

Revelation 5

Come Let Us Worship the Lamb of God

As Christians we are always in the Gospel, which means essentially that Jesus is always before our eyes. This means that as we read our Bibles we should always be close to one of the Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We should always be hovering over one of them, reading about Jesus, dialoging with Jesus, being challenged by Him, having our worldview transformed as we think His thoughts after Him.

It also means that you make the proper connections as you read your Bible. You understand that the Old Testament is the back-story of the Gospels, that must be known in detail to properly know Jesus. Everywhere you read the Old Testament you are circling back to the Gospel just as you are constantly turning back to the Old Testament to better understand what you are reading in the Gospel. The Old Testament is written like a novel without an ending. In the Old Testament, we hear God's promises of peace and deliverance, of coming salvation where God will raise up a king like David who will rule over His people and sit on God's throne forever. The Old Testament abruptly ends with expectation and hope that God Himself is coming to make all things right again. The Gospels pick up exactly where the Old Testament leaves off. The Gospels are announcing the good news that the long awaited promises of God are finally coming true. God has now appeared to His own people in Jesus to begin to set all things right. He has come to fill full all the expectations of Israel as not only her hope but equally the hope of all the nations.

The rest of the New Testament comes along to explain:

2 Corinthians 1:20 ²⁰ For as many as are the promises of God, in Him [Jesus] they are yes; therefore also through Him [Jesus] is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

Paul reminds us in Ephesians:

Ephesians 1:8-10 In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He [God] made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him [Jesus] ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

So Jesus is not only the center of God's world and our faith but He is also the center of our Bibles. God's revelation of Himself comes to us through Jesus and our response back to God always flows through Jesus back to the Father. This communion with God through Christ comes as we meet Jesus in our Bible by the power of the Holy Spirit so that from beginning to end our fellowship with God is always Trinitarian.

One of the dangers of really knowing our Bibles and theology well (if there are really any true dangers at all) is that familiarity breeds a loss of simple amazement (pure astonishment) of what the good news being announced actually is! We can hear the stories so many times and think through truly profound God-thoughts so often that boredom with the precious things of God can set in and we are no longer like children who are shocked at the scene of their first snowfall.

One of those deeply profound thoughts I wish to explore this morning is something so central and therefore common to our everyday thinking about Christianity that to even bring it up threatens to fill the room with a corporate yawn of apathy. But it is exactly for that reason that I think we need to take the subject up yet once again and take another deep look at it so that we can once again truly appreciate what is so often set before our eyes.

Last week we looked at a passage which made clear to us the true identity of Jesus, who is God in human flesh, the LORD. In **Philippians 2**, Paul makes use of **Isaiah 45:23** (cf. **Phil. 2:10-11**) where God promises that a day is coming when all humanity (to all the ends of the earth) will turn to God as the true and only God, not only of Israel, but of the whole earth. In acknowledgement of His supremacy, every creature will bow their knee before His majesty and swear their loyalty and exclusive allegiance to Him alone. What is so shocking about what Paul says in **Philippians 2** is that he confesses that the God of Israel, Yahweh, who makes this promise in **Isaiah 45** has come to earth to die on the cross for our sins in Jesus. Jesus the Nazarene, the rabbi born in the little city of Bethlehem is the LORD or Jesus is Yahweh. Paul says this not only a pious, first century Jew but as a Pharisee, who prized himself on theological precision and faithfulness to the one true God of heaven and of earth.

What Paul further introduces here is something truly scandalous: Jesus, this prophet from Galilee, who was brutally crucified by the Romans, is worshipped as “a god.” No Jew would have made this blasphemous mistake. While in their far distant past Israel might have been tempted to worship the false plurality of gods of their pagan neighbors, the exile cleared all that up. That temptation had been put to bed a long time ago. Any thought that any other god would be worshipped alongside the one and true God of Israel would simply be repugnant and any Jew would gladly sacrifice his life as a martyr than bow their knee before any idol of the pagans. So for a first-century Jew, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a Hebrew of Hebrews to worship Jesus something truly incredible must have happened to turn this one time persecutor of His followers to a devoted worshipper before His throne.

In order to think through more carefully what we are saying about Jesus when we worship Him, let us think through several important themes in our theology this morning.

- 1. Only God, who called Israel to be His people, is the true God of all Heaven and earth and all worship is due Him alone.**

The LORD God says to Israel:

Exodus 34:10 ¹⁰ ¶ Then God said, "Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you **Exodus 34:14** ¹⁴ -- for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—(Cf. **Exodus 20:3-5** ³ ¶ "You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ ¶ "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵ "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,

Deuteronomy 6:13-15 ¹³ "You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. ¹⁴ "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, ¹⁵ for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God (cf. Ps. 22:27-28; 81:9; 86:9).

Psalm 96:4-5 ⁴ For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens (cf. 1 Chron. 16:25).

Jesus Himself, a faithful Jew, taught the exclusive worship of Yahweh. When tempted by Satan to worship him:

Luke 4:8 ⁸ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (cf. Deut. 6:13; see Matt. 4:9-10).

In fact, according to many Scriptures, the heart of why God punishes sinners is because they give worship to a creature (a false god) rather than to God alone:

Revelation 14:9-11 "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (cf. Rev. 9:20).

Romans 1:18 ¹⁸ ¶ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **Romans 1:21** ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. **Romans 1:25** ²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (cf. **Acts 12:20-23**).

So God takes it extremely serious when any of His creatures gives worship to any other creature. He will not share His glory with any other:

Isaiah 42:8 ⁸ "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. **Isaiah 48:11** ¹¹ "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

Now, we could take time this morning to explain why God not only commands us to worship Him but threatens to punish us if we worship any other than Him alone and rather than this being a sign of a divine megalomaniac, why this is actually the most loving and compassionate commandment of all God's Laws but that would take us to far afield for our purposes this morning. That will have to wait another message for another day.

2. **Not only does God take the worship of any other than Himself seriously, but throughout Scripture those who have been faithful to God have quickly repudiated any worship offered to them that didn't belong to them.**

For instance, when Peter or Paul were worshipped by some of their overzealous hearers, they clearly turned such undo worship away from them and back to God alone:

Acts 14:15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM (cf. **Acts 10:25-26**).

This is true not only of man, but even of angels. When John was tempted to worship the glorious creatures of Heaven, they forbid him at once saying:

Revelation 19:10 ¹⁰ Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God (cf. 22:8-9; Rom. 1:25; Col. 2:18).

3. **So, we ought to be shocked both by the fact that the early Jews worshipped Jesus and by the fact that Jesus accepted and received that worship as due Him.**

In fact, Jesus goes so far as saying:

John 5:23 ²³ so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Now, to see how scandalous, how outrageous this language truly is think of what it must have took for a faithful Jew to hear this. If it is difficult to think what a Jew in the first century would have thought think of what a modern day Muslim would hear if he heard you say that a mere man, a prophet, would be worshipped as Allah! What would a Muslim think if he heard that the same honor that is given to Allah is to be given to Jesus? That's what a Jew in the first century heard Jesus say. And when they were ready to stone Jesus for saying these things, He didn't let up. Instead He went on to say:

John 5:25 ²⁵ ¶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Jesus not only said many things like this, but He also received and welcomed the worship that belongs to God alone. After he healed the man born blind in John 9, he returned to Jesus and Jesus asked him:

John 9:35-38 "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." ³⁸ And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.

There are so many Scriptures we could turn to this morning, especially through Matthew's Gospel which begins with the wise men coming to worship the new born King of Israel (**Matt. 2:2**) to the disciples at the end of the Gospel where they gather to fall at Jesus' feet and worship Him (**Matt. 28:9, 17**) (cf. 8:2-3; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; **Luke 24:51-53**; **Heb. 1:6-8**; **Ps. 2:12**; **John 17:4-5**; **Col. 1:15-17**; **Rev. 4:10-11**; **5:12-14**).

Revelation 5 – the Worship of the Lamb of God

1. Chaps. 4 & 5 belong together as the one worship of the one God. Chap. 4 focuses on God's work in creation (4:9-11). Chap. 5 focuses on the work of redemption and recreation (5:12).
2. The book of God which contains the plan of the ages of the full restoration of the fallen creation appears with no one worthy to open it (or enact the plan) (5:1-4). If no one is found worthy to execute God's plan of redemption of the fallen creation, what hope do we have that the earth (God's creation) will once again be set right?
3. When heaven's anticipation reaches its highest climax suddenly the One whom God has promised appears. The angel tells John to stop his weeping and look. He is the promised lion from the tribe of Judah (as God promised Jacob long ago, Gen. 49:9-10). The One who will open God's plan of the ages is the promised strong, fierce lion who comes to triumphantly conquer all God's enemies, who are also the enemies of His people (cf. 6:9-11). To stress how amazing is God's answer to man's miserable condition, the angel also stresses that He is "root of David" (5:5; Isa. 6:13; 11:1, 10). God promised David an everlasting Kingdom and that One of his descendants would sit on his throne forever. Note that God didn't simply promise that David's descendants would sit on his throne forever, as if each one successively to the throne one after another. One is born, becomes king, and then dies and then another is born, becomes king, and then dies. No, God promises that one of David's descendants Himself will eternally sit on the throne of his father David forever. In other words, this King of Israel will sit on the throne forever and no one will ever take his place (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ezek. 34:23-24). But Jesus is not simply from the stock of David, as if He is only the branch coming out of David. The angel declares that Jesus is the "root" of David, the source of King David Himself. If it wasn't for Jesus, the Son of God, not only would David have never received the promise of an everlasting kingdom, but David Himself would have never existed.
4. When John finally turns to see the promised Lion sent from God what he sees is equally scandalous, simply outrageous, completely incredible. He sees a Lamb – the Lamb of God - who both has been slain but is somehow standing (5:6; cf. Gen. 22:8; John 1:29, 36; Rev. 6:9; 7:10, 17; 14:4, 10; 15:3; 19:9; 21:22, 23; 22:1, 3). Here we find the great paradox of the Christian Gospel – God has achieved all He has promised in setting the world back right but not in any way that Israel or the world expected. It wasn't with bombs and guns, by shock and awe, that God defeated His enemy. It wasn't by sending a King, glorious in raiment, riding on a white charger, coming not to serve but to be served. Rather, it was by God being born into a dark, cold world, wrapped in swaddling cloths

by a frightened, young virgin and her new husband and laid in a dirty, smelly manger. He came to a world unprepared for His appearance, who couldn't see LOVE incased in flesh standing before them. Instead, they saw Him as a "troubler of Israel" (cf. **1 Kin. 18:17**) and took Him into their hands and nailed the immortal God of Israel onto a tree and left Him to suffer and die alone.

5. In this snapshot of Heaven's Lamb, we see what it looks like when God comes to earth to fulfill His promise. John, along with all the hosts of heaven, then take this picture along with the picture of **Rev. 4** and combines them together and worships Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit (cf. **5:6**) along with the Father and worships the Triune God who has defeated our enemy by LOVE through the sacrifice of His divine blood to purchase us from the pit of never-ending destruction (**Rev. 5:9**). But He has not only saved us from something, He has saved us to something (**Rev. 5:10**) – we have become through Him citizens of God's new kingdom, His priests, who will reign in the newly created heavens and earth. It is for this reason that the whole creation bows before the throne of God and His Lamb to worship (**Rev. 5:11-14**).

In Revelation, we see the consummation of the completed plan of God Almighty through His Lamb. What we are celebrating this Christmas is in some sense the beginning of this plan being worked out for you in time and space.

Galatians 4:4-7 ⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Amen!

-SDG-