

## Revelation 4

### A Throne in Heaven

In our study of the book of Revelation so far we have been given a vision of the glorified Jesus Christ. He is the Head and Lord over the church. He is our faithful and merciful High Priest. He is also our judge and our redeemer having power over death. And Christ knows the condition of his people, the church.

He knows we are faithful and courageous. And he also knows that at other times our love for God and others cools; we get caught up with the things of this world. We are tempted to sin and we become indifferent and lazy. So the Lord had letters sent to seven real churches in the first century that also represent all churches everywhere and at all times.

The content of these letters praise what we do well and put us back on track when we go astray. It is always good to examine ourselves concerning our faith. We know that we are far from perfect in following Christ. We certainly have our ups and downs. But are we pressing toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?<sup>1</sup> Is the trajectory of our lives set on the right priorities?

One thing that will help and motivate us is our understanding of God. Knowing God, who He is, what He is like, what He requires of us and desires for us, is the most practical endeavor in which we could engage. We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing God. Without the knowledge of God and the hope He gives us in Jesus Christ, our world becomes a confusing, deceitful and painful place. Without a relationship with God and Christ we sentence ourselves to stumble through life as we search for fleeting pleasures.

However, Scripture tells us that when we delight ourselves in the LORD, He will give us the desires of our hearts. And that at His right hand are pleasures forever more.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 4 of Revelation shows us the power and glory of God to focus and settle and encourage our hearts before we read about the terrible fate that awaits our world.

After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here,

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:12-14

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 37:4; Ps. 16:11

and I will show you things which must take place after this."  
(Revelation 4:1)

After the letters to the seven churches John hears a voice like a trumpet, meaning a voice of great authority. It is the same trumpet like voice he heard back in chapter 1, the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> And the apostle is invited to enter a door into heaven.

In the early chapters of Revelation we are told about three significant doors. In Revelation 3:8 Jesus said to the church, "See, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it." This was the door to ministry opportunity. Walking through that door allowed the church at Philadelphia to make known the good news of Jesus Christ. A door of opportunity is often set before each of us.

Secondly, in revelation 3:20 we have the door of the heart. Christ called out, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Jesus Christ wants to be at home in our hearts, to settle down, to have fellowship with us. And only we can open the door. And finally, here is the door of spiritual understanding. God offers to everyone the true knowledge that leads to insight into the purpose and meaning and destiny of our lives.

So John is invited to come and see things that "must" take place in the future. Notice that word "must." Our world is not randomly limping towards nowhere. There is a day of terrible divine judgment coming. And to escape the wrath of God against sin there is another "must" of which we must take heed. In John 3:7 Jesus said that to gain everlasting life in the coming kingdom of God we "must" be born again. And the how of being born again and saved is simple. John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Continuing in Revelation:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set  
in heaven, and One sat on the throne.  
(Revelation 4:2)

When John said he was "in the Spirit" this does not mean that he was dreaming. It means he experienced something beyond his normal senses by the power of God. And the first thing he sees in heaven is a throne. And the one who sat upon the throne is God Almighty.

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 1:10-13

You know, the fact that there is a God and that he is on His throne goes directly against the thinking of humanity. We do not like the idea of a divine Almighty Judge, because this means that there are absolute truths which must not be changed. We want to make our own morals and rules. But we can no more circumvent the laws of God any more than we can the laws of physics.

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there* was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.  
(Revelation 4:2, 3)

When John describes God to us he paints the scene with flashing gem-like colors. First we are told that God is like a jasper. What we call a jasper today is different from this stone. Later in chapter 21 jasper is described a crystal clear like a diamond. God is also described as a sardius, which is a blood-red gem. When John saw God it was like the blinding flash of a diamond reflecting the sun, along with the brilliant blood-red of the sardius. And around the throne was a rainbow with the peaceful green of the emerald.

What does this mean? Psalm 104:2 informs us that God covers Himself with light as with a garment. In 1 Timothy 6:16 we read that God dwells in unapproachable light. These are all symbolic about the character the character of God. It is said that the jasper stands for the glorious, dazzling holiness and purity of God. The blood-red sardius reveals His heated wrath against sin. And the peaceful green rainbow for God's grace and mercy that gives us a hope that sin and evil can never destroy.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.  
(Revelation 4:4)

There has been much debate over who these elders are. Some Bible scholars who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church think these elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, thus all of God's redeemed people. But as we will see later in revelation, God's people will go through the great tribulation. And we will see the redeemed in glory later in this book. We will also see later that these elders present our prayers to God.

These 24 elders are a special class of spiritual beings; God's council of elders. In the Old Testament there is evidence of a council or court around God. For example God, in Genesis 1:26 God speaks and says "Let Us make man in Our

image, according to Our likeness." This "Us" is perhaps this council of elders. In Isaiah 24:3 the prophet speaks of God ruling victoriously before His elders. And Daniel 7:9, 10 tells us about a court that is seated before God. Twelve is the biblical number for governmental perfection. So two times twelve, twenty-four, would be absolutely perfect. So there is good reason to understand these elders to be the principalities and powers of Ephesians 1, who govern heaven and the angels.

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings,  
and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the  
throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.  
(Revelation 4:5)

The first thing John saw in heaven was a throne and the One who sat upon it. Then the scene widens and he saw 24 elders. But then the camera of John's eye moves back to the throne where he sees lightning and hears thunder. Lightning and thunder are often associated with the manifestation of God, especially in times of judgment.. The lightning and thunder presented to John was not the unharnessed power of nature, but the righteous fury of God that will fall on an unrepentant world.

What we need to understand about the book of Revelation is that this book describes the time when God's dealings with humanity turn from grace to judgment. For most of human history God has demonstrated His grace and mercy. He is constantly appealing to people to open their minds and hearts to Him, to receive His truth and love. 2 Corinthians 6:1, 2 says "Now is the accepted time...now is the day of salvation." But this time of grace will come to an end. And without the blood of Christ to cover you, the whole world will stand condemned before God. The seven Spirits as we have seen are another special class of angelic beings.

Before the throne *there* was a sea of glass, like crystal.  
(Revelation 6a)

The Greek text does not say "*there* was a sea of glass", but "something like a sea of glass." The Greek word for "crystal" is *krustallon*, which can mean either crystal or ice. The idea would be that the floor of God's throne dazzled like crystal or a field of ice on a clear sunny day.

In revelation the sea is always mentioned with chaos, turmoil and wickedness, with fallen humanity. The beast or the anti-Christ comes up out of the sea. But here before and around the throne of God all is pure and at peace. God is never troubles or startled by events in our world or in our lives.

Before the throne *there* was a sea of glass, like crystal.  
And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne,  
were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.  
<sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second living  
creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face  
like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying  
eagle. <sup>8</sup> The four living creatures, each having six wings,  
were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest  
day or night, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is and is to come!”  
(Revelation 4:6-8)

Here is the first strange image in Revelation. These four living creatures are almost exactly like the four living creatures around the throne that Ezekiel saw.<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel called these beings Cherubim.<sup>5</sup> Many people, because of Renaissance art, think of the Cherubim as pudgy, little, naked angel babies. That is far from the truth, as we can read!

In Genesis 3, God placed cherubim to guard Adam and Eve from the tree of life. God is often depicted as sitting between the cherubim.<sup>6</sup> In revelation they are involved in the worship of God. And they invite John to see the opening of the seven seals. They seem to be the royal guardians of God's throne. Their wings perhaps represent power and swiftness. Their being full of eyes tells us that nothing escapes their sight. Their faces perhaps represent all that is noble, strong and wise in creation. And when they worship God they proclaim that He is holy, almighty and eternal.

And they do not rest day or night, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is and is to come!”  
(Revelation 8:b)

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<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 1

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 10:19, 20. In Isaiah 6 we find similar creatures again and they are called Seraphim, meaning burning ones.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 19:15; Psalm 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16. There were two gold cherubim on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. Their wings covered the mercy seat (Exodus 25:18-21). They were part of the decorations in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:23-30; 2 Chronicles 3:7).

We do well to pause here and consider whether this is our vision of ultimate reality. As important as we think we are all of us stand before a supremely holy and powerful God who alone has immortality.<sup>7</sup> And as unimportant as we think we are this is the God who so loves the world that He sacrificed His Son and then brought him back to life to save us. This is the God who loves you!

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, O Lord,  
To receive glory and honor and power;  
For You created all things,  
And by Your will they exist and were created."  
(Revelation 4:9-11)

When the elders worship God in response to the cherubim they cast their crowns before God. Here is symbolism well known in the ancient world. When a king surrendered to another, he would place his crown at the victor's feet. Here is a sign of complete submission. There can be no salvation without submission to God. And the elder's words tell us why.

"You are worthy, O Lord,  
To receive glory and honor and power;  
For You created all things,  
And by Your will they exist and were created."

God is the Creator of and the reason for all that exists. Life is to be centered on God. He is the reason why we exist. People ask, sometimes with a cry of desperation, "Why am I here?" The famous atheist scientist, Stephen Hawking suggested that if we knew the answer to this question we would know the mind of God.

You are here not just to make money, or to win athletic contests, or to invent new technologies. We are not here just to get a good education, or a good job, or to prepare for retirement and the so-called good life. You are here for God—to know who He is, to know what He requires of us and to know what He desires for us. We are here for Him; to reflect His truth and love.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 6:16

You and I exist because God willed it. Think about this, Isaiah 40 is all about the greatness of God. Verses 25, 26 reads as follows,

To whom then will you liken Me,  
Or to *whom* shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.  
<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high,  
And see who has created these *things*,  
Who brings out their host by number;  
He calls them all by name,  
By the greatness of His might  
And the strength of *His* power;  
Not one is missing.

God wants us to be stunned by the vastness and glory of the universe! But not for its own sake. He wants for us to look at the billions and billions of stars and galaxies and to realize that in the vastness of space, not one star is unknown to God and not one is missing without His consent.

And so, we are to understand by all of this the majesty and grandeur and power of God. Compared to the universe we are nothing! Yet, God created us to be like Him! Our rebellious sin has marred that purpose. But the one true God who created all things for His glory set out to redeem us, because He loves us! And the apostle John gives us this staggering promise in 1 John 3,

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God...  
<sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.  
(1 John 3:1, 2)

May all that we do and all that we say bring glory and honor to God.

