

“A Throne in Heaven”
Revelation 4:1-11
Steve Mood

Introduction

- Have you ever wondered what heaven is like? Angels sitting on clouds strumming harps? Doves and butterflies and shimmering lights? Fine white mist? Or maybe the old song gives you a better idea: *Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace, I want to see my Savior's face. Heaven is a wonderful place. I want to go there.* Today we are going to catch a glimpse of heaven and the very throne room of God! Does that excite you or bore you? Create yearning or fear? Confusion or clarity? Right now or wait a while?
- Today we are looking at chapter 4 of Revelation. The book of Revelation has been interpreted four different ways in the history of the church: (1) The nonliteral or Allegorical Approach – the book is one great allegory, it is not literal, just symbolic about the conflict between Christianity and evil; (2) Preterist Approach – Revelation is a record of the conflicts of the early church with Judaism and paganism; (3) Historical Approach – Symbolic presentation of the total of church history culminating in the second advent; (4) Futuristic Approach – Revelation is futuristic beginning with chapter 4 and therefore subject to future fulfillment. The only interpretive approach that makes sense to me is the Futuristic Approach, where starting in chapter 4, it is still future for us. It hasn't been fulfilled yet and it is important for us to see what will be coming in the future.

• **Lesson**

- **Point 1:** Transition to the third section (4:1-2a)
- **Rev. 4:1-2a** *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.” At once I was in the Spirit...*
- The first phrase (1) After this in Greek is Μετὰ ταῦτα (**meta tauta**) and indicates a transition in the book. As Carol said in her first lecture on Revelation, the key to understanding Revelation is told to us in **Rev. 1:19** *Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.* The first section is chapter 1 – the vision of Jesus Christ, *the things that you have seen*. The second section is chapters 2-3, *the things that are*, the current church age. The third section is chapters 4-22, *those that are to take place after this*, that was future for John the Apostle and is still future for us in 2022.
- John saw (2) a door standing open in heaven. He saw into heaven from where he was on the island of Patmos off the coast of Turkey. This is very similar to what Stephen saw in **Acts 7:56** *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.* John heard a voice, the voice he had heard before. It was loud. It was Jesus speaking once more.
- John was commanded (3) “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” He was going to heaven! Did his body get transported to heaven, or was it merely a vision? Paul had this happen to him in **2 Cor. 12:2** *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not*

know, God knows. We don't know for sure, but what John experienced was probably a vision as the phrase *in the Spirit* indicates. For the Jews the first heaven was the atmosphere, the second heaven was outer space, and the third heaven was the dwelling place of God.

- Some have taken this phrase, *Come up here*, as an allusion to the Rapture of the Church. This seems unlikely, as we will see that sometimes John is in heaven, then he is on the earth, then heaven, and then earth, etc. John Walvoord states: *It is clear from the context that this ("come up hither") is not an explicit reference to the rapture of the church, as John was not actually translated; in fact he was still in his natural body on the island of Patmos. He was translated into scenes of heaven only temporarily.* – **Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ.**
- One thing I want to mention, that is sometimes overlooked, is the constant use of three words in the text throughout Revelation, and translated as (4) “*like*”, “*as*”, or “*appearance*.” In fact, you see all three of these in this chapter more than ten times. In the first verse it says *speaking to me like a trumpet*. What does this tell us? John had a hard time describing what he saw and heard, and he used the best words he could to describe to us what he saw and heard. What John saw amazed him and left him speechless and without words to describe things fully and completely. My caution to you, as we work through Revelation, is that you keep your antenna up to look for these words in the text and understand that what John described may not be fully understandable to us.
- **Point 2:** Who and what were in the throne room (4:2b-8a)
- **Rev. 4:2-3** *and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. 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.*
- **(1) John saw a throne**
- The first thing that his vision focused on was the throne in heaven. Though he described more later in this passage, his attention was immediately drawn to the throne. What does the throne mean? It is a symbol of God's sovereignty and authority. God is in permanent, unchanging, and in complete control of the universe. In Revelation 4 and 5 the divine throne is mentioned seventeen times.
- **Psa. 11:4** *The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes see, His eyelids test the children of man.*
- **Psa. 103:19** *The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.*
- Not only was John in the throne room, the throne room is also in the heavenly temple, which is made clearer to us in **Rev. 7:15** *Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence.*
- **(2) One seated on the throne**
- The person on the throne is not described. We know from Scripture, and even in the verses that were quoted, that God is seated on throne. Some think that it is Jesus, some think it is the Father. I think it is probably God the Father. In Revelation 5 God is still seated on the throne,

but Jesus is standing beside the throne as a lamb. In this passage, the Holy Spirit is symbolized by the seven torches.

- **(3) His appearance was majestic**
- God is described by using color and light and sounds. He is described as japer, crystal clear like diamond, and sardius or carnelian, a red stone like ruby. Some commentators see this as an allusion of the first and last stones on the breastplate of the High Priest in Israel, an indication of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Around Him is a rainbow with the appearance of emerald, a green color. These colors show us God's glory, His mercy, and His grace. They show us God's majesty through brilliant colors.
- **(4) Twenty-four thrones**
- **Rev. 4:4** *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.*
- Surrounding God's throne are twenty-four other thrones that are occupied by twenty-four beings. They are described as elders, wearing white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. There are many different ideas who these elders are: (a) Angels; (b) Great saints from the Old Testament; (c) Representatives of the New Testament Church; (d) 12 Patriarchs of Israel + 12 Apostles; (e) Representatives of all believers in a rotating service before the throne of God. I don't think they are angels as angels are never described as elders or have crowns. I don't think that they are merely Old Testament saints. Neither do I think they are the Patriarchs or Apostles as they are not named this way. The number twenty-four is used in the Old Testament to refer to priests serving in the temple on a rotating basis (1 Chr. 24:3-19), twenty-four Levitical gatekeepers (1 Chr. 26:17-19), and twenty-four Levitical worship leaders (1 Chr. 25:6-31). I think that it is best to think that the twenty-four elders are representatives of all saints, from both the New Testament and Old Testament, that serve before God on a rotating basis. We will see this group many times more in the lessons on Revelation.
- **(5) Lightning and Thunder**
- **Rev. 4:5-6** *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, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*
- This is reminiscent of what happened on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:16. We also see this usage in the rest of Revelation before God's judgment is executed. This description indicates that God is about to execute His judgement upon the earth. A dreadful storm is about to break upon the earth. It reveals the terrors of God's judgment ready to break out on the sinful world. It is a warning: Be ready!
- **(6) Seven torches**
- Seven torches indicate the fulness of the Holy Spirit. They are not indoor torches, but torches for outdoors use, which give fierce, blazing light, bringing light to the darkness.
- **(7) Sea like glass**

- There is a vast pavement, with brilliant light, reflecting like a crystal. It's like a vast sea, that is empty. We will see this area before the throne of God filled... **Rev. 7:9** *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.*
- **(8) Four living creatures**
- **Rev. 4:7-8a** *And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 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. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within...*
- The last thing mentioned in the throne room are four living creatures. Four different faces are seen: like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. They surround the throne, constantly moving, and serving God before the throne. Ezekiel 1 calls them cherubim and Isaiah 6 seraphim. They are angels dedicated to the service of God. In **Eze. 1:6** *As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.* They are described as beings with four different faces, with each of the faces that John saw. Maybe John from his vantage point could only see one face at a time? Their eyes indicate awareness and alertness and comprehensive knowledge. Before the throne of God are magnificent lights, sounds, elders, and creatures, all focused on Him who sits on the throne. What are they doing?
- **Point 3:** What went on in the throne room (4:8b-11)
- **(1) Four living creatures worship God**
- **Rev. 4:8** *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!"*
- They worship God, day and night, never ceasing to praise Him. They proclaim who God is. He is holy. He is mighty. He is eternal. They never tire of worshipping God. They worship all day long. They proclaim that God is holy, indicating that He is completely separated from evil in any form. They proclaim that He is almighty, that He is all powerful and is able to do whatever He desires. They proclaim that He is eternal, He has always existed, and always will exist.
- **(2) Twenty-four elders worship God**
- **Rev. 4:9-10a** *And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever.*
- In response to the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders fall down before God who is seated on the throne and worship Him who is eternal, He who never dies. He can fulfill His promises, for He will never cease to exist. He is trustworthy and faithful.
- **(3) Twenty-four elders cast their crown before the throne**

- **Rev. 4:10b-11** *They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “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.”*
- Crowns here are not the royal crown, the **διάδημα (diadem)**, but the crown of a victor, the **στεφάνος (stephanos)**, a wreath that is given to the victor of a race or an event. It was something they had earned. Paul tells us in **2 Tim. 4:8** *Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.* Carol in a previous lesson mentioned the five different crowns that believers are given.
- But the elder's crowns, compared to who God is, are only something that they can offer to God. Were it not for God's grace, mercy, and salvation, they would not have had the victory over sin. They are not preoccupied with what they had accomplished, but who God is and what He has done, and what He will do. Their focus was totally upon God, and not themselves at all. It was God who was the center of their attention.
- The elders said that only God is worthy. He is the one that is worthy to receive glory, and honor, and power. It is God who has created all things. It is God who causes all things to exist and continue to exist. He has created us and the universe. It is God who keeps the universe existing. It is God, and God alone, who is worthy of our praise, adoration, worship, and thanks. We owe our lives to God and He was willing to die for us, to pay the price for our sins, so that we can live with Him forever. Praise, honor, glory, and power to our God. Amen?
- **Application**
- What does worship mean? Hold my hands up? Close my eyes? Ecstatic feelings? Standup, sit down, fall on the floor? My answer is yes! We can worship God in many different ways. It really doesn't matter. The key? We are to focus 100% upon God, what He has done, and who He is.
- *Worship is ascribing “worth” to something or someone. We attribute value, honor, and devotion to our object of worship. When we truly worship God, we turn all our attention, affection, and adoration to Him* – **Swindoll, Insights on Revelation**
- The focus of this lesson has been primarily upon God and worshipping Him. What are some applications from this passage that we can make to our lives?
- (1) We are called to worship God regularly
- **Psa. 95:6** *Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*
- We are all called to worship God. It is not an option. For He is worthy and desires our praise. We need to make a commitment to worship and do it regularly.
- (2) We are to focus on God alone during worship
- **Deu. 6:13** *You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.*

- We are easily distracted when we worship. Remove anything that is distracting us and worship God only and focus upon Him. Turn our attention fully upon God, who He is and what He has done.
- (3) We are going to continue to worship throughout eternity
- **Rev. 4:10** *the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.*
- Worship is an activity that we will continue to do when we are in heaven and do it forever. God deserves our worship and praise and we should start practicing today! Heaven is not a boring place, but a place filled with glory and grace, and I want to see my Savior's face. Heaven is a wonderful place and I want to be there.
- One more thing... **Rev. 1:3** *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*
- We have heard the passage read today. Let us read it together...
- **Rev. 4:1-11** *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."*
- *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. 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. 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. 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, 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: 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. 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!"*
- *And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 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, "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."*
- Let us practice reading aloud the book of Revelation every week.