

THE WORTHINESS OF GOD:

Revelation 4:9-11

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I. Introduction:

Marshall Shelley tells the story that early in his marriage he gave his wife a terrific anniversary gift: a rain gauge. He writes, “At least I thought it was a great gift. Susan, after all, is a farmer’s daughter and keeps close watch on the weather. I envisioned her delight and nostalgia while tracking our backyard precipitation. I congratulated myself on my creativity. Guess what? Susan was not impressed: “A rain gauge- for our anniversary?!” The rain gauge is now a family joke, a classic example of a gift enjoyed by the giver but not the receiver.

Ladies and Gentlemen: In the same way, when you are going about your daily lives in worship, what are you offering Him? Do you offer in your daily worship a gift you enjoy and figure God will like it to? We think our worship is so wonderful because we enjoyed it so much. But just like a thoughtful gift, real worship means knowing what is important to the Receiver.

Tonight we are going to examine our worship to His worthiness.

- A. In terms of a recap so far in our study of Revelation 4:
1. We began our study by examining John’s description of the One sitting on the Throne in verses 1-3. We recognized His position as our sovereign God, His power as almighty, and His person: one whose appearance is described in gem-like colors: brilliant like a Jasper diamond and blood red like a Sardius gemstone, and whose throne is encircled by a rainbow, emerald in appearance.
 2. Afterwards, we directed our attention to verses 4-11 where we have learned certain truths about those who surround God in this future heavenly vision:
 - a. First, the 24 elders and the four living creatures continuously worship God. They do not cease. **They know their purpose.**
 - b. Their activity of worship is God-centered. No attention is drawn to them. There is no first person in their claims of worship. **They know what really counts.**
 - c. We observed their location: they are in God’s presence. The 24 elders encircle the throne. They fall before Him. The four living creatures are in the midst and around the throne. If they are worshipping Him continuously, they never leave His presence. **They know where to be.**
 - d. The content of their worship is most biblical: they continuously bring attention to God and His holiness, eternity, and worthiness. **They know what to offer Him.**

- e. Note the disposition of the 24 elders: They fall down and they cast their crowns. Whether these crowns are crowns of rewards or rulership, what is absolutely clear is that **they know who their God is and what to offer Him.**
- f. I also said chapter 4 also gives us a central truth about Him in view of the beings that surround Him?

All they do is reflect who He is for He alone is worthy of their worship. Ever in His presence they glorify the One sitting on the throne. Do we?

3. Then the last time we met we examined the first expression of praise which was given by the Four Living Creatures. Here they proclaimed His holiness, His omnipotence, and His eternality in Rev. 4:8. We then drew applications from the command 1 Peter 1:1:15-16 on growing in holiness in our every day lives.
 - a. Cultivate the desire to be a holy man or woman of God;
 - b. In your daily decision-making or moment-by-moment decisions you make, seek to think as God thinks and will as God wills;
 - c. Be resolved never to do anything which you would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of your life;
 - d. Develop an intimacy with God with utmost reverence in mind;
 - e. Never tolerate activities that are not in keeping with our holy, loving God;
 - f. Remember that authentic holiness points people to Jesus Christ.

This evening we are going to explore the second expression of worship which we find in Revelation 4:9-11. Afterwards, we will ask ourselves how to respond to this revelation of praise.

II. EXPOSITION 4:9-11:

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

**¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by your will they exist and were created.”**

If I could summarize this expression of worship in one statement I would say:

**This tribute of praise declares God is worthy
to receive power, honor, and glory because He is the Creator and the Sustainer.**

Let's take a closer look at our passage for the evening.

1. The doxology or praise in verse 8, "**Holy holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who and is and is to come**" is explained as giving God "*glory, honor, and thanksgiving*" in verse 9.
2. The word "*give*" should not be understood in the sense of imparting to God qualities that He does not already possess. These are characteristics inherent in Him.¹
3. In response to the worship by the Four Living Creatures, the 24 elders offer a four-fold response:
 - a. First, they fall (*pasountai*) down before the One sitting on the throne who exercises all power, rule, and dominion.
 1. Whenever the Living Creatures give glory...the elders fall. To fall down is a proper response to the majesty of God: to worship is appropriate for his eternal being.

"It is certainly possible to picture the praise of the living creatures and the response of the elders as taking place at repeated intervals of great significance throughout Revelation."²
 2. They prostrate themselves in worship before the one who is eternal.
 2. Here they alone fall before God who sits upon the throne.
 3. Interestingly, this is the first of six times in the Book of Revelation that the elders prostrate themselves before God or the Lamb (5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). Three times they are joined by the four living creatures (5:8; 7:11; 19:4) and once by all the angels (7:11).³

For example listen to the words in Revelation 7:9-12:

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and 10 and crying out with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!' 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God 12 saying:

¹ Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, 364.

² R. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 126.

³ Thomas, *Revelation*, 365.

Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom. Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever.”

3. Thus, they fall before God who sits on the throne. They engage every aspect of their being in their worship to Him. What a display of humility as they direct their undivided adoration to the eternal God.
- c. **Second, they worship Him.** The word “*worship*” originally involved the idea of prostrating oneself before deity to kiss his feet or the hem of his garment. As an act of reverence and respect it was not uncommon in the East. Just as vassal kings removed their crowns when coming into the presence of their emperor, these kings lay their crowns before God.⁴

I would define worship here in this passage as “*worship*.”

- d. **Third, they cast their crowns before Him.** They give no indication of selfishness. Rather, they voluntarily surrender by casting their crowns before throne. What a demonstration that all glory belongs to Him.

Lenski makes an interesting comment regarding the One sitting on the throne:

“He wears no crown, for no mission of victory, no act of victorious enthronement, no triumph pertains to Him whose majesty as the Creator places him and his throne above and beyond anything of this kind.”⁵

- e. And fourth, **they worship Him by saying:**

**“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by your will they exist and were created.”**

4. **You are worthy, O Lord To receive glory and honor and power;**

A. The praise of the elders differs from that of the living creatures in two ways:

1. The praise of the elders is addressed directly to God;
2. The praise of the elders is based on his work in creation rather than his divine perfections.

B. The word “*worthy*” [*axios* /**ax**-ee-os/] is an adjective that carries the idea of **(1)** weighing, having weight, having the weight of another thing of like value, worth as

⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 126.

⁵ Lenski, *Interpretation of Revelation*, 188.

much; (2) befitting, congruous, corresponding to a thing; (3) of one who has merited anything worthy, whether in good and a bad sense.⁶

- C. Interestingly, the phrase, “*you are worthy*” was used in the political language of the day on such occasions as when the emperor marched in triumphal procession. In the ultimate sense, however, to attribute worthiness to anyone else than the one upon the throne is blasphemous (Mounce).
- D. The words, “*glory*”, “*honor*”, and “*power*” focuses upon God’s creative power. As the song of the living beings in 4:8 has for its theme the holiness, omnipotence, and eternity of God, aspects of his infinite-person, this verse revolves about the theme of God’s glory as reflected in his creation.

This leads us to the next statement:

5. **“For you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.”**

- A. He is worthy because in accordance with his will all things “*were created and have their being.*” We might re-translate it and say, “*they were and they were created.*” “This suggests that all things that are, existed first in the eternal will of God and through his will came into actual being at his appointed time.”⁷ Moreover, “The song accumulates emphasis on God’s creative work through this threefold statement that he did it.”⁸
- B. The particular reason for the declaration of God’s worthiness is because of God’s creative work. Whereas the first expression offered by the 4 living creatures praised God for his holiness, the 24 elders praise him for his worthiness. He is worthy to receive such adulation because he sovereignly created everything that exists and by his will allows them to continue to exist.
- C. This reminds me of God’s first speech to Job when God finally breaks his silence and speaks to Job, rhetorically asking him more than 70 questions to show Job’s ignorance and God’s greatness in Job 38. Listen to Job 38:4-7:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 who sets its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone. 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

- D. Such an acknowledgement of God’s creative work recalls the following:

1. **Psalm 33:6-9:**

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

⁶Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G514

⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 127.

⁸ Thomas, *Revelation*, 368.

- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
 He lays up the deep in storehouses.
⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
 Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
⁹ For He spoke, and it was *done*;
 He commanded, and it stood fast.

2. Psalm 102:25:

Of old You laid the foundation of the earth,
 And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands⁹

3. Another passage is Psalm 136:5-9:

E. Before we move onto the application aspect of our study, let me just say I find this statement of praise (and statements like these) so comforting, don't you?

1. God, the author of all things exist and continue to exist; we are his handiwork, and we continue to exist even in spite of our sin. Consider the words of J. I. Packer in his classic work, *Knowing God*:

“What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort... in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench His determination to bless me.”

III. How should we respond to this revelation?

- A. If worthiness is giving what is due God, what are you offering Him in daily worship? Are you giving God a water gauge? Do you offer him what you enjoy and figure God will like it? Once again, like a thoughtful gift, real worship means knowing what's important to the receiver.
 1. What do you offer Him in your worship? Does that truly express His worthiness?
 2. When do you offer such worship? Does that truly express His worthiness?
 3. Why do you even offer worship?

- B. Yesterday I listened to the story of a pastor who went to minister in Africa. After being there for a while he turned to God in prayer-absolutely angry at Him. He said I came to preach the Good News of Salvation, to see these dear children be spared from the fury of hell and damnation. But it turns out that they aren't ignorant of your presence. Rather, they refuse to acknowledge your presence. Why? Why would you send me here to be in

⁹ *The New King James Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S. Ps 102:25

the company of rebellious savages who know you exist but refuse to bow to you? In that moment of prayer he came to horrible realization: “To show you, preacher and pastor, that you are robbing me of my glory.” See, this pastor went to Africa for his own sake, maybe for the sake of others, but not for the glory of God.

- C. **Who do we think we are kidding?** When we are not offering him our utmost best, offering God the worthiness that is due Him, we are actually saying to Him, “God you are not worthy enough to receive my utmost.” We know from the story of Cain and Abel that God doesn’t like acts of selfish worship cloaked in unselfish appearances.

But then the question comes: **How can we offer Him our very best?** Surely, because of the residual effects of our sin nature, every act we do is tainted in some way with selfish motives or intentions.

On the surface, that seems right. (a) We are very selfish creatures. (b) There is this warring within, there is this old man, and (c) there are thousands of past experiences in our own lives to which we can appeal to demonstrate that though our actions appeared to be God-honoring, but if the truth be fully known, our motives were indeed selfish.

- D. If it is inevitable that at the core of every action is a selfish motive, even in those acts that appear to be most noble, then I don’t see how any “reward” will survive the exposing fire at the judgment seat of Christ. Consider the words of 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. ¹⁰

Every selfish act will be wood, stubble, & hay.

- E. Thus, while I am not advocating perfectionism, I do believe it is possible to offer our very best to Him with God-honoring motives, when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, walking dependently, step-by-step in His strength, bearing the fruit of the Spirit.
- F. Having said it is possible to offer Him our very best because of the Holy Spirit’s ministry (s) in our lives when we “*abide*” in fellowship with our living God, let’s look again at the passage, and I want you to notice two qualities of worship that are expressed in this praise:

1. **Humility and submission.**

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S. 1 Co 3:10-15

- a. When these high orders [24 elders] sing their praises to the One sitting on the throne, they fall before him and relinquish all their honor to him.
 1. When they fall down, they offer *humility*. They aren't clinging to their own bit of honor. Nothing is reserved for them; nothing is held back.
 2. When they cast their crowns, they offer submission. They aren't clinging to even one "smidgen" of power, no matter how well deserved it may be. All they have that is worthy of self-recognition is laid before the throne of God.

- b. To be sure, the positions they occupy and the authority or rewards they have are indeed blessings. They are privileged, blessed to occupy these thrones that encircle God's throne and to wear crowns of rulership or rewards. But, in their worship of God, do you see them clinging to their own bit of honor and power, no matter how well deserved it may be?¹¹
 1. Do you see any reservation as they worship him? No, as they prostrate themselves we see every ounce of energy is directed to God.

They are offering Him their utmost.
 2. Are they distracted in any way in their worship? Are they looking back at John as they worship him? Not one of them said, "I can't worship right now because John is here. . . I don't see them asking in their praise to God, "You know, I wonder what this John is up to? I don't see them saying, "The four living creatures with all their eyes around and within are giving me the creeps

They are focused.
 3. Do you see any embarrassment in their worship? Do they even care who sees them? They don't think it is embarrassing to drop to their knees and bow their face to the floor.

Rather than be self-conscious, they know who they are worshipping.
 4. Do you see any bit of selfish motive? Is there anything here that says, "what about me? Are they seeking to gain any bit of the glory, to fulfill their personal needs and wishes?

No, their worship of God is their identity.

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 483.

Is yours?

- G. If anything less than my very best is what expresses His worthiness, then what are steps I can take to offer my utmost in worship? In answering this question I am going to start with are affections, consider our appetites, then our thinking, and lastly, our surroundings. By approaching this holistically, we may better address this subject.

Beginning with our affections (the desires of our heart):

1. **Pray to God every day that you will whole heartily seek to honor His name.** Just as Jesus prayed in Matthew 6:9, “Pray then like this, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. To see God’s name honored should be the greatest joy of all who love God.

2. **Pray to God every day that you will authentically find joy in worshipping Him.** Do you realize time and time again the psalmists links the joy we have in God with the praise we bring his name. Consider Psalm 9:2, “I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O most High”

3. **Pray to God every day that He will bind your heart to Himself.** Is that not what we ask God to do when we sing “*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*” by Robert Robinson?

One of the reasons why I’ve come to enjoy this hymn so much is because I am acknowledging God’s absolute right to bind my heart to Himself:¹²

*“O to grace how great a debtor, Daily
I am constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.”*

Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee. A “fetter” is chain. We need to pray this with all our wandering heart, “Grant us, O God, to see the surpassing value of your goodness so that it binds us, as with a chain, to you. I offer you my heart...take and seal it, for your courts above.”¹³

4. **Regularly examine the desires of your heart and see whether they express the worthiness that is due Him.** Activities tend to follow the desires of your heart. Let me put it this way, “*What do you want out of life?*” Does what you want reflect the worship that is due Him with the remaining breath you have.

¹² John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, 152.

¹³ Ibid.

Like Dr. Ken Hanna states:

“We can’t expect worship to flow from our lips on the Lord’s Day if we keep it dammed in our hearts throughout the week. The waters of worship should never stop flowing from our heart, for God is always God and always worthy of worship. But the flow of worship should be channeled and distilled at least daily into a distinct worship experience.”

Moving from our affections to our appetites:

5. Quit nibbling at the table of the world.

John Piper puts it this way:

“If you don’t feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. God did not create you for this? There is an appetite for God. And it can be awakened. I invite you to turn from the dulling effects of food and the dangers of idolatry and to say with some simple fast: ‘This much, O God, I want you.’”¹⁴

Using Old Testament ceremonial language Paul says, “*Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be new lump, as you really are unleavened*” (1 Cor. 5:7). In other words, you are sinless in Christ; therefore become sinless in practice.

Moving from our appetites to our thinking:

6. Meditate on God’s Instructions:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
⁸ *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;*
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
⁹ *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;*
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
¹⁰ *More to be desired are they than gold,*
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
¹¹ *Moreover by them Your servant is warned,*
*And in keeping them there is great reward.*¹⁵

Other passages: John :17:17; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:16-17.

Moving from our thinking to our surroundings:

¹⁴ Ibid., 172.

¹⁵ *The New King James Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S. Ps 19:7-11

7. **Give God your very best (Mark 14:3-8):** There is really something beautiful when you give back to God what He has given to you. In that moment, when you give back the good and perfect gifts God has given you, He is worshipped...for you are willing to give up for the glory of God.

Consider the anointing of Jesus by Mary in **Mark 14:3-8:**

“3 While he was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. 4 But some were indignantly remarking to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? 5 For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they were scolding her. 6 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial.”

Though you may not be able to pour costly perfume on Jesus’ feet, in one sense you actually do when you sincerely love others, meeting the practical needs of others, even if that means it will demand self-surrender.

8. **Determine what places, activities, and thoughts prompt you to worship.** Incorporate those elements into your daily and weekly life. Devote quality time to them. Similarly, identify and avoid the things that hinder meaningful worship.

We must not forget, however, that God expects us to worship privately ... We minimize our joy when we neglect the daily worship of God in private. It is one of the great blessings of life that God does not limit our access to Him and enjoyment of His presence to one day per week! Daily strength, guidance, and encouragement are available to us. An invitation to grow in intimacy with Jesus Christ Himself is open every day. ... To worship God throughout a lifetime requires discipline. Without discipline, our worship of God will be thin and inconsistent. When I say that worship is focusing on and responding to God, I hope to convey my conviction that true worship is always covered with heart prints. Worship can’t be diagramed or calculated, for it is the response of a heart in love with God. And yet, we also must be able to think of worship as a Discipline, a Discipline that must be cultivated just as all relationships must be to remain healthy and grow.¹⁶

9. **Lastly, seek to see what few only take time to see: The glory of God revealed in creation.**

Psalm 92:4 states *“For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.”* **Psalm 19:1-4** puts it this way: *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out his speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. The measuring line goes out through the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”*

¹⁶ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian life*, p. 94.

Do we *really* realize, in and through God's creation, God's creation reflects and even rests on the glory of Him.

IV. Conclusion:

In conclusion, I want to illustrate upon this last point by a sharing a story from C. S. Lewis' *God in the Dock*.

I was standing today in the dark tool shed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sun-beam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitched-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it. Then I moved so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no tool shed, and (above all) no beam. Instead, I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.¹⁷

See, here is a man who is able to see what few see. Ladies and gentlemen: every day take a moment, gaze upon some aspect of God's creativity, and allow that display of glory prompt you to worship Him, giving Him his due (cf. Prov. 29; the wisdom of four creatures).

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, "Meditation in a Tool shed" in *God in the Dock*, pg. 212.