



Praise is comely

Revelation 4.⁸-5.¹³

Introduction

For years, no, decades, I avoided the Book of Revelation like the plague—feel free to smile at that weak pun. I was almost sixty years old before I finally decided. “This is ridiculous. What am I afraid of? Time to man up and brave the Book.”

How glad I am that I did so!

It wasn’t easy. I have now read the Book upwards of fifty times. Slowly, my appreciation for, trust in, and even dependence upon the Book has grown. I hope to share some of what I have learned. But in today’s homily, I am going to share my first insight from this most fascinating Book. The insight convinced me that study of this feared book was worth the effort. Maybe, if you too find the Book intimidating, it will also convince you of the Book’s worth.

The lead up

Revelation begins with a sort of introduction in Chapter 1, verses 1-3. This is followed by a universal of “catholic” letter to the seven churches of “Asia,” or modern-day Turkey, to whom the letter is addressed (1.⁴⁻²⁰). This “catholic” letter is followed by seven individual letters each addressed directly to one of the seven churches (3.¹-3.²²)—Revelation’s author

loves the number seven. There is much of interest here, and we will return to the Book's introduction, the universal letter, and the individual letters at a later time.

For now, we press on. As we begin chapter four, John hears a voice, his first, that possesses the clarity and resonance of a trumpet. It voices an invitation:

“Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.”

Immediately, John finds himself in the divine throne room of God “set in heaven.” Here, as you can imagine, John witnesses many amazing, awe-inspiring things, the greatest being a vision of God, Himself. The glory is indescribable, and in his attempt to describe what he sees, John is reduced to inadequate metaphor and fantastical imagery (4.²⁻⁸).

a festival of choirs

As fascinating as it all is, I wish to focus our attention on the words John heard rather than the sights he saw. Here are the first words he heard spoken in heaven. They are spoken in the form of a hymn, sang by a choir of four voices.

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
which was and is, and is to come.”¹

This hymn is followed immediately by another, sang by a larger choir of twenty-four voices:

“*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.”²

¹ Revelation 4.⁸

² Revelation 4.¹¹

As if to focus the reader's mind upon the "worthiness" of Deity, John is allowed to observe Jesus open the unopenable seven-sealed book and begin to reveal what no man can understand. We will want to look at this episode later. For now, we remain focused on the celestial hymns.

Immediately after witnessing the "worthiness" of the lamb in vision, the two previous choirs, one of four and the other of 24, join to sing,

"Thou art worthy to take the book,
and to open the seals thereof:
for thou wast slain,
and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood
out of every kindred, and tongue,
and people, and nation."³
And hast made us unto our God kings and priests:
and we shall reign on the earth.

Suddenly, the former, relatively small choir of 28 voices explodes into one of "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." The multitude sings:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches,
and wisdom, and strength,
and honour, and glory, and blessing."⁴

But, as if a choir of "ten thousand times ten thousand" were too small to give voice to the immeasurable worthiness of Father and Son, another choir steps forward, this one composed of "every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea."

³ Revelation 5. 9-10

⁴ Revelation 5. 12

“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”⁵

This crescendo of voices and emotion and praise in Revelation 4-5 is impressive and inspiring. Seeing these choirs through the divine throne room of God, we realize the Psalmist’s declaration, “Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel,”⁶ is too small and restricted. God and His Christ “inhabit” a much larger space than the praises of Israel. They “inhabit” the praises of the entire cosmos.

Yet, it may be the smallest of spaces that he most wishes to “inhabit.” The praise found in the individual heart may be God’s choicest of all habitations. “Praise ye the LORD,” admonishes the Psalmist, “for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”⁷

Conclusion

Surely we glorify Father and Son and testify of them best through faithful discipleship. But we are invited—and that repeatedly—to “lift up [our] voice as with the sound of a trumpet...like unto angels of God;”⁸ to “lift up [our] voice...with a sound of rejoicing, crying—Hosanna, hosanna, blessed be the name of the Lord God!”⁹

The spirit of praise is, in fact, one of the markers of the Spirit-filled soul. After we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, “then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.”¹⁰

Who knows, perhaps such individual and earth-bound praise is but practice, a prelude to our

⁵ Revelation 5:13

⁶ Psalm 22.³

⁷ Psalm 147.¹

⁸ DC 42.⁶

⁹ DC 19.³⁷

¹⁰ 2 Nephi 31.¹³

joining the Celestial and eternal choirs above. King Benjamin looked forward to that time when his “immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God.”¹¹ Mormon promises that “he that is found guiltless” may “dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost.”¹²

In one of humanity’s greatest visions of God’s expansive power to save, Joseph Smith saw the Celestial Kingdom. He saw “the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshipping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever.”¹³ He saw that that glory

“excels in all things—where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever; before whose throne all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever.”¹⁴

This portion of Revelations has inspired and given me hope. It causes me to look forward to that day when I can unite my voice with such grand and glorious choirs. Hopefully, my enthusiasm will make up for the tone-deaf sounds that emanate from the bottom of my heart.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

¹¹ Mosiah 2.²⁸

¹² Mormon 7.⁷

¹³ DC 76.²¹

¹⁴ DC 76.⁹²⁻⁹³