

# The Throne of God and of the Lamb

by Stanley Voke

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*The sermon emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the throne as the center of everything, and the Lamb as the only one worthy to open the book of God's purposes.*

**Duration:** 26:30

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 2:9-10, Revelation 4:9, Revelation 5:1-4, Revelation 5:6, Revelation 5:8-9, Revelation 6:1

**Topics:** "Lamb Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of worshiping God as the Creator. He emphasizes that everything in the universe, including ourselves, was made for God's pleasure. The preacher mentions that although things have gone wrong and fallen, there will come a time when all creation will praise and worship God. The sermon also highlights the importance of recognizing that everything exists for God's pleasure, rather than our own.

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## Transcript

Now just consider the circumstances in which this book was written. Here was John in his lonely prison on a rocky isle of Patmos in the Mediterranean. The vast Roman Empire was being ruled by a Caesar who was regarded as a god, and whose will was law, from Britain right away to Parthia in the Middle East.

And he was about to launch a furious persecution against the Church, persecutions that were going to go on for 250 years, when time and again it would seem the Church of God was to be wiped out. And Christians, and John among them, could be wondering, what does the future hold? We believe that Christ is the Son of God, He has come, He has died, He has risen again, we believe He is Lord. What does the future hold? How is it going to work out? Now I'm going to elaborate a little more on this this evening when we're going to speak on chapter six on the wrath of the Lamb, the judgments of God.

It was in this situation, of this unknown future, that this book of Revelation was given. Let us remember that it was written in symbols, and we don't need to run around in circles trying to interpret the symbols in all manner of ways. We need to get hold of the central key, which is the triumph of Christ, the supreme authority of God and of Christ, throughout history and in the whole universe.

We need to remember that the symbols are nearly all bedded in the Old Testament. And as we said last week, we need to understand Old Testament truth in order to understand Revelation. But in this situation, of a Roman world, ruled by a wicked Caesar, the future all unknown, the man who is in the spirit of the

Lord's day, sees into another dimension, one that is more real and ultimate than the dimension of time and space.

And what he sees is a throne. So chapter four, verse one, I looked and behold, a door was opened in heaven. Verse two, immediately I was in the spirit, and behold, a throne.

When you are in the spirit, you behold the throne. Now what does this mean? I don't know that it means that he actually saw a literal throne, but it represents what men in the Bible always saw when they felt or encountered God. They realized that God was infinitely great, that he certainly was holy, that he was bright as fire, and that he was supreme over all things.

You've only to think of people like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, all of the prophets, especially Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, to realize that there's a long list of people, who whenever they encountered God, always saw the throne. And this is the dominant message of the scriptures. Throughout from Genesis to Revelation, it is the sovereignty of God.

Calvin once tried to define the central message of the Bible, and he said it was the sovereignty of God. It was the throne. It was that the Lord reigneth.

This comes all the way through. The Psalms are full of it, for instance. Again and again you read, The Lord is over all.

The Lord reigneth. Heaven is his throne. Earth is his footstool.

All flesh will worship at his footstool, and so on. It's the throne all the way through. So it's not surprising that when John was in the spirit, and he saw into that heavenly dimension, he saw a throne.

He felt a throne. Now I wonder if we see this. Put it another way.

What do you think of as the center of everything? Center of the universe. You know, these astronomers have just discovered that there's some center in our galaxy that's emanating very powerful X-rays. And they're wondering what it is.

Well, there was a time when people thought the Earth was the center of everything. Then they moved out of it, and they thought the Sun was the center of everything. And then we moved out a bit more, and we discovered that the Sun was only one of a great galaxy of stars, and there was something else that was the center.

And then astronomers saw the whole of the vast universe of galaxies all revolving around something they didn't know quite what, in a great spiral. But what does the Christian think of? He doesn't think spatially. He thinks spiritually, and he sees that at the center of everything, the real center, not located so much in space, perhaps, but in another dimension, is the throne of God.

God in control of his universe. And that means, of course, that God's going to be the center of our life, personally. God's not in the gaps, and he's not pushed out to the circumference.

He is the God who is in the center, and at the controls. And therefore, it's in the light of this throne, we need to see and evaluate all things. For instance, we need to see sin in the light of the throne.

Sin is rebellion against the throne of God. That's the heart of it. We may think of sin as breaking the commandments, or violating God's love, or anything else.

But ultimately, it is rebellion against the throne of God, and that's what makes sin so terrible. We need to see repentance in this way. Repentance is really returning to the throne.

When the prodigal son came home, he didn't just come home to his father's love, he came home to submit to his father's authority. And repentance means returning to the throne. Conversion is not just having a kind of all-time high, conversion means submission to the throne.

And unless conversion means I really capitulate to Jesus as Lord, it is no conversion. And Christian life means obedience to the throne. Obedience worked out in all the areas of life, in personal life, in home life, in church.

Obedience to the throne. And only where the throne of God rules is there what the Jews used to call shalom, which meant not just peace, but all the fullness and blessing of life that God wanted to give. Shalom.

It was only there where God reigned that there was shalom. And we look here, we see what this throne is like. It says in verse 3 that he that sat upon it was like a jasper, that is comparable to a diamond.

It's blazing white, and that speaks of holiness. It's a holy throne. So that all who are around it, and in proximity at all, are deeply conscious of the holiness.

Remember in Isaiah 6, those seraphim sang, holy, holy, holy. And here again, they say this. Verse 8, holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.

So when we are in any way near the throne, we are conscious of the holiness of God. It's also a throne of judgment. It's a sardine stone, or sardine stone in verse 3. And sardine is blood red.

So there's something blood red about this throne. In verse 5, we are told that out of the throne there come thunderings and lightnings and voices. They speak of judgment.

And again, seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. And the Holy Spirit, who is associated with this throne, is here designated in his aspect of the spirit of judgment. Remember Isaiah speaks of spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning.

And the Holy Spirit in his fire aspect is the spirit of holiness, who brings judgment. So it's a serious thing to get near that throne. Our God is a consuming fire.

But it's also a throne of mercy. Because it says in verse 5, there was a rainbow around the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. Praise God for this.

The rainbow, you know, is always the symbol of God's mercy. It was that which God gave in the time of Noah to show that he would have mercy on the earth. And I like the thought of the rainbow, that the rainbow is that white searing light that passes through rain.

And it's broken up into its component parts. And when the light of God's holy love comes through into the rain of our sinfulness, then God shows himself in mercy. Praise God there's a rainbow around the throne.

That's comforting, isn't it? If it was only thunderings and lightnings and jasper and sardine, it would frighten us off. But here's a throne that says, come near because there's mercy for you. Now look what we see around the throne.

There's a floor, it says round about the throne with four and 20 seats and elders sitting upon them. And then it says there were also, verse six, round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. First like a lion, second like a calf or an ox, third like a man and the fourth like a flying eagle.

Now this is all very mysterious, isn't it? The rabbis used to say in the Jewish writings that there were four supreme orders in the world. There was man, birds, animals and tame animals and wild animals. And amongst the man was the supreme of all created beings.

The eagle was the supreme among the birds. The ox was the supreme or the bull was supreme among the cultivated animals and the lion was the supreme among the wild animals. And these four creatures here symbolize all that is great in God's creation.

In fact, they represent God's creation and his supreme power over it. Now what the Jews call the cherubim. And they stand very close to God, guarding his throne in the vision.

They lead the worship of heaven and they carry out the great purposes of God. Because it's they who give the book to the Lamb. And it's they who cause the seals of judgment to be broken.

They're great mysterious beings. If I may define them, they represent God's overwhelming might to do what he likes in the earth. And their hymn of worship bears witness to God's right to do what he likes.

To create or to destroy. He is the creator and the sustainer of all things and by God's will alone things exist and continue. That's what these beasts say.

They say in verse 8, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty which was and is and is to come and when these living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne then everything falls down before the throne. They're like the four that Ezekiel saw in his vision. Also with these four faces.

You see they represent every aspect of creation. The man, the eagle, the ox, the lion. All in strength but all giving honor and glory to God.

The whole of creation submits to the creator. And the great song of praise in verse 11 is that God is worthy because all things were created by him. Then there's the four and twenty elders.

A thing that frightened the Presbyterian minister. He said he didn't want to go to heaven because there were four and twenty elders there. I don't know about deacons.

But what are the four and twenty elders? Well it's twelve in the old, twelve in the new. The church of the Old Testament and the New Testament are represented here. Don't forget ultimately that church is one.

Old Testament and new. The church has the first place in heaven. They are right around the throne.

Isn't that wonderful? Because that church of the Old Testament was the bride of Jehovah. The church of the New Testament is the bride of the Lamb. You have your bride right next to you.

Now look what happens before this throne. It is worship and worship and more worship. They worship before this throne.

These are two great chapters of worship. Worship is knowing and declaring the worth of God. It's defined here in verse nine, giving glory and honor and thanks.

Glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne. It's called your falling down to a door. It's called your casting out crowns before him.

In other words, worship is submitting your whole being to the object of worship. It is acknowledging who God is and what he is. Notice these living creatures, verse eight, are very deeply aware in their worship of the holiness of God.

They say holy, holy, holy. They're conscious of the almightiness of God. Lord God Almighty.

Do you know that that term is one of the first that is used about God in the Bible? Before the name Jehovah was ever given, God revealed himself to Abraham as El Shaddai. Lord God Almighty. El Shaddai.

And that's the term that's particularly used in the book of the Revelation about God. The Lord God Almighty. It means, El Shaddai means the God who has everything in himself and from whom everything comes and therefore who has the power to create anything and to destroy anything and no one dare say a word about it because it all came from God and it all belongs to God.

He has power to create and power to destroy. And it is this that motivates their worship in chapter four. It is this that God is worthy because he had everything in himself to begin with and he has created all things out for himself and it's for his pleasure.

Verse 11. Worthy are thou because you have created everything and for your pleasure they are and were created. You know we need to get hold of this.

Things exist, says this chapter, for God's pleasure. Not for our pleasure. That's where man has gone hopelessly wrong.

He thinks everything's for his pleasure. Don't you think like that? I do. I think this is a lovely day.

It's giving me pleasure. This is a lovely car. It's giving me pleasure.

This is a beautiful garden. It gives me pleasure. And we're always living getting pleasure for ourselves.

God didn't create things just for our pleasure. He created them for his pleasure. And when we take away that which is for the pleasure of God and we only look on it and use it for the pleasure of ourselves we have perverted the whole purpose of creation.

And this is what is the beginning of sin. You see when Adam looked at the apple or the fruit when Eve looked at the fruit and she saw it was, think, something good to eat and pleasure to the eyes. Something for her pleasure.

Instead of saying now what is God's pleasure? God's pleasure is that I should not touch this. Makes a world of difference in our life when we stop thinking of things as for our pleasure and we see that things

only exist ultimately for God's pleasure. And we will only get the fullest pleasure out of things as we see them and we use them and we have them for God's pleasure.

And that's what causes worship here. They see the glory of the creator who has created all things for his pleasure. Now the Old Testament saints had always known about the throne of God as we've already said and therefore nothing of this would have been strange.

A Jew would have read this chapter and he said amen to every word of it. That the great Jehovah was God Almighty in the throne of the universe, yes. They also knew about a scroll or a book in God's hands because Ezekiel had written about that.

He said he saw a scroll in the hand of God and it was written on inside and outside and full of woes and judgments and so on. And they knew that there was a book that was the book of God's purposes God's secret destiny for the world. But here in chapter 5 when he begins he sees this book and the angel is asking who's worthy to open this book or to loose it.

That's the question. Oh the book's there all right. The people of God knew that God was Almighty and that he had purposes for the world but the question is who can understand these purposes and who can open them and loose them.

Who is there who can not only disclose the plan of God but also put it into motion, bring it to pass? There's no one. Not an angel in heaven, not a man on earth. None of the great dictators or thinkers, no Caesar, no Alexander, no Charlemagne, no Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, the lot.

There is nobody who really knows the purposes of God but more than that can handle them. And bring them to pass. Oh some of these people have been cogs as it were in God's machine.

They've been instruments God's used for his purpose at that time. The Bible tells us this. But no one is worthy to handle all the purposes of God.

John weeps and the angel says don't weep. There's someone worthy. It's the Lamb, only the Lamb.

So let's look a moment at the Lamb in the throne. To the amazement of John he's told to look. The lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed it says, verse 5. And he looks to see a lion, something powerful, mighty.

The lion of the tribe of Judah of course you remember was the symbol of the Messiah. It was a symbol of the tribe of Judah from whom the Messiah was to come. So he's in a sense saying the Messiah who was promised, the great king is the one who is able to handle the purposes of God.

And he looks to see this Messiah, this lion and he sees a little lamb. It's in the diminutive, a little lamb. And what's more to the little lamb is that it's been slaughtered.

What a sight. Does he see an actual lamb looking as though he'd been slaughtered? No, it's a symbol. What he sees is he sees Christ who is the Lamb of God in all his purity and his lowliness and his brokenness and meekness and his willingness to die.

He's the slaughtered Lamb. Now you may think that the picture of the Lamb in Revelation is always the idea of the meekness and the lowliness. You think of the Lamb.

He's led as a lamb to the slaughter and he opens not his mouth and so on. But the Jews had another idea of the Lamb. It's interesting in some of the rabbinic writings, particularly the apocryphal books, they talked about leaders as horned lambs.

Horned lambs. And there was this idea that the lamb with horns is not the symbol of weakness. But the symbol of mighty power.

And when the word lamb is used in the book of the Revelation, it is always the idea of the power of Christ. The mighty power. And so he sees one who is though he's been slaughtered in weakness.

He is here the lamb who has seven horns and seven eyes. Perfect power. Perfect wisdom.

He knows everything. He's in control of everything. And he is the only one who's able to take the scroll and break the seals.

Now here is an interpretation of the death of Christ that is profound. It goes beyond a great deal else we find, even in some parts of the New Testament. It is this.

Listen carefully. Christ came to this world not only to show us the mind and will of God, but in his death and resurrection he is the only one in whom that mind and will of God are perfectly obeyed, perfectly fulfilled, perfectly taken hold of, and released in history to be brought finally to their realization. He takes the book of God's purposes and he opens the seals of them.

Christ crucified and risen is the power, the agent, who is to determine the course of things and their fate in history. No dictator, no philosopher. Christ and Christ alone.

This is the message of this. And he will do this right away through to the final encounter between himself and the Antichrist's powers. The Lamb is the symbol of ultimate power.

He is, as 1 Corinthians 1 says, Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. And you notice this too. That when he releases the seals, we shall see this evening, it is as though from the cross of Calvary there not only is released mercy for sinners to be saved and grace to redeem men, but there is also from the cross of Christ to release judgments as never before.

There is a judgmental aspect in the cross as well as a redemptive. The cross means judgment to men who do not repent. And so there are these two streams that are seen in these seals.

The mercy for those who can be saved, who repent. Judgment and more judgment for those who will not repent. The Lamb is the symbol of power.

But let's remember this, that it is a Lamb. It is a Lamb. That within the great power of Christ there is humility and meekness and grace and mercy and love.

It's always been there. That within the law was grace. And before judgment was love.

And within power there is humility. And that is what God is like. And this is why he is the only one God can entrust with the seals of his purposes.

Because he's the only one that's ever lived who is fit to handle the purposes of God. Who can be trusted as someone said in prayer this morning. Who is meek and lowly and perfect in understanding.

So praise God this morning for the Lamb in the throne. And lastly the worship of the Lamb in the throne. Chapter 5 as chapter 4 is a chapter of worship.

In chapter 4 they're worshipping God the creator who made all things for his pleasure. But what God has made for his pleasure has gone wrong. It's fallen.

It's gone down the drain as it were of iniquity. Many have rebelled against God's throne. And the slaughtering of the Lamb is the evidence of that rebellion.

They took him by wicked hands and crucified and slew him. But by his sacrifice on the cross he has redeemed out of every kindred and trident nation by his blood people out of that fallen condition. We sang a little chorus this morning in our prayer meeting.

Worthy is the Lamb who died in awesome grief. Worthy is the Lamb who saved the dying thief. Worthy is the Lamb who made up for our fall.

That's it. He's made up for our fall. You see God as creator did something great.

But God as redeemer did something far greater. In order to create a world God had only to speak and it was done. But to redeem a world God had to suffer all the debts of what human sin had done.

Creation was a command. Redemption was a sacrifice. In creation God called out of nothing a world that was going to fall and corrupt.

But in redemption God called out of the ruins of that corruption a new world and a new creation which would never fall and never be corrupt. It's a far greater thing. That's why the worship of chapter 5 is different from the worship of chapter 4. In chapter 4 they worship God for his creative power.

In chapter 5 they worship God for his redeeming love showed through Christ. An old hymn in one of the hymn books that speaks about the singing that's up in heaven and the chorus goes like this. Holy, holy, holy is what the angels sing and I shall one day join them, make the courts of heaven ring.

But when they sing redemption story, when I sing redemption story they will fold their wings. For angels never knew the joy that my salvation brings. See, angels can worship God for his creative power, but it's only the redeemed who can worship him for his redemptive power.

I wonder if you've ever heard in some quiet morning, when you've woken up a little earlier than usual, you hear a little bird begin to pipe out from the garden, an early song, just a tiny little piping noise. And presently another one joins and then another and another and another and the blackbirds and the thrushes and all the others come in and presently the whole of the wood around you is reverberating with a glorious song of praise for a new morning that's begun. And if you were to go up there you'd hear the birds as far as your ear could possibly catch the sounds, singing in glorious harmony.

Why? Because the dawn has come. That's how the worship begins here. So you see the lamb taking the seals of the book in his hands.

A little group around the throne begin to praise. Begin to say, worthy is the lamb, thou art worthy. The new song.

A song that we already sing here. We sung it this morning, haven't we? Just a little circle of us. But that circle grows wider and wider.

Many angels join in. Ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of thousands. Oh, they'll join us even though they've never experienced it.

Because he's their lord and saviour too. And verse 13, every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea and all that are in them, I heard saying, blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sits upon the throne unto the lamb forever and ever. I just can't conceive of that.

I don't know how it's going to be. I only know that in the ultimate, in the great final situation, when satan has been bound and hell has been subdued and cast into the lake of fire, this will be true. That the universe will sound with the praises of the Lord God Almighty for whom all things were made and for the lamb by whom they have been redeemed.

Now this may sound grandiose and far-reaching, but let us see it in our own hearts this morning. Is the throne of God there in your heart? Do you worship him because everything is for his pleasure? Today the Lord say you're going to go out and you're going to enjoy everything for the pleasure of God. You're going to submit everything for his pleasure.

And is the lamb in the throne? Are you seeing Jesus knowing his redeeming power in your life? And are the ever-widening circles of your own life and experience adoring the lamb and giving praise to him? What a life! To live in the experience of Revelation chapter four and Revelation chapter five. May we go out this morning every one of us with a harp in our hand of praise and a vial of prayer and a new song in our heart to our precious Jesus. Amen.

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