

Singing with Angels | Jayson Knox

SPEAKER	Jayson Knox
DATE	Sunday, November 19, 2023
PASSAGES	Revelation 4-5; Revelation 6:10; Revelation 1:4-5; Colossians 3:1-3; Ephesians 2:6; Romans 12:1-2
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:03:52 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Revelation runs on a split screen. One feed is heaven's throne room, where the outcome is settled and the singing never stops; the other is earth, where it is still being worked out and the crowd is shouting at the officials. Worship is the first feed breaking into the second — and the people who join in get changed by it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Worship is one of Revelation's primary themes, not its background music. The throne is named forty-six times, and authority, power, rule, kingdom and king another seventy-seven.
- ◆ The first readers were a hated, hunted minority. What John hands them is not a strategy — it is a seat in the courtroom of heaven.
- ◆ Heaven, as Jayson put it, is not directionally up. It is at hand.
- ◆ It is legitimate to ask God questions in worship. Revelation 6 is a complaint, and God answers it by shaking the earth.
- ◆ Missions exists because worship doesn't. The choir described in Revelation 5 is not yet at full strength, and the church is on a recruiting trip.
- ◆ We are wired to meditate — on lottery billboards, on election news, on junior high. Worship is that same faculty pointed at what is actually true.
- ◆ Colossians 3 does not answer the discipleship question with a list of behaviors. It says set your mind above, and let the new self be renewed after the image of its Creator.

► 1:03:52

Jayson began by commending the series Matt has been preaching through Revelation — “very, very brave pastor” — and then said he was going somewhere else with the same book. Three altitudes: the timeless view from thirty thousand feet, then street level, then in the door at Hope Chapel.

A split screen

► 1:05:39

Someone gave him the image accidentally in conversation this week, and it organized the whole message. Modern broadcasts let you watch one game from several angles at once: one feed carries the commentators who know everything and explain what you are seeing; another is just the stadium, no commentary, only crowd noise. “The experts are talking about how things really are in heaven,” Jayson said, “and then you get to kind of watch on earth how it’s working out.” The book cuts back and forth. Worship in heaven introduces what God is about to do on earth, or answers what has just been done there.

Read the songs out loud

► 1:09:24

Rather than describe the worship scenes, he made the room perform them. Center section: the four living creatures. Sides: the twenty-four elders.

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” ... “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.”

REVELATION 4:8-11 ↗

He liked the elders best — the ones who bring everything they have and throw it down. “I know we don’t have a lot of crowns to offer, but everything you’ve got is the Lord’s. Your pencil sketches on the refrigerator — it’s still kind of cute. Bring it.”

► 1:14:25

One clarification he wanted on the record, on the authority of Dr. Hawthorne and of Jesus: heaven is not a direction. It is at hand. Close. Our part is acknowledging it and putting a hand out to take hold.

Who received this letter first

► 1:13:00

It matters who was holding the page. “They were not the moral majority. They were not even the noticed minority. They were the harassed, hated, barely-noticed-unless-I-want-to-kill-them fringes.” Nero killed Christians by the tens of thousands for sport; Domitian likely more. There were not many believers, they were not on their way to running the empire for another two centuries, and they had watched people they loved die. Into that comes a letter opening with grace and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness — and then a door into the throne room.

Worthy is the Lamb — and why missions exists

► 1:18:36

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” ... “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

REVELATION 5:12-13 ↗

► 1:20:25

For the next one there were no sides. This is where heaven and creation say the same thing, so he asked everyone to stand and say it together:

“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.”

REVELATION 5:9-10 ↗

► 1:22:07

That is a statement of fact, he said — true in eternity, and on its way to being true here. Which is where he reached for the sentence John Piper puts in the opening pages of *Let the Nations Be Glad*: missions exists because worship doesn't. Every tribe, tongue and nation is a preview, and the choir is not yet at full strength. “We're on a recruiting mission to make sure everybody that wants to be in that choir can be.”

It is okay to ask questions in worship

► 1:23:37

His favorite of the heavenly texts is not a song at all. It is a question, and a bitter one.

“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

REVELATION 6:10 ↗

► 1:25:47

He put it in a stadium. A packed house on a good night is emotional and loud and entirely focused, and nobody thinks that is strange — we are made to celebrate. But then there are two touchdowns called back, and the arms are still raised and the crowd is still roaring, only now they are shouting *what was that?* “They’re asking questions of the authority and disputing his reality.” That is exactly what the martyrs do. Nobody in the scene is telling God how lovely he is. They are grumpy about the results.

► 1:27:23

What he loves more is the answer. A question obligates a response — even ignoring one is a response — which is part of why prayer so often takes the shape of a question. And God’s answer is not a sentence. The prayers of the saints go up from the altar, and fire comes back down: thunder, earthquake, business as usual on earth brought to an end, every ruler and authority terrified. “Question asked in heaven, answered by God on earth. This is not the replay booth. This is something much bigger.” Chapters four through nineteen run on that rhythm — worship providing the background against which human institutions come apart and a city is built.

Small-w worship and the attitude indicator

► 1:30:52

Down to street level: what happens when we gather and sing. It is a preview, but more than a preview — an anchor already set in heaven with a rope in our hands, pulling us toward it. “To worship God is to be changed. Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, sometimes under conviction — but even in the soaking, when you don’t feel it, the declaration of things that are true changes you.” He borrowed the pilot’s attitude indicator: a small dial showing which way you are leaning relative to the horizon. You come in leaning one way, you hear that God’s love is broad and deep and wide, and you begin to lean toward it.

► 1:32:15

His argument for why this works is that we are meditating creatures whether or not we choose to be. Worry is meditation — on a past you cannot change, or a future you cannot act on. So is rehearsing a regret from junior high, or doing the arithmetic on a two-hundred-million-dollar lottery billboard. With an election year coming, everyone will be trying to make us meditate on the way things are, and cynicism is the predictable result. Where our thoughts go, the rest of us follows.

Theology happens in the liturgy

► 1:34:48

He once asked an Orthodox priest to recommend a systematic theology, and got a look like he had fallen out of a tree. There isn't one — too much mystery to systematize. Creeds, yes; theology, certainly. "But our primary place for doing theology is in the liturgy. In corporate worship." It took Jayson a while to hear what he was being told, and Revelation is what finally explained it: the declaration of what is true and right, with everything focused there, is theology at its most serious.

► 1:36:03

You do not have to sing to worship, he added, but it is good that we do. Robert Coleman: the things we spontaneously sing about have a way of shaping our minds, just as in time they reveal what is uppermost in our thoughts. Even people with no faith at all have known this — Nietzsche thought life without music would be a mistake, and Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote that without music she should wish to die. Jayson's favorite came by way of Bono quoting Carlyle on how Irish music outlasted centuries of empire: let me make a nation's songs, and I care not who makes their laws. Our own gatherings tend to arc — first person singular to first person plural, confession to adoration, and adoration around again to our own formation. Pilgrimage to the throne.

Set your mind on things above

► 1:41:53

Then a short run of verses he wanted the room to say out loud, because they are hard to believe and confessing them is how they start to land. God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places — which may be why one of the declarations in Revelation comes from the direction of the throne itself. He blessed us with every spiritual blessing, not some. And the mystery hidden for ages is now being made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church.

► 1:42:45

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

COLOSSIANS 3:1-3 ↗

► 1:44:40

This, he said, is one of the places where Paul is most direct about how discipleship actually works. The list that follows — immorality, impurity, evil desire, anger, wrath, malice — is a list you read going *guilty, guilty, guilty*. Put off the old self with its practices. But notice what does not come next: no matching list of new behaviors to practice. Just put on the new self, “which is being renewed after the image of its creator.” Jayson’s summary was the sharpest line of the morning: “Christianity is not about how you behave. It’s about who you adore, who you follow, who you trust with your life.”

► 1:46:41

His one practical counsel, offered as opinion rather than apostolic instruction: in private devotion, do whatever the book actually says to do. If it says kneel, kneel. If it says prostrate yourself, get down. If it says lift your hands, try it — you would do it without a second thought in a stadium of a hundred thousand people, and we were given imaginations precisely so we could import that. He confessed he still regrets never learning to dance, and floated the idea of converting the old cry room into a nursing mothers’ and dancing fathers’ room, shades drawn, sound piped in.

► 1:49:36

Asked once how a person gets this transition going, Dallas Willard reportedly said: do what the Bible says — present your bodies. And what does that mean? Lie down on the floor. Just lie there. Present your body to him and say, Lord, take it.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

ROMANS 12:1-2 ↗

A church that sings a long time

► 1:51:47

Last, in the door. Worship is one of Hope Chapel's real values — not a unique one, he was careful to say, but a genuine one, and you can tell because we sing for a long time. Coming from a church in Arizona that loved to worship but did it in seventeen and a half minutes because there was another service to get to, he had to rebuild the muscle. It is also something the church has handed on. When Hope sent its first team to Turkey in the eighties, one of the assignments was to plant worship in a church that did not exist yet; a woman on that team taught herself guitar and went on to translate hundreds of songs. There are services in Turkey now where every song being sung was written by someone connected to this congregation. "It's not that we're special. God just did it."

► 1:53:35

Which gave him his closing assignment, and it is a small one. Sometime you will be sitting next to a visitor who is looking around wondering what they have walked into. Introduce yourself. Then tell them: what is about to happen to you is good. We are going to stand for a while; sit if you need to. We really like to sing, and we kind of get carried away. That is hospitality, and it is also discipleship — being ready to explain the hope that is in you, and why it gets that particular response out of a room.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Revelation 4:8–11
- Revelation 1:4–5
- Revelation 5:12–13
- Revelation 5:9–10
- Revelation 6:10
- Revelation 8:3–5
- Ephesians 2:6
- Ephesians 1:3
- Ephesians 3:9–10
- Colossians 3:1–3
- Colossians 3:5–10
- Romans 12:1–2
- 1 Peter 3:15

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When you are on the “stadium feed” — no commentary, just noise — what do you conclude about how things are going? What would the other feed say about the same week?
2. Jayson said heaven is not up, it is at hand. What difference would it make to your Monday if you took that literally?
3. Revelation 6 puts a complaint in the middle of heaven’s worship. What question have you been keeping out of your prayers because it felt too irreverent to ask?
4. What are you already meditating on by default — news, money, a regret, a scenario? What would it take to point that same attention somewhere true?
5. Colossians says put on the new self rather than handing you a list of behaviors. Name one thing you will do this week to set your mind above — and one person you will sit next to and welcome on Sunday.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Jayson Knox is part of Hope Chapel's leadership and was asked to preach while Matt Ryniker's series on Revelation was under way. He came to Austin from a church in Arizona where worship ran a brisk seventeen and a half minutes, and says he had to rebuild the muscle for Hope's longer gatherings. He speaks of the church's first mission team to Turkey in the 1980s as part of his own heritage, and counts worship among Hope's defining values.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWWdxGKTONA&t=3832s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.