

**Reading Revelation Part 2 –
“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty”
Revelation 1:4 - 6; 4:8 – 11; 5:12 – 14**

So for those visiting or weren't able to make it, last week we began a looking at the Book of Revelation.

Revelation that has been misunderstood, treated with suspicion, given way to speculation and left many people not wanting to read it at all.

I said, where I'm up to is this:

***Revelation was written to seven real churches in seven real locations
addressing real challenges, problems and pressures.***

As God's Word it is able to speak to us today as speak to our future as well.

So here's the question this morning:

“What is the core theme(s) of the book of Revelation?”

- The end of the world? Well yes and no. Revelation does speak of our ultimate end and final destination but it speaks as much to the present.
- Spiritual conflict? There *is* a spiritual conflict that does rage across this planet and that is present in Revelation.
- ...

Having said all this, at its core – the core theme of Revelation - ***is worship, true worship of the one true God.***

Time and time again throughout Revelation there God is worshipped.

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created and have their being.”

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour and glory and power,

for ever and ever!”

John, on the prison island of Patmos, sees what is currently happening in heaven, in God’s dimension.

He is not physically transported there; he is “in the Spirit”, that is, he is given a vision.

It is as if the curtain is drawn back and there he sees “a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.”

“And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby.

A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.”

John tries to express, in limited human language, the glory of what he has seen.

And what we do see is all these participants.

We see the 24 elders who represent the whole people of God from both the Old and New Covenant.

In chapter 4 we see these strange winged creatures, covered in eyes, with faces like that of a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle.

They represent the created order, the natural world, leading and giving praise to God.

Then there are a plethora of angels joining bringing their praise.

However we understand the symbols the clear message is that God and Lamb are to be praised because they deserve it.

And when you read through Revelation you see again and again, song after song bursts of exuberant praise, fabulous songs of worship.

Revelation is an invitation to worship.

We are invited to join in the heavenly praise.

Whatever else happens in Revelation, the book keeps cycling back to God and to Jesus – the Lamb who was slain but is alive – who are enthroned.

The word “throne” occurs 43 times in the book of Revelation.

We have a God who reigns supreme.

It does raise another question for us:

“What is worship?”

Have you ever thought about that?

Several years ago I attended a wedding in Sydney at a Greek Orthodox Church.

It took place in this beautiful building with these giant icons on the walls.

All the normal aspects of the service were there: the bride and groom were there, along with the priest and his assistant.

The ceremony however, was very different from what I'd experienced before.

The priest chanted and sang and spoke and at one point circled around the couple multiple times.

It was a beautiful ceremony which I'm sure was full of meaning but there was one problem – I literally did not understand a word of it; it was all in Greek.

Perhaps our services aren't as foreign.

Yet there is a place at times for explaining why we do what we do.

So,

“What is worship?”

Tell the person next to you.

Worship is to give God all He is worth: offering our admiration, verbalising our gratitude – in word and song is the core calling of all human beings.

Worship is what we're made for.

Worship is what church buildings cathedrals are made for.

God doesn't *need* our worship.

Worship is a perfectly proper and reasonable response to God's love, goodness, beauty, power and truth.

But here's the thing: we are invited but not compelled to join in worship.

Worship, like love and as an expression of love, must be given freely.

It is expressing our gratitude that Jesus became for us the lam that was slain, shedding his blood for us to free us from our sins.

In turn we have become his people – a kingdom of priests who have full access to His Father in heaven, who we can now call our Father.

That's such good reasons to sing.

Of course, it's not limited to our words and songs either.

It is both lifestyle and event. It's gathered and individual.

It's what we collectively do together and in our alone times and personal spaces.

Colossians 3:17 counsels us:

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."¹

Whatever you do.

Worship of God and the Lamb is a matter of offering both our verbal praise and our hearts allegiance, our lips and our lives, to the Creator–Redeemer and to no one else – no other so-called lord or god or saviour.

The challenge to the worship of the one true God has always been a threat to followers of Jesus everywhere and at all times.

Alongside true worship there is false worship in different forms.

Jesus quoted Isaiah in saying:

"These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."²

This is the false worship of empty religion.

In empty religion you may have someone who identifies as a Christian but lacks a deep, personal faith and commitment to Christ.

They retain the form of Christianity but lack a genuine connection to God.

In Revelation the worship is vibrant and alive and rejoices in what God has done.

There is false worship that is marked by joylessness.

John Stott wrote:

"When I attend some church services, I almost think I have come to funeral by mistake. Everybody is dressed in black. No one talks or smiles. The hymns are played at the pace of a snail or a tortoise and the whole atmosphere is joyless. If I could overcome my Anglo-Saxon reserve I would want to shout, "cheer up!"

Christianity is a joyful religion and every service is a celebration".³

¹ Colossians 3:17.

² Matthew 15:7

³ John Stott, *The Living Church*, 31.

To the church in Sardis there is warning that they have reputation for being alive but Jesus says, they're actually dead.⁴

There is false worship that rejects holy living.

To the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira, Jesus rebukes them for tolerating sexual immorality.⁵ He calls them to repent. Their worship is unacceptable because their lives are mired in behaviour God rejects.

True worship expresses in what is in our hearts but is also accompanied by and upright life.

Worship without holiness is something God discards.

There is also false worship that worships the wrong things.

Without the true worship of God, our lives, even as Christians, can slowly succumb to competing lords and saviours on offer in our culture.

In fact, the one besetting sin that Israel faced was that of idolatry, either in the form of trusting in other gods or other military powers and kings.

And we probably name them: sex or power or money or people's esteem or popularity or family or careers or relationships or pleasure or leisure – the list is endless.

We are assaulted – I don't think that's too strong a word – by the stories our society and cultures tell us.

These are meta-narratives: these are the overarching stories of where meaning and satisfaction and fulfilment are said to be found.

- The story of consumerism, that in fact life is made up in the abundance of things.
One Christian commentator observed, "Personally, I have rarely left a mall inspired to be a more generous and caring person."
- The story of individualism, the fulfilment is found in self-absorption and autonomy.
- The story of eroticism that tells us the satisfaction and fulfilment are found in the next sexual partner or conquest.

It might show itself in that temptation to simply 'go through the motions' on a Sunday morning because the true focus of our worship is someone or something

⁴ Revelation 3:2

⁵ Revelation 2:14 – 16; 20.

else. Or we might mouth the words but our hearts and minds are somewhere else entirely.

In a sense, with these stories bombarding us, we can forget God.
We can forget His promises to us in Christ.
We can forget who we are and to whom we belong.
We can forget that we're designed for union and communion with our Maker.
And this forgetfulness allows us to worship lesser things—people, money, possessions, prestige, the “perfect life.

Revelation calls us back to centre of all reality – giving to God all he's worth.

Worship so important because here's the thing – the central conflicts of Revelation stems from questions of worship:

God is holy, beautiful, pure and good – *but will we worship Him?*

He is the giver of life – we are not a random collection of cells – *but will we give him the glory?*

Jesus the Lamb been killed and has risen for our sakes – *but will we give Jesus our praise?*

The Lord is enthroned as the world's true God and King – *but will we bend the knee and bow the heart?*

For us then, this morning is an opportunity to take stock of our corporate and personal worship.

And to do that let me suggest to that we attend to the well of our hearts – with the Spirit's help and with best honesty we can muster.