

The Creator's Throne

1

Revelation 4

I would invite you this morning to take your Bibles and turn to Revelation chapter four. Paul said that he preached in “weakness and in much fear and trembling” and I can certainly identify with that statement, especially this morning as the Lord would have me take you into the court of His glorious throne.

The 18th century New England Puritan preacher Cotton Mather said this, quote, “The great design of a Christian preacher is to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men,” end quote. And, dear friends, we have a wonderful opportunity to do just that this morning as we look into the Word of God and see what He has revealed to us with respect to our sovereign Creator's throne. And we see this as it was witnessed through the eyes of the apostle John.

The prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel also saw the throne of God in a vision, and we read from Ezekiel a few minutes ago. And they recorded elements of what they saw and in each description we find ourselves being awe struck, overwhelmed by things that are beyond our capacity to even visualize, beyond the range of human imagination, beyond even the scope of language. But with every description we find ourselves coming away with a greater grasp of the glory of God as well as a better understanding of our own finiteness and our sinful estate. So, once again, we have an opportunity to get lost in the wonders and the majesty of God's glorious plans to give glory to Himself.

By way of review, first, He unveils to us a vision of the ascended, glorified Christ in chapter one. And then in chapters two and three He revealed to us the condition of seven churches that perfectly represent the characteristics of every Church throughout the Church age. And now the glorified Lord of the Church turns our attention away from the things on earth and He causes us to gaze heavenward into the throne room of God to give us a glimpse of our Creator.

And this, I might add, will prepare us for chapter five where the worthy Lamb—who is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah—will take the scrolls and open up the seals of divine judgment upon the ungodly that will be revealed throughout most of the Apocalypse through chapter 19.

Let me read the text that we have before us in Revelation chapter four, a brief, yet amazing chapter describing the throne of God.

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had 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."

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,

Revelation 4

clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of 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 that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

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, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."¹

The Lord has graciously outlined this text for us and divided it into six parts. He will show us, first, the throne of God and then; secondly, what is around the throne; thirdly, what emanates from the throne; fourthly what is before the throne; fifthly, what is in and around the throne; and then, finally, the doxologies directed toward the throne. And it is my prayer that what we witness today will elevate our view of God to even greater heights because, again, the higher our view of God, the more realistic the view we will have of ourselves and the undeserved mercy and grace that we have been given.

This is now John's second vision as indicated by the phrase in verse one, "After these things."² That is, after his vision of the ascended Christ in chapter one verses 9 through 20 and the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven."³

Here John is allowed to actually witness the throne room of heaven, the celestial court where Christ ascended after his resurrection. In fact, for most of the Apocalypse we are going to see that John will view the events of history from this vantage point. He goes on and says, "And the first voice which I had 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.'"⁴

¹ Revelation 4:1-11.

² Revelation 4:1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Revelation 4

Now the trumpet speaking denotes the summoning voice of authority, a voice that is about to announce something of profound importance. And, obviously this is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is revealing these great truths. This is reminiscent of the divine summons that we read about in Exodus when God called Moses up to Mount Sinai. And John says that He said to him, "I will show you what must take place after these things."⁵ That is, in the future.

This indicates both a transition as well as a sequence of chronology consistent with chapter one and verse 19. Remember there God said to him, "Write...the things which you have seen,"⁶ that is a reference to the past vision of the glorified Christ in chapter one. And then He also said, "and the things which are,"⁷ which refer to the characteristics of the Church and the Church age in which we now live described in chapters two and three. And He added, "and the things which shall take place after these things,"⁸ referring to the prophetic events detailed in chapter 4 through 22.

So John's vision now transitions from the Church age to the throne of God from which all of the tribulation judgments will originate, from where all of the magnificent promises pertaining to the millennial kingdom and the new heaven and the new earth and the new Jerusalem and the eternal state were all decreed and will be brought to fruition as promised.

Now, it is important for you to understand that the Church is never again mentioned in chapters 4 through 22. I believe that it will be raptured prior to the tribulation judgments. This is consistent with His promise in chapter three and verse 10 when he said, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing."⁹ Again, that was the hour of divine judgment that we find in Revelation chapters 6 through 19, designated specifically in chapter 14 and verse seven as "the hour of his judgment,"¹⁰ that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth.

And I might also remind you that that period of time, yet future, is also known as Daniel's 70th week. We have gone over that in some detail earlier. That is a distinctly Jewish context pertaining to God's covenants with Israel. It cannot be describing anything in the Church age. That will be the time when Israel enters into "the time of Jacob's trouble" as we read from the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 30 and verse seven, a period of unprecedented oppression for Israel. The context there describes her final restoration.

So these are pre-kingdom judgments consistent with God's purposes and plan for Israel, not the Church as we read in Daniel 9:24.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Revelation 1:19.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Revelation 3:10.

¹⁰ Revelation 14:7.

Revelation 4

Now we come to the first division where John sees, number one, *the throne of God*.

Verse two: "Immediately I was in the Spirit."¹¹ In other words the Holy Spirit somehow supernaturally transports him into heaven, perhaps in some type of an ecstatic state where he consciously is able to use all of his senses. "Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne."¹²

The throne of God in the Bible is emblematic of His eternal, holy, omnipotent, sovereign rule over all of His universe. And suddenly John sees the ineffable majesty of the glory of God. It is interesting that the symbolism of the heavenly throne and the heavenly temple are often pictured together throughout the Apocalypse indicating that they are interrelated along with the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant.

He continues his description in verse three. "And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance."¹³ Now *sitting* is always the posture taken by a sovereign who is reigning over his kingdom as God is over His universal kingdom today. And while we do not want to press the symbolism of John's descriptions beyond the bounds of reason, I would also argue that it is... it is very important that we never disregard the details that we have in Scripture as if they are somehow not important.

So with this in mind we endeavor to understand all that John said by looking at these symbols and seeing how they are used in other passages of Scripture and, thus, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture as best we can. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit attempts, now, to describe in human terms the indescribable majesty of God. He says that He "was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance."¹⁴

Now, *jasper* is a reference to the ancient diamond that was a crystal clear stone refracting the full spectrum of light in every imaginable color. It is also used to describe the glory of God in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:11 where we read "its brilliance was like a precious stone, as a crystallized jasper stone."¹⁵ So he sees Him as if He is a diamond, but also as a *sardius*. This is a carnelian or a ruby, a hard mineral stone that was beautiful. It is a translucent deep red that has the appearance of fire when you look at it.

So when we combine John's description of the throne throughout the Apocalypse with that of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, it would seem that the white light of the *jasper* diamond symbolizes the holiness of God. And the fiery red of the *sardius* pictures His judgment. Certainly this is emblematic of the holy wrath that is about to be discharged from this throne.

Furthermore, according to Exodus chapter 28 and verses 17 through 20, we read there that the *sardius* and the *jasper* were the first and the last of the 12 precious stones that were attached to the breastplate of the high priest. This would be what he would wear

¹¹ Revelation 4:2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Revelation 4:3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Revelation 21:11.

Revelation 4

when he was performing his sacerdotal duties before the altar. And also, each stone represented one of the 12 sons of Jacob and, thus, the 12 tribes of Israel. The *sardius* represented Reuben, who was the first born. And the *jasper* represented Benjamin, the last born. And it is interesting that the name Reuben means, “Behold a son.” And Benjamin means, “Son of my right hand.” So these two stones could very well be symbolic of the son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of his Father.

And here we can also see Him as the faithful high priest representing the sons of Israel before the throne, each stone picturing his covenantal relationship with his chosen people, the 12 tribes of Israel. Or, again, as we will discover, the pre-kingdom judgments in the tribulation will also be a period of unprecedented evangelism where 144,000 male Jews—12,000 from each of the 12 tribes—will be evangelists to preach the gospel and ultimately, according to Romans 11, all Israel will be saved. This is also in keeping with the rainbow that John describes next.

This is, secondly, *what he sees around the throne*. Notice in verse three he says, “And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”¹⁶ Now, while a rainbow has seven primary colors, the dominant color that John sees is like an emerald, smaragdino (smar-ag’-dee-no) in the original language. It refers to a bright, light green, translucent stone. So this is what he is seeing in his mind. And, again, this was the first stone on the second row of the breast piece of judgment worn by the high priest, symbolic of the righteous judgments of God. And we also understand that in Ezekiel chapter one and verse 28 the rainbow depicted the surrounding radiance of the glory of God, as I believe it does here as well.

Moreover, it was the visual sign of God’s covenant with Noah, symbolic of His faithfulness, of His mercy and His grace. And here, perhaps, a reminder of His covenant mercies to Israel as depicted in the two stones. Because, again, God will use these judgments, the judgments of Daniel’s 70th week to reconcile Israel unto Himself and fulfill His covenant promises that He has made to them.

Now regarding the rainbow, Robert Thomas has well said—and I quote—that, “This is a reminder that God’s mercy is as great as his majesty.” He went on to say that, “There will be no triumph of God’s sovereignty at the expense of his mercy. The disaster portrayed in the following pages cannot be interpreted as meaning that God has forgotten his promise to Noah,” end quote.

So in his attempt to somehow describe the ineffable majesty and transcendence of God, he gives a picture here of this dazzling white light mingled with the fiery red that is emanating from the person of God Himself, with a rainbow of glistening emerald all around the throne providing a vivid background to this magnificent scene. Utterly astounding!

He continues to describe that which is around the throne in verse four. He says, “And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four

¹⁶ Revelation 4:3.

Revelation 4

elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.”¹⁷ Now, over the years I have studied all of the various interpretations of who these 24 elders are and I am convinced that the most compelling answer to that question is that *they represent the glorified Church*. It is interesting. There will be other magnificent angelic creatures mentioned next. But these are mentioned first because they represent the most important creatures in heaven, the object of divine love, namely the Redeemed saints.

Now some have argued that these 24 elders are angelic beings. But may I remind you that Jesus invited the *saints*, not the angels, to sit with Him on the throne, as we read in Revelation 3:21. And according to Revelation 20 and verse four, judgment will be given to the saints who will sit upon thrones, not angels. Unlike angels who were created to be ministering spirits to the saints and to meet the needs of the saints as we read in Hebrews one and verse seven, God created man and appointed him to rule as we find in Genesis 1:28; and He crowned man with glory and honor, Psalm 8:5. In Scripture the angels are never depicted as ruling and reigning or sitting upon thrones. You never see that. But repeatedly we read of believers who have been promised to reign with Christ in both the Old and New Testaments.

Moreover, the term “elder” would beg for relevance if it is used to describe angelic beings that never age. Furthermore, *elder* translates the Greek word presbuteros (pres-boo'-ter-os) and the New Testament term there is used to define older men in general, but it is also used to define men who ruled in Israel as well as those who rule in the church. The term is never applied to angels, although some believe that it is in Isaiah 24:23. But I believe the term there is better understood to describe human beings.

Notice also the *attire* of the elders. John says they are “clothed in white garments.” Now we do see angels dressed at times in white. But in the context of Revelation we see that white garments symbolize the imputed righteousness of Christ to the believer that comes at the moment of salvation.

Now keep in mind the first to read what we are studying here would have been the seven churches, and they would have readily understood this. We see this symbolism in Christ's promise to the believers at Sardis who were promised to “be clothed in white garments” in chapter three and verse five, and also with the Lord's appeal to the Laodiceans He said, “Buy from me white garments so that you may clothe yourself,”¹⁸ chapter three and verse 18. We see the same picture in chapter seven and verse nine where the saints “stand before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes.”¹⁹ And, finally, at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19 and verse eight we learn that his bride, the Church, will, “clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”²⁰

¹⁷ Revelation 4:4.

¹⁸ See Revelation 3:18.

¹⁹ See Revelation 7:9.

²⁰ Revelation 19:8.

Revelation 4

Now, here in chapter four and also in chapter five we learn of other living beings that are clearly angels. But if the 24 elders were also angelic, I would submit to you that the saints who have been the focus of redemptive history would have no representation. Notice, also, the 24 elders wore “golden crowns on their heads.” Again, this is something angels are never pictured doing. Crowns symbolize authority to rule with Christ, a privilege only given to the saints. The word “crown” translates the Greek word *stephanos* (stef'-an-os) which is the victor's crown. It is the overcomer's crown as promised to the faithful saints at Smyrna when the Lord said in chapter two and verse 10, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”²¹

This would hardly be relevant to the existence of angelic beings that know nothing of overcoming. This is the crown Paul anticipated in the final days of life when he said in 2 Timothy 4:8, “The future 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.”²²

Would you notice, also, that John is careful to give us the number of the elders and the thrones upon which they sat? It is the number 24. Twenty-four denotes the idea of fulness or completeness and representation in Scripture as seen in the 24 priestly orders mentioned in the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles 23 and 24 including the 24 divisions of musicians in chapter 25. Each of the 24 orders of priests in the Old Testament were represented by one single priest. So, again, the number 24 seems to be a number of completion and representation as we see here the 24 elders representing the raptured glorified Church.

Now some might ask, “Well, why wouldn't this refer to Israel? Why is this not representative of Israel?” And the answer is: Because ethnic, national Israel as a whole will not be redeemed until *after* the pre-kingdom judgments during the tribulation when the Messiah will return in all of His glory to the earth and all of Israel will be saved, an event that has not yet taken place in the chronology of Revelation where we are right now. So, again, I believe the 24 elders *represent us*, dear friends, the glorified church that will have been snatched away from judgment in the rapture as described in John 14 and 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

So he has described *the throne* and *what is around the throne*. Now, thirdly, *what emanates from the throne?* Verse five, “Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.”²³

Again, this scene is reminiscent of what happened at Mount Sinai at the giving of the law in Exodus 19 verse 16. Here John witnesses a preview of the righteous judgment of God that will soon flow forth from His presence. And the phrase, “out from the throne,”²⁴ is

²¹ Revelation 2:10.

²² 2 Timothy 4:8.

²³ Revelation 4:5.

²⁴ Ibid.

Revelation 4

really just a reverent way of saying that these things were proceeding or emanating from God Himself.

Beloved, here we see God as a God of wrath and His throne one of judgment. It is interesting that later in Revelation eight verse five where we have the description of the *seventh seal judgment* where we read, "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."²⁵ So there we have the same language. We see the same thing in Revelation 11 verse 19 with the *seventh trumpet judgment*. "And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm."²⁶ We also see it, again, in Revelation 16 verses 17 and 18 with the *seventh bowl judgment*. "And a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, 'It is done.' 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."²⁷ So the Lord reveals to John the awesome fury of divine wrath that will one day emanate from the throne.

But, fourthly, he describes *what is before the throne*. The end of verse five. "And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."²⁸ Now this is not a reference to seven separate spiritual beings, but rather the one Holy Spirit. And this is in keeping with the revelation of the Holy Spirit that we read about in Isaiah chapter 11 verses two and three and Zechariah 4, one through 10 where the number seven denotes His ultimate perfection and completeness, including the characteristics of *wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, reverence and power to judge*. So, beloved, here we see the Holy Spirit being pictured as a *blazing torch* ready to go into battle as the consuming fire of the wicked.

We saw this pictured, as well, in Judges chapter seven. You remember the story of Gideon where he had the 300 men of Israel under his leadership and they surrounded the vast armies of the Midianites and the Amalekites. And in the middle of the night they were to hold their trumpet in their right hand and their torches in their left hand and they blew their trumpets and revealed their torches and the entire army was defeated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, notice, John describes something else that is before the throne in verse six. "And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal."²⁹

To put it in our vernacular, "I am not sure what it was, but it reminded me of the magnificent of some kind of glass sea. It was clear and dazzling." Again, this is reminiscent of what we read about in Exodus 24 when God summoned Moses and Aaron

²⁵ Revelation 8:5.

²⁶ Revelation 11:19.

²⁷ Revelation 16:17-18.

²⁸ Revelation 4:5.

²⁹ Revelation 4:6.

Revelation 4

and Nadab and Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel up to Mount Sinai. And there the text says that “they saw the God of Israel and under his feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky itself.” Sapphire is a beautiful deep blue stone. And Ezekiel described it, as we read earlier as an expanse “like the awesome gleam of crystal,”³⁰ chapter one verse 22. And in verse 26 he said, “Like lapis lazuli in appearance.”³¹ Lapis lazuli is an opaque blue precious stone that was used much in Mesopotamia and Egypt in that day. So this is an indescribably beautiful blue expanse before the throne that is crystal clear. What an amazing picture of the purity and the holiness of God.

Might I add as a footnote, as you think about these descriptions, bear in mind that physicists tell us that human eye cannot see light, that it is completely invisible to us. All we are able to see is light interacting with tiny particles of matter that are in the air that reflect light. And the colors that we see in light depend upon varying wave lengths and the spectrum of light. In fact, visible light, they tell us, occupies one-one thousandth of a percent of this light spectrum. And it is only in this minute portion of the spectrum of light that we see all of the beautiful colors that we can see. And yet in that miniscule range of light God reveals to John some of what he can see, and possibly he opened up that spectrum so he could see more.

But, beloved, think about it, with what we can see in our fallen state today, God has only revealed to us just a miniscule portion of Himself through creation and through his Word. We just see just a little teeny bit of who He is in all of His glory. Can you imagine what it will be like when one day we stand in the presence of His glory and we are able to see the full spectrum of His glory? Beloved, I believe we will see things we never knew even existed.

Well, John moves away from what was before the throne to, number five, *what is in and around the throne*. Notice in the end of verse six. “And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”³² Now these are an exalted order of angels that may be the *cherubim* of Ezekiel 10 verses 20 and 21, and maybe even the *seraphim* of Isaiah 6. We are not completely sure. But if not, they at least bear a striking resemblance to them.

Then he says that they are “full of eyes in front and behind.”³³ That is, they are aware of their holy assignment. Nothing escapes their attention. And primarily we will see them in the Apocalypse as ministers of divine justice. And here John sees these celestial creatures stationed in the inner most circle which is the idea of *in and around the throne*.

Ezekiel's description indicates that these magnificent angels would hover as if we would see a bumble bee. Do you remember seeing bumble bees before? They will come right up in your face and they can go left, right, down, up... they just kind of hover and they go

³⁰ Ezekiel 1:22

³¹ Ezekiel 1:26.

³² Revelation 4:6.

³³ Ibid.

Revelation 4

to and fro. They move in every direction. Likewise these angelic beings. In Ezekiel 1 verse 14 he says, "And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning."³⁴ And in verse 17 he says, "Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions, without turning as they moved."³⁵

Now, dear friends, we see that these were the protectors of the tree of life in Genesis 3:24. They are the ones that stood at the entrance of the Garden of Eden to prevent Adam and Eve from entering back in, from returning after their sin. And in the Old Testament we discover that these were the protectors of the Ark of the Covenant. In fact, in the Holy of Holies we read that two cherubim sculptures were there with human faces overlaid with gold that stood on either side of the ark. So these living creatures, these four living creatures were the guardians of God's holiness, the guardians of His holy presence. And, according to Ezekiel 28 in verse 14 this was, perhaps, the unique office of Satan before his fall, because there we read that he was "the anointed cherub who covers."³⁶

John continues in verse seven, "And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle."³⁷ Now in order to understand this, keep in mind the context. Remember, John is seeing the *God of creation*. That is the emphasis here as we read in verse 11, *the God of creation is worthy to receive glory and honor*. So this scene is going to attest to Him as Creator.

We know that the Jewish Talmud understood these exalted creatures to represent the four primary forms of life in God's creation. The *lion* represented wild creatures and it was always symbolic of *strength*; the *calf* represented domestic creatures, symbolic of *service*; the *eagle*, flying creatures, symbolic of *speed*, and *man* represented the zenith of all creation, the symbolic emblem of *intellect and reason*. In fact, the 12 tribes actually camped under four banners with these symbols upon them. The tribe of Reuben had the symbol on their banner of a man, Dan's was symbolized by an eagle, Ephraim symbolized by the calf, and Judah symbolized by the lion. And all of the tribes were divided amongst those four.

And in verse eight he adds that, "the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within,"³⁸ again, symbolizing their supernatural ability to remain forever vigilant in their service to God. And this, of course, is reminiscent, as well, of Isaiah's description of the angels in Isaiah 6 upon which John MacArthur comments, quote, "Four of their six wings related to worship. With two they covered their faces since even the most exalted created beings cannot look on the unveiled glory of God without being consumed. They also used two wings to cover their feet since they

³⁴ Ezekiel 1:14.

³⁵ Ezekiel 1:17.

³⁶ Ezekiel 28:14.

³⁷ Revelation 4:7.

³⁸ Revelation 4:8.

Revelation 4

stood on holy ground. Worship is, thus, their privileged calling and permanent occupation,” end quote.

And we witness this, dear friends, in John's description, finally, number six, of the *doxologies that are directed toward the throne*. Won't you notice their worship in verse eight?

And day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." 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, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."³⁹

Here we witness the uninterrupted praise before the throne of God emphasizing four things primarily. First, His *holiness*, through the three fold ascription, "Holy, holy, holy,"⁴⁰ the idea of, He is completely other, He is utterly transcended and separate from sin. Secondly, the emphasis on His *omnipotence*. We see in the phrase, "The Lord God, the Almighty."⁴¹ And the emphasis on His *eternality* in the phrase, "Who was and who is and who is to come."⁴² And then, finally, the emphasis on His *creative power* through the phrase, "For you created all things and because of your will they existed and were created."⁴³

Now someone might ask, "Well, what about his mercy and his grace in redemption?" No, dear friends, please understand. First we have the *hymn of creation* in chapter four. The *hymn of redemption* will begin in chapter five. In chapter five the Lamb who is worthy will take the scroll, open up the seals of divine wrath, *and then the hymn of redemption will break forth*, a glorious oratorio that will include all of heaven's host, all of the glorified Church.

You see, at this stage of the Revelation, redemption is not yet complete. Creation still awaits its redemption. Even we ourselves, the saints, we groan inwardly, Paul tells us in Romans eight. We are waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.⁴⁴ But after the pre kingdom judgments the Lamb will return as the Lion and ultimately redemption will be completed. We will see this expressed in Revelation 20 and 21.

³⁹ Revelation 4:8-11.

⁴⁰ Revelation 4:8.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Revelation 4:11.

⁴⁴ See Romans 8:23.

Revelation 4

Oh, child of God, please hear me. A day is coming when the evolutionist will be consumed by the Creator God he denies. A day is coming when Satan and his minions will finally be banished to the pit. A day is coming when every sinner who refuses to trust Christ as Savior and serve Him as Lord will be judged and forever damned. But for those who have been saved solely by His grace, a day is coming when we will see the triune God in all of His glory, and we will enjoy Him forever and forever.

And I have to ask: Does this describe the longing of your heart? Because if it doesn't, you need to examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. You need to ask yourself: "Have I really ever been so horrified by my sin that I ran to the foot of the cross and I begged God to save me, to give me His undeserved mercy and grace?" Because, dear friends, that is your only hope of salvation.

And, dear Christian friend, may I challenge you as we close this morning? This week when you find yourself kind of down and out and kind of struggling and, like me at times, whining about something—and you will, we all do. Or when you find yourself chasing after some fleeting pleasure of this world that is eternally inconsequential and probably destructive to your Christian life, won't you pause for a moment and gaze heavenward and think about Revelation four? Think about the throne. Think about God in all of his glory. Praise Him for who He is.

In fact, it might be good to even practice up a bit for your part in the heavenly oratorio, that heavenly choir that we will see continue to mount with more and more angelic beings and all of the glorified church and all of the saints down through redemptive history in chapter five.

May I leave you with these thoughts?

There is no life upon this earth apart from heaven's hope.
For only fools could find real joy within this fallen scope.

But, oh, the throne! What blissful thought! What stretching of the mind!
Where God doth sit and rule and reign in majesty sublime.

To think that one bright glorious day when heaven's hosts will sing
a new song to the worthy Lamb, "Our Savior, Lord and King."

Oh, God, may all our thoughts be free of love for here below,
but fixed, instead, upon that place prepared for us to go.

May heaven's light o're come the dark of sorrow's dreadful night,
until we see You face to face and faith gives way to sight.

Will you pray with me?

Revelation 4

Father, we rejoice in these eternal truths and we praise you that in your great mercy you have seen fit to give us a glimpse of your glory. I pray, Lord, that the implications of what we see in this text and so many others will move us ever more towards a life that is absolutely committed to holiness. Lord, may we keep our focus upon you because, indeed, that is a purifying hope. And finally, Lord, I pray for those who really know nothing of you. I pray that by your grace you would convict them of their sin, cause them to see themselves for who they really are and in the darkness of that reality, Lord, would you show them the light of Christ that they might be saved? We ask all of this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Transcript Explanation: Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Olive Tree Resources.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Dr. David Harrell. © Olive Tree Resources. Website: olivetreeresources.org