

Revelation 4:2-11—The Throne Room of God in Heaven

Revelation 4:1-11 NKJV

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³ And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵ And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

⁶ Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸ The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

**“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”**

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

**¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honour and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.”**

Revision—The Rapture and overview

Over the last two weeks, we saw that Chapter 4 verses 1 and 2 are a turning point in the book of Revelation. Chapter 4 verse 1 actually showed the church going extraterrestrial, because that is a picture of what the rapture is going to be like. It is a prelude, a preview of coming attractions. John the apostle was given this experience to show us what we are going to experience.

I spent the last 2 weeks looking at what the resurrection is and why we need a new body, what the rapture is, and scriptural reasons why the rapture must happen before the tribulation starts.

In Revelation 4 through 19 we have a section mainly concerned with God’s judgment upon the world preceding Jesus’ earthly reign, the period known as the “Messianic Woes” or the “Great Tribulation,” which happens after the rapture of the church.

During the tribulation, God’s judgments are announced by a seven-sealed scroll, seven trumpets, seven signs, and seven bowls that pour out God’s wrath, and then the end comes, Jesus comes back to earth to rule and reign.

Revelation chapter four introduces us to the place judgment comes from, which is God’s throne in heaven.

The Throne Room of God in Heaven

So now we come to Revelation chapter 4 verse 2. Chapters 2 and 3 gave a panoramic view of the church age, showing the seven stages that the church would go through. But now we come to “after these things,” *meta tauta*. The scene shifts from earth to heaven. And that’s the thing about the word of God, it moves from the things that are familiar to us on earth, with equal ease to things of heaven. It shows us what heaven is going to be like. So let’s take a look at verse 2. We’ll start reading from verse 1.

Revelation 4:1-2 NKJV

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

When Jesus said, “Come up here, and I will show you what will happen after these things,” instantly, at the voice of the Lord, as soon as Jesus gave the command, John was transformed or translated from the isle of Patmos to Heaven. And he begins to describe to us, in the best way he can, what he saw.

v 2 **I was in the Spirit:** What does this mean? John already said he was *in the Spirit* at Revelation 1:10. This was yet a different experience, as John came to heaven and a heavenly perspective. John here is completely enveloped by the Spirit, and translated both to a different location and a different point in time. Most likely, John was taken outside of time, into eternity, from where you can see everything at once. The Holy Spirit also gave John an understanding of what he was to see and what he was to say.

v 2 **A throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne:** It’s important that we realise that in Heaven, everything centres around the throne of God. And so that’s the first thing that John saw — the throne of God, standing in the centre of heaven. The book of Revelation, like no other book of the bible, shows that everything emanates from God’s throne. Everything is centred around who sits on that throne and His power and His will.

God’s throne is **set** or *planted*. It isn’t going anywhere and it isn’t going to change. This is our security. No matter how unstable things may appear down here on earth, we know that God is in control, that He loves us, and that He will only allow those things to happen to us that will cause us to become more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29).

Revelation 4:3 NKJV

And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

Now notice that John doesn’t try to explain the form of God, or the shape of God. That’s something that would be impossible for him to communicate. John knew that it was God the Father sitting on the throne. But he doesn’t try to explain Him in human terms. Instead, what he does, is seek to explain God’s overwhelming glory and spender. John did this by using various symbols to explain the tremendous impact of the Father’s person and His character.

Firstly, John uses jewels to approximate God's divine essence, that is God's divine character. John first describes God as a jasper stone. This is a diamond. So John is telling us that seeing God on the throne was like seeing a multifaceted, sparkling diamond. And emanating from it was a white light that sparkled from within and it was overwhelming.

What do you think this symbolises? God's absolute righteousness, His perfect character. So John is using this symbol to show us what it was like to be confronted with the flawless character of God.

v 3 **A Sardis stone:** This is a ruby. Rubies are red. Again this ruby is multifaceted, and is glowing from within, a beautiful red light emanating from it. What do you think this symbolises? The blood of Jesus Christ.

What is the significance of the white representing righteousness and the red representing the blood of Jesus being together? Divine justice was fully satisfied by the blood of Jesus, making it possible for sinful man to be forgiven and stand in the presence of God. So even the precious stones symbolise the work of Jesus Christ and His sacrificial and substitutionary death in our place.

v 3 **And there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald:** What do you think the rainbow represents? Where did we first hear about the rainbow? It was after the flood. The rainbow is His sign of His covenant, that He would never again destroy life on this earth with water. And, that as long as the earth stood, there would continue to be the four seasons and things of ecology that sustain life. In other words, although we are damaging the ecology of the planet, God won't let us destroy it to the point where we can't survive. This planet will always be able to sustain life as long as man is living on it. That is God's promise to us.

So we have this emerald glowing green from within as a symbol of what? Of life. And it's to remind us that God is the source of life and everything.

Why is God revealing these things to us? Because what God is about to reveal to us in the next few verses will show us that He wants us to know that, even in the midst of terrible judgement (as this book predicts will come), that there will be mercy before judgement, and that even in the midst of judgement. God love to show mercy to those who will turn to Him. Isn't that exciting. What an awesome God we serve. And I love the book of Revelation because it focuses on God. It focuses on His character.

Who are the 24 elders?

Revelation 4:4 NKJV

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

The bible has a symbology associated with numbers. We know what certain numbers mean because of the way they are used over and over again in the bible. For example, 7 is the number of perfection or completeness. 3 is the number of perfect union — as seen in the trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 12 is the number of government — 12 apostles, 12 tribes of Israel. It's used in connection with government.

So what does the number 24 represent? Priests! In Deuteronomy and Leviticus and 1 Chronicles 24, the priests were always divided into 24 courses or groups or rotations.

Both Revelation 1:6 and 1 Peter 2:9 tell us that we, the church are God's priests and kings. As priests we represent God to the people, and people to God.

Revelation 1:5b-6 NKJV

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 2:9 NKJV

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;

So who are these **twenty-four elders**? Commentators debate whether they are glorified human beings or angelic beings. But taking all things into consideration, I believe that the elders certainly seem to represent God's people, the church. Let's see why.

v 4 **Elders** represent the people of God— not angels. The 24 courses of the priesthood represented all the priests.

v 4 **Clothed in white robes**;

Angels are sometimes presented in white robes or garments (Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10), but saints also have white robes (Revelation 6:11, 7:9, 13–14). Why would the saints, the church, be pictured as wearing white robes? What are they a picture of? Our imputed righteousness (Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:5–18), that is the righteousness or right standing that we receive from Christ. We are in Christ. The white robes characterise the righteousness of Christ, that is clothed upon all of us who put faith in Him. It's a symbol of His righteousness that covers our sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God **in Him**.

Ephesians 4:24 NKJV

...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Philippians 3:9 NKJV

...and be found **in Him**, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Romans 4:3 NLT paraphrase

For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."

And this is the way it has always been from the beginning, no one has ever been made righteous apart from faith. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Amen! Faith is the one thing that you can do but still have done nothing. Why?

Because faith has no merit in it. Faith is receiving a gift. Those in heaven, us, will understand this very very well, as we will see as we continue on through the book.

In other words, God sees us as being perfect, as having lived a perfect life, as having kept the whole law. Why? Because Jesus did, and He transferred or imputed that righteousness, that right standing with God, to us who accept it as a gift by faith. And what did we give Jesus in return? Our sinful life, which put Jesus on the cross. Wow! Talk about unfair.

v 4 **And they had crowns of gold on their heads:** Throughout the bible, we never see angels *crowned*, but, believers will be:

1 Corinthians 9:25 NKJV

And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

2 Timothy 4:8 NKJV

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

1 Peter 5:4 NKJV

and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

What about here, what kind of crown is John seeing being worn on the 24 elders?

It's the crown of a victor in the ancient Olympic games. In other words, this is a crown for those who have won the race. A golden crown for the overcomer. This is another reason that the 24 elders can't be angels because angels didn't have to fight in the arena of this world and overcome. Remember who the overcomer is? It's us.

1 John 5:4-5 NKJV

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

So the overcomer is the believer, and this is a crown that will be given to every believer. There are many different crowns that will be given, but this one is important, because if you don't have this one you won't be there in Heaven.

v 4 **Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,**

This is a beautiful, and, for me, a humbling picture. Around God's magnificent throne are 24 lesser thrones. Redeemed, glorified man sits enthroned with Jesus. On lesser thrones, to be sure, but thrones none the less. We, the church are not only priests, but also kings. We are *joint heirs with Christ* (Romans 8:17), and we will *reign with Him* (2 Timothy 2:12). Angels never have this privilege. Humans don't deserve this privilege, but that's where we, the church, will be, alongside Jesus ruling the world.

Romans 8:17 NLT paraphrase

And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

2 Timothy 2:12 NKJV

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him....

Another hint of who the 24 elders are is in Revelation 5:9–10, where the twenty-four elders sing a song of praise to Jesus, and they cried out:

Revelation 5:9b–10 NKJV

For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

In that passage, the twenty-four elders clearly spoke as representatives of all God's people, of the great company of the redeemed. Think about it, there are more than 24 tribes, tongues and nations. These 24 elders represent the church in its entirety.

So here we are, the church in heaven, fulfilling our role as kings and priests for God. And our first priestly duty will be praying for the believers in the 7 year tribulation. And also, a priest doesn't just pray for the salvation of those who believe, a priest also prays for judgement, on those who martyr them, on those who persecute and mistreat God's people. God sent His ambassadors, the church, to the world for 2,000 years, but the world largely rejected us. Just like Israel was judged for not believing all the prophets and other messengers sent to them, so will the world be judged for not believing us, the church. Think about the persecution that the church has experienced over the last 2,000 years. We have been, are are still being killed, torched, imprisoned, beaten, and abused, just like God's Old Testament messengers were by the children of Israel. We will see this as we go through the book.

Summary of why many believe that the 24 elders represent the church in Heaven?

1. 24 is the number that represents priests. The church is a kingdom of kings and priests.
2. Elders: angels are never called elders, only people are.
3. "Clothed in white robes" represents Christ's righteousness. Every other time white robes are mentioned in revelation it is in reference to believers (both the church and tribulation saints, e.g. Revelation 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 7:13-14, 19:7-8).
4. The crowns of gold: only people are rewarded with crowns, not angels.
5. Redeemed by the blood of Christ out of every tribe, tongue... Speaking in unison, there are obviously more than 24 voices speaking here, as there are more than 24 tribes, tongues (languages) etc. Also, this means that this group of believers is primarily gentile (non-Jewish), like the church is.

The coming judgement (The 7 year Tribulation)

Revelation 4:5 NKJV

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Now notice the change here. What did we see? We saw representations of the awesome splendour of God, a representation of His righteousness, of God the Father being satisfied with the blood of Christ, a reminder that God keeps His covenant promises. But now look. As John looks at the throne in verse 5... **And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices.**

What has happened to the throne. What do you think the lightnings, thunderings and voices represent? Judgement. The throne has now changed to the throne of judgement. God remembers mercy, but now God on His throne is ready to judge an unbelieving world. The storm is coming. Again, Revelation 4 is the change from the church age, the age of grace, to the 7 year tribulation, where God judges the world.

Remember that God has withdrawn His ambassadors, the church, from the world. What does it mean when a country withdraws their ambassadors? War is coming.

v 5 **Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God:** Here we have the Holy Spirit represented visually. The Holy Spirit (the seven Spirits of God, as referred to in Revelation 1:4 and Isaiah 11:2) is represented by seven burning lamps. In other passages He is represented as a dove (Matthew 3:16) or a flame of fire (Acts 2:3). So, in the centre of heaven we have the Father and Jesus and also the Holy Spirit — the Trinity.

Revelation 4:6a NKJV

Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal.

John doesn't explain what this is or what it means. However, it could be referring to or be similar to the sea of brass in the Tabernacle in the Old Testament or the molten sea in the Temple. Both were lavers, or washstands, designed for the cleansing of the priests, and contained water used for various ceremonial rites. This may represent, as a type or picture, the sanctifying and cleansing power of the Word of God.

Revelation 4:6b-11 NKJV

And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸ The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

**“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”**

From comparison with Ezekiel 1:4–14 and 10:20–22, we understand these creatures to be *cherubim*, the spectacular angelic beings surrounding the throne of God. Satan was once one of these high angelic beings, according to Ezekiel 28:14.

What were the living creatures doing? Constantly worshipping God.

v 8 **They do not rest day or night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy”:** The cherubim constantly repeat the phrase **holy, holy, holy**. God's **holy** nature and character is declared, and emphasised with a three-time repetition.

Why do the cherubim say, “Holy, Holy, Holy”? Because God is Triune—Father, Son, and Spirit. The word “holy” means “whole”—not eroded by sin, not falling apart at the seams, not hypocritical or flawed in any way. And it is this holiness, this wholeness, which causes the cherubim to fall down in worship. God is complete. God is beautiful. It's primarily God's holiness that attracts us to Him, His perfection.

God wants us to become holy. Holiness is the most beautiful quality or characteristic that we can have. Again it means to be pure, unblemished, undefiled. He tells us, “be holy, for I am holy.”

Application: we are called Christians, which means a Christ follower. And if Christ is holy, then so should I be.

1 Peter 1:13-16 NLT paraphrase

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. ¹⁴ So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. ¹⁵ **But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy.** ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, “**You must be holy because I am holy.**”

So why bother making the effort and sacrifice it takes to live a holy life? The passage in Peter continues with the answer:

1 Peter 1:17-20 NLT paraphrase

¹⁷ And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favourites. **He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as “temporary residents.”** ¹⁸ For you know that **God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors.** And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.

comment on bold sections... what we do now, how we live our lives now matters. We will not regret giving up worldly things and going without satisfying our physical desires once we get to heaven. But we will regret it if we don’t.

However, the glorious thing is that one day, no matter how much we fail now, we will all be just as holy and pure as God is—perfect. This is the work that God is completing in us now, the work of sanctification.

v 8 **Lord God Almighty:** The cherubim declared that the **Lord God** is **Almighty**. As in Revelation 1:8, the ancient Greek word is *pantokrator*, with the idea of “the One who has His hand on everything,” that is, “**God is in control.**”

v 8 **Who was and is and is to come:** This repeats another idea from Revelation 1:8, and refers to God’s eternal Being. It translates the *thought* or *idea* behind the meaning of the name “Yahweh,” the ever present one or the great “I AM.”

Revelation 4:9-11 NKJV

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

¹¹ **“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honour and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.”**

What do you think we will be doing most in heaven? Worshipping God.

Whenever the living creatures give glory... the twenty-four elders fall down before Him: The worship of the twenty-four elders is prompted by the cherubim. Since the cherubim worship God day and night, so do the elders (that is us, the church).

v 10 **The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him:** The twenty-four elders **worship** (which means to credit worth or worthiness to) God—that is, God *alone* is worthy of receiving honour and glory. The **elders** give the credit to God for their own work and any reward they might have received for that work. They demonstrated this as they **cast their crowns before the throne**. They recognised that their worth, their worthiness belonged to God, not to themselves.

Casting down their crowns simply acted out their declaration, **You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power**. If God was worthy of the **glory and honour and power**, then *He* should get the crown. God gets all the credit.

There is also an allusion to a practice in the Roman Empire. The Emperor of Rome ruled over many lesser kings, and these kings were at times commanded to come before the Emperor and lay their crowns down before him in homage. Then he would give them back, as a demonstration that their crowns, their right to rule, their victory, came from him. “This is an allusion to the custom of prostrations in the east, and to the homage of petty kings acknowledging the supremacy of the emperor.” (Clarke)

As I mentioned earlier, the **crowns** mentioned in Revelation 4:10 are the *stephanos crowns*, the crowns of *victory*, not royalty. These are the crowns of achievement that a winning athlete would receive at the ancient Olympic Games. The **twenty-four elders**—representing all the redeemed of God—threw every achievement reward they had back to God, because they knew and proclaimed that He was **worthy ... to receive glory and honour and power**.

When we get to heaven, we will recognise that every good thing we do, that is, everything we do that is motivated by love and is according to His will, was only achieved because *God* both gave us the will and the power to do it:

Philippians 2:13 NLT paraphrase

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

All we have to do is walk in faith and receive the opportunities to serve and obey that God gives to us. Then when we get to heaven, God will reward us for what we have done, but then we will give credit to whom credit is due—God. It is God who gives us the desire to obey. It is God who gives us the strength or power to obey. Everything is from Him. Only *God* is **worthy... to receive glory and honour and power**.

v 11 **For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created:** The twenty-four elders worshipped God because of His creative power and glory. The fact that God is Creator gives Him all right and every claim over everything—even as a potter has all rights and claims over the clay (Romans 9:21).

Application: God's right over us as Creator is a fact that can be accepted (and enjoyed), *or*, rejected (leading to frustration and discontent). If we recognise and submit to His ownership of us, then we will experience peace, contentment and fulfilment as we abide in Him. If, as believers, we reject His ownership of us, then we will be in rebellion against Him and will be quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit and so be subject to God's Fatherly discipline.

The King James Version translation of Revelation 4:11 says *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* The wonderful phrase *and for thy pleasure they are and were created* reminds us that **we each exist to give glory and pleasure to God. Until we do that, we don't fulfil our created purpose.** Our human nature wants to please ourselves, to fulfil the desires of the flesh, to live independently of God, which leads to death. On the other hand, our spirit wants to please God and do His will. This leads to life, peace, righteousness and holiness.

Romans 8:5-6 NLT paraphrase

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

I've been learning about training horses. Until you deal with all the distractions or fears (e.g. sheep in the paddock) and attractions (e.g. other horses), you can't teach the horse anything, because you don't have its full attention. Its mind is always elsewhere. The way to fix it is to make life difficult for the horse by making it work hard and then offering it comfort where you want it to stop. If it wants to go back to the distraction or attraction then off you go again and make that horse run. Then again you offer comfort where you want it to stop. If the horse chooses to rest, and be content where you want to stop, then you remain stopped. The horse has learnt to submit to and focus on you.

God uses the same principle with us. His fatherly discipline makes life difficult and uncomfortable for us as we seek the things we like and run from the things we are afraid of. The things we chase and the things we are afraid of keep our focus off God and on ourselves. God can't use us when we are like that. We all need to learn to trust God and submit to Him, to be like Mary who found her satisfaction and fulfilment at Jesus' feet as she worshipped Him.

Another Application: ***"Now, dear brothers and sisters, have you learnt to cast your crowns at the Saviour's feet already?"*** (Spurgeon)

Am I living for myself or living for God? Am I taking credit for what God does through me, or am I giving the glory to God? Am I using the gifts, talents and opportunities that God has given me for my own use or benefit, or am I using them for the kingdom of God?

What is True Worship?

One final application that brings this whole chapter together is worship. What does it mean to worship God? Is it just singing songs? Is it just reading the Word?

In the scriptures there is the principle of first mention. That is, God explains the meaning of a word is the first time it is used. It is one of the rules of hermeneutics, or how we correctly interpret scripture, the bible.

So when do you think the word worship was first used? The temple singers, King David? No. It was when God tested Abraham in Genesis 22. God was saying to Abraham, “who do you love the most,” or, “who or what is most important to you”—Me or someone or something else?

Genesis 22:1-5, 18 NLT paraphrase

Some time later, God tested Abraham’s faith. “Abraham!” God called.

“Yes,” he replied. “Here I am.”

² “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you **love** so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.”

³ The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ “Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the servants. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. **We will worship there**, and then we will come right back.”

¹⁸ And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have **obeyed** me.”

v **5 We will worship there**: What did Abraham do? Did Abraham get there and have a song service with himself and Isaac? No. Instead, Abraham tied Isaac to the altar, and was ready to plunge the knife into his son—but God stopped him.

What does this have to do with worship? How does this situation define the word **worship**? Well, in Genesis 22 we also have the first use of the words **obedience** and **love**. **Worship is love** demonstrated by willing **obedience**.

“Worship is love demonstrated by willing obedience.”

It’s not grudging or unwilling obedience (legalism), but rather we willingly obey anything that God desires for us simply because we love Him more than anyone or anything else.

We also have a supreme example of this willing and obedient worship in the life of Jesus Christ. He said on one occasion, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). The author of Hebrews tells us that when he came into the world, he said, “Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7; cf. Psalm 40:7–8). The apostle Paul sums it up in these words, “[Jesus] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:7–8 paraphrase).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said:

The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death—we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”

Why is it that so many of us are not willingly obedient, that we are not truly worshipping God? Is it because we do not have our minds fully fixed on God? Instead, we have our eyes on the world and so we doubt, waver and are tossed to and fro. We are double minded (see James 1:6-8).

Why will it be so easy to really worship God in heaven? Because our eyes will be fully fixed on Him. We will not have our sin nature or the world or the devil to distract us. God will be right there in front of us and we will see Him and know Him as He sees and knows us (1 Corinthians 13:12, 1 John 3:2).

Do not be deceived. If I am not living in willing obedience to God's will for my life, then I am not a true worshipper—I am not truly worshipping God. I might feel great as I go to church, sing the songs and study God's Word, but does feeling good and being happy really prove that I am fully submitted to God? Is worship about feelings and emotions or willing submission to God? Also consider the legalistic person who obeys but not out of love. They think that God owes them something. They are obeying, but not loving, therefore it's not true worship.

Do you think Abraham actually 'felt good' or was on a 'spiritual high' when he was about to plunge the knife into Isaac's heart? No way! It was the most difficult decision that Abraham would ever have to make. Abraham making the choice to love God more than his only (promised) son Isaac was the highest, greatest, and yet hardest act of worship (willing sacrifice/submission) that God would ever require of Him.

Do you think Jesus 'felt good' as He sweated great drops of blood as He willingly yielded Himself to the will of the Father?—the highest, greatest and hardest act of worship (willing sacrifice/submission) that the Father ever required of Jesus. Abraham and Jesus are two of the greatest examples of what true worship looks like—and I doubt that either of them felt good or were happy at the time. Why weren't they happy? Because they were dying, dying to self, giving up their will for the Father's will, and this is never fun. Living for Jesus will cost us our flesh life. However, we should be willing to give up all things temporary in view of the infinite love towards us demonstrated by Jesus death on the cross while we were still His enemies (see Romans 5:6-11). Romans 8:17 also tells us that if are to share his glory, we must also share his sufferings.

Romans 12:1 AMP

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.

In today's modern Laodicean church age, there is an emphasis on physical and financial wellbeing, and emotions and feelings. Like the Laodicean church back then, they would have felt good as they went to 'club' church and sang the songs, but they weren't truly worshipping God in Spirit and truth. They were just having a nice time, feeling great, just like people who are at the football game with their friends enjoying watching their favourite team win.

Revelation 3:17 NKJV

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

In the modern Laodicean church with its emphasis on material prosperity and getting what you want, there is little or no talk of sacrifice, self-denial, or the giving up of temporary or worldly affections. A good example of how hard it is for us to give up our affections is to consider how difficult it is for even a bad relationship to break up. The christian girl knows that the non-Christian boy is no good for her and will only cause her much pain and grief, but she has given him her heart, her affections. Jesus wants her heart, her affections, and she wants to love Jesus with her whole heart, but she keeps going back to the old boyfriend—back and forth, too and fro—double minded.

It's so hard to cut off and deny what we love and have affections for when God asks us to, even when we know that it's wrong, and it gets even harder when it's a good gift like Isaac was to Abraham. This is also why we struggle with giving up sin, because we (our sinful nature) love it, we have affections for it, and get much pleasure from it.

Think about how Abraham would have felt at this time. Abraham wouldn't have felt good or happy as he walked up that hill, bound his son, prepared the wood and lifted up the knife. I don't think that he was singing — la, la, la, I'm so glad that I get to offer up my son. But by his actions, he proved to God and to the rest of the world that God was the most important part of his life, his first love. Abraham loved God more than he loved his promised son Isaac (the only way we can really know if we love God more than someone or something is if we are willing to give it up).

A true worshipper will obey God from their heart, without any doubt, without any hesitation, no matter how hard the request may seem, *and regardless of how they feel*. Why? Because they love God more. Remember that love is a verb, not a feeling. We don't feel love, we do love. Jesus said "if you love Me, you will obey Me." The evidence of our love for God is obedience to God and submission to His Word.

Remember that when we truly love someone, then nothing we do for them is a burden or a chore. Instead, it's a delight. It's like the true story of a young man spending his weekend fixing plumbing, mowing lawns and painting — he can't wait and he's excited about it because he will be doing it for his fiancée, soon to be his wife. There was nothing he wouldn't be willing to do for her because he was in love with her.

Again, the secret to being a true worshipper is surrender to God, to say like Jesus said, "not My will but Yours be done." This is the hardest part about being a Christian. This is where the true battle lies—the battle of my will or desires—any desire that is going to hurt my relationship with God must be put to death or given up. May we be willing to humble ourselves before God and seek His will, His glory, His pleasure and His kingdom instead of my will and my glory and my pleasure and my kingdom.

Remember the secret to surrender, to willing obedience, is to love God. And to grow in our love for God we need to grow in our understanding of who He is, how much He loves us and what He has already done for us as a demonstration of His infinite love for us. And the only way we can grow in our understanding of God is to spend time with Him, praying to Him and listening to God speak to us through His Word and fellowship with other believers. Let's not neglect our relationship with God. Our daily time with God is where it all starts—prayerfully reading the Bible and praying according to Scripture, plus fellowship and evangelism.