

CHAPTER 1

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Worship

On Earth as It Is in Heaven

Jonathan Gibson

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Lit·ur·gy | λειτουργία | Worship

Worship is the right, fitting, and delightful response of moral beings—angelic and human—to God the Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator, for who he is as one eternal God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and for what he has done in creation and redemption, and for what he will do in the coming consummation, to whom be all praise and glory, now and forever, world without end. Amen.

Introduction

Since the beginning of time, there has been worship—in heaven and on earth. In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, he created angelic beings to sound forth his praise through the courts of heaven. Day and night, seraphim flew before God in the heavens, singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa. 6:3); angelic creatures flew before him, calling to one another, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev. 4:8); the twenty-four angelic elders fell down before him, casting down their crowns, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11). In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, he created the expansive skies and placed the sun, moon, and stars in them to sound forth his praise across every land and sea under the heavens. Day and night, the voices of God’s choral trio were heard throughout the earth, declaring the glory of God (Ps. 19:1–4). “Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars” (Ps. 148:3). In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the

earth, he created human beings, made in his image and likeness, to reflect his glory and sound forth his praise across the whole earth. From the rising of the sun to its setting, the Lord's name was to be praised (Ps. 113:3):

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth! (Ps. 96:7–9).

Worship in Eden

The beginning of creation was the beginning of worship in heaven and on earth—by angelic beings, by the created order, and by the first couple of mankind. However, in the unfolding revelation of God in history, the first explicit call to worship was made to Adam. Created from the dust of the earth as a man, yet made in the image of God as his son, Adam was placed in the garden-temple of Eden as God's prophet-priest-king to work and keep it. As prophet, he was to speak God's word to God's world; as priest, he was to guard God's divine sanctuary and mediate God's blessing to God's world; as king, he was to rule God's world. As God's son—and in his specific roles of prophet, priest, and king—Adam was called to worship God through his word: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen. 2:16–17). It was a call to adore and acknowledge the goodness and greatness of God. His goodness was seen in the invitation to eat from every tree of the garden, trees that were pleasant to the eye and good for food; his greatness was seen in the prohibition to eat from one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—a sign that God alone was God, and man was to have no other gods before him. In sum, it was a command to know God and enjoy him forever.

The call to worship came to Adam in the context of a covenant, in which life was promised to him and through him to all his descendants, upon the condition of his personal and perfect obedience (cf. WCF 7.2). This call to worship within a life-and-death bond distinguished Adam from the animal kingdom: He was not only unique as an image-bearer of God's glory; he was unique as a heaven-bound *homo liturgicus*. God's call to worship within this covenant of life was expected to elicit in Adam a response of faith and obedience, love and devotion, with heart and mind and strength. Adam's reward for such a response was to be a fellowship meal with God at the tree of life. Adam was commanded to fast from one tree in order that he might feast at another tree, and thus enjoy consummate union and communion with God—everlasting life. And so, for Adam and all his descendants, a liturgy was fixed, stitched into the very order and fabric of human life on earth: call—response—meal:

Call to worship (through God's Word)

Response (by faith and obedience, love and devotion)

Fellowship meal (union and communion with God)

In short, worship in Eden was familial, covenantal communion with God, through his word and sacrament.

Idolatry in Eden

This singular invitation to worship was soon muted when Adam allowed the serpent—that craftiest of creatures—to enter the garden-temple. Through Eve, the serpent presented Adam with an alternative liturgy. He called Eve (and through her, Adam) to abandon the call of God and follow his call: to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and become like God. It was an invitation to act in unbelief and disobedience toward God, but in faith and obedience toward the devil—to bow down and worship the creature instead of the Creator. The one who had abandoned the worship of God in heaven—angelic Lucifer himself—had come to spoil the worship of God on earth. In careless and sinful rebellion,

Adam followed the lead of his wife and obeyed the voice of the serpent, eating from the forbidden tree. He abandoned his probationary fast, disobeyed the voice of his God, and bowed down to the serpent. Since evil and error are always parasitic on goodness and truth, the worship of the serpent became a counterfeit worship of God. Adam and all his descendants remained in the same state: *homo liturgicus*. The liturgical structure for humanity remained the same: call—response—meal. But the object of worship had changed. God had been dethroned in the heart of man, and the devil had been enthroned. The worship of the Creator had been exchanged for the worship of the creature. An alternative liturgy—idolatry—had been introduced into the world and would remain the liturgical disposition of all Adam’s descendants.

Worship through Sacrifice

Yet God is too great and good and glorious to forego the right, fitting, and delightful adoration that is due him from his creatures—angelic and human. And so, in heaven, he removed the wicked Lucifer (cf. Luke 10:18), in order to preserve a devoted and faithful angelic choir for his own praise. On earth, God made another covenant with man—the covenant of grace. In Genesis 3:15, God promised another son who would come and crush the serpent, and, by implication, restore—and perfect—the worship to which he had first called Adam in the beginning. The covenant of grace became the context in which God would relate to his elect people from the offspring of the woman. God’s first act in this new gracious arrangement was to clothe Adam and Eve with garments of skin, which implied an animal had been slain. An innocent victim had to die in the place of the guilty pair, so that they could remain, even temporarily, in the presence of God. The idea of sacrifice as a prerequisite for being in the presence of a holy God, whatever the duration, would become essential for all future worship of the chosen seed. Indeed, for there to be a permanent restoration of God’s people living in God’s presence, worshipping him and communing with him, a future son of the woman would have to undergo the flaming sword of God’s judgment—in effect, experience death and

resurrection—in order to lead the offspring of the woman back into the presence of God, so that they could eat from the tree of life.

However, until that permanent arrangement would be realized through the promised son, animal sacrifice would become an essential part of worship in the covenant of grace. The mention of descendants of Eve “calling upon the name of the LORD” after the birth of Seth (Gen. 4:26) demonstrated that the dawning of a new era of worship, east of Eden, had begun. As redemptive history unfolded, sacrifices began to play an important part in the lives of the chosen seed. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob responded to God’s call (word) in faith and obedience, and offered sacrifices to God. The centrality of sacrifice to the worship of God under this new dispensation of grace was also seen in the life of God’s national (typical) son Israel, where the sacrificial system became foundational to their cultic practices. Indeed, the purpose of the Exodus and the Tabernacle building at Sinai is described in terms of the sacrificial worship of God’s son. In Egypt, God commanded Pharaoh to let his son go, so that his son might “serve” him (Exod. 3:12; 4:23; 10:7–11) and “sacrifice” to him (Exod. 3:18; 5:1). Worship by sacrifice in the Holy of Holies reached its climax under King Solomon, God’s royal (typical) son. In his “dedication service” for the temple on Mount Zion, Solomon offered an incalculable number of sheep and oxen (cf. 2 Chron. 5:6), as he led Israel in worship in the Holy of Holies.

Worship at Eden, Sinai, and Zion

The Old Testament story, then, presents three “mountain peaks” of worship, in which God’s son was called to worship: Adam on Mount Eden, Israel at Mount Sinai, and Solomon on Mount Zion. In each worship setting, the liturgical order is organically developed. For example, as Israel gathered at Mount Sinai, after being redeemed and rescued out of slavery in Egypt, a liturgy was formed that became the basic pattern for Israel’s worship in the future. The liturgy reflected the structure of worship in Eden, of call—response—meal; only now it included cleansing through sacrifice and mediated access through a prophet-priest as essential elements. Exodus 19–24 reveals the following pattern for Israel’s worship:

- Gathering (at Mount Sinai) (19:1–3a)
- Calling (by God’s Word) (19:3b–9)
- Cleansing (through sacrifice) (19:10–15)
- Mediated access (through an appointed prophet-priest) (19:16–25)
- Divine communication (Ten Commandments and Book of Covenant) (20:1–24:2)
- Consecration (promise of obedience) (24:3)
- Sacrifice (burnt offerings and peace offerings) (24:4–5)
- Divine communication (Book of Covenant) (24:7)
- Cleansing (blood of burnt offerings and peace offerings sprinkled) (24:6, 8)
- Mediated access to God’s presence (24:9–10)
- Fellowship meal (with God) (24:11)

What was implicit in Eden, when God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins, was now explicit at Sinai—sacrifice was essential to the worship of God. But a new element of prophetic-priestly intercession was also introduced. When Israel heard the voice of God at Sinai, they trembled with fear and asked Moses to intercede for them, lest they perish (Exod. 20:18–19). Thus prophetic-priestly mediation was established as a core element of worship within the covenant of grace (cf. Deut. 5:5).

A similar pattern to Exodus 19–24 is seen in 2 Chronicles 5–7, as Solomon gathered Israel for the dedication of the temple. Again, the key elements of sacrifice and prophetic-priestly intercession are present:

- Gathering (at Mount Zion) (5:2–3)
- Cleansing (through sacrifice) (5:4–6)
- Mediated access (through priests) (5:7–10)
- Praise (with singing and music) (5:11–13)
- Glory of God fills the temple (5:14)
- Divine communication (Word of God through Solomon) (6:1–11)
- Prayer of intercession (by Solomon) (6:12–42)
- Fire and glory (from heaven) (7:1–2)
- Praise (bowing and thanking) (7:3)
- Cleansing/consecration (through sacrifice) (7:4–7)

Meal (feast) (7:8–10)

Blessing and dismissal (7:9–10)

This is how the Old Testament “worship service” organically developed, with God’s national (typical) son Israel at Mount Sinai, and then with God’s royal (typical) son Solomon at Mount Zion. Since grace restores nature, and with it worship, the general structure of worship in Eden remained: call—response—meal. But then, because of sin, new essential elements were incorporated into the worship of God’s redeemed people within the covenant of grace: gathering, cleansing, mediated access, divine communication, cleansing/consecration. In each case, the new elements countered the effects of sin under the covenant of works: Gathering countered the “scattering” that had occurred in the expulsion from the garden-temple; cleansing by sacrifice, before and after hearing the Word, countered the staining of sin; mediated access countered the restricted access to God’s presence, seen in the cherubim with flashing swords on the east side of Eden, and the angelic figures engraved on the curtain restricting entrance into the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and the temple; divine communication countered the alternative calls to idolatry; and cleansing/consecration countered Israel’s desertion of God that occurred through unbelief and disobedience. These elements remained essential parts of restored worship in the covenant of grace in the Old Testament.

Adam, Israel, and Solomon—Idolatrous Sons

The worship that began and failed with Adam was recovered with Israel and Solomon, at least in a partially realized sense. Although imperfect in many ways, the worship of Israel and Solomon was acceptable to God because it was their response within a gracious arrangement—the covenant of grace. Yet the worship of God, as originally intended in Eden and recovered by Israel and Solomon, was never perfected or fully realized in the national (typical) or royal (typical) sons. As with Adam, Israel and Solomon failed fully to realize the perfected worship of God.

No sooner had Israel worshiped God at Sinai and consecrated themselves to his service, than they broke the first and second commandments, committing idolatry. And despite God graciously renewing his covenant with them through the intercession of Moses, and warning them of the future dangers of idolatry as a result of intermarriage with foreigners, they lapsed into idolatry again on their journey to the Promised Land. At Peor, they whored with the daughters of Moab and sacrificed to their gods. At Sinai, God's son Israel had exchanged the worship of God (the Creator-Redeemer) for the worship of the golden calf (a creature-redeemer); at Peor, God's son Israel was led into idolatry by women—Adam *redivivus*.

Once Israel settled in the Promised Land, the potential for realizing permanent and perfect worship began to emerge in the early period of a united Israel. King David set the liturgical project in motion when he expressed a desire to build God a house for him to dwell in. Even though God denied him that desire, David nevertheless made provision for a temple near the end of his reign. He purchased the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite on Mount Moriah, built an altar on the site, and then called on the name of the Lord. After fire descended from heaven, consuming his sacrifice, David concluded: "Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel" (1 Chron. 22:1). That vision, however, was never realized in David's time. Rather, it was Solomon who would complete the temple-building project that David had begun. As the heir of David's throne and the covenant promises, Solomon was the one of whom God had said to David, "I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son" (2 Sam. 7:14). As God's royal (typical) son, Solomon asked for wisdom to rule God's national (typical) son Israel. Where Adam had been unwise, Solomon prayed to be wise. God graciously answered Solomon's prayer and blessed him with wisdom. In addition to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and his own palace, Solomon also built God a temple on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David at the threshing floor (2 Chron. 3:1). Solomon's "dedication service" for the temple was the high point of Israel's worship on Mount Zion. The worship that had been revealed in Eden and typified in Sinai began to be realized in Zion. And yet it was not long before the worship of

God in Zion was corrupted by the royal son himself. Despite God's gracious gift of wisdom, Solomon was led into the foolishness of idolatry through the influence of women. The culmination of Solomon's idolatry was seen in the high places he built for Chemosh and Molech—the gods of Moab and Ammon, respectively. That he built them east of Jerusalem is of no small significance when the geography of Eden and the architecture of the temple are taken into consideration—Adam *redivivus*.

Irreversible Idolatry

From Solomon's reign on, not only did the kingdom split, but the divided nations of Israel and Judah began to spiral into an ever-deepening, and irreversible idolatry—one which would thrust them both into exile. In Israel, the idolatry began when Jeroboam established two alternative worship centers: one in Bethel in the south and the other in Dan in the north. In each, he placed a golden calf to be worshiped. He also built temples on high places in Bethel and Dan where sacrifices could be offered through a new (rival) priesthood. Despite God's gracious provision of prophets, calling Israel back from their evil ways, Israel would not listen, and in the end, God removed them from his presence (2 Kgs. 17:14–18).

Under Rehoboam, Judah fared no better. They provoked the Lord to jealousy with their own idolatrous worship. They built high places and pillars and Asherim on every available worship spot in the land, even instituting male cult prostitution. Despite liturgical reforms under King Hezekiah some years later, worship in Judah continued to spiral downward. Under King Manasseh, idolatry returned to Judah in full force:

For he rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the

LORD. And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. . . . Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel (2 Kgs. 21:3–6, 9).

Following Manasseh's reign, King Josiah repaired the temple and made significant moves toward liturgical reform. Indeed, he spared Israel from seeing trouble in his own lifetime. But, in the end, it was still not enough to stay the wrath of God. Under King Zedekiah, God's wrath fell upon Judah in the form of the Babylonian invasion and they were thrust from God's presence (2 Kgs. 24:20).

Thus, the history of God's national (typical) son Israel (united or divided) was one of recapitulating Adam's idolatry. As with Adam, Israel heard an alternative call to worship—a word of invitation from the Baals and Asherim—and they responded in faith and obedience to the created not the Creator; they feasted at the altars and high places of other gods and not at the temple of the one true God. And so, as with Adam, Israel and Judah's idolatry resulted in exile to the east.

Seventy years later, when Israel was relocated to the land and reaffirmed as God's son in covenant with him—with a fully functioning temple on Mount Zion—it soon became clear that the exile had not essentially changed Israel's heart. No sooner were they back in the land than they began to desecrate the Sabbath, pollute the cult with blemished sacrifices, and commit idolatry through intermarriage to foreigners (Neh. 13; Mal. 1:6–14). The heart change that Ezekiel had foretold in exile—in which God would give them a new heart, and put a new spirit in them, and cause them to walk in his ways (Ezek. 36:26–27)—had not yet materialized. That change would require God himself to come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant (of grace), to purify the sons of Levi and to restore right worship in Zion: “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years” (Mal. 3:4).

Jesus—The Perfect Worshiper

The Old Testament develops in such a way that we are left hoping for a son of God who will lead God's people in perfect worship before the one true God. That expectation is met in the coming of God's final (last-days) Son, Jesus Christ—the Last Adam, the true Israel, and the son of David. As God's Son, he fulfilled (and perfected) the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.

At Jesus's birth, he was adopted by Joseph to be an heir in the royal line, becoming the "son of David." But it was at his baptism that he was confirmed by his Father to be his "beloved Son," with whom he was "well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). That affirmation—"beloved-and-well-pleasing Son"—required proof through testing, however. So the Spirit drove God's Son into the wilderness, where the ancient serpent (Satan) was allowed to test him, to see what was in his heart. Jesus's ministry began in the place where Adam's ended and where Israel's was tested—in the wilderness. There, God tested his final Son Jesus to see if he would worship him alone as Father and King. Jesus's victory over Satan's temptations to break his fast, to test God's presence, and to bow down and worship another "god" meant that here at last—in an epoch-defining moment—was a Son who worshiped God alone, with all his heart and mind and strength. Here was the true Prophet-Priest-King that Israel had been waiting for. Here was the perfect Worshiper.

Perfected Worship—Now . . .

While Jesus exhibited perfect worship as God's Son, the worship of God's people had not yet been perfected. For that to happen, a once-for-all, sufficient sacrifice for sin was needed, as well as a perfect High Priest who could enter God's presence in the Holy of Holies above and sit down, permanently to intercede for his people. As an unblemished sacrifice and a flawless High Priest, Jesus underwent the flaming sword of God's judgment in his death, and then, in his resurrection, he led the way back into the presence of God to the tree of life. In the final moment of his perfect, obedient life, as he breathed his final breath, the temple curtain was torn in

two, signifying the end of the old way of worship and the beginning of the new way of worship, in the real Holy of Holies above. “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, *a minister in the holy places*, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man” (Heb. 8:1–2, emphasis added). There, seated at his Father’s right hand, Jesus conducts the worship of heaven; and from there, he purifies the worship of his church on earth:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:19–22).

The writer to the Hebrews goes on to capture the significance of this worship-defining moment in redemptive history:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. . . .

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:18–24, 28–29).

And so, with pure hearts and clean consciences, as God's people we are now able to worship him acceptably; we are now able to hear his call to worship without being terrified by his voice; we are now able to assemble around the heavenly Mount Zion without the fear of being consumed by the blazing fire of his presence, for

[Christ] has hushed the law's loud thunder;
He has quenched Mount Sinai's flame;
He has washed us with his blood;
He has brought us nigh to God.

(John Newton)¹

Perfected Worship—Now . . . but Not Yet

Through his ministry in the Holy of Holies, Jesus, God's final (last-days) Son, inaugurated the perfected worship of God on earth. As a result, our worship is purified and perfected in God's sight, in a way that the worship of Old Testament saints was not, for

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

(Isaac Watts)²

1. "Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder" (John Newton, 1774).

2. "Not All the Blood of Beasts" (Isaac Watts, 1709).

Even so, our worship is not yet fully realized in its glorified, consummate form in the new heavens and new earth. For now, we worship with many weaknesses and imperfections down here (cf. WCF 16.6), but then we will do so perfectly up there, where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13). For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then we shall fully know, even as we are fully known (1 Cor. 13:12). For now, as justified sons in the Son, we worship by faith; but then, as glorified sons in the Son, we will do so by sight. What that worship will look like was partially revealed in the beginning in the garden of Eden, and then typified at Sinai and Zion (cf. Heb. 8:5). But the fullest glimpse into that heavenly worship is left until John's vision in Revelation.

Worship in Heaven

The fact that the word "worship" is concentrated more in Revelation than in any other book (twenty-four times), and the fact that John receives his vision while he is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, sets the liturgical tone for the book. Christ is presented to us as the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead and the Ruler of the kings of the earth; he is the First and the Last, the living One who was dead but now is alive forevermore. And as the Risen Christ, he now walks among his gathered churches (the seven lampstands) calling them to repentance for their sins (Rev. 2–3). After this, John is invited into the throne room of heaven to see God seated on his throne in all his glory (Rev. 4). The manifestation of his greatness recalls the theophany at Sinai—with lightning, thunder, and fire. God is worshiped there in heaven by angelic creatures who surround his throne and worship him for who he is in himself. Day and night, they never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8). Twenty-four angelic elders also worship him for who he is as Creator, casting down their crowns, and saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11). But the praise of heaven is not reserved for God alone; it is also given to the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who was slain, for his

provision of a sin offering. The twenty-four elders fall before the Lamb as well as God, and sing a new song, saying:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9–10).

They are accompanied by innumerable angels, saying in a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12). And then angels and archangels, and the whole company of heaven and earth join together—every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea—saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:14).

This symphony of praise for God’s work in creation (Rev. 4) and the Lamb’s work in redemption (Rev. 5) follows the call to worship and the call to repentance (Rev. 1–3). A recurring cycle of divine communication (God’s Word) and human response (prayer and praise) then follows, punctuated with fire consuming the sacrifices or glory filling the temple (Rev. 6:1–19:5). The cycle is centered on the reading and proclamation of God’s Word in the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven signs, the seven bowls; and then it climaxes with the fall of Satan’s kingdom, seen in the fall of Babylon. The covenantal blessings and curses—for worshiper and idolater, respectively—result in two suppers: the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (for the saints) and the Great Supper of God (for sinners) (Rev. 19:6–10, 17–21). The former meal relates to the supper that Jesus said he would enjoy with his followers in his future kingdom (Mark 14:22–26).

As with worship in the Old Testament, the worship of God here in Revelation climaxes in communion with God over a meal, followed by an announcement of blessing for those who have worshiped God aright (Rev. 21–22). Faithful worshipers will receive the blessing of the new creation, in which the dwelling of God will

be with them, “and they will be his people and God himself will be their God” (Rev. 21:3). There will be no more tears or death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things of a broken and fallen world will have passed away. There will be no temple in the city, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb will be its temple; there will be no sun or moon to shine there, for the glory of God will give it light, and the Lamb will be its lamp. In the light of the Lamb will the nations walk, and the leaves of the tree of life will be for their healing. They will see God’s face; his name will be on their foreheads; and they will reign with him forever and ever. And then, the benediction that was pronounced in the covenant of grace throughout redemptive history (Num. 6:24–26) will be perfected and realized in the heavenly Jerusalem: God’s people will be blessed and kept; God’s face will shine upon them and they will receive his grace; God’s countenance will be lifted up upon them and they will experience, in its consummate form, his *shalom*.

Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest,
Beneath your contemplation
Sink heart and voice oppressed;
I know not, O, I know not
What joys await me there,
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare!

O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God’s elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!
In mercy, Jesus, bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who are, with God the Father,
And Spirit, ever blest.

(Bernard of Cluny)³

3. “Jerusalem the Golden” (Bernard of Cluny, twelfth century; trans. John M. Neale, 1858).

In the consummated worship of that “sweet and blessed country,” the same general elements and structure of worship at Sinai and Zion will be present:

- Gathering around Christ (the church on earth) (Rev. 1–3)
- Call to worship (on earth and in heaven) (2–4)
- Confession/Repentance (sin in Christ’s churches exposed)
(2–3; 5:3–4)
- Cleansing (the Lamb who was slain) (5:5–7)
- Mediated access (the Lamb opens the scroll before God) (5:8)
- Praise (by angels and the whole creation) (5:9–14)
- Divine communication (God’s Word opened and proclaimed
in all the earth) (6:1–19:5)
- Response: prayer (by the saints) (7:9–8:4; 11:15–18)
fire/glory (fills the temple) (8:5; 11:19; 15:5–8; 16:17–18)
praise (by the saints) (7:9–8:4; 19:1–5)
- Meal (19:6–10)
- Benediction (21–22)

At a macro level, the basic structure of worship in Eden is still present: call—response—meal. So too are the new elements of worship introduced in the covenant of grace, as seen in the Old Testament: gathering, cleansing, mediated access, divine communication, cleansing/consecration, and benediction. Thus the worship that was revealed in Eden, and then typified at Sinai and Zion (cf. Heb. 8:5), is finally perfected and realized in the heavenly Jerusalem. The three “mountain peaks” of worship in redemptive history find their complete perfection and ultimate realization in the heavenly Zion, where Christ is seated and reigning, and where the nations will gather to sing his praises.

Worship on Earth

In the meantime, the church is called to worship God on earth as he is in heaven, and to invite the nations to join in. Gentile worship was typified at Jesus’s birth when the Magi came from the east (note the direction) to worship the King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). But

the direct invitation to the nations to worship God's King was first sounded by the King himself. On one occasion, during his earthly ministry, Jesus met a Samaritan woman by a well. The woman had previously had five husbands, and the person with whom she was now living was not her husband. Jesus spoke to her not about wedlock, but about water and worship. He promised to give her water, which after drinking, she would never thirst again; and he called her to worship in spirit and truth, "for the Father is seeking such people to worship him" (John 4:23). And with such words stood before her the husband she had been looking for all her life. Here was the faithful Son who would satisfy his bride, and lead her in pure worship before the one true God. Jesus's invitation to the Samaritan woman pointed forward to what was to come.

After his ascension to his Father's right hand, Jesus sent his Spirit out into the world to woo a bride for himself from among the nations. God the Holy Spirit was sent to call sinners from every nation to renounce their idolatrous ways and to worship God the Father through his Son. That call to worship has been going out from Jerusalem since the Apostle Peter preached his first sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2), and it has been going out to the ends of the earth since the Apostle Paul began preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46–48). For everyone who hears and responds to God's word of invitation, a benediction awaits: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and that they may enter the city by the gates" (Rev. 22:14). Repentant sinners will receive the blessing of cleansing for sin and unrestricted access to the tree of life. They will enter, not just a garden, like Eden, but a garden-city, better than Eden—in which flows a pure river of the water of life, gushing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And so the Spirit and the bride say: "'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17).

The mission of the Church, Christ's bride, is worship and witness: to worship the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and to witness to a lost world of what God has done in Christ as Creator and Redeemer, and what he will do in Christ as Consummator of all things. One day, the Church's witness in the present world will

cease, but her worship in the world to come will not. In the future new heavens and new earth, a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, and from all tribes and peoples and languages, will stand before the throne and say, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:10). They will fall down on their faces and say, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (Rev. 7:12).

Worship Matters

The story of human history, from beginning to end, is the story of worship. This is because God has so structured his world that every person will worship through one of two men—Adam or Jesus Christ. The first man Adam was made *homo liturgicus*, and everyone bearing his image has inherited his fallen liturgical orientation toward idolatry. We are born worshiping the creature, not the Creator; we live our lives seeking salvation and satisfaction in pseudo-redeemers, not *the* Redeemer. We are a restless race, wandering "east," away from the divine sanctuary. But, through the Second Man Jesus Christ, we have the invitation to return and worship God aright in spirit and truth, in his presence. Through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ—the true *Homo Liturgicus*—God has opened a way back into his presence. Since the first son of God, Adam, through the national (typical) son of God, Israel, and the royal (typical) son of God, Solomon, to the final (last-days) Son of God, Jesus, and now the (redeemed) sons of God, the Church—God has been seeking a people to worship him. We are called to worship, and our hearts are restless until we respond to that call by faith and obedience, and come and feast on Christ: "[W]hoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The consummate experience of this truth must await the final day when we will feast on, and with, the glorified Son of God himself, at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. For now, it is right, fitting, and delightful to worship as God's redeemed people; then, it will be

right, fitting, and delightful to do so as God's glorified people. It is why worship matters now—because it will matter then, forever.

As It Is in Heaven

And so, as we gather each Lord's Day, between the now and not yet of God's kingdom, let us worship God for who is he, as one eternal God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and for what he has done in creation and redemption, and for what he will do in the coming consummation. Let us worship God on earth as he is worshiped in heaven:

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!

Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD!
For he commanded and they were created.
And he established them forever and ever;
he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

Praise the LORD from the earth,
You great sea creatures and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.

Praise the LORD!

(Ps. 148)

Amen and Amen.