

When the Praise Ends

All of us have this mental image of what we think God is.

... our theology is shaped and molded by that mental image and the longer we live the more we gravitate toward that mental image

The more involved we are with God and the things of God, the more perfect that mental image that we have of God becomes.

Our mental image of God influences our lifestyle, our ethical decisions, and our worship.

True worship is when the mind, heart, and the emotions intersect upon God.

Today we begin with the end of last week's text.

(Rev 7:11-12) ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

After the 6th seal is broken, and before the 7th, as we saw last week, the focus moved from the earth to a scene taking place in heaven.

There in heaven saw a great multitude of Christians who, as the bible says, *"have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb"*

We are coming to the apex of celestial thrill and adoration where Jesus, the lamb of God, is holding in his hands the open scroll.

Why are we here? As we said last week, we are here to see what praise and worship looks like in heaven and we are going to see that today.

1. The Power of Praise in Worship

(Rev 8:1) When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

In the OT Jewish temple throughout the whole first part of the ceremony, while the priests were offering sacrifices musical instruments were being played, the people were singing and the music would be ringing throughout the entire temple and courtyard.

What was the reason for the animal sacrifices.

- This was a precursor to the crucifixion of Jesus.
- They would take the animal, sacrifice it and then sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed animal on the Ark of the Covenant, or around the altar—depending upon which sacrifice it was.

Those sacrifices were prophetic of the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins.

Now why in the world would they be “singing and praising” while the priests were killing the animals?

Because, as odd as this may sound, the sacrifice, the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat, was not about death!!!

Leviticus 17:11 tells us that the “life of the flesh is in the blood.”

No Hebrew would have ever dared to bring “death” into the presence of God.

The purpose of sprinkling blood on the mercy seat was to bring “life” into God’s presence.

I don’t want to diminish the importance of the cross at all, but I must tell you that the cross only has significance because of the resurrection...

...the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church that without a resurrection their faith was pointless.

(1Co 15:14)¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

The resurrection wasn’t the vindication of Jesus. The resurrection was the KEY that unlocked the door.

Read the book of Acts you will find that it wasn’t the disciples preaching about Jesus’ miracles or even his crucifixion that angered the Pharisees ... it was the disciple’s proclamation of the resurrection.

Sacrifice is all about life. Jesus came and said that He was the life ... and He came to bring us life abundantly.

So, the sacrifices, the shedding of the blood doesn't picture death—it **pictures life**—therefore the Hebrews would sing praises to God during the first part of their worship.

- Psalm 150 commands us to praise God in his sanctuary.
- Psalm 33:3 says..... “Sing unto him a new song; play SKILLFULLY and with a LOUD noise...”
- Psalm 98:4 says.... “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth’ make a LOUD noise and rejoice and sing praise.”

Why would God command us to PLAY skillfully and loudly and sing loudly????

- Is God hard of hearing?
- Perhaps if our praise is louder than the next guy maybe we'll get to go ahead of him in the line to God?
- Maybe the sincerest people are the loudest?

No, God can hear the smallest thought, God is against a “holier than thou” attitude. God is not asking us to “out praise” the next guy. God is asking us to give all that we, to the best of our ability can to Praise him.

God is saying loudly because when it comes to worship there must be **the balance of both passion and reverence**.

The danger is that **unchecked passion** can fall into chaos and **reverence** without passion can fall into dead formalism.

Music in worship is about praising God passionately AND reverently. In other words, get every single instrument you can play: Stringed, percussion, woodwind, brass, even electronic, pull out the stops and praise God!! **–But make sure it is worship and not chaos.**

Praising God is about taking our focus off of ourselves and putting it totally upon God.

2. The Sacredness of Silence in Worship

(Rev 8:1) When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Allow me to describe this point of worship in the Old Testament.

The priests with the incense and those assisting would ascend the steps into the Holy Place. One would reverently spread the coals on the golden altar, one would arrange the incense. [It was probably at the moment in worship that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias regarding the birth of John the Baptist.]

The people withdrew from the inner court and fell down before the Lord, spreading their hands in silent prayer.

The priest would lay in the incense on the golden altar as the worshipping multitude bowed in silence.

In Psalm 62:1 King David wrote about this period of worship: **My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation. (Psalm 62:1)**

In our life there must be places where we sit in silence and contemplate the glorious and matchless, incomparable wonder of God.

The value of silence has been lost. Silence is the place meditation.

We live in a world of so much noise, so much hurry and rush; our minds are so harassed and fragmented by all the things that are pulling at us we can hardly remember the most ordinary things. Our society is multi-tasking itself into a coma.

We need to make moments of silence where we can meditate upon heavenly things ... this is where we hear the voice of God.

In OT the time of **praise was followed with a time of sacred silence**. I believe **this part of Jewish worship was observed on Calvary**, when at the sixth hour, God sent darkness over the earth and I believe this is what we are seeing here in Revelation 8:1.

In Revelation 7 a great multitude had just worshipped God and there was a crescendo of praise as the halls of heaven echoed and rang with the cry of glory ... but when the 7th seal is broken and Jesus, the Lamb of God, is standing, holding in his hands the complete opened scroll and the host of heaven's angels and this great multitude of saved people are simply awestruck.

- In Exodus Moses told the people, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord..."

- In Zephaniah 1:7 the prophet said, “Be silent before the LORD GOD! For the day of the LORD is near.....”

A return to true worship will revive reverence. True Worship is: Humble and Dependent upon God.

**“I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”
(Job 42:3)**

Our verse says that there was silence in heaven for about 30 minutes.

Now, I really don’t understand how you can have “temporal time” in an eternal environment. I can’t explain it, but I believe it.

I believe God is so infinitely boundlessly wonderful that even Heaven falls into adoring silence.

If you really know who God is. If you really understand how much Jesus loves you, it will revolutionize the way you think about worshipping God.

3. The Poignancy of Prayer in Worship

(Rev 8:2-5) ² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

In the silence of heaven 7 angels are given 7 trumpets for the purpose of announcing the next 7 judgments to come and then in that awesome silence we see the actions of a single angel.

Back to the scene of worship in the OT. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would put incense on the burning coals in the censer then he would take the basin of blood and go into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat.

The incense that was put on the burning coals represented the prayers of God’s people.

But notice what this angel in heaven does with the burning censer that he has just put the incense into. The angels throws it to the earth! What is that???

It is Judgment. When God responds the prayers of His people it often brings judgment.

- For Noah to be blessed the world had to be destroyed.
- In order for the Israelites to get out of Egypt Pharaoh and his people had to endure judgment.
- For Israel to inherit the land of Canaan, the other people had to lose it.
- For David to be king Saul had to die

Prayer is a serious thing.

- In Old Testament symbolism you would always find prayer and the altar in close proximity.
- In the **last part of verse three** we even see that the altar is right in front of God's throne.
- You see not only does a lowered view of God negatively impact our praise and reverence ... it also hurts our prayer.
- When you **take away the throne of God** in your thinking **you will lose the altar** of prayer.

What is accomplished here at Mount Zion is directly proportional to how we pray.

In verse 4 we see that the throne of God, the glory of God, the redemptive work of Christ, and the prayers of God's people are all together.....

- There must be praise.
- There must be sacred, holy, silence and meditation
- But there must also be sweet fragrance of our prayers rising up before the throne of God.