Series: A Call to Worship on Earth as in Heaven (a study in Revelation)
Sermon Text: Revelation 5:11-14 **Slido Poll:** How would you define worship?

Easter is our annual celebration of history's most pivotal moment--the day God brought Jesus back to life after His horrible death on the cross! Why is that such a big deal? We'll, 1 Corinthians 15 says that "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins*." How's that for a reason to celebrate? Instead of giving us what we deserve, God in His great mercy, gave His only Son so that people of all backgrounds can receive a clean record and a fresh start by believing in Him! As I was scouring the Bible for a text worthy of Easter, I had originally overlooked ***Revelation 5*** because it doesn't contain the word "*resurrection*" and because it portrays Christ's victory through the image of a ***slain Lamb standing in Heaven***. Then I thought, "*That's really the ironic, upside-down nature of how God operates, isn't it?*" He most often brings victory by means of waiting, weakness, pain, sacrifice, and death. This, of course, is an understandable barrier to faith, right? It's hard to trust a God that doesn't do things our way or on our timetables (cf. Isaiah 55:9). ***Revelation 5*** speaks to that idea with 3 soulful ***songs*** (heavenly hymns) offered in worship to God by 3 distinct groups: The living creatures and the elders (5:8-10), then the angelic creatures (5:11–12), then all creation (5:13–14). Today, we'll discover how these heavenly ***songs*** are filled with Easter truths intended to improve short-sighted views of the infinite God and stir our deepest recesses with this super controversial…

BIG IDEA: We're to worship the resurrected Lamb who is equal with God!

Notice the progressive expansion of heavenly worship as I read ***verses 11-14***: ***Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*** ("*innumerable*", not a literal number)***, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped***. These are 2 incredibly controversial songs, especially when we read them alongside the hymn in Revelation 4:11. Look there with me where the living creatures sang, "*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*." While it's no surprise to find created beings worshiping their Creator, it's strange to hear equal praise being offered to Jesus, the

Lamb who was slain. In his commentary on Revelation, Dr J. Scott Duvall (pg. 97) tells us why this is so controversial: "*Throughout the Bible, God alone, the Creator of all things, is considered worthy of worship. To worship another is to commit idolatry. Even powerful angels refuse worship (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9). But here we see Jesus being worshiped alongside God, not only by angels but by all of creation.*" This lesson will address 3 questions raised by these Revelation songs: 1) How did Jesus become ***worthy*** of worship that belongs only to God? 2) What does ***the Lamb's*** strange victory reveal about who God is and how He operates? 3) How are we to respond to this reality-altering revelation?

Answers to question 1 can be gleaned from a poem in Philippians 2:5-11 which also points to Jesus' "*resurrection*" without using that word: "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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.*" I really love how God's Word helps us process transcendent ideas by describing them in different ways. For instance, this poem, like the ***Revelation songs***, is a creative retelling of the gospel story from heaven's perspective. Together, they help us grasp what it means that "*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, was buried, and was raised by God on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*." The Philippians poem tells us that God exalted Jesus because of His humble, sacrificial death on the cross. The ***Revelation songs*** celebrate how this made Him worthy to ascend to God's right hand (cf. 1Corinthians 15:3-4; Acts 7:56) to receive and carry out God's rescue plan for fallen creation.

Now that we know how Jesus became worthy of worship that belongs only to God, let's move to question #2: "*What* does ***the Lamb's*** strange victory reveal *about who God is and how He operates?*" To answer that, let's first consider those to whom ***Revelation*** was written--1st century church members who were being persecuted, oppressed, and murdered for believing in Jesus. They had lots of reasons to quit Christianity, yet many continued to believe. Why? Because, according to 1 Corinthians 15, they personally knew oodles of people who had seen Jesus after His resurrection! This, however, didn't change the fact that they were suffering and watching their friends and loved ones die. People thought they were foolish and naïve to have faith in a God who brings victory by means of waiting, weakness, pain, sacrifice, and death. Sound familiar? Ever felt that way? Again, this is an understandable barrier

to faith, especially in a culture that prefers to make progress by arguing and overthrowing! Over the years, it's led many into periods of deconstructing their faith, which is nothing new, nor necessarily bad. In fact, rethinking their views of God enabled many faithful 1st century religious people to eventually follow Jesus. The fact is that everyone, even a committed Christian, has misconceptions about who God is and how He operates. Would you agree with that? I mean, some of us still discover new things about ourselves and the rest of creation, right? I've spent years learning about God only to discover that more learning can lead to questions that I didn't even know I had! So, on some level, faith in the infinite God requires life-long learning so that He can adjust, expand, and correct our vision of Himself (cf. Romans 12:1-2). Let me ask: "*Have you ever been upset when God didn't do things the way you expected?*" If so, you're in good company! Faith, according to Hebrews 11, isn't about having God all figured out, rather it's an ongoing willingness to "*believing God exists and rewards those who seek him*" when we have strong reasons to doubt that. That's what our spiritual ancestors teach us--to root our faith in what God reveals about Himself rather than short-sighted, human assessments of His activities.

That's a rather decent answer to our 3rd question: "*How are we to respond to this reality-altering revelation?*" Of course, since we're not all the same, perhaps that's a question we should ponder for ourselves with some trusted family and friends. As you're processing, maybe throw in some questions like: "*Where am I struggling to let this heavenly revelation about Jesus shape the way I see the world?*", or "*How is His life, death, resurrection, and equality with God helping me process life on a daily basis?*" Having faith in God's upside-down ways means we can't build defenses (or offenses) here. Every pain point can be an opportunity for God to replace our lust for control with confidence in promises that are hard to see in the moment. Hopefully, it's clear that Easter is an annual reminder that our Creator hasn't given up on restoring His broken creation and that He has not left us to suffer alone. We are a people who need constant reminding, aren't we? That's why we've come here this morning--not because we have God all figured out but because we know that we need Him! I was thinking this week how much of a miracle Sundays are--how we keep gathering with one another, not because we're all the same or at the same place in life, but solely because we all want to know this Jesus, the Lamb who was slain and resurrected by God! I want to thank you for showing up today because your presence is a much-needed proof that God is worth pursuing even though this world is broken. One of our deacons is going to come and explain 2 ways we can visibly display our faith and encourage one another in hope.

Let's pray: Jesus, we thank you for identifying with us so that we can identify with you. Amen.

Considerations for discussion leaders:
1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparing for and applying our sermon from Revelation 5:11-14.

During this series it would help to repeatedly read over the chapter we're exploring. It would also be beneficial to utilize a commentary that explains the various interpretive strategies used throughout church history. If you need a suggestion, please ask! We should also be thinking about our "*next step*" in our relationship with Jesus. The Bible isn't meant simply to "*inform*" but to also "*transform*", and a next step always begins with faith in Christ--either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Our help comes through Christ's Spirit and His church body!

Other application questions (Don't forget the underlined questions in the sermon notes above!):

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- 5 Strategies for Reading Revelation from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- Heaven and Earth Theme from the Bible Project
- Other super helpful Revelation summaries from the Bible Project

Quotes related to this passage:

- **The resurrection implied**: The fact that there is no explicit mention of the resurrection in the interpretative section of the hymns in vv. 9–14 is noteworthy and underscores the ironic nature of Christ's victorious death. The point of this is likely to emphasize the fact that it is through death—the way of the cross—that life comes, and that saints through the ages should take comfort in this truth even during their present sufferings." (Beale, 117)
- **Myriads and thousands**: "The number symbolizes a multitude of angels too large to count (cf. Rev. 7:11; Dan. 7:10). The circle of worship widens from four living creatures and the elders (5:6) to countless angels (5:11) to every creature and all of creation (5:13). Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise! The sevenfold angelic praise is very similar to the hymn to God in 7:12…Now all of creation worships God and the Lamb together, and remarkably this unique relationship continues throughout the rest of the book (e.g., 6:16; 7:9–10; 14:4; 21:22–23; 22:1, 3)." (Duvall, 96-97)
- **Expansive praise**: "Thus the singing is begun by 'the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders.' It is then picked up by the innumerable host of heaven, who in verse 12 echo the song previously sung to God the Father in 4:11. And finally, the whole created order, both heaven and earth, sing a concluding doxology to both the Father and the Son (v. 13), which in turn is affirmed (now in reverse order) by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders." (Fee, 83)
- **The progression of worship**: "The song of 4:11 was sung by the 24 elders alone. In the song of 5:9–10, they were joined by the four living creatures. Now many angels (v. 11), numbering into millions, add their voices in attributing glory to the Lamb. This is the second song sung to the Lamb in this chapter. In the first (v. 9), He was declared to be 'worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.' In the second (v. 12), He is proclaimed worthy to receive His due, described in

the form of a sevenfold doxology. He is thus 'doubly worthy'—first, to unleash judgments on His persecutors (i. e., by breaking the seals), and second, to get for Himself His rightful glory. Finally, every created being in the universe joins in this rising crescendo of praise and worship to both Him who sits on the throne and the Lamb (v. 13). When the praises have reached their highest point, the four living creatures add their Amen! (v. 14), and the elders fall on their faces. After all of this dramatic praise, it would seem difficult for the following chapters to avoid being anticlimactic—but they manage to overcome this difficulty!" (Gregg, 100)

- **All creation praising**: "When we are told that every creature (v. 13) in heaven, earth, and the sea now sing of the glory of God, this 'must refer,' writes Morris, 'either to holy angels appointed to serve in these regions, or else to the animal creation—more likely the latter.' That the creation glorifies God is declared in Psalm 19 and again in Psalm 148:7–10: 'Praise the Lord from the earth, You great sea creatures, … beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowl.' Morris qualifies this statement, as seems necessary, 'with the implied exception, no doubt, of those evil ones from whom the world is to be redeemed.'" (Gregg, 101)
- **Creator and Redeemer**: "Even though in John's Gospel, God created all things through the Word (the Son), here that emphasis rests with the Father alone; and in giving praise to the Lamb (the Son), the focus is not on creation, but altogether on redemption (because you were slain). And with this the heavenly picture is complete. The eternal God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is both Creator and Redeemer; and to get there by way of hymnic poetry, John sees all heaven as worshiping the Father and the Son as Creator and Redeemer." (Fee, 86-87)
- **Praise that belongs only to God**: "The lamb shares the praise which belongs to the one and only God. This is John's own way of glimpsing and communicating the mind-challenging but central truth at the heart of Christian faith: Jesus, the lion-lamb, Israel's Messiah, the true man—this Jesus shares the worship which belongs, and uniquely and only belongs, to the one creator God." (Wright, 58)
- **Jesus is God**: "The passage reasserts Jesus's deity and oneness with God. Throughout the Bible, God alone, the Creator of all things, is considered worthy of worship. To worship another is to commit idolatry. Even powerful angels refuse worship (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9). But here we see Jesus being worshiped alongside God, not only by angels but by all of creation. Richard Bauckham rightly concludes that "the worship of Jesus must be understood as indicating the inclusion of Jesus in the being of the one God defined by monotheistic worship." (Duvall, 97)
- **The oneness of God and Jesus**: "Revelation 5 echoes Jesus's statement in John 10:30: 'I and the Father are one.' The Lamb's position in the 'center of the throne,' his worthiness to take the scroll from God, his close relation to the Spirit of God, and the worship he receives alongside God in the second half of the chapter all point to his oneness with God. For the early Christians who were committed monotheists, to worship Jesus alongside God means only one thing: they regarded Jesus as God, as one who shared God's nature and glory." (Duvall, 91)
- **The revelation of Jesus as God**: "The affirmation of the full, unequivocal divinity of the lion-lamb comes, and only comes, in the context of the victory of God, through the lion-lamb, over all the powers of evil. It isn't enough just to agree with the idea, in the abstract, that Jesus is, in some sense or other, God. (People often say to me, 'Is Jesus God?', as though we knew who 'God' was ahead of time and could simply fit Jesus into that picture.) God, as we have already seen in Revelation, is the creator, who is intimately involved with his world, and worshipped by that world. God has plans and purposes to deliver his world from all that has spoiled it; in other words, to re-establish his sovereign rule, his 'kingdom', on earth as in heaven. It is at the heart of those

plans, and only there, that we find the lion-lamb sharing the throne of the one God. The church has all too often split off a bare affirmation of Jesus' 'divinity' from an acceptance of God's kingdom-agenda. To do so is to miss the point, and to use a version of one part of the truth as a screen to stop oneself from having to face the full impact of the rest of the truth. We discover, and celebrate, the divinity of the lion-lamb Messiah only when we find ourselves caught up to share his work as the royal priesthood, summing up creation's praises before him but also bringing his rescuing rule to bear on the world." (Wright, 58-59)

- **Symbolism**: "One example of why taking a literal approach to Revelation is problematic can be seen here, where every created thing in the universe is said to be singing God's praises. Every creature (v. 13) would have to include humans, yet many of them are still cursing and blaspheming throughout the judgments that follow." (Gregg, 101)
- **The key to Revelation**: "Together these images constitute the hermeneutical, or interpretive, key to the entire book. They reveal in pictures the essential theology of the book of Revelation: God the creator reigns and is worthy of our complete devotion, and Jesus the faithful, slaughtered Lamb of God reigns with God, equally worthy of our complete devotion. This combination of images creates two mind-boggling paradoxes. The first is that God shares sovereignty and honor, expressed in the receiving of worship, with the Messiah Jesus. The second is that this Jesus who is worthy of worship has exercised his messianic office and power by being slaughtered. His power is power in weakness, as Paul would put it (2 Cor 12:9). We will return to this theme later. First, however, we need to look more carefully at this two-panel visionary painting. It consists of a theophany (revelation of God) and a Christophany (revelation of Christ) and, through both together, a christologically reconfigured vision of God." (Gorman, 103-106)
- **Application for the first audience then us**: "One should note how nearly impossible it would be even to imagine that all of this is not aimed especially at the readers in the seven churches, who are undoubtedly expected by John, with the reception and reading of this letter, to join now in the worship that here is seen as belonging eternally to their own future existence 'in heaven.' It would seem equally to miss John's point and concern if later readers are not moved to do the same. Indeed, what is left for us at the least is to burst forth with our own 'Amen!' to the eternal glory here described as belonging especially to the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ." (Fee, 89)

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Biblical Apocalypses**: "So, in terms of the two books that are given the label apocalyptic, there's one in the Hebrew Bible, one in the New Testament: Daniel and Revelation. With Daniel, it's a bit of a misnomer because half of the book is these dreams and visions. But the first half of the book are the narratives about Daniel and his friends. Those two halves go together in a crucially important way, but the whole book isn't an apocalypse like The Revelation is. It's also true that there are sections of other books that are apocalypses. Like Zechariah, first half of the book is about his dreams and visions in the heavenly temple. Sections of the book of Ezekiel, the beginning, middle, and end. The prophet Isaiah has an apocalypse in one chapter, chapter 6. The Prophet Amos has a series of apocalypses: chapter 7 through 9. And then we talked about Abraham has dreams, visions and so is Jacob. There you go. In a way, what we're focusing in on is when you have a whole book or a section of a book that is full of this kind of dream imagery." (Tim Macke Video Transcript)
- **Apocalyptic Literature**: "John's throne vision in Revelation 4, like most of this book, resembles visions in the biblical prophets (esp. Isa. 6:1–5; Ezek. 1:4–28; Dan. 7:9–14). Yet while Revelation is biblical, it is also relevant to the issues and language of its day: John frequently emphasizes the

themes most dominant in the literature of his contemporaries, which we call apocalyptic literature. From an early period, Jewish apocalyptic texts focused on and developed particularly the throne visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah. John's language regularly echoes Scripture, but he shares this feature with some of his contemporaries: 'And I looked and behold' (lit. trans. of 4:1) is standard language from Ezekiel (e.g., Ezek. 1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:2, 7, 10; 44:4) and Daniel (Dan. 8:3, 15; 10:5; 12:5), which also becomes characteristic of apocalyptic visions (e.g., 1 Enoch 14:14–15, 18; 85:3). The similarity of subject matter between Revelation and other apocalyptic visions makes some of the differences in detail all the more striking. Apocalyptic texts frequently narrate the visionary's arduous journey through various heavenly gates to reach God's throne (e.g., 1 Enoch 14:9–13); some suggest dangers involved in this journey. By contrast, yet like his biblical predecessors, John is simply transported there by God's sovereign summons (Rev. 4:1) and the Spirit's inspiration (4:2; cf. 17:3; 21:10). Some texts provide angelic help for the ascent (e.g., 1 Enoch 71:5; 87:3; 2 Enoch 7:1; 2 Bar. 6:3–4), but John ascends simply by the Spirit, as did Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 5, 24; 37:1; 43:5)… John does not have to force his way into heaven, as some of his contemporaries thought they did; he is invited, in language that recalls God's call to Moses to receive his revelation: 'Come up here' (Rev. 4:1; cf. Ex. 19:20, 24; 24:12; 34:2) recalls the Bible's first throne vision (Ex. 24:10–12; cf. also 19:24)." (Keener, 169-170)

- **Engaging our imaginations**: "Perhaps above everything else, one must be warned not to stoop to unthoughtful literalism while reading chapters 4 and 5. Rather, children of the Enlightenment though we are, we must do our best to let the visions speak to our imaginations—to take our breath away, as it were, and thus to give one theological perspective from which to see what comes next in chapter 6, not to mention our own present existence." (Fee, 66)
- **How chapter 3 flows into 4**: "The picture of Christ in 3:21 presently sitting on His Father's throne leads into the vision of chs. 4–5. In these chapters John wants to explain in more detail and with more imagery the past act of Christ's exaltation upon His throne as ruler over the church and the cosmos, which was accomplished by His death and resurrection. John is taken up to the throne room of God, where he sees Christ enthroned along with the Father. The vision shows how Christ's exhortation to each of the churches to overcome is based on the fact that Christ Himself has already overcome (5:5)…*I will show you what must come to pass* after these things is apparently used in the same way as in 1:1 and 1:19. We have already seen that the after these things allusion from Daniel in 1:19 and its equivalent 'shortly/quickly' in 1:1 indicated that the fulfillment of the Daniel 2 prophecy concerning the establishment of God's kingdom has begun in Christ and the church. Rev. 4:1 introduces not only 4:1–5:14, but also the rest of the visions in the book (4:2–22:5). It becomes clear, therefore, that all the visions about to unfold concern events throughout the church age, past, present, and future. Some may have already unfolded, others await their fulfillment, and yet others have multiple fulfillments throughout the church age. In this connection, the NT is both consistent and clear in its view that the 'last days' or 'latter days' started already with the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:17–21, citing Joel 2:28–32 as fulfilled; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 1:20; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18, etc.)…All the visions from Rev. 6:1 to 22:5 flow out of the vision in chs. 4 and 5. They are all visions which come from the sealed book of 5:1ff. This means that all these visions probably have a mixture of past, present, and future elements." (Beale, 96, 99-100)
- **How the chapters fit together**: "It may help us to keep our balance in the rich mixture of imagery in the following chapters if we see the book like this, structured around its sequences of 'sevens'. We have already had the seven letters to the churches. Now we are to be introduced to the seven seals, which are opened between 6:1 and 8:1. The seventh introduces a further sequence, the seven

trumpets, which are blown one by one from 8:6 to 11:15. Then, at the centre of the book, we find visions which unveil the ultimate source of evil and its chief agents: the Dragon, the Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Land—and also a vision of those who have somehow defeated these monsters (chapters 12–15). This then leads into the final sequence of seven: the seven bowls of God's wrath, the final plagues which, like the plagues of Egypt (15:1), will be the means of judging the great tyrannical power and rescuing God's people from its claws. These bowls of wrath are poured out in chapter 16, but their effect is described more fully in chapters 17 and 18, leading to the celebration of victory over the two Beasts in chapter 19. That only leaves the old Dragon himself, and the last twists of his fate are described in chapter 20. This then clears the stage for the final unveiling of God's eventual plan: the New Jerusalem in which heaven and earth are joined fully and forever." (Wright, 43-44)

- **Behind the scenes**: "Now, by strong implication, we are being invited to see that the powers of the world are simply parodies, cheap imitation copies, of the one Power who really and truly rules in heaven and on earth. As John's great vision unfolds, we will see how it is that these human kingdoms have acquired their wicked, cruel power, and how it is that God's radically different sort of power will win the victory over them. This is the victory in which the seven letters were urging the churches to claim their share. We now discover how that victory comes about. It begins with the unveiling of reality. Behind the complex and messy confusions of church life in ancient Turkey; behind the challenges of the fake synagogues and the threatening rulers; behind the ambiguous struggles and difficulties of ordinary Christians—there stands the heavenly throne room in which the world's creator and lord remains sovereign. Only by stopping in our tracks and contemplating this vision can we begin to glimpse the reality which not only makes sense of our own realities but enables us, too, to win the victory." (Wright, 45-46)

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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