

Some of the greatest theologians show up in the strangest places. Like between the pages of the Sunday comics. Consider philosopher/theologian, Dr. Pogo. He said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Reality bites. It's a painful paradox to realize that the greatest threat to self-fulfillment is self-absorption. What irony! The person consumed with the person in the mirror: how you look, how you feel, what's your score on the ladder of success; how you rate when it comes to beauty, bucks, brains and brawn; the person consumed with the person in the mirror murders himself. He's a cannibal. Self-absorption is suicide. It leads to boredom, emptiness, personal chaos, drunken escapades, and the stupid pursuit of fantasies that never fill up the chasm within. Eugene Peterson says, "*Life confined to the self is a prison, a joy-killing, neurosis-producing, disease-fomenting prison*" [*Where Your Treasure is*, p. 12]. Narcissism is suicide, the slaughter of the self.

Narcissus should have recognized that. Narcissus, the handsome youth, was so smitten by his own image in the water he couldn't give his beautiful girl friend Echo the time of day. And so stretching out over his mirror image in the water, he becomes something sub-human. A Narcissus plant. The universe dances around Narcissus and every person obsessed with themselves, their hurts, their agendas, their needs, their dreams, their ego. Over 150 years ago Alexis de Tocqueville visited America from France and wrote: "*Each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object, namely himself*" [*Ibid*, p. 3]. "We have met the enemy and he is us."

I'm excited to tell you tonight that there is a way out of our 21st century Narcissism, a way that can give you more meaning, purpose, passion and adventure than you ever dreamed of. It's worship. In worship: daily or weekly, in worship a powerful thing happens. You get your eyes off yourself, off your image, and on to God. In worship the ego gets unhinged from self and wrapped up in God. You unself the self. It is this profound God-centered philosophy of life and worship that shows up here in Revelation 4 & 5. When it comes to worship, the first thing the Apostle John introduces us to is an open door.

I. AN OPEN DOOR. In Revelation 3:20 the only thing keeping the Laodiceans from Christ was a closed door. I like how Eugene Peterson puts it: "*The Laodiceans had just heard one of the most powerful (and briefest!) sermons in the history of Christian preaching. The preacher gave the invitation, 'I stand at the door and knock,' and then he looked, and lo, in heaven an open door!*" [4:1 *Reversed Thunder*, p. 58]. Like the Laodiceans, we too are ushered through heaven's door.

Somewhere I read that the average American worker labors 163 more hours per year today than in 1970. We have a global addiction to work. The revolving door of work often leaves one drained and breathless. But the open door of worship refreshes and rejuvenates for work again. Some people want to gulp down life like an undigested Big Mac and fries. We want fast food romance, prayer, and worship. But building a love bond with friends, your mate, your kids, your God takes time. Through the blood of Christ and in the power of the Spirit we now have free access to the throne of God. The welcome mat is out. The door is ripped off its hinges. It seems as if this is the Apostle John's second Lord's Day encounter with Christ. For just as in chapter 1, John is again "in the Spirit" and again hears the trumpet voice

[1:10 *cmp.* 4:2, 10]. On the Lord's Day and in the Spirit we are ushered through an open door to the throne room of the universe.

II. THE THRONE ROOM. Three matters I need to comment on here. **The throne room is the most beautiful place in the universe.** We read in vs. 3 "*And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper [opaque stone, perhaps diamond] and carnelian [blood-red stone]. A rainbow, resembling an emerald [green] encircled the throne.*" Human language is stretched to the absolute limit as it tries to describe God and the place from which God rules the universe.

The throne room is the source of our security. "*A rainbow...encircled the throne....From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder*" [4:3b, 5]. Understand that before the outbursts of God's wrath entire civilizations will be wiped off the map. Yet God restrains his wrath in keeping with his covenant with creation. Never again will God destroy the world with a flood. God promises to sustain His creation order until the final cataclysm of fire. "*As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease*" [Genesis 8:22]. The sign of that covenant instituted after the flood was the rainbow. The technical term for this covenant is a self-maledictory oath. The bow as an instrument of war is pointed heavenward. God is saying, "If I fail to keep my covenant with creation, may the lightning bolt of my wrath pierce my own heart." The world is secure because our world belongs to God, not to demons, fate or chance!

The throne room is the gravitational center of our obedience, love, and praise. The entire universe is not geocentric [earth-centered], nor heliocentric [sun-centered], nor is it ego-centric. The universe is theo-centric. Like a tetherball, the universe is tethered and surrounds God.

When I was a kid, I loved going to Mission Bay Park north of San Diego. And there at that Amusement Park was a giant record player. It was fun to slide down a huge slide and hang on to the center of that record player for dear life as it drove out from the center. Sin is like that. It drives us centrifugally from the center. Frederick Buechner writes: "*The power of sin is centrifugal...it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and piecesof the core itself go flying off until in the end nothing at all is left*" [*Wishful Thinking*, p. 88]. The whirlwind of the Spirit overpowers and drives us centripetally toward the center. Our worship is always that, a miracle of the Spirit.

Now in this throne room at the center of the universe, John sees a vast gathering of creatures. Every creature in the universe shows up to worship God. We're introduced to four living creatures in vv. 6-9. If time permits in my ministry here I'll spend more time talking about angels but for now let me say that the four living creatures John encounters are like the Sphinx like Cherubim of the OT. "*In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings*" [they were all eyes! The vision must have been staggering! And they were singing]. In chapter 5:11 the throng of angelic worshipers expands. "*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne...[and] in a loud voice*

they sang...." One day we will worship with, we will make contact with extra-terrestrial creatures that boggle the imagination.

In vv. 10-11 we're introduced to the twenty-four elders probably representing all the saints of the OT and NT: 12 tribes of OT Israel; 12 apostles in the new. These leaders of old covenant and new are so thunderstruck by the revelation at the center of the city of God that they "fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

This matter of worship snowballs. Because not only do massive angels, big league leaders, and a vast throng of humans break loose in song. We read in 5:13 *"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever.'"* All creation is caught up in this hallelujah chorus. All creation has this vertical thrust. You can't split reality in half. Nature/super nature. Sacred/Secular. Not in this world. Nor in the next. This God we worship is so great, there is no creature anywhere who can resist this irrepressible impulse to praise.

III. THE TRIUMPHANT LAMB. The joy, the worship, the praise of Revelation 4 & 5 reach a dramatic climax when he throws open a window on the triumphant lamb. This is how the drama unfolds. There in the Father's right hand is a scroll. This mysterious scroll represents the book of destiny and history. Every single event, the dramatic unfolding of time itself is wrapped up in that all important volume--the book of destiny. The Apostle however breaks into uncontrollable weeping, because no one in heaven or earth could be found to open the book. The advance of history itself, the unfolding of our glorious destiny would be aborted, of no one worthy could be found to break open this sealed book. History would become little more than "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," if this book of the Kingdom of God would remain closed. We'd be sunk. We would be orphans in an age of no tomorrows.

But wonder of wonders, there was one found worthy to open the book. And suddenly the curtain is ripped open to reveal the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Great King David's greatest Son. But the royal Lion of David's Seed, is also the Lamb of God. But John here is not talking about a meek, mild, defenseless and harmless puny creature when he thinks of the Lamb. Indeed, he has been slain to release us from sin and Satan's tyranny. and purchased us for God [5:9] But in his coronation, the lamb of Revelation becomes the victorious, *"Lord of lords, and King of kings"* [17:14]. All the wicked machinations of Babylon; all the forces of darkness are helpless before the conquering lamb. The kings of the earth, the rich, the mighty are so frightened by this history shaking Lamb, that they vainly call on the rocks of the mountains to shelter them from the blasts of the Lamb's wrath [6:15-16].

The Lamb looks rather grotesque. He possesses 7 horns and 7 eyes [5:6]. The 7 horns symbolize his omnipotence. His 7 eyes point to his omniscience. No event in history escapes his notice, no unruly principality or power is free of His almighty grip! Worship is dangerous. Annie Dillard writes. *"Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a*

packaged tour of the Absolute?...The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares: they should lash us to our pews" [Found in Eugene H. Peterson's, The Contemplative Pastor, p. 83].

It is this Invincible Lamb who sovereignly takes the scroll of history. As Lord of the Universe, Jesus Christ assumes full responsibility for the course of human history. The Lamb reigns. History now lies in the grip of the Lamb's almighty invincible hands. Let the blood thirsty abortionists beware. Let the blasphemous guardians of Babylon's pleasure palaces take heed. Let the Humanistic American Civil Liberties Union watch its step. Let the history's tyrants tremble. The Lamb is Lord. Satan's empire will crumble into the dust.

All this moves us to worship! Recently I ran across a bumper sticker which reads: "I am woman. I'm Invincible. I'm tired." I don't think it matters whether we're male or female. On our own none of us invincible and most of us are tired. It's good to know history is in His hands. The Lamb reigns. His Kingdom will triumph. Real joy and real passion is found when we get our eyes off ourselves and keep them fixed on the Lamb.