

“The Vision of the One Seated on the Throne”

Revelation 4

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Revelation 4

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

² *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.*

³ *And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,*

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

⁹ *And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*

¹¹ *“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.”*

Introduction

Revelation 4 and 5 are a vision of heaven. They form one two-part vision. Chapter 4 talks about how God is worthy to be worshipped. Chapter 5 talks about how Jesus is worthy to be worshipped. Commentators view these chapters as the turning point in Revelation. Revelation 1-3 shows Jesus’ perspective of the Church on earth – their experience of suffering, difficulties, and hardships. We wonder what is going on and whether God is doing anything as this happens. Revelation 4-5 gives perspective of what is happening in heaven.

Often as we go through trials in our lives and worry more than worship. We are so prone to magnify our problems rather than magnify God, who is more powerful than our problems. We are not to escape our problems, but to see a more complete picture of reality. This is why we want to examine Revelation 4-5.

I. Take a look – Understanding

A. Summoned by the One seated on the throne [1-3]

- Revelation 4:1

1. *After this I looked*

After showing John the vision of the churches on earth (Rev. 2-3), the scene of John's vision changes from earth to heaven and remains there until about Revelation 10. After that the point of view continuously alternates. This is kind of like what we need to do. We need to see this earth and be realistic, but we also need to see heaven. We need to be faithful and faith-driven in our lives. We need to alternate that vision.

2. *a door standing open in heaven!*

The door is open for John to see what the heavenly court is like and then to tell us about it. The door is not open for God, as if he were to leave heaven. He is omnipresent. This is similar to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The stone is rolled away for us to witness his resurrection - not for Him to come out.

3. *The first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet*

This is the same voice that he heard in Revelation 1:10. He is listening to Jesus himself.

- Revelation 1:10 *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet"*

4. *Come up here*

Some commentaries say this means the church is raptured. That's not what this phrase means here. There is no good reason to see the invitation of John to come up into heaven as a symbol of the rapture of the church. Rather God is inviting the person who will write Scripture, just as he invited Moses to write the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:20).

- Exodus 19:20 *"The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up."*

5. *I will show you*

He receives a new vision of God's majesty and power so that he can understand the events on earth. For the first time the reader is introduced to the frequent interchange between heaven and earth found in the remainder of the book. What happens on earth always has its heavenly counterpart. Very few people are allowed to see visions of heaven. Many people claim to have seen visions of heaven. Very few might be right and true, but most of us should read the Word to know and to see.

- Revelation 4:2

1. *I was in the Spirit*

John was in the Spirit, a state of heightened spiritual awareness by the power of the Holy Spirit. Often this phrase is used when a prophet or apostle receives the revelation of God by the Holy Spirit.

- Revelation 1:10 a similar phrase is used. Here he is seeing the vision of Jesus.

We should all strive to be “in the Spirit” like John. For the apostles it was to receive revelation, but for us it’s to understand the Scriptures. Always be in prayer as we read God’s word. The Spirit revealed this to the apostle John, and the same Spirit will help interpret what he wrote to us.

2. *a throne*

The next phrase now centers on the One seated on the throne. Again, the throne is a key item in this chapter. The throne is the place of the King, the Ruler. God who dwells in heaven possesses absolute authority over the universe.

3. *one seated on the throne*

- Revelation 4:3

1. *he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian*

Notice no clear description is written of God. John simply tells of various colors emanating from precious stones flashing through a strange, rainbow cloud. He avoids a precise description of God perhaps because he knew no language could describe what he saw. When the book of Revelation mentions jewels to describe what the place looked like, these jewels are not to be interpreted individually but to signify collectively the splendor of the majesty of God.

2. *around the throne was a rainbow*

The rainbow reminds the reader of God’s everlasting covenant promised to Noah and all creatures after the Flood. God gives a rainbow to say I will never destroy this earth again with water. The throne (omnipotence) and rainbow (mercy) are significant symbols in a book whose overriding theme is the judgment of God and the kingdom of God.

Our vision of God is simply too small. We need to see, understand, and experience God. Think about your daydreams and your plans. We are at the center; everything revolves around us. But as we look into the Bible, God is to be the center of the universe, not us.

B. The surroundings of the One seated on the throne [4-7]

1. Who was around the throne? [4]

Who the twenty-four elders are is very controversial. There are two main interpretations. A lot of people think they are angels, but I believe they represent the twelve patriarchs in the Old Testament and the twelve apostles in the New Testament. They symbolize the unity of God's people.

2. What was coming out of the throne? [5]

From the throne lightning, rumbling, and peals of thunder were coming out which are representations of God's terrifying splendor and glory. We see this in Mount Sinai, another allusion to Exodus where Moses receives revelation.

- Exodus 19:16 “ *On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.*”

3. What were some things around the throne? [6]

1. *as it were a sea of glass, like crystal*

It is not a literal sea of glass, but it looked like a sea of glass. The ‘sea’ in Revelation often represents the chaos of the fallen world. Beasts will come out of the sea.

- Revelation 21:1 “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*”

There is no more chaos, no more sin in this world. When he says, ‘sea of glass’ it is different. It is the floor of heaven and the ceiling of the created universe. Its transparent tranquility shows peace in heaven in contrast to earthly turmoil. It represents, especially when compared to Exodus 24:10, purity.

- Exodus 24:10 “*and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.*”

The word clearness means purity. The sea of glass probably represents all chaos sinfulness gone before God. Around him is purity and victory over sin.

2. *on each sided of the throne, are four living creatures*

These are angelic beings. Both seraphim and cherubim are mentioned. Isaiah mentions a group of angels called seraphim. Seraphim have six wings and are crying out, “Holy, holy, holy!” (Isaiah 6). Ezekiel mentions the group of angels called cherubim. Cherubim are described as lion, ox, man, and eagle (Ezekiel 1). These four living creatures lead worship of God around the throne. They were full of eyes, meaning they have exceeding knowledge of God. Nothing escapes their attention.

4. What were the creatures around the throne like? [7]

Probably the lion represents power. The ox represents strength. The man represents spirituality, and the flying eagle represents swiftness of action. Each of the creatures mentioned is the chief of its species. Together, they embody the fullness of his nature and reflect the character of God. They are reflecting the character of God to the world because they are so close to God.

C. The worship of the One seated on the throne [8-11]

1. The worship of the living creatures [8]

1. *Six wings*

This is the seraphim of Isaiah 6. With two wings they covered their feet (humility), with two wings they covered their faces (God's holiness), and with two wings they flew (serving God). The six wings give an impression of unlimited mobility in fulfilling God's command; they are serving God.

2. *Holy, holy, holy*

In Hebrew, double repetition adds emphasis. The rare, three-fold repetition tells the infinite holiness of God. The quality of God felt by creatures in his presence is holiness. The most foundational attribute of God is his holiness. Holiness does mean purity from sin, but it also means separate-ness. Everything else is created, but God is the Creator. God is holy and perfect.

3. The Lord God Almighty

He is the Lord Almighty. He is powerful.

4. *Who was and is and is to come!*

He is the One who was, and is, and is to come. God's power and holiness extends from before the beginning of time and is and is yet to come. God's infinite holiness and power is manifested in his past, present, and future activities.

2. The worship of the twenty-four elders [9-11]

1. *And whenever the living creatures*

In heaven there are angels and human beings singing praises to God.

2. *The twenty-four elders fall down before him*

3. *Worship him*

The subject of worship is everything else, but the object is One. Everything that exists is worshipping One God.

4. *They cast their crowns before the throne*

In contrast to the four living creatures and other beings, the elders “cast their crowns before the throne”. This phrase convinced me that these elders are human beings. The Greek word for crown here is *stephanos* meaning “wreath” not *diadem* which is the king’s crown. *Stephanos* is a victory “crown”. This is a winner’s crown after you finish the race.

- Revelation 3:11 “*I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*”

The ones who persevere receive the crown. The church of Jesus Christ will finish the race and receive the crown, and we will give all the glory and honor to our God because he is worthy.

5. *Worthy... you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*

Sometimes we wonder why we were born. He made us in his image to serve him and represent him. We find out who we are as we live for him and worship him. You are the only being that can represent and image him like this! This is his design for us.

II. **Take away – Applying**

III.

A. **God is sovereign**

- Revelation 4:2

The throne is a central and crucial symbol of heaven. Our God is seated on the throne forever. He promises and he fulfills. The sea of chaos will turn into a sea of glass. The Israelites cross the Red Sea to be saved. Just like that we will go through a sea of suffering and difficulty in this world. But one day there will be no more sea and no more sin. For all those in Jesus Christ we will worship him forever and ever. Everything in this life depends on our relationship to this throne.

B. **God is beautiful**

- Revelation 4:3

In Isaiah 6, the angels say, “Holy, holy, holy!” The whole earth is full of his glory! My question is, “Do you see his glory everywhere?” Why not? Because sin limits our vision of glory and reality. He will make everything beautiful in time. All of the ugliness of this world will be gone. As we grow in our knowledge of him and beauty of him, we will be able to see more beauty of this world.

In Revelation 4:6, the angels never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy’. Angels are able to see the holiness and majesty of God, so they cannot stop worshiping because they are so impressed. They continuously see more and more of God. They cannot help but to explode in worship because God is that beautiful. I pray that we will see more so that we will worship and honor and praise him endlessly. Whenever you are able to worship, you are in the right place.

C. God is merciful

- Revelation 4:3

God flushed humanity once to show his holiness. After that, he will not cast away what has been defiled by sin. Rather he will redeem them.

- Revelation 5:12 *“saying with 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!””*

Why do we give him power? We are not adding to his omnipotence, but what he has given to us, all of our power, we give it back. God does not use his power to destroy us, but he uses his power to redeem and recreate us.

- Revelation 3:8 *“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”*

The heavenly door is wide open so you can receive his power. Little power is delegated power from God. God uses power to redeem his people.

- Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

You who are sinful, you who have failed, he will never cast you away. He will use his power to revive you. Every day, receive his mercy, forgiveness and power so you can be used for his glory. God is merciful as he redeems us.

D. God is worthy

- Revelation 4:10-11

We see twenty-four elders falling before him giving their *stephanos*, crowns, victory wreaths. They cast their crowns before the throne saying, “Worthy are you Lord our God!”

We usually sing when we get something we want. They are singing because God is worthy. We need to see God. And when you see, you will sing and surrender your crowns. He will be worshiped, honored, and glorified in and through us. There are a million things God is doing in your life. We see one thing, so we criticize and we complain. When we see the whole picture, we can see what we are designed to be. When we see the bigger picture through Scripture, it triggers right emotion. When worship comes out in the midst of difficulties, you are seeing God. We must see God on the throne until the day we cast our crowns.

I have been pastoring twenty seven years at CFC going through all kinds of difficulties. Whenever I go through hard times, I utter, “He is worthy! Jesus is worthy. God is worthy!” We are saying God is worth more than our comfort and our temporary happiness. Sometimes he will take things away so that he is worth more than anything else in your life. As you are serving the Lord, if you feel like you’re sacrificing something is wrong. As you serve the Lord you should think what a privilege it is to serve him. Doing anything for God should be a privilege. Whenever we complain about serving the Lord, something else is worth more than him.

Conclusion

Worship. Four words: Behold, bow, belittle, bless.

When you behold the One who is sitting on the throne, you will bow to the only true God who deserves any and every praise in this world. Then you will belittle all the idols in this world, and bless him forever and ever.