

Hello Creek family! If you have your Bibles, will you turn with me to Revelation 4?

A few weeks ago the world crowned a new super bowl champion. The 49ers were playing the Chiefs. I asked one of my friends here at church if he was going to watch the game. He said, “Oh yeah, I’m really interested to see how the Patriots find a way to win this one.” Of course, they didn’t win, the chiefs did. It had been a long, long time since they had a championship, and there was quite a bit of excitement. Take a look at this viewing party back in their hometown (view the video recording of this sermon to see this clip). They were having a pretty good time! Seeing that made me think about a video montage I saw recently of how teenage girls responded to being near Justin Bieber. Take a look (view the video recording of this sermon to see this clip). Maybe you see that and think, wow, teenage girls are crazy! Too easily excited. But take a look at this video of adults at a concert (view the video recording of this sermon to see this clip).

Now, there were literally thousands of different videos I could have shown you with people going crazy over a sporting event (someone they’ve never met taking a ball across a line), or a celebrity (someone they admire and esteem), or of people being caught up in a moment of music and celebration. But I hope what you see when you look at all those is a clear understanding of human nature: we were made with the capacity for devotion, celebration, adoration and excitement. In the presence of beauty or greatness, something naturally comes out of us and ascribes worth and value to that person or thing. The word the Bible uses to describe that response is “worship.”

We are in this series as a church called “317” where we are talking about the vision, mission, and priorities of our church. Our threefold mission is to *love God, love people, and make disciples*, and our vision is to *connect people to Jesus*. Today we begin to talk about our 7 priorities. Priority number one is *worship*. It might be helpful to begin with a definition of worship: worship is directing your affection and devotion toward someone or something in response to a perception of ultimate worth. Whatever it is or whoever it is we believe is ultimately worthy and ultimately most important, we naturally direct our affection and devotion that way.

When the conversation about worship comes up some people say, “I’m more of a traditionalist when it comes to music - I don’t know about all these drums and lights.” I didn’t say anything about music, I’m talking about *worship*. Sometimes when the conversation about worship comes up some people say, “I don’t go to church very often. I’m not religious.” I didn’t say anything about church attendance or religion. I’m talking about *worship*. Worship is the affection and devotion that wells up within us and is directed toward whatever it is we believe is most valuable, most important. Everyone, everywhere worships someone or something. It’s part of human nature that we can neither suppress or deny.

There are two questions that I think are most pressing when it comes to worship. First: what or who are you worshipping? When we are younger we often find ourselves giving our affection and devotion to things like popularity or beauty or sports or a boyfriend or girlfriend because we believe those things have ultimate worth. We get a little bit older and what do we pursue as if it had ultimate worth? Our career, success, money, family? We can direct our affection and devotion just about anywhere. So that leads to the second question: is the object of your worship *worthy* of worship? Justin Bieber fans got pretty excited about a teenage boy who could sing or dance, but looking back as grown-ups, it may not have been the best idea.

Adults have the same issue: we pursue success, money and fame. I know Tom Brady is not the most popular athlete here in Indy, but a man who is married to a supermodel wife, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, is widely considered to be the greatest quarterback to ever live was interviewed a while back and said: “There’s times where I’m not the person that I want to be. Why do I have all these Super Bowl rings, and still think

there's something greater out there for me? A lot of people would say, 'I reached my goal, my dream.' Me, I think it's gotta be more than this. This can't be what it's all cracked up to be. What else is there for me?" His interviewer asked: "What's the answer?" Brady responded: "I wish I knew. I wish I knew."

Do you know how easy it is to find quotes about depression and disillusionment from celebrities, millionaires and billionaires?! They pursued this as if it had the ultimate value, they got to the end of the road, and there's nothing really there. Not everything can bear the weight of worship; not everything can sustain the weight of being given ultimate worth. Put that on your spouse, it will crush your spouse and your marriage. Put that on your kids, it will crush them and your relationship with them. Put that on your ability to achieve and perform and accomplish, it will require everything of you, and then it will disappoint you.

The conversation about worship is perhaps the most important conversation we could ever have, and Revelation chapter 4 is the perfect place to go to have such a conversation. In the first few verses of this passage, John is transported to heaven. He sees all these bright colors and all these loud sounds - beautiful images of God's glory and majesty. And he also sees a throne: verse 2 says, "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was 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." There are bright lights and colors everywhere he looks, the scene is arresting in its beauty. Verse 4: "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." The number 24 is important - there are 12 tribes of Israel that represent the people of God under the Old Covenant, and there are 12 apostles that represent the people of God in the New Covenant. So it appears these 24 elders represent the entire people of God throughout all of human history.

Now look at verse 6: "In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings." Now these appear at first blush to be strange creatures, but just like almost everything else in Revelation, these creatures represent something. The Lion represents all wild animals, the ox represents all domestic animals, the man represents humanity, and the eagle represents all flying animals. So as the 24 elders represented all the people of God throughout history, these four creatures represent every living thing on planet earth. And what are they doing?

"Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" They are praising God, declaring his worth. But it's not just the four living creatures. Verse 9: "Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'" So every living thing and all God's people are constantly praising God, declaring that he is holy, and that he is worthy to receive worship, and verse 11 says he is worthy specifically because "he is the one who created everything."

Now let's look in chapter 5 - we are going to see the focus of worship expand: Verse 8: "And when the Lamb had taken the scroll, 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 God's people." So once again it is these heavenly beings that represent all creation and all of God's people, but now instead of worshipping the lamb, not God the Father, but God the Son. Verse 9: "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom

and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” They are no longer just praising God the Father because he *created* everyone, they are praising Jesus because he has *saved* everyone.

So in heaven, constantly, night and day, all creation and all God’s people are bringing him praise and worship. God is the only being in the universe who has the ability to sustain the weight of worship without it crushing him or crushing us. Revelation 4-5 answers two important questions: Who should we worship? *God and God alone*. He is the only one on the throne! Why should we worship God? *Because he is our Creator and Savior*. He is the one who gave us life and is the one who has saved our life. So we see those two questions: who should we worship and why should we worship. That leads to a third question that I’d like to spend the rest of our time today talking about: *How* should we worship? That’s an important question, and I’d like to try to answer it two different ways from important passages in the Bible.

How should we worship God? *By pursuing his presence*. Just like the angelic creatures and the 24 elders, they were always in God’s presence, before his throne. And we should desire to be near him, as well.

All throughout the Bible, men and women who loved God desired to be near him. In Exodus God told Moses, “Because the people keep sinning, I’m not going to keep my presence among you. I’ll send you to the promised land, but I won’t go.” And do you remember what Moses said? “If you don’t go with us, we don’t want to go. We would rather stay here and starve to death in the wilderness with you, then to have all the comforts and luxuries of life in the promised land without you.” And once God said his presence would go with them, Moses asked for even more: “God, show me your glory.” We’ve talked about this as a church before: we want that to be the cry of our hearts. “God, we don’t want to go anywhere unless you are going with us, leading the way. Just like Moses, we want to talk to you like we talk to our friends. We want to see your glory!”

Another example we see of this is in Jesus’ life, in Luke 10. Jesus and his disciples have entered into the house of Mary and Martha, and these kind women are friends of Jesus and were happy to have him and his disciples in their home. But you know what happens when a dozen people come over - it takes time to prepare. Today, Keren and I are having about 20 people over to our house for lunch...food needs to be cooked, tables need to be set, floors need to be swept, bathrooms need to be cleaned. And someone has to watch ESPN while Keren is doing that, right? (Just kidding!) It kind of felt that way to Martha when Jesus shows up, because her sister Mary didn’t help her with any of the work. She just sat there in the living room with Jesus, listening to what he had to say. Martha is slaving away, working all over the house, she’s sweaty, she’s tired, and she looks around and sees her sister just sitting there. She’s doing all the work, gets kind of ticked off and decides to tell on her. They are grown women - and she doesn’t tell on her to their parents, she tells on her to *Jesus!* Read Luke 10:40: She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” And what do you think Jesus is going to say? Yeah, I care about justice and what’s right and fair? I care about equal division of labor? I appreciate that some people are more wired to worship through service? No. He said, in verse 41: “‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’” Think about what Jesus is saying in this passage. All of our days we want Jesus to look at us and say: Only one thing is needed. Dan has chosen what is better - he chose to be with him. And that will never be taken from me.

James 4:8 is one of the greatest promises in the entire bible: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” That’s what we want to be about as a church. If that promise is true, do you know what that means? We know God as well as we choose to. We want to be a church that knows God. We want to follow wherever you would lead. We want to see your glory. We could pursue all the things of the world, but we’d rather pursue you.

Because we want to desire God’s presence passionately, that’s why we have begun to embrace new spiritual disciplines. We have had several events where we gather together, hundreds of people, and pray through the

entire night, from 11pm until sunrise. That's weird. That's strange. Sleeping sounds better. I get that sleeping is wonderful. But even more than our bodies need sleep, we need the *presence of God*. That's why last month we started the year by taking two weeks and doing a 24/7 prayer. People signed up for prayer slots starting at midnight and we had different people praying all day long until midnight the following day. We needed 336 hours to fill that entire two-week time. Do you know how many people signed up? 587! Now, that's awesome, almost 600 people! But can I remind you how many people come here every weekend? 4,000! We had almost 600 people come, but that's only 15% of our church! This is an area where we have been growing, but we want to grow more. That's part of this priority to worship: we want to pursue God's presence!

The question we've been answering is: how should we worship God? The first answer is to pursue his presence. But that's just the first part, we worship God not only by pursuing his presence but also *by pursuing his honor*. When you look at the elders and the four living creatures in Revelation, they are not only constantly in God's presence, they are bringing him honor in everything they do. They fall down before him in worship and reverence, they take their own crowns and lay them at God's feet. They weren't looking for recognition, praise, and honor, they wanted God to be praised, recognized, and honored. "You and you alone are worthy of authority, power, devotion, and awe."

Now I want you to imagine that you were in downtown Indy, you are by yourself, you are really hungry, so you pop into a restaurant to grab a bite. There is only one table left, a little two-seater. You sit down and the waitress brings you water. You're sitting there for a minute or two and Peyton Manning walks in. There's no table for him, he sees you sitting there by yourself and asks if he can join you. You say, "No, I'd like some alone time." Of course not, you say, "Of course!" Now, people start taking note of you and Peyton Manning, and they start coming up to your table and clambering all over the two of you. They obviously recognize Peyton, and they just assume that because you are with him, you are famous and rich and important, too. So they ask for his autograph and your autograph, his picture and your picture. Screaming, crying, asking for you to kiss their babies. And at first you kind of like it! It feels nice to get so much attention and adoration. But after a while you realize it's not that satisfying, because you're actually not a superbowl winning quarterback headed for the hall of fame, you're just an average person, and you know it. Before long, you start saying, "I'm no one special, don't give me any attention, he's the one you want to connect with, not me."

When we are younger, for a while, we like attention, we like when people think we are special and honor us and esteem us, but as we mature and gain wisdom and perspective, we realize there is only one person worthy of honor, adoration, esteem and worship, and we point to God and say: "He's the one you want to connect with, not me. We want to pursue His honor in all we do."

Listen to what we read in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Every single decision they made, even small decisions about what to eat, wasn't made based upon preferences or convenience, it was made based upon the ultimate motivation of bringing God glory. What might that look like in our lives? Look at Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." There are multiple ways we can worship God: insincere worship, half hearted worship, lackluster worship - but what does he want? He wants true and proper worship. And how do we do that? We offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Not just our words, not just music we sing at church - we worship God by how we live our lives!

This is pulling from the understanding that most sacrifices were animals that were taken to an altar and then killed as a gift to God. If you want to give a gift to God, don't go to the temple and offer an animal. The world is an altar, live your entire life for him! This is how The Message translation puts it: "Take your everyday, ordinary life--your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life--and place it before God as an offering." God wants us to worship him when we are grocery shopping, when we are driving through our

neighborhood, when we are eating a meal with family members, when we are talking politics, when we plan our budgets, when we are watching television. Worship is the *entire* way we live our lives. We want to honor him with everything! Listen to this story from Zach Steinbrook, a guy who started his career as a pastor, but is now working IT at a local university and still worshipping God with all he does. (View the video recording of this sermon to see Zach's testimonial video.)

We are all worshipping someone or something. The real question we have to answer is: "Is our object of worship *worthy* of worship?" The Bible tells us that God alone is worthy of worship. He created us, he saved us, and the Bible tells us how to worship God: by pursuing his presence and seeking his honor. Worship! That's what we want to be about!! Worship is our priority - priority number one.

One of my friends says: "When our worship gets stale, our mission goes stagnant." We can never let our worship get stale. God is too worthy and our mission is too important to let that happen.