

The Worth of Christ (Part 1)

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I'm always afraid of an introduction like that where anything good is said about me, lest God need to prove to you that none of it's true. We trust He won't have to do that tonight. I have what is really in some ways an introductory message tonight, so it's not going to be quite as long as some of the others. So we're going to take some time here to read actually two short chapters of Scripture. Revelation 4 and Revelation 5. And so let's read through these now.

"After these things, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.' Immediately, I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne, and He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardis in appearance, and there was a rainbow around the throne like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were 24 thrones and upon the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads. And from the throne proceeds flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder."

I remember one time years ago I was reading through the book of Revelation. There's a lot of thunder. And thunder uttering its voice and speaking and so on. We had a terrific lightning storm there in Kirksville at that time, and it brought home to me a little bit of the reality of what it's like when thunder utters its voice. And here at this throne, lightning flashes are going out and thunder's coming from this throne.

Verse 5, "And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. And before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass like crystal. And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings are full of eyes around and within. And day and night they do not cease to say 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.'

And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed and were created.' And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book, written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. I saw a strong angel proclaim with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping. Behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.'

And I saw between the throne with the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb standing as if slain." I don't know what that means - "standing as if slain." "Having seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And He came and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne." That's a fearsome thing, isn't it? "And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song saying, 'Worthy art Thou to take the book and to break its seals, for Thou was slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God. And they will reign upon the earth.' And I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders and the number of them (these angels) was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands..." That's millions. Millions of angels. "Saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea and all things in them, I heard say, 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped."

As the Lord wills, I'd like to speak to you these days on the subject of the worthiness of God. The elders here have given us leeway - they kind of set a theme, but they gave us leeway to speak on anything that it seemed that the Lord was leading us to. And this is all I have. I need your prayers. It's a worthy theme to speak on the worthiness of God, but I'm certainly not worthy to speak on it. The worthiness of God. In these chapters, and I've read them, because they give us a glimpse of just how worthy God is. In these chapters, we see the Triune God described in glorious symbolic language surrounded by millions and millions of worshipers declaring how worthy He is. God the Father's described in v. 2-6 of chapter 4. And He's seated on a great throne with flashes of lightning and peals of thunder and seas of glass and emerald rainbows and living creatures. God the Son is described in chapter 5, verses 5 and 6 and following as a great Lion. And once this Lion is introduced, we turn to look at Him and we see a Lamb standing as if slain. And then God the Holy Spirit appears in chapter 4:5 as these seven mysterious lamps of fire. And in chapter 5:6, He appears as the seven eyes of the Lamb which are the seven spirits of God which are sent out into all the earth. And then we see God's creation from the very highest to the very lowest worshiping prostrate before this worthy triune God.

So I want to begin by asking a question: Just how worthy is God? How worthy is God? And we can see the answer just by pronouncing the word a little differently. How worth-y is God? That's where the word worthy comes from. It has the word "worth" in it. How much is God worth? The word "worthy" literally means having worth, value, or merit. So how much is God worth? Is He worth a million dollars? How much is God worth? There was a time when the Holy Spirit was moving in power there in New England and Christ was very real and near to various ones. And Sarah Edwards was going through such a time as that, and one of her neighbors was visiting with her and said this: "One smile from Christ is worth a thousand million pounds." "One smile from Christ is worth a thousand million pounds." And this is what she says, "The words affected me exceedingly and in a manner which I cannot express. I had a strong sense of the

infinite worth of Christ's approval and love and at the same time of the grossness of the comparison. It only astonished me that anyone could compare a smile of Christ to any earthly treasure." A thousand million pounds? She said how could you think of something so base? She said, "Towards night I had a deep sense of the awful greatness of God and felt with what humility and reverence we ought to behave ourselves before Him." It only astonished me, she said. "Well, if a smile of Christ is of infinite worth, how much worth is Christ Himself?" How much is God worth? Well, He's of infinite worth. He is infinitely worthy. So that means that you take the entire created order and stack it all together at once and multiply it by a million times and put it in the balance against God - it's nothing and less than nothing. There is nothing whatsoever of comparison because God is infinitely worthy.

Now, this one fact affects literally everything in life. And I hope that we'll see this in a measure during the next few days, but notice this: God's infinite worthiness is described in these two chapters that we've read in terms of three songs, or you might say three outpourings of worship.

The first one might be called the song of God's being. Now notice this in v. 8-9 of chapter 4. It says, "The four living creatures each one of them having six wings are full of eyes around and within and day and night they do not cease to say 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty.'" Day and night, they don't cease. Twenty-four seven. All the time. Constantly. "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.' And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne..." Now this is what's going on: Glory, honor, and thanks. And these outpourings of worship have to do with God's being.

Now, I want us to notice two things here. First of all, this outpouring of worship comes from those who are themselves sinless. They've never committed one sin. And yet, they are around the throne all the time constantly saying, "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Why is that? Because even though they have not committed even one sin, He is so much more holy than they are that they worship Him for His holiness. Now how in the world can that be? They have never committed a sin and yet God is infinitely more holy than they are. Well, because you know holiness has to do with the idea of separateness or separation. (You had) holy vessels in the Old Testament. You had pots and pans and everything that were called holy. They had no moral character in themselves but they had been set apart from common use, set apart for God. They were separated out from everything else. That's the idea of holiness.

I think in the human realm, we can see this a little bit. I like to think about Babe Ruth. You know, Babe Ruth's jersey - he was number 3 - and his number was set apart. Nobody who comes to that team and wants to put on his jersey and say I'd like to be number 3 - you can't be number 3. You can't be number 3? Why's that? Because that's holy. That's been set apart by this man's incredible performance, you see. Well, that's in the realm of sports. I guess they did that with Michael Jordan too, didn't they? 23 - that's set apart. Nobody else gets that. If you want to make it a little closer, you could think in terms of the way things have been hallowed like Lincoln said, that no one can hallow this ground any more than what these guys have by spilling their blood. And when we think to stand on the spot where people have died so that we could have liberty, that's holy ground in some sense.

Take it a little bit further. I know some of you probably have read about the Anabaptists and some of the things they suffered. One of the things that happened was that the people, when they were being burned at the stake were preaching. And so many people were converted through the preaching that they got a thing called a tongue screw. And it's a piece of metal - maybe you've seen pictures of it. They screw that on their tongue - a big chunk of metal on their tongue, so that they couldn't preach. That shows the power of the Gospel, doesn't it? And so they screw that on their tongue and after their bodies were burned to ashes, their relatives would retrieve that tongue screw. And they'd pass it down through the family. Now imagine being a wife or being a son who your dad died in the flames wearing that tongue screw. That thing takes on a different meaning. You don't toss it around and play with it. There's something holy about it.

Now these are weak analogies in the human realm, but you see, holiness is the idea of separation. God is utterly separate. He's infinitely separate from us. He's the Creator. We are creatures. If I could just get across a little bit what a different realm God is in. He doesn't have to exert Himself in order to be. They say that shrews are so voracious that if you put two shrews in a jar overnight, in the morning, you'll only have one shrew. The reason is that they've got to eat constantly just to stay alive. And beloved, that's the way we are. My wife and I were talking about this on the way down. Basically, we're all like people on a ventilator. We've got to be kept going all the time from power from the outside.

But what kind of Being is this who lives on His own power from the inside? Who has no effort whatsoever to be? He just is. You see, He's in a different realm entirely than mankind. He is the self-existent One. He's infinitely set apart. You see, when we talk about the Creator-creature distinction, we're not talking about something quantitative. We're not saying God's just a lot, lot, lot bigger than we are. No, we're talking about something qualitative. He's in a different realm entirely. He is just as high above the archangel as He is above the earthworm. As you go up, you know, I used to study math and we'd make a very stupid statement. They've stopped making that now. They're much more careful, but we used to say, well, as that gets smaller, the value of that thing goes to infinity. It goes to infinity. Well, that's a nonsense statement because once you get out there as far as you are, you've still got that much farther to go. I mean, when you even say the word "infinity" in your mind you draw a circle around it. You can't do that. You can picture a line, but you can't picture a line that has no end on either end. You can't picture that. God is infinitely above us. That means He's holy in an absolute way. And here's these sinless creatures - no telling what kind of power they had in relation to us - but there's an infinite gulf between them and the Creator. And so they can't do anything but say, "Holy, holy, holy... holy, holy, holy." He's infinitely separate.

Now notice this too, that this outpouring of worship mentions nothing about anything God has done or may do. The outpouring of worship relates to who He is in Himself. They're not thanking God for benefits they've received from Him. They're just worshiping Him for who He is in Himself apart from anything that He's ever done. And I think this is an amazing phrase here where it says in verse 9, "The living creatures give glory and honor and thanks..." They're thanking Him for being who He is. Well, God being God can't be anything but who He is. But who are you going to thank if you don't thank Him? (incomplete thought) Isn't this a fearful thing? You're before God - and have you ever felt this way? If you're a Christian, you have. God,

I thank You, I thank You, thank You for being who You are! I'm so thankful that You are who You are. I worship You for being who You are. Apart from anything You do for anybody. That has to do with God's being. He's worthy! He would be worthy if He had not ever created anything - He would be worthy.

But there's a second song here. And that's the song of God's creation. And that comes in v. 10-11 of chapter 4. The 24 elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, "Worthy art Thou our Lord and our God to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou didst create all things and because of Thy will they existed and were created." Now think of this. We're talking about worthiness. He says worthy. They say worthy right there in v. 11 don't they? Worthy art Thou because You created. The worthiness of God, beloved, in terms of His creation. The one who spoke by an act of the will spoke all things into existence out of nothing. If there was some way that we could just stand outside of everything and watch it happen - God speaks everything into existence out of nothing, it would be reason to fall down before Him. It would show His infinite worthiness of worship because He's the Creator of all things. You know, one theologian said, well, because the universe is not infinite it displays God's power, but it doesn't display His infinite power. Right? You could say, well, look, suppose God had just created this desk. It would display His power, but it wouldn't display His infinite power.

But I'd like to ask you a question. How much power does it take to call this desk into existence out of nothing? If you don't think that's infinite power, I don't know what it would be. You see, He spoke. He called things into being. He called them into being by speaking; by an act of the will. Now, not only did He call this desk into existence, but He called the entire universe into existence a 15 billion light year radius. They look at this and they worship. And I say, if somehow you could get outside of everything and see it happen, you would have infinite reason to worship such a God. But the fact is, we are part of what He created. We ourselves were spoken into existence by Him. Now you have even more reason - if there could be even more reason to worship Him because you owe literally everything to Him. You exist! You would not exist, you would not be here apart from God speaking you into existence. How much worship do you owe a God that spoke you into existence? You owe your being to Him, not to mention your well-being. The fact you've got clothes on, you've got your sanity, and whatever degree of health you have, you owe Him everything - literally everything. So I say here again, it's almost like can you pile any more on this? He's infinitely worthy just for who He is. But how much more worthy is He of the worship of those whom He has called out of nothingness into existence? I mean, you can't be any more worthy of worship than by your creatures, you see. We owe Him literally everything. And so how much more is He worthy of all glory, honor, and worship from those whom He has called into existence?

But there's a third song here, isn't there? V. 8-12 of chapter 5. And this is a song of God's redemption. Not only is God infinitely worthy because of His own being and because He is the Creator as opposed to the creation, but He's infinitely worthy because of this glorious redemption that He has accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice verses 11 and 12. "I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was myriads of myriads." Now we're talking about the angels here. "And thousands of thousands." Millions of angels singing here. Brother Michael mentioned

this thing of the angels watching with awe and wonder as the second Person of the Trinity comes down, down, down - the infinite, holy One comes down to earth and is born in a stable. And they watch Him grow up as a little boy working in a carpenter's shop. And they see Him allow His creatures to spit on Him and mock Him. And they watch Him as He stumbles under the cross and somebody helps Him carry that cross. And they watch Him as He dies on the cross for those sinners. And they look at this and they fall down and worship Him for what He's doing. They fall prostrate just for what they've seen Him do.

Now beloved, what I want to get at is this: Those angels don't "get anything" out of Him doing that. He's worthy of worship whether you end up going to hell in the end, He's still worthy of worship for what He's done. If you look at what He did on the cross, if you look at the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, He owes no one anything! He doesn't need to save anybody. Everybody in this world ought to bow down before Him and worship Him just because of what He's done whether you get anything out of it or not. He's worthy of worship for that act that He did of redemption. Well, if that's true in itself, then again, pile infinities on infinities. How much is He worthy of our worship who have benefited from this redemption? If the angels are worshiping Him and they get nothing out of it in terms of redemption, how much more ought we who have been cleansed by His blood, how much do we owe Him? How worthy is He of our worship? He's infinitely worthy. Time over time over time. He deserves to die and the death angel's coming in and He interposes with His blood on the doorposts, and while we hear the cries going up from the Egyptian households, we're still alive! Don't you think you ought to fall down before Him and worship Him? You see how it's just piled upon - it's infinite. It's not that God's worthy - He's infinitely worthy. He really is infinitely worthy.

Now these chapters end very fittingly then in verses 13 and 14 with the entire created order worshiping the Triune God for the totality of His person and His works. I haven't said anything up to this point about this, but I'm sure many of you realize that the word "worship" comes from this same word: "worth." Worth-ship. It's literally acknowledging, declaring the worth of the one you are worth-shiping. And beloved, He is worthy. Now, in light of God's infinite worthiness, we should not be surprised to find that this has implications that permeate literally everything. That's what we're going to be looking at, Lord willing, in the next few days. That's what we would expect. After all, God isn't one among many. He's the center and the foundation of everything. And when He moves, everything moves.

So, what are some of the implications of the infinite worthiness of God? I just want to mention one tonight before we close. We'll be looking at several of these, Lord willing, but tonight, I just want us to consider one.

First implication of the infinite worthiness of God is: What is the reason that God does what He does? Or you might say, what is the chief end of God's actions? Why does He do what He does? And the chief end of God's actions is God Himself. Because He's infinitely worthy, it would be wrong, shall we say; it would be irrational, it would be impossible for Him to center on anything as being the ultimate worth except Himself. So the purpose for His actions is always to glorify Himself first and foremost. The reason He does anything is to glorify Himself. The chief end of all God's acts is to glorify Himself, to do what pleases Him and glorifies Him. Why did God create the world? He created it for His own glory. Why did He permit the fall? For His own

glory. Why does He choose to save some? For His own glory. Why does He choose to leave some in their sins? For His own glory. Everything He does.

Now what's God's glory? It's the manifestation of His excellencies. He creates the world to manifest His excellencies. He saves people in order to manifest His excellencies. He judges unrepentant sinners in order to manifest His excellencies. Now the Bible is full of these things and I'm not going to take the time. I actually have a lot of Scriptures that I could give you. I'll just give a few. I want to just look at three areas and just mention some Scriptures so you'll know that I'm not just saying these things.

First of all, in the area of creation, why did God create? Well, let me give you some verses. Colossians 1:16-17. "All things have been created by Him and for Him." All things were created for Him. Now what does it mean, "for Him"? In order to meet some need that He has? No, He doesn't have any needs. Everything that is created is created for His good pleasure; in order to glorify Him, to bring glory to Him. Romans 11:36, "From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things." So all things not only came from Him and through Him, but they go back to Him. They're for His glory, for His pleasure. They exist for Him. Paul ends that in Romans 11, "To Him be the glory forever and ever." Psalm 19:1, "The heavens are telling the glory of God." (incomplete thought) They're manifesting His excellencies. Isn't that true? They do that all the time. They're doing what they were created to do. Daily, they do what they were created to do. Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." He created it to be full of His glory. He created the universe. Why would God create a universe that has a 15 billion light year radius? Why would He create such a big - I mean, He could have had it half that big or a third that big or a tenth, or a millionth that big. It would have still been big. But He wanted us to get some idea that He's an infinite God. You know, get a little bit of a glimpse of how big He is and I'm sure we haven't got to the end of it. The whole earth is full of His glory. That is, even the snowflakes and the spring flowers and all those things. They're manifesting His excellencies.

Secondly in the area of salvation. Why does God graciously save people? Well, just a few verses on this. Not first of all for their own sake, but for His own glory. Isaiah 43:6-7, "Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name and whom I have created for My glory." That's what happens when a person becomes a Christian. God creates someone as a Christian for His glory. Isaiah 44:23, "Shout for joy, O heavens, for the Lord has done it. Shout joyfully, you lower parts of the earth, break forth into a shout of joy, you mountains, O forests and every tree in them, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob and in Israel He shows forth His glory." He shows forth His glory. Isaiah 61:3. He talks about the fact that we'll be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified. In Ephesians 1 going right down through there, "to the praise of the glory of His grace." Over and over. Romans 9:23, "...In order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory." Wonderful things!

Why does God not cast us off and destroy us once we are converted? Well, for His own glory. Let me just read you one here out of Ezekiel 20. Ezekiel 20:13-14. He says, "The house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes, and they rejected My ordinances by which if man observes them, he will live. And My sabbaths they greatly profaned and then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness to annihilate them.

But I acted for the sake of My name that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations before whose sight I have brought them out." Now if He did that for Israel in the Old Testament, how much more will He do that for us? He says My name's tied up in you. I mean, that's why I've put up with you as long as I have. My name, My glory is tied up in you. Remember Ezekiel 36 - "Not for your sake, O Israel, not for your sake. For My own name's sake..." Listen to what the Psalmist prays in Psalm 79:9. "Help us, O God of our salvation!" Well, why should I? "For the glory of Thy name... and deliver us and forgive our sins for Thy name's sake." Isn't that amazing? We can even pray that way as Christians. Even when you've got sins that have got to be taken care of and you've got to be delivered. And when you need help. Help us, for the glory of Thy name. Do you realize God gets glory by helping miserable people like us? I mean, it's amazing!

Thirdly in the area of judgment. Why does God bring judgment upon the wicked? For His own glory. Ezekiel 28:22, "Thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I shall be glorified in your midst. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I execute judgments in her and I shall manifest My holiness in her." It's a terrible thing when God has to glorify Himself in that way by pouring out judgment and manifesting His holiness. One more, Romans 9:17, the Scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very purpose, I raised you up, that I might show My power in you and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth. Here's this man and his pomp. And God says I just raised you up so that I could be glorified by putting you down. I mean, it takes a lot of the wind out of the sails of earthly rulers, doesn't it. I mean, Pharaoh thought he was God. He was the most powerful man in the world. God says I'm the one that raised you up. "What if God although willing to demonstrate (this is verse 22 of Romans 9), willing to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known." You see, manifesting. Manifesting. The manifestation of His excellencies. His wrath - that's one of His excellencies?

Yes it is. A God without wrath would be a wicked God. Anyone who can see, even to see the atrocities that we've seen in our lives. I stood there at the ovens in Dachau. I've been there a couple times. I don't know how many people died there, but at Auschwitz they said 16,000 pounds of women's hair. Suppose a god could look at that and just say it doesn't matter. You see, the wrath of God - that's one of His glorious excellencies. He hates wickedness. He is so pure and holy and good that He despises and loathes - His wrath burns against wickedness. So he says God is willing to show His wrath and make His power known. He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. Why? That He might make known the riches of His glory on vessels of mercy which He afore prepared unto glory. I better quit. I'm getting my words mixed up here. And I'm ready to quit.

In closing, you understand that for a man to seek his own glory is a selfish and a low thing, but because God is infinitely worthy, for Him to act for His own glory is the only reasonable and right thing for Him to do. And we shouldn't think of this in some sort of contrived and unnatural way, like God's got to think through what am I going to do now? I want to do something for My own glory. That's not the way it is. God acting for His own glory is just God being Himself. It's just God doing what comes naturally. What could bring more glory to God than for God to just be who He is? And so this is not some kind of contrived thing? And that's why you can say, why does God save His people? He saves them for His own glory. You can also say He saves them because of the great love with which He loved them. They're not in

contradiction at all. It's just God being who He is. He really does love His people. It's not some cold mechanical thing: "I think I'll save them. I don't really want to, but because of My glory, it would bring more glory..." That isn't it. Because of His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, He raised us up. And you can say just as well He saved them according to His great wisdom. You see, every one of those things is true. God is one. And there's perfect harmony within Himself. So the most glorious display of God's glory is just God being Himself.

But we've got to be clear on this. The universe does not revolve around man. I mean, if anything ought to be clear from just what we've looked at so far is that this little rebellious defiled speck of dust, finer than the dust in the balances that's called man is not the center of reality. And that, as I said, the fact that God is God or that God is infinitely worthy permeates all of reality. And Lord willing, that's what we're going to be looking at in the next session.