aside if our churches can reflect even a little of this multicultural worship at a time like this when nation rises against nation then we will be showing forth the power of the cross of Christ in a very powerful way pointing people toward this heavenly vision but this multitude are waving palm branches just as those stone hushes did when Jesus entered

Jerusalem prefiguring this day when Jesus would be truly exalted as king and see that crowd in Jerusalem didn't understand Jesus true worth but this crowd the thousands and millions are praising Jesus for his ultimate act of glory his death on their behalf salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the lamb they know it's the lamb who's made them worthy to be before the throne at all it's the lamb who's brought them forgiveness by his blood giving them his righteousness and his victory over sin and death to wear as white robes as they draw near he's the one that enables them to draw near right around the throne just as he calls us to do even today by faith and what a noise there would have been as they sang this countless multitude and it must have been such an encouragement to John exiled on the island of Patmos by himself wondering how the church is growing but to see this vision to see millions of believers would encourage him so much that Christianity was not just a flash in the pan was not another religious sect as some of the Jewish leaders had been saying it is the power of

God to bring the full number of those he has chosen to be with him forever you see earlier in the chapter John's heard that this countless multitude has a number it's 144,000 which is 12 times 12 times a thousand simply the full number of the people of God these full round figures and the 12 tribes of Israel the full number of the people of God will be there exactly who God wants nothing can thwart his plan so encouraging but here is where I got stopped in my tracks and I'm not just using a rhetorical device a preacher's trick to get you listening at 20 minutes these verses really really really challenged me this week and I want them to challenge all of us tonight the reason is because they tell us this that if we want to take part in this heavenly worship it will come at a great earthly cost let's read verses 13 and 14 then one of the elders addressed me saying who are these robed in white and where have they come from this is one of the angelic beings speaking to John I said to him sir you are the one that knows then he said to me these are they who have come out of the great ordeal they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb to become a heavenly worshipper comes at a great earthly cost these this multitude have come through the great ordeal and to see the book of revelation is not just a message about the future it's a message for the present it's a call for us to worship the one true God and the lamb in the midst of our present circumstances encouraged by the future we have in Christ but standing firm against the pressures and temptations to worship the idols of our world now

I mentioned that there was that Greek word meaning fall down bow down used lots of times in revelation before but it's not just used of worshipping God it's not just used of bowing down before God it's also used of those who worship Satan so there are in fact two categories of worshippers set before us in John's vision those who worship the true God and those who worship the evil one and his servants pictured as the dragon and the beasts in contrast to God's reality the world actually rewards those who worship Satan and the world punishes those who worship God and indeed Revelation chapter 13 says that those who would not worship the image of the beast were to be killed and so we have a picture of these white robed martyrs coming through the great ordeal their worship of

[ 18 : 25 ] God having cost them their lives sacrifice but

David says this no I will buy them from you for a price I will not bring an offering to the Lord my God that cost me nothing true worship is costly it has to be to show that God is worthy of all we are all that we have all that we hope to be the Lord Jesus was the ultimate worshipper wasn't he and he lived a life of obedience that led to death on the cross for us to be true worshippers ones who really mean what we sing who live it out who are not simply honouring God with our lips when our hearts are far from him there will come a time even many times when we need to take a stand that will cost

us dearly and it must be the case we can't expect that we can live our comfortable lives buying everything that we see on

TV or at least the stuff that we definitely need enjoying all that there is on offer pursuing our own desires using our time as much as we want to but just setting aside a little time for God and think that we can bring really worthy worship to the Lord we can't bring to the Lord worship that's cost us nothing friends it must be costly it must be a spiritual sacrifice as Lisa will speak on next week and so it may be that we refuse to bow to the idol of money or career so that we can bring worship to God and that means that we lose the respect of family members of our boss or we lose our job because we won't work the hours that they want us to it may mean that we miss out on all the great parties because we won't worship at the idol of pleasure we won't sleep with someone who's not our spouse we won't get drunk we won't watch pornography it may mean that we're constantly ridiculed by our friends by our work mates by family members even by a spouse because we pray to and worship a

God that they won't believe in and that rolls off the tongue of a preacher doesn't it as an example but it chips away at you it tests your resolve it makes coming to worship harder and harder when always in the background there's people saying this is ridiculous you are being in some way persecuted for your faith or of course costly worship may mean imprisonment torture even martyrdom and this could certainly happen today if you were to go as a missionary to Pakistan possibly to China it happens to Christians in those countries all the time but as the opposition of Satan to the church continues or indeed if it grows stronger as seems to be what is implied by the concept of the great ideal or the great ordeal or the great tribulation that time before the return of Christ when things become worse and worse worse for believers than they ever have been we may even see greater persecution of Christians in Australia we may be in those days now or at least at their beginning we don't know but it's often said and it's true that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th century than in all the previous centuries combined or maybe Satan's scheme for us in Australia is simply to convince us that we can be worshippers who bring offerings that cost us very little until we're just worshipping amidst all the world offers turning from God to it from God to it to it to it friends worshipping God in song is awesome it's great to be together it's great to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light but we can't do it without taking a stand against all that asks for our allegiance in this world we can't put on a worship mask the worship shuffle sing the heavenly words seek the heavenly amen if we're not asking the [ 26 : 10 ] Lord to make us and keep us standing under the pressures and persecutions of this life so that we worship him alone he will do it he will keep us he will guard us he will protect us but it will be costly but if we count the cost and worship him anyway that cost in eternity will seem like the smallest drop in the ocean the smallest gift we could ever have given because in eternity we'll be surrounded by countless millions worshipping God from every place on this great planet and it will feel like we've come home have a look at verses 15 to 17 coming out of the great ordeal we will hunger no more thirst no more cry no more we will be sheltered and kept and protected and loved like we've never felt loved before and then true worship will be the easiest thing in the world because we will behold the worthiness of

God and experience his presence completely giving God his place of worth and honour in our lives making sure we're singing out so that those stones won't have to however difficult it might be will be worth it because we will have the lamb as our shepherd seeing him face to face being refreshed day after day by the living water of God as we finish will you bow your heads as I pray for us Lord our God over the past four weeks we've reflected on your revelation to us in your word and so we know that you seek worshippers we want to respond to your call tonight would you help us to worship you alone in spirit and in truth fueled by your word set on fire by your holy spirit made acceptable to you by the blood of

Christ would you help us to draw near to you in faith with boldness in every situation and would you give us your grace and your strength to help us pay whatever price is asked give whatever cost is taken so that we might indeed sing the heavenly song with all that we are Lord we cry out with our voices and with our lives salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the lamb blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever Amen