

**10/24/21 “Inside the Throne Room of God”
Revelation 4:1-11**

Welcome...

How many of you have seen the movie Chariots of Fire? Do you remember the opening scene?

The film opens in 1978 in a church at the funeral of one of the 1924 Olympic runners, as a stately gentleman and aged athlete reminisces that, now, “There are just two of us;” still alive, he describes how they back when they were young they all had “hope in their hearts, and wings on their heels.” As the scene crossfades to the beach, we initially hear just a thrumming, percussive sound, mimicking the patter of footsteps on sand. French horns punctuate the percussion, majestically bellowing; they evoke nobility, a military march. Even if you have not seen the movie, you will recognize the music.

The runners move as if performing an athletic ballet, and in slow motion the camera n several faces. Some, like Harold Abrahams’ are stern and focused, while others, such as Eric Liddell’s are rocked back in pure delight. Few film scores have captured so intently the sensation of running, especially of running with others - not necessarily what it always is (the pain, the effort), but rather that fleeting moment of euphoria that it promises. That tension—between the joy of the race, and the exertion of running - creates the crux of Vangelis’ musical score and of the film.

Liddell, the beloved Scottish athlete and Christian missionary, represents the soul of the movie. In the film, Eric Liddell’s sister desperately wants him to quit running so that he will fulfill his true calling as a missionary in China. Yet the possibility of competing in the Olympics beckons, and so he takes her for a walk in the Scottish Highlands, where he goes for his daily run. He explains to his sister, “I believe that God made me for a purpose. For China. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

In 1988, I had finished my Navy flight training in California and had received orders to report to my first squadron in Jacksonville, FL. A high school friend flew out to California from Maryland to join me in the car trip cross country. When we got to Arizona we went to the Grand Canyon and paid for a helicopter tour.

It was just the pilot and my friend Phil and me. The pilot asked us to put on the headphones so we could hear him talk. And as the helicopter approached the edge of the Grand Canyon unexpectedly the theme music of Chariots of Fire began playing on our headsets and suddenly the pilot took the helicopter down into the Grand Canyon and I was overwhelmed with the beauty and immensity and God’s creation. It is an experience and a scene I will never forget.

This morning, as we return to the book of the Revelation, we will discover that God has an even more powerful and even more important ‘opening scene’ for us to consider.

Turn with me to Revelation chapter 4....

The key word in chapter is “throne,” it is used fourteen times. In fact, this is a key word in the entire book, appearing forty-six times. No matter what may happen on earth, God is on His throne and is in complete control. Various teachers interpret Revelation in different ways, but all agree that John is emphasizing the glory and sovereignty of God. What an encouragement that would be to the suffering saints of John’s day—and of every age in history.

John is given a vision into heaven and tells us who is on the throne, what is going on around the throne, and what is directed toward the throne. My prayer is that this opening scene inside the throne room of God will transform your vision of the power, preeminence and perfection of God and will be a scene that will help you daily.

I. The Sovereign on the Throne

A. God's Plan

Verse 1...

Notice how verse 1 begins with the phrase “after these things” and then ends with the same words.

The first occurrence of “after these things” relates to John’s personal chronology. It notes that this second vision followed immediately after John’s vision of the risen, glorified Christ (1:9–20) and the letters to the seven churches (2:1–3:22). The phrase after these things is used throughout Revelation to mark the beginning of a new vision (7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

The second occurrence of “after these things” at the end of verse 1 relates to God’s chronology. “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” marks an important transition in the book of Revelation.

If you remember, Jesus’ words in Revelation 1:19 form the outline of the whole book of Revelation, “what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.”

The things which you have seen (Past) in chapter 1

The things which are (Present) in chapters 2-3 addressing the seven churches of Asia Minor

The things that will take place (Future) in chapters 4-22 (the Tribulation, millennial kingdom, and eternal state) that unfold in chapters 6–22.

So, the scene shifts both to heaven (mentioned 50 times in Revelation) and the future as God lays out for us His plan for the consummation of history. History is not aimlessly moving forward out of control. There is purpose in God’s plan.

Notice in verse 1, John sees in heaven a door, ‘standing open.’ The Greek is the passive perfect participle, and literally means ‘was opened’. This implies a divine action: God Himself opens the door in heaven for the seer.

Remember in 3:20...Jesus was standing at the door of the church at Thyatira and knocking so they would open the door. But now in 4:1 God opens the door and shows us His plan for the future. Second, we see:

B. God's Preeminence

Verse 2...

John was amazed and astounded by what he saw, causing him to exclaim, “behold.”

The cause of John’s amazement was the throne of God that he saw “standing in heaven.” This was not a piece of furniture, but a symbol of God’s sovereign rule and authority in heaven (7:15; 16:17). According to Revelation 21:22 the heavenly temple is not an actual building: “The Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” are the temple. The use of the term “temple” symbolizes God’s presence.

The throne was said to be standing because God's sovereign rule is fixed, permanent, and unshakable. The throne of God is vastly different than the throne of Caesar as God's immovable throne reveals He is in permanent, unchanging, and complete control of the universe. That is a comforting realization in light of the frightening end-time events about to be revealed in chapters 6–19.

Earthly monarchs, rulers and presidents come and go, but this one remains forever. As Isaiah 6:1 says, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." Psalm 47:8 adds, "God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne." In heaven, no one doubts who is in control. His authority is sovereign. God is preeminent.

C. God's Peace

Verse 3...

Jasper – probably refers to a translucent rock crystal (21:11), perhaps a diamond. It pictures God's glory and purity. Sardius stone – a blood red stone, pictures both the wrath of God poured out (14:20) and the blood of Christ that purchased our redemption (19:13). Rainbow – pictures God's covenant to Noah (Genesis 9:16-17) and His faithfulness to keep His word. Emerald – green, pictures life, even mercy as our God is the God of new life and new beginnings.

Taken as a whole these precious stones portray God in all His majestic splendor and glory. He is beyond description in appearance and utterly dependable in activity. He is awesome, magnificent, transcendent and spectacular.

God's attributes always operate in perfect harmony. His wrath never operates at the expense of His faithfulness. He is the sovereign on the throne. Second, we see:

II. The Saints Around the Throne

Verse 4a...

A. Their Character **verse 4a**

Here in heaven's court, there are twenty-four "presbuteroi" the Greek word that is translated "elders." This reminds me of the little girl who was in Sunday school and the teacher got a little carried away and went a little more in depth and asked if anyone know what English word came the Greek presbuteroi. No one answered so the teacher said the word gives us our English word Presbyterian.

Well, on the way home from church, her mother asked this girl what she learned in Sunday school. She said, "We studied Revelation and the teacher said that only twenty-four Presbyterians made it to heaven."

The identity of the twenty-four elders has been much debated. While some see them as an order of angelic beings, it seems best to view them as human representatives of the church. Why? First, the reference to the twenty-four thrones they sit upon indicates that they reign with Christ.

B. Their Comfort

Verse 4b...

Nowhere in Scripture do angels sit on thrones, nor are they pictured as reigning. The church, on the other hand, is repeatedly promised to rule with Christ (2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Corinthians 6:2–3; 2 Timothy 2:12).

What great comfort we have in knowing the truth of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:6 tells us, “God has raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.”

The Greek word translated “elders” is never used in Scripture to refer to angels, but always to men. It is used to speak of older men in general, and the rulers of both Israel and the church. There is also no clear use of this word outside of Revelation to refer to angels. Further, “elder” would be an inappropriate term to describe angels, who do not age.

C. Their Clothing

Verse 4c...

While angels do appear in white (John 20:12; Acts 1:10), white garments more commonly are the dress of believers. That is particularly true in the immediate context of Revelation. Christ promised the believers at Sardis that they would “be clothed in white garments” (3:5). He advised the Laodiceans to “buy from Me ... white garments so that you may clothe yourself” (3:18). At the marriage supper of the Lamb, His bride will “clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean” (19:8). White garments symbolize Christ’s righteousness imputed to believers at salvation.

That the elders wore golden crowns on their heads provides further evidence that they were humans and represent the church. Crowns are never promised to angels in the Bible, nor are angels ever seen wearing them.

Each of the elders wore crowns of gold. These were not crowns of deity. There are 2 Greek words translated crown in the NT. One is the word “diadem.” This is the crown Jesus will wear, His crown of glory. This is the word “stephanos” and refers to a crown given to an athlete, who successfully competed and won the victory.

Christ promised this crown to the overcomers, the loyal believers at Smyrna (Revelation 2:10; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12).

The redeemed people of God will be worshipping Him alongside the angels.

We have seen the one on the throne. We have seen the ones around the throne. Now we see what comes forth from the throne and who is before the throne.

III. The Scene Before the Throne Verses 5-11

A. The Power of the Creator

Verses 5-6a...

“Flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder” are associated with God’s presence in Exodus 19:16 and Ezekiel 1:13. These are indications of a coming storm and reminders of God’s awesome power (see Ex. 9:23, 28; 19:16). These “storm signals” will be repeated during the time of judgment, always proceeding from the throne and temple of God (Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). God has indeed prepared His throne for judgment (Ps. 9:7; note also 77:18).

Our world does not like to think of God as a God of judgment. They prefer to look at the rainbow around the throne and ignore the lightning and thunder out of the throne. He certainly is a God of grace, but His grace reigns through righteousness (Romans 5:21). This was made clear at the cross where God manifested both His love for sinners and His wrath against sin.

The seven blazing lamps also stem from Ezekiel 1:13 and signify the powerful presence of God. These are not just lamps but the same “torches” that in Revelation 8:10 are linked with the “great star” that fell from heaven. They often depict the blazing power of a falling star. The storm and the blazing torches are connected in Revelation not just with God’s majesty but with the God of judgment and prepare for the outpouring of God’s wrath later in the book. The torches are defined as the “seven spirits of God,” which as before signify the sevenfold (perfect) Holy Spirit who joins the Godhead as the means by which God oversees and judges his world.

Sea of glass like crystal – unclear as to its meaning other than it adds to the splendor and brilliance of the vision. Some believe it represents: 1) There is no more need for cleansing from sin in heaven. 2) God’s transcendence, holiness and his unapproachability. 3) In mirror-like reflection the fact that all is revealed to God.

Hence idea of cleansing and holiness, omniscience and majesty are presented. But we see not only the Power of the Creator, but next:

B. The Praise of Creation

Verse 6b-9...

Ezekiel 10:15 specifically identifies the four living creatures are cherubim, an exalted order of angels frequently associated in Scripture with God’s holy power.

Many people picture cherubs as naked babies who fly around on tiny wings, shooting people with arrows that make them fall in love. That may be good for Hallmark, but it is not true of heaven.

The cherub or cherubim (plural) are majestic, awe-inspiring creatures. It was the cherubim with their swords of fire that made sure Adam and Eve could not return to the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). The angelic forms of cherubim were sculpted out of solid gold with their wings touching over the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31). With golden thread, the forms of the cherubim were woven into the veil of the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:1).

Notice in their power of perception and alert diligence is described as being covered with eyes in front and behind so that no matter where they were they saw clearly. The translation “living creatures” is somewhat misleading, since these are not animals. The phrase derives from a single word in the Greek text that can mean “living ones.”

Ezekiel’s description of these angels notes that each one possessed all four facial features (Ezekiel 1:6). From John’s point of view, the first was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had a face like that of a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. Those descriptions view the four cherubim in relation to the created world and we see the praise of creation.

This praise of creation, the first movement, may be divided into several elements. The four living creatures begin by focusing on God’s *holiness*: “day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God.’” The threefold repetition of *holy* is also found in Isaiah 6:1-3 which Adrian read at the beginning of our service. Holiness is the only one of God’s attributes repeated in this way, since it is the summation of all that He is.

Next, the four living creatures refer to God's *power*. He is the Almighty, a title by which God identified Himself to Abraham (Genesis 17:1). That term identifies God as the most powerful being, devoid of any weakness, whose conquering power and overpowering strength none can oppose. Because God is Almighty, He can effortlessly do whatever His holy will purposes to do (Isaiah 40:28).

The four living creatures also praise God for His eternity, extolling Him as "He who was and who is and who is to come." Scripture repeatedly affirms God's eternity, that He has neither beginning nor ending (Psalms 90:2; 93:2; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 1:17).

The praise of creation leads to:

C. The Praise of Christians

Verses 9-11...

This scene in heaven ends in worship directed toward God on His throne. Here and in chapter 5 are five great hymns of praise, each gradually increasing in the number of singers—from a quartet (the four living creatures) with the twenty-four elders joining in (verse 10), then myriads of angels adding their voices (verse 11), and finally, all created beings in the universe filling in the mighty chorus of praise to God (verse 13).

There are two reasons sung of in this hymn.

1. Because of who God is! Notice Revelation 4:11a. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, . . . He is worthy, not only because of who He is, but for a second reason.
2. Because of what God has done! Continue to Revelation 4:11b. . . . for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

He alone has the right both to redeem and to judge His creation. The elders' song anticipates paradise lost in Genesis is now becoming paradise regained in Revelation.

Friends, there are two things I hope you will do this morning. First, I hope you will let John's description of God's revelation wash over your imagination; that you will allow the colors and the imagery and the worship to capture your heart with a profound sense of awe in light of the person, presence, power, perfection and preeminence of God.

But second, if we can do that, if God grants us even a tenth of that kind of sense of awe, then we must discipline ourselves to let this 'opening scene' be the 'opening scene' throughout our everyday. Let me explain what I mean.

What if you woke up and allowed this heavenly scene to be the 'opening scene' of your day? What would be different?

What if before you stepped into the classroom at school or the office at work, this scene was the 'opening scene' of your time at school or work? What would be different?

What if before you closed your eyes and bowed your head, this scene was the 'opening scene' of your time in prayer? What would be different?

What if before you spoke to your spouse or to your children, this scene was the 'opening scene' of that imminent conversation? What would be different?

What if before you made your choice at that place of temptation, in that moment when your flesh is enticing you toward the wrong, what if this scene was the 'opening scene' of your inner deliberations? What would be different?

What if before the tidal wave of obligations, what if before your device booted up, what if before the check is written, what if before your meal, your vacation, your Facebook post, your ambitions, your conversation with that unbelieving friend...this was the 'opening scene'?

What would be different? What should be different?

A true sense of awe in light of the person and presence of God will change things. It will humble us. It will correct us. It will encourage us. It will guide us. It will embolden us. It will set the tone for what is to come.

Let's not allow our 'opening scene' to be written by our own pride, or fear, or doubts, or anxieties, our lust, or some other lie.

Let's cry out to God this morning. Let's ask Him, through the sacrifice and victory of Jesus, to give us new eyes; eyes filled with this same vision.

When is the showtime for this 'opening scene'? It's every day, all throughout the day. Let's join the cherubim and the whole family in heaven as they worship God. Let's look and keep looking to the throne of God.

Let's pray...