



In this series, we've explored core truths which drive how we live. So far, we've seen:

- God's big plan is to bring all things under Jesus; and
- Life is short, while eternity in heaven or hell is long.

In this study we will be considering what stands at the centre of heaven and the centre of God's plans by looking at Revelation 4-5.

The Book of Revelation can be an intimidating book. It is full of picture language to portray powerful truths. But ultimately Revelation is a gospel book where God pulls back the curtain to show core spiritual realities to his people. Written to suffering saints in the first century who were facing marginalisation and persecution, these pictures are God's gift for us as we seek to patiently endure until Christ returns.

Heaven's throne room

Split into two groups. One group read Revelation 4:1-11. The other group read Revelation 5:6-14. Draw your scene on a blank piece of paper (include speech bubbles for the words of praise)

Some hints:

Seven spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit (7= perfect/holy).

The 24 elders represent the complete people of God (12 old covenant tribes and 12 new testament apostles - the new covenant people)

The four living creatures represent the peak of the created order, who have complete insight into reality ('full of eyes')

The scroll represents God's plans to bring justice on his enemies and rescue for his people. The one who opens it will bring these plans about.

Let the first group share their picture.

Question just for the first group - how would you score the picture in Revelation 4 out of 10 (not your picture, but the goodness of what is happening in the passage)

1. Why is God being worshipped (according to 4:11)?

Tears in heaven

At first glance, Revelation 4 can look like the peak of all reality! What could be better than this? All creation and all God's people are worshipping God for his incredible holiness and creation. And yet....something is wrong.

Read 5:1-5.

John has seen this incredible picture of heaven. But he is in tears! Something is desperately wrong. Something is lacking in heaven.

2. Why is John weeping according to verse 3? Why is this such a problem?
3. Imagine you are a 1st century Christian facing persecution and marginalization. Why would you feel desperate like John for someone to open the scroll?
4. What/who is the solution according to verse 5? What/who would you be expecting to take centre stage at this point?

Spot the difference

Let the second group share their picture.

5. Spot the differences between the two pictures.

6. Let's zoom in on the songs/words of praise. Compare the 'new song' of verse 5:9 to the 'old song' of 4:11. What is similar? What is different?

Revelation 4:11	Revelation 5:9-10
Worthy are you, our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power, For you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.	Worthy are you [Lamb] to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to or God and they shall reign on the earth.

7. In the context of these chapters, is one song 'better'/more of a climax than the other? How?
8. What evidence is there in Revelation 5:9-10 that the cross is the reason Jesus (called 'the lamb') can take the scroll (i.e. achieve God's plans)?
9. According to these verses, what did the cross achieve? Why do you think Jesus is repeatedly called a lamb even though he is described as a Lion in 5:5?

In Revelation 5, we get to rewind and watch the moment when Jesus ascended and took his seat at the Father's side in glory. We see that Jesus is being glorified because of his death. When he died, Jesus was paying a price (his blood - his death) to ransom people for God. The reason he came was to 'give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

Jesus could have done so many things! He could have brought in a new system of government, healed every disease, lived a long life teaching others to love one another. Instead he saw his big goal and achievement was to be his death. Heaven views it the same way. More than a teacher, a wise man, a healer, humanity needed (and still needs) a saviour to take our place under the penalty of God's right justice.

Big thinking

10. Pick one-two of the following to discuss based on these chapters:

“Without the Cross, Jesus could not have been the Christ (God’s chosen king)” True or False.

OR

Is it more appropriate to praise God for his creation or salvation?

OR

“I believe in God, I worship God, I just don’t worship Jesus.” Is this true worship of God?

Personal reflection...

11. Choose one of the following to discuss in pairs and then share with the group: What could it look like to keep the cross central to:

- a) How you celebrate easter this year?
- b) What we pray for?
- c) How we encourage one another as Christians?

Pray together

Leaders notes:

- Big idea: The cross is central to Christianity. We see this in the picture of Revelation 4-5 where the lamb (i.e. Jesus who died in our place like a sacrificial lamb) is on the throne because of his death. I.e. The cross is central to heaven.
- Chapter 4 looks amazing! But it is missing Christ on the throne, and it is missing the impact of Christ's death.
- We may want to see Revelation 4 and 5 as two parallel chapters, each highlighting something amazing about God (he is creator- chapter 4 - and he is savior - chapter 5). But John's tears show that there is a progression - Chapter 4 is improved, fulfilled, by chapter 5. If we just live life praising God as creator (loving his creation, investing in creation), we miss the goal of the story. Now we get to live praising God also as saviour (loving his death for us and investing in salvation work).

Some thoughts for the 'big thinking section'. These discussion questions are deliberately provocative. Usually there is at least a little bit of 'both-and' in each but try and hold off letting people settle for this too early. Try and push them along to pick one or the other and give reasons why. The goal is healthy discussion and wrestling with the Scriptures, more than 'getting the right answer'. Keep asking people 'do you have a part of the Bible in mind for that?'

- 1) The Son has always been the son (eternal, all powerful, worthy of praise and worship). He is called the Christ during his life during the gospels (e.g. Mark 8) But something did happen and change in heaven after the cross. He is glorified *because* of his death.
- 2) Both are great! But the progression from 4-5 suggests there is something particularly wonderful about his saving work, it is the goal creation was getting to.
- 3) Even though the creatures do worship him for his creation in chapter 4, we have been given both chapters! If somebody denies Christ, refuses to worship him, then they are not prepared for true worship (I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me - John 14:6-9)