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## CHAPTER 36

# Worship and the Climax of History

## The End Times Will End

Wolfgang Pannenberg describes the Eschaton as “the epitome of Christian hope”.<sup>1</sup> When Christ returns, He will fulfill the deepest longing of every redeemed believer. The end times will not last forever but connecting with Jesus will extend through eternity. Arguably, one of the most pivotal moments in history, this occasion will ignite a decisive season change.

Jesus waited thousands of years before coming to this earth. After a brief visit, He began waiting once again. As Jesus waits, we wait. He waits at His eternal address while we wait in marked time at our finite address. The climax of history draws near at an undisclosed rate of speed. Only our Heavenly Father knows how much longer we’ll have to wait—it may be a long time. Then again, it may not.

During the First Century CE Jesus said,

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* (Mat 24:35-36 NIV)

Jesus will not wait forever to return for His chosen bride. One day, the waiting clock will reach its final increment. The last tick of mortal time will launch everyone into the Eschaton—an event guaranteed to be worth the wait. The word eschaton comes from the Greek word *eschatos*; it means last. Theologically, *eschatos* refers to the climax of finite history. Eternal life follows the last moment of

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 527.

time, as we know it. With determined finality, business as usual will end. An entirely new era will begin in an exhilarating eternal context.

Notwithstanding, at some point between now and the Eschaton, resurrected saints martyred for their faith and those who did not worship the beast or receive his mark will reign with Christ on earth for 1,000 years, i.e., a Millennium.<sup>2</sup> Whether Christ returns before, during, or after this literal or figurative period of time remains a topic of debate. John asserts:

*“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”* (Revelation 20:6 NIV)

In the fullness of time, Jesus will return to display the fullness of God.<sup>3</sup> His arrival will mark the quintessential hope of redeemed humanity. Quintessential means “the essence” of our hope in its “purest and most concentrated form”.<sup>4</sup> At last, the great romance between Christ and His church will consummate in a venue enriched with angelic ambiance. The entire community of saints, past and present anticipate Christ coming with the utmost priority. Everything, which our human senses have experienced thus far, will pale in comparison to this moment.

At the end of this age, redeemed worshipers will show their Heavenly Father, the response that He deserves. They will encounter everlasting joy, they will reciprocate steadfast love, and they will exude demonstrative reverence. As worshipers embrace the culmination of history, they will worship God en masse with the heavenly hosts.

Worship is unique because it carries everlasting significance; it transcends mortal finitude. Finitude refers to the biological limit of human existence. That means the expressions we generate on earth by faith will cross over with us into eternity. Many activities performed during this life will not continue in heaven. In fact, very few have lasting value beyond time and space. Worship spans time-space continuums; it shatters mortal barriers.

Worshipers arrest God’s attention in this life because their reverent heart and deferential spirit extend beyond the here and now. Worshipers convey sentiments of veneration that extend beyond the constraints of a human life span. For-

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<sup>2</sup> Rev 20:1-6

<sup>3</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, (Col 2:9 NIV)

<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, tenth addition,1994

tified with eternal promise, worshipers occupy high and holy realms where “*the high and exalted One*” reigns supreme.

*For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isa 57:15 NAS)*

One day the Bride of Christ will praise Jesus without stunted senses or emotional restraints. She will sing with skilled resonance and dance with dynamic precision. Her praise will declare the truth about God with informed certitude.

As mortal beings, we normally only have one opportunity to pass the finish line into eternity. When this epic juncture occurs, the truth about Jesus will assume monumental significance. As revelation unfolds with greater clarity, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will evoke a universal response on earth as it does in heaven. When the reality of His presence becomes evident, eruptions of praise will converge with expressions of worship. Courageous worshipers in touch with their own identity will contend with Satan’s rage as they boldly show their Heavenly Father precisely what He seeks—true worshipers.

### **An Undecided Ratio**

During a period of unprecedented tribulation, John saw a fraction of humanity worshiping someone whom they did not really know. Being ill informed or willfully ignorant, these individuals offered worship to the dragon, the beast, or an image of the beast.<sup>5</sup> The dragon represents Satan, “*And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world...*”<sup>6</sup>

Since the Bible does not specify numerical data concerning this account, we might assume that the ratio of God-worshipers to Satan-worshipers remains undecided, though God knows each outcome in advance. John wrote:

*All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. (Revelation 13:8 NIV)*

Long ago, God revealed Adam and Eve’s response to Satan’s deception. Everyone who does not embrace the truth about Jesus Christ eventually makes the mis-

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<sup>5</sup> Revelation 13:4-15; 16:2

<sup>6</sup> Rev 12:9 NAS

take of worshiping “*the beast*”. Led astray by demonic deception and coercion, misinformed worshipers overestimate Satan because they underestimate God.

Those whose names appear in the book of life offer a radically different response. At all cost, they refrain from worshiping inferior substitutes. While others bow before idols and demons, a multitude of humans will worship God in spirit and in truth.<sup>7</sup> Despite life-threatening ultimatums, they will stand strong in defiance to Satan and bow low in reverence to God.

True worshipers will not compromise the direction in which they bow. They know their God and venerate Him accordingly. Since He alone deserves worship, any other response remains completely unwarranted.

### **A Conviction for Worship**

Satan’s intimidating nudge will eventually become a monster shove.

*He [another beast] was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. (Rev 13:15 NIV)*

As nations fall sway under the power of the wicked one, the direction people bow may carry eternal consequences.

*And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image... (Revelation 14:11 NIV)*

In each generation and particularly in the last, worship indicates the destiny of the worshiper. We need more than historic precedent to contend with Satan and his edicts. Generations of religious dogma may offer a degree of comfort with an illusion of security. True worshipers, however, will not take refuge in the familiar tradition of saying and doing religion, or offer reverence based on personal convenience. When faced with great tribulation and severe persecution, the courage to worship God will come from a personal encounter fortified with theological certitude. Instead of opinions based on customs, we must strengthen our resolve with sincere faith—being the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not yet seen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rev 9:20 NIV

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 11:1 NAS