

Study 12 -- Revelation 5:8-14

8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

I am repeating the verse that we ended on in the last study, because I did not give it enough attention at that time.

This verse gives us a picture of the partnership between heaven and earth, the heavenly church, so to speak, and the earthly one. The prayers of the saints are mixed with heavenly worship focused on the Lamb.

The four creatures perhaps represent the role of the church on earth, and the twenty four elders represent the ruling nature of the church and heaven together (see Study 10, Revelation 4:7).

When Jesus takes the book from the hand of the Father, the Church falls down before Him. The fact that He is worthy to take the scroll and open it is cause for worship and prayer. We worship and pray because He is all-powerful. That is how we express His sovereignty on earth. We should be known as a worshipping and praying people.

There are so many verses on prayer and worship that I will not even attempt to highlight them. But this verse reminds me of one particular story:

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God (Acts 10:1-4).

Cornelius prayers and giving had come before God. They had been like incense, which is how the prayers of the saints are portrayed in Revelation 5:8. Incense has a pleasant aroma, so incense is chosen as a symbol of something that brings pleasure to God. It smells good. Are you doing enough to bring pleasure to God through giving and prayer?

The prayers in verse 8 are contained in golden bowls. No prayer escapes God's notice, but they are held in bowls, symbolically of course. What happens to a bowl? It can become full and so it seems that there is an aspect of prayer that requires waiting on God, until the "bowl is full" and it overflows to God's attention.

Dr. John W. Stanko

One of the worship postures in the Bible is to “fall down.” I don’t fall down enough when I worship, symbolic of my complete surrender and subservience to the sovereign God.

The elders and living creatures worshipped Jesus, the Lamb. If Jesus was only a prophet or a good man, as some religions state, and He receives and received worship, then He is taking the place of God and is a false prophet! Does that make sense?

Of course, I am not saying that Jesus is anything less than God. He is worthy of all worship and honor, but when religions say Jesus was a “holy man” (like Islam) and then sidestep the fact that He was worshipped, they are deceived.

When Jesus was on earth, He allowed Himself to be worshipped: “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). So when someone tries to tell you that Jesus was only a prophet or holy man, ask them how He could have allowed Himself to be worshipped unless He was also God!

9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Heaven sings a new song. There is always a fresh expression of who God is and what He has done. I don’t care for songs that talk about me, we and I. More of our worship songs need to sing about God. Many of our worship songs today are more like prayers that are put to music, not songs expressing the goodness and magnificence of God! I am not against singing prayers, I just don’t think they should be considered “worship” as such.

John Piper has stated, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” Think about that saying.

We must go to the nations and people groups where worship does not exist, so worship can spring forth from a people who know not God. Notice Jesus has already purchased the people from every nation; we must go find them, but God has already done the work.

What are you doing to help reach the nations for Jesus? Are you singing about it or are you participating in it? Are you praying for a particular people or nation? How much of your time and money goes toward missions? Remember Jesus’ words:

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’”(Matthew 28:18-20).

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

God's people from every nation, tongue and tribe are a kingdom through the blood and death of Jesus. A kingdom has a King and our King is Jesus! Our kingdom is a heavenly kingdom, but we are also to reign on earth.

I think there is a now aspect to our reign and a future aspect. Once again, let's put ourselves in the place of the early churches who were receiving this letter. They were small, insignificant and under pressure from the cultures in which they lived. This vision of heaven would give them tremendous hope *now*; hope to carry on and not just exist, but work to extend the kingdom of God to include more people from every nation.

God's people are also priests through the blood and death of Jesus. A priest ministers to God on behalf of people. As priests we intercede, evangelize and release people from their sins. A priest exists for others; so do we. Are you selfishly protecting your world and relationship with God or are you acting as a priest of God, serving God and people?

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

This is the second time that John said he "looked and heard." When God opens your eyes, He allows you to hear what He is doing. I think of Proverbs 20:12, which states, "**Ears that hear and eyes that see-- the LORD has made them both.**"

John looked and heard a host of angels and that is similar to the story in 2 Kings:

Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:14-17).

We are not alone! The early, persecuted church needed to see what Elisha's servant saw in the passage above. He saw that they actually outnumbered the opposition and the early church needed that assurance as well. You and I need it too.

What a powerful picture of the church, represented by the elders and living creatures, and heaven, with myriads of angels, standing around the throne where the Lamb is being worshipped. Nothing can overcome that picture. The truth of Romans 8 has been for every generation:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Here is the second song of heaven that is found in this passage. Notice once again it is a song about the Lamb and what He has done.

Heaven sings about Jesus' death. It was a landmark event in history. Man can see Jesus' death as a waste of a good life, or simply dismiss the significance of it. But heaven focuses on Jesus' death; it established His supremacy in the Church and He became the focus of worship because of it. I tend to emphasize the resurrection more and obviously He is in heaven, on the throne, because He came back to life. But heaven sings of Jesus being worthy because of His death.

Paul wrote:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

The message of Revelation is that Jesus is Lord! He is the focus of worship, He is the centerpiece of the Church; He is worthy. That should be the message of the Church, no matter what the situation or circumstances.

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

This is the third song in this short passage. Each one exalts the goodness of God and Jesus! Do we see a pattern here?

Dr. John W. Stanko

It is interesting that every creature everywhere enters into this worship song. There is a heavenly song that is the backdrop for all earthly activity.

The song differentiates between the One who sits on the throne the Lamb. It seems like they are two separate personalities.

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

What more can be said? This is not a future view of heaven, but a present view of the joint venture between heaven and earth. The Church enters into a partnership with heaven to worship God and glorify the Lamb. Are you part of this venture, or do you have another agenda? I urge you to join with the heavenly hosts that focus on the throne and worship Him!