

The Throne Room in Heaven

Revelation 4

I. Teaching and preaching.

A. Teaching—the careful, methodical unfolding of truth.

B. Preaching—"the herald's art".

1. The preacher is a "herald" announcing a message from the King.

II. A change of focus.

A. The purpose of the balance of Revelation (chapters 4-22) is not application for us *per se*, but rather to present Almighty God!

III. The basic outline: Revelation 1:19

A. "*The things which you have seen*"—Revelation 1 presents Jesus Christ to John.

B. "*The things which are*"—Revelation 2-3 presents the letters to the seven churches—churches of all time (to the present).

C. "*The things which will take place **AFTER these things***"—*meta houtos*.

1. Chapters 4-22 are yet in the future.

D. Basic outline for the future.

1. Chapters 4-5—A picture of the throne room of God and Jesus.
2. Chapters 6-19—A picture of the coming judgement (the Great Tribulation).
3. Chapter 20—the return of Christ and the millennial kingdom.
4. Chapters 21-22—The new heaven and new earth.
5. Where's the rapture?

- a. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

IV. The throne room of God.

A. Heaven is inexpressible—The use of metaphors.

1. John does not describe who is on the throne, he can only tell us what He is like

- a. Jasper and sardius—majesty and judgement.

- b. Emerald rainbow—Genesis 9? God’s faithfulness.
 - B. Twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders (verse 4).
 - 1. Attributes of the redeemed—The church? Raptured?
 - a. White clothing, golden crowns
 - b. “Golden crowns”—*Stephanos*—Crowns of victory.
 - 1st Corinthians 9:25
 - C. Flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.
 - 1. Exodus 19—Moses receiving the Ten Commandments.
 - 2. God is mighty and all-powerful! Revelation 16:18
 - D. Seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God .
 - 1. The Holy Spirit in His perfection.
 - E. Four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.
 - 1. Angels—very aware!
 - 2. Faces: Lion, calf, man, eagle—All representation of God’s creation.
 - 3. Six wings—Isaiah’s vision (Isaiah 6).
- V. Worship.
 - A. The angels— *“And day and night they do not cease...”*
 - B. The “superlative”—“Holy, Holy, Holy”
 - 1. The highest degree of holiness.
 - 2. The attribute of God not shared inherently with man.
 - a. Man’s holiness is imputed holiness from Jesus Christ.

God’s holiness is what separates Him from all other beings, what makes Him separate and distinct from everything else.

- C. Do you gaze in wonder at Him?
- D. How do you worship?
 - 1. You cast your crowns at His feet! (Verses 10-11).

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In seminary you take classes in how to preach... homiletics...the first thing you are taught is the difference between teaching and preaching...

Teaching is the careful, methodical unfolding of truth: it seeks to **inform** the mind, to **clarify** meaning, to explain doctrine... what the Bible teaches... and illuminate context, teaching draws out the rich historical, literary, and theological threads woven through Scripture. The purpose is to teach what the passage says...

Preaching... is different... In an article on preaching... claimed that teaching is the dispensing of information where preaching is the application of that information...that's what everyone wants... *"how do I apply this Bible information in my life?"* *"what is the point of sitting through all of this?... what's in it for me?"* ...we are a bit selfish!... self-centered aren't we?

How is this information going to give me a better life?... a more peaceful, happy, meaningful, life?... how's it going to help me raise my kids?...improve my marriage?... guide my steps in life?

We want to leave church with at least three things that will improve our lives!... six would be better.... And all that is legit.

However...that is not the purpose of preaching...**preaching is the herald's art**... a "herald" is an individual who proclaims or announces important news or messages, often on behalf of a king or authority figure...Paul Revere was a "herald"... *the British are coming the British are coming!*.. the preacher is a "herald" announcing a message from the King...a herald doesn't just deliver information...

It is not content merely to instruct, but to proclaim—pressing truth upon the heart with urgency and passion.... Preaching takes the truths revealed (through teaching)... and, with the Holy Spirit's fire, calls for a verdict....a decision...*Here's the news! What are you going to do with it?"* It does not just open the Word, but seeks to move the listener, awaken awe, and summon a response...

We've turned a corner in our look at the book of Revelation...chapter 1 centered us on Jesus Christ... chapters 2 and 3 focused on the letters to the seven churches that represent all churches (and Christian individuals)... full of application...

From chapter 4 all the way to the end...chapter 22... is a great change in the message... the focus is not on us... NOT TO SAY there will be no personal conviction in these verses... but it is

not specifically about us...they don't deliver a list of do's and don'ts.... **They are not about me... or you... but rather WHO...**

Beginning in Revelation 4, we must allow ourselves to be caught up in the Who?"—to marvel at the splendor set before us.... John's does not begin chapter four with a list of dos and don'ts, but with a summons to awe...

The door to heaven swings open, not for instruction, but for revelation: an invitation to see, with trembling clarity, the majesty and holiness of the One who reigns over all creation..... It's only after our eyes lift from earth and our hearts are overwhelmed by God's glory that true application can flow—**from worship, to transformation, to action.**

Preaching in the context of Revelation 4 is to stand, trembling, before the Throne and declare: "Behold your God!" It is to call us to worship, to repentance, and surrender in the presence of divine majesty.

Revelation chapter 4 exists to exalt God to the highest... To get us to stop and realize we're not to diminish God to little "g" status....A.W. Tozer in his classic book *Knowledge of the Holy* said

What comes to mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. Why? Because the way you see and think about God shapes the way you see and think about everything else.

He added... *when the Church has a low view of God, it will diminish their effectiveness and lead to idolatry...* idolatry is ANYTHING you place above the Almighty....anything that is in your life that has in any way diminished God in your life.

The vision John receives is meant to jolt our perspective—to lift our eyes from the ordinary and the trivial, and to center our gaze on the overwhelming majesty that surrounds the Throne. The apostle is summoned through an open door, beckoned by a voice *like* a trumpet, to witness the splendor and glory reserved for the God who was, and is, and is to come....

Every image is saturated with awe: flashes of lightning, thunder, and a sea of glass like crystal stretching before the throne.

Here, the worship of heaven is relentless and undiluted. Living creatures and elders, clothed in white, cast down golden crowns and ceaselessly declare, **"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty."**

The chapter calls us not only to reverence but to reorientation—a return to seeing God as the One enthroned, at the center of all creation. Our response is not simply wonder, but surrender—a willingness to join the chorus of heaven in giving glory, honor, and thanks to the One who holds all things together.

Read Chapter 4

This is a difficult passage!... that is why most preachers only preach chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation!... difficult because the imagery is so otherworldly....and we can't be 100% sure and clear what many of these visions are... I have several commentaries on Revelation... no two of them agree on much!... on many things, your opinion and my opinion are as valid as any of the "scholars"...

That tells me something... that tells me that these images have a roll to play but what is important is the underlying message...that is the message I want to herald... but we can't ignore the *inscrutable*...[the impossible to understand or to interpret...]

[I grew up with a quote: in 1960: Sen. Sam Ervin explains to Sen. Everett Dirksen, why he required more information on a point of floor debate: "*I am unable to unscrew the inscrutable.*"... Well... we are going to try to unscrew the inscrutable a bit...but not miss the message]

Let's begin with a time picture... understanding there are many views on this... one such view which is prevalent in this town is that all of Revelation is history...all this has already taken place... mostly in and around 70AD... to get that you must allegorize...as you know I take a mostly literal, historical and grammatical view of scripture...

The simple, straight forward view of Scripture.... The view you do not have to be taught what it says... the *perspicuity of Scripture*

The simple outline of Revelation was back in 1:19... **Therefore write the things which you have seen...** Which was chapter 1... the revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle John...who "saw those things.

The things which are... which is where we've been for the last few months... the letters to the seven churches... which encapsulates all churches and all Christians from the time of John to now...we are still in the **things which are...**

But then we turn the page to chapter 4 which begins **after these things** *meta houtos*...after *the things which are*...we advance to the last and final and longest stage... **the things which will take place after these things....** From now on we are seeing into the future.

John says (1) **...I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven...**I couldn't help seeing the contrast between the end of chapter three and this beginning... remember?... Jesus is standing outside the church door... the door is shut... He can't go in!... so He knocks... **Behold I stand at the door and knock... If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me...** BUT CHURCH HAS CLOSED THE DOOR!

But now... Jesus opens the door of heaven to John... an invitation... **Behold a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said “Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things...*Meta houtos*.**

An outline of the simple reading of the rest of Revelation might look like: Chapters 4 & 5 we get a glimpse into the throne room of God and Jesus... and a preview of a coming judgement... chapters 6-19...with a correlation in Daniel 9 we have the great Tribulation period... after the seven years of Tribulation... in chapter 20 is the return of Christ and the thousand year reign of Christ we call the millennium...

The defeat of Satan... the Great White Throne Judgement which is different than the throne we are looking at this morning... and then in the final two chapters... 21 and 22... the new heaven and new earth...AMEN?

Something seems to be missing... oh yes... the rapture?... where's the rapture?... many scholars, preachers, theologians are desperate for some reference to the rapture that they've argued that it is in verse 1 of chapter 4...

When Jesus said to John **Come up here...!** There's the rapture of the church!... John had heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me...which... didn't something like that happen in 1 Thessalonians 4?

Paul was trying to comfort those in the Thessalonica church who had lost loved ones to death...

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord...when the Lord returns...we aren't going to be stuck here... will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first....so the dead then the living Christians are going somewhere!.. where?... 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

That's the rapture!... the trumpet of God will sound... is that what John is writing about here in verse 1, chapter 4?... I don't think so... In fact... I don't think anywhere in Revelation specifically speaks about a rapture of the church....but I do think it is implied.

The church is mentioned 18 times in the first three chapters of Revelation... it is not mentioned again after the church at Laodicea until the final chapter... chapter 22 when Jesus closes the book with **I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches....**

After delivering the most penetrating messages to the Christian church in chapters 2 and 3.... Not a word is mentioned after... why?... because it is not there!... and as we go along we'll see more support for this removal of the church PRIOR to the great Tribulation.

Read verse 2

This reminds me of the apostle Paul's trip to the throne room...2 Corinthians 12:2–4... Paul describes a time when he was caught up to the third heaven [Explain]... He mentions himself in the third person: **"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard *inexpressible things*, things that no one is permitted to tell."**

Can you imagine?... of course everything in heaven is inexpressible!... John is trying to express!... so here in chapter 4 he uses a lot of metaphors... *There was something like, ... it was like...was like a lion...* He wants us to understand something about things he couldn't even understand fully... he grasps for words we can understand because what he saw is beyond understanding!.....

He goes through the door Jesus invited him through...John says he was in the Spirit...he says that four times in Revelation... and every time he says that...he then experiences an ecstatic... fantastic in the true sense of the world.. literally "out of body experience"... he sees a throne... **a throne standing in heaven... and One sitting on the throne.... "a throne"** appears 40 times in Revelation!!!.....40 times!

Do you suppose Jesus wants us to see and know who is in charge?... whose on the throne whether we acknowledge Him or not...God is on the throne... He is in charge?...interesting that John does not **describe for us who is on the throne**... he can only tell us what "He is like"...

1 Timothy 1:17 **...the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God...**

1 Timothy 6:16 **...who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see....**now John tries to tell us what He is like...

Read verse 3

I just read an update on how many times the Old Testament is quoted or referred to in Revelation... they stopped counting after 800... you want to understand Revelation....read and understand the Old Testament!

He was sitting like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance... Ezekiel also had a vision... some 600 years before John... Ezekiel 1

Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something in the likeness of a throne, like sapphire stone... lapis lazuli... jasper and carnelian stone... all these stones were “crystal clear”... more like diamonds... **in appearance; and upon the likeness of the throne, high up, was the likeness of one with the appearance of a man.**

27 Then I saw from the appearance of His loins and upward something like the gleam of glowing metal with the appearance of fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something with the appearance of fire; and there was a radiance all around Him.

28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the radiance all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. And I saw this, and I fell on my face and heard a sound of a voice speaking.

The stones... jasper = majesty, holiness, purity.... Sardius, or carnelian stone, red stones = judgement... there was a rainbow... but this **looked like an emerald in appearance...** many have referenced the rainbow in Genesis 9 which was a sign of God's faithfulness to never destroy humanity through a flood.

You get a picture from all those metaphors... God is majestic, holy, pure and faithful.... But there is judgment in the picture...

Read verse 4

24 thrones and 24 elders... plenty of arguments and disagreements as to who these 24 elders are... some say they are “stars”... many think they are an order of angels... Old Testament saints... angelic representation of the saints... each one a representative of the 24 books of the Old Testament... but I count 39... maybe just the prophetic books?... but I count 17.

Some say they are the 12 heads of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament joining the 12 apostles of the New Testament... at least the math adds up.... There are some clues:

- Elders in the Bible never refer to angels... always refers to men...
- Angels don't sit on heavenly thrones... but in Matthew 19:28 we read... Jesus speaking to His disciples...

“Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Revelation 3:31... last week we read in the letter to the church in Laodicea... **He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.**

An open invitation to believers to sit on the throne with Him!...

- John says these elders were dressed in white clothing... angels are sometimes describes as wearing white garments... but most of the time in this book of Revelation it is talking about believers...

Remember the letter to Sardis? Revelation 3:5—**He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments...** five times in Revelation the redeemed in Christ are clothed in white clothes.... But this one... (4) they will be wearing **golden crowns on their heads...**

These golden crowns were only worn by humans... these are not golden diadems... crowns only worn by those in authority... God, Jesus... these are Golden *Stephanos*... these crowns were awarded to victors in war or in an athletic event... these are crowns to the ones that “endure to the end” and are victorious...

Remember the letter to Smyrna (2:10) **Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life...** a *Stephanos*...the apostle Paul said it well... 1 Corinthians 9:25-- **Everyone who competes in the games exercises self control in all things... they then do it to receive a perishable wreath... but we an imperishable...** a *Stephanos*...

These 24 elders are sitting on their thrones... dressed in white with crowns of victory on their heads... everyone argues about the “24”... 1Chronicles 24 tells us that there were 24 officers of the sanctuary that represented the 24 courses of Levitical priests... there were 24 divisions of singers in the temple...

but I think they are **the representatives of redeemed in Christ**... possibly representatives of the raptured church!...the vision amps up... something’s up... something is in the making...John is starting to realize this trip to heaven has a purpose...John is going to be a herald!

(5) And out of the throne came flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder...much like the scene in Exodus 19 when Moses in the presence of God to receive the Ten Commandments...

Down the road in Revelation... Revelation 8:5 **Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake....**even further down the road...

Revelation 11:9... **And the sanctuary of God which is in heaven was opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His sanctuary, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.**

Envision this!... hear this!...**God is mighty!...All powerful**... even further down the road... Revelation 16:18... the seven bowls of God’s wrath... seven angels pour out seven bowls of God’s wrath over the earth... [I vote that the 24 elders are the raptured church!]

The final seventh bowl Revelation 16:18... **And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.**

Back to chapter 4:5... **and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne...which are the seven Spirits of God...**seven the number of completion... this is the Holy Spirit perfect in His person... this is the only appearance of the Holy Spirit in heaven in Revelation...

I love what commentator Hendrikson said after commenting on this verse: *What a vision! What a King!...Our affairs rest in the hands NOT OF MEN, but of God! Hence when the world is enkindling the flames of hatred and slaughter and when the earth is drenched with blood, may our tear-dimmed eye catch a vision of THE THRONE which rules the universe...in the midst of trial and tribulation may our gaze be riveted upon the One who is King and Lord of Lords!*

(6) and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass like crystal... nobody knows for sure what that refers to... at a minimum it adds to the splendor and glory of the entire throne scene...but these guys... **and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind...**these creatures were VERY aware of what's going on!...they see it all!

I immediately thought John was describing my mother... I was sure she had eyes in front AND behind!...

And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like a man, and the fourth creature like a flying eagle... and the four living creatures, each of them having six wings are full of eyes around and within...

Most agree these are angels... angelic worshipping beings... nobody can be sure of the individual characteristics... it has been suggested that all these creatures represent God's creation:

The lion—represents strength

The calf—represents servanthood

The man—represents reason

the Eagle—Speed... I don't know... interesting though is that in the Old Testament... the twelve tribes carried with them four banners which they camped under... the banner of the Lion, Calf, Man and eagle...

They had six wings... John was not the first to see this... 600 years earlier Isaiah had a vision...Isaiah 6:2-3 **Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is Yahweh of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory."**

How similar is John's vision...

Read verse 8

And day and night they do not cease to say.... They never stop... they never sleep... ceaselessly they proclaim the holiness of God!... **Holy, Holy, Holy!**... only two places in the Bible God is Holy three times... here and in Isaiah vision... why three Holys?...

(Alan Johnson) In Hebrew when a word is repeated twice... a “double repetition” it is for emphasis... rarely is a word repeated three times... When it is... it designates *the superlative*... the highest degree or quality... you can't get any higher than a superlative... God is not just holy... He is holy, holy, holy!

I had this in my file and I don't know who wrote it:

*The holiness of God is the most difficult of all God's attributes to explain, partly because it is one of His essential attributes that is not shared, inherently, by man. We are created in God's image, and we can share many of His attributes, to a much lesser extent, of course—love, mercy, faithfulness, etc.... holiness is not something that we will possess as an inherent part of our nature; we only become holy in relationship to Christ. It is an imputed holiness. Only in Christ do we “become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). **God's holiness is what separates Him from all other beings, what makes Him separate and distinct from everything else.** God's holiness is more than just His perfection or sinless purity; it is the essence of His “otherness,” His transcendence. God's holiness embodies the mystery of His awesomeness and causes us to gaze in wonder at Him as we begin to comprehend just a little of His majesty.*

Do you gaze in wonder at Him?

When need to learn from these angels... **Holy, holy,, holy is the Lord God, THE ALMIGHTY** nine times in Revelation... God is ALMIGHTY—unlimited power and might... **WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME...**

(9) And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever [!]

GET THIS... whenever you give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne... you worship... how do you worship?... like the 24 elders:

Read verse 10

I think this is profound... Where did these crowns come from?... God gave them and God still gives them... to those who are victorious in the Christian life... There are five heavenly crowns mentioned in the New Testament that will be awarded to believers. They are the **imperishable crown, the crown of rejoicing, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory, and the crown of life....all are Stephanos...**

Jesus tells us to store up treasures in heaven... the crowns are our treasures... Jesus says that He will bring rewards with Him when He returns...at the end of Revelation... chapter 22:12... after Jesus has shown this amazing vision to John... He brings us back to the beginning.. and says **“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to his work.”**

What will we do with these crowns? I think we will be happy to receive them from Jesus...but after He hands them to us... we are going to realize that all that we have is a gift from Jesus.. we didn't earn it... we don't merit them... standing next to the Holy, Holy, Holy... there is only one thing to do...

Read verse 10-11

We will cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus!