

## Forever and Ever, Amen!

The First Hymns of Heaven – Part V

Revelation 5:11-14

### Introduction

If you believe, as I do, that a few minutes in heaven will straighten everything out, make it right, and prioritize things, you should know that not only will our presence before God in heaven accomplish all of this and more, but even the vision of heaven and the record of the apostle John in the book of Revelation accomplishes the same things.

- For those wondering about the deity of Jesus Christ – just watch and listen to the worship of the Lamb around the throne;
- For those wondering if God’s plans and purposes will be fulfilled – study in this Apocalypse the precision of His plans as they unfold;
- For those tempted to think that the triune God is a mystical force or some ethereal source of power they can tap into – note in John’s tour of heaven the presence of God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit;
- For those who have fallen for the view that God is learning as He goes along and is making things up as He observes our actions – discover otherwise in this Revelation of John.

The future of this planet and the universe and mankind is already written down on a scroll. In other words, God has the script – He alone is the author of it. The seven-sealed scroll about to be unrolled was finished and the ink was dry long before puny mankind raised his doubts and his disbelief and his disrespect toward the throne of heaven.

If you have given an ear to Marianne Williamson’s teaching of *A Course in Miracles* on Oprah Winfrey’s radio show in which she says that Jesus is merely a symbol which can stand for any god or goddess that one can take and pour into that name – notice the singularity of Christ’s sovereignty in John’s vision of heaven.

If you have fallen for Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret* and have begun to believe that you can command the universe – telling it what you want and believing that the universe will respond to your will – note in John’s record that the universe follows the bidding and command of sovereign God alone.

If you have fallen further into this false teaching along with those who write and think with Byrne that, and I quote, “You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of you on this planet. . . . You are God in a physical body. . . . The birds sing for you. The sun rises and sets for you. The stars come out for you . . .” – note in this truth of heaven that John is able to describe that the birds and planets do not exist for our honor and they are not singing to our glory, but are singing to the glory of God alone.<sup>i</sup>

If you have gotten caught up in the latest fancy over *The Secret* and the law of attraction and have begun to believe that you can speak your own destiny and mouth the words of your own future – read of how utterly dependent we are upon the sovereign will of God, who alone determines the destiny of the universe.

I want to further warn you, dear flock of God, that the teaching that you are divine and you have the power to create and you are little gods and you

command the universe is nothing more than the repackaging of Satan's lure to Eve.

I also want to warn you that much of what Rhonda Byrne and Eckhart Tolle are now teaching, primarily through the media outlets of Oprah Winfrey to literally millions of people daily, has made its way as a baptized version of this same false teaching into the church.

For years now, a loosely associated movement known as the Word Faith movement has been teaching a "Christianized" form of creative word power. The Word Faith movement basically believes the following principles – all of them using biblical language, but distorting biblical texts:

1. First, God creates by using His words;
2. Secondly, mankind is made in the image of God and is thus a "little god" capable of creating through the use of words;
3. Thirdly, the Christian, by faith, can create by what he speaks.

In other words, just speak it; name it, claim it – it is yours. Speak words of health and healing and wealth and prosperity, and you can have it. By speaking positive faith-filled words, you can create your own future.

This is basically the same thing as the law of attraction – we get whatever we want. The only difference is the unbeliever on Oprah says the universe will give it to you, while the Christian on television and in the book stores says God will give it to you. It is basically the same thing – you have the power in your words to create your destiny.

I have appreciated the research into this movement by James Walker, the president of Watchman Fellowship who was a guest speaker during our church summer series last summer and will be returning this summer. In one of his articles, James uncovers a number of teachers in the Word Faith movement who have, in recent months, espoused a Christianized version of the law of attraction – otherwise known as Word-Faith.

A leading teacher in this movement by the name of Charles Capps wrote, "We are capable of operating on the same creative plane as God." From what I have read by him, he means by this that we have the power to create our lifestyle on earth – whether we prosper or not; whether we are sick or whole depends on our creative authority.<sup>ii</sup>

Imagine this – throughout the Bible your condition and place in life is described as the work and will of God, but that is too bad – all along it was

up to you and you should have spoken prosperity. There was no reason for Paul to have to suffer poverty – he should have spoken more words of prosperity! There was no reason for him to suffer imprisonment – he should have spoken words of freedom!

This is nothing more than religious-sounding law of attraction – speak to the universe and the universe will give you what you want.

Walker's article noted another rising star in this way of thinking – a woman with a growing television audience by the name of Joyce Meyer. She said recently, and I quote, "We can speak positive thoughts about ourselves into the atmosphere and thereby prophesy our future."<sup>iii</sup>

Another leading teacher, by the name of Gloria Copeland, said in a similar vein, and I quote, "One of the first things Ken and I learned when we started walking in the power of God was that our words had to match what we wanted to come to pass."<sup>iv</sup>

In other words, we declare our future. Our words determine everything and bring what we want to pass.

This is nothing more than a Christianized version of the law of attraction, and The Secret.

Your words determine everything – which makes you sovereign, right?

A favorite text most often distorted and misunderstood by this movement is Genesis 1:26-27, that we have been,

*. . . created . . . in the image of God . . .*

They distort the meaning of this text in order to give us divine power – literally to consider us little gods.

According to Copeland and Meyer and Capps and many others, we are little gods.

In her message entitled "Authority and Opposition," Joyce Meyer said, and I quote, "Why do people have such a fit about God calling [us] little gods? . . . what's God supposed to call us? Doesn't the Bible say we are created in His image?"<sup>v</sup>

This teaching, supposedly in the name of Christ, is deeply troubling to me. Being made in the image of God does not mean we are godlings – that we are little gods. It means, among other things, that like God, we can live objectively for eternity – self-aware, with a desire to worship; we are immortal.

Like God, we have no ending. But do not forget that unlike God, we had a – what? – beginning.

Being made in the image of God means that we can be creative – not that we have become creators.

My friend, false teaching elevates the power of man and depersonalizes God into a force you tap into – a divine power you learn to manipulate to your bidding; He represents a universal secret you learn – and you have the power to speak a word and prophesy your own future.

It is no wonder that Kenneth Copeland can make this statement in one of his messages, “When I read in the Bible where He [Jesus] says, ‘I am,’ I just smile and say, ‘Yes, I am too.’”<sup>vi</sup>

This is false teaching – even though it comes with a smile and in the name of Jesus.

Ladies and gentlemen, two minutes in heaven, or less, around the throne of this personal, terrifying, majestic, sovereign God, and we, like all the others, will fall to our faces before Him and sing, and then we will rise to sing some more, and then we will fall prostrate once again.

Charles Lamb, an early nineteenth century writer, once told a group of friends, “If Shakespeare was to come into this room, we should all rise to meet him; but if Jesus Christ was to enter, we would fall down to kiss the hem of His garment.”<sup>vii</sup>

## Hymns of Heaven to Honor Jesus

When we first arrived at this scene in Revelation chapter 4, John delivered some amazing sights and sounds. We began to hear the first of several hymns sung by angels and the raptured church in heaven. In fact, Revelation chapters 4 and 5 represent the church now in heaven, before the throne of God. It should be no surprise that music is synonymous with heaven.

In Revelation chapter 4, the angelic creatures began by singing, in verse 8, of the holiness of God,

*... who was and is and is to come!*

Then the “presbuteroi,” or the elders, representing the church and all the redeemed, fell down and sang, in verse 11,

*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power . . .*

Then the scene shifted, in chapter 5 verse 5, to the One standing beside the throne of God the Father,

*... the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . .*

We are introduced to John’s description of Jesus Christ who takes the scroll from His Father, representing the truth that Christ is capable of fulfilling the will of His Father on earth.

Then both the angels and the church sing antiphonally the third hymn in chapter 5 verse 9.

*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,*

Imagine this scene.

Many Christians know of Jim Elliot and the way his death, and that of his missionary companions, paved the way to the conversion of the Auca Indians. However, few people know that an American Indian named Geronimo was converted to Christianity and was publicly baptized as a follower of Christ at Apache mission in Fort Sill Military Reservation in 1903.

Imagine singing one day in heaven, and kneeling next to you is Geronimo!

We have no idea!

## Fourth Hymn of Heaven

The fourth hymn now begins in Revelation 5:11-12.

*Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, . . .*

Now, the fact that the text uses the phrase “saying with a loud voice” might give the impression that they were not singing. However, “legontes (λεγοντες),” translated “saying,” is an amplification of “adousin (αδουσιν),” used in verse 9 as a clear reference to singing. We could understand this phrase in verse 12 to simply mean, “and these were the lyrics”.<sup>viii</sup>

Angels do sing and they evidently do so with a loud voice.

In fact, the words translated “loud voice,” in verse 12, are from the words “phone megale (φωνη μεγαλη),” which we reverse to say “megale phone,” and get our word “megaphone”. The sound is a deafening roar, yet majestic music.<sup>ix</sup>

We could understand these verses to mean, “They were singing with their loudest voices and these were the lyrics they were saying . . .”

Did you notice how many there are singing?

Revelation 5:11 says that the angels alone numbered,

. . . *myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*

Myriad means “10,000”. Ten thousand was the largest unit used in the ancient Greek world. It can refer to a literal 10,000 which in this case, if we did the math, would be talking about more than one hundred million, and millions more.<sup>x</sup>

The word “myriad” can also mean, simply, “a number impossible to count”.

Either way, this hymn is being sung by hundreds of millions of angels, along with the redeemed church.

And to whom are we all singing at the top of our lungs? Notice Revelation 5:12 again,

. . . *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain . . .”*

We just cannot seem to get away from the cross work of Christ.

John described Christ earlier in this scene as one who looked as if He had been slain. In other words, Christ retained the scars of His crucifixion – forever reminding us of how we got to the throne!

Christ has kept His scars – forever reminding us how we are able to be there. Those scars are on His body because of me. They are there because of you.

Marianne Williamson, teaching millions of listeners *A Course in Miracles* – a new age teaching that defies self and depersonalizes God, making Jesus just a symbol of overcoming suffering and reaching enlightenment – has taught this lesson, “A slain Christ has no meaning. Do not make the pathetic error of clinging to the old rugged cross.”<sup>xi</sup>

Let me say it again – and we can see it in this text – we are before the throne of God because of an old rugged cross – the death of our Savior atoning once and for all upon that cross for our sins. We *cling* to the old rugged cross.

Today, leaders in the emerging church movement, such as Brian McLaren, and liberals along with him, have begun calling the crucifixion, “cosmic child abuse”.

Be encouraged; the apostle Paul already promised that to the unbeliever the cross would either be considered foolishness or offensive (I Corinthians 1:23). In spite of that, Paul said,

. . . *we preach Christ crucified . . .*

Evidently Jesus Christ is not embarrassed about it either.

In fact, the word John used in this verse for “slain” is not the usual word translated “crucified,” but a word that literally means “slaughtered”.

It is the same word used in Isaiah 53:7 when Isaiah wrote that our Lord was,

. . . *like a lamb that is led to the slaughter . . .*

It is because of Christ the Lamb that was slain that we, the redeemed, have been forgiven and now stand with hundreds of millions of angels and redeemed believers. And guess what? One of our first hymns in heaven refers to that moment in history,

. . . *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain . . .”*

What follows next is a hymn of praise for seven attributes of the Lamb. Again, the number seven subtly implies the comprehensive perfection and majesty of the Lamb of God.

. . . *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive . . .”*

**1. He is worthy to receive power (δυναμιν).**

This is a reference to omnipotent, total, comprehensive ability. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that Jesus Christ is the power of God (I Corinthians 1:24).

**2. Worthy is He to receive wealth (πλουτων).**

This is not just a reference to spiritual wealth, but to unconditional wealth in every possible realm.<sup>xii</sup>

Haggai the prophet quoted God saying,

*The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:8)*

Paul refers, in Ephesians 3:8, to,

. . . *the unsearchable riches of Christ,*

**3. The Lamb is worthy because He has all wisdom (σοφιαν).**

This is the attribute of God that refers to His understanding, intelligence, and skill. According to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, this attribute would distinguish the Messiah and His reign.<sup>xiii</sup>

**4. The hymn continues to sing of the Lamb who is worthy to receive all might (ισχυον).**

This has the idea of strength. Paul spoke of Christ returning in the terrifying power of His strength (II Thessalonians 1:9).

**5. We sing to the Lamb because He is worthy of all honor (τιμην).**

Even now, Jesus Christ is dishonored on earth. He is blasphemed and ridiculed.<sup>xiv</sup>

Perhaps you have seen the documentary called “Expelled” that chronicles how people are losing their jobs as professors and professionals for casting doubt on evolution by even suggesting the possibility of an intelligent designer.

I watched this documentary the other night with my sons and some of their friends. It was not surprising, but it was still amazing to hear so many supposed scholars forced to speculate as to origin of life on the planet, rather than even consider the possibility of intelligent design, much less the existence of God.

I watched on the screen as Richard Dawkins was forced by his own argument into an impossible corner where he had to postulate that since there could be no God, the original cell – the origin of the potential for life – had to have been seeded on this planet by aliens. I watched the expression on his face turn to anger when the host asked him at the end, “So you don’t believe in a God?” He said, “No, how could ask me that after all I’ve said?!”

Imagine, one of the most well-known defenders of evolution forced to declare his faith in the possibility of aliens depositing some form of life on earth to start it all, rather than crack the door open to the possibility of God.

If I were God, I would write at least once a year in the sky with bright cloud, “I created the heavens and the earth.”

I would write, “I rule the universe.”

I would write, “Richard Dawkins will be sorry!”

I would be honored if I were God.

He is not honored by the world at large. But He will be, as we will see in a moment.

#### **6. The Lamb is worthy also of all glory (δοξαν).**

This gives us our word “doxology”. The word “glory” refers to the splendor and fame that characterize everything about Him and His court.

Our Lord is connected to this word on several occasions in the New Testament:

- His pre-incarnate glory in heaven (John 17:5);
- Glory bestowed on Him at His resurrection and exaltation (John 12:23-24);
- His triumphal glory which He will reveal at His second coming (Matthew 24:30);
- His millennial glory which will characterize His earthly kingdom (Matthew 25:31);

- His eternal glory which parallels the glory of the Father (Revelation 21:23).<sup>xv</sup>

Jesus Christ is worthy of all glory.

#### **7. The final stanza has us singing that the Lamb is worthy of receiving all blessing (εὐλογίαν), which gives us our word “eulogy”.**

We think of a eulogy as something nice said about someone who has died. This eulogy is all the wonderful things that can possibly be said about Christ who is alive.

In the first of these five hymns, the four creatures chanted their song of God’s holiness.

In the second hymn, the church sang to the worth of God the Father.

In the third hymn, the four living creatures and the elders representing the church sang antiphonally to the worth of Christ and the promise of the church’s future reign on the earth.

The choir is getting progressively larger because in the fourth hymn, hundreds of millions of angels now join the church – the elders – and the living creatures.

### **Fifth Hymn of Heaven**

Now, however, in this fifth hymn of heaven, Revelation 5:13 informs us that John,

*. . . heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them . . .*

Now singing to the Lamb of God, John hears of Christ’s,

*. . . blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!*

Imagine now – the choir is universal; it is global; it encompasses everything above the earth and on the earth.<sup>xvi</sup>

“Under the earth” is a reference to the demonic world and all the inhabitants of hell. Imagine the implications of this choir – it is no longer representative, it is exhaustive – not one creature or human being is left silent.<sup>xvii</sup>

One author wrote that this hymn anticipates that great future day when no one will withhold from God His due.

This is the fulfillment of Philippians 2:10-11 when,

*. . . every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord [kurios] . . .*

Every tongue will admit that Jesus Christ is God.

There will be no atheists in eternity – not even in hell!

There will be millions of condemned theists on this day when all the world acknowledges that Jesus Christ *is the image of invisible God* (*Colossians 1:15*).<sup>xviii</sup>

Throughout history, our Savior has been vilified and scorned. Even in recent years, an increasing number of books, speakers, politicians, scholars, and comedians have run the name of Christ into the dirt.

However, on this day, every tongue will acknowledge that it was not aliens after all.

- S. G. Brandon will see that Christ was more than a political zealot;
- Richard Horsley will admit that Jesus was not merely a social prophet;
- Gerald Downing will recant his view that Christ was a cynical philosopher;
- Morton Smith will cringe over his writings that Jesus was a magician who tricked his followers;
- Laurie Beth Jones will recognize that Christ was more than a good example for corporate CEOs;
- Barbara Thiering will understand that Christ really was not influenced by Buddhism; was not married to Mary Magdalene in His thirties; did not escape death by crucifixion through medicine;
- John Allegro will bow his knee to the One he claimed invented His own cult and promoted it through the use of hallucinogenic drugs;
- John Hick and Shelby Spong will utter through their clenched teeth that He is the truth, even though they claimed He was not God in the flesh, did not atone for anyone's sins on the cross, and did not rise from the dead;
- The writer, actors, and producer Martin Scorsese, of *The Last Temptation of Christ* will recognize the blasphemy of their work which had Christ say on the stage before mocking crowds, "I am a liar, I am a hypocrite. I am afraid of everything.";
- Dan Brown will understand as he joins in the universal chant to Creator Christ that Jesus

was not a mere man and the church did not conspire after all by making up the four gospels;<sup>xix</sup>

- Marianne Williamson will understand on that day that the cross was not a tragic error to cling to, but was something to cry out to;
- Oprah Winfrey will tragically discover she was wrong on that fateful day recorded and watched now by millions of people when she said, "Jesus Christ is not the only way to God";
- Christopher Hitchens, on this day, will acknowledge the crucifixion was not barbaric, but redemptive – only too late perhaps;
- On this day as the entire universe sings this hymn, Richard Dawkins will acknowledge it was not aliens, and he and Charles Darwin will join together and surrender to the truth of their Creator God!

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the goal toward which all of history is racing. Human history is not rushing toward the deification of mankind; it is not racing toward the exaltation of little gods; it is not racing into the oblivion of oneness with the universe – it is rushing toward a universal choir that will acknowledge and honor and glorify,

*. . . him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb . . . forever and ever!*

## Conclusion

My friend – you will say these words one day. Will you be filled with incredible joy or unbelievable regret and fear?<sup>xx</sup>

Accept the Lamb of God as your Savior now and be assured you will sing to the Lamb of God with great joy. What are you waiting for? Give Him your worship now – by grace through faith in the crucified, resurrected, ascended sovereign Savior. Call out to Him now. You can trust His promise that,

*. . . everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13)*

Call on Him now. Do not wait another moment. One day it will be forever too late.

Before this scene closes and the hymns cease (and I love this little addition to the scene), we see in Revelation 5:14,

*And the four living creatures . . .*

You may remember them from chapter 4. These four strange creatures rotated around the throne of God the Father, and,

... said, "Amen!" ...

The tense of the verb means they continue saying it. All the universe is singing and these four creatures keep saying, "Amen."

After each attribute – which, by the way, in the original language is preceded by a definite article giving it grand dignity and ceremony – is sung, these creatures shout, "Amen!"

... *To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be:*

- *the blessing – Amen!*
- *and the honor – Amen!*
- *and the glory – Amen!*

- *and the might – Amen!*
- *forever and ever! – Amen! Amen! Amen!*

Can you imagine? There will be hundreds of millions of angels and all humanity acknowledging these truths and the four living creatures thundering from the presence of the throne, "Amen!" – which means, "It's true! It's true! It's true!"

He is worthy of honor – It's true!

He is worthy of glory – It's true!

He is worthy of might – It's true!

He is worthy forever and ever!

It is the truth!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/18/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> Servant Issue, Number 79 (2007), p. 7.

<sup>ii</sup> "What Joyce Wants, Joyce Gets," Watchman Fellowship.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> David J. MacLeod, "The Adoration of God the Redeemer," Bibliotheca Sacra (Oct/Dec 2007), p. 470.

<sup>viii</sup> Robert Thomas, Revelation: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1992), p. 404.

<sup>ix</sup> Steven Lawson, Heaven Help Us (NavPress, 1995), p. 94.

<sup>x</sup> Stewart Custer, From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 68.

<sup>xi</sup> Erwin Lutzer, sermon manuscript (Apr. 2008).

<sup>xii</sup> Thomas, p. 405.

<sup>xiii</sup> MacLeod, p. 467.

<sup>xiv</sup> Lehman Strauss, Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1964), p. 151.

<sup>xv</sup> MacLeod, p. 468.

<sup>xvi</sup> Sam Gordon, Worthy is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 143.

<sup>xvii</sup> Thomas, p. 408.

<sup>xviii</sup> Lawson, p. 97.

<sup>xix</sup> MacLeod, p. 454.

<sup>xx</sup> Ray Stedman, God's Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 137.